

NEWSLETTER

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per la Solidarietà
Internazionale ETS

FMSI

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Right to be children - Derecho a ser niños

International Day of the Rights of Children and adolescents

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This year, on the occasion of the International Day of Children's Rights and Adolescence, celebrated every November 20th, the Marist International Solidarity Foundation ETS (FMSI), in collaboration with the Secretariat of Solidarity of the Marist Brothers Institute, has

organized the event **"Right to be Children - Derecho a ser niños."**

The event represents a unique opportunity to share knowledge and experiences, as well as to reflect on recommendations and next steps to be taken as a Marist Family, in order to ensure that every children can enjoy their fundamental rights. **FMSI and the Secretariat of Solidarity are determined to contribute to the creation of a world where children's rights are respected, protected, and guaranteed.** The event, focused on children's rights, aims to shed light on the challenges and difficulties facing young people around the world, actively promoting their rights and safety.

Br. Ernesto Sánchez Barba, the Superior General of the Marist Brothers, along with Br. Ken McDonald, President of FMSI and General Councillor of the Institute, welcomed participants and emphasized the importance of global support and commitment to protecting the rights of children.

Br. Fortune Chakasara from the Southern Africa Province, illustrated the importance of acting for children's rights in Africa. Br. Fortune has proven experience in designing, organizing, and implementing seminars on child protection throughout the Marist African Region. With over a decade of experience in the field of children's rights, protection, and safeguarding, he is a respected member of the Marist Brothers International Commission for the Protection of Minors and Sexual Abuse, an advisory body of the Marist Brothers Institute. His training includes a Postgraduate Diploma in Child Safeguarding from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, as well as certificates in Child Rights

and Protection and Child Rights in Africa. He has recently completed a Master of Advanced Studies in Child Rights (MCR) at the University of Geneva. Br. Fortune's testimony provided an opportunity to understand the unique challenges facing children in this region and the importance of targeted initiatives to improve their living conditions.

Internationally, the presence of Maria D'Onofrio, Secretary General of **CCIG** (Centre catholique international de Genève), illustrated the rights of every children according to the definitions and conventions of the United Nations in an international context, offering a clear view of the importance of International Cooperation in promoting and protecting the rights of children globally.

A significant moment was the awarding of the **"A Better World for Children"** prize, with the intervention of Alessandra Aula, Secretary General of **BICE** (Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance). The award not only celebrates positive initiatives for children but also serves as a call to continuous action to ensure the well-being of the youngest.

The goal of the event was to share knowledge and experiences, reflecting on future actions within the Marist Family to ensure that every children can fully enjoy their fundamental rights.

The focus on Africa, international collaboration, and the recognition and valorization of positive initiatives are all key elements that characterize the event. **The event represented a significant step toward creating awareness to undertake an increasing number of concrete actions to ensure that children's rights are respected worldwide.** The participation, diversity of topics addressed, and declared commitment to the protection of children's rights highlight the importance of collective initiatives to create a future where every children can grow up in a safe environment that respects their fundamental rights.



FMSI, CCIG and Marist Brothers submit a report for the UPR on situation of children in Bangladesh

In March 2023, FMSI (Marist Foundation for International Solidarity) and the CCIG (International Catholic Centre of Geneva), with the support of the Marist Brothers Trust Bangladesh, submitted a report for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Bangladesh on **“Human Rights in Bangladesh: the situation of children and their families in the tea gardens of Sylhet.”**

While Bangladesh is making significant strides in several areas, it's crucial to acknowledge the persistent challenges faced by the most vulnerable members of its population. In the tea gardens of Sylhet, the situation for children and their families is particularly dire.

As a State-driven review on human rights taking place within the UN, the UPR offers an opportunity to shed light on the harsh realities they face and the critical areas that demand immediate attention.

- 1. Corporal Punishment:** Children in the tea gardens of Sylhet often find themselves caught in a cycle of violence, with corporal punishment being a common and disturbingly normalized practice. These young souls endure physical abuse, affecting their overall well-being and mental health. The UPR report underscores the urgent need for stricter enforcement of laws prohibiting corporal punishment to protect the rights of these children.
- 2. Child Labor:** The economic situation of families in the tea gardens paints a bleak picture. Parents earn meager wages, with many struggling to make even \$2 a day. To make ends meet, many parents resort to taking their children to work in the tea gardens. The statistics reveal a grim reality: a staggering 29.8% of tea-garden children aged 5-17 are involved in child labor in Habiganj, 15.6% in Moulvibazar, and 19.3% in Sylhet, well above the national average of 6.8%. These children become a substitute for or an addition to a family member's income, perpetuating a vicious cycle of child labor.
- 3. Forced Child Marriages:** In the tea gardens, forced child marriages are not uncommon. Girls, in particular, are vulnerable to this grave violation of their rights. Early marriages not

only rob them of their childhood but also deny them the opportunity for personal growth and development. It is essential to address this issue to secure a brighter future for tea-garden children.

- 4. Access to Quality Education:** One of the fundamental rights of any child is the right to education. However, the average span of schooling in the tea garden areas is shockingly low at 2.9 years, compared to the national average of 6.2 years. This statistic highlights the pressing need for improved access to quality education in the tea gardens. The high dropout rate further underscores the urgency of addressing this issue, as these children deserve the chance to break free from the cycle of poverty. The UPR report submitted by FMSI, CCIG, and the Marist Brothers Trust Bangladesh shines a spotlight on the dire situation faced by children and their families in the tea gardens of Sylhet, Bangladesh. It is essential for all stakeholders, including the government, civil society, and the international community, to work towards resolving the pressing issues outlined in the report. The rights of these children are non-negotiable, and their well-being should be a priority. Through concerted efforts and a shared commitment to ensuring their rights and providing opportunities for growth and development, we can work towards a brighter future for the tea garden children of Sylhet.





Empowering Marist Leaders: Training in Project Management and Fundraising

To equip Marist religious and lay personnel with the skills and knowledge needed to make a lasting impact, **FMSI (Marist International Solidarity Foundation ETS), in collaboration with the Secretariat of Solidarity of the Marist Institute and AMS (Australian Marist Solidarity)** organized a training program on Project Cycle Management and Fundraising.

This fundamental course, scheduled from November 9 to November 30, 2023, is designed to provide participants with the essential tools required to excel in the fields of project management and fundraising.

The primary objective of the training program is to offer Marists, both religious and lay, a comprehensive understanding of Project Cycle Management and the art of crafting compelling project proposals for international organizations and potential donors.

The training program adopted a holistic approach, balancing theoretical knowledge with practical applications. The curriculum was meticulously crafted to ensure participants acquire practical skills for project proposal writing, management, and effective communication, all while adhering to international standards and requirements.

As an essential part of the program, attendees will become proficient in the tools needed to prepare high-quality projects.

The course is not limited to theory: participants also developed project planning and monitoring skills through engaging in presentations, group discussions, learning strategies, and practical exercises. This multifaceted approach equipped Marists with the tools and confidence to undertake projects that drive positive change.

The training program was more than just a learning experience; it aims to foster a sense of community and collaboration among participants. It provided a platform for networking, enabling attendees to establish connections and engage in dialogue with fellow trainees. By creating this space for dialogue and interaction, participants explored and expanded on various aspects covered during the course, potentially leading to future collaboration on solidarity programs and activities.

The training program was open to Marist Brothers and lay individuals from Marist Provinces in Asia, from Syria and Madagascar. Participants were project managers within their respective Province, Sector, or NGOs.

This training also served as an invaluable opportunity for younger religious and lay individuals to learn about the project cycle and develop their skill sets.

The training program was designed to strike a balance between theory and practice. Notably, all speakers have experience in managing training courses for the benefit of Marist Missions.

This training program was a unique opportunity for Marists to enhance their project management and fundraising capabilities, ultimately contributing to the betterment of communities, NGOs, and solidarity offices across Asia.



FMSI fundraising visit donors in Aachen, Königstein and Rottenburg

In today's world, non-profit organizations play a vital role in creating positive change and addressing critical issues that affect our society. They rely on the generosity of donors who share their passion for making a difference.

FMSI embarked on a mission to strengthen existing relationships and establish new collaborations with donors who are essential to FMSI's cause to support the Marist Mission worldwide. For this purpose, Maria Rita Pala and Pamela Difino, Project Administration Officers at FMSI, visited some donors in Aachen, Königstein, and Rottenburg from October 16 to 19, 2023. The aim was not only to secure financial support but also to communicate FMSI mission and objectives effectively.

The first step in ensuring a fruitful fundraising visit is thorough research. FMSI took the time to delve into the backgrounds, interests, and past contributions of the donors. This level of preparedness is essential because it allows for a personalized approach that resonates with the donors' values and objectives.

During these visits, FMSI followed a structured agenda and the discussions covered a wide range of topics, all with the aim of fostering a deeper connection. FMSI introduced the donors to their mission, vision, and the impact they have achieved through projects and advocacy actions. This helps donors understand the bigger picture and the role they can play in it. The organization outlined specific projects and initiatives in need of financial support. What's remarkable is how these initiatives were carefully chosen to align with the donors' interests, whether they were in geographic areas or thematic topics. This alignment is crucial in engaging donors who feel a personal connection to the Marist cause.

These fundraising visits bore fruit, with donors expressing a strong interest in supporting FMSI's initiatives. This is a testament to the power of genuine connections and well-prepared discussions. The donors not only affirmed their support for the organization but also expressed an eagerness to explore further engagement opportunities.

One such example is their interest in attending FMSI's upcoming event on November 20th, either in person or through virtual platforms. FMSI understands that building and maintaining these relationships is an ongoing process. Following the visits, they plan to provide donors with detailed project proposals and budgets related to the specific initiatives they expressed interest in funding. This transparency ensures that donors know how their contributions will be utilized, fostering trust and accountability.

FMSI's recent fundraising visits were more than just meetings; they were about building relationships and partnerships. They were instrumental in securing vital financial support in favor of the Marist Missions worldwide and in forging bonds that will last. These visits were a reminder that the success of non-profit organizations is intertwined with the generosity and commitment of donors.

Through well-prepared interactions and strategic alignment of interests, FMSI is paving the way for a brighter future, one where their mission can flourish and make an even more significant impact.

We look forward to witnessing the positive outcomes of these visits and the continued collaboration between FMSI and its dedicated supporters. **Together, they are making the world a better place, one step at a time.**

FMSI moves from being Onlus to being a Third Sector Entity (ETS)

On October 5, 2023, the Marist International Solidarity Foundation ETS (FMSI) completed the process of adapting to the Third Sector Reform, promoted in Italy, and was officially registered in the Single National Third Sector Register (RUNTS), and officially assuming the status of Third Sector Entity (ETS). This date represents a significant moment in the growth and evolution of our organization and entails several important changes and opportunities.

For more than 16 years, thanks to the fundamental support of the Marist Brothers' Institute, which supports its work every year, FMSI has been working to develop the potential of children and young people, especially those in the most vulnerable conditions, through education, advocacy and solidarity projects. FMSI promotes solidarity, education, and development in the peripheries of the world, following the Marist Charism and the words of the Founder of the Congregation, St Marcellin Champagnat.

FMSI has contributed to the elimination of inequalities in access to education, breaking down all socio-economic, gender and origin barriers that could be an impediment to the education of children, girls and young people supported by the Marist Missions around the world. The transition from a non-profit organization (ONLUS) to Third Sector Entity (ETS) brings with it a number of responsibilities that will further strengthen the Foundation's mission. As a Third Sector Organization, the Marist Foundation will ensure greater transparency in financial operations and resource management. This new status will allow the Foundation to diversify its activities and develop new partnerships to better address global challenges, including poverty, education, health, and the promotion of Human Rights. Furthermore, as the Marist International Solidarity Foundation ETS, it will be able to adapt to the changing needs of Marist communities globally and respond effectively to humanitarian emergencies. This transition is a fundamental step that reflects FMSI's commitment to pursue its Vision of a world where childhood is respected and guaranteed, free from violence and fear. A world where children, girls and young people are recognized as active members of their communities and society.

Today, the Marist International Solidarity Foundation ETS continues to operate in more than 67 countries, implementing more than five

hundred development and emergency projects in favor of children, girls, youth and communities in vulnerable conditions and sending to the United Nations more than 67 UPR (Universal Periodic Review) in order to shed light on the condition of human rights and the rights of children in the countries where the Marist Congregation works through its Missions. FMSI has also carried out activities with a political impact, such as the 'Humanity' and 'Peace Goes Beyond' campaigns promoted by the FOCSIV Network, of which FMSI is a member, and fundraising campaigns to support populations in a state of emergency. Among the most important ones, FMSI launched a fundraising campaign on February 7, 2023, to support the Mission and the population of Aleppo following the earthquake that devastated Syria. Thanks to this campaign, FMSI raised €469,941 from 538 donors and obtained essential medical supplies, including hospital equipment such as lung ventilators and continuous pressure equipment. The fundraising aimed to respond quickly to the initial phase of the earthquake and the ensuing state of humanitarian emergency through targeted interventions, such as the distribution of food parcels, psycho-social support to people in vulnerable conditions and the distribution of clothes, nappies and blankets. On November 20, 2023, on the occasion of the International Day of the Rights of the Child, FMSI, together with the Solidarity Secretariat of the Institute of the Marist Brothers, will organise the event "Right to be Children". The main objective of the event is to raise awareness of the challenges and issues facing children and to promote their rights and safety. The event aims to share knowledge and experiences, as well as to reflect on recommendations and next steps to be taken in the Marist Family to ensure that every child enjoys his or her fundamental rights. The Marist Foundation for International Solidarity ETS is enthusiastic about continuing to work with supporters, partners and volunteers to create a more just, fair and inclusive world for all.

"We have an enormous responsibility towards the missions, the social works, the Marist schools in the world, the children. And last but not least, of the General Council, which every year confirms its trust and supports us" says Andrea Rossi, Director of FMSI ***"we feel this trust in us and we want it to be the stimulus to commit ourselves to do even more, build bridges and look further ahead"***.



Empowering Marist Brothers of Africa: a training program for child safeguarding and child rights

Child rights and protection are universal concerns, but they carry particular significance in the African context, where millions of children continue to face numerous challenges and violations.

According to the 2020 Global Estimates of Child Labor, Africa is home to 23.9 percent of the world's child laborers, totaling a staggering 86.6 million children. Despite global progress in eradicating child labor, sub-Saharan Africa has seen an alarming increase in child labor numbers since 2012. In 2021, Human Rights Watch uncovered a range of issues affecting children in African countries, from barriers to education and child marriage to gender-based violence in educational settings, corporal punishment, and discrimination against children with disabilities. To address these pressing issues, FMSI (Marist International Solidarity Foundation) has proposed a comprehensive training program to enhance the skills and competencies of the Marist Brothers of Africa in child safeguarding and child rights. The heart of this proposal lies in addressing the critical need to safeguard children's rights within the unique and diverse African context. This project aims to develop the institutional capacity for child rights, child protection, and child safeguarding for the five Marist Provinces of Africa, comprising 79 schools in 18 Countries. It is not merely an isolated intervention but a systemic one, with a ripple effect that will impact leaders across the African continent. The program extends its invitation to other congregations and organizations willing to actively participate in the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. The primary objective is to ensure that every child the Congregations come into contact with, either directly or indirectly, is treated with respect, dignity, and protected from harm, neglect, or abuse. Africa, with its unique demographic challenges, is home to more than an eighth of the global population. It is the region with the highest birth and death rates, and the child protection challenges it faces are immense. Child marriage, physical abuse, female genital mutilation, and teenage pregnancies are prevalent in many African Countries. Additionally, sub-Saharan Africa experiences high rates of child exclusion from education and the most elevated out-of-school percentages globally, with girls, children with disabilities, and those from low-income households facing the worst consequences. The challenges have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic,

particularly for those already facing societal and discriminatory barriers. The need for this training program is reinforced by the fact that many Marist communities in African Countries, especially new generations of Marist Brothers and lay Marists, have not had adequate opportunities for formation in child protection and safeguarding. The analysis of existing practices highlights gaps in child safeguarding procedures in schools, which need urgent attention. Moreover, violence against children is often considered the norm in some African Countries, making it essential to raise awareness about child rights and protection. The beneficiaries of this project are the Marist Brothers and lay staff working with children in the African context. With their presence in schools and their direct interaction with children, they are uniquely positioned to be advocates for child rights and guardians of child safeguarding. The goal is to empower them through an eight-module training program, which includes both online and in-person sessions. This initiative by the Marist Brothers Institute represents a pivotal step in fulfilling their mission and commitment to child safeguarding. By offering comprehensive training, the Institute aims to transform its members into influential advocates for child rights and safeguarding. The training's value extends beyond the immediate beneficiaries, as its ripple effect is expected to influence those who did not attend directly. It will lead to a significant enhancement of human resource capabilities across African Marist Provinces and fortify existing Child Protection Policies. The project's monitoring and evaluation process is meticulous and iterative, with the project management team continuously assessing progress, learning outcomes, and financial management. This ensures that the project is on track to achieve its objectives and that resources are managed efficiently. The training program proposed by the FMSI is a significant step toward addressing the urgent need for child safeguarding and child rights in Africa. By empowering the Marist Brothers and other stakeholders with the knowledge and skills required to protect children's rights, it has the potential to create a lasting impact on the Continent's most vulnerable population. **This initiative reflects a commitment to ensuring a safer and more supportive environment for children in Africa and sets a powerful example for organizations and institutions globally.**



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