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The intervention of two Australian students in the Human Rights Council

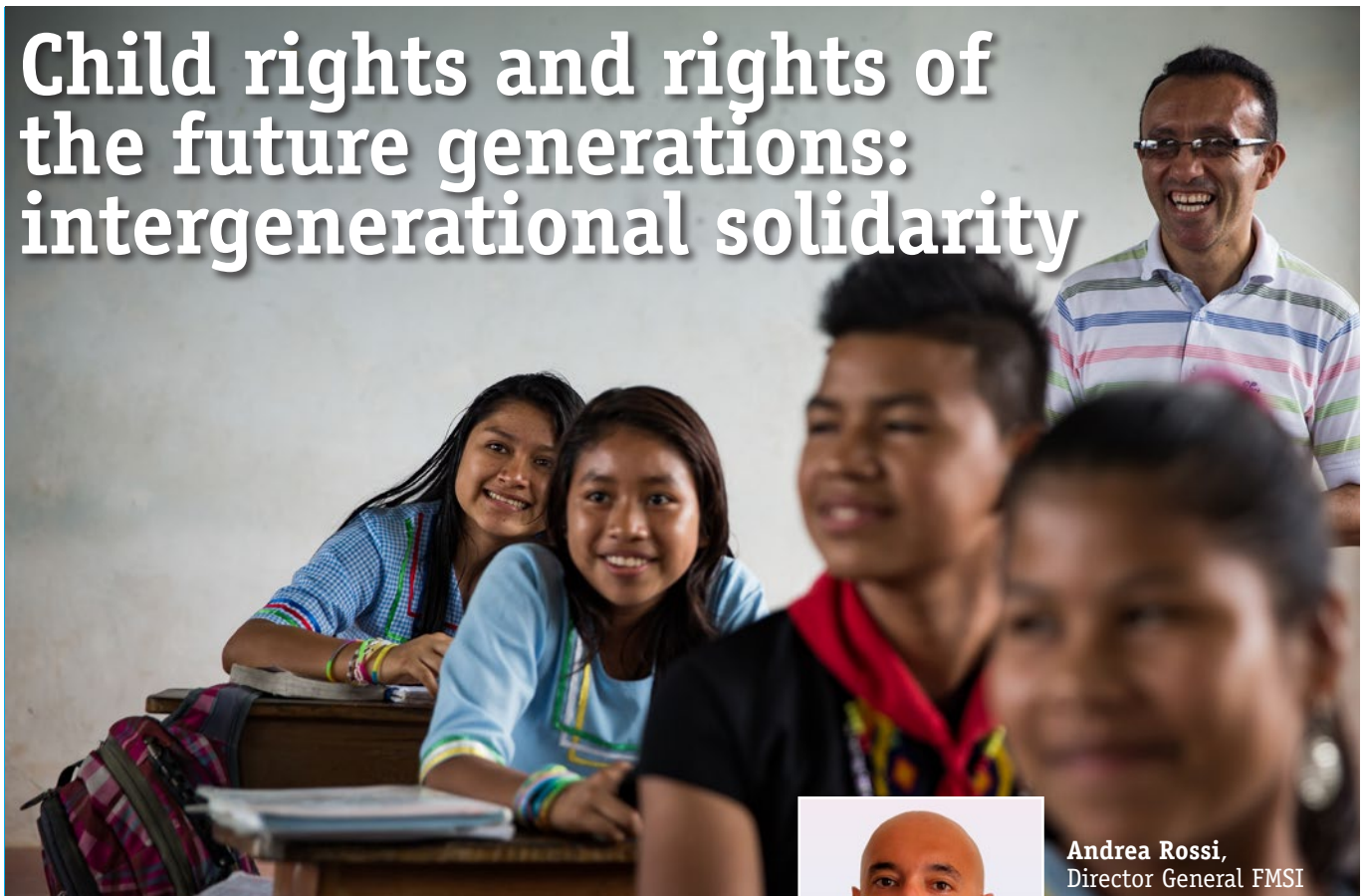
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Child rights and rights of the future generations: intergenerational solidarity



Andrea Rossi,
Director General FMSI

According to the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), scientists are observing changes in the Earth's climate in every region and across the whole climate system. We are experiencing these changes almost everywhere in the world. Few months before the IPCC report, in April 2021, in a groundbreaking decision, Germany's Supreme constitutional court of Karlsruhe ruled that the government's climate protection me-

asures are insufficient to protect future generations.

The court pointed out that it was unconstitutional for emission reduction targets to have been postponed for so many years and stated that the law was not detailed enough about how reductions would happen.

The judges ruled that young people's "fundamental rights



to a human future" were threatened and that the law in its current state jeopardized their freedom

because the goals which were set were too focused on dates too far in the future. In its decision, the Court stated that "Virtually every freedom is potentially affected by these future emission reduction obligations because almost every area of human life is associated with the emission of greenhouse gases



and is therefore threatened by drastic restrictions after 2030."

With this ruling, Germany joins those countries which have taken decisions in this matter, with some nations, such as Germany, Bolivia, Ecuador, Kenya, Norway and South Africa, enshrining the rights of future generations within their Constitutions.

This concern for future generations is based on the guiding principle that living members of a community benefit from the sacrifices and investments made by previous generations. Therefore, each generation has an essential responsibility to preserve the rights of future generations.

For decades, the rights of future generations have been discussed and analyzed. One such document, The Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment (1972), refers to future generations in the context of the environment.

Another paper, approved by UNESCO and supported by more

than 100 countries in 1991, was even more explicit:

Future generations have the right to an unharmed and not contaminated Earth; they have the right to enjoy this Earth that is the support of the history of humanity, the culture and social bonds ensuring the membership in the great human family of each generation and each individual.

Each generation, having received its partial inheritance of the Earth, has a duty to prevent all irreversible breaches to life on Earth, as well as preserving the liberty and the dignity of all humanity.

At the 1995 World Social Summit, all countries committed themselves to create a framework of action to, among other things, "fulfil our responsibility to present and future generations by ensuring equity among generations and protecting the integrity and sustainable use of our environment".

A fundamental aspect of safe-

guarding human rights in the midst of the global challenge of climate change is the participation of children and young people speaking up against climate change. Voices, choices, and participation of children and young people are critical for a sustainable future. The Future We Want, presented during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro from 20 to 22 June 2012 stressed "the importance of the active participation of young people in decision making processes" since these issues of climate change and sustainability "have a deep impact on present and future generations." The contributions of children and youth "are vital to the achievement of sustainable development" and the promotion of "intergenerational dialogue and solidarity by recognizing their views."

At the 47th Session of the Human Rights Council, on 30 June 2021, Mr Brendan Pospischil, a 16 year old student at Parramatta Marist High School and repre-

senting FMSI, held a Panel discussion on the human rights of older persons in the context of climate change. Brendan addressed the impact of climate change on his country and told the dramatic story of “young people pushing their grandparents in wheelchairs away from their burning homes, masks strapped to their faces, oxygen tanks working overtime”.

[You can watch his whole intervention here.](#)

Solidarity is a very human value. Whether we are confronting a pandemic, income inequality, racism or gender-based violence, solidarity depends on how individuals come together. It has a deep significance in the social teachings of the Church which strive to recognize the principles of subsidiarity, of the common good, and of solidarity, one of the fundamental pillars of social and political organization.

In the domain of international law, the dedication shown to different generations is referred as **intergenerational solidarity** or Intergenerational equity: “the issue of sustainable development referring, in the environmental context, to fairness in the **inter-temporal distribution** of the endowment with natural assets or of the rights to their exploitation”¹

This new concept of solidarity is fundamental to understanding how in the specific context of place and time, actions of solidarity by each member of an organized community are needed that go beyond the relationships between currently living representatives of different generations and embrace future generations, which do not yet exist.

Many of us tend to care most deeply for those closest to us. Our efforts and sacrifices aimed at protecting and improving the world for the sake of



our children and grandchildren (or grandparents as in the case of Brendan) seems very natural to us. We feel closer to our immediate family, friends, and those from groups with whom we easily identify. But what about our fellow humans that are geographically and temporally distant from us? There is in fact no ethical ground that justifies how other human beings shall be treated different-

ly based on their place or date of birth. In fact, as stated in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in spirit of brotherhood.*” The basis for our moral obligations towards future people is thus argued to be simply the equal concern and respect we owe to all humans, regardless of not only **where** but also **when** they may have been born.

Quite paradoxically, in the case of the global environmental challenges, the consequences of our present actions could not have any consequence on future generations as there might not be **any one left to enjoy any right**. The whole humanity is now at risk.

When we made crucial decisions in the 70s, 80s and 90s, we were unable

to think beyond our pressing needs; we exercised solidarity actions which were too limited by time and space. But if humanity is to have a second chance, the generations of today and those still to come will have to think and act not only for their well-being and that of their grandchildren, but of the whole future human family still to come. The mistakes of our past cannot be repeated. ■

¹OECD, Glossary of Statistical Terms. <http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=1387>

Interview with two Australian students who participated in the UN Human Rights Council

Zain Chaudry and Brendan Pospischil, are two students from Parramatta Marist High School who addressed the 47th session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations (UN), calling out Australia's approach to climate change, and its treatment of refugees.

1. Can you tell us something about the experience with the 47th Human Rights Council meeting? How important was it to have the chance to speak up for human rights?

Zain: "Being able to play such a role as we did at the 47th Session of the UN Human Rights Council was an incredibly unique and amazing opportunity. As young people, it isn't often that we have the opportunity to have our voices heard on such a huge scale with real, observable impacts. It is incredibly important for us to not only be aware of the human rights issues around the world but do what we can to bring attention to them and hopefully solve them. This is even more important to us as many of the changes we want to see happen directly impact our future and the world that we will inherit. At first, the process was very overwhelming, being taught about the UPR process which was completely new to us, as well as having to pick a few of many human rights issues that we were going to dedicate ourselves to. As the preparation process continued, we realized just how much of a role we played and how loud our voices truly were. After weeks of preparation and practice, we finally arrived at our presentations to Permanent Missions around the world and educated them about the human rights issues in Australia that we chose to focus on. Although incredibly daunting, we were extremely surprised at just how many government rep-



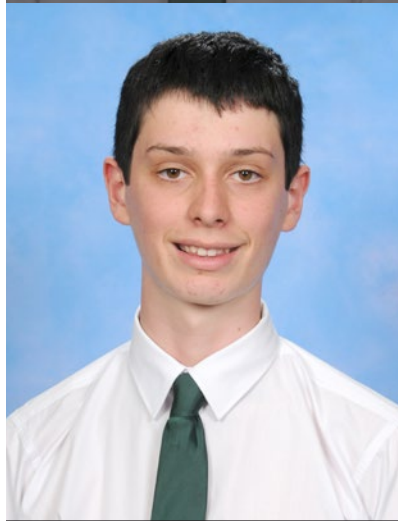
representatives and ambassadors were interested in what we, students from Sydney, had to say about the human rights issues in our country. Finally, being able to watch the 47th Session of the UN Human Rights Council and hearing some of our recommendations being presented was an incredibly rewarding experience for all of us, being proudly able to say that we played a part in the upholding of human rights in Australia. As a group, we are incredibly thankful to FMSI and everyone involved who showed us just how loud our young voices are and hope we can continue to be advocates for those whose voices are unheard".

2. We were quite impressed to hear Brendan saying, "It is essential to ensure the enjoyment of human rights for all, and even more so for our older persons". Why the older persons in particular, can you tell us a bit more of what happened in Australia?

Brendan: *The speech that you reference was given to a panel of the UN HRC that was specifically addressing the unique impact of climate change on older people. The reason why older people need special attention in regards to climate change is that they are especially vulnerable to extreme weather events such as floods, bushfires, droughts, storms, etc that are made worse by climate change. This is because older persons tend to be less physically mobile than younger people, and may not be able to, say, build a wall of sandbags outside their house before a flood, clear out flammable material near their property before a bushfire, or clean up after a violent storm that caused a tree to fall on their driveway, which all need to be done either to protect their property, or bring it back to a liveable state. Not only are older persons less physically able to prepare for and clean up after extreme weather, they are also more susceptible due to their advanced age and likely underlying health conditions, such as being more likely to experience heat stress or dehydration on a hot day. It is for reasons such as these that we must ensure that our older persons are taken care of and protected against the impending effects of climate change, and we commend the UN HRC for their focus on this issue.*



Zain Chaudry



Brendan Pospischil

3. The principle of intergenerational equity states that every generation holds the Earth in common with members of the present generation and with other generations, past and future. What does this sentence mean to you and how do you think we are going in taking care of our planet? What more do you think that we could be doing?

Brendan: *Each generation is placed in partial control of the Earth, and as modern technology has allowed higher leverage of human labour,*

the impact that each generation can make for good or evil has grown. Our generation is no exception, we are growing up in a world that desperately needs our careful care and attention, but we also come prepared with decades of climate science and research into clean energy that enables us to make the changes that we must. I personally believe that humanity is currently

not doing anywhere near enough to take care of the planet, and my generation finds itself in a fairly unique place where we will be growing up right at a crucial point in our climate's history. If the right actions are taken, and taken fast enough, then we may live to give our grandkids a planet like the one that our grandparents were given. This is due to the fact that climate change has progressed so far that even the most drastic actions will take decades to fully take effect, and the climate will inevitably get worse before it gets better. If our generation takes the wrong actions, then the compounding effects of climate change (such as melting ice caps increasing the surface area for heat to be absorbed into the ocean, melting more ice), may become too intense and the world will truly face a climate disaster, one that will persist for centuries. My participation in the UPR process was focused on climate change, and while there are other issues in relation to the earth's environment (such as a loss of forests for farming despite humans having plenty of food and

farmland), I believe that climate change is the most important, fundamental problem. The simple fact is that humanity is not taking very good care of the planet, due to the reliance of most of our society and economy on non-renewable fossil fuels, which causes climate change. The conceptually simple, yet practically incredibly complex actions that we must all take is to completely and totally remove our reliance on fossil fuels to power our society. ■

Nabil and the Blu Marist in Syria



Taken from the article of Chiara Zappa published in Mondo e Missione

The doctor Nabil Antaki, after the outbreak of the **Syrian conflicts** ten years ago, decided to embark himself on a very difficult mission: he had done everything possible to bring comfort to the civilians that war had unexpectedly transformed into **victims**: displaced, injured, traumatized, left without food or water. In this way the **Blue Marists** were born: a group of volunteers who, over time, would become a sound organization of solidarity, with 155 workers and fifteen projects under its belt, that provide first assistance, professional training, and school support for psychological rehabilitation.

Today in Syria there are only a few hotbeds of conflict left, such as the province of Idlib and the north-eastern region, yet “peace is still a long way off and, paradoxically, people are even worse off than before due to a frightening economic crisis,” says the doctor, who together with **Brother George Sabé** recounted the **sufferings** of his people in the book *Letters from Aleppo*, published

last November for Harmattan Italy. An alarm confirmed by data from the World Food Program, according to which, while the country has over **400,000 dead** and **12 million displaced people**, almost half abroad, and 60% of those who remained are not sure they will be able to eat every day: double the amount recorded in 2018. There are almost **1.5 million** Syrians who could not survive without food assistance from humanitarian organizations.

In this context, the tireless work of the Blue Marists represents a small light in the daily darkness of so many Syrians. Like the **elderly**, who in recent months have found themselves even more fragile: “Many are alone, because they have no family or because their children have fled the war, and their conditions are truly miserable. This

is why we have set up a kitchen in which some of our volunteers prepare a **hot meal** every day for 190 elderly people in need.” The boys in the blue t-shirts distribute the food in the houses, bringing at the same time a little **human warmth** and some support: “By visiting these people, in fact, we realized that many of them need someone to take care of their personal hygiene, to clean the house, and to buy medicines.”

However, the category that has suffered the most serious consequences of the conflict is **children**, many of whom in their life have known nothing but **war**. For them, the risk of abuse, including early marriages, is added to the poverty and lack of education: still today two million children are cut off from school. “Alongside material assistance, we focus on **educational projects** for preschool children whose parents cannot afford a private kindergarden,” says the Syrian doctor, “while our team of psychologists and volunteers works with children and adolescents who experience psychosocial **distress**.”

Among these, even more vulnerable are the children who grew up in **refugee camps**. Al Shahba, 40 km from Aleppo, is home to 125 Kurdish families (750 people) who fled Afrin after the Turkish invasion in 2018. “Our volunteers visit it twice a week, bringing packages of **food and health products** and organizing games and educational activities for children, while with a **medical assistance** we provide a pediatrician, a gynecologist and a pharmacist.”



Yet despite everything, for Dr. Antaki the war has not succeeded in destroying a model of **interconfessional coexistence** that represented normality in Syria: “My patients have always been mostly Muslims, as are 70% of our beneficiaries today. Here we make no difference, we **all feel Syrians**. Among our volunteers there are several Muslims: we share the same **human values**, and we have no difficulty in working together.”

The **extremism** that Syria has experienced in recent years, that has taken away the elder brother of the Aleppo doctor, killed in 2013 by a fundamentalist group, “was **imported from abroad**, is not part of our tradition. On the contrary, normal people have had the opportunity to know and appreciate the work of many **NGOs** and **Christian realities** who have never stopped helping everyone during the conflict.” Dr. Nabil himself, with his US citizenship (because two of his children have lived in the US for some time), could have left Syria at any time; instead, despite the insistence of his family,

he decided together with his wife to stay (both veterans of Covid-19).

“We strongly ask the international community to listen to the **cry** of the Syrians, of the **children** who had no childhood, of the young people who no longer have dreams. We join the appeal of the many realities, including the local Churches and Caritas, which are pressing for the lifting of the **sanctions** that strangle the people. And then, finally, we implore **peace**.” ■

PROJECT IN MALAWI "COVID 19 PREVENTION CAMPAIGN"

The project was set up to **combat the spread of COVID 19** in the communities of Likuni and Balaka, Malawi, and the increased phenomena during the period of



isolation and economic crisis caused by the pandemic, such as gender-based violence, early marriages and pregnancies, and school drop-outs, particularly among girls.

Our intervention has been based around three main actions:

1. An in-person **communication campaign** to inform the rural population about the virus, in order to ensure adequate personal and community prevention measures. Many rural areas are not easily accessible

due to bad roads and the population has limited access to internet and mobile phones, receiving **little information** and being **vulnerable** to the spread of the virus.

2. A community **awareness programme** against gender-based violence and early marriage, using posters, radio messages, and the involvement of community leaders. The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on the lives of **women** in Malawi, and **early marriages** have almost doubled due to school closures and increasing family poverty.

3. A **distance learning system** for students in informal and remedial courses and on scholarships, particularly the **girls**, to combat their **dropping out of school**.

The activities were carried out



in collaboration with the **Girls Club** and **local mothers' groups** and were made possible thanks to co-financing from the NGO **Manos Unidas** and the **FOCSIV - Caritas Campaign** "Give us today our daily bread - in solidarity with the least favoured". Thanks to the scholarships, several girls who had already dropped out of school have now resumed their studies.

[The project sheet can be found here.](#)



Project in Papua New Guinea

PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND PRESENTATION OF THE UPR REPORT

PROJECT IN BRIEF

Reinforce human rights in Papua New Guinea through an effective engagement with the UN human rights mechanisms, especially the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

CONTEXT

Although Papua New Guinea is a resource-rich country, almost 40% of the population lives in poverty, and the country has many outstanding human rights issues, such as the inadequacy of the criminal justice system, prison overcrowding, extrajudicial killings, the imposition of the death penalty, the high level of violence and political unrest, violence against women and girls including sorcery-related violence, violence against children, human trafficking, land rights violations and abuses, the situation of asylum seekers, refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and the rights of people with disabilities.

AIM OF THE PROJECT

This project is helping civil society actors to acquire a methodology for reporting, monitoring and following up the most pressing issues related to human rights in Papua New Guinea through the UPR process. In this way, local NGOs can be more effective in their advocacy activities, improving their collaboration with the Papua New Guinea government and, in the end, improving the situation of those who are at risk of human rights violations. The two project aims are:

- Build or strengthen the capacities of local human rights defenders to advocate for the respect and protection of human rights at both both nationally and internationally, through an effective

contribution to the upcoming UPR of Papua New Guinea;

- Create a more conducive environment and foster skills to further support existing programs promoted by local civil society that address violations of human rights and monitor the implementation of the human rights government obligations in this regard.

Through various activities aimed at local NGO representatives, the project will constitute a network of committed stakeholders and activists. The multiplier effect will allow a much larger number of people and target groups to be reached and will ensure widespread impact of the project. In fact, the 25 NGO representatives participating in the in-country consultation and in drafting the UPR submission, run human rights programs on a regular basis that reach over 70,000 beneficiaries, including vulnerable children, girls and women, teachers, people with disabilities, indigenous people and other victims of unlawful mining activities and climate change in Papua New Guinea.

PROJECT MAIN FIGURES

1 Joint UPR submission, including at least 5 recommendations concerning human rights in Papua New Guinea, is drafted

1 Common action plan to advocate for the inclusion in the UPR process of recommendations adopted that address key local human rights concerns

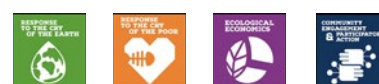
10 representatives of Papua New Guinea civil society organizations are contacted by the Steering Committee in order to create an in-country network for the protection of human rights

2 UPR recommendations reflecting key concerns of the in-country coalition have been addressed to the government of Papua New Guinea during the UPR.

SDGs



Laudato si' Goals:



Project in India COVID-19 EMERGENCY



PROJECT IN BRIEF

In a country where the living **conditions of citizens** have deteriorated very rapidly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project “Emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic”, funded by Misesan Cara, has facilitated the distribution of food parcels and hygiene products for people in need: displaced persons, very poor families, large families with many children, widows or widowers with a family, families with small children and beggars in Talit and in some neighboring villages.

CONTEXT

India is the second most populous country after China with about 1.2 billion people and is the seventh largest country in the world with an area of 3,287,000 km². The highly contrasted country has enjoyed growth rates of up to 10% over many years and is one of the largest economies in the world, with a gross domestic product (GDP) of 1,644 billion US dollars. But only a small percentage of the Indian population has benefited from this impressive economic boom so far, as the majority of people in India are still living in abject poverty. More than 800 million **people in India are considered poor**. Most of them live in the countryside and keep afloat with odd jobs. The lack of any employment providing a livable wage in rural areas is driving many Indians into rapidly growing metropolitan areas such as Bombay, Delhi, Bangalore or Calcutta. There, most of them are doomed to a life of poverty and despair in the mega-slums, made up of millions of corrugated ironworks, without sufficient drinking water supply, without garbage disposal and in many cases without electricity. The **poor hygiene conditions** are the cause of

diseases such as cholera, typhus and dysentery, that cause suffering and death in particular for children. Poverty in India impacts children, families and individuals in different ways like:

- High infant mortality
- Malnutrition
- Child labour
- Lack of education
- Child marriage
- HIV / AIDS

AIM OF THE PROJECT

The objective of the intervention was, therefore, to give temporary **emergency** food and health support to the identified beneficiaries, delivering packages containing: food (rice, mustard oil, lentils, wheat, powdered milk, salt, sugar, tea and spices), hygiene items (masks and cleaning soap).

FMSI, that has more than 14 years experience working in the field of International Solidarity and, inspired by Marist spirituality and the charisma of St. Marcellin Champagnat, will support the Blue Marists to implement projects that can help many families, children and people who live in very difficult situations.

THE PROJECT BY NUMBERS

700 families

100 beggars

Received hygienic products / food baskets

SDGs



Laudato si' Goals:2



HAITI EMERGENCY AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE OF 14th AUGUST

On 14 August, a terrible earthquake shook Haiti again, with an even stronger magnitude than that of 2010, leaving behind new poverty and destruction. The area affected was Grand'Anse, where there are Marist communities and schools. The Brothers immediately took action to help the population. Many of the local families have had their homes destroyed or seriously damaged and need food assistance to live.

At the moment **145 families** in particular need have been identified - a total of 580 people - who, with the support of FMSI in collaboration with **Maristen Solidarität International** (Germany) and the **Mediterranean Marist Province**, will receive food items for a period of one month. The Brothers of Haiti will distribute and monitor the families at Dame Marie, Les Cayes, Latiboliere.

Some of the displaced families are housed in Marist structures or in the immediate vicinity: 35 of them live inside the Alexandre Dumas College in Latiboliere, while others



are settled around the Marist houses of Jeremie and Dame Marie. There are also families of Marist schools' pupils who live with relatives or nearby families. Finally, 50 families belong to an isolated community, accessible only on foot, which has been left out of aid by the government or other organisations.

The assistance includes the distribution of parcels containing **basic necessities** such as rice, pasta, oil, tinned food and the provision of personal hygiene items.

The project is in synergy with the support campaign for the people of Haiti launched and coordinated by the **Marists of Central Mexico**.





BILANCIO SOCIALE 2020

Read the Bilancio Sociale
2020 on our website
www.fmsi.ngo