

Assisi Statement



On the occasion of the centenary of the Canticum of the Creatures, we, members of the International Council for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (ICJPIC) of the Order of Friars Minor, came together in Assisi from 1st to 7th March 2025 to pursue a prophetic discernment of the next steps of our service.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES: ALARM BELLS AND SEEDS OF HOPE

The signs of our time show us that the year 2025 is a critical moment in human history, a true crossroads. Humanity is playing with fire, in the most literal of senses, with potentially tragic consequences ahead. We are ***deeply alarmed by what is happening*** in the three dimensions of our ministry – Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation. Rather than experiencing justice, we are witnessing terrible injustices being inflicted on the most vulnerable, such as migrants and refugees. Rather than experiencing peace, we are witnessing an intensification of the bloodshed of absurd wars and a frightening arms race. Rather than experiencing the integrity of creation, we are witnessing its brutal desecration, such as the madness of fossil fuel expansion and continued deforestation while climate disasters become more deadly and frequent. It is a terrifying trajectory on all three fronts of our ministry, in all corners of the globe.

Paradoxically, the year 2025 is also a Jubilee Year, with no other theme than ***“Pilgrims of Hope”***. In the midst of so much suffering and death, we recall that the Lord of Life overcame death. While witnessing the heavy crosses carried by so many sisters and brothers, we remember that the Cross is followed by the empty tomb. Grounded in our Christian hope, we recommit to intensify our efforts so that Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation might prevail. As children of Saint Francis and inheritors of his charism of service to “these least brothers of mine” (Mt 25:40), we resolve once again to serve and walk together with the victims of various injustices, conflicts, and environmental disasters, bringing hope to the world.

CONFESSION AND APPEAL FOR MORE ACTION

We find much hope in witnessing what JPIC animators have accomplished this past triennium, as illustrated by very inspiring reports from the different conferences. JPIC is becoming an increasingly important part of the Order’s life and many goals have been accomplished. Yet, we have also accepted the invitation of our Vicar General, Br. Ignacio Ceja, to be very honest about “the faults and difficulties that are faced”, a very timely exercise in this Lenten season that just began. So we acknowledge that ***what we and the Order are doing is not enough***. Given the exponential expansion of challenges our world faces, we must admit that the Order now finds itself failing to stand up to the occasion. This must change. The Order must take much more seriously the gravity of the existential crises we face. For that reason, as St. Francis said, “Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up until now we have done little or nothing” (1 Cel 103).

A major challenge we identify is that JPIC is still seen as an “optional” thing by many friars, whereas various general ministers defined JPIC as the “DNA” of our charism. Sadly, this is a major discrepancy in the life of the Order and a need for conversion that must be named. Our **Franciscan vocation demands that JPIC is an integral part of the daily life** of every single friar, not something delegated to JPIC animators alone. As followers of St. Francis we must imitate his service to the lepers and the most vulnerable, his risky attempts to promote peace like at Damietta or in the Assisi Mayor-Bishop conflict, and his fraternal affection and compassion with other creatures. In this 21st century, this charismatic option for JPIC is illuminated by the magisterium of our beloved Franciscan-named pope, most notably through his prophetic encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*. Now is the time to bring those teachings to life as a central priority of the Order.

LINES OF ACTION

Gathered here in the sacred birthplace of Saint Francis and the Order, we reviewed and reaffirmed the overall lines of action of the Jerusalem 2019 and Petropolis 2022 statements, while updating them to reflect the ever-evolving signs of the times, discerning what the Holy Spirit is inviting us to do next.

1. Seeking Justice for Migrants and Refugees

In all parts of the world, we witness the reality of people on the move, both within and outside of national borders. The reasons for this movement are complex but are becoming ever more involuntary through increasingly unjust socio-economic systems, climate disruption, and violence. We recognize that people have a right to migrate as well as a right not to migrate. Unfortunately, systems that allow for the smooth migration of people are broken. These broken systems are being further manipulated by political and other social leaders, unjustly blaming and using violence against migrants and refugees. These dehumanizing efforts make the plight of those sisters and brothers even more difficult and dangerous.

Recalling the itinerant nature of our Franciscan life, the Franciscan family has joined to form networks to support migrants and refugees. These networks can be found in the Americas, the Mediterranean, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. We strongly **affirm their continuation and strengthening**, creating opportunities for more people to participate. Thus, we call on all friars, the larger Franciscan family, and all people of good will, to:

1. **Raise awareness about migration realities** in each of our entities by coordinating closely with the Franciscan Family networks.
2. Strengthen, and initiate where needed, Franciscan networks for the **pastoral care** of migrants, refugees, victims of human trafficking, and those working in conditions of modern-day slavery.
3. Develop a continuous, systematic, and holistic **migrant and refugee ministry**, based on the local reality of where friars are serving, together with our Franciscan networks and other social and human rights agencies; they should address the complexity of the stages in migrant families' journeys: those remaining behind, those leaving a community, those on the road, and those arriving at a new place.

4. Advocate through our Franciscan networks and act through other appropriate means to **lessen the “push” factors** that lead people to feel that migration is their only possibility for a better life, and in many cases to just survive.
5. **Empower young migrants and refugees** with skills development so that they are better able to flourish in their places of residence.

2. Promoting Peace in a Violent World

Conflict is a normal element of life. How we address this conflict is a matter of whether it leads to violence or the possibility of peace. In fact, we acknowledge that our faith reminds us that God wants us all to have peace. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis calls our attention to the Franciscan gifts of fraternity and social friendship, raising up the centrality of dialogue and encounter (FT 199). We are aware that how we live in fraternity is our first sign of the path to nonviolence and reconciliation. From this point we bring the application of a spirituality and practice of active nonviolence as the pathway for peacebuilding that flows from our Franciscan tradition.

Embracing our heritage as “heralds of peace” we have built networks in Asia and Africa and joined other organizations, like Franciscans International and Pax Christi International, to strive for peace. In these efforts we are **building our skills and expertise for conflict mediation and resolution, peacebuilding and dialogue**. Thus, we call on all friars, the larger Franciscan family, and all people of good will, to:

1. Break cycles of violence and trauma by providing resources to help friars **assist victims of violence** with spiritual, psychological, and other support.
2. Work with Pax Christi International’s Catholic Nonviolence Initiative and its Center for Nonviolence to develop public policy and further Church teaching to build structures for nonviolence as a **counterbalance to the growth of militarism** as the primary resolver of conflict.
3. **Build bridges** between rival leaders to promote nonviolent mediation of conflict, following Saint Francis’ example, like between the Crusaders and the Sultan or between the Mayor and Bishop of Assisi.
4. Stand with vulnerable communities given that one of the drivers of violence is the **dehumanization of others** through racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and attacks on other vulnerable groups as persecuted Christians.
5. Support Franciscans International and their tireless work for human rights at the United Nations, as we are concerned that many corporate interests are seeking to lessen the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs); we must strengthen our advocacy so that this lessening role does not come to pass.

3. Ending the destruction of Creation

The year 2025 marks the 8th centenary of the Canticum of the Creatures and the 10th anniversary of its “child”, the *Laudato Si'* encyclical. As we celebrate these two prophetic texts, we were blessed to visit the “Garden of the Canticum” at San Damiano and to reflect with Br. William Short, OFM, about the relevance of the Canticum in inspiring an integral ecology. Given that the Order, the Church, and humanity at large still are responding inadequately to the *Laudato Si'* appeal and the huge urgency of the climate crisis (cf. *Laudate Deum*), the Canticum holds much promise to bring our gaze to God as Creator and to the sacredness of fellow creatures as a motivation to care for them.

Tragically, climate denial now dominates many halls of power and plans are underway to accelerate even further the destructive plans of the fossil fuel industry and other polluting industries. Concerned about the increasingly desperate cries of the earth and the poor, we must be much more intentional in following St. Francis as “the example par excellence” of an integral ecology (*Laudato Si'* 10), uplifting a consistent “culture of life” to protect human life in all its stages and a healthy planet to sustain life in all its forms. Thus, we call on all friars, the larger Franciscan family, and all people of good will, to:

1. Practice an “**ecological spirituality**” (LS 216) in our daily lives, while also evangelizing about its importance in our respective spheres of mission, by praising God together with our fellow creatures (as modelled by the Canticum) and learning from creation, as a source of motivation to care for it.
2. Integrate *Laudato Si'* into our liturgical life to stress how the mystery of Creation is at the heart of our faith, particularly by celebrating “Creation Day” (September 1st) as the “World Day of Prayer for Creation”, which brings us much hope as it will soon become a liturgical feast in many churches. We also encourage the celebration of the larger ecumenical “Season of Creation” that month.
3. Counter the toxic consumerism that pervades our societies by embodying **sober lifestyles** in the Franciscan ascetic style and implementing local initiatives to care for creation and promote ecological wellness, for example by drastically reducing and greening our energy use, saving water, and planting trees.
4. Help build a **fraternal economy** that enables integral sustainable development and the just sharing of natural resources, denouncing polluting industries such as agroindustry, fracking, unrestrained mining, etc, together with their victims and social movements; we also commit to contribute to the construction of alternatives, such as agroecology, cooperatives, etc.
5. Denounce the continued expansion of the **fossil fuel** industry, which is the main responsible for the climate emergency, by deepening financial divestment efforts by OFM entities and continuing to support the Fossil Fuel Nonproliferation Treaty.
6. Advocate for climate justice in the process of the annual **COP summits**, particularly in our respective countries in collaboration with other ecclesial and social actors, so that the promises of the Paris Agreement are fulfilled.
7. Continue the process of creation and implementation of the network of **Franciscan centers for higher education** on integral ecology, to support the Order’s efforts in this field.

CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITIES

Lastly, we also identified some cross-cutting themes that are essential for all three dimensions of our work:

1. Ever-deeper integration of JPIC with the secretariats of ***“Evangelization and Mission”*** and ***“Formation and Studies”***, as discussed with their general secretaries here in Assisi, given that the three services are deeply interconnected in the life of the Order, both at the level of the Curia and the Entities; in particular, we discerned that the JPIC General Office also deserves becoming a secretariat, to signal decisively that JPIC truly is our DNA as Franciscans, as various general ministers have stated.
2. Active ***participation in networks*** given that the Order is not big enough to effectively tackle the gigantic challenges we face; these range from networks of the Franciscan family – such as Franciscan Network for Migrants in the Americas, Franciscan Network of the Mediterranean, Franciscan Network for Peace and Integral Ecology in Asia, Franciscan Network for Peacebuilding and Ecological Justice in East Africa – all the way to Catholic thematic networks – such as the Laudato Si’ Movement and the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative.
3. Greater ***attention to communications***, calling upon friars to share their stories so that we can all gain insights and inspiration from best practices and actions for JPIC.

In closing, after a fruitful week of fraternal sharing and discernment, the International Council for JPIC is recommitted to supporting all of our friars to become ***“Pilgrims of Hope”*** by bringing about the dreams of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation in every place where an OFM fraternity is present.

Members of the OFM International Council of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation:

1. Br. Daniel Rodríguez Blanco – ***OFM JPIC General Office***
2. Br. Taucen Girsang – ***OFM JPIC General Office***
3. Br. Jean Eric Mutabazi – ***OFM JPIC Animation Committee***
4. Sr. Mary Wangari Sebastian, LSSJ – ***OFM JPIC Animation Committee***
5. Mr. Tomás Insua – ***OFM JPIC Animation Committee***
6. Br. Carlos Molina – ***Holy Land Conference Coordinator***
7. Br. John Luke Gregory – ***Holy Land Conference Coordinator***
8. Br. Marco Bussi – ***COMPI Coordinator***
9. Br. Natanael Ganter – ***COTAF Coordinator***
10. Br. Fridus Derong – ***SAAOC Coordinator***
11. Br. Cordian Szwarc – ***North Slavic Conference Coordinator***
12. Br. Benjamin Milkovic – ***South Slavic Conference Coordinator***
13. Br. Flavio Chavez – ***Our Lady of Guadalupe Conference Coordinator***
14. Br. Augustine Seng Mun Aung – ***EAC Coordinator***
15. Br. João Paulo Mendes de Moraes – ***Brasil-Cono Sur Conference Coordinator***
16. Mr. Russell Testa – ***English-Speaking Conference Coordinator***