



INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

DOMINICANS IN THE PROMOTION AND DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Salamanca, Spain
1 – 5 September 2016

Final Statement

In this 800th Jubilee Year of the Dominican Order being entrusted by the Church to go forth and preach the Gospel, we, 200 Dominican friars, sisters, laity, nuns, priest associates and youth, ministering in 50 countries in all corners of the world, have gathered in Salamanca, Spain, from 1-5 September, 2016, to reflect on how our Dominican Family can renew its mission through the promotion and defense of human rights.

While the terminology of “human rights” is relatively recent, there is a growing consciousness in the Church that the focus on human rights touches and unifies every aspect of our work to respect and defend the inherent dignity and freedom of each and every person which is at the heart of the Good News that Jesus, the Incarnate Word, came to preach:

- **People and Creation.** Respect for human dignity and the promotion of human rights are inseparable from respect and protection of Creation in all its integrity. There cannot be a flourishing human species, exercising human rights, if Earth’s eco-systems are depleted and unprotected. This broad respect for the whole of Creation gives flesh to the Church’s understanding of the “common good”.
- **Justice and Peace.** Human rights enable us to translate the principle of justice into concrete, binding commitments. Human rights are recognized by the international community as constitutive of a peaceful and democratic order. All persons have rights, freedoms and responsibilities, which in turn enable each one to build a just world and nurture peace.
- **Multiple Dimensions of Rights and Responsibilities of Each Person.** Human rights are now categorized into civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. They are understood as **universal, indivisible, and interdependent**, while respecting cultural diversity. These principles, while not readily applied in our world, correspond to the emphasis of Catholic Social Teaching on the whole person.
- **Intellectual Life and Experience.** Each of the human rights challenges us to reconsider the purpose of our study and research. They call us to direct our intellectual pursuits to exploring the meanings and structural roots of violations of dignity and freedom. This focus can only be accomplished if we continuously listen with respect and compassion to the testimonies of those who suffer.

Following Jesus and Dominic, we, therefore, are called to preach this Good News in a way that can touch the hearts of all people: those who suffer those standing with them, those indifferent to them, those oppressing them, and those who abuse God’s gift of creation.

It is, therefore, no accident that we are meeting in Salamanca. We wish to breathe in the spirit that inspired our brothers, Pedro de Cordoba, Antonio de Montesinos, Bartolome de las Casas, Francisco de Vitoria and other Dominicans of the 16th century centered around the Salamanca School. In close collaboration, they expanded the meaning of human community. Emphasizing the need to recognize and protect the rights of indigenous peoples of the "new world", Vitoria with his brothers laid the foundation of International Law and the need for global community and cooperation that has inspired the founders of the United Nations, today's primary institution to promote global justice and peace.

Surveying the history of our Dominican Family, we recognize that often we have failed to promote and defend the rights of all. Nevertheless, throughout the ages, and even today, we acknowledge many brothers and sisters who are shining witnesses of compassion and defenders of the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed and the earth.

We recognize that we still have a long way to go to become true defenders of the rights of those who suffer, and so, gathered at this Congress, we commit ourselves to the following actions.

1. Embrace as an integral part of our Dominican charism the mission of justice and peace as constitutive to the preaching of the gospel.
2. Integrate Catholic Social Teaching and the defense of human rights into all aspects of the formation of the Dominican Family – brothers, sisters, nuns, laity, associates, priest fraternities, youth, and other movements and members of the family.
3. Promote the study of *Laudato Si* as a means for teaching an integral ecology that combines the well-being of humans with the whole of creation.
4. Adopt and promote the *Salamanca Process* which calls on Dominicans, our educational institutions, and ministerial programs to direct our study, research, analysis, and action towards addressing the challenges our world faces, thus creating a passionate synergy between our intellectual and apostolic lives.
5. Create and strengthen networks that enable collaboration at all levels of our mission.
6. Improve our structures of communication, using modern technologies effectively and seeking alternatives when necessary.
7. Develop and strengthen structures at all levels that facilitate the Dominican Family working together to address the root causes of injustice.
8. Strengthen the Dominican presence at the United Nations by ensuring that the voices of those suffering human rights abuses are heard at the highest levels through the sharing of the Dominican family on the ground and by increasing resources dedicated to that mission and concrete justice and peace projects.
9. Be in solidarity with our brothers and sisters whose mission experience is difficult and dangerous due to political, religious or economic factors.
10. Support those who take prophetic stands, like our early brothers and sisters, against sinful structures of power that oppress people and violate the whole of creation.

As we embark on this new stage of our history, we ask forgiveness for our many omissions, attitudes and actions against human rights that have prevented the Good News being spread. We rely on the grace of God and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that, inspired only by the compassion of Jesus, we may become messengers of Truth and our preaching may bring hope to the millions of victims of violations of human rights and of the Earth that are crying out for Good News and for a new future.