

Towards a Culture of Advocacy

Why Are We Here at the United Nations?

We are present at the UN with a clear mission:

- To give voice to the vulnerable people and the planet that our congregations care and protect at the grass roots.
- To influence UN policies so that promises become obligations nations must uphold.
- To reflect experiences of our congregations at the ground with the marginalized in our advocacy activities at UN.

Our Advocacy at the UN

Active actively participate at UN Platforms and Processes

We network with major UN forums and some of them are: High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Financing for Development (FfD), Environmental negotiations, Migration and child rights discussions, Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Civil Society Organization (CSO) forums, Anti-trafficking initiatives, Anti-violence and drug abuse initiatives, Youth and children negotiations, Commission for Social Development (CSocD), COP, and many more

Building Networks and Partnerships

We strengthen our influence through collaboration with:

- **UN departments and specialized agencies**
- **Member States and diplomatic missions**
- **Civil society Networks:**

NGO Major Group for Children and Youth, Justice Coalition of Religious, Religious at the UN, NGO Committees on Trafficking, Migration, and Social Development

Through these alliances, our collective voice grows stronger, and our impact multiplies.

Advocacy in Action

Our networked advocacy activities include:

Submitting written and oral statements, Organizing side and parallel events, engaging in consultations and official discussions, Signing joint statements, Co-sponsoring events, Building relationships with UN departments and permanent missions etc.

What Fuels Our Advocacy?

At its core, our advocacy springs from the painful realities faced by marginalized communities where our congregations serve. Yet, challenges remain:

- Grassroots experiences often fail to flow into UN-level advocacy due to lack of proper data.
- Local responses tend to focus on charity and service rather than rights and advocacy.
- Advocacy is sometimes seen as the responsibility of a few, instead of the shared mission of all in the congregations.
- Numbers of dedicated advocates are shrinking, threatening the continuity of this vital work.

At this critical juncture, we must reaffirm advocacy is not optional—it is essential. If we do not carry this mission forward, who will?

A Way Forward

To renew and strengthen our advocacy, we must:

- Connect our advocacy at UN and at other international institutions with our congregation's mission on the ground—speaking the same language at UN and the ground.
- Institutionalize advocacy so it becomes the responsibility of all, not just a few.
- Move from charity-based to rights-based advocacy approaches.
- Ensure that our grassroots realities are reflected at global platforms.
- Recognize that the STATE/Governments have the primary responsibility for securing the rights and well-being of its people.
- Recognize that our congregations through their institutions and projects and programs at the ground are not setting up and running parallel governments.

Advocacy is about reminding our governments of the promises that they have made—and urging them to fulfill them.

Beyond Academic and Personal Success

Our institutions nurture academic excellence and prepare students for sustainable livelihoods. But we must also ask:

- **Are we forming responsible citizens?**
- **Are our graduates equipped to stand for justice and lead change?**

Despite shaping hundreds of thousands of young people each year, very few emerge as social leaders rooted in our values. Advocacy must therefore become central to our mission of forming upright citizens and leaders too.

The members of our congregations and our collaborators are becoming institutional people. Advocacy and shaping the beneficiaries of our institutions into upright citizens and leaders is not the concern and an attitude that our people generally have.

Bridging Local and Global Advocacy

Our UN advocacy will only bear fruit if the spirit of advocacy is alive at our grassroots. This requires:

- Cultivating an advocacy mindset in every community. Institutionalize advocacy.
- Establishing strong information/data flows from local experiences to global platforms for advocacy activities at UN.
- As of now the information that we use for advocacy seem to be from internet, from others and not from our lived experience at the grass roots where we work.

TOWARDS A CULTURE OF ADVOCACY

Let us build a culture of advocacy in the members of our congregations, in our collaborators and in our beneficiaries so that they would support our advocacy efforts at UN and other places from the ground. Building an advocacy culture does not demand massive budgets or disruptive reforms. We can start with teaching advocacy to our congregation members, collaborators and beneficiaries/ students. It can be integrated into what we already do, especially through education. Let us plant seeds of advocacy in them. Let those seeds sprout and grow.

Advocacy Training Curriculum

We propose nine easy to teach, engaging and interactive sessions for students, collaborators, and members:

- 1. Human Rights Education**
- 2. Understanding Democracy**
- 3. Climate Action**
- 4. UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**
- 5. Voluntary National Review (VNR)**
- 6. Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**
- 7. Child Rights Education**
- 8. Labour Rights**
- 9. The Common Good**

They are basic information that any citizen must have in them.

Guidelines for Implementation

- **Keep sessions simple, interactive, and under 1.5 hours.**
- **Limit participation to 50 students for effective engagement.**
- **Target senior students.**
- **Hold one session per month over an academic year.**
- **Ensure proper documentation and reflective record-keeping.**
- **Celebrate achievements with certificates and recognition ceremonies.**

These sessions can also be adapted for collaborators, congregational members, and for those in formation programs.

Expected Outcomes: A New Era of Advocacy

By planting seeds of advocacy, we will:

- **Foster an advocacy culture across our institutions and congregations.**
- **Strengthen our advocacy impact locally, nationally, and globally.**
- **Equip youth and collaborators with advocacy awareness and skills.**
- **Inspire future leaders who care for society and creation.**
- **Position our institutions as vital contributors to global movements such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, COP etc**
- **Build inclusive, interfaith advocacy for justice and peace.**

To Conclude...

We can shape not only successful individuals, but courageous citizens—leaders committed to justice, dignity, and care for the vulnerable.

Mathew Thomas SDB
Salesian of Don Bosco

NB: The advocacy training manual will be available by the end of December 2025. Each session will have 3 versions: College Graduation Students, Technical institute graduates and Senior school students. The manual will also have resource section for the trainers. This advocacy training program becomes the curriculum of our institutions.