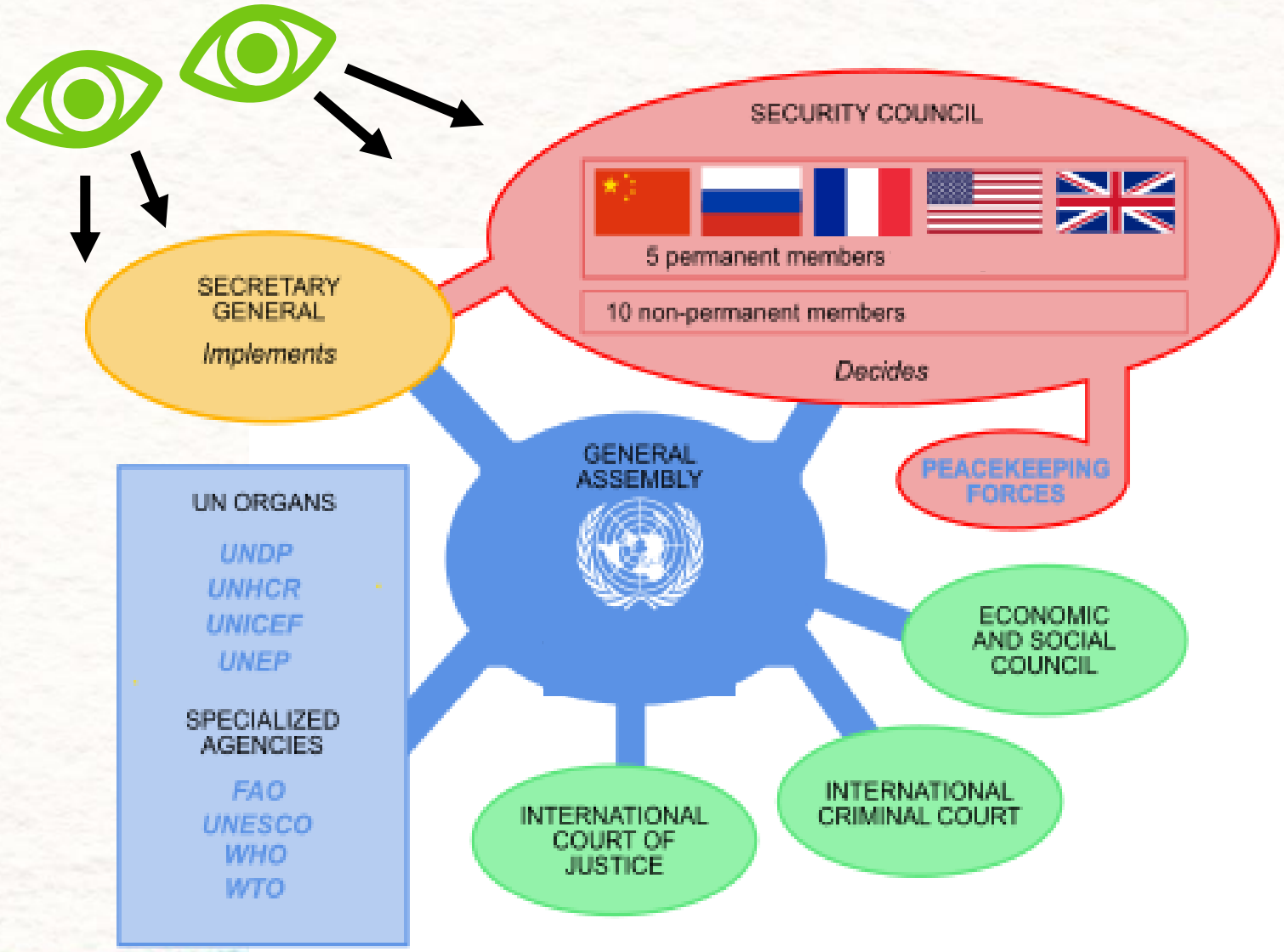
Catholic Religious NGOs and the UN:

Primer on Spiritual Leadership & Engagement in UN Processes

Catholic Religious NGO Presence at the UN

- From the perspective of the UN system, we are considered **"NGOs"** (non-governmental organizations)

- ~30 NGOs accredited to engage with the UN on behalf of over 200 Catholic Religious congregations



Religious Voice at the UN

- **Expert:** provide insights from members' work ministering to most vulnerable and excluded populations
- **Impartial:** represent communities that span many nations and have no national identity
- **Credible:** known to *practice* values of care for human dignity of all and for the natural environment through lives of intentionality and dedicated service
- **Consistent:** maintain positions based on constitutions and principles older than UN and many nations; bring continuity and stability to global conversation that governments with frequently changing leaders/politics cannot
- **Collaborative:** speak and work through coalitions and committees that model for governments how to prioritise common goals and common good ahead of individual glory, achievement, or control

Catholic Religious NGO Leadership in Collaboration























Our Motivation to Engage in Systemic Change at the Global Level



Catholic Social Teaching

Signs of the times: a Call to JUSTICE

Trend of **smaller numbers of vocations to Religious life** requires us to confront questions of justice *beneath* the question of sustainability:

If a day comes when *we can no longer provide this charitable ministry,*

- *how will the dignity of those we serve be upheld?*
- *what system or structure will fulfill and protect their rights?*

Signs of the times:
a Call to MULTI-LEVEL ORGANISATION

Shift toward authoritarianism across many countries **requires us to:**

- use and defend our remaining access to political spaces more effectively by **speaking with an informed, organized, and unified voice**
- **raise** social/political/environmental/human-rights **consciousness of the local communities we serve**
- **establish channels** for direct passage of information and messages **from local communities and marginalised groups into global fora**, circumventing political leadership and State/for-profit media

SDGs: a Call to PARTICIPATION



Women and men Religious have been working toward the SDGs for centuries and are well positioned to **guide political leaders and hold them accountable** to the promises of this agenda.

How Religious NGOs Engage with the UN System

How Religious NGOs Engage with the UN System:

- "Get **in** the way"
- "Get **out of** the way"
- Model **a new** "**way**"

"Getting *IN* the Way"

Occupying space in places of power on behalf of those who can't be present in order to raise awareness of an injustice in progress and to infuse the global conversation with the perspectives, experiences, and needs that would otherwise be absent

- Speaking from the floor of the UN or submitting written statements and recommendations (literally termed "interventions") during major meetings or negotiations
- Writing letters to and seeking meetings with governments' representatives to the UN
- Participating in the political systems of our respective nations (via voting, lobbying, etc.)
- Physically protesting or demonstrating outside UN offices or Member States' missions to the UN

"Getting *OUT OF* the Way"

Creating and giving space within places of power for those who face the greatest barriers to that space **so that they can assert their own voices**, perspectives, and experiences

- Organizing events and opportunities for marginalized individuals to speak at the UN
- Providing financial or technological support and training to facilitate marginalized individuals' participation in UN meetings
- Collecting testimony of marginalized groups and submitting it to UN processes and Member States
- Ensuring marginalized groups are aware of the UN's open calls for input through which they can express their concerns and ideas directly
- Amplifying statements of marginalized groups by sharing them with our networks via social media, newsletters, or other platforms

Modeling *A NEW* "Way"

Continually **evaluating *our* role in unjust systems, modifying our behavior, and telling our stories** to

(a) lessen the burden our actions place on other's ability to access their basic needs and

(b)demonstrate to political leaders that responsibility *can* be taken for past harms, genuine collaboration for the common good *can* be realized, and institutional changes *can* be made in favor of justice

This work includes making intentional choices about:

- What we buy, wear, and eat
- How much waste we produce and how we dispose of it
- How we travel and how often
- Where we invest our money & whose money we accept (personally and institutionally)
- How we use media and technology
- How willing and adept we are at working with others for a common goal

*Best **evidence that a new world is feasible—not fantasy!**