Thank you for the opportunity to share a third paper at this symposium. I pray it will help us reflect together on the importance of human rights for the way we live our lives in the 21st century. In my first paper, I argued that the future of human rights is at risk. In my second paper, I proposed that human rights needs religion to flourish in the 21st century. In this third paper, I will suggest some practical ways to make human rights a reality for billions of people around the world.

My central argument at this symposium is that human rights was clearly defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was built on a rich heritage of philosophical and religious thinking over thousands of years. The Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – were able to embrace the 1948 vision of rights for all people. However, in the past 70 years human rights has become detached from its religious and philosophical foundations. It has become closely aligned with western secular individualism resulting in many in the global south and people of faith around the world losing trust in contemporary human rights.

I believe this is not the time to give up on human rights but, instead, seize the opportunity for the world’s religions to come alongside secular believers in human rights and rediscover firm foundations for human rights for the benefit of everyone. In this third paper, I continue to develop this proposal by focusing on Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

1. **The current situation**

Almost three years ago, the leaders of all 193 countries in the United Nations agreed Agenda 2030 with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The government of Brazil was one of the signatories. The SDGs followed on from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which guided international development from 2000 to 2015. The MDGs only applied to ‘developing’ countries. Agenda 2030 and the SDGs applies to every country.

The MDGs helped to lift more than one billion people out of extreme poverty in the 15 years from 2000. The MDGs made inroads against hunger, enabled more girls to attend school than ever before and helped protect our planet. They generated new and innovative partnerships and had some success in galvanising public opinion. The MDGs showed the immense value of setting ambitious goals. The UN Secretary General said: ‘By putting people and their immediate needs at the forefront, the MDGs reshaped decision-making in developed and developing countries alike’. ¹

¹ The UN MDG Report 2015
Having the agreed MDG goals and targets has resulted in significant advances. For example:
- The global under-five mortality rate has declined by more than half.
- Since 1990, the maternal mortality ratio has declined by 45 per cent worldwide.
- New HIV infections fell by approximately 40 per cent.
- The global malaria incidence rate has fallen by an estimated 37 per cent and the mortality rate by 58 per cent.2

The success of the MDGs encouraged the world leaders to develop a new plan for 2015 to 2030. Agenda 2030 is an ambitious plan that has the potential to make human rights a reality in the lives of billions of people. The Salvation Army – and many other faith groups – are supporting Agenda 2030.

2. What are the SDGs?
I appreciate some of you may not have heard much about Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Here is a short video in Portuguese to explain the SDGs.


3. What should we do?
How can people of faith – and particularly Christian denominations and organisations like The Salvation Army – get involved in Agenda 2030? This is a massive, ambitious plan to improve the lives of billions of people. What should we do?

3.1 Don’t get cynical
First, we must not get cynical and lose hope. Agenda 2030 is ambitious – some say too ambitious. We might be tempted to give up.

It is true that plans to solve the world’s problems are not new. I have been involved in the international development sector for more than 20 years and there have been many plans, initiatives and strategies. Back in the 1990s and the early 2000s much of the focus was on HIV and AIDS. Huge amounts of money was invested in fighting the AIDS pandemic. The Salvation Army played its part in the global response. There is still a major problem in many parts of the world with new AIDS infections but there is much less money for AIDS. UNAIDS reports2 that approximately 36.7 million people globally were living with HIV in 2016 with 1.8 million people became newly infected with HIV in 2016. 20.9 million people were accessing antiretroviral therapy in June 2017. Progress has been made in addressing the problem but it has not gone away. Despite the ongoing crisis, the attention of the international development community went off in a new direction. To some extent The Salvation Army’s attention on AIDS has reduced to a large extent driven by less funding. After HIV/AIDS, the focus was on maternal and child health. Then the focus moved to health systems. Now the focus is on the SDGs as well as human trafficking.

It is easy to get cynical and sceptical about the way the international development community behaves. Organisations like the Catholic Church and The Salvation Army must always make sure we work with these different government agendas without losing focus on our primary purpose of serving God and his people. To do this, Christians and the Church need to be clear about our purpose – building God’s Kingdom on Earth. We will think about this more tomorrow. As long as God’s purposes

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2 Ibid
are our priority, we can work with the strategies and initiatives of the international development community. We must not get cynical. We must be agile, creative and always hopeful.

3.2 Embrace opportunities to partner
Second, we need to build partnerships. Everyone knows that Agenda 2030 is very ambitious. Progress towards the 17 goals will require a huge, coordinated effort. Partnerships are essential. The 193 governments who approved the Sustainable Development Goals have said that no one must be left behind and everyone must be included.

This promise to ‘leave no one behind’ gives new opportunities for faith groups to partner with governments and UN agencies. While some people in the UN and government agencies may be wary of FBOs and religious communities, there are many other people in the UN system and in governments who want genuine partnerships. It is true that there was no mention of religion or faith in the video we just watched. We could get defensive and upset but that does not solve anything! We need to be wary of being used by the state but we also must not withdraw and become isolationists. There is a common saying at the UN – if you are not at the table you will be on the menu. However, when we sit at the table with governments, business, secular NGOs and FBOs we need to know what we are going to say and be able to keep our promises!

3.3 Make constructive proposals – the moral and spiritual imperative to end extreme poverty

This brings me to the third point, we need to make constructive proposals grounded in our theology. I will share one example. In 2015, General Cox, the current international leader of The Salvation Army, joined many other religious leaders and signed the Moral and Spiritual Imperative calling for the end of extreme poverty by 2030. The World Bank facilitated this initiative.

The signatories stated that ending extreme poverty is a moral and spiritual imperative. They identified two commitments necessary to accomplish this goal: ‘to act guided by the best evidence of what works and what doesn’t; and to use our voices to compel and challenge others to join us in this urgent cause inspired by our deepest spiritual values’.  

These two commitments are important in respect of human rights. First, human rights cannot remain a theoretical idea simply filling books, laws and classrooms. Human rights needs evidence – what works and what doesn’t work to help people live full lives? This is also a challenge to The Salvation Army and other parts of the Christian Church. We need evidence. Measurement is important. For too long too many Salvationists have hoped programmes are making a difference. That is not good enough. If we are serious pilgrims we must know where we are going, what difference we are making, whether we are achieving our purpose. We need evidence. This means we take statistics seriously. Not because the donors tell us we must. We take measurement seriously because we want the people who we are serving to know how they are doing. 

The second commitment in the Moral and Spiritual Imperative signed by General Cox is a commitment to be inspired by our deepest spiritual values. This means we cannot go into the fight for human rights for all people without God and without the resources of our faith. For Christians, our passion for human rights is inspired by Jesus’ teaching on the greatest commandment in Matthew 22: 37 – 40.

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'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: ‘‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’

Salvation Army foundations for supporting human rights are built on these two interconnected truths:

First, the salvation that Jesus has made possible for all people is a comprehensive salvation – all your heart, all your soul, all your mind. We must not fall into the trap of dualism – separating body from soul. I am concerned when I hear Salvationists and other Christians talk about the priority of saving souls. It suggests souls are more important than bodies. Equally, we cannot say it is enough to save peoples bodies – that is denying the essential spiritual dimension of all people created in God’s image. The Salvation Army believes in a holistic Salvation – the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body.

Second, every person is precious because we have all been created in the image of God. This phrase ‘image of God’ is very important. People are, in their very essence, made for relationships. God who is in very essence a relationship – Father, Son and Spirit – has created us in this image. Therefore, Christian must make relationships our priority. Jesus put relationships at the heart of the greatest commandment – love God and love each other. We are not individuals who stand alone – we are the relational nature of humanity made in the image of God.

Loving other people with the same love and priority we have for ourselves, radically changes our view of human rights. The UDHR is not simply a document drawn up by the world’s elites 70 years ago, it has becomes an inspirational guide for how our world can function. Agenda 2030 is a very good roadmap that people of faith can fully support. However, we all need to show the source of our inspiration. For Christians it is God who is in very nature relationship.

3.4 Habits and practices sustain relationships
Finally, I want to emphasise the importance of good habits and practices to help sustain our relationships. It is not enough to have an inspiring vision or even a roadmap such as Agenda 2030. We need good habits and practices to keep us on track. I will talk more about this tomorrow but I mention a couple of them now.

Let me explain with a football illustration. The world’s greatest footballer, Pele, was born with many natural abilities but those alone did not make him the greatest footballer who has ever lived. He also had to practice hard. He would not have been able to do all the great tricks and shots in the matches if he had not practiced them every day. He also needed good habits to stay fit. There have been other very gifted footballers like George Best. George Best was a brilliant player but he had a bad habit – drinking alcohol. He died young because of his bad habits.

If we want to achieve Agenda 2030; if we want to change the world we need good habits. We need to translate fine words into daily practices and actions. Alasdair MacIntyre, the famous philosopher has extensively argued that justice should not be decoupled from the practices and habits that sustain it.6 Without shared practices and habits, human rights becomes a hollow construct, a blank sheet upon which to project a variety of perceptions of justice. Rights in themselves are insufficient to change the reality of life.

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6 MacIntyre, Whose Justice?
Professor Stanley Hauerwas, my favourite living theologian, argues Christians can use rights language as part of our moral toolkit but we need to be careful and modest in claiming what it can achieve. He wrote: ‘Rights, I think, are best used as a reminder, claims to help us remember the thick moral relationships our bodies make possible and necessary’.  

Professor Luke Bretherton argues the specific difference between the church and other communities is that these thick moral relationships include a relationship with God.  

Let’s go back to thinking about football for a minute. I am adding in a few thoughts that are not in the notes. Pele, could not have achieved all he did without ten other players on the team. He also had support from the coaches, the medical staff, his family. He became a great footballer because he had a whole nation supporting him – in fact many people love Pele who are not Brazilians. Despite his individual brilliance, his hard work and practice, Pele could not have achieved anything on his own.

This is an important lesson for Christians and especially Salvationists. We must never forget the importance of fellow Christians. We can be tempted to think it is all about me and Jesus or me and the Holy Spirit. We need each other. Our relationships are the most important aspect of our lives. It is not our wealth, our power, our position – it is all about our relationships. Our spiritual relationship with God does not just to make us ready for Heaven, they help us ensure God’s kingdom comes on Earth as it is in Heaven.

So, what are these good habits and practices? Here are a few examples of habits that build deeper relationships: Most important, we need to be active members of our local church. We need making time to listen to others – especially those who are different to us; we need to focus on long term relationships; take time to listen to God by being people of prayer; read the Bible; take a day of rest, a Sabbath, each week; be people who take care of our physical health, our emotional health, our spiritual health. There are many good habits and practices that help us to build deeper relationships. What are the habits that help you build deeper relationships?

When we do this, we produce the fruit of the Spirit in our relationships as St Paul described in Galatians 5: 22 and 23:

‘the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.’

4. Summary
Here are a few practical ideas of how can we work with Agenda 2030:

1. Look for opportunities to connect the Brazilian government at local, state or national level to support Agenda 2030
Your government promised to implement Agenda 2030, find ways to help them keep their promises. Agenda 2030 and the 17 SDGs offer an opportunity for everyone to work together to improve the lives of people – particularly poor and marginalised people. No doubt, the rich and powerful will try to undermine Agenda 2030; they will say it is unrealistic; they will try to find ways to ignore the promises made. We must be the voice of the voiceless and stand up the rights and value of every girl, boy, woman and man. There is a place at the table but we will probably need to push a bit – don’t expect everyone to welcome you with open arms!

7 Hauerwas, 2016, 206.
8 Bretherton, Hospitality as Holiness, 107–8.
2. People centred moral imperative
When we are at the table, we must encourage people focused interventions. It is easy to focus on a particular area of work – health or education or housing or trafficking or protecting the environment. However, silo approaches often result in fragmentation. The strength of Agenda 2030 is that all 17 SDGs work together to improve the lives of people. Sadly, there is already evidence of fragmentation. Some NGOs and some governments are choosing only two or three SDGs. This fragmentation is not helpful. The Salvation Army is part of the holiness movement – wholeness. We must fight for this – we will think more about this tomorrow.

3. Gather Evidence
People of faith must get better at collecting evidence about the difference our work makes. We cannot just tell people we do a good job – we must be able to prove it. I am encouraging you to focus on people centred evidence. What are the changes in the lives of people? How do they assess the difference made? Those most affected should be the primary audience for evidence.

4. Be Good Partnerships
One of the key principles of Agenda 2030 is the promise to ‘leave no one behind’. This is very important. The poorest and most marginalised people cannot be ignored by the powerful or the majority. This creates an opportunity for people of faith to be involved. This is a challenge because we have not always been good partners. Many Christians like to work on their own or with people who think like them. This needs to change. To ensure the success of Agenda 2030, to ensure the realisation of the promise of human rights, we have to learn how to work in partnerships without losing our faith and our purpose. Being good partners means attending meetings and finding ways to work together; good partners delivering on promises and allow others to get the credit.

5. Conclusion
I close with a story from Salvation Army history: Late one night – it was in the early morning hours – in the year 1888 William Booth returned to London from a campaign in the south of England, and slept badly when he arrived at his home. Bramwell Booth, living near by, was early in attendance next morning, and scarcely had he entered the dressing-room, quick, alert, and cheerful, when his father, who was walking to and fro with hanging braces and stormy hair, burst out at him, ‘Here, Bramwell! Do you know that fellows are sleeping out at night on the bridges? Sleeping out all night on the stone?’

Bramwell, thus checked in his greeting, exclaimed, ‘Yes, General; why, didn’t you know that?’

The General appeared to be thunderstruck. He had seen those tragic huddled forms benched on stone for the first time on the previous night, and his own sleep in a warm bed had been robbed in consequence. ‘You knew that,’ he said, ‘and you haven’t done anything!’

To this attack the Chief of the Staff made answer – first, that the Salvation Army could not at present undertake to do everything that ought to be done in the world; and, second... that one must be careful about the dangers of indiscriminate charity.

The General broke in angrily on this exordium. ‘Oh, I don’t care about all that stuff,’ he said; ‘I’ve heard it before. But go and do something. Do something, Bramwell, do something!’ ... ‘Get a shed for them,’ he ordered; ‘anything will be better than nothing; a roof over their heads, walls round their bodies’; and then he added, with characteristic caution, ‘you needn’t pamper them.’

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This conversation, between the founder of The Salvation Army and his eldest son, resulted in the birth of The Salvation Army’s social ministry. Two years after this exchange, William Booth’s book, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* was published laying out a plan for the Army’s social work. When implemented, The Salvation Army made a significant impact in the lives of millions of people. Its effects are evidenced today in the work of The Salvation Army in more than 125 countries around the world.

Booth’s plan was not just to meet needs – he wanted to change the world. He understood that required addressing the causes of misery as well as its effects. This was not simply a humanitarian initiative. It was social work and social justice motivated by the gospel of Jesus Christ. It encompassed emergency relief, personal and community development as well as advocacy. Salvationists understand that social work and social justice are an essential part of God’s plan to save his world.

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the injustices in the world. It is tempting to throw our hands up and say: ‘What difference does it make what I do?’

While we cannot fight every issue that threatens the well-being of the world on our own, the words of William Booth are still relevant today. William Booth’s plan to change the world in 1890 is similar to the Sustainable Development Goals to change the world by 2030. Both are bold, comprehensive and integrated plans. But we must always remember that humans cannot save the world by our own efforts. We must rely on God – Father, Son and Spirit.

We are called to be 21st century Bramwells. ‘Go and do something. Do something, Bramwell, do something!’ ‘Go And Do Something’ is the title of a booklet the ISJC has produced to explain the 17 SDGs and what we can all do to support their attainment.

May God help us all to go and do something!