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Crossing borders

In recent years fear has too often served as the base of U.S. foreign (and much of our domestic) policy. With very limited connection to reality, we have been led to believe that the immigrant “other” is someone to fear, someone who is going to take our jobs, overwhelm our public services, take away the familiar and the good from our daily lives. As missionaries, Maryknollers find that characterization to be highly objectionable and, as the contentious issue of immigration reform comes up on the U.S. political agenda, a shift in this mindset is essential.

In fact, Maryknoll experiences of crossing borders to encounter a diversity of cultures, languages, ideas and ways of life have been deeply life-giving and the basis for values of hospitality and social justice that, in our opinion, should shape U.S. immigration policy.

Diversity, we believe, is essential to human well-being and to that of the whole earth community. More and more clearly we understand Earth as a massive living organism comprised of millions of different but interdependent species. We know, for example, that our own survival depends on the survival of honey bees; that maintaining a diversity of crops and a variety of seeds is essential to future food security because genetic diversity enables species to adapt to new pests and diseases and to new climatic conditions.

People of faith, who experience God’s presence on this spectacularly diverse planet, in this amazing unfolding universe, and who believe that each person carries within himself or herself elements of the divine also treasure the gift of diversity as a manifestation of God’s work and presence and value each encounter with “the other” as a way to see a new facet of the divine.

Furthermore, contemporary science is helping us to understand that at a quantum level, everything is the “other” and equally, everything is “the same.” Earth is a single living organism. The entire planet is designed to function harmoniously as one, with every piece essential to the existence of the whole.

Joyce Rupp writes, “There are many ways to speak of the oneness that people have with all of human kind. Scientists describe this communion as the comingling and dancing of atoms one with another in people who are formed of the same stardust, breathe the same recycled air and drink from the same streams of life. Christian theologians present this oneness as humanity’s participation in the body of Christ. Buddhists speak of it as the practice of compassion which views all beings as one. Native Americans approach this same oneness in their understanding of each person as their brother or sister.”

An enormous challenge for all of us is to interpret this insight, this reality into the construct of human relationships, into the political arena, into our definition of peace and security.

Perhaps this can be done if we are willing to risk crossing the political, cultural, social, economic and religious barriers we have raised between ourselves and “others” – and open ourselves to be changed by those we encounter. Then, perhaps, we can bring the fragments of these enriching experiences into the global reality where hatred and fear are so often engendered.

Ubuntu, according to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, “speaks of the very essence of being human ... It is to say, ‘My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.’ We belong in a bundle of life. We say, ‘A person is a person through other persons.’ It is not ‘I think therefore I am.’ It says rather: ‘I am human because I belong. I participate, I share.’”

Many years ago, Thomas Merton wrote, “Violence rests on the assumption that the enemy and I are entirely different: the enemy is evil, I am good. The enemy must be destroyed, but I must be saved ... love sees things differently. It sees that even the enemy suffers from the same sorrows and limitation that I do. That we both have the same hopes, the same needs, the same aspiration for peaceful and harmonious life. And that death is the same for both of us.” (No Man is an Island, 1955)

“It is less and less possible to live as isolated human beings on our planet. Yet the differences among people continue to bring division rather than harmony, to produce domination struggles and war rather than enrichment, strength and peacefulness.” (Rupp)

This one-ness we now see; the consequences of exclusion we are beginning to understand; and the absolute necessity of inclusion and diversity are profoundly important to the future of the human race, yet they are elusive and complex.
Kenya: 50,000 threatened with eviction

According to the following update from Amnesty International (AI), Kenya’s government should halt the proposed eviction of more than 50,000 people living alongside the country’s railway lines until guidelines that conform to international human rights standards have been adopted. AI’s Demand Dignity Campaign is drawing attention to what is a potentially devastating situation for some of Kenya’s most impoverished people.

On March 21, Kenya Railways published a notice giving residents 30 days to pull down their structures and leave, or risk prosecution. Most of those affected are slum dwellers in Nairobi. “People have been living and working on these lands for years and a 30-day notice period is wholly inadequate,” said Justus Nyang’aya, director of Amnesty International Kenya. “Without proper safeguards, the proposed mass evictions will have a devastating impact on people’s access to water, sanitation, food and schools and could well create a humanitarian emergency. They will result in forced evictions, which contravene Kenya’s obligations under international human rights laws.”

While AI recognizes that the government is taking important steps to upgrade the railway system, for the tens of thousands of people living in the affected area, the demolition of homes and informal businesses will be socially and economically disastrous. To date, no comprehensive resettlement or compensation plan has been announced and the government appears to have made no provision for those who will lose their homes, livelihoods, possessions and social networks as a result of the project.

Under international human rights law, evictions should only be carried out as a last resort and only after all other feasible alternatives to eviction have been explored in genuine consultation with affected communities. Governments are also obliged to ensure that no one is rendered homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights as a consequence of eviction. “Kenya’s government is failing to deliver on its promise to put in place guidelines which comply with international human rights law regarding evictions and until it does it should halt all mass evictions of this nature,” said Nyang’aya. “To put 50,000 of your poorest and most vulnerable citizens at risk of homelessness is unacceptable.”

The estimate of 50,000 people at risk of forced evictions is based on government figures from a study commissioned in 2005 which concluded that 50,000 people or more live or work within the Kenya Railway reserve in Nairobi alone and many thousands more use the tracks as a walking route to and from their residences.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the government of Kenya is legally obliged to respect, protect and fulfill the right to adequate housing, including the prohibition on forced evictions, as guaranteed under Article 11 (1).

The Kenyan government has made commitments to various international bodies that it will adopt eviction guidelines, which will incorporate safeguards and due process. To date, this commitment has not been honored. Through the Demand Dignity campaign, launched in May 2009, Amnesty International is calling on governments globally to take all necessary measures, including the adoption of laws and policies that comply with international human rights law, to prohibit and prevent forced evictions. Amnesty International’s Demand Dignity campaign aims to end the human rights violations that drive and deepen global poverty. The campaign will mobilize people all over the world to demand that governments, big corporations and others who have power listen to the voices of those living in poverty and recognize and protect their rights.
Sudan: Elections aftermath

The Catholic Information Service for Africa (CISA) described well the “disappointment” in Sudan following the first multiparty general election there in 24 years. “Sudan’s ruler of 20 years [President Omar Hassan al-Bashir], who last year became the first sitting head of state to be indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, is now a presidential shoe-in.” In the weeks prior to the election, the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), which led the south in a decades-long struggle against the regime in Khartoum, withdrew from the election, eliminating the candidacy of Yasir Arman, the man seen as “able to present the strongest challenge to al-Bashir.” Other candidates followed suit, “citing repression and the expectation of vote-rigging.” Jennifer Schutzman, an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, contributed to this article.

A necessary step in the process mandated by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the elections drew heavy criticism from within Sudan and internationally. Independent election monitors noted serious irregularities and the elections’ failure to meet international standards. The general secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches, Rev. Ramadan Chan Liol, called the elections neither free nor fair, but said they should continue as a “key step in the implementation” of the CPA. The U.S. “noted” the assessment of independent observers and serious problems with the elections, but emphasized the importance of these elections to the CPA process.

At a meeting in Juba on April 20, Salva Kiir Mayardit, chair of the SPLM, and Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, deputy chair of the National Congress Party (NCP), pledged to accept the results at all levels despite any complaints from parties and discussed the expected formation of the next Government of National Unity – a clear move to perpetuate the “status quo.” The former SPLM presidential candidate, Yasir Arman, and the party’s secretary general, Pagan Amum, also attended the meeting, where resumption of the dialogue over contested CPA issues, including those related to Sudan’s oil, also was discussed.

Thanks to divestment campaigns organized by the Sudan Divestment Task Force and the European Coalition on Oil in Sudan – with the goal of pressuring the government of Sudan to change – most industrialized nations have avoided supporting Sudan’s oil industry, a root of its violent conflict and war. However, the state-run China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) continues to receive roughly 84 percent of Sudan’s oil; India’s Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. (ONGC) and Malaysia’s Petronas are the other major buyers.

This stand-still, with ethical investors not yet changing the system and oil benefits not yet reaching communities, will be affected by the referendum scheduled for January 2011. If, for example, South Sudan decides to secede, it will be faced with the challenge of how to handle its oil trade in a manner that will profit its citizens and maintain peace with the North at the same time.

Although at least 75 percent of the country’s 6.3 billion barrels of oil reserves are located in South Sudan, the North will not want (or be able) to break all ties with this industry; 60-70 percent of the North’s current income comes from the oil trade. One incentive for the North to permit peaceful secession would be for the South to maintain the status quo (as mandated by the CPA) of 50/50 revenue sharing. Pagan Amum, the SPLM’s secretary general, assured the North that, in the event of a vote for secession, in the interest of peace, the South would initially continue similar profit sharing.

Since all of the oil currently drilled in the South is sent directly through infrastructure in the North for trade; the South will not have an option in the near term to break off oil relations with the North. If the South were to withdraw immediately from the 50/50 agreement, it would risk not only armed attacks from the North but also abrupt economic failure.

The CPA also specifically addresses citizens’ rights pertaining to oil, yet the companies continue to disregard, if not work against, them. IKV Pax Christi refers to the Sudanese oil industry as “possibly the least socially responsible on the earth” and points a finger directly at the companies for making no attempt to guarantee CPA-granted citizens’ protections.

IKV Pax Christi also points to the CPA for not specifying exactly how those rights are to be protected. Article 3.1.5 of the CPA states that the oil companies “shall share in the benefits of that de-
development” but the oil companies do not have viable strategies to ensure community benefits. The CPA also states that “the communities in whose areas development of subterranean natural resources occurs have the right to participate, through their respective states/regions, in the negotiation of contracts for the development of those resources,” but this kind of involvement rarely takes place. (“Sudan: Whose Oil?” IKV Pax Christi) Possibly the most blatantly disregarded section of the CPA is Article 4.5: “Persons whose rights have been violated by oil contracts are entitled to compensation. On the establishment of these violations through due legal process, the Parties to the oil contracts shall be liable to compensate the affected persons to the extent of the damage caused.”

As Sudan takes the next steps on its painful journey toward peace, North and South, separately or together, with or without oil, will have to face very difficult questions about how to build an economy that is sustainable, inclusive and provides a life of dignity and well-being for every Sudanese person.

For additional information, see IKV Pax Christi’s “Sudan: Whose Oil?” The link is available on the MOGC website; contact the MOGC for a copy if you do not have access to the internet.

DRC: Conflict Minerals Trade Act of 2009

The following article is based on information from Amnesty International USA.

The Conflict Minerals Trade Act (HR 4128), introduced by Reps. Jim McDermott (D-WA) and Frank Wolf (R-VA) in November 2009, seeks to improve transparency and reduce the trade in conflict minerals coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in order to promote the larger policy goal of supporting peace and security in the DRC.

The DRC is rich in natural resources, including large deposits of columbite-tantalite (known as coltan), cassiterite, wolframite and gold, which are used in everyday technology such as cell phones, laptops and digital video recorders and in jewelry. The mines from which these minerals are extracted are most often under the control of armed groups, especially in the volatile eastern part of the country, where conflict has been ongoing for many years despite the presence of MONUC, the United Nations peacekeeping mission.

The most recent report of the UN Group of Experts on the DRC found that armed groups in eastern DRC continue to control and profit from the extraction and trade of these minerals. Both the conflict and the mining of minerals itself have led to grave human rights abuses, including sexual violence, child and slave labor and mass displacement.

If enacted into law, HR 4128 would mandate the production of a “Congo Conflict Minerals Map,” which would identify mines currently under the control of armed groups in the DRC. In addition, the bill would mandate the secretaries of State and Commerce to work with interested parties, including commercial entities, to determine best practices to ensure due diligence and documentation on the origin and supply chain of potential conflict minerals. HR 4128 would specifically ensure that the minerals used by companies do not directly finance conflict, result in labor or human rights abuses, or damage the environment. It would mandate the creation of a “Potential Conflict Goods List” and the regular auditing of facilities that are engaged in the trade in minerals from the DRC.

Most importantly, HR 4128 would require that individuals or companies be subject to penalties if found guilty of bringing conflict minerals into the U.S. by fraud, gross negligence or negligence. HR 4128 would greatly advance the goals of regulating and stemming the flow of conflict minerals, thereby limiting the ability of armed groups to benefit from conflict minerals and perpetuate the conflict.

Faith in action:

HR 4128, the Conflict Minerals Trade Act, is currently being considered by key policymakers in the House of Representatives. It should reach the House floor soon. Contact your representative (phone, fax, email) to ask him/her to co-sponsor this important legislation; use information provided in the above article, or check the Amnesty International USA website for a draft letter.
Africa: Impact of climate change on pastoralists

“For Africans the damage of climate change is not something that could happen in the future. It is already here with us, sowing misery and death across the land. Africa is indeed paying with the misery and death of its people for the wealth and well-being that was created in the developed countries through carbon-intensive development. That is fundamentally unjust.” Meles Zenawi, prime minister of Ethiopia and the African Union’s chief negotiator in Copenhagen, December 16, 2009.

The effects of climate change - such as drought, livestock deaths and resource conflict - may be all too apparent to pastoralists of northern Kenya, but there is much educational work to be done to explain the true causes and to identify effective and acceptable adaptation strategies.

“We were warned about the current situation by our elders and spiritual leaders when I was very young. This was about 50 years ago when the Ngishili age groups were born,” said Lemeteki Lerinagato, 70 to IRIN (April 15, 2010).

“Our people are dying like wild animals due to hunger, thirst and poverty. Young men are being killed every day. I am afraid our girls will not find men to marry. It is a curse... nothing else,” said Wario Ndenge, a Gabra elder from the upper eastern Marsabit region. “Frequent droughts and lack of food are clear signs of the curse. Women must stop wearing trousers. They should respect their husbands. And the wealthy must help the poor.”

According to local officials, many residents either disagree with the scientific explanation for climate change or are unaware of it. But pastoralist expert Daud Tari claims it is misleading and unfair to suggest that nomadic pastoralists are ignorant about climate change. In fact, they are well informed about the subject because they are the most severely affected, but the least prepared to adapt to the changes or to mitigate the effects “for which they are also the least responsible.” Tari added that more funds should be allocated to help dry-land communities adapt.

According to Abdinasir Ali Guled of the Indigenous Resources Exploitation Organization, the changing climate has increased poverty and environmental degradation as residents turn to charcoal burning to survive after dropping out of pastoralism. Youth are resorting to cattle rustling and insecurity has worsened.

Lordman Lekalkalai of the Isiolo Arid Lands Resource Management Project said that local officials are using government assessment reports of past weather patterns and impacts and information gathered from residents to help communities prepare for weather changes and to forestall losses, including livestock deaths. The government will also establish more livestock markets and abattoirs in the region and will encourage rainwater harvesting and the diversification of livelihoods and diets.

Both livestock keeping and food crop production are viable in the region as there is fertile land along the Ewaso N’giro and Tana rivers. The hope is that these steps will help increase income, promote food security and alleviate poverty.

Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai recently noted that 15 of the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change are in Africa. “We must find the right way to let our people know why.”

“Even a few years ago, most developing nations viewed climate change as one more trouble to which they could, with sufficient aid, adapt,” said Archbishop Desmond Tutu. “But after Arctic sea ice melted so dramatically in the summer of 2007, climate scientists began re-evaluating their predications – the earth was reacting more violently than expected to even small temperature increases.

“It became clear that for many countries basic survival was at stake ... Kenya’s ongoing drought, with the deaths of thousands of cattle and devastating crop failures that have accompanied it, is giving us a vivid picture of what uncontrolled climate change might bring to the African continent...

“I ask all those around the world who care about Africa to support climate fairness by starting or joining an awareness-raising action where they live. It is a chance for us to act as global citizens, not as isolated individuals and lonely consumers. It is a chance for world leaders to listen to the voices of conscience, not only those who speak about financial markets....”
Honduras: Efforts continue for new constitution

Despite the portrayal by mainstream press of the return to normalcy in Honduras, the government continues to repress popular movements and ignore demands for a new constitution. To show the level of popular support for a new constitution, the National Front of Popular Resistance (FNRP by its Spanish title) recently launched a campaign to collect signatures in support of a new constitution. The recently established Truth Commission, which many hoped would help lead to reconciliation in the country, has received criticism from both sides of the dispute and is unlikely to resolve tensions.

Since the installment of Porfirio “Pepe” Lobo as president on January 27, the human rights situation has continued to decline, with members of the resistance facing threats, kidnapping, torture and assassination by police and military officials as well as by marauding death squads operating with impunity. Just in the first 30 days of the new government, a human rights organization documented at least 160 human rights violations that appeared to be politically motivated. Seven reporters were been killed during March and April.

This continued state repression is one of the reasons that the Truth Commission is likely to fail. The commission, coordinated by former Guatemalan vice president Eduardo Stein, has been attacked by both conservative and progressive activists as illegitimate. Its eight-month investigation is set to begin May 4, with the aim to “provide an ‘objective and impartial’ report on the events leading up to and following the June 28, 2009 coup.” Conservative forces have called for the removal of Julieta Castellanos, president of the public National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), while the resistance has criticized the other national member, former UNAH president and jurist Jorge Omar Casco, for being from the fringe of the radical right. The international members of the commission, Michael Kergin, Canadian ambassador to the United States from 2000 to 2005, and María Amadilia, former minister of justice of Peru, have been criticized by both sides as being ineffectual and for being chosen simply for being from countries that have not criticized the coup.

Traditionally, truth commissions use extensive input from human rights abuse survivors, though this commission has not asked for any input from those who are part of the resistance. The continued political violence in the country also makes it difficult for the commission to function, as normally these types of panels are established after the end of such conflict. Finally, the fact that the commission will seal its records for 10 years implies that exposing the truth may not be its ultimate goal. Because of these and other concerns, human rights groups are forming an alternative commission to “monitor the process and conduct of those who make up the Truth Commission.”

Of greater concern to the FNRP is how the coup has stalled any advances toward writing a new constitution, its fundamental demand. The coup took place on June 28 last year, the day that the Honduran people were scheduled to vote on whether they wanted to rewrite the constitution or not. On April 20, thousands of members of the resistance mobilized throughout the country to collect signatures in favor of rewriting the constitution. They aim to collect at least one million signatures by the one-year anniversary of the coup. As Annie Bird with Upside-Down World writes, “The current constitution was written by a constituent assembly convoked during a military dictatorship, approved by congress and adopted during a military dictatorship. There was no national debate in regards to its content.”

In a sign of how difficult it is for Hondurans to act freely in their country, as the resistance launched its signature gathering campaign, Oscar Flores, a resistance leader famous for carrying a poster during marches showing the number of days since the coup, called the wife of a union leader who had been assassinated in February, and reported that he had been arrested by the police and taken to an unknown site before the call was cut off. He was released the next day with the police and government denying any involvement. The case shows the continued difficulties facing Hondurans working to bring about a more legitimate government and the importance of their eventual victory.
Brazil: River re-direction creates water market

The following interview by journalist Patricia Benvenuti with Roberto Malvezzi of the Brazilian Catholic Church’s Land Commission (CPT) focuses on the controversial project to transpose the São Francisco River. The interview was reprinted in News from Brazil, published by Brazil Justice Net, April 13, 2010.

What is the current situation of the São Francisco River’s transposition?

Roberto Malvezzi (RM): The construction of the work is moving ahead. The government accelerated the process of the construction of two canals and says that it will conclude one by the end of this year—the one called the “east channel,” that brings water directly to Paraíba. The other is to be concluded in 2012. …

At this moment, what are the impacts being felt in the region because of this construction?

RM: The channels have a direct environmental impact in the “caatinga” region (arid region). These channels are long and wide, and require the removal of the communities around them. Some communities are relocated, and others have many difficulties, as in the case of the Pipipã indigenous group. The “west channel” cuts right through their territory, which is also known as the Biological Reserve of Serra Negra, in Pernambuco. It is one of the oldest biological reserves, created in the 1950s. Also, there are many problems in regions in Paraíba and other states due to poor compensation people are receiving in return for giving over their land to the project.

How many people have been removed?

RM: We don’t have an exact total. The government is saying 700 families, but we think it is much more than this. As the area is vast, we don’t have connections in every place where the project passes, so we don’t have a real estimation of the number of people being impacted. But counting only the Pipipãs of the Serra Negra Reserve, there are more than 5,000 people. And we know that, directly or indirectly, the impact will be much greater than what the government alleges.

What is the current state of the revitalization of the river, as was promised would happen?

RM: Revitalization is what we thought it would be. It was in the mind of the government a sort of coin exchange, a way to get the people who resisted the transposition to “shut up” in exchange for having the river cleaned up. But we knew that the government would not invest nearly as much in this as in the project itself. Even the mainstream press has noted that the investments greatly diverge in what is put into revitalization as opposed to what is put in the transposition. I think that at this moment while working on the transposition, they will abandon the revitalization. They are only doing something small as a way of compensating politically, and not so much out of concern of the environment. The focus is on the construction of the project.

You have referred to the Northeast as being a laboratory for the marketing of water in Brazil. What is the role of the transposition in this experiment?

RM: Truthfully, the transposition is the creation of a lucrative market for water. The mechanism of the working the transposition is like this: a certain kind of company will sell water from the São Francisco, and when the water goes into other state receptors, other companies will buy this water. Afterwards, these companies will sell the water to the so-called users, which are still other companies, and will finally arrive to the final consumer. So, the final process and the final cost of this water will be very expensive. Personally, I think what is most serious is that the companies are going to buy water from the São Francisco and are going to [claim the] free rainwater stocked in the big reservoirs. So, they are going to sell not only water from the São Francisco, but also rainwater from the big dams. It is going to be a big business: You will buy water or receive water for free, and then resell it to the general population. In this way, it is simply following what the World Bank has always wanted: to create markets for water in Brazil. This is prohibited by law, but in practice, the transposition of the São Francisco creates this market. It is the international philosophy of [marketing] water. This way of managing water resources came to Brazil from France; ... if you go to other coun-
tries in Latin America, you will see the same system. It is the system that these multinational organisms wanted to implant around the world because you control the use of water through mechanisms where businesses either buy the reservoirs or receive licenses from the State to exploit that reservoir. In Brazil, water may not be privatized, but the State can [yield] water for private use, which is what will happen in the São Francisco Valley. Businesses will buy this water and be able to exploit it commercially.

And how are the people the semi-arid region mobilizing in relation to the transposition?

RM: Today resistance is greater in Paraíba and in Ceará. The number of mayors who have left the pro-transposition side is significant because they see that the water [flows] to Paraíba, but it is not being distributed. In Ceará, there is resistance from the populations that are being dislocated by the transposition. Above all, I think that the resistance will grow in the measure that the grand promises of the government are not kept. The government promises water to 12 million people in Paraíba, Ceará and Rio Grande do Norte. So these people have the expectation that they will get water; and when the water finally arrives, they will see that it will not go to the general population. So, the government will have to face another level of conflict, which is caused by the finality of water. The water has an economic end, and the population is being used as a mere instrument. I know for sure, through conversations inside the government, that many people are worried about this. Many even say that they are distressed because the transposition is not going to distribute the water, but only transfer it to the basins of Ceará, Paraíba and Rio Grande do Norte which already have water.

Mexico-U.S. border: Shattered dreams, restoring hope

The following article is based on “Shattered dreams and restoring hope: Organized crime and violence on the U.S.-Mexico border,” written by Eric Olson, senior advisor for the Woodrow Wilson Center’s Mexico Institute. In February, Olson participated in a delegation to the U.S.-Mexico border to examine the effectiveness of efforts to confront transnational organized crime, with the assumption that both countries share the responsibility to address the violence and its underlying causes.

Olson and his colleagues visited the home where 13 teenagers and two adults were killed on January 31 during a birthday party in Ciudad Juarez. He writes, “Outside the house was a hand-scribbled sign that simply said, ‘What do you want us to do? Arm our children? Justice.’ In its simplicity, the sign captured the sense of anger and desperation we heard expressed throughout our nine-day trip to the U.S.-Mexican border. …”

Olson’s report provides many detailed observations that might lead to a more informed discussion about the border region, including: Consumption is the driving force behind trafficking in illegal drugs. However, despite the importance of drug trafficking, what is going on at the border and throughout the hemisphere extends well beyond drug trafficking, i.e., it now includes extortion, kidnapping, and trafficking in pirated goods and humans. This phenomenon is circular, not one-way. Weapons and money flow southward with little strategy to stem the tide. Most violence appears to be conflicts within and among organized crime groups and youth gangs (with some exceptions, such as the January 31 massacre at the birthday party.)

One of the final observations is that the crushing economic and social realities in Mexico and especially along the border are a contributing factor to the violence. “Widely reported statistics include an estimate that 116,000 dwellings in Ciudad Juarez have been abandoned and approximately 25 percent have fled the city due to the violence and economic recession,” Olson writes. “An estimated 80,000 [of] Juarez’s youth are characterized as ‘nño’ as in they neither work nor go to school (in Spanish: ní estudian, ní trabajan).”

Mexico’s President Felipe Calderón “seemed to acknowledge the need for economic development and social investment when he visited Ciudad Juarez on February 11 and said ‘The presence of troops and police is not enough,’” Olson writes. “… In the midst of the multiple and interconnected problems
facing the United States and Mexico, it is sometimes overwhelming to figure out what can be done. Organized crime naturally operates in an opaque environment where precise information is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. Little wonder, then, that a clear strategy for addressing this problem is equally difficult to define. Nevertheless it’s important that leaders in both countries continue to work together to develop a strategy that is both long term and multi-dimensional, shunning the temptation to find easy answers or ‘magic bullets’ that will ‘solve’ the problem in short order.”

Olson’s report then lists the following suggestions that the governments might consider as they work for more effective policies:

- Focus more resources on reducing demand for illegal drugs in the U.S. with a particular focus on prevention and treatment programs. Reducing demand will reduce the economic incentives for trafficking and cut into the profits that are feeding the trade.
- Prioritize upstream intelligence based efforts to stop the flow of money and weapons back to Mexico. Southbound border inspections do not appear to have resulted in an effective strategy to disrupt the flow of cash and weapons southward, and the serious back ups in vehicular movement are causing major hardships for legitimate commerce and border communities.
- Provide idle youth with alternatives other than joining a gang, absorption by organized crime, or fleeing to the U.S. Investment in better educational opportunities and vocational training tied to real job opportunities are a starting point. But federal, state, and local governments should consider investing more in urban planning as well to create recreational and cultural opportunities for young people that give them healthy alternatives to crime.
- Professionalizing law enforcement agencies and the justice system are indispensable, especially when it comes to increasing the investigative capacity of authorities. Investing in training for prosecutors, judges, and public defenders is also essential if the new oral/adversarial justice system is going to win public support. Equally important is governmental investment in mechanisms that promote transparency and accountability within governmental agencies, including but not limited to federal, state, and local police forces.
- Take steps to re-establish public trust in authorities by de-politicizing anti-crime strategies. Non-partisan task-forces that include civil society leaders, academic experts, and law enforcement professionals could be a starting point. Breaking down the barriers of distrust is key to a successful anti-crime strategy. Creating partnerships between civic organizations and government will be critical to reestablishing trust and make communities a secure place to live.
- Develop a culture of inter-agency collaboration and coordination within the three levels of Mexico’s government, and between the U.S. and Mexico.
- Encourage, strengthen, and protect an independent press and the role of civil society in Mexico, especially in the border cities.

Read the entire report on the MOGC website, or contact the MOGC for a copy.

Burma: Will nonviolence work?

A recent interview of Mark Kurlansky, author of Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea, by Francis Wade was published by the Democratic Voice of Burma. Excerpts follow. For the entire article see [http://www.dvb.no/interview/mark-kurlansky-on-nonviolence/](http://www.dvb.no/interview/mark-kurlansky-on-nonviolence/).

Like Gandhi before, Aung San Suu Kyi has stubbornly refused to take up arms against her oppressors, and her vow not to fight fire with fire has gained her a legion of admirers, from U.S. first ladies to celebrities to world leaders. But after nearly 50 years of military rule in Burma, any tangible results are hard to find, and observers have said that her cause may be lost against a military government that openly shuns respect for human rights. Mark Kurlansky claims that it is “precisely in the context of Burma where nonviolence will eventually win.”

He says: “There’s this mistaken idea, voiced by George Orwell and others, that Gandhism and nonviolent activism is great against relatively benign opponents, but not against someone who’s ruthless
and violent. But it’s the opposite of this; if you have a really ruthless opponent you have absolutely no option but nonviolence, because you’re not going to beat them at their own game. . . .

“The thing that people don’t understand about nonviolence is that it’s not a dreamy, moralistic argument, but a very pragmatic one. Gandhi was a pragmatic man, and despite having deeply religious convictions, he was doing this as a political activist. It’s the same as Martin Luther King, another pragmatic man who is now portrayed as a sort of holy dreamer. Nonviolence is based on very pragmatic thinking about what would work in political activism if you are unarmed people facing an armed repressive regime. History teaches that tyrants will fall sooner or later, so the question for political activists is how to make this sooner, and I think violence would cause just the opposite of that. Burma is a paranoid regime, and the one thing you don’t want to provide a paranoid regime with is enemies for them to fire at. . . .

“One of the reasons that nonviolence is not more popular is that it takes a tremendous amount of patience. We opposed the Vietnam war for 10 years, for example, while people were complaining after only a year about the lack of results from Iraq war protests. Therefore, in a place like Burma, it’s difficult to gauge the progress that is made. But the elections this year, as far as I know, are attempt by the junta to try and give them some legitimacy, and this tells us that they recognize they have none, so some progress has been made. . . .

“My argument is that violence doesn’t work. There have been cases in history where rulers are overthrown by violence, but that violence leaves a legacy. World War II got us the Cold War, and a series of other wars that came with the Cold War. The American Civil War did not free blacks in the south; it preceded a hundred more years of oppression, and it was the nonviolent civil rights movement that changed that. . . .

“It’s interesting that the political establishment still doesn’t give nonviolence its due credit – nobody in the U.S. talks about the nonviolent overthrow of the Soviet Union; the Republicans try to claim Reagan did it. How many monuments and statues are there to nonviolence as opposed to violence and war? Likewise how many books and films exist that celebrate nonviolence, as opposed to war? ‘Avatar,’ for instance, tried to promote itself as an anti-war movie, but it glorifies war and says violence is the solution. Culture is just loaded with that message. . . .

“I want to be clear to the people of Burma that I’m not saying don’t resist. Gandhi, using a Hindu teaching, used to say that the greatest sin is not the use of violence, but not resisting at all. If you can’t figure out how to use nonviolence effectively, then use violence. So, it’s not enough to just say that you won’t be violent – which is pacifism – but that you will use not being violent to achieve your goals. . . .

“The most important component of nonviolence and political activism is non-cooperation: you can’t govern people who refuse to be governed. This is what happened in Czechoslovakia: after the 1968 Soviet invasion, the Czechs realized they couldn’t fight and drive them out, so they found ways to refuse to participate. The terrible truth is that the worse things get, the better the chance of overthrowing the government is. You don’t want to make things work. The Burmese government is a tough force because they’re so paranoid, and having countries like the U.S. boycott them is completely ineffective because they want to be boycotted. . . .

“The interesting thing about Obama is that, while he is pretty involved in warfare, he has a tendency to believe that the way to win people over is to not be aggressive with them, and this drives a lot of Democrats crazy. He seems to have the belief that if you corner people, rogue regimes, it’s not going to make them act well, and I think there’s truth to that. . . .

“On the other hand, I’m not sure how I feel about Obama’s change in policy. Like I said before, the best thing to do is to let things fall apart – you don’t really want to do anything to help these regimes or make them appear legitimate. . . .

Global Health Initiative: Promises, questions

President Obama’s ambitious Global Health Initiative (GHI) was first proposed in May 2009 as a way of combining the U.S. government’s multiple international public health programs under one umbrella. The purpose of this framework is to provide greater integration and coordination of health services, with a particular focus on strengthening health systems and improving the wellbeing of women and children. With the release of the implementation’s consultation document and the president’s proposed FY2011 budget, the shape and scope of the program has become clearer. A final version of the GHI is expected in early summer. The following article was written by Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns intern, Stephen DeWitt, OFM.

The consultation document identifies seven key principles on which the GHI will be based: implement a women and girl-centered approach; increase impact through strategic coordination and integration; strengthen and leverage key multilateral organizations, global health partnerships, and private sector engagement; encourage country ownership and invest in country-led plans; build and sustain ability through health systems strengthening; improve metrics, monitoring and evaluation; and promote research and innovation. These are all excellent principles that have the potential to improve significantly the nature of U.S. sponsored health services around the world. From an HIV/AIDS perspective the focus on a women and girl-centered approach, increased country ownership, and health systems strengthening are particularly welcome.

Serious questions exist, however, as to whether the implementation of these principles is truly possible as the program is currently designed. One of the biggest issues revolves around the funding of the GHI: Will enough money be allocated to fully implement the above proposals, especially for the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)? The administration’s FY2011 budget proposal reduces the U.S. contribution to the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria and essentially flat-funds PEPFAR for the coming year. On April 12 the Boston Globe reported that PEPFAR has already instructed some clinics in Uganda to stop enrolling new patients on anti-retroviral medications. Eric Goosby, U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator, contends that the instruction was merely a reminder to clinics to stay within already agreed upon budgets, but the net effect remains the same: new patients are being turned away and not receiving critical medication.

If this trend continues, important gains in the fight against HIV/AIDS will be imperiled. This action also comes at a time when HIV/AIDS activists are already questioning the administration’s commitment to HIV/AIDS and fuels speculation that the GHI is part of a plan to shift focus from HIV/AIDS to less costly diseases. To be clear, there is nothing wrong with the U.S. developing programs to address other important international health problems, but this should not be done at the expense of AIDS victims in the developing world.

Other questions focus on the GHI’s structure and implementation, including the leadership and governance structures; tools for evaluation; meaning of “country-ownership” and accountability to donors; and the role of civil society.

Another important factor is that many of the GHI proposals lack either adequate targets or do not integrate those targets with existing ones. For example, the HIV/AIDS-related targets in the consultation document appear to reflect PEPFAR’s current five-year plan and have not been adjusted to the six-year time-frame of the GHI. This is especially noticeable in the area of tuberculosis, where the GHI consultation document’s targets are significantly lower than those proposed in the Lantos-Hyde Act reauthorizing PEPFAR. In the area of health-systems strengthening, the documents proposed support and training of 140,000 new health care workers over six years is well shy of the estimated 4.25 million needed to fill critical shortages in GHI target countries.

For more information check the [Kaiser Family Foundation Policy Brief on the U.S Global Health Initiative](https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/brief/global-health-initiative/), available on the MOGC website.

**Faith in action:**

Encourage your member of Congress to support full funding for PEPFAR and other programs that implement U.S. commitments in response to HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.
Nuclear weapons: Recent actions meet expectations

The following update on the recent actions around nuclear weapons was written by returned lay missioner Tim O’Connell.

Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)

The NPR, released by the Obama administration on April 6, represents modest progress in U.S. nuclear weapons thinking.

For the first time, the NPR enshrines the goal of nuclear disarmament and elevates nonproliferation efforts, making them an integral part of overall U.S. nuclear policy.

The NPR also clarifies negative security assurances, that is, the U.S. will not use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear weapons state that is in compliance with the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

The NPR states that nuclear weapons are for deterring and responding to “nuclear” attacks, marking a departure from existing policy. Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush left open the nuclear option as a response to chemical or biological attacks as well. In another shift from Clinton and Bush, Obama does not envision new missions, such as bunker busting, for nuclear weapons.

Overall, the NPR still focuses on countering Russia and China and maintains nuclear forces on “hair trigger” alert. It does not significantly reduce roles or numbers of nuclear weapons. The NPR does not mark a radical shift in nuclear posture or force structure, but does signal a change in attitude and should help Obama as he seeks ratification of the START agreement and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START)

A Follow-On Agreement to START was signed by Obama and Russian President Dmitri Medvedev on April 8 after a year of extensive negotiations. The agreement will limit each side to 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads, a 30 percent reduction from previous START levels. It would limit deployment of delivery vehicles to 700 for each country. The agreement will also enhance verification procedures including more efficient information sharing and on-site inspections.

The deal has some Republican supporters including former Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger as well as Admiral Brent Scowcroft, who was National Security Advisor under President George H. W. Bush. Still, support is not unanimous, as nuclear hawks believe the cuts go too deep without building replacement warheads for the weapons that will remain deployed.

The new START agreement is a step in the right direction. It has reinvigorated strategic arms control, paving the way for future cuts and improves the prospects for progress at the Review Conference for NPT. It’s expected that Obama will submit the treaty to the Senate for ratification in late May or early June. In the current political climate nothing passes easily, so it will be important for people to encourage their senators to support the new START Follow-On Agreement.

Nuclear Security Summit

On April 13, delegations from 47 countries, the United Nations, the European Union and the International Atomic Energy Agency met in Washington to make plans to prevent nuclear terrorism and within four years “lock-down” all nuclear materials which are found in bombs plants, nuclear reactors and other civilian facilities in dozens of countries with varying degrees of security. Participants at the Summit agreed that safeguarding these materials is essential for international security and requires global cooperation. They issued a formal communique and work plan.

The Summit was important for raising the profile of nuclear nonproliferation efforts in general and galvanizing support for action. Several countries also used the summit to make important announcements. Chile, Mexico, Vietnam, Kazakhstan and Ukraine pledged to dispose of highly enriched uranium used in civilian reactors, reducing the amount of weapons grade material available. India announced plans to build an international center for training professionals in nuclear security and radiation safety. In addition, China’s President Hu Jintao made his first public remarks regarding the dangers of nuclear proliferation adding an important voice to the chorus calling for tighter controls on nuclear materials.

In April 2009, Obama declared that the world must eliminate nuclear weapons. The Summit, the release of the Nuclear Posture Review and a follow-on to START renews hope that progress is possible.
Free trade: Bill Clinton’s epiphany

In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, former president Bill Clinton shocked many by saying, “Since 1981, the United States has followed a policy, until the last year or so when we started rethinking it, that we rich countries that produce a lot of food should sell it to poor countries and relieve them of the burden of producing their own food, so, thank goodness, they can leap directly into the industrial era. It has not worked. It may have been good for some of my farmers in Arkansas, but it has not worked. It was a mistake. It was a mistake that I was a party to... I did that. I have to live every day with the consequences of the lost capacity to produce a rice crop in Haiti to feed those people, because of what I did. Nobody else.” Many farmers in Arkansas would refute the idea that these policies were so beneficial to them, but at least Clinton has acknowledged that current trade policies are problematic.

Later, responding to a reporter’s question, he expanded on the topic: “I just think that, you know, there’s a movement all around the world now... starting in 1981, the wealthy agricultural producing countries genuinely believed that they and the emerging agricultural powers in Brazil and Argentina ... they really believed for 20 years that if you moved agricultural production there and then facilitated its introduction into poorer places, you would free those places to get aid to skip agricultural development and go straight into an industrial era.”

“And it’s failed everywhere it’s been tried. And you just can’t take the food chain out of production. And it also undermines a lot of the culture, the fabric of life, the sense of self-determination. And I have been involved for several years in agricultural products, principally in Rwanda, Malawi, other places in Africa, and now increasingly in Latin America, and I see this. So we genuinely thought we were helping Haiti when we restored President Aristide, made a commitment to help rebuild the infrastructure through the Army Corps of Engineers there, and do a lot of other things. And we made this devil’s bargain on rice. And it wasn’t the right thing to do. We should have continued to work to help them be self-sufficient in agriculture... that’s a lot of what we’re doing now. We’re thinking about how can we get the coffee production up, how can we get other kinds of—the mango production up—we had an announcement on that yesterday—the avocados, lots of other things.”

This was a strong confirmation of what many organizations, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, have for years warned would be the results of the “free trade” paradigm. While it is good that Clinton recognizes his role and that of the U.S. in worsening conditions in Haiti, he still misses the point by pointing to increased coffee and mango production – crops for exports – as a solution.

An alliance of Haitian farmer groups has identified different solutions. They want to grow food to feed the Haitian people before moving into export crops. Most importantly, they call for food sovereignty for Haiti: the right of a people to grow and consume its own food. They call for land reform with technical support to help farmers stay on the land. They also call for the decentralization of public services that today are almost exclusively available in the capital Port-au-Prince, technical training in sustainable, ecological farming methods, credit to help buy equipment, and support with storage, marketing, and water management. Finally, because most of Haiti’s seed stocks have been used to feed people after the earthquake, they need seeds, insisting that they not be genetically modified. As one farmer said, “If people start sending hybrid [and/or] GMO seeds, that’s the end of Haitian agriculture.”

While President Clinton’s statements show that he finally recognizes the destructive nature of “free trade” agreements, it is clear that he still has not taken the demands of farmers to heart, but still focuses on export-oriented agriculture as a solution. His efforts to help bring about a “Green Revolution” in Africa also show that he does not share the concerns about GMO technology that farmers there have expressed.

Fortunately, President Clinton is not the only politician who has identified the problems with current trade agreements. The TRADE Act, a bill that aims to radically shift U.S. trade policy, has over 140 cosponsors in the House and has set the agenda for a new trade model. Perhaps, President Clinton, with his newfound concerns about trade, could be a champion of this important piece of legislation.
Corporate accountability and water

A number of corporate accountability concerns involve corporations and water, just as corporations and climate change. While corporate responses range from efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to obstruction of any efforts to address climate change, companies are just in the early stages of looking at their impact on water supply; the impact of their water use on local communities and the local ecology; and the impact on their own operations of changing water availability due to climate change. Socially responsible investors are calling for greater transparency and accountability in regards to corporations and water. The following article was written by Cathy Rowan, corporate accountability coordinator for the Maryknoll Sisters.

In January, at the request of a number of institutional investors, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission highlighted water in its new “interpretive guidance” that clarifies what public companies need to disclose to investors about the climate-related risks and opportunities they face. “Changes in the availability or quality of water…can have material effects on companies.”

“Murky Waters,” a new report by the environmental group CERES, confirmed the lack of corporate disclosure about water. Of 100 companies surveyed, only 17 reported local-level water data and only a handful provided this information in the context of operations in water-stressed regions. No companies gave comprehensive data on their suppliers’ water performance – a glaring omission when one considers that a vast majority of many corporations’ water footprint is in the supply chain.

Just before World Water Day (March 22), the microprocessor company Intel announced the adoption of a corporate policy that supports the human right to water. This came after discussions with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) and a socially responsible investment firm, NorthStar Asset Management.

In the policy statement, Intel recognizes “that water is a critical natural resource that is of strategic importance to our business and the communities in which we operate. We acknowledge the importance of having guiding principles in terms of our responsible use and preservation of this vital resource.”

The policy explicitly references the United Nations’ definition of the human right to water: “All people’s right to safe, sufficient, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use.”

Intel commits to “openly communicate and engage with our communities regarding our water usage and conservation initiatives in an ongoing manner” and “work to ensure that our operations do not adversely impact physical accessibility of community members to water resources.”

It will “consider the impact on water throughout all stages in our operations, including: reviewing access to sustainable water sources as a criterion when selecting a site for a new Intel facility, incorporating water conservation elements into the design of our facilities, and establishing specific water goals for new process technology changes in an effort to support a safe, consistent, adequate and affordable water supply in line with local practices.”

Last year, the UUSC and NorthStar were instrumental in getting PepsiCo to become the first multinational corporation to adopt a policy in support of the human right to water. PepsiCo had its water-use license revoked in Pudussery, India, in 2003 after claims that its bottling plants were depleting community groundwater. This prompted investors to call on the company to be more accountable to local communities on water use.

In April, the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), which collects data on corporations’ greenhouse gas emissions and climate change strategies, launched a Water Disclosure Project. The CDP has sent a questionnaire to 302 of the world’s largest companies in industrial sectors that are water-intensive or that face particular water-related risks. The focus includes beverage, oil and gas, mining, food and food processing, pharmaceutical and chemical companies. CDP states: “We will request information on the risks and opportunities companies face in relation to water; on water usage and exposure to water stress in companies’ own operations and in their supply chains; and on companies’ water management plans and governance. This data will provide insight into the strategies deployed by many of the largest companies in the world on water and will be used to help drive investment towards sustainable water use.”
Food security: Time to end agribusinesses’ power

The following article is slightly adapted from a piece written by Siena Chrisman, Networks and Outreach Coordinator, World Hunger Year (WHYHunger).

There are two million farmers and 300 million consumers in the U.S. Standing in the middle are a handful of corporations who control just about everything that happens to our food between the farm and our plate -- how much it costs, how it’s grown, where it comes from, what’s in it, and who sells it. Most of what probably matters to you about why food isn’t healthier, safer, tastier, or all around better is affected by that narrow bottleneck of power between producers and consumers.

Standard economics holds that if the top four companies in any industry control over 50 percent of the market, that industry is no longer freely competitive. Right now, the top four companies control 85 percent of the nation’s beef, 70 percent of pork, and 60 percent of the nation’s poultry. Three corporations process over 70 percent of the nation’s soy. Just one company controls 40 percent of our milk supply, and Monsanto holds patents on 80 percent of corn seed. Our food system has become one of the least competitive sectors of the marketplace.

Fair markets are supposed to be protected by federal antitrust laws, which prohibit corporations from anticompetitive behavior such as collusion, excessive mergers, and predatory conduct like price-fixing. In reality, last year’s near-collapse of the world financial markets made it clear that federal laws don’t always work to curb corporate power. Indeed, the world food crisis, in the headlines just before the financial crisis hit, spotlighted the level of concentrated power of the world’s biggest agribusinesses: in the winter of 2007-08, the same period that saw lengthening lines at food pantries, tough times for farmers, and populist rebellions around the world protesting skyrocketing food prices, the world’s three largest grain producers reported profit increases ranging from 67 percent to 86 percent.

We now have an unprecedented opportunity to speak out against corporate control. The Justice Department and Department of Agriculture are conducting an investigation this year into the issue of corporate concentration in the food system. They have scheduled five public listening sessions around the country -- the first was on March 12 near Des Moines—and they are accepting public comments on how corporate concentration affects all of us.

The U.S. Working Group on the Food Crisis commends the government for initiating these investigations and sincerely hopes the administration will use this opportunity to address decades of lax enforcement of antitrust regulations and restore fairness to the marketplace. This is also a critical moment for all of us to stay informed and take action -- you can be sure that agribusiness will put up a fight to maintain the status quo, and so we all must be prepared to speak out loudly in favor of a fair and democratic food system.

For information see www.bustthetrust.org.

Additional resources:

- Public comment to USDA and Department of Justice RE: Agriculture and Antitrust Enforcement issues in our 21st century economy, Food and Water Watch, December 31, 2009
- Concentration on agricultural markets, M. Hendrickson and William D. Heffernan, Department of Rural Sociology, University of Missouri, 2007
Greening urban food deserts through local agriculture

On March 25, Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) introduced HR 4971, the Greening Urban Food Deserts Act. The act would establish a new office in the Department of Agriculture to help increase local agricultural production and fresh food availability especially in underserved communities experiencing hunger, poor nutrition, obesity, and food insecurity.

“Food deserts” are areas with limited access to affordable and nutritious food. In many U.S. cities and rural areas, economic, demographic and land use changes over the past 50 years have created communities where supermarkets are non-existent and where poor quality food, limited choices, and lack of affordable food impact large segments of the population. What HR 4971 proposes to do is to create an office under the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) focused on strengthening U.S. agriculture by diversifying U.S. food production – moving from reliance on globally consolidated and industrial food chains to a system that includes local production.

The findings section of the bill looks at key problems such as the high level of concentration in agricultural production and outsourcing; rising fuel costs making transporting food long distances significantly more expensive; and increased costs to treat diet-related diseases like obesity and diabetes. It also looks at positive trends – the fact that by the end of World War II over 20 million home gardens were supplying 40 percent of domestically consumed produce; the recent rise in the number of new farms that have begun smaller, less consolidated operations within the past three years; and the steady growth of farmers’ markets throughout the United States – many of which now feature electronic benefit transfer devices allowing for food stamp purchases.

Specifically, the bill would create an Office of Urban Agriculture responsible for coordinating USDA activities focused on food security and economic development in underserved communities that do not traditionally participate in USDA programs; expand the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program which links farmers to consumers and create a farmers market infrastructure program to assist with the development of thousands of farmers markets; authorize up to $20 million in grants and micro-lending intended for organizations working toward urban agriculture; create nutrition programs in the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) and school feeding program to use food production as a mechanism for teaching healthier food options and to better integrate locally produced foods into the feeding programs; and provide extra money to schools that teach children about gardening or food production if the food they produce is used in school meals. Currently, schools get about $2.68 per school lunch (less for breakfast). This bill provides an extra 20 percent for every meal that includes food from the school garden or other educational program (like agricultural internships).

This bill is an important step in rethinking the role of the USDA which has traditionally focused on maximizing large-scale production as a way of carrying out its mandate to promote agriculture, food safety and nutrition. One problem with large-scale agriculture is that many people – especially those living in food deserts – are left feeling disconnected from the land and sources of their food (see related article on page 17). Few U.S. citizens can participate in mechanized large-scale agriculture since the capital intensive start-up costs and overhead make it prohibitive. The bill proposes that the USDA empower and capacitate community garden programs, expand access to nutritious food by better connecting local communities with local farmers and promote agricultural education in schools. This can ultimately serve to keep money circulating within local communities while creating strong local connections and providing viable livelihoods.

These proposals can be constructive in building an economy of thriving resilient communities – the kind of communities that Bill McKibben describes in his book Deep Economy. We are not independent individuals but interdependent members of Earth-based communities. Community-based investment – especially in community gardens that connect people directly to the land – keeps resources circulating locally. This has the potential to build community assets and strengthen social ties.

Faith in action:

Ask your member of Congress to contact Marcy Kaptur’s to co-sponsor the bill, or thank your member if he or she is already a co-sponsor. Check the MOGC website for current co-sponsors.
Going one month without Monsanto

April Dávila, a writer living in Los Angeles, declared the entire month of March a “month without Monsanto.” She created a blog (http://web.me.com/aprildavila/MWM/Blog/Blog.html) to record her daily struggle to completely rid her life of Monsanto products and bi-products.

It all started when a friend of Dávila’s sent her an article published in the [Huffington Post](#) reporting on an [International Journal of Biological Sciences (IJBS)](#) study that linked Monsanto’s GM corn to organ failure. The IJBS study, however, differentiated the data based on the sex of the animal and dose, and observed the results in animals over a longer period of time.

One of the scientists involved in the study, Gilles-Eric Séralini, explained, “Monsanto systematically neglects significant health effects in mammals that are different in males and females eating GMOs, or not proportional to the dose. This is a very serious mistake, dramatic for public health.”

The study prompted Dávila to swear off all things Monsanto for good – but after research she wondered if she could do it. She then challenged herself to try it for one month. She states in her blog: “I’m not doing this as a political statement...I am simply fascinated by the fact that one company can have such a profound grasp on the human species and I’m ultimately curious – if we decide, as individuals, we don’t want Monsanto products to be a part of our lives, is it even possible to live without them?”

Through the entire month of March Dávila details how difficult it is to avoid Monsanto. She cut out processed food (including Girl Scout cookies – a personal favorite), stopped dining out and turned to local sources of whole foods purchased at farmers’ markets. But even there she constantly consulted her iPhone to ensure that the seeds farmers used for their produce were “Nonsanto” – her word for Monsanto-free. She rejoiced at finding [Johnny’s Seeds](#), an organic seed supply company that has struggled to stay independent since Monsanto began buying up seed companies in its quest for consolidation. Most of Johnny’s line of seed remains independent, but they source less than four percent from Semenis (now owned by Monsanto).

Dávila found that Monsanto’s reach is much broader than processed foods and vegetables. When buying animal products she looked for eggs and meat from grass fed animals to avoid the possibility that these animals had been fed Monsanto corn or soy. She also took to washing her hair with hemp-based and USDA organic soap since she could not verify whether organic shampoos could be traced back to Monsanto seed sources or not.

In addition to monitoring her food, Dávila took a look at her clothing. Her research revealed that Monsanto owns the patent on most of the cotton in the world – so she found herself painstakingly ordering clothing made from organic cotton, or cotton alternatives like hemp to guarantee that it was “Nonsanto.” She also found herself laundering frequently since she was limited to a few guaranteed “Nonsanto” pieces of clothing.

Dávila admits that the greatest challenge of the month was the inconvenience, but she also found that her experiment made her feel more connected to the sources of her food. The more she got to know people who grew her food, the more they replaced brands in her head. Dávila ends her month-long experience encouraging consumers to be informed and aware. The blog continues as a forum for discussion.

The Month without Monsanto blog highlights the stronghold that Monsanto has on seeds, and the reality of corporate consolidation in the U.S. food system. Of hundreds of brands of food we see in grocery stores, the vast majority are owned by a handful of industrial food companies like Kraft, Conagra and General Mills. Dean Foods and Dairy Farmers of America control most of the milk we consume and Smithfield, JBS and Cargill dominate meat processing. Decades of deregulation and governmental inattention to industrial consolidation have had a negative impact on U.S. and other family farmers around the world; and have created a food system that is “convenient,” but impersonal and quite possibly unsafe.

See related article on page 17.
Take action on climate change

Call or write your senators and urge them to join Sens. Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Susan Collins (R-ME) in moving forward the Clean Limits and Energy for America's Renewal (CLEAR) Act, S.2877.

Following the climate summit in Copenhagen, momentum is growing to put in place structures and systems that help to slow global warming and its destructive outcomes. Urge your senators to seize this historical opportunity. U.S. residents, our brothers and sisters around the world and Earth itself are negatively impacted by the pollution and waste caused by the over-consumption of fossil fuel-based resources. U.S. citizens need incentives to design new ways of living that respect Earth’s carrying capacity.

The CLEAR Act (S. 2877) is a promising, straightforward, long-term politically feasible route to put in place structures for the United States to reduce carbon footprints while encouraging the development of alternative, sustainable energy systems. Some highlights of the bill include:

- 100 percent auction of pollution permits: Those most responsible for harmful greenhouse gas emissions will have to pay commensurate to the amount they pollute. Although this measure is designed to encourage the most efficient emissions reductions, it will also increase carbon-based energy prices. To ensure that low to middle-income consumers are held unharmed, the CLEAR Act provides an “energy security dividend,” which will return 75 percent of the pollution revenue collected by the government equally to all U.S. residents on a monthly basis. The remaining 25 percent of carbon revenue would be deposited into a fund to be used in the annual congressional appropriations process.

- The CLEAR Act does not include the carbon offsets proposed in other Congressional climate legislation to substitute for U.S. industry pollution reductions. Offsets not only delay research and investment in new alternative energy; but according to the Government Accountability Office, they are very difficult to verify consistently as real emissions reductions.

- The CLEAR Act proposes to maintain the Environmental Protection Agency as the government entity to set minimum standards for the largest greenhouse gas emitters.

- The CLEAR Act includes provisions to prevent excessive speculation by limiting participation in the carbon market to those companies who must turn in carbon permits for compliance; this leaves Wall Street and other traders out.

A few ways to improve the CLEAR Act:

- The greatest impact of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions is being felt in the global South. As the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, the United States should act on its responsibility to assist the most impacted countries by providing dedicated international climate funding. The CLEAR Act could add a specific set-aside of the income from the sale of carbon permits to assist these poor nations, both to adapt to the destructive effects of global warming and to put in place sustainable, low-carbon development.

- Because of its history as the largest historical emitter of greenhouse gas emissions, the U.S. has a special responsibility to mitigate its emissions substantially. The CLEAR Act sets near-term emission reductions at 20 percent below 2005 levels by 2020. Though this is more rigorous than the House ACES bill which requires 17 percent reduction by 2020, U.S. targets should be stronger. Additional mechanisms could be included in the CLEAR Act that would ensure that Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) fund spending is appropriated in accordance to the bill’s overall emissions reduction goals.
Climate change: Major gathering in Bolivia

In mid-April, more than 35,000 people from 142 countries met for four days during the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Many participants had been deeply dissatisfied with the results of the high level government climate change negotiations held in Copenhagen in December 2009 (see NewsNotes, Jan-Feb. 2010).

At that meeting, tens of thousands of demonstrators demanded that their government leaders sign a binding agreement to cut carbon emissions. Ignoring those pleas, a small group of leaders chose to undermine almost two decades of negotiations by pushing through an “accord” with promises, but no binding measures, from a handful of countries. Even if each country fulfilled its promises in the Copenhagen accord, scientists estimate that global temperatures would increase by approximately four degrees centigrade, which would threaten much of humanity. As a result of the botched conference in Copenhagen, Bolivian president Evo Morales called this people’s conference in order to “analyze the structural and systemic causes that drive climate change and to propose radical measures to ensure the well-being of all humanity in harmony with nature.”

Expecting close to 10,000 participants, organizers of the April conference were surprised by the 30,000+ attendance, especially since many Europeans were stranded at home due to the Icelandic volcano. Except for a 4-5 hour wait to receive credentials, the conference was fairly well organized with a multitude of panels, workshops and working groups meeting simultaneously on the Universidad del Valle campus. It was a beautiful display of humanity as people from all walks of life and corners of the globe, concerned with preserving the planet for future generations, met, formed friendships and initiated alliances around a number of themes. Farmers discussed organic agricultural techniques; students shared their successes in greening their campuses and communities; and religious organizations discussed what spirituality has to do with the environment.

The Bolivian government had a heavy presence with a number of tables showing environmental initiatives by the military and other governmental sectors. This brought critiques from many, especially Bolivian organizations that pointed out a number of extractive industry projects in Bolivia that are displacing communities and polluting the environment. They decried the irony of the Bolivian government being seen as an ecological leader internationally while continuing to depend on polluting, extractive industries at home.

As described by Naomi Klein, four proposals dominated the discussions: “that nature should be granted rights that protect ecosystems from annihilation (a ‘universal declaration of Mother Earth rights’); that those who violate those rights and other international environmental agreements should face legal consequences (a ‘climate justice tribunal’); that poor countries should receive various forms of compensation for a crisis they are facing but had little role in creating (‘climate debt’); and that there should be a mechanism for people around the world to express their views on these topics (‘world people’s referendum on climate change’).”

During the conference, working groups met to develop the consensus and mechanisms necessary to move forward with the proposals. The nine-page “People’s Agreement,” read at the closing ceremony on Earth Day, April 22, represents the general consensus developed during the conference which will be deepened in coming months and years. The statement calls especially for profound reforms within industrialized countries: “Developed countries, as the main cause of climate change, in assuming their historical responsibility, must recognize and honor their climate debt in all of its dimensions as the basis for a just, effective, and scientific solution to climate change.” The declaration calls for the next UN climate change negotiations in December in Mexico to define binding resolutions for developed countries to reduce their emissions by at least 50 percent of 1990 levels by 2020, “excluding carbon markets or other offset mechanisms that mask the failure of actual reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.”

“At addition to Official Development Assistance and public sources, developed countries must commit to a new annual funding of at least six percent of GDP to tackle climate change in developing countries. This is viable considering that a similar amount is spent on national defense, and that five times more have been put forth to rescue failing
banks and speculators, which raises serious questions about global priorities and political will.”

With such a large and diverse pool of participants, it proved difficult to finalize strategies for the global referendum. A tentative date for the referendum was set for April 22, 2011, but that date will likely be extended in order to guarantee the participation of as many countries as possible.

While the conference showed some of the organizing limitations of the global climate movement, it clearly displayed a large, growing movement of people and organizations who are truly concerned about climate change and are willing to work for stronger reforms. It is unclear if the Global People’s Movement for Mother Earth, officially established at the end of the conference, will be a significant global player in climate negotiations. A good opportunity to measure the movement’s effect will be at the next UNFCCC negotiations in Cancun, Mexico, scheduled for December 2010.

UN: CSW’s GEAR Campaign report

The following is a report from the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which recently held its 54th session. A priority for CSW is the Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) Campaign, which would create an agency that would coordinate the UN’s work on women with the capacity to hold the system accountable for gender mainstreaming. See related article in May-June 2008 NewsNotes.

The recent [CSW] meeting ... advanced the GEAR Campaign goal of continuing civil society pressure on governments to move forward in passing the resolution that creates the entity during this session of the General Assembly (GA), which ends in September. At the CSW, over 60 countries ... spoke in support of the new gender architecture in their speeches. Governments initiated a resolution that was co-sponsored by 180 countries and introduced by the Joint Coordinating Committee of the Non-Aligned Movement and Group of 77/China (JCC) supporting the creation of the entity, indicating the wide spread assumption that this will happen.

[During his speech on March 3, the UN’s official observance of International Women’s Day,] UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on governments to take action to create the entity without further delay. [His speech is available on the MOGC website.] ... The sessions on the new entity were packed, and many other sessions that addressed UN structural issues assumed the new architecture as part of the future UN landscape. ... [T]he GEAR Campaign’s greatest concern is not whether the entity will be created but WHAT will be created. [The CSW expects] the resolution to be passed by the end of this GA session in time for the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Summit review in September, but there are still a number of important details to be resolved. In order for the entity to be effective as a driver for the UN system on women’s rights and empowerment, it must have a robust country level operation that is more than just advisory to the UN system. This requires that it be both a coordinating body for the UN’s work on women with the capacity to hold the system accountable for gender mainstreaming as well as able to engage in its own programmatic work and to support governmental and NGO work at all levels.

[The CSW remains] concerned about the money to enable the entity to be effective. Member states should pledge core, predictable, and multi-year voluntary funds now with a goal of growing to US$1 billion and beyond over time. There has not been enough progress on financial commitments to date. Further ... the resolution creating this entity [should] recognize that civil society has played a vital role in work on women’s rights and that it is critical to partner with [CSW] and tap into the expertise and insights of a diverse and wide-ranging NGO constituency, particularly women’s organizations.

[The CSW] would like to see the Secretary-General initiate a transparent recruitment process for the Under Secretary General to lead the entity immediately.... [It] would like a clear and accessible process begun soon to ensure a strong committed woman is appointed to this critical job.

Additional items related to the GEAR Campaign are available on the MOGC website.
Resources

1) Know Justice, Know Peace: Ending War at Home and Abroad: Pax Christi USA’s annual Catholic peacemaking conference will be held July 16-18 at the Rosemont Hotel O’Hare near Chicago. Keynote speakers include Rev. Bryan Massingale, STD; writer Jeremy Scahill; and Elena Segura, who serves as the director of Office for Immigrant Affairs and Immigrant Education in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Registration with meals is $200. Scholarships available. For more information, contact Pax Christi USA at www.paxchristiusa.org, or call 814-453-4955.

2) Free Trade Doesn’t Work: What should replace it and why: This new book by Ian Fletcher is aimed at both ordinary citizens and people with a bit of sophistication about economics, and explains in detail why the standard economic arguments free traders use are false, and what kind of economic ideas - well within the grasp of the average reader - justify protectionism instead. It examines the history and politics of free trade and explains how the U.S. came to adopt its present disastrous free trade policy. It examines what’s wrong with NAFTA, CAFTA, the WTO, and the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership. 348 pages, $24.95. Published by the U.S. Business & Industry Council; ISBN-10: 0578048205. For more information check the website at http://www.freetradedoesntwork.com/.

3) Speaking up for Gender: A step-by-step guide to holding IFIs accountable: Published by Gender Action, this user-friendly guide provides grassroots groups and others affected by international financial institutions’ (IFI) projects with information, tips and guidelines for submitting a gender discrimination complaint to an IFI accountability mechanism. Despite having gender policies, IFIs continue to finance projects that often ignore gender inequalities and increase poverty, sex work, violence, and HIV/AIDS among women and girls. Visit Gender Action’s website to support and learn more about its work promoting gender equality and women’s rights in all IFI projects such as those of the World Bank: www.genderaction.org.


5) Let There Be...Stuff?: This six-session curriculum from the creators of “The Story of Stuff” helps Christian teenagers understand the problems the planet is facing, raise awareness of the changes needed and empower them to develop environmentally sustainable patterns of consumption that honor creation and deepen their spiritual lives. It’s chock-full of hands-on exercises, thought-provoking questions and great group activities. Find it online at www.storyofstuff.com.

6) The Story of Bottled Water: Also from the makers of the Story of Stuff, this new video and website arrived on March 22, World Water Day. Available for free at www.storyofbottledwater.org, the seven-minute film and its resources employs “The Story of Stuff”-style to tell the fast-paced, fact-filled story of manufactured demand—how you get U.S. Americans to buy more than half a billion bottles of water every week when it already flows from the tap. The film explores the bottled water industry’s attacks on tap water and its use of seductive, environmental-themed advertising to cover up the mountains of plastic waste it produces. It concludes with a call to take back the tap, not only by making a personal commitment to avoid bottled water, but by supporting investments in clean, available tap water for all. Check it out at www.storyofbottledwater.org.