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Published by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: Peace, Social Justice & Integrity of Creation
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Maryknoll centenaries: Promoting social justice

In 1971, the world’s Catholic bishops issued “Justice in the World,” a remarkable document, which is well worth reading 40 years later.

Because Maryknoll missioners working in countries around the world have listened, as the bishops proposed, “to the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures” (#5), their individual and institutional commitment has been strong and vibrant to “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world,” which the bishops called “a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.” (#6)

Often, Maryknoll action has been “directed above all at those people and nations which because of various forms of oppression and because of the present character of our society are silent, indeed voiceless, victims of injustice” (#20) – most especially, women, children, migrants, indigenous peoples, and people living with HIV or AIDS.

Maryknoll missioners around the world feel the impact of social injustice and see its effects in the communities where they live and work. Flowing from their ministries of presence and accompaniment, as well as from the concrete programs and projects in which Maryknollers participate, Maryknoll justice and peace/social concerns ministries have engaged in the hard work of identifying root causes of social and economic injustice. With a particular focus on the geographical regions where Maryknoll is present (see NewsNotes, March-April 2011) as well as on structural or systemic injustice affecting women, children, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees and people with HIV and AIDS, Maryknoll joins with others of like mind to identify potential pathways to social transformation and to move our world in that direction.

Promoting respect for the dignity and rights of women, Maryknoll advocates nationally and internationally for policies that eliminate the abuse of women and gender discrimination and promote the full participation of women in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the community. Maryknoll, particularly the Maryknoll Sisters’ with their then-separate Social Concerns Office, participated actively in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns has remained active in follow-up to the conference and in the promotion of women through the United Nations, including the work of the Commission on the Status of Women, the establishment of UN Women and on the role of women in peace-making and disarmament.

Maryknoll also has worked to raise awareness of the rights of children, supporting U.S. ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and development of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), especially in Latin America and Africa.

For many years, Maryknoll has supported the right of indigenous peoples to a life of dignity and respect by honoring and learning from traditional practices, ensuring access to land, and strengthening their capacity to respond to the challenges of urban life. Increasingly, Maryknollers working with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns have identified the indigenous concept of “buen vivir” as a very important antidote to the accumulative and unsustainable thrust of consumerism. Annual participation in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has provided good opportunity to learn about indigenous ways of thought and organization. In earlier decades Maryknoll in Latin America sponsored occasional conferences for missionaries working in indigenous communities.

Maryknoll also has important experience with migrant and refugee communities in Asia, Africa and the Americas, including on the U.S.-Mexican border. A Maryknoll statement on migration, “Toward Global Solidarity,” written in 2006, guides current work on this issue. Based on Maryknoll experience, it articulates principles that are rooted in the inherent value of each human person; in the community’s responsibility to protect the most vulnerable; and in the Gospel mandate to welcome the stranger.

Because Maryknoll missioners in many countries, including Namibia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya, Cambodia, China, Taiwan, Peru, Bolivia, El Salvador and Guatemala, work in programs responding to HIV and AIDS, the Maryknoll AIDS Task Force was established to provide information, to educate about the pandemic and to advocate for just policies of the U.S. and international financial institutions that affect HIV and AIDS projects. HIV and AIDS-related advocacy and education continue through the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.
Honduras: Challenge human rights abuses

As violence increases against human rights defenders, teachers, union leaders and others who oppose the Honduran government, three U.S. representatives have prepared the following “Dear Colleague” letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton calling for the U.S. government to take a stronger stance toward the Honduran government until it responds more adequately to the escalating violence.

We write to express our deep and continuing concerns about the protection of human rights, freedom of expression and the rule of law in Honduras. We urge you to ensure that U.S. policy towards Honduras is based on a more vigorous U.S. response in support of human rights. We share the concerns expressed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in March 2011 regarding “the disproportionate use of force to quell public demonstrations against the policies of the current government, the lack of an independent judiciary and the situation of human rights defenders.”

We are greatly concerned about the threats and violence directed against human rights defenders, activists, opposition leaders, members of the LGBT community and journalists in Honduras ... As you are aware, the IACHR singled out Honduras in its 2010 Annual Report, released on April 15, as one of four countries in the hemisphere whose human rights situation warrants special attention. Precautionary measures issued by the IACHR are generally not being implemented by Honduran authorities. Moreover, members of the security forces are implicated in many incidences of threats, harassment, attacks and extrajudicial executions.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) cites 10 journalists killed since March 2010 in total impunity... The International Federation of Journalists reported that 10 of 29 journalists killed in Latin America in 2010 were in Honduras, and along with 2009. In the Aguán valley, violence and forced evictions against campesino farmers continue unabated. ... COFADEH reports 237 death threats during the first year of President Lobo’s term in office (January 2010-January 2011), 133 directed at human rights defenders; 36 politically motivated killings; and 36 people fleeing the country into exile after having received threats. In a December 2010 report, Human Rights Watch noted that “no one has been held criminally responsible for the human rights violations and abuses of power committed after the coup,” and observed little evidence of progress in human rights violations committed since the Lobo administration took office in January 2010.

We strongly urge the State Department and U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa to vigorously press the Honduran government to take concrete steps to end abuses by official security forces by suspending, investigating and prosecuting those implicated in human rights violations. The State Department’s own 2010 human rights report notes the lack of progress in investigating human rights crimes. We further urge you, Madam Secretary, to suspend U.S.
assistance to the military and police, due to the lack of mechanisms in place to ensure security forces are held accountable for abuses.

It is essential that the United States require the Honduran government to respect its citizens’ rights to freedom of expression and assembly, including an end to excessive use of force in response to protests... We ask the U.S. Embassy to publicly denounce violence and threats against defenders and activists. It is vital that the Embassy denounce attacks against the staff of the non-governmental Commission of Truth and urge the government to ensure that the Commission can carry out its functions safely and that victims and witnesses are protected from intimidation and abuse... Finally, to end the cycle of abuses and repair the deteriorated rule of law in Honduras, human rights abuses that have occurred since the June 2009 coup must be brought to justice.

Thank you for your serious consideration of these requests regarding strengthening the protection and promotion of human rights and the rule of law in Honduras.

**Faith in action:**

Please call your representative’s office and ask that s/he sign on to this letter to Secretary Clinton. To sign on, they should contact Cindy Buhl in Rep. Jim McGovern’s (D-MA) office at x5-6101 or cindy.buhl@mail.house.gov. Deadline is May 25.

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**U.S.-Colombia FTA: Plan minimizes human, labor rights**

Although as a presidential candidate he vowed to oppose the Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) until progress was made on human rights, in early April Obama indicated that he was prepared to move forward with the U.S.-Colombia FTA after signing an “action plan” on labor rights with Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos. While the action plan represents some steps forward, it does not make adequate progress on labor rights, and it effectively removes other human rights concerns from consideration. Moreover the U.S.-Columbia FTA sadly resembles the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in that it promotes growth in exports and investment at the expense of local economies, ecological concerns and resilient local food systems.

The “action plan” signed by the Obama and Santos administrations outlines some movement forward on labor rights. It calls for hiring 480 new labor inspectors; it improves the system for lodging complaints about labor violations; it proposes legislation to impose penalties for anti-union activity and it expands protection programs for trade unionists. While these measures sound positive, Colombia is under no obligation to take action on these proposals in a timely manner.

Moreover, the action plan does nothing to address other significant human rights issues that have plagued Colombia. Nothing was included on dismantling paramilitaries, protecting human rights defenders or addressing needs of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities.

The Obama administration has signaled that it plans to send the FTA to Congress for a yes or no vote before the end of this year; the Republican-led House hopes to pass this agreement, as well as trade pacts with South Korea and Panama, by July 1.

There is concern that investment provisions of the U.S.-Colombia FTA will open the door for a flood of foreign investors in agriculture and extractive industries which will encourage even more illegal appropriation of lands and violent displacement of
The following is the founding statement of the Red Buen Vivir (Living Well Network), formed after a Latin America-wide meeting of Maryknoll missionaries in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The network aims to educate and mobilize people and communities around religious and indigenous solutions to the economic and ecological crises we face today.

Never before have human systems created such vast divisions of wealth and poverty, nor such vast destruction of our planet. Never before has the urgency of a fundamental change in vision been so strongly forced upon us by a common necessity.

We are people from different cultures and grassroots movements across the Americas who share a common urgency in the face of the unprecedented challenges and opportunities currently facing the human family and Earth. Never before has humanity collided with the economic and environmental limits of the planet as we do today.

To continue on the present economic and environmental course is suicidal.

Partly because of this inescapable urgency we are hearing new voices and new visions. These are voices of hope, of peace, of equity and complementarity instead of competition and war. One of the strongest of these voices comes from indigenous peoples of Latin America as they urge us to live well, or vivir bien, instead of trying to “live better” in a world of limited environmental capacities.

Religious communities are issuing similar clarion calls for deep changes in the way we act in order to assure that all are able to benefit from Earth’s bounty and that this bounty will be respected and maintained for future generations. Many of these communities are on the forefront of preserving and recuperating ecosystems for the benefit of all.

With the traditional cultures of the world, we know that the Creator has provided us with a rich, beautiful planet with more than enough to provide a
satisfying life for all humans and other forms of life. Perhaps these traditional cultures carry the collective memory of the human family as they recognize the intense interconnectedness of all living beings on the planet; that each living being depends on the other to maintain the intricate web of life.

As Gandhi so aptly stated, “Earth provides enough to satisfy every human’s need, but not every human’s greed.” We are deeply concerned about the current global economic system that encourages greed, perpetuates inequity and is clearly unsustainable. Not only does the current economic system exclude a huge portion of the world’s population, relegating millions to starvation and to lives of desperation, but it also consumes many key natural resources at rates that will leave our children and theirs with very few resources with which to build satisfying, dignified lives. It is clear that deep changes are needed to create a new system that provides livelihoods for all within the biophysical limits of Earth.

Many indigenous communities use the term Buen Vivir (Living Well) or Estar Bien (Being Well) to describe a way of living in harmony with Earth while creating equitable societies where all are included. Within Judaism and Christianity, themes like Sabbath economics, Jubilee and the Catholic Church’s social teachings provide guidelines for sustainable lifestyles and economic systems that prioritize the Common Good.

The Buen Vivir Network strives to promote such alternative economic, ecological and cosmological visions and to assist in the implementation of the concrete social structures and strategies that flow from them at community, national and international levels. We carry this out in four working areas:

**Cosmological visions:** We will explore the rich diversity of cosmological visions from indigenous and other cultures around the world to gain a deeper understanding of humanity’s role on Earth and of traditions which can guide our actions.

**Stories of life:** To help these concepts be better understood, we will share stories of people and communities carrying out concrete actions that embody the concept of Living Well.

**Alternatives:** We will participate in grassroots movements and activities aimed at moving our communities to be more in harmony with Earth and all forms of life through concrete social arrangements, cooperative businesses, and communal projects.

**Campaigns:** We will support and promote important educational and advocacy campaigns that we feel embody the beliefs of Buen Vivir and to help more people and organizations to actively participate in these campaigns.

We would be unwise not to recognize that the recently developed ways of life based on overconsumption are in crisis. These crises are economic and ecological, but they are also reflections of a more fundamental spiritual crisis. As a species, humans have lost touch with our place in the Earth community. We forget that we are but a part of the wonderful mystery brought about by the Creator.

We are confident that these crises themselves represent a unique opportunity and a reason to be optimistic. With strong vision and courageous action the human family can become a positive and sustainable part of an Earth community with greater equity, harmony, complementarity and peace.
Africa: Agricultural technology and food security

Today, no one would argue against the fact that in most African countries agriculture has been sorely ignored for decades and desperately needs investment. Extension services, agricultural education and subsidies for growing sensitive crops are a distant memory in countries that have drastically scaled back public spending in order to make debt payments or changed government policies to facilitate trade with countries of the North. This second article in a series exploring the underlying causes of food insecurity in Africa focuses on the kinds of technologies being proposed to help lift the African small holder farmer out of poverty.

A chorus of voices have claimed that the Green Revolution, which modernized agricultural production through technology in the U.S. and then in Latin America and much of Asia, skipped over Africa. But actually, the Rockefeller and Ford foundations, the drivers of the original Green Revolution, did target Africa in the 1970s. Research centers for agriculture and agro-forestry were established in a number of African counties. But African farmers did not buy nearly as many hybrid seeds, chemical pesticides and inorganic fertilizers as their counterparts in South and Southeast Asia, so many of these projects were abandoned. African farmers were poorer, basic infrastructure was mostly absent, and Africa’s farming systems and conditions were much too diverse for the one-size-fits-all solutions that were offered.

Green Revolution supporters hold up India as the best example of the benefits of new seed technologies, but others would argue that the results are not nearly as positive as touted. While initially yields did increase, they shrunk significantly in later years. Many poorer Indian farmers found impact of the Green Revolution disastrous. When hybrid seeds failed to reproduce, farmers had to buy new seeds every year in addition to the required chemical pesticides, fertilizers and insecticides. Millions of farmers fell into unsustainable debt and some were driven to suicide by drinking the very pesticides they had bought for their plants.

The history of these failed projects is all but forgotten today as the Gates Foundation with its Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, the World Bank through its Global Agriculture and Food Security Program, and USAID with its Feed the Future Program proclaim the necessity of new technologies to fight food insecurity and poverty in Africa. As the second Green Revolution for Africa charges ahead with this sense of amnesia, the same social conditions like inequality, unjust land tenure, insufficient infrastructure and gender disparity are screaming for attention. Yet, new money pouring into Africa threatens to usher in not only the cookie cutter approach that worked poorly in Asian and Latin American countries but an entire gene revolution through the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMO) technology as well.

In essence, the discourse behind the African Green Revolution looks specifically at insufficient productivity as the cause of rural poverty. It then proposes technology in the form of high yielding varieties and farming techniques as the answer. Its promoters want to transform African agriculture into a dynamic sector with emphasis on export crops that assist in integrating small holder farmers into the greater global economy. Unfortunately, not taken into account are the political, social and economic factors that have led to the decay of African agriculture. Because they do not address any of these factors, the immediate technological fixes may end up abandoned as in the past, leaving people with fewer options and even more food insecure.

The 2008 report of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), compiled by 400 scientists over a five year period, suggests that agriculture is important for more than just generating food. Farms guarantee livelihoods giving people a reason to stay and invest in rural communities. In many African countries between 60 and 80 percent of the population depends on farming for living. Small holder agriculture, both for subsistence and commercial purposes, is by far the dominant trend. With the majority of people involved in agriculture a sudden emergence of mono-cropped industrial agriculture brought on through the new Green Revolution threatens to push great numbers of people into the cities where industry is not developed enough to offer jobs.

Taking some of these social factors into account, IAASTD research points to a focus on ecological agricultural as well as traditional and local knowledge systems to promote food security, employment and sound environmental practices for current and future generations (see related article in NewsNotes).
July/August 2010). Technological assistance to increase access to water, credit, information, better transportation, post harvest storage systems and value added training, hand-in-hand with agro-ecological and traditional farming practices, could go along way to improve food security and boost rural livelihoods.

Rather than taking a precautionary stance to protect Africa’s biodiversity, the African Union and its development wing, the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), have embraced the Green Revolution. The AU established a High Level Panel on Modern Biotechnology’s Freedom to Innovate and is currently engaged in an effort to revise the carefully crafted African Model Law on Biosafety to make the biosafety provisions less stringent and set the stage for Africa to conform to the needs of the corporations pushing GMOs. This directly contradicts the group of African negotiators’ position in developing the Cartagena Protocol (which was entered into force in 2003) to ensure strict biosafety precautions.

Across the continent, a number of African governments and civil society organizations are speaking out against the pressures from gene companies and the foundations and projects backing the adoption of these technologies. Examples of this resistance include Zambia, Sudan and Angola resisting the acceptance of GM food aid; the African Biodiversity Network in Addis Ababa defending community and farmers’ rights to reject GMO seed; and Kenya’s Small-Scale Farmers Forum leaders, representing crop farmers, pastoralists, and fisherfolk issuing a statement rejecting GMOs and demanding a 20-year moratorium on GMOs in Kenya.

If today we were to rewrite the Genesis account of the Tower of Babel, the story might very well involve seeds and fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, combines and other tools that allow humans to grow plants that reach for the heavens. If the clever people of Babel were trying to build a tower such that they could be on the same level as God, today our story might be about how humans have used their ingenuity to build “better” plants than those that have evolved from God’s first creative act. Not unlike the clever people of Babel, scientists and technicians seek to “make a name for themselves,” by developing and globalizing seeds with specific traits that they have deemed “perfect.” They envision a world where every arable piece of land around the world is planted with these seeds, where all will marvel at (and pay dearly for) their innovation.

Today, the promises of this new Green Revolution encompass more than just increased yields. In an effort to make the public more accepting, seeds are promised to be drought resistant to fight climate change and vitamin enriched to combat malnourishment. But underneath these claims, some of the same actors who profited from the first Green Revolution see in Africa a similar opportunity, namely, to establish a dominant agricultural model based on agro-exports, free trade, and the use of chemical-intensive large-scale monocultures and GMOs.

As we know from Babel, the story does not end well. Those who constructed the tower sought unity, but were divided by language. Today we see corporate powers that want to unify the world under one trading system where even basic human needs, like food, are controlled by a handful of entities. This world view works in direct contradiction to the world that God created: abundant, bio-diverse, interdependent and ultimately mysterious. Around the world Maryknoll missioners have worked side by side with people using ancient techniques and local seeds to adapt to conditions of drought and excess water, producing well in difficult conditions. These efforts to work with nature rather than against it should be supported before technology, disconnected from social, political, gender and ecological conditions, is embraced.
Zimbabwe: Hard road to reform

As uprisings spread through northern Africa and the Middle East, Zimbabwe’s ruling party, ZANU-PF, organized its own “popular” demonstrations in Harare with ZANU-PF supporters carrying banners reading “No to foreigners controlling our economy” and “Foreigners, sanctions have destroyed our economy so we want to control our wealth.” According to Solidarity Peace Trust, “the demonstrations were violent and destructive, causing enormous damage to property at the Gulf shopping mall in the city. They were also carried out on the eve of the EU meeting to review the targeted measures against key ZANU-PF figures, almost in an attempt to ensure that measures were not removed as the sanctions issue was a key message in the ZANU-PF election campaign.”

ZANU-PF also stopped any incipient Egypt style demonstrations. In February, 45 people were arrested for watching a video of demonstrations in Egypt and Tunisia. They were charged with treason for plotting to overthrow the government.

A recent AfricaFocus Bulletin (April 14) quoted extensively from the April 13 report of Solidarity Peace Trust entitled “The Hard Road to Reform.” The report discounts “over optimistic hopes for an ‘Egypt moment’ in Zimbabwe,” but notes that the Global Political Agreement (GPA) still offers hope for change, despite the fact that ZANU-PF has consistently blocked its full implementation. Civil society groups noted with approval the recent sharpening of Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) criticism, but warned that it remains to be seen how much pressure will be sustained. The full report is available on the Solidarity Peace Trust website (http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org).

The report makes particular note of the recent change in the SADC approach to ZANU-PF:

[The] … seeming lethargy of the SADC facilitation took a dramatic turn at the SADC Troika summit in Zambia on March 31. Noting with “grave concern” the political polarization in Zimbabwe characterized by the “resurgence of violence, arrests and intimidation,” the Summit made five resolutions on Zimbabwe:

* There must be an immediate end of violence, intimidation, hate speech, harassment, and any other form of action that contradicts the letter and spirit of the GPA [Global Political Agreement].
* All stakeholders to the GPA should implement all the provisions of the GPA and create a conducive environment for peace, security, and free political activity.
* The Inclusive Government should complete all the steps for the holding of the election including the finalization of the constitutional amendment and the referendum.
* SADC should assist Zimbabwe to formulate guidelines that will assist in holding an election that will be peaceful, free and fair, in accordance with the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections.
* The Troika of the Organ shall appoint a team of officials to join the Facilitation Team and work with the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC) to ensure monitoring, evaluation and implementation of the GPA.

Without naming Mugabe directly, these resolutions were arguably the most forthright diplomatic criticism that SADC had issued of the Mugabe regime, with the recommendations largely echoing the demands that the MDC [Movement for Democratic Change] and the civic movement had been making since 2009. Moreover for the first time since SADC began discussing the outstanding issues of the GPA the sanctions issue was not mentioned, an issue that consistently kept the region in solidarity with Mugabe. The style of diplomatic intervention shifted significantly from Mbeki’s “quiet diplomacy,” which the Zuma team had largely adopted on taking over the reins of the facilitation.

At this point it might be argued that the reasons for the change in SADC’s approach were the result of a combination of factors. These included: increased international pressure in the wake of events in North Africa; the growing frustration of SADC with the obstructive behavior of the Mugabe regime; and the persistent pressure of the lobbying of the MDC and civil society in both Zimbabwe and South Africa. It remains to be seen whether SADC has the united political will to follow this through.

The response to the SADC resolutions by the Mugabe regime was, to say the least, apoplectic. …

In early March ZANU-PF also lost the Speakership in Parliament, robbing the party of control of a key position in the legislature in the event of a succession vote in Parliament should Mugabe pass on in the near future.
Sudan: Problems still exist

In early April the Sudan Catholic Bishops’ Conference issued a statement on this period between the January referendum and the July independence of the South. They wrote:

*In a previous statement, we said, Sudan will never be the same again. This has come to pass in the most concrete way, as we await the formal Declaration of Independence of the South and the formation of two new countries on 9th July 2011. However it is also true in a deeper way. The people of the South have had the opportunity to determine their own political future. This is a basic expression of human dignity. We call upon all the citizens, politicians, security forces and leaders of the two countries to respect human life and dignity, and to build the future based on these God-given values.*

We call for patience, understanding and restraint as this dramatic change takes place. Those in authority must act justly, and foster openness and participation in spirit and action. Citizens must recognize that great changes are not completed overnight; there is a process which may not always meet immediate expectations. Legitimate authority must be respected, but leaders must work selflessly for the common good and avoid exaggerated political ambition. Leadership is a service to the people, and offices must be surrendered willingly at the end of the requisite term.

While there is great joy, there are also those who are saddened at the division of our country. There are fears and concerns about the future. Problems still remain: Abyei, the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile, citizenship, borders and oil. There are concerns about the inclusivity and transparency of the constitutional review process. Not least, the conflict in Darfur continues and there is increasing violence in the South, including the activities of the Lord’s Resistance Army [LRA]. We are saddened that our people have been inculcated to turn to violence when faced with disputes, whether ethnic, or over resources, or over personal or political issues....

The situation in post-referendum Sudan remains fragile. South Sudan has to deal with multiple ongoing internal and external problems while it settles into the post-euphoric stage of building a new nation with diverse local communities that are both very poor and unfamiliar with lasting peace.

Most of the challenges identified in a March-April 2011 NewsNotes article have not been resolved. For example, fighting continued near Malakal in Upper Nile state between the army of Southern Sudan and rebel militias, with civilians bearing the brunt of the conflict; clashes have occurred between south Sudan police and members of the nomadic Messirya tribe; and the people of Western Equatoria are again being attacked by the LRA.

Talks between north and south Sudan have not settled the dispute over the oil-producing area of Abyei. Renewed accusations and a build-up of military weapons are of great concern. North and south Sudan have yet to agree on post-referendum issues such as border demarcation, oil, water, international agreements and citizenship. The African Union (AU) panel led by former South African president Thabo Mbeki is mediating on these items. The new U.S. special envoy to Sudan, Princeton Lyman, is involved. The NCP and the SPLM have agreed to work together toward cancellation of Sudan’s foreign debt.

The northern government in Khartoum has been accused of supporting the rebels and in other ways violating provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). In response to reports that First Vice president of Sudan Salva Kiir might lose his federal post before the South officially secedes next July and to a decision by the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) to exclude Southern MP’s from attending the new session of the parliament, analyst John Ashworth wrote: “This is an extremely significant development, and a further breach of the CPA by NCP. First Vice President Salva Kiir’s position is far from ‘ceremonial and without any powers.’ The CPA defines ‘the presidency’ as being the president with the first and second vice presidents, and a number of key decisions can only be made by ‘the presidency,’ i.e. by all three of them agreeing, not by the president alone. The fact that the NCP has ignored this rule on occasions does not invalidate it. With key decisions coming up on Abyei, Blue Nile, Southern Kordofan and a number of North-South issues, this is an attempt by NCP to remove the first vice president from any role in decision-making as defined in the CPA, which is valid until 9th July despite the fact that the south has voted for secession. By the same token, it is not clear on what authority NCP has dismissed the southern members of the national legislature several months before the end of the CPA. The interim arrangements for governing the (united) country as laid out in the CPA and the
interim constitutions are valid until the end of the CPA on 9th July.”

After somewhat of a lull, Darfur is in crisis again. The United Nations Security Council recently expressed its “deep concern over the serious increase in violence and insecurity in Darfur, including ceasefire violations, restrictions on access to vulnerable populations throughout Darfur by UNAMID (the UN-AU Mission in Darfur) and the humanitarian community, attacks by rebel groups, aerial bombardment by the Sudanese Armed Forces, and the ongoing displacement of civilians.” More than 70,000 people have arrived in camps for displaced people since December.

Africa: Tension swirls around Nile water

Water is an issue of great concern in many parts of the world, but negotiations over the use of water from the Nile river are exceptionally delicate. South Sudan is approaching independence and needs to develop policies that address extreme poverty, protect access to basic resources, including water, and preserve fragile ecosystems. Ethiopia, with very high levels of poverty, is looking to hydroelectric generation as a source of export income. Egypt is seeking new sources of water, as are communities in many countries - and climate change is threatening the stability of water sources throughout the region.

An article in The East African (April 4) predicted diplomatic problems for Tanzania over its plan to draw water from Lake Victoria, which is a major source for the Nile and thus of great interest to Egypt and Sudan. The water would be used, beginning in 2014, in the Tabora region and would also benefit other regions and villages situated along the pipeline. An earlier project drew water from Lake Victoria for Kahama and Shinyanga.

During the colonial era, Britain and Egypt signed two treaties that “restricted the carrying out of any project on the Nile river tributaries or their lakes that could adversely affect its water level without Cairo’s consent,” giving Egypt dominant rights to Nile water. But seven countries – Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – argue that the two treaties are illegal, since they were negotiated and signed before independence for Tanganyika [Tanzania], Kenya, Uganda and the other states. In May 2010, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania and Ethiopia signed the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), in an effort to curb Egypt’s water rights. Kenya and Burundi also signed within the time limits established. Egypt obviously disagrees and Sudan has supported Egypt.

Ethiopia is planning to build a massive $4.8 billion hydroelectric dam in the Nile river basin near its border with Sudan. The Blue Nile, which begins in Ethiopia, meets the White Nile in Sudan’s capital Khartoum. Ethiopia hopes to address its own serious poverty by exporting electricity, but has run into strong opposition to its new project from environmentalists and from Egypt, which depends entirely on the Nile for its water. Egypt is thus far not attracting the necessary funding from donors and lending agencies, but intends to go ahead with the project regardless, claiming it is essential to addressing Ethiopia’s poverty.

Voice of America reported in late March that Ethiopia is discussing with Egypt and Sudan the possibility of joint ownership of the project, which will have an electrical generation capacity that will more than triple Ethiopia’s current capacity. The project will create a reservoir of water twice as large as Lake Tana, presently Ethiopia’s largest body of water, but Ethiopian authorities claim it will not displace any people because it will be contained in the existing river gorge.

Meanwhile, the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) has assured Egyptian officials that, once it is independent, the new country will honor the agreements already in place regarding the allocation of the Nile waters. Cairo was concerned that the secession of Southern Sudan would impact allocation of the Nile waters, particularly if the South decided to join the NBI, but, apparently, South Sudan intends to sustain its positive relationship with Egypt.

At the same time, Egypt is hoping to restart the unfinished Jonglei Canal project in South Sudan, which would channel swamp water back into the Nile. Egypt desperately needs more water, and the Jonglei Canal appears to be the only way to achieve that. However, according to analyst John Ashworth, there are serious concerns about the impact of the canal on the climate of South Sudan, as well as on migration routes for livestock and wildlife.
DRC: Women’s bodies as battlefields

The crimes of the forces of various militias in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are now well publicized. The armed groups have been using the rape of women as a weapon of war for over 10 years now, including in well-publicized attacks against hundreds of women in August 2010, October 2010 and January 2011. In a March 14 article in America magazine, Kevin Clarke reports on the Forces Democratiques de Liberation du Rwanda (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, FDLR) and the National Congress for the Defence of the People (Congres National pour la Defense du Peuple, CNDP) who have been raiding villages in North Kivu province in the DRC.

The organization Centre Olame (which means “living with dignity”), a partner of Catholic Relief Services in the Bukavu archdiocese in South Kivu, was instrumental in bringing to light the extraordinary level of sexual violence that has been taking place in the brutal Congo conflict. They have documented officially the use of rape as an instrument of warfare in the Congo and have been responding to the survivors of this warfare, mostly area women.

In the DRC normality has seemingly returned to some areas in the western side, but not everywhere. The DRC, according to Amnesty International, “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, as well as in jewelry. Many of the mines from which these minerals are extracted are 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 a UN peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO. A recent report by the United Nations 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 violations, including sexual violence, child and slave labor, and mass displacement.”

NGOs such as Oxfam and other international organizations are frustrated that MONUSCO, with 19,000 peacekeepers, is ineffective. The humanitarian forces cannot safely complete their mission as the areas that they cover are very spread out, and they have not been able to apprehend the armed militias. According to the Enough! Project, “Alarmingly, the final resolution passed by the Security Council [on MONUSCO] emphasized the role of the UN to ‘support,’ act ‘upon explicit request from,’ and ‘assist’ the Congolese government on fronts ranging from training its army, to helping displaced people return home, and preventing armed groups from benefiting from the East’s lucrative mineral resources. Of course, the catch-22 of this plan is that the Congolese soldiers are themselves one of the major predators threatening civilians and exploiting mineral wealth in the region. One Congolese commander, Bosco Ntaganda, is wanted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes.”

At Ecumenical Advocacy Days, held in Washington, D.C. in March, Nita M. Evele of Congo Global Action said that because of the long wars, women in the DRC have been traumatized, and the terrible sexual violence there has caused the breakdown of the traditional society. Now, it can be called “the battle of rape,” as women’s bodies have become a battleground. Some women have been raped many times over, even eight or a dozen times.

Because of the violence against women many survivors of sexual violence suffer from grave long-term psychological and physical health consequences. These can include the problems of HIV and AIDS, traumatic fistula, depression and many other problems. Also, the shortage of medical services is critical. The number of sexually transmitted infections and HIV and AIDS among the rebels, soldiers and irregular combatants is very high.

On a positive note, a coalition of 25 organizations called the Synergy of Women for the Victims of Sexual Violence in Conflict are supporting women victims of violence by giving legal assistance, medical help, and other support for the socio-economic reinsertion of women, and by sensitizing communities. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court recognizes rape as a war crime and a crime against humanity, therefore it should be possible for the perpetrators of rape during wartime to be tried in national and/or international courts.

Amnesty International urges the government of the DRC to take immediate action in order to prevent, punish and eradicate sexual violence and to demonstrate that this type of sexual violence can be stopped.
When the news broke that Osama bin Laden had been killed, many U.S. newscasters sounded jubilant and thousands of people celebrated. Others, like Kathy Kelly, who has visited Afghanistan and Iraq regularly for the past 15 years, and Matt Daloisio, who co-coordinates the Witness Against Torture Campaign, were much, much more sober.

Kelly and Daloisio pointed to 10 years of aerial bombardments, night raids, death squads, assassinations and drone attacks, hundreds of thousands of civilians killed, more than 6,000 U.S. soldiers killed, trillions of dollars wasted, tens of thousands of men, women and children detained and imprisoned in the “war on terror” and the fact that torture became an accepted component of U.S. foreign policy.

In late 2001, as the war in Afghanistan intensified, religious leaders, including Maryknoll leadership, issued a statement on “Different Pathway to Peace and Security.” They wrote: “Justice demands that perpetrators of terror be held to account, but a vicious crime that took the lives of thousands of people from dozens of countries should be prosecuted under international law, not avenged by war. ... The investigation, pursuit and prosecution of suspected terrorists and their supporters should be accomplished in a manner completely cooperative with the family of nations and making full use of international law enforcement mechanisms. The accused should be brought to justice in an international tribunal established to deal with terrorism.”

Claims that “enhanced interrogation” techniques used on Abu Faraj al-Libbi, a senior al-Qaeda operative, helped lead Obama officials to the courier who connected bin Laden to the outside world have been discredited by high level officials, including Deputy National Security Advisor John Brennan, who said, “There was no one critical bit of information provided by either a detainee or somebody else ... [S]ome very, very good people ... have been following bin Laden for many, many years [and] have been very persistent. They have pulled on every thread. And as a result of that diligence and their analytic capabilities, they were able to track this and continue to build a body of evidence that suggested, circumstantially, that [he] was at that compound.”

In response to bin Laden’s death, Human Rights First said, “[L]ike many criminals before him, [he] used terror ... to get the United States to abandon its principles. ... With bin Laden’s demise, the United States should ensure that his goal is definitively rejected. The strength of our country lies in its belief in the inherent dignity of all people and respect for universal human rights. We are strongest when we live up to these beliefs.”

In April, the website Wikileaks provided previously classified military documents to news outlets in the U.S. and Europe which give new information about the hundreds of men who have been held prisoner at the detention center at Guantanamo Bay.

The files show that only 220 of the 779 men detained at Guantanamo Bay at some point are a threat to the U.S. About 150 Afghans and Pakistanis -- who held positions such as drivers, farmers and chefs -- were innocent but held in the detention facility for years, some for intelligence purposes.

Today, 172 inmates remain in the detention facility. While President Obama promised to try the detainees in civilian courts and close the prison when he issued his executive order halting torture in 2009, the prison remains open. In April the administration re-started military tribunals in Guantanamo Bay after a two-year freeze.

In a statement after the papers’ release, the Center for Constitutional Rights noted, “The broad picture these documents paint is not of men ‘too dangerous to release’ but of a government attempting to justify its mistakes and detaining, interrogating and abusing men – as well as teenage boys and men old enough to be suffering from dementia – for years based on bad evidence, hearsay from self interested jailhouse informers and sheer incompetence.”

Witness Against Torture (WAT) and the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), anti-torture groups with whom the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns works, each issued statements about the newly-leaked documents. WAT continues to advocate for prison closure, release of those cleared, fair U.S. trials for the remaining prisoners and a comprehensive inquiry against all those who carried out torture at Guantanamo Bay.

“Will we take an honest look at the mistakes we made and move forward with a plan to ensure that they are not repeated?” asked NRCAT Executive Director Richard Killmer. “Or will we continue to try to cover up the past and allow the ... leaked documents to continue to demonstrate the immorality of our treatment of post 9/11 detainees?”
UNESCO: How to strengthen peace today

The following report was written by Maryknoll Sister Elizabeth Zwareva, a volunteer with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

On March 11, the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held a high level panel, comprised of about 20 professionals – journalists, entrepreneurs and religious leaders – entitled “Building peace: Reconciliation through the power of education, the sciences, culture and communication”; the public event was attended by more than 450 people. The occasion also marked the culmination of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World. In his opening remarks, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon spoke of the values, attitudes and behaviors that form the cornerstone of peace: diversity, tolerance and dialogue.

UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova opened the discussion by posing the following questions: “What does peace mean today? How can we strengthen it between states and within societies?”

Although the Secretary General had indicated some of the obstacles to building peace – violence, bigotry, intolerance and exclusion – Bokova reiterated the current problems the world is facing today. She said, “Humanity is moving around more than ever before. Internal conflicts are on the rise. People are more connected, but other forms of inequalities are emerging. People and cultures do not weigh the same in the balance of globalization. Values, traditions, customs and cultural expressions are moving to the front of national politics and global trends.”

In relation to these points it is important to remember that UNESCO was created to help the United Nations’ efforts towards building peace through its contribution in the areas of education, science, culture, communication and information; UNESCO’s constitution declares that “if war starts in the minds of men and women, it is in these minds that the defenses of peace must be built.”

The first step towards building the defenses of peace is recognizing the basic problems that generate conflict. The issues that negatively affect the efforts of peace building include: gender inequality (which denies women and girls access to education and employment); a deficient educational system (affected by constant war); and misinformation (which generates conflict among religious groups). Disadvantaged groups use force to obtain desired goods, and often, in that process, recruit children for combat. The aftermath of war leaves physical, psychological, and emotional scars in addition to trauma and stigmatization which affect their ability to learn.

A documentary on child soldiers in Africa produced by panelist and actor Forest Whitaker was presented to the attendees; Whitaker’s piece showed the fate of children who were abducted and forced to become militants. The young boy and girl interviewed in the film are epitomes of what happened to the majority of children post-war: Acceptance into the community and the chance to get an education helped the boy find approval, self-confidence and dignity, while on the other hand, the young girl, who was rejected by her community, continued to live psychologically the ravages of war, and to experience constant flashbacks. This pre-disposition is a sure path to violence. Having learned to kill, children need to learn how to build peace. The documentary is an example of how communication, film, and the arts can help re-educate children for peace.

Educating the child’s emotional and psychological self assures an environment of collaboration and self-discipline. Quality education is critical to overcoming religious and ethnic biases as well as eliminating tensions and misunderstandings. The language used in the media and in schools has the capacity to generate wars if its message is divisive. Disseminating misconceptions, stereotypes and fallacies about other cultures and religions has resulted in lifelong enmities in some countries. Therefore, there is need to develop a curriculum that is sensitive to an all inclusive history, culture and religion so that children learn respect early in life.

“Cultures or religions are not in themselves causes of war or conflict, even if they have often been used as a pretext to stir up conflicts,” noted Bokova. In order to harness effectively the power of education in the peace-building process, first of all, it is necessary to engage the parties in conflict in a process of reconciliation. Success in building peace must be firmly based upon the universal principles of respect for the dignity and the autonomy of every individual as well as upon a justice system that assures a safe educational environment, remembering that “peace is everyone’s responsibility.”
Economic justice: Learn more about the FSB

According to G24 Secretariat Amar Bhattacharya, who spoke recently during meetings of the IMF and World Bank in Washington D.C., the Financial Stability Board should be considered as the fourth pillar of global economic decision-making architecture, adding the letters “FSB” to the alphabet soup of IMF, WTO and World Bank. (The G24 is an intergovernmental agency of countries from the global south.) After the economic crisis of 2008, the governments of the G20 – the 20 most powerful country economies in the world – created the FSB to “coordinate at the international level the work of national financial authorities and international standard setting bodies and to develop and promote the implementation of effective regulatory, supervisory and other financial sector policies.”

Composed of representatives from regulatory agencies in the G20 countries, together with representatives of other “financially important” countries (Switzerland, Singapore, Netherlands, Spain and the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong), the FSB lacks clear procedures or guidelines for its work, leaving a great deal of power in the hands of the chair, currently Mario Draghi of the Bank of Italy. People who work in the FSB say the plenary sessions are little more than rubber stamping rituals where proposals from its working groups are passed with little discussion.

It is unclear which of the numerous working groups and committees are important or influential. For example, in its February 2011 progress report, the FSB reported that four different groups are exploring the issue of commodity market regulations: IOSCO (International Organization of Security Commissions), the CPSS (Committee on Payments and Settlement Systems), the Over-the-Counter (OTC) Derivatives Supervisors Group and the OTC Derivatives Regulators Forum. At the same time, the G20 has asked the UN Food and Agriculture Organization to prepare a report on the issue and has established a commodity prices study group chaired by Japan. Global hunger activists do not know which of these six different groups will be the one that actually influences policy. Even within the FSB there seems to be confusion over the same issue.

While the FSB does not establish or enforce regulations, it does work to build international consensus on how to best regulate financial markets through accounting standards, regulation of securities markets including commodities and derivatives, as well as regulations for banks, insurance companies and deposit insurance. While these themes may seem esoteric and unrelated to international development, the 2008 global financial crisis showed how poorly developed financial regulations can undermine the global economy.

Unfortunately, while the FSB is an important new part of the global economic structure, it is far less transparent than the IMF, World Bank or WTO and has fewer channels for input from countries in the Global South or civil society than the other institutions. It was only after years of pressure from activists around the world that those other institutions began to be more transparent and participative.

While the FSB represents a new challenge for civil society, in terms of struggling for greater transparency and inclusion, it also represents a much larger test. In the past 30 years, the financial sectors of the global economy have grown to unimaginable proportions. In 2009, global gross domestic product was $70 billion while the unregulated derivatives markets were estimated to be $605 trillion (estimated because they are unregulated and opaque markets). Banks have been able to gain power partly due to the fact that finance is an area that very few people understand well. Even within governments, there is a significant lack of understanding of financial markets, which has allowed the financial sector to operate without oversight.

This is not a unique situation. When the debt crisis struck in the early 1980s, few social justice advocates knew how international debt markets functioned and were reluctant to get involved in the issue, which allowed debt to be used to subjugate countries in the Global South to severe free market reforms. Similarly, in the early 1990s with the proposal of a very new, and more destructive, form of trade agreement in NAFTA, many groups were initially reluctant to engage in the confusing world of international trade. But today, most activists are mini-experts on issues of international debt and trade. In the same way, today, social justice activists need to begin to educate themselves on the workings of the financial system. Only then will there be a voice to counter the current monologue of bankers in halls of power.
Debt: IMF gold sales should be used for relief

Many international and national organizations, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and the Jubilee USA Network, have advocated energetically for the IMF to use some of the windfall profits from gold sales for debt cancellation to benefit some of the world’s poorest countries - or for grants rather than for new loans. The current financial crisis has had a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable people in impoverished countries and it would be unconscionable to saddle poor nations with crushing new debt to pay for a crisis they did not create.

On December 22, 2010, the IMF sold 403.3 tons of gold. Given the historically high price of gold, the IMF realized at least $3.5 billion more than it had projected on the sale. In advance of the recent World Bank and IMF spring meetings, more than 50 faith-based and civil society groups called on the IMF to “use all excess windfall profits from gold sales to fund debt cancellation and/or non-debt creating assistance for poor countries.”

The organizations wrote, “In 2009, the Fund agreed to use $900 million of the windfall profits from gold sales to increase the amount of low interest lending to poor countries, and since then the price of gold has continued to climb. Even after creating the endowment for its new income model and subsidizing its low interest lending program, the Fund will conservatively realize an additional $2.5 billion in excess windfall profits...

“Too many poor countries find themselves taking on new debt in the wake of natural disasters or other external shocks such as the global financial crisis. The IMF does not need these funds for its administrative budget or for increased lending capacity, but the poorest countries now face mounting debt burdens due to the financial crisis through no fault of their own. The two year interest-relief on IMF loans that was partially funded by gold sales may have reduced interest payments for poor countries but did not provide these countries with the non-debt creating assistance that they need. The reduction in interest payments from the subsidy was marginal - an average of less than $1 million per year for countries that qualified. The $2.5 billion in excess windfall from gold sales represents another opportunity to provide debt cancellation and non-debt creating assistance that is so desperately needed by poor countries.

“We urge the IMF Executive Board to expand the criteria for the Fund’s new Post-Catastrophe Debt Relief Trust Fund to provide debt relief without harmful conditions to countries in crisis, and use the gold sales proceeds to fund it. In June 2010, the IMF launched its Post-Catastrophe Debt Relief Trust Fund, which provides a two-year moratorium on debt service payments on IMF debt and considers cancellation of full debt stock for poor countries that face catastrophic disasters. The trust fund was initially funded through internal IMF resources, and was used to cancel all of Haiti’s debt stock to the Fund in the wake of its January 2010 earthquake. Currently the Trust Fund has a mere $154 million, and has such narrow criteria that only a very small country facing a catastrophe on the scale of Haiti’s earthquake can qualify. The Executive Board should expand the criteria for the Debt Relief Trust Fund to include crises created by other external economic shocks, to be able to provide debt cancellation and grant equivalent assistance in response to such crises. The Board should then commit its excess windfall profits from gold sales to capitalize the Trust Fund and/or other non-debt creating, unconditional assistance for poor countries.”

At the spring meetings of the World Bank and IMF, decision-makers failed to reach an agreement on using some of the windfall profits to provide this desperately needed debt relief. Instead the IMF re-affirmed the commitment made by the G20 to double new lending to poor countries and laid out three broad options: 1) to use resources linked to the gold sale to narrow, if not close, the large projected gap in the Fund’s capacity to assist low income countries (LICs) beyond 2014; 2) to use the profits to augment precautionary balances held to protect the Fund against financial risks, including increased credit risks; and 3) to make the profits a permanent part of the Fund’s financing structure to help ensure a sustainable and diversified income base.

Several other options considered include providing alternative forms of support to LICs through additional interest relief on Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust credits, augmenting the Post-Catastrophe Debt Relief Trust, or using the windfall profits to fund further debt relief, grants, or technical assistance. The discussions will continue prior to the IMF and World Bank annual meetings in the fall.
Faith in action:
The U.S. Congress will consider whether or not to approve new funds for the IMF. Write to your Congressional representative and senators to ensure that U.S. support for IMF money is conditioned on using the money from gold sales for debt relief and the removal of harmful economic policy conditions on IMF loans.

Harmony with nature: An invitation to fresh thinking

On Earth Day, April 22, the UN held an Interactive Dialogue on Harmony with Nature. The dialogue was framed by a report on the same theme delivered by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in 2009 which provides an overview of how contemporary lifestyle in industrialized countries, through its consumption and production patterns, has severely affected the Earth’s carrying capacity. It points out humanity’s fundamental failure to recognize that human beings are an inseparable part of nature. It states passionately that nature cannot be damaged without severely damaging humanity, and calls for new and fresh thinking to guide human behavior.

The 2011 event, organized by Ambassador Pablo Solon of Bolivia, included a panel of speakers: Vandana Shiva of India, Riane Eisler of the U.S., Peter Brown of Canada and Cormac Cullinan of South Africa. Their remarks were tied to the upcoming two week meeting on Sustainable Development and the major UN Earth Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in Rio de Janiero, Brazil in 2012.

Following the remarks of the panelists and interventions by government representatives, Sr. Ann Braudis, a Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns staff member who represents Maryknoll at the UN, was invited to give a brief response. Her remarks follow:

I would like to begin by thanking the Plurinational State of Bolivia for organizing this excellent event. I spent 15 years working and living in Bolivia and much of my thinking has been shaped through close association with the Bolivian people.

I would also like to acknowledge the excellent work of the panelists. Your inputs have been very compelling! I was pleased to hear Prof. Brown refer to the work of the great thinker and advocate for the Earth, Thomas Berry. I would like to add to the work that was highlighted earlier the following words of Thomas: “It is hand in hand with nature that we will go into the future or we will not go at all.”

Maryknoll Sisters work with marginalized people around the world and bear witness to the fact that [Earth’s] ecosystems are moving steadily toward biological collapse. Therefore, it is not surprising that we concur with most of the thinking presented here today, that the present dominant economic system is outmoded and corresponds to thinking that no longer correlates with reality. Furthermore, it is a source of immense injustice and inequity.

We believe that new ethical principles aligned with contemporary understandings about the nature and limits of the planet need to be articulated, and deliberately chosen to undergird a green and sustainable economy in the Sustainable Development Summit of 2012.

We hold that the satisfaction of human needs and rights must be seen as integral to a new approach to the Earth in its cosmic order, as known through science, and interpreted through the richness of cultures, through philosophical and spiritual insight, and through both visual and performing arts. The unbroken unfolding of the Earth in the past and up through the present indicates that the entire universe ... leans continuously into the future. Since humanity draws on the nature of the universe for its fundamental guidance and direction, humanity too must lean into the future. Today that means assuming the obligation to assure the very existence of the future in harmony with nature.

Economically speaking, a functional manifestation of this obligation and this work is understood and expressed in the concept of Steady State Economy; this means a sufficiency based economy for developed countries. It implies respecting the rights of countries in development to forge their own economies, sustainably and adequately, for meeting the authentic needs and rights of their citizens.

In the days and weeks to come Maryknollers will be deeply engaged in the meetings of the Commission on Sustainable Development, making every effort to assure that the situations around the world where Maryknollers and their partners are in mission are represented. It is the intention of Maryknollers to bring to the global table fresh thinking in support of international policy that guarantees for all humanity just societies in harmony with nature.

Thirteen religious institutions (including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns), offices and organizations submitted an amicus brief in support of a six-state lawsuit seeking to cap greenhouse gas emissions from power plants. In a 10-year process, the defendants (American Electric Power Co., Cinergy Corp, Southern Co., Xcel Energy Inc., and the Tennessee Valley Authority) have kept the case from going to trial arguing that policy questions it implicates do not belong in court. In 2006 a three-judge panel of the Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decided that the case did have merit. This decision set the stage for the Supreme Court to hear oral arguments on April 19 over whether states and private citizens could bring common law nuisance claims in order to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.

This office joined the Unitarian Universalist Association; the Shalom Center; the Province of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception; the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good; the National Catholic Rural Life Conference; the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate; the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation; Interfaith Power and Light; the General Synod of the United Church of Christ; the Franciscan Action Network; the Columbian Center for Advocacy and Outreach; and Church World Service in submitting an amicus brief in support of the plaintiff respondents (Connecticut, New York, California, Iowa, Rhode Island, Vermont, and the City of New York, collectively “Connecticut”) and three private land trusts. The religious institutions argued in the brief that Supreme Court should not wait for other branches of government to address climate change, and emphatically urged the Court “to err on the side of prudence, to err on the side of action and justice, and to allow this lawsuit to proceed.”

The main issue for the courts is whether a party can assert a federal common claim challenging a company’s carbon dioxide emissions as a public nuisance, or whether such efforts to curb emissions should be the responsibility of the legislative process. In 2004 eight states and the City of New York (collectively “Connecticut”) filed a suit which was dismissed before trial in a district court. The court held that the “political question” in this dispute about global warming would be better resolved by the legislature.

However, in 2009 the Second Circuit Court of Appeals held that courts are allowed to hear such cases and that such disputes are not restricted to resolution in the political arena. What is important to note about the Second Circuit Court’s decision is that it came just after the Environmental Protection Agency’s 2009 finding that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions endanger human health, which gave the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) the authority to regulate GHG emissions under the Clean Air Act.

Though the power companies had argued that the courts’ authority was displaced by the EPA’s new authority through this finding, the Second Circuit Court pointed out that the EPA’s regulation only applied to cars and other mobile sources, not stationary sources like power plants. Therefore until the EPA actually starts regulating all sources of carbon dioxide, the Court could not really determine whether or not displacement had occurred.

The case sets a significant precedent essentially positing that the public nuisance of greenhouse gas pollution has a proper place in court until federal regulations are in place. Since the Second Circuit denied a motion to dismiss, the case was allowed to move forward. The motion to appeal this decision was made by the power companies – the largest emitters of greenhouse gases in the United States, collectively responsible for 25 percent of GHG emissions in the United States. The final decision (by June 30 at the latest) will depend on whether the Supreme Court feels that the judiciary can properly handle such claims, or whether the complexity, controversy, and volume of such cases are grounds to dismiss this initial suit.

According to sources like the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times and other major newspapers, the Supreme Court was deeply skeptical about allowing states to sue electric utilities to force cuts in greenhouse gas emissions from power plants. The eight justices who heard the case repeatedly drifted into questions about how a federal judge could go about deciding such a case. Justice Sonia Sotomayor recused herself because she had been involved in the case, but not the decision of the Second Court of Appeals. Without Sotomayor, it is possible for the court to reach a 4-4 tie. If that happens, the lawsuit will be allowed to proceed.
Land grabbing undercuts food sovereignty

Between 2007 and 2010, foreign interests sought or acquired a total of 2.64 million hectares of land (26,400 km2) in Southern Sudan for the agriculture, forestry and bio-fuel sectors alone. That is a larger land area than the entire country of Rwanda.

“If one adds domestic investments, some of which date back to the pre-war period, and investments in tourism and conservation, the figure rises to 5.74 million hectares (57,400 km2) or nine percent of Southern Sudan’s total land area. While in theory, this influx of investment could provide development opportunities for rural communities, without the appropriate procedures in place there is a danger that it will serve to undermine livelihoods.” (“Land-grabbing Links,” German Church Development Service, March 30, 2011, www.eed.de/)

From April 18-20, the annual World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty was held in Washington, D.C. to discuss how to operationalize a framework called Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI). Formulated by the World Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), RAI consists of seven principles which investors abide by or not when conducting large-scale farmland acquisitions.

A statement released on April 17 by Centro de Estudios para el Cambio en el Campo Mexicano, FIAN International, Focus on the Global South, Friends of the Earth International, Global Campaign on Agrarian Reform, GRAIN, La Via Campesina, Land Research Action Network, Rede Social de Justiça e Direitos Humanos and World Forum of Fisher Peoples calls instead for an outright ban on land grabbing.

According to Henry Saragih from La Via Campesina, “The food price crisis happened because of the commoditization of food. RAI will legitimize land grabbing worse than in the colonial era.”

“Large-scale land acquisitions are designed to open up new spaces for export oriented, industrial, plantation agriculture” said Henk Hobbelink of GRAIN. “There is no point in sanctioning that through any set of investor ‘principles’ or code of conduct. This is not an agriculture that feeds people in a just and sustainable way.”

Accounts pouring in from Asia, Africa and Latin America reveal that local communities are being dispossessed as never before of their sole sources of food and livelihood security. Reports indicate that at least 50 million hectares of good agricultural land – enough to feed 50 million families in India – have been transferred from farmers to corporations in the last few years alone. Investment brokers estimate that US$25 billion have already been committed globally, and boast that this figure will triple in a very near future. RAI will offer such large-scale land deals a cloak of respectability.

“RAI is dangerously deceptive” said Shalmali Guttal from Focus on the Global South. “Corporations and governments will win, but local communities, eco-systems and future generations will lose; the takeover of rural people’s lands is completely unacceptable no matter what guidelines are followed.”

“Forced evictions, the foreclosure of vast stretches of land for current and future use by rural peoples, the introduction of models of land use and agriculture that destroy natural environments, the blatant denial of information, and the prevention of meaningful local participation in political decisions that affect people’s lives are all human rights violations,” stated Sofía Monsalve from FIAN International.

“The new wave of land grabbing will have a devastating effect in the Amazon and Cerrado by giving the green light for illegal activities of large cattle ranchers, agribusinesses, mining and lumber companies to destroy protected forests and biodiversity in food production by small farmers and indigenous land,” said Maria Luisa Mendonça, Network for Social Justice and Human Rights, Brazil.

According to Ibrahim Coulibaly from the National Coordination of Peasant Organizations in Mali, member of La Via Campesina, “Land grabbing is state banditry; it’s about seizing or taking over the only resource that poor people have left and giving it those who already have too much, those who are already extremely rich. And that is not acceptable.”

The statement calls instead for a renewed focus on genuine agrarian reform and agricultural investment that supports small-holder farmers to produce on their own lands through agro-ecological means.

The statement can be found online in English, French and Spanish at http://www.focusweb.org/content/its-time-outlaw-land-grabbing-not-make-it-responsible.
Nuclear power: Splitting the atom

“The splitting of the atom changed everything, save man’s mode of thinking.” Albert Einstein

Reading about Japan’s Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster is chilling, not simply because of the catastrophic wreckage induced by the earthquake and resulting tsunami, but because, in using nuclear energy, humanity has unleashed dangers that it is not capable of controlling. Natural disasters are terrible and bewildering but the dangers uncorked by humans are incomprehensible. In the case of serious nuclear accidents, the effects will be experienced on Earth for hundreds of thousands of years to come. And it must not be forgotten that the effects of a nuclear accident cannot be contained in one place; radioactive particles are borne by air and travel widely.

It is 25 years since the Chernobyl nuclear explosions. According to the latest report of the New York Academy of Sciences, Chernobyl may have caused nearly 1,000,000 deaths over the course of the years. This information is corroborated by 5,000 documents translated from Russian for the first time, and contradicts data previously provided by the World Health Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency. According to nuclear expert Dr. Helen Caldicott, Fukushima is of an order of magnitude many times worse than Chernobyl.

Radioactive particles concentrate on crops. Although not seen, not smelled and not tasted, these particles are insidious in their effects on the people and animals that consume them, perhaps not immediately, but over the long run. The same happens with food from the sea. First the algae are contaminated; then crustaceans, the small fish, and finally, the larger fish that people eat. Radiation taken into the body is cumulative, slowly building up; the effects may not be noticeable for years except in young children, infants and those still in the womb, all of whom are immediately affected.

Since the Fukushima calamity, it has been difficult to get correct information about radiation levels. It has been pointed out repeatedly that there is always a certain amount of radioactive material in the atmosphere, food and water. Currently though, it appears that human safety levels have been moderated upward by officials of the Japanese government and from the Tokyo Electric and Power Company (TEPCO). As a matter of fact, as pointed out by Krista Mahr in Time magazine on April 18, there has been a continuous stream of conflicting information. One cannot but question the transparency of the above mentioned officials, particularly given the comment made by the Maryknoll Sisters in Japan on April 25 regarding their long term experience related to the nuclear industry:

In the Japanese Asahi newspaper we read about how, for decades, civil suits have been brought against companies running nuclear reactors throughout Japan, but the courts have always ruled in favor of the Japanese government and the nuclear industry.

Aside from questionable transparency, there is the sheer magnitude of coping with several reactors in excessively dangerous states at a level not previously experienced.

Some people are quick to point out that the record of nuclear power plants is actually quite good, with very few accidents. It must be borne in mind, however, that when a nuclear reactor fails, the result is calamitous. Even those not yet conceived may well be born with severe birth defects.

Einstein’s words ring true. Splitting the atom has changed everything. It can be hoped, though, that the forces let loose in Japan may trigger a sober response that will enable humanity to recognize its limits, taking precaution in the face of elements that are not well understood, taking action to protect human health and the environment against the possible danger of severe damage before it happens. The human mode of thinking can change. Events can bring with them a profound shift in consciousness, jarring people into recognition of the need to act differently.

In the weeks to come the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns will look hard at all the issues related to the use of nuclear materials and present a reflection paper designed to be of use in determining how to move forward.
HIV and AIDS: Sustaining our commitment

In June, the United Nations will host a General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV and AIDS to assess progress in the global response to the pandemic and to make new commitments for the coming years. Faith-based activists are working together in networks, including the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) and the Catholic AIDS Network, as well as with broader coalitions, to ensure that what has been achieved in treating people living with HIV and AIDS and slowing the spread of the disease is not lost and that high quality global attention to its eradication is sustained.

Of great concern is the potential impact of severely restricted budgets in countries like the U.S. that have been generous in recent years in their support of AIDS programs in the global South. Since 2009, the U.S. has not increased funding for global AIDS enough even to keep up with inflation (see NewsNotes, March-April 2011). Further, the determination of many Congressional newcomers to reduce the deficit and control government spending will make it more difficult to secure increased – or even the same – funding for the President’s Emergency Program for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) or the Global Fund.

In testimony submitted to the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs for FY 2012, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns wrote:

“We urge the U.S. Congress to appropriate the nearly $5.74 billion requested by President Obama for bilateral HIV/AIDS programs, as well as $1 billion for the Global Fund, and $251 million for bilateral TB programs. The deep experience of Maryknoll missioners in varied situations verifies the critical importance to the survival of millions of poor HIV+ people around the world of sustained contributions from bilateral, multilateral and private donors. U.S. support for PEPFAR and the Global Fund have enabled many not only to survive but to thrive, to care for their children and to become once again productive members of their communities.”

Recounting the story of Lucy, who is HIV+ and works with Maryknoll Sisters Dee Smith and Marlene Condon in Guatemala, the testimony underscores the importance of sustained access to anti-retroviral medicines and the contributions being made to families, local communities and the world by those restored to health and productivity by ARVs.

The testimony continues, “When anti-retroviral medicines are readily available and properly administered, mother-to-child transmission of the AIDS virus is increasingly rare and HIV+ parents are staying alive to care for their healthy children. ... [C]onsistent treatment is prevention. Interrupted or unavailable treatment will reinvigorate the pandemic just as its ultimate control is beginning to seem possible.

“We urge you to support the administration’s requested appropriation for HIV and AIDS programs, including PEPFAR and the Global Fund. While in general we support the impetus of the Global Health Initiative, it is crucial that full funding for existing prevention and treatment programs continue as national health care capacity is strengthened. Obviously, high standards of accountability and transparency should be required of all public and private recipients.”

Efforts by faith groups and others will have to be particularly focused and intense in the weeks leading up to the high-level June meeting at the UN to send a clear message to governments that the issue remains of supreme importance. The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and other faith-based groups are insisting that the declaration by June’s high-level meeting include commitments by national governments to address stigma, discrimination and root causes of vulnerability to HIV; achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support; and ensure accountability and sufficient resources.

Faith in action:

Two immediate actions are very important to ensure that the U.S. government lives up to its commitment on HIV and AIDS: 1) Write to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Dr. Eric Goosby, the U.S. Global AIDS administrator, urging high level U.S. participation in the June UNGASS on AIDS in New York. President Obama’s participation would give a significant boost to the status of the meeting and encourage serious ongoing commitments by the U.S. and other governments; 2) Contact your representative and senators, urging them to fully fund the administration’s request for global AIDS-relates funding, including for PEPFAR and the Global Fund. Remind them that the U.S. response to the AIDS pandemic has enjoyed broad bilateral support in Congress.
Resources

1) Torture Awareness Month resources: Several years ago, religious and human rights organizations in the United States declared the month of June to be Torture Awareness Month as a way to provide greater visibility to this issue and provide an opportunity for coordinated actions across the country. June 26 is United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. The National Religious Campaign Against Torture has several resources available for churches and other groups to meet the needs of congregations at different stages of engagement with this issue. One resource is “Preventing Torture Everywhere,” a new video about preventing torture through the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture. The video features four victims of torture, including Juan Mendez, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, and can be downloaded at http://www.nrcat.org/opcat or bought on DVD for $5. A study guide is also available online.

2) Churches for Middle East Peace Advocacy Conference, Washington, D.C., May 22-24: Learn how to make a positive difference in the Middle East. Guest speaker is Archbishop Dr. Elias Chacour of the Greek Melkite Catholic Archeparchy, founder and president of Mar Elias Educational Institutions, a group of schools open to all regardless of religion or ethnicity. The conference has workshops, speakers, lobbying opportunities and more. Visit http://www.cmep.org/content/advocacy-conference-2011 for more information.

3) The Climate Scoreboard: This interactive graph marks developments in climate change, the progress being made and indicates the progress that needs to happen. Explore the scoreboard here: http://climateinteractive.org/scoreboard.

4) B corporations: A “B corporation” uses business to solve social and environmental problems. The legal structures in place for B corporations allow them to take employee and community concerns into account. The website offers a search engine to find B corporations in your area, a B corporation job board and other resources. Visit http://www.bcorporation.net to learn more.

5) Bridge the Gulf Project: This citizen journalism initiative helps Gulf residents tell their stories and express their thoughts on a just future for the Gulf Coast. With the recent BP oil spill and Hurricane Katrina, the project is a medium for their voices to be heard. The website contains videos, blog postings, an interactive map and other resources. Visit the site here: http://www.bridgethegulfproject.org/.

6) After the Spill: April 20 marked the one year anniversary of the BP oil spill. The website features reflections and calls to action from the faith community over the next few weeks. The site also has one-year memorial resources for congregations. Visit http://afterthespill.com/ to read them.

7) Health care budget calculator: Put out by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, this calculator shows what the U.S. deficit would be if the U.S. had the same healthcare cost per person of the nations listed on the website (France, Spain, Japan, etc.). The chart compares the costs country-country. http://www.cepr.net/calculators/hc/hc-calculator.html.

8) Cambodia immersion trip, October 2011: Friends Across Borders (FAB), a program of the Maryknoll Lay Missioners, will host this trip October 9-23 which will include visiting Maryknoll ministry sites, where they care for children and adults with HIV/AIDS, educate deaf persons, work on resettlement of displaced persons and anti-human trafficking initiatives, and provide literacy programs. Delegates will also visit museums and temples and will participate in daily reflections. Total ground cost is $1,600 + $200 nonrefundable registration fee per person. Program fees cover all lodging and meals, all transportation within the country, medical insurance, English-Khmer speaking guides and tourist fees. International airfare, taxes and visa are not included. Friends Across Borders will provide information on obtaining a visa, immunizations and can help you make flight arrangements. Contact Friends Across Borders for more information: 914-762-6364 ext. 207, friendsacrossborders@mklm.org, www.mklm.org/friendsacrossborders.