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Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns:
Peace, Social Justice and the Integrity of Creation
http://www.maryknollogc.org

Maryknoll Sisters
Maryknoll Lay Missioners
Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers

Marie Dennis — Director.......................................................... mdennis@maryknoll.org
Sr. Ann Braudis, MM.................................................................. abraudis@mksisters.org
Judy Coode.............................................................................. jcoode@maryknoll.org
Sr. Rose Bernadette (Meg) Gallagher, MM................................. rgallagher@mksisters.org
David Kane, MLM...................................................................... dkane@maryknoll.org
Rev. Jim Noonan, MM.............................................................. jnoonan@maryknoll.org
Kathy McNeely..................................................................... kmcneely@maryknoll.org
Angel Mortel........................................................................... amortel@maryknoll.org
Sr. Veronica Schweyen, MM.................................................. vschweyen@maryknoll.org

MOGC Washington
P.O. Box 29132
Washington, D.C. 20017
(202)832-1780 phone
(202)832-5195 fax
ogc@maryknoll.org

MOGC Maryknoll NY
P.O. Box 311
Maryknoll, N.Y. 10545-0311
(914)941-7575 phone
(914)923-0733 fax
ogc@maryknoll.org

MOGC UN Office
777 First Ave., 10th Fl.
New York, N.Y. 10115
(212)973-9551 phone

Take action - Contact decision makers

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500
www.whitehouse.gov

Vice President Joe Biden
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500
vice_president@whitehouse.gov

White House Comment Desk
(202) 456-1111 phone
(202) 456-2461 fax

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520
(202) 647-6575 phone
(202) 647-2283 fax
www.state.gov

Robert Gates
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301
(703) 695-5261 phone
www.defenselink.mil

Robert B. Zoellick
President
World Bank Group
1818 H Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20433
www.worldbank.org

Eric Holder
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20530
(202)333-1555 phone
AskDOJ@usdoj.gov
www.justice.gov

Christine Lagarde
Managing Director
International Monetary Fund
700 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20431
www.imf.org

Susan Rice
U.S. Representative to UN
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
(212) 415-4000 phone
www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov

Robert B. Zoellick
President
World Bank Group
1818 H Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20433
www.worldbank.org

Current status of bills:
(202) 225-1772
http://thomas.loc.gov

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(202) 224-3121
www.congress.gov
Maryknoll responds to devastating poverty

No matter where they live and work, Maryknoll missioners witness and respond to the devastation of poverty. Believing that the Gospel and Catholic social teaching clearly call us to a “preferential option for the poor,” the eradication of poverty has been one of the central concerns of Maryknoll missioners’ work for social justice. In these two years of Maryknoll centennial celebrations (2011-2012), we continue our look at Maryknoll’s long term commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation – particularly, in this issue and the next, their commitment to economic justice.

The Maryknoll Justice and Peace Office (Fathers and Brothers/Lay Missioners) and the Maryknoll Sisters’ Office for Social Concerns were, from their beginnings in the 1970s, looking for ways to address the systemic and structural causes of poverty. Early Orbis Books (published by Maryknoll) such as The Gospel of Peace and Justice by Joseph Gremillion (1976), raised awareness of calls from poor nations for a new international economic order.

Maryknoll was an early and active member of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), founded in 1971 to build a more just and sustainable world by integrating social values into investor actions. Forty years later, ICCR is a highly respected voice in the field of corporate social responsibility. Comprised of nearly 300 organizations with collective assets totaling over $100 billion, ICCR members help shape corporate policy on a host of environmental, social and economic justice concerns.

Early on, the Maryknoll Justice and Peace/Social Concerns offices also began to give particular attention to the debt crisis in Latin America and the Philippines. In 1980, Maryknoll Father Tom Burns came from Lima, Peru to testify before the U.S. Congress about the negative impact of debt on poor people in his parish. With the help of others, especially the Center of Concern, Maryknoll began to study the roots of the debt crisis and to identify ways that concerned people of faith could respond.

In 1992 Maryknollers meeting in Sao Paulo initiated a campaign called Life Not Debt. Thereafter, Maryknoll was a primary force behind the formation of the Religious Working Group on the World Bank and IMF, which launched Jubilee 2000 in the U.S., and has now developed into the Jubilee USA network.

Consistently working for economic justice with an emphasis on the elimination of poverty and the empowerment of impoverished people, the range of issues addressed by Maryknoll grew substantially beyond debt. From the earliest discussions about the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and establishment of the World Trade Organization, Maryknoll was concerned that the model of international trade taking shape would not serve the needs of poor people. In 1993, as NAFTA was being debated, Maryknoll leadership wrote:

...We know well the impact of unjust economic structures on poor communities and are committed to evaluating all economic proposals by their potential effect on the most marginal, especially on the poor – women, children, minorities and indigenous peoples... We believe that a transnational agreement for fair trade and just commercial interaction is possible. To accept something else is to lock ourselves into a system of trade and commerce that will perpetuate injustice, not enhance the quality of life for all; that will exacerbate environmental destruction, not move us toward a sustainable future; that will exclude the vast majority from participating in the decisions that profoundly affect their lives rather than promoting real democracy and the healthier societies it can produce.

The collaborative Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC), which was founded in 1997 to represent the entire Maryknoll family in the work for social justice, peace and the integrity of creation, has engaged in the work for economic justice even more deeply since the process of globalization accelerated in the 1990s. MOGC continues to work for just debt cancellation and for an end to harmful economic policy reforms imposed on impoverished countries by creditors. Maryknoll also helped found the Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment and has been fully engaged for almost two decades in efforts to address a series of U.S. bilateral and multilateral trade agreements and trade policies that would have a huge impact on impoverished communities.

The next issue of NewsNotes will continue to explore Maryknoll’s work for a just global economy that respects human life and the rest of creation.

www.maryknollogc.org
Kenya: Drought, high prices lead to malnutrition

The following article is reprinted from the June 16 issue Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), an editorially independent, non-profit project of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Successive poor rains coupled with rising food and fuel prices are leading to a worsening food security situation with alarming levels of acute malnutrition being recorded in drought affected parts of Kenya, mainly in the north of the country, say experts.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2011 is the driest period in the eastern Horn of Africa since 1995 “with no likelihood of improvement until early 2012.”

“From the nutrition point of view, it is possibly the worst we have seen in the last 20 years,” Noreen Prendiville, at the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Kenya office, told IRIN, noting that increased global acute malnutrition rates of over 35 percent are being seen in some drought-affected areas.

“In less serious situations, one would hear so many requests for assistance with livestock or water, but just now, the number one request is food and the need is substantial and urgent.”

While past droughts have been longer, such as the 2008-09 one, “the current drought is severe, and its impacts have been exacerbated by extremely high food prices, reduced coping capacity, and a limited humanitarian response,” said the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET).

The predominantly northern pastoral region is often the scene of resource-based clashes leading to the displacement of some communities. In May alone in Turkana, 16 armed livestock raids took place with thousands of heads of livestock stolen, according to data compiled by the UN.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), two consecutive below-average rainfall seasons have resulted in failed harvests, depletion of grazing resources and significant livestock mortality in the Horn of Africa region. [In a recent statement, the FAO said that Kenya’s] food security situation is expected to further deteriorate as milk production in the drought-affected areas has collapsed and will not recover until October when the short rains are expected to start.

In the northeastern Garissa region, food scarcity has led to an increase in the number of people relying on food aid ... almost 40 percent of the county’s population. ...

Food prices have shot up in Garissa, like elsewhere, with a kilogram of meat selling at about 400 shillings (US$4.70) compared to 250-300 ($3-$3.50) in 2010. The price of a liter of milk has also almost tripled to 80 shillings (US$0.95) over a similar period, Garissa trader Hassan Ali Ibrahim, told IRIN.

According to FAO, wholesale maize prices in Kenya in May in the main urban markets of Nairobi and Mombasa were 60-85 percent above the levels of May 2010.

The food security of an estimated 2.4 million people is likely to decline after June in most northern pastoral and the southeastern and coastal marginal agricultural areas, said FEWSNET, which further warned that food security could decline to emergency levels among pastoralists.

At present, UNICEF and partners are scaling up nutrition and health outreach and clinic services in the affected areas to deal with the high number of malnourished children needing therapeutic and supplementary feeding, but few human and health resources and the long distances to affected regions are making this response very difficult.

The government also announced, on June 14, a doubling of the monthly allocation of famine relief food (maize, beans and rice) to affected areas, but with drought being a cyclic event in the Horn of Africa region, experts are calling for longer-term approaches to mitigation.

The government also announced, on June 14, a doubling of the monthly allocation of famine relief food (maize, beans and rice) to affected areas, but with drought being a cyclic event in the Horn of Africa region, experts are calling for longer-term approaches to mitigation.

According to FAO’s regional emergency coordinator for Eastern and Central Africa, Rod Charters, “the challenge ahead is to empower farmers and pastoralists to adapt to the new realities of high variability of weather patterns and more frequent extreme weather events.”
Africa: Water and water privatization

The following is based on an article in Pambazuka News (No. 533). Written by Jacques Cambon and translated from French by Odile Leclerc, it is part of a special issue on water and water privatization in Africa produced as a joint initiative of the Transnational Institute, Ritimo and Pambazuka News. Read the full article at www.pambazuka.org.

On July 29, 2010, the UN's General Assembly recognized “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.”

But, according to the UNESCO/WHO 2010 report, 884 million people around the world (343 million are in Africa) do not have access to an “improved drinking water supply” and 2.6 billion people do not have access to “improved sanitation systems.” Water-borne diseases (diarrhea, cholera, typhoid, polio, meningitis, hepatitis, etc) are the main cause of death in the world.

The world’s water is not distributed evenly and global warming will exacerbate that fact by bringing more rain to polar, temperate and equatorial zones and less to tropical ones. Natural storage (glaciers, lakes, rivers, perennial water flows) is also scarcer in tropical areas, like much of Africa.

But a global population increase from 2.5 billion in 1950 to almost seven billion in 2010 and the globalization of lifestyles that consume vast amounts of water are even more problematic. Domestic water use (five liters per day for survival, 50 liters per day for a decent life, more than 500 liters per day to satisfy North American standards) is only 10 percent of the total water footprint, which includes water for food, goods, energy production, etc. On average, this footprint reaches 3,400 liters per day worldwide, varying from 6,800 liters per day in the United States to 1,850 liters per day in Ethiopia. The production of one kilogram of beef calls for 15,500 liters of water, one kilogram of chicken, for 3,900 liters and one kilogram of wheat, for 1,300 liters.

Urbanization is another key factor in the water crisis because it is much more difficult to supply water as a community grows and diversifies its activities. More than half the world's population now lives in urban areas, with increased water conveyance and distribution, as well as storage, pumping, and purification, needs.

In countries recently decolonized, where technical competence was scarce, these urban services...
have long been the responsibility of national utilities. The achievements of these utilities vary, but on the whole they have been quite poor, thanks to unfit and corrupt leaders, lack of supervision, shortage of maintenance equipment, insufficient funding and penniless consumers. From these deficiencies, multinational water companies have made a lot of profit, being able to say that better (private, of course) management of the water service would help put the situation back on its feet.

In the past, Africa has only marginally interested water multinationals. In the early 1990s, the increasing intervention of the World Bank and IMF forced developing countries to put in place structural adjustment policies. The consequent reduction in public spending and privatization of publicly held companies encouraged the privatization of drinking water distribution systems. This almost always led to a rate increase (up to 40 percent in Nairobi) without improving the service. Movements against water privatization across the continent led to the establishment of the African Water Network during the World Social Forum held in Nairobi.

In fact, privatization doesn’t answer Africa’s multiple water problems:

- The water resources being exploited are insufficient, potential new resources are scarce, remote, and expensive to develop.
- Equipment for the production, purification and storage is often in need of repair.
- Distribution systems also networks are in need of costly repairs and extensions.
- Purification networks (not including purification stations) are at best embryonic.
- Public corporations’ institutional flaws are just “the icing on the cake.”

Africa: Food security, land use

In many African countries, the inequity of land distribution persists as one of the main reasons that millions of small holder farmers continue to work on poorly fertile rain-fed land. The following article, part three of a series of articles on African agriculture and food security, is an overview of persistent trends in land use that present obstacles to African food security.

When looking at land use, it helps to recognize the biases that shape the world view of those most likely to make decisions about how land is used. Entire societies based in northern countries favor urban life as the pinnacle of culture and deem rural settings as backward. These preferences are shaped by an understanding that humans are separate from (and more important than) the natural world – which leads to prioritizing human needs and desires over the absolute needs of Earth and its species. Indeed, the history of land use in Africa is shaped by this world view with the caveat that even some human communities are more important than others.

Colonial history in Africa left a legacy of land use where even today men, women and children are forced to work under slave like conditions to produce or extract raw products (coffee, cacao, tea, cut flowers, cotton, fruit, oil, diamonds, precious minerals and the like) for export. Several years after independence many African countries have yet to put in place meaningful reform such that land use benefits the majority of African populations.

Even when African nations have been more sensitive to indigenous land rights (see NewsNotes March-April, 2010, p. 7) land is not always used equitably. Throughout Africa women are responsible for at least 70 percent of food staple production. Other agricultural activities, like food processing and marketing, cash cropping and animal husbandry, for the most part depend on women’s labor. In addition to the constraints that most small-scale farmers face, women farmers are challenged with gender-related barriers.

Dual systems of Western and traditional or religious law often disadvantage women. A joint study by the UN Development Program (UNDP) and World Bank in 2000 on gender and agriculture in Africa argues that in reality, inheritance rights for women do not exist. The study highlights Kenya’s Succession Act which provides for equal rights to inheritance for both men and women; it goes on to state that when a man dies without a will, the customary law relating to land inheritance will prevail. Since few men write wills and most Kenyan communities do not allow a woman to inherit property from her husband or father, the equality provisions of the Succession Act generally do not apply.

In more recent history African nations seem to be giving up control of how land is used as large...
tracts have been leased or sold to foreign interests. Much of these “land grabs” are meant to produce crops that will not directly benefit Africa, but will ensure the investors’ own food and energy security needs. Countries like Saudi Arabia and others with arid climates have purchased land to grow food, while rising economic powers searching for alternative energy sources, like China and South Korea, are securing African land holdings to produce crops like palm, sugar, and corn among others to convert into biofuels.

Vast amounts of land are being grabbed up. For example Maplecroft’s Global Risks Portfolio cited that “in conflict torn Democratic Republic of Congo alone, China has a contract to grow 2.8 million hectares of palm oil, whilst in the last year in Sudan companies from South Korea purchased 700,000 hectares and the UAE (20) 750,000 hectares.” Though the World Bank, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) met recently to operationalize the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI) framework, voluntary guidelines fall short in terms of stemming the tide of land-grabs spreading all over the African continent (see NewsNotes May-June 2011, p. 20).

During the World Social Forum in Senegal in February 2011, social movements and organizations released a collective appeal against land grabbing. Over 150 mostly African organizations signed the petition demanding that governments, the Regional Unions of States, FAO and other national and international institutions immediately implement the commitments that were made at the 2006 International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) to secure land rights of users; and to revive agrarian reform processes based on fair access to natural resources and rural development for the welfare of all.

The Dakar statement goes on to demand that states, regional organizations and international institutions guarantee people’s right to land and support family farming and agro-ecology, calling attention to the fact that the land grabbed up by foreign investors is being mono-cropped in huge industrial agriculture projects which bring few jobs and little benefit to local people while causing ecological de-

struction. The statement underscores that African countries should implement appropriate agricultural policies that consider all different types of producers (indigenous peoples, pastoralists, artisanal fishermen, peasants, agrarian reform beneficiaries) and answer specifically to the needs of women and youth.

Fr. Ken Thesing, MM, a missioner in Kenya, comments: “People who are ‘subsistence farmers and pastoralists’ are being displaced [from] the land being taken by these ‘land-grab’ or investor projects from abroad. If no immediate ‘year around’ jobs are created to absorb these people they just become squatters on the edge of towns and cities with most having ‘subsistence’ jobs at best, day laborers.” For many African nations over 60 percent of their people are employed in agriculture or animal husbandry. When rural displacement happens, the cities simply do not have the industrial base to provide jobs for the newly unemployed.

For far too long a perspective held predominantly by economically powerful people in the global North has ruled decisions about how land is used in many countries around the world, including Africa. The underlying assumption is that “progress” or “development” is defined by industrialization, city dwelling and a life of over-consumption. Since this worked for many northern countries, it’s become the modern model of development.

While the economic and social ways that this model is not working in Africa have been explored, ecologically speaking this development model and the biases that shape it are not sustainable. By their very definition, cities stretch beyond the carrying capacity of the land. As more and more of the world’s people become urban dwellers, they lose a real sense of the limits of the natural world specific to the place they live. Such knowledge is critical if we are to make decisions about living in a world of limited and diminishing resources. The drafters of the Dakar statement had this in mind as they expressed the importance of preserving the knowledge held by small family farmers claiming that small family farmers are best placed to meet dietary needs for themselves and surrounding populations; to ensure food sovereignty; to provide employment to rural populations; to support and maintain economic life in rural areas; to produce with respect to the environment; and to conserve natural resources for future generations.
Sudan: Complex violence precedes independence

As South Sudan prepared for its independence on July 9, violence in the border regions of Abyei, Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan intensified, sparking a humanitarian crisis and fears of a return to war. While an agreement was reached in Addis Ababa between the North and South for the withdrawal of Sudanese Armed Forces from Abyei and Ethiopian forces prepared to deploy to Abyei as the agreed interim security force, the violence in Southern Kordofan continued unabated.

On June 20, Susan Rice, U.S. ambassador to the UN, told the Security Council, “On June 5, violence broke out in multiple areas of Southern Kordofan, including its capital, Kadugli. The reports ... of the ongoing fighting are horrifying—both because of the scope of human rights abuses and because of the ethnic dimensions to the conflict. The Sudanese Armed Forces [SAF] have shelled and bombed the areas around Kadugli. Ongoing and intense aerial bombardments threaten the lives of civilians and UN personnel; a bomb fell just 100 meters from the UNMIS compound in Kauda. The SAF have threatened to shoot down UNMIS air patrols.

“They have taken control of the airport in Kadugli and refuse landing rights to UNMIS flights ... UNMIS’s lack of access is alarming and indefensible. UNMIS and humanitarian aid workers must be granted full access, most especially when so many are in need of food, water, and humanitarian aid.

“According to the United Nations, more than 360,000 people have been displaced in Sudan over the past six months, and more than half were displaced in the past month. As many as 75,000 people have fled the fighting in Southern Kordofan....

“[W]e have also received reports that forces aligned with the Government of Sudan searched for Southern forces and sympathizers, whom they arrested and allegedly executed. We have received further allegations, not yet corroborated, ... that the SAF are arming elements of the local population and placing mines in areas of Kadugli. The United States condemns all acts of violence, especially those that target individuals based on their ethnicity or political affiliation. Security services and military forces have reportedly detained and summarily executed local authorities, political rivals, medical personnel, and others. These acts could constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity.”

Ambassador Rice’s words were strong and the Obama administration seemed to recognize the seriousness of the situation, but in the same statement Rice criticized actions of the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA), returning to the “moral equivalency” position the U.S. has held onto for too long. In fact, according to Eric Reeves of Smith College, “the ethnic killings, the summary executions, the indiscriminate aerial bombardments (only Khartoum has an air force), the use of heavy artillery against civilian targets, the destruction of churches and murder of church officials – these are singularly the responsibility of the National Islamic Front/National Congress Party regime ... There are also a number of reports that Nuba civilians have been collected in cattle trucks; that these human round-ups are being conducted by Arab paramilitary and militia forces, including the notorious Popular Defense Forces, is extremely ominous. Most chilling are the repeated reports, from various quarters, of mass graves in the Kadugli area.” (www.sudanreeves.org)

John Ashworth writes about “two zones” now present within South Kordofan: In areas controlled by the SPLA, especially in the mountains, there are broad similarities to the days of the civil war. People are being bombed and shelled by SAF, and face great hardships. A humanitarian tragedy is unfolding, with an urgent need for the international community to find ways to help. But people are fleeing there as a “safe haven”; at least they feel protected by the SPLA. Whatever skeleton civilian administration exists in the area is sympathetic to them, and there is some capacity to handle humanitarian aid.

In areas controlled by the Khartoum government, the situation for Nuba citizens is chaotic. They are being targeted by government forces. They have fled as far as El Obeid, but Nuba are reportedly still being hunted down even there. There is a climate of fear. The priority for the international community is to stop the killing before it turns into full-scale ethnic cleansing as experienced in the 1990s.

Faith in action:

Write to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, urging the United States to stay fully alert to the serious situation in South Kordofan.
Zimbabwe: SADC’s cautious push forward

An Extraordinary Summit of Southern African Development Community (SADC) Heads of State and Government met in South Africa June 11-12 to consider the situations in Madagascar and Zimbabwe. The outcome document was publicly welcomed by political leaders on both sides of Zimbabwe’s political divide, according to allAfrica.com, though their interpretations were significantly different.

The Summit “noted the decisions of the Organ Troika Summit held in Livingstone, Zambia in March 2011” when the Troika, SADC’s security organ, expressed its “impatience” at delays in implementation of the Global Political Agreement (GPA), which created Zimbabwe’s unity government, and noted its “grave concern [at] the polarization of the political environment as characterized by, inter alia, resurgence of violence, arrests and intimidation.”

That the recent Summit “mandated the Organ Troika to continue to assist Zimbabwe in the full implementation of the GPA” was interpreted by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai’s Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T) as supporting the Troika’s earlier strong language. The Summit itself “encouraged the parties to the GPA to move faster in the implementation of the GPA and create a conducive environment to the holding of elections that will be free and fair, under conditions of a level playing field.” The Summit urged the Troika to appoint their representatives as soon as possible to participate in the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC). This point was vigorously opposed by ZANU-PF on the basis of state-sovereignty. MDC-T Secretary General Tendai Biti said that the party was pleased with the Summit outcome, noting also the Summit decision to devote resources to ensuring that outside monitors in the JOMIC could carry out their work in Zimbabwe.

At the same time, the Summit “committed to continued dialogue with the Western powers on the removal of sanctions against Zimbabwe,” which ZANU-PF claimed as a major victory for President Robert Mugabe.

The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition reported on some of the more contentious moments during the Summit:

ZANU-PF put up a spirited fight but its charm offensive failed. We are told at one point during the discussions there was a heated exchange between [South Africa’s] President [Jacob] Zuma and President Mugabe when Mugabe challenged the Facilitator’s report presented in Zambia. Zuma is said to have retorted: “I do not manufacture things; my reports are based on things that are happening in the country, based on facts.” Additionally, when ZANU-PF said they had not been given a copy of the report before-hand [SADC Executive Secretary] Dr. [Tomaz] Salomao is said to have reported that indeed his office had sent copies of the report to all three parties on time. The ZANU-PF delegation left in a huff – they did not wait for the communiqué to be issued. MDC-T appears satisfied with the outcome.

Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition Regional Information and Advocacy Coordinator Dewa Mavhinga continued, “SADC leaders have maintained their position taken in Zambia, they are behind President Zuma, it appears. While they have said the right things, the challenge remains that of implementation. We wait to see ZANU-PF’s reaction, it may continue on the path of defiance. The communiqué did not address timelines in concrete terms. It did not address measures to be taken by SADC in the event of non-compliance. The language of the communiqué has somewhat been toned down in what appears to be an attempt to allow ZANU-PF to save face, but the contents have remained those agreed in Zambia. The Troika team to work with JOMIC is a significant development, depending on their specific terms of reference. We would have wanted a clear indication that progress should be reviewed at the August Summit in Angola. From this communiqué it is inconceivable that elections will be held in 2011... Although not a loud bang, its an important step in the right direction that needs to be sustained and to be viewed as a building block on the democratization path. Thanks to President Zuma and his Facilitation Team for this definite shift in SADC position.”
El Salvador: Responding to gangs

Nineteen years after the end of the brutal civil war in El Salvador that took the lives of an estimated 70,000 people, violence continues to ravage this small Central American country. Its homicide rate currently is approximately 10 murders per day. Organized street gangs, originally established in the U.S., grow in size and influence. The following article was contributed by Larry Parr, a Maryknoll lay missioner who lives and works in San Salvador.

The response by the government in the last 10 years has been very similar to its response to the guerrillas during the civil war: violence. Government officials have chosen to use harsh anti-gang laws known as “mano dura” or strong hand tactics detaining youth for mere suspicion of being in a gang, longer prison sentences, and raids against suspected gang members. More recently, the military has begun accompanying the police in patrolling some of most violent zones.

The U.S. and Salvadoran governments have viewed this as a transnational issue and have poured millions of dollars into police equipment and training with little success. These strict policies have not worked, as the violence and crime rates have stayed the same or slightly increased in this time period. These policies have also led to police corruption and have alienated many young men in El Salvador.

Many youth are constantly stopped and searched by the police. This includes students who are just walking home from school. One student in my neighborhood was stopped and hit in the head by police while he was on his way to soccer practice. Other youth are detained by the police for up to three days and are never charged. One 16 year old I work with has been detained six times in five months. This exposure to prison life leads many youth into deeper gang involvement. The current policies are not only ineffective but are counter-productive, with the end result being a community paralyzed by fear of both the gangs and law enforcement officials.

Local governments and community development organizations are beginning to look at this environment of violence in a different light. Lack of education and employment opportunities have come to the forefront and increasingly seen as a critical factor. This has resulted in community-based solutions that generate more opportunities for the youth and create safe spaces to allow them to develop and grow in peace.

Many young people do not have the money or resources to complete middle school, much less attend high school or college. Consequently, roaming the streets becomes the everyday activity for these impressionable youth who are at high risk for joining street gangs. Local organizations provide youth with alternatives to the street. These associations provide educational scholarships, establish community libraries where the children receive support needed to succeed in school, vocational and computer training programs, women’s self-empowerment groups, and sports leagues. These programs help combat violence at the source by sending the message to young people that they are valued members of society, and should not be treated like criminals for walking down the street. These community organizations, use young and older adults as role models in the community. Youth are treated with respect and consideration which in turn allows them to build individual and group esteem. The youth respond to these programs with enthusiasm and optimism.

Violence continues to plague this small country, but there have been many individuals who have been positively affected by these programs. There needs to be more focus on creating a better environment within communities, rather than combating violence with more violence. These policies have been in place for many years, and have been proven to be ineffective in diminishing the atmosphere of fear and violence. There needs to be more of an emphasis on community development from the ground up. Both the Salvadoran government and the U.S. need to start looking at violence in Central America in a different light, and start focusing on development and not on the violent tactics that have been used since the civil wars.

Fr. Tom Goekler, MM (left), who died in 2010, worked to help young people in Central America leave gangs and gain education and employment.
Chile: Protests denounce dam construction

The approval of a $3.2 billion dam complex by the Chilean government in May has mobilized thousands in protest, resulting in a national movement around the environmental and political implications of this project. On June 20, a Chilean court of appeals ordered the suspension of the project, and while this injunction comes as a temporary victory to Chile’s mobilized citizens, the threat remains until the project is formally canceled. The following article was written by Sarah Brady, a student at Seattle University and an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

In one of the largest protest movements since the Pinochet era, Chileans of all ages have taken to the streets and plazas, denouncing the proposal by the Spanish-Chilean company HidroAysén to build five dams in the environmentally rich region of Southern Chile, flooding over 15,000 acres of Patagonia’s pristine wilderness. The growth of this movement – with marchers touting posters that cry “Destruction is not the solution” -- has provided a moment for the country to embrace care of the earth in a surprisingly broad grassroots mobilization.

Support for the proposal comes from Chile’s government, eager to use the energy supplied by HidroAysén dams to maintain the country’s growing mining industry (currently the engine of the Chilean economy). President Sebastián Piñera has given urgency to the project, warning of a future plagued by persistent blackouts and high electricity prices, and the important role of hydropower in furthering the country’s development. Critics of the dam view these concerns as alarmist and misrepresentative of Chile’s real energy needs.

Flooding from the dams would forever change the landscape of one of the last virgin territories on the planet. The construction would also include more than 1,200 miles in power lines, which environmentalists fear will facilitate future exploitation of Patagonia’s rivers with more dams. Protestors denounce the government’s concession to the company that already controls 70 percent of the country’s energy power, and point to the recent earthquake in Japan as evidence that it is unsafe to rely so heavily on one central source of energy.

In addition to the environmental issues, the HidroAysén dams carry a human cost. Though sparsely populated, it is precisely these valleys where the majority of the Aysén region’s population lives. Everyone will be forced to move out but only those with property titles will be relocated; many families in the region have no such documentation.

The struggle against damming and mining is felt throughout Latin America, and sheds light on the costs of a desperate drive for more resources to which our lifestyles are especially complicit. From Colombia to Argentina, Peru to Brazil, dam complexes for hydroelectric power generation have brought great environmental, political and social ramifications for people with the least voice. The Belo Monte dam in Brazil provides a prime example of this, where a large dam complex is scheduled for construction that will flood 120,000 acres of rainforest, undermine the local fishing economy, release large amounts of toxins and displace 20,000 mostly indigenous people from their native lands. Indigenous communities in Peru are likewise under threat of displacement thanks to the Inambari hydroelectric complex, which recently was temporarily suspended. It is a story common throughout the region that the scramble for resources by global powers has pushed itself into the living spaces and sacred areas of local indigenous peoples, often the last preserved land available.

The June 20 decision by Chile’s courts to pause the HidroAysén project has provided the moment for a popular discourse on alternative energy sources and the limits of energy consumption. In a national economy with few incentives for renewables, HidroAysén critics argue that further investment in the company closes the market for ventures in alternative renewable energy. Non-conventional power sources available to Chile include the improvement of solar energy from the Atacama Desert, geothermal energy and smaller hydroelectric plants, among other possibilities (as proposed by the National Resource Defense Council in May 2011). The raised voices of thousands of Chileans argue that it is the mentality surrounding the issue that must be challenged – it is not a “one-or-the-other” choice between development and the environment. For the moment, Chileans are not willing to allow the usurpation of their beautiful natural resources for the sake of an unsustainable development plan.
Peru: Indigenous struggle for justice

On May 2, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns brought Trinidad Carlos Serna, a human rights lawyer from Peru, to the United Nations so that she could present the case of the indigenous people of Peru’s Puno region and their great struggle against the devastation to their lands being caused by mining corporations with the collusion of the Peruvian government. While the information was well received by those who heard her compelling story, the Peruvian ambassador to the UN remained completely unresponsive.

On June 24, five people were killed and dozens injured when those protesting the mining concessions broke fences and ran into the airstrip of Juliaca’s international airport. Following is a public statement from Catholic leaders in the diocese:

Faced with the tragic events of June 24, as priests, nuns, committed laity and various institutions within the Diocese of Puno, we consider it our evangelical duty to speak out publicly. First, our condolences to the families of the peasant brothers who have been killed and we express our solidarity to the more than 30 persons who were wounded by bullets and buckshot, some of whom were maimed for life.

We find that the inhabitants of the Ramis river basin for years have been peacefully lobbying the central government for effective action against the semiformal and informal mining that is polluting their fields, their animals and their own lives. In making this claim they are also asking for the health of us all, because the pollution reaches Lake Titicaca and affects the food and water we consume in the region.

The government of Alan Garcia, however, did not take seriously the requests, took a pro-mining stance, and did not meet the covenants agreed upon while they let time pass until conflict broke out, as happened in Moquegua, Bagua and Islay. And when in the midst of the strike, a mob tried and partly took the city’s Manco Capac airport, the DINOFES police and those of the USE from Lima, backed by the soldiers stationed in Puno, acted not as deterrents, but responded by bullying and shooting at close range. There, people like Antonio Campos Huanca, who were not protesting, were killed and others were injured.

These deaths and serious assaults on life can not go unpunished. The central government, which is slow in finding solutions but rapid at repression, has to respond for these acts before the court. The police and the army must also respond before the court. The strikers and their leaders must assume their responsibility of their actions and critically examine how they acted on this tragic day, June 24, as well as separate themselves from aligning with these infiltrators and provocateurs who were present and claim as well as demand that after the case has been investigated, they should be penalized.

In a situation as challenging as this one, we reaffirm our faith in the God of life, who requires that we protect it every moment, because the life of the poor “is precious in his sight” (Psalm 72: 14). We recognize the just cause of the azangarino people in their struggle for the decontamination of the Ramis River, which is a struggle for life for all. As the problems are still latent and pain persists, we call on the central government, the regional government, the local governments, the mining sector involved in the problem and the organized local peasants to overcome attitudes of indifference or aggression in order to find the best solution to the conflict.

Pachamama, a gift of God, is home to all and is designed so that all may have life in abundance (John 10: 10). Join forces to make this wish come true.

Juliaca, 27 de junio del 2011

P. Luis Jesús López, párroco de Cristo Rey - Juliaca; P. Jorge Huanca, párroco de Santa Catalina – Juliaca; P. Luis Zambrano, párroco de Pueblo de Dios - Juliaca; P. Marcos Degen, párroco de Arapa y Chupa; P. Manuel Vassallo, párroco de San Felipe - Caracoto; Misioneras Dominicas de Puno y Arapa; Hermanas de la Cruz de Chavanod; Comunidades Laicas de Santiago de Pupuja (COMLAS); CONFER Puno - Juli; Hna. Vilda Zamalloa - Juliaca; Fe y Derechos Humanos (FEDERH); Instituto Surandino de Investigación y Acción Solidaria (ISAIAS); Centro de Espiritualidades EMAUS; Casa Don Bosco - Juliaca; Centro de Desarrollo Humano (CEDEH) Centro de Promoción Integral para el Desarrollo Rural (CEPIDER); (CEADMUN); Mesa de Concertación de Lucha contra la pobreza – San Román.
Peru: Surprising presidential election results

The following article was written by Fr. Tom Burns, MM, who has lived and worked in Peru for many years.

On June 5, former army officer Ollanta Humala, with 51.449 percent of the vote, won the second round of Peru’s presidential race, beating Keiko Fujimori, daughter of former President Alberto Fujimori – now serving a 25 year sentence for crimes against humanity – who came in second with 48.551 percent of the vote. Even in Peru’s normally fickle political climate, no one would have imagined this outcome at the beginning of the year.

In January five serious contenders vied for the presidency, three more or less centrist free market politicians backed in varying degrees by the national and international corporate interests: former president Alejandro Toledo (2000-2005), his former minister of economy and finance as well as prime minister Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (PPK); and Luis Castaneda, the mayor of Lima who had an 80 percent approval rating in Lima when he entered the race. At the beginning he and Toledo were the front runners. But by the end of March when the first round elections took place, PPK came in third, Toledo fourth and Castaneda fifth.

So what happened? Why did Humala and Keiko come in first and second? The three original frontrunners had campaigned to continue free market policies, promising that the benefits accrued over the past 10 years would continue to “trickle down.” Of the three, only Toledo called for more equal redistribution. The others presumed that the seven percent average yearly growth over the past decade had benefitted all. After all, the percentage of people living in poverty in Peru had dropped from the low 50s to the low 30s. Both Humala and Keiko, on the other hand, had campaigned promising change (Humala from the left, Keiko from the right), which the people clearly wanted. Another mistake was that all three stayed in the race until the end; if one of them dropped out, one of the remaining two centrists would have been the leading contender in the second round and would have won.

Finally another significant dimension was evident in both Humala and Keiko: The people voted for the two who most represented figures of authority who would “get things done.” Humala was a former soldier, Keiko the daughter of an authoritarian father and the people didn’t have the time or the clout to get actively involved in every day politics. They wanted change and demanded results.

Humala filed a detailed 180 page plan to move from a market economy toward a nationalist economy with significant participation by the state; Keiko’s plan was a 25 page outline and clearly favored the free market with a populist slant, bringing back memories of her father’s style: supplying food to the soup kitchen and co-opting them politically, building new schools without reforming public education, etc.

The main strategy of the market economists and corporate interests who supported Keiko was to co-opt the media with a fear campaign by vilifying Humala as the “soul brother” of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, basically the same strategy they had used in the last elections in the runoff between Humala and Garcia. They failed to realize that Keiko was not Garcia and that Humala would gradually come across in the heat of the debate as a maturing politician capable moderating his policies but not his principles – as a politician who had learned to regard politics as the “art of the possible,” as more of a Lula (the former president of Brazil) than a Chavez, or at least it seemed that way.

With few exceptions their anti-campaign was brutal and without letup, while only the Republica and the Primera newspapers supported Humala. Juan Luis Cipriani Thorne, cardinal of Lima, supported Keiko’s campaign, while the Peruvian bishops’ conference played more the role of a moral guide: using church social teachings to give the voter criteria for discerning the vote. It was a tough choice, a choice “between cancer and AIDS” in the words of the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, this year’s winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for literature. Vargas Llosa believes in the free market but he is just as committed to democracy and, therefore, totally opposed to authoritarian regimes. Within a few weeks he was cautiously siding with Humala as were many highly respected intellectuals.

Ten days before the election Keiko had a slight lead of one or two points in most of the polls. About 20 percent of the voters were undecided or were thinking of nullifying their votes. (Peruvians are fined for not voting). Up to the last few days, although the candidates were statistically tied, Keiko seemed to have a slight edge. It seems that most of
the undecided opted for Humala in the end and that made the difference.

Humala's party has 47 seats in parliament; he has received the promise of critical support (but not an alliance) from Toledo, whose party won 21 seats. Since he needs 66 seats to constitute a majority and since the opposition will have the support of the corporate elite and their allies, Humala will have an uphill battle and will have to negotiate and implement his promised reforms gradually. He will be watched carefully, even by many of his new supporters.

In a public declaration signed a few weeks before the second round, Humala promised to respect the constitution and freedom of the press. Both the ministers of defense and the interior will be civilians. He will defend the separation of powers. His main thrust will be policies with sustained growth and inclusion: economic, social, ethnic, geographic and cultural, especially of the most poor. In this thrust he will have the support of Toledo who had made the redistribution of the benefits a key part of his program.

In May, according to the Ombudsman’s office, there were 227 social conflicts in Peru, half of them related to mining, land rights and the environment. A major thrust of Humala’s program will be to prevent these conflicts by working aggressively to assure safe mining and respect for the environment as well as increased benefits to the local population. To move in these directions, in his first year in office he will move to renegotiate a tax on the windfall profits of the mining sectors these past few years.

This will also allow him to implement a program called Pension 65 which will guarantee a monthly sum of around $100 to senior citizens, starting in the poorest areas of the country and moving gradually to cover all. He has promised to raise the minimum wage from $215 a month to $270 within the first year as well as implementing programs for infants and scholarships in public education for the youth. Combining steady growth with increased income from the tax on windfall profits, he hopes to be able to gradually implement his program responding to the poor’s call for change and inclusion. His program promises to be more reformist than radical.

Another decision by Humala to increase confidence in the electorate and the market sectors has been to choose highly respected advisers from the center, mostly independents who had been associated with Toledo but were not party members. Once Toledo had lost, a number of his closest advisers chose to be on Humala’s team, while remaining independents.

At this time, it seems that the waters are beginning to settle and a cautious hope is beginning to emerge.

Japan: Insecurity since March tsunami

A recent New York Times article described protests by survivors of Japan’s March 11 earthquake and tsunami, including a mother with a three-year-old child clad in a shirt reading “please let me play outside again.” Survivors gathered in the streets of Tokyo in mid-June to express their anger over the government’s handling of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant meltdown. While protesting is not a typical part of the Japanese culture of conformity, people are questioning whether the government can be trusted; in the ongoing uncertainty, many worry about their food and health.

According to a Pew Research Center survey of 700 adults, 79 percent said Prime Minister Naoto Kan’s management of the crisis was poor. His public support has plunged, and he faces pressure to resign. Kan says he will do so once a renewable energy bill and a disaster assistance bill are passed. The executive branch of the government recently approved a bill to help the Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco, the company that owns the Fukushima plant), compensate disaster victims. The bill must next be passed in parliament for official approval.

Since the disaster, Tepco has announced losses of $15 billion; its shares have fallen 91 percent. The government’s bailout plan would consist of contributions from other nuclear power operators and private contributors which Tepco would eventually have to repay. According to a June 28 Reuters report, “The proposal faces weeks of challenges, however, with both ruling party and opposition lawmakers intent on scuttling the legislation or demanding amendments in return for their support. Some critics have urged the government to allow a court-led bankruptcy and rehabilitation, which would wipe out the equity of shareholders.”

The massive tsunami, which struck one hour
July-August 2011

Immigration: Balanced policy badly needed

On May 10, President Obama gave a speech on immigration reform in El Paso, igniting hopes that this long-neglected issue would move to the center of the national political arena as the U.S. heads into another election cycle. But with little appetite for comprehensive immigration reform (CIR) in either the House or Senate, the battle over the fate of millions of migrants and undocumented persons continues to be waged in individual states with disconcerting results. Since the passage of Arizona’s notorious SB1070 immigration law, described by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as “draconian,” four states have passed similar pieces of legislation. The following article was written by Ashley McKinless, a University of Virginia student and an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

President Obama pointed to the escalation of border security and intensified deportation efforts purportedly focused on violent offenders and convicted criminals, saying his administration has “gone above and beyond what was requested by the very Republicans who said they supported broader reform as long as we got serious about enforcement.”

The numbers back up this claim: In 2010, 393,000 undocumented immigrants were deported, a 10 percent increase from 2008 and 25 percent increase from 2007. These record numbers are partly thanks to the controversial federal program “Secure Communities,” through which everyone who is arrested and booked has their fingerprints checked against the Department of Homeland Security immigration records. Though intended to indentify and deport the worst violent criminal offenders, data released by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) show that 60 percent of those deported under the program have been non-criminals or those who have only committed misdemeanor offenses or traffic violations.

The administration touts a hard stance on border security as well. There are now over 20,000 Border Patrol agents, twice as many as in 2004, as well as 1,200 National Guard troops on the border. The

After the earthquake, hit the power plant, flooding the generators and destroying the outdoor fuel tanks of the emergency generators. This caused all power to be lost, so normal cooling systems stopped working, temperatures rose and water evaporated. When reactor temperatures exceeded 1,000 degrees Celsius, the reaction of water and zirconium created hydrogen, which collected near the ceiling of reactor buildings, causing explosions. More than two months later, the heat, radiation and hydrogen have yet to be contained, according to a story by Jun Tateno, a professor at Chuo University specializing in nuclear energy.

Over 600 square kilometers of radiation has leaked from the plant. On May 31, a gas tank exploded and oil was reported to have poured into the ocean. On June 13 excessive levels of highly toxic strontium have been found in the seawater and groundwater near the plant’s number one and two reactors, according to the Wall Street Journal. Strontium accumulates in bone and bone marrow, causing bone cancer and leukemia. Six more workers may now have exceeded radiation exposure limit, bringing the total to eight, the government reported on June 13. Tepco predicts that the reactors will be brought under control by October at the earliest.

According to National Public Radio, Tepco has been continuously pumping water into the plant since the disaster hit in order to keep the reactors cool; at this point, the radioactive water could fill 40 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Several companies have been hired to build a water decontamination plant. The cleaning is expected to take a few months and afterwards, depending on the results, the water may be dumped back into the ocean.

According to reports, about 100,000 evacuees still sleep in gymnasiums. There are 1,670 children living within 12-20 miles of the Fukushima power plant, the emergency preparation zone. While the government recommends that pregnant women, children and people who require medical care not remain in this area, it has not mandated their evacuation.
results of this escalated enforcement are two-sided. On the one hand, the number of people attempting to cross the border without documentation has decreased: border apprehensions have dropped by 40 percent in the past two years—though this could say more about the lack of job opportunities in the United States than border patrol. Even so, improved technology and “more boots on the ground” do not deter everyone. Tragically, desperate migrants continue to risk their lives in order to get into the United States, facing longer and more dangerous treks through treacherous desert terrain. The number of migrant border deaths has actually increased over the past decade even as the number of apprehensions has decreased. In 2009, there were 419 known border deaths, more than double the number recorded in 1995. The official statistics for 2010 have not been released, but The Arizona Daily Star, which began tracking border deaths recorded in three Arizona counties in 2004, reported 249 deaths in 2010, up from 219 in 2004, indicating a continuation of the upward trend in deaths over the past decade.

President Obama defended his record, saying, “Even as we recognize that enforcing the law is necessary, we don’t relish the pain that it causes in the lives of people who are just trying to get by ... [As] long as the current laws are on the books, it’s not just hardened felons who are subject to removal, but sometimes families who are just trying to earn a living, or bright, eager students, or decent people with the best of intentions. And sometimes when I talk to immigration advocates, they wish I could just bypass Congress and change the law myself. But that’s not how a democracy works.”

But in fact, there are a number of steps the president could take even within the constraints of current laws to ameliorate their negative effect on the vast majority of undocumented immigrants who are a vital and enriching part of U.S. society. In April, a group of legal experts released a memorandum that summarized various executive branch administrative powers that are at the disposal of the president in the context of immigration. Prosecutorial discretion is a fundamental part of the U.S. justice system and one that has been affirmed by the Supreme Court. When resources are limited, agencies should and must make decisions about priorities and immigration enforcement is no different. The Department of Homeland Security decides who will be investigated, what leads will be followed, what cases will make it to trial, and ultimately, who will be deported.

If the Obama administration is focused on those undocumented persons who threaten the safety of U.S. communities, steps can be taken to ensure that resources are not wasted apprehending, detaining, and deporting people whose only crime is not having their “papers.” The executive branch can grant deferred action to a deportable immigrant in “the presence of sympathetic or compelling factors.” Recently, applicants under the Violence Against Women Act were granted such protection. Similarly, the president can grant “Deferred Enforced Departure” (DED) to a group of foreign nationals if dangerous conditions in their country of origin demand such a concession. The executive branch can also apply “parole” (for those entering the U.S.) and “parole in place” (for those already here) for “urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit.”

The president has proved that he takes seriously concerns about securing the border and enforcing current immigration law to target dangerous undocumented immigrants. It is now time to show that he is willing to use the available executive levers in order to maintain a balanced and compassionate immigration policy in the absence of the broader reforms that are still badly needed. While it is up to the Congress to tackle genuine reform, the Obama administration has the space to interpret, prioritize and administer current laws to deter the deportation of young students who have known no other home and those who face grave threats to life and livelihood because of violence, extreme political turmoil, or natural disaster in their country of origin.

**Faith in action:**

“PLEASE SAVE US. We as in my fellow inmates find ourselves in the Torrance County Detention Facility and we are scared for our lives.” These are the words of immigrants being held at a U.S. detention center, who face kidnapping, torture, and death at the hands of drug cartels that prey on the migrants who are deported to Mexican towns along the Texas and New Mexico border. Is this not an “urgent humanitarian reason” to defer deportation until these immigrants safety can be ensured?

Torture: Urge Senate to oppose indefinite detention

On May 26, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the $690 billion National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2012 (HR 1540), which included section 1034, a provision introduced by Rep. Buck McKeon (R-CA), chair of the House Armed Services Committee. Section 1034 would give the president the authority to detain people indefinitely and declare war against anyone thought to be associated with Al Qaeda or the Taliban. This power could remain in effect as long as the broadly-defined “war on terrorism” continues, and would provide another bump in the road on closing Guantanamo Bay, something the president says he still intends to do.

According to the daily Congressional newspaper The Hill, McKeon argues that the provision’s language is similar to the Authorization for the Use of Military Force that was passed in 2001. While the “war on terrorism” originally was defined in terms of September 11, 2001, McKeon believes that the conflict is different and more widespread now. “I believe our men and women in uniform deserve to be on solid legal footing as they risk their lives in defense of the United States.”

However, the House Foreign Affairs Committee has the power to introduce such provisions, not the Armed Services Committee. No hearings or any sort of debate were held on the provision.

On May 24, the White House issued its official objection to various provisions of the bill, including indefinite detention. The administration objects to restrictions on funds that would transfer detainees to the U.S. for civilian court trials as it believes that civilian courts have effectively tried terrorism suspects in the past and would continue to do so. Additionally, the president objects to section 1034 due to the lack of debate or discussion of the provision.

A group of 40 retired generals and admirals issued a letter to the Senate Armed Services Committee, urging it to oppose the several controversial provisions. The letter asserted the generals and admirals’ belief that the U.S. must adhere to its domestic and international legal obligations and that suspects should be tried as criminals in court rather than in military commissions: “The military’s mission should not be expanded to become judge, jury and jailer for all foreign terror suspects. Federal courts have more criminal laws to incapacitate terrorists, more precedent to guide them, and more experience in adjudicating these laws than military tribunals.”

Faith in action:

The Senate Armed Services Committee will work on its version of the bill in closed session and should have a version ready in early July. Check the list of members of this committee, and if one of your senators is listed, please urge him/her to remove section 1034 from the Senate version: http://armed-services.senate.gov/members.htm.

Speaking out against torture

On June 23, 15 Witness Against Torture activists entered the gallery at the U.S. House of Representatives during its vote on the Defense Appropriations bill for FY 2012 (HR 2219) and read the following statement aloud:

“Today the House of Representatives is in the process of contemplating not the passage of a bill but the commission of a crime. Provisions in [HR 2219] grant the U.S. powers over the lives of detained men fitting of a totalitarian state that uses the law itself as an instrument of tyranny. The law would make the prison at Guantanamo permanent by denying funds for the transfer of men to the U.S., even for prosecution in civilian courts.

“Abandoning the civilian courts, the bill would be the ultimate concession that the rule of law and cherished American values cannot survive the fear and hatred that have consumed this country. The proposed bill makes restrictions on the transfer of detainees even to foreign countries so severe that no one — whether cleared for release by our own government or acquitted in trials — could be expected to leave Guantanamo. It therefore mandates the indefinite detention even of innocent human beings, which is the very essence of tyranny. Congress has an obligation to uphold the U.S. Constitution. ... The proposed bill makes America a callous and reckless jailer, unworthy of the name of democracy. It must be defeated. Guantanamo must close. Those unjustly bound must be freed. Justice must rule.”

The activists were escorted out of the gallery and arrested.
Human trafficking: Encouraging progress

The following article was written by Maryknoll Sister Mary Ann Smith, who participates in the Catholic Coalition Against Human Trafficking.

Human trafficking -- what many call modern day slavery -- is a shameful reality in the global community of the 21st century. For more than 20 years many religious and secular service organizations have educated themselves and others about this scourge in labor and commercial sex abuse markets. The members of the Catholic Coalition Against Human Trafficking, along with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Migration and Refugee Services (MRS/USCCB) have provided leadership for education and advocacy in their local communities as well as in legislatures at state and national levels.

Results have been encouraging in the past year or two. For example, “Safe Harbor” legislation, which decriminalizes children under 16 years old who have been sexually exploited, has been passed in Vermont and a similar bill is being debated in Minnesota. The coalition continues to advocate for inclusion of children under 18 years old, the age of majority in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some women religious have provided safe housing for survivors who break away from their abusers. ECPAT USA (Ending Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) has a “Child Survivor Health Project” which funds health services for sexually exploited youth that are not covered by other available services.

With the help of the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility and the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Millennium St. Louis Hotel signed the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism. Radisson and Hilton hotels have also signed the Code which was inaugurated by UNICEF in September 2009, with Carlson Companies, Inc. as the first U.S. signatory. In March 2011 Delta Airlines became the first U.S. carrier to sign on. Almost 1,000 travel and tourism industry members have signed worldwide. Signatories agree to six basic criteria requiring them to educate and train employees, suppliers of goods and services, and customers about the issue. U.S. businesses have been slow to join but by supporting those that have we hope to encourage others to join.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee is expected to introduce the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act 2011 (TVPRA) this summer; the original bill from 1998 (TVPA) requires reauthorization every two years. The 2008 TVPRA went a long way to strengthen protections and improve services to foreign victims of human trafficking in the United States by helping fill some gaps in the continuum of care for victims.

MRS/USCCB is pressing several provisions to strengthen the TVPRA 2011 that concern unaccompanied children, including requiring the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to contract with NGOs with child welfare expertise to screen the children at U.S. borders and ports of entry; prohibiting return of the child if s/he would face threats to her/his life; effective follow-up care and other protections. The question of adequate funding resources is another area of concern.

The Child Protection Compact Act 2011 (S.185) would authorize the Secretary of State to provide assistance through grants, cooperative agreements, and/or contracts to countries with a significant prevalence of child trafficking. To receive these resources eligible countries must enter into a Child Protection Compact with the U.S. to support policies and programs to eradicate the trafficking of children.

The Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Deterrence and Victims Support Act (S.596) addresses the protection of domestic victims. This bill authorizes large block grants for law enforcement activities and direct services to survivors in six regionally diverse locations within the U.S. The grants would be awarded through an application process to locations that have a multi-disciplinary plan to combat the sex trafficking of minors. The bill also requires improvements to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) system. The NCIC system is used by federal, state and local law enforcement to track information about missing, exploited and runaway children. It also requires that state welfare agencies have procedures to require reporting of missing or abducted children to law enforcement for entry into the NCIC.

St. Josephine Bakhita of Sudan, who was a trafficking victim, has been proposed as the patron saint of victims and survivors of human trafficking. Once free she resolved to work effectively to liberate girls and women from oppression and violence. With her inspiration we can do the same for today’s victims and survivors.
Arms trade: Treaty moves forward

In December 2006, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 61/89, “Towards an Arms Trade Treaty: Establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms.” At that time, 153 member states supported the resolution, with the U.S. voting against it. The ability to move the Global Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) forward improved in October 2009, when the Obama administration reversed the previous position and publicly stated support for the resolution.

Religious and spiritual leaders from many different traditions (Hindu, Islamic, Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Bahai and Parsi) wrote recently in support of the treaty now under discussion, noting that the objective of the ATT is to “ensure responsible transfers of weapons globally in order to prevent any serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the form of atrocities and genocides.”

In July UN member states will hold a meeting to discuss the proposed treaty, which is due to be negotiated in mid-2012. The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) Women’s Network reminds us that this meeting presents an opportunity to call on governments to adopt an ATT that would cover small arms and light weapons (SALW) within the scope of conventional weapons. SALW kill humans more than any other weapons in the world. They are also the tools that facilitate the commission of violence against women in both conflict and non-armed conflict situations.

Following is an open letter initiated by the IANSA Women’s Network calling for a strong ATT:

Women from around the world call for a strong arms trade treaty

We laud the fact that nations of the world are deliberating a treaty on the arms trade. Women have paid the cost of arms proliferation for too long. We suffer the consequence for the lack of controls on today’s billion-dollar trade in arms. We are particularly at risk of certain crimes because of our sex - crimes such as violence in the home, on the streets and in the battlefield.

Small arms are the weapons of choice in committing violence against women. Hence, we call for a strong and robust Treaty containing the highest possible, legally-binding standards for the international transfer of conventional weapons, including small arms and ammunition within its scope.

Small arms facilitate a vast spectrum of women’s rights violations, including killing, threats and intimidation, rape and other forms of sexual violence. They facilitate the assault on women in both conflict and non-conflict situations. We hardly ever fight the world’s wars, but we often suffer the most – directly and indirectly.

Hence, we ask that the ATT does not authorize the transfer of arms if they will be used to perpetrate acts of armed violence, especially gender based violence including sexual violence used as a weapon and tactic of war.

International law includes women’s rights, but these are not explicit within the UN Charter or the Geneva Conventions and other instruments of international law used by diplomats in the disarmament community. However, they have been recognized by UN Security Council resolutions and other binding instruments of international law that is relevant for the ATT.

Therefore, to protect women’s rights, the relevant binding international instruments covering gender-based violence, including rape and sexual violence, must be included in an arms trade treaty to be applied in arms transfer decisions.

It is time that women take on the role of peacebuilders and our role is recognized. Stop the victimization of women fuelled by the irresponsible trade in small arms. Forge a strong Arms Trade Treaty that will complement the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms - now!

For more information contact the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), www.iansa.org.
Rio+20: Creating structures for sustainability

Following World War II, in the early years of the United Nations, world peace was uppermost on the minds of most people. Given the horrors perpetrated against millions of people prior to and during the war, it was clear that peace would never happen without profound respect for the human rights of all people. It is no surprise, therefore, that by 1948 the UN enshrined as its foundational document the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it subsequently became the global advocate for social and economic development as the path that would secure the human rights of all people and ultimately support lasting peace.

By the mid 1960s, however, it was becoming clear that economic development was depleting natural resources at an alarming rate. This was accompanied by increasing environmental degradation and noticeable air and water contamination. At that time, it was not easy to promote serious concern about resource diminishment because people could not believe that natural resources were limited. Nevertheless, eventually the strong voices calling attention to the situation were heard and the UN convoked the first international conference on the human environment in 1972.

A major outcome of this conference was the creation of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). Until this time, there was no formal UN work linked with the environment. UNEP was intended to be a global anchor that would integrate and coordinate all the work the UN would do throughout its systems for the protection of the environment worldwide.

However, in spite of the hope generated by this step, by the 1980s it was obvious that environmental degradation had continued unabated. Clearly, economic development with its ever increasing destructive impact on the environment and the rapid loss of natural resources along with species extinction was unsustainable. It was becoming more and more evident that the resources needed for development could be used up, thereby leaving future generations of people without necessary resources.

For this reason, a three year UN commission was established and given the mandate to project a sustainable way forward. This commission produced the report Our Common Future, which stated that development rests equally on three pillars: social justice, economics and the environment. It declares that present generations must meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Based on this report, the UN convened the first Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for the purpose of bringing together civil society and government representatives to work towards making these insights operational.

The first Rio Summit produced three vital documents: The Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and a Statement of Forestry Principles. Knowing that the ultimate success of the Summit would rest in the implementation of the principles set forth in these documents, the UN created the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). This commission has met every year since 1992 for the purpose of ensuring the effective follow-up of the Summit.

Unfortunately, in 2011, in spite of the continuous work of the Commission, the environmental situation of the planet has worsened and social justice remains weak. Again, it is time to rethink how sustainability can be guaranteed. With this end in view, the UN has convoked a new Earth Summit for the year 2012, to be held once again in Rio de Janeiro (dubbed Rio+20). (See related article on page 21.)

Aside from dealing with the difficult issues of economics and sustainability, the Rio+20 Conference will need to rework the structure of the CSD. Originally it was hoped that the commission framework would provide the amplitude and flexibility to move easily, putting in place the policies necessary to implement the principles agreed upon in the Summit. Recently, however, the Commission has not functioned well and it now appears that a more serious and demanding framework is required. The framework proposal most likely to be accepted is to upgrade the commission to Council level under the UN General Assembly. (In its current format as a commission, it functions as a standing committee under the Economic and Social Council, which in turn reports to the General Assembly.)

UNEP is also under review. Its monumental work is immensely appreciated; nevertheless, it has little authority. Perhaps during Rio+20 it will be upgraded to become the World Environmental Organization, functioning like the World Health Organization.
CSD 19: Sober learning for Rio+20

In May, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) met for the 19th time since its institution in 1992 following the first Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro. The purpose of CSD is to work for the implementation of the principles set forth in the 1992 Summit.

The 2011 sessions were to have been significant given that they were the final opportunity for the Commission to meet prior to the next Earth Summit in 2012, also to be held in Rio de Janeiro. However, the 2011 Commission Conference is considered a failure because, on the last day of the two week session, the member states were unable to agree on three major points of the outcome document.

The first major point of disagreement concerns peoples’ rights in occupied territories. At first glance, the language used in the document seems benign as it refers to removing obstacles to realizing the rights of people living under foreign occupation. However, just two years ago, the CSD 17 document stated emphatically that living under foreign occupation is incompatible with the rights and dignity of the human person and such situations must be combated and eliminated. The wording used in the new document was interpreted by many to be compromise language intended to satisfy Israel and its allies. This outraged many member states since, in terms of human rights; new documents must respect what has been agreed on in previous negotiations by member states.

The second point of disagreement concerns green economy, the main issue around which the 2012 Summit is being constructed. The block G77+China is highly suspicious of the intentions of the United States and other industrialized countries in terms of this concept. In an attempt to negotiate acceptable terminology, green economy was dropped and replaced with cleaner and more resource efficient economy. However, at the last moment, agreement could not be reached as the G77+China charged that this wording was ambiguous and undefined. In addition, these nations were outraged that the chair of the Commission, Laszlo Borbely of Romania, supported by the U.S., Japan and the EU, presented the text as a take it or leave it package and was unwilling to open it to new negotiations. Later, when this position may have been ameliorated, there was no longer a quorum present to vote.

The final major issue of disagreement pertains to memoranda of implementation (MOI). Initially the issue concerned the place of the MOI in the text. The G77+China wished them to be placed clearly throughout the text aligned with their thematic subjects and listed in a separate section of their own. The U.S. and several other countries preferred that they be listed only in a separate section to avoid duplication. A trade-off was agreed upon, however, in the final text items important to the G77+China were not reflected at all.

Unfortunately, when these points were being discussed the negotiators were exhausted after two weeks of working day and night. The last day stretched into mid-morning of the following day. Positions became entrenched and no conclusions were reached. Ultimately, as mentioned above, there were too few voting members left to determine a way forward. This is particularly unfortunate because a great deal of work on other points had been agreed upon during the course of the meeting.

In view of the fact that the Rio+20 Summit will frame the global sustainable development conversation for the next 20 years, the following are three points of learning from CSD 19:

1. Progress agreed upon in former sessions must be respected and implemented.
2. It will be more manageable to work with making global progress around creating patterns of sustainable consumption and production than around the concept of green economy.
3. It is evident that the structure of the Commission on Sustainable Development is dysfunctional. It is widely hoped that Rio+20 will make a strong recommendation for correcting this weakness. When the CSD was first conceptualized, a fundamental tenet of its organization was to include a strong partnership with civil society. From the beginning it was clear that the work of sustainable development could not be accomplished by governments alone. Unfortunately, over the past 19 years the influence of civil society, particularly NGOs, has been eroded. Whatever new structure will be put in place as a UN framework to ensure sustainability will need to guarantee the role of civil society in order keep nations on a meaningful and honest track into the future.
AIDS: Hopes to eliminate disease by 2020

Much of the following article was published by the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) on June 13.

The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on AIDS (UNGASS), which took place in New York June 8-10, concluded with the adoption of a declaration that by 2015 seeks to double the number of people on antiretroviral (ARV) treatment to 15 million, end mother-to-child transmission of HIV, halve tuberculosis-related deaths in people living with HIV, and increase preventive measures for the “most vulnerable populations.” UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called for a global commitment to eliminate AIDS by 2020. “That is our goal - zero new infections, zero stigma and zero AIDS-related deaths,” he said.

The three-day event, attended by heads of state, civil society groups, AIDS organizations and activists from more than 30 countries, coincided with the 30th anniversary of the discovery of AIDS and was dominated by discussions on the importance of increasing access to treatment.

“This Declaration is strong, the targets are time-bound and set a clear and workable roadmap, not only for the next five years, but beyond,” said Joseph Deiss, president of the General Assembly in a statement. “UN member states have recognized that HIV is one of the most formidable challenges of our time and have demonstrated true leadership through this Declaration in their commitments to work towards a world without AIDS.”

The money to achieve these aims is still a major issue, but the document is vague on where it will come from - about US$10 billion is spent each year, and UNAIDS says another $6 billion will be required. Countries agreed to increase AIDS-related spending to reach between $22 billion and $24 billion in low- and middle-income countries by 2015.

During his talk at a session to launch the global plan to eliminate new HIV infections in babies, former U.S. President Bill Clinton discussed the importance of coordination among governmental agencies and other bodies, and the overhead costs in assisting HIV-positive people. He noted that many UN conferences have failed to achieve the goals they set for themselves, but hoped this time would be different.

Some nongovernmental organizations participating in the debate are skeptical. They see barriers to the level of appropriations for HIV and AIDS-related programs, given the budget deficit debate in the U.S. and other countries. They are also concerned about the impact of trade agreements now being negotiated between, for example, the European Union and India, on access to generics medicines and to newer cheaper medicines by millions of people dependent on them for survival. Furthermore, opposition to women- and girl-centered responses to HIV and AIDS and to even discussing the impact of AIDS on sex workers and other highly vulnerable populations leaves gaping holes in any strategy to get the AIDS pandemic under control.

Others were more optimistic. In its June 18 issue, the highly respected medical journal The Lancet wrote, “Last week saw the conclusion of a landmark event in the recent history of AIDS. The two turning points took place in New York. The visible one was a high-level meeting on AIDS, which brought 3,000 participants to the UN to review progress in defeating an epidemic 30 years into its devastating course. Ambitious new targets were agreed. Countries committed themselves to, by 2015: halving sexual transmission of HIV; halving HIV transmission among people who inject drugs; ensuring that no child will be born with HIV; getting 15 million people onto treatment; and halving deaths from tuberculosis among people living with AIDS.

“But the invisible turning point was the realization that simply strengthening the vertical program that is AIDS has to end. The new opportunity is integration. As one senior UNAIDS scientist put it: AIDS is not an exceptional disease; it is an exceptional opportunity. Part of the reason for a change in strategy is a matter of brutal reality. Investment in AIDS is in decline relative to other spheres of global health. But the incredible success of the AIDS movement also means that it is in a strong position to embrace—warmly and generously—other sectors of global health. AIDS can be the engine that broadens a front to defeat the diseases of poverty.”

Faith in action:

Contact your member of Congress to urge the highest possible appropriations for the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Response (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund in FY 2012.
Resources

1) Food security and economic justice: A faith-based study guide on poverty and hunger: Published by the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, the three-part study guide serves as a reflection, education and action tool, and looks at global facts as well as scripture to discern action. Available for download or in hard copy. http://www.ncrlc.com/

2) Mind the Gap!: The wealthiest one percent owns 75 percent of the wealth. This and other facts, charts, videos and other tools are available through Mind the Gap!, a new campaign from NETWORK, a national Catholic social justice lobby, about the wealth gap. Go here to take NETWORK's “Who Owns America?” quiz, watch the videos and take advantage of the other resources: http://www.networklobby.org/mind-the-gap-learn-more


4) Budrus: This film tells the story of a Palestinian community organizer who unites Palestinians of all factions with Israelis to save their village from destruction by Israel’s Separation barrier. The film aims to generate awareness and support for Palestinians and Israelis working together to end Israeli occupation nonviolently. Go to this website order the film: http://www.cmep.org/content/budrus-create-discussion-take-action-peace. The site also has resources for hosting and planning a screening event. Go here for more information about the film including a schedule of screenings: http://www.justvision.org/budrus

5) Food Desert Locator: This interactive map of the United States shows areas of food scarcity. It displays data by county, giving the percentage and number of people with low food access. To qualify as a low access community at least 500 people must live more than one mile from a grocery store for urban areas and 10 miles for rural areas. http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert/index.htm

6) Rio + 20 resources: Two PowerPoint documents about the Rio + 20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. One looks at the governance for sustainable development and the other gives the background leading to the 2012 earth summit. The documents are available on the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) page at Trunity.net: http://www.trunity.net/CoNGOSD/articles/

7) Spanish language resources from Catholic Coalition on Climate Change: The Spanish edition of the Coalition website has been updated with three newly translated resources. Both the Primer on Catholic Teaching and Climate Change and Climate Change informed by the 7 Principles of Catholic Social Teaching can now be found in Spanish on the Spanish Catholic Teaching--Enseñanzas Católicas page (scroll down to bottom of page). Additionally the Planning Guide for Taking the St. Francis Pledge is also now translated into Spanish and is now available on the Spanish Resources Recursos page. http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/spanish/

8) The FTT for people and the planet – Financing climate justice: This new 12-page paper from CIDSE, the international Catholic development agency, posits that the financial transaction tax (FTT) is a credible mechanism that can generate substantial amounts of money to finance global challenges including action to tackle climate change. Available for download in English and in French from the CIDSE website, www.cidse.org/resources.