

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

*a bimonthly newsletter of information on
international peace and justice issues*

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An elusive peace

In this year when the Catholic community celebrates the anniversaries of *Pacem in Terris* (Pope John XXIII, 1963) and *The Challenge of Peace* (U.S. bishops, 1983), it is ironic that war, violence and threatened violence seem to be visible in every direction and that our world is so far from an experience of *shalom*.

There is in this world a great yearning for peace – a tiredness of war; a sense that security must be rooted in social justice and community; a belief that as a global family we must respond to tyranny and terrorism, injustice and repression with active, nonviolent resistance, not war. We know that peace is much more than the absence of war, but stopping war, refusing to accept it as a solution would be a giant first step in the right direction, forcing the human community to find other ways of negotiating difference, of responding to violations of international law or human dignity.

On January 13, 2003, Pope John Paul II said, “I have been personally struck by *the feeling of fear which often dwells in the hearts of our contemporaries*. An insidious terrorism capable of striking at any time and anywhere; the unresolved problem of the Middle East, with the Holy Land and Iraq; the turmoil disrupting South America, particularly Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela; the conflicts preventing numerous African countries from focusing on their development; the diseases spreading contagion and death; the grave problem of famine, especially in Africa; the irresponsible behavior contributing to the depletion of the planet’s resources: all these are so many plagues threatening the survival of humanity, the peace of individuals and the security of societies.”

In spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, U.S. Americans are being told that our security rests in massive military might that includes battlefield-ready nuclear weapons and a commitment to the aggressive, even preemptive, pursuit of any person or any country thought to be a threat to national security - defined very broadly and including U.S. economic interests. Our fear is orchestrated and often manipulated. The consequences of far-reaching homeland security measures now in effect are difficult to comprehend. With unsettling fervor, the Bush administration seems determined to ignore the growing, articulate and worldwide opposition to war in Iraq, pursuing military action on three continents (in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Philippines, Colombia); to conduct U.S. foreign policy in an

increasingly isolated and unilateral manner; and to shape a domestic agenda that puts at risk basic civil, political, social and economic human rights.

The challenge to move beyond terrorism, including state terrorism, and justified war is an enormous one, but many people of faith – including people who have lived in situations of conflict, the global peace movement, academics, theologians – are striving to do so.

The leadership teams of the three Maryknoll entities -- the Fathers & Brothers society, the Sisters congregation, and the Mission Association of the Faithful -- recently agreed upon a joint public statement against this current rush to war (page 4). We hope it is useful for your reflection. Also consider the excerpts from bishops’ statements from around the world (page 23).

Prayer to end the war against Iraq

by Art Laffin

Reprinted courtesy of Pax Christi USA

Loving God,
We beg your forgiveness for the war that the U.S. is waging
against the Iraqi people, for destroying Iraq’s infrastructure
by massive bombings, for using highly toxic weapons
that contaminate Iraqiland and water,
and are causing major increases in cancers among children.

Forgive us for imposing economic sanctions
that have killed over one million Iraqis, mostly children.

Forgive us for placing oil interests above human welfare.
Heal us of our moral blindness and fill our hearts with love.

Help us to renounce all killing, to stop demonizing our
adversaries, to value all life as sacred,
and to see the Iraqi people as our brothers and sisters.

Empower us to engage in nonviolent
action to end this slaughter of the innocents.

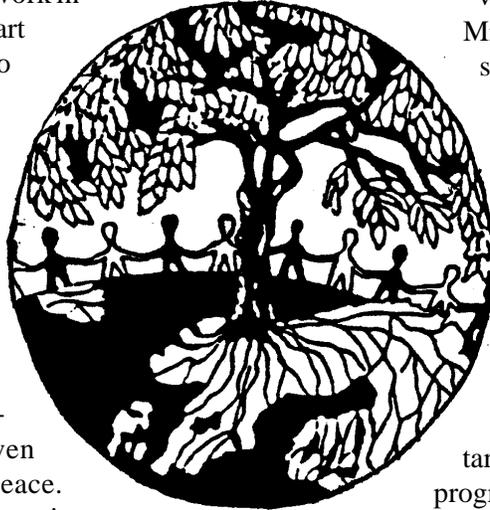
O God, make us channels of your peace and reconciliation.

Amen

Maryknoll leadership opposes war on Iraq

The following statement was released in March by the leadership teams of the Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers, the Maryknoll Sisters and the Maryknoll Mission Association of the Faithful.

Maryknoll missionaries live and work in communities around the world torn apart by conflict and war. We know too well the intense suffering and destruction that war brings. As followers of Jesus we are committed personally and institutionally to reverence and affirm the dignity of each person and the whole community of life of which we are a part. We seek to participate actively in the transformation of the world, pursuing social justice, the integrity of creation, and – with even greater intensity in these times – peace. We believe that as a global community, particularly in the form of the United Nations, we must respond to tyranny and terrorism, injustice and repression with active, nonviolent resistance, not war.



We cry out unequivocally in opposition to war on Iraq.

The Holy Father Pope John Paul II said, “Choices need to be made so that humanity can still have a future. Therefore, the peoples of the earth and their leaders must sometimes have the courage to say ‘No’ ... No to War! War is not always inevitable. It is a defeat for humanity. International law, honest dialogue, solidarity between States, the noble exercise of diplomacy; these are methods worthy of individuals and nations in resolving their differences.” (Address to the Diplomatic Corps, January 13, 2003)

With millions of others, Maryknoll missionaries have prayed and fasted for peace; we have supported alternatives to military action; we have vocally and visibly opposed the U.S. government’s unwavering march toward war on Iraq. We reiterate and affirm the words of Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Vatican Secretary of State: “We are against the war. That is a moral position.” (January 29, 2003)

We believe that

- the cost of war on Iraq in terms of human life and suffering for the people of Iraq, for our own service people and their families, and for others involved in the conflict would be unconscionable;

- war in Iraq would further destabilize the Middle East, causing more death and destruction in the region and increase the threat of terrorist attacks throughout the world, including on U.S. soil;
- ecological devastation would be an inevitable consequence of the war, causing further damage to an already fragile situation;
- the burden of war would be carried by the poor and vulnerable as military expenditures siphon funds from social programs in the U.S. and around the world;

- a preemptive strike against Iraq would be in violation of international law and an act of aggression that would open the door to similar acts by other countries;
- the possibility that the U.S. would use nuclear weapons in this impending war is horrifying; it would unleash a destructive force and be an insult to the God of Life.

As Maryknollers we honor the many cultures around the world that have welcomed us; we treasure their wisdom and believe that no one country, even one with enormous military might, has the right to destroy those cultures or negate that wisdom. Instead of military action to establish in the Middle East and Central Asia a “more stable and open” political environment that is friendly to U.S. interests, we believe the U.S. should commit itself to

- honoring the right of all people to self-determination and real participation in decisions that affect their lives;
- full and positive participation in international efforts for peace that is rooted in social and economic justice; and
- take serious steps toward the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, including those held by the United States, as a real contribution toward global disarmament.

El Salvador: Conflict over health care

In November, after a two-month strike and a relentless popular struggle, El Salvador's Legislative Assembly passed Decree 1024, "State Guarantee of Health and Social Security." The decree guaranteed a national health system within the Social Security System, preventing privatization or concessions of any of its services and establishing the state's obligation to provide accessible, quality health care to every Salvadoran regardless of ability to pay.

The doctors succeeded in lobbying with all the legislative party factions, and got the parties of the right, the PCN (National Conciliation Party) and the PDC (Christian Democratic Party), to support the decree and overturn the recommendations of President Francisco Flores.

The strikers vowed to continue the strike, however, until they achieved reinstatement to their workplaces of those who were dismissed in the conflict over health care; repayment of salaries that had been suspended for workers on strike; the dismissal of the current director of Social Security (Public Health) and of other officials; and the formation of a Monitoring Commission that would guarantee the negotiations for the reform of the health care sector.

Decree 1024 had been passed for only a couple of days when unknown men showed up at the home of Ricardo Monge, general coordinator of STISSS (the Union of Workers at the Social Security Institute) and finding him not at home, told his family that they would kill him if he did not shut his mouth.

Following this, when union and community members took to the streets asking amnesty, reinstatement, and back salaries for striking workers involved in the movement, the Salvadoran government responded by dispensing tear gas, using pepper spray and firing plastic bullets at protesters. The tear gas affected not only protesters, but also bystanders and ultimately reached pregnant women and infants in Rosales Hospital, the maternity and cancer hospital.

The government's own Prosecutor for the Defense of Human Rights, Beatrice de Carrillo, described the police aggression as "a violation of the 1992 Peace Accords" and "an attack against the democratic right to free assembly and free speech."

Then, on December 19, in a reversal brought about by new political coalitions in the Legislative Assembly, Decree 1024 was rescinded. The strike continued and protests intensified as Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) negotiations began, with privatization of ser-

vices, including health care, a central part of the debate. From January 9-13, 20 people occupied the national cathedral in opposition to privatization. Their occupation was ended peacefully and negotiations, mediated by the church, between the government and the strikers began, but were soon suspended.

The director of the social security system relieved 12 striking doctors, members of SIMETRIS, of their official duties. The union opposed the dismissals as illegal and more roadblocks and demonstrations ensued.

On January 27, the police entered hospitals to remove the striking doctors. Ten were arrested and over 100 people spent the night in the national cathedral for a vigil in support of the strikers. Two hundred striking doctors returned to work; 958 remained on strike.

In late January/early February, police continued to raid clinics and hospitals, arresting striking members of the STISSS healthcare workers union. Doctors at the Rosales hospital, the flagship hospital in the Ministry of Health public hospital system, engaged in a one-day solidarity strike.

On February 5, nearly 100,000 protesters came together in San Salvador to celebrate the fifth doctor-led "White March" against the privatization of health care. Some 100 unions and organizations from across the Salvadoran social movement turned out to oppose privatization, known in El Salvador as the "Pay or Die" system because it denies health care to those without the means to pay. Police, who had previously threatened violent repression against the march, attempted unsuccessfully to prevent dozens of busses from entering San Salvador, but found their roadblocks overwhelmed by protesters. President Flores had hoped to break the strike by mid-February, but the strong turnout for February 5 march was a clear indication that the Salvadoran social movement had no intention of backing down.

For more information contact SHARE: sharedc@share-elsalvador.org or www.share-elsalvador.org.

Guatemala: Proposal to tackle impunity

In 2002 the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights reported "more than 100 attacks and acts of intimidation" against lawyers, witnesses, civil society leaders and others seeking prosecutions. In light of this reality, momentum is building for a proposal to establish an independent, international commission to investigate the role of Guatemalan "clandestine security forces" made up of former and current military and criminal organizations that carry out human rights abuses and criminal activity.

The UN Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) condemned the growing influence of clandestine groups and detailed allegations of connections to current and retired military and government personnel in its most recent report. At the beginning of 2002, a broad range of Guatemalan civil society organizations asked the Guatemalan government's Security Cabinet to investigate the clandestine groups responsible for attacks against human rights activists, social activists and journalists.

On January 16, 2003, in the presence of diplomats from the international community, Human Rights Ombudsman Dr. Sergio Morales issued a specific proposal to create a Commission to Investigate Illegal Groups and Clandestine Security Apparatuses. The commission would be made up of high profile representatives appointed by the Secretaries General's offices of both the United Nations and Organization of American States. Technical experts would contribute expertise in criminal investigation and judicial prosecution. The plan was immediately embraced by international human rights groups which have expressed concern about impunity as violence and intimidation spreads throughout the nation.

Perhaps one of the greatest concerns is the intimidations around crucial court cases like the trial of Myrna Mack's murderers (*NewsNotes*, Sept/Oct 2002). Most of the efforts to prosecute the perpetrators of the worst atrocities (especially those perpetrated during the 36-year civil war) have triggered a wave of death threats, illegal searches, kidnappings and murders.

Guatemalan human rights workers were given quite a scare when Guatemala's Fourth Court of Appeals annulled the original verdict in the case against the murderers of Bishop Juan Gerardi, opening up the prospect of a retrial. The possibility of a retrial was particularly frightening since Noé Gómez Limón, an important witness in the Gerardi case, was killed in what appears to be an extrajudicial execution on December 19, 2002. The court ruled on February 13, 2003 to stay with the original findings of the Gerardi case. That same week one of the military officers

convicted of the murder was killed in a prison riot.

Bishop Gerardi was a major architect and organizer of the Catholic Church's inter-diocesan Recovery of Historical Memory project (REMHI), which documented human rights violations committed during Guatemala's civil war. The report placed responsibility on the military for 87 percent of the 200,000 deaths and disappearances that were perpetrated during the war. On April 26, 1998, only two days after releasing the final report, Bishop Gerardi was brutally murdered in his home. (See *NewsNotes* articles May-June 1998, Nov-Dec 2000, throughout 2001, and Nov-Dec. 2002.)

When explaining the plan at a recent meeting among non-governmental organizations in Washington D.C., Dr. Morales expressed the belief that international attention focused on the eradication of clandestine security forces would help the Guatemalan government to recommit to the full implementation of the 1996 peace accords.

U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher hailed the Ombudsman's proposal, saying, "Persistent allegations indicate such groups may represent a serious challenge to democracy, human rights and the rule of law." He also said that an international commission would mark "an important step" to disband such groups.

This is not the first time the U. S. has expressed concern over corruption in Guatemala. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency stripped Guatemala of its certification in the "War against Drugs," saying that it has "failed in its efforts to stem the tide of drugs." The Guatemalan government is particularly sensitive to this since the U.S. could press to strip decertified countries of all trade benefits under the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) now being negotiated. In a desperate attempt to regain his country's certification, Guatemalan President Alfonso Portillo offered to control over his country's seaports over to the U.S.



Plan Puebla Panama: Road to development?

The PPP - Plan Puebla Panama. What is it? Some of us have never heard of it; others are watching its bulldozers drive through our villages and change our lives. The following article was written by Dana Hill, a graduate student at American University and a volunteer at the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

Plan Puebla Panama is a development project created by those who see life through the lens of the neo-liberal paradigm, those who believe that the free market and industrialization will enable impoverished nations to climb up the ladder of prosperity. While others see the so-called "first world" stepping on the shoulders of "third world" countries as they reach for higher rungs, many of today's leaders sustain the conviction that the free market will benefit all involved, including the poor. Mexican President Vicente Fox is typical. "Southern and southeastern Mexico," he said, "have a great wealth of natural resources, an exceptional endowment of human talent and regrettably, unacceptable levels of poverty and marginalization against which we are hastening to launch a direct offensive."

Ironically, the direct offensive he hopes to launch against poverty is being countered by the poor themselves, who are organizing across Mesoamerica in an attempt to halt the PPP's realization. Previous *NewsNotes* articles about the PPP (see *NewsNotes* July/Aug 2001, Jan/Feb 2002, Sept/Oct 2002), as well as T.J. Meyer's piece in this issue, give firsthand accounts by Maryknoll lay missionaries of the protests and other activities of this growing popular movement.

Groups opposing the PPP are worried about the displacement of local people and the destruction of their culture, environment, and livelihood as small farmers. The increased number of large plantations and industrial zones, the flooding of indigenous lands by the building of hydroelectric dams, will facilitate a mass movement of people to live in urban areas, where they will provide a source of cheap labor for the industry the PPP will draw. Lax environmental and labor standards, tax breaks, and improved infrastructure encourage these factories and large plantations to move to the area. Ancient ruins, traditional culture and lifestyle, forests and the lives of people will be effectively destroyed.

Phil Dahl-Bredine, a lay missionary in Mexico, has clearly expressed the perspective of the campesino communities with whom he works. "The indigenous communities are feeling the effects of the PPP in the presence of new highway projects crossing their lands without previous consultation ... Locally, we are most concerned that the

aim of PPP is to move campesino and indigenous populations out of the countryside to make way for outside investment in mining, forest and hydroelectric projects ... [This goal] is having a great deal of success. Six hundred campesinos leave the countryside each day in Mexico ... Campesinos are beginning to participate in regional and international forums on the PPP and the free trade treaties to try to develop alternatives."

All over Central America, and in other parts of the world, people are organizing against the PPP. The next big meeting is the IV Foro Mesoamericano Contra el PPP, which will be held in Honduras in July.

The basics:

- Plan Puebla Panama was announced in Mexico on March 12, 2001.
- The PPP stretches across eight countries and will affect over 64 million people.
- It is a \$10+ billion, 25-year industrial development and transportation infrastructure project.
- Some of the institutions financing the project are: the federal governments of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama; the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); the Central American Economic Integration Bank (BCIE), the Latin American Economic Commission (CEPAL), World Bank, the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation, the European Union, Spanish government, other agencies.
- The plan has been divided into eight areas, dubbed "Mesoamerican Initiatives," which are: energy sector integration, roadway integration, telecommunications development, sustainable development, human development, promotion of ecotourism, telecommunications development, national disaster mitigation and prevention.

For further information: <http://www.asej.org/ACERCA/ppp/webliography.html>

Resisting CAFTA and Plan Puebla-Panama

In early January negotiations began over a regional trade agreement between the United States and Central American governments. A second round of talks took place in February in Cincinnati, Ohio (coincidentally the home base of Chiquita Banana and Proctor & Gamble, two corporations with enormous interest in the negotiations). U.S. citizens living in El Salvador, including Maryknoll missionaries, were visible participants in actions there to raise awareness of the potential disastrous impact of CAFTA on the lives of poor and working Salvadorans. An account by Maryknoll lay missionary, T.J. Meyer, of a cross-country bike trip and information about his seven-day, 24 hour fast with another U.S. citizen, Matthew Eisen, follow.

“We hopped on our bikes in front of the International Fair Grounds in San Salvador and started pedaling. Our shirts read “Pedaling for Life” and our mission was to raise consciousness about the potentially negative impact of the trade agreement being negotiated on the common Salvadoran. We rode with four main objectives: to talk about the real intentions and future consequences of CAFTA, Plan Puebla-Panama (PPP), and the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA); to enable the voice of youth to be heard on the effects of corporate globalization; to motivate other youth to organize around these issues; and, lastly, to promote the use of the bicycle as an alternative means of transportation that does not contaminate the environment.

“Armed with a loud speaker and pamphlets, we went from town to town on our bicycles. We stopped at the main plaza or market, passed out information and talked to passers-by about CAFTA, PPP, FTAA and their implications on our lives. We talked about how free trade agreements, as they have been negotiated, widen the gap between rich and poor, ... destroy our environment and leave farmers without means of survival.

“We saw the effects first hand as we passed through the town of Nueva Concepcion. There we stayed with a community that supported itself with an agricultural cooperative on lands given to them as part of the 1992 peace accords. They consider themselves lucky to still be functioning since the majority of the cooperatives in the area were rice-based and had already gone bankrupt due to the cheap subsidized rice imported from the U.S. that had flooded the market. The imported rice had so reduced the quality and price of the rice market that these local cooperatives could no longer compete. One farmer we talked to said that CAFTA would be a deathblow to Salvadoran agriculture. He cited the example of the cheese that they had offered us for breakfast that morning. To break even they sell a pound of fresh cheese for \$2.06, but since cheese coming in from Mexico and Nicaragua in great quantities is being sold at \$1.37, they are unable to sell their product. He told us that the government would rather have farmers

sewing clothes for \$0.50 an hour in a maquila than growing their own food.

“Inspired by the words of this farmer and the thousands of others we encountered along the way, we continued each day with more commitment. By the time we reached the plaza at of the Cathedral in San Salvador 10 days and 320 miles later, we had visited eight of El Salvador’s 14 departments and created a form of protest ...

“The trip was organized by a local youth initiative and supported by UNES (Salvadoran Ecological Unit) and the Sinti Techan Citizen’s Network on Trade and Investment which is composed of consumer protection groups, women’s groups, campesino organizations and environmentalists, and is part of the Hemispheric Social Alliance.”

On Saturday February 22, 2003 Eisen and Meyer began a seven-day water-only fast and vigil in front of the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador protesting U.S. trade policies. According to the fasters, “CAFTA is being run through on a fast track denying participation of the Central American labor, human rights and environmental movements, for this reason, we oppose CAFTA and ask U.S. Trade Representatives to stop negotiations as they are currently modeled.

“We demand negotiations that promote *fair* trade, not *free* trade. NAFTA has been a disaster for Mexico's poor and their environment; we won't stay silent as U.S. economic policies destroy the poor and environment of El Salvador.”

Faith in action:

Contact the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador to express your agreement with the concerns of Meyer and Eisen for *fair* trade not *free* trade. U.S Embassy fax (from the U.S.): 011-503-298-2336. Send a copy to the U.S. Trade Representative, 600 17th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20508. For additional information contact the Fair Trade Committee in El Salvador at alto_cafta@hotmail.com.

Bolivia: Conflict intensifies

Since the inauguration of a new Bolivian president in August, efforts at dialogue between the Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada administration and leaders of the opposition, including coca growers, raised a glimmer of hope. The cocaleros, for example, had insisted on the demilitarization of the Chapare, modification of anti-narcotics Law 1008 (see NewsNotes Sept/Oct 1995, March/April 1998) and a break in the forced eradication of coca. They had proposed a study to determine the real level of traditional coca consumption in Bolivia, and had called for increased development and marketing of legal products made from coca leaf, which is already used in tea, sweets, ointments, and toothpaste.

But the dialogue broke down when U.S. officials expressed opposition to any change in the existing, very aggressive coca eradication program. Roadblocks and protests in response began in January and involved coca growers, union members, transportation workers, and pensioners. They shut down the nation's major highways for weeks and were met with heavy military and police presence. Tensions increased as security forces repeatedly used excessive force, including indiscriminate use of tear gas, rubber bullets, and live ammunition against the protestors. The confrontations resulted in eleven deaths and multiple injuries of both civilians and security personnel.

Government and protesting sectors reached an agreement to begin negotiations again on January 27, 2003. The Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, and the Catholic Church agreed to serve in a facilitating role. Topics on the table included Bolivia's participation in the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the country's exportation of natural gas, land issues, earlier privatizations of state enterprises, the national budget, and forced eradication of coca. Over two weeks of dialogue with protesting sectors reached no conclusions, except compensation for the dead and injured. Coca growers, complaining that the government was using the negotiations to stall, continued to demand a break in eradication or voluntary eradication, leaving one hectare of coca per family. U.S. Ambassador, David Greenlee, reiterated U.S. opposition to the pause.

On February 11 and 12, Bolivian National Police in La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz went on strike in response to the Sánchez de Lozada government's announcement of a new IMF-encouraged tax of approximately 12.5 percent to be deducted from all salaried employees who received more than four times the minimum wage. The whole country - labor unions, students, merchants, business people - was infuriated about the new tax, which came with

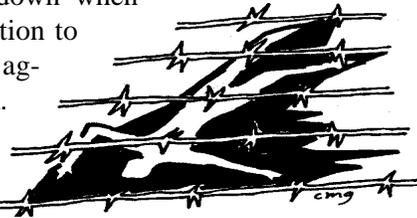
no previous popular consultation. It was a recipe for disaster.

On February 12 and 13, Bolivia turned into a battlefield, resulting in 33 dead, among them ten police and four soldiers; 143 people wounded; millions of dollars worth of property damage, both to public buildings and to private property; the Vice-President's office building burned and sacked; the Ministry of Labor building gutted; other government buildings, the central buildings of the political parties in the government coalition, large stores and small shops, all destroyed. Anarchic burning and pillaging by infuriated mobs went unchecked for 30 hours in every major city with no public security forces to stop the violence. "A holocaust," according to Mike Gillgannon, a U.S. missionary who has lived and worked in Bolivia for many years. "I could not believe my eyes as I watched television from all over the country and then walked all over the deserted streets of the war zone in La Paz."

Eventually, the president agreed to withdraw the new tax, but it was too late. The police would not back down on their grievances; they stayed in their quarters while "chaos ruled in the streets."

On February 13, the unions had already called for national protest marches in every city. The marches were peaceful but ended with thousands of people still in the streets. Pillaging continued; government buildings and transnational companies were attacked while the police were still negotiating their contracts. Finally, the government conceded and signed agreements with the police, who, by the end of the day on the 13th had regained the streets.

For additional information contact the Andean Information Network (AIN): paz@albatros.cnb.net or kledibur@albatros.cnb.net or consult the "updates" heading of the English section of the AIN website: www.scbbs-bo.com/ain



Venezuela: Maryknoll perspective

As the strike in Venezuela reached the peak of its intensity, Maryknoll lay missionaries living in Barquisimeto wrote the following statement.

Venezuela now finds itself in the throes of a tense and bitter political conflict, which is causing considerable damage to the lives of the average Venezuelan and to the well-being of the nation. We are in the midst of a national strike, with 24-hour gasoline lines, two-day lines for cooking fuel, scarcity of food staples, and the loss of oil revenues that pay for such items as teachers' salaries. Perhaps most critical, once-peaceful marches are becoming increasingly confrontational and violent. As Maryknoll missionaries who have walked alongside the Venezuelan people and experienced their tremendous warmth and generosity for many years, we feel pain and sadness as we witness divisions and hardships, and we feel a sense of alarm that we may be at the doorstep of a much more serious situation. If unconstitutional or violent means are used to overthrow a democratically elected government here in Venezuela, this may set an undesirable precedent for other countries in Latin America.

In response, we reject the use of any violence on the part of any side in the conflict; call for an end to the national strike; are concerned that the Venezuelan media is being used to incite rather than to inform; think that the root of this conflict is control of Venezuelan oil; think that all voices should be heard in the shaping of a solution; are concerned about the role of the U.S. in the Venezuelan conflict; and believe that this conflict must be resolved within the legal framework of the Venezuelan constitution.

There are voices in this explosive conflict that are not being heard: those in the urban barrios and rural towns such as those where we live and work. At a time in Venezuela in which political parties have lost the respect of the majority of the population, the leadership of the political opposition has been taken up by a very unlikely source: the media. The power of the major television stations and newspapers is such that they appear to be directing the entire script of the opposition. Since the December 2nd initiation of the strike, the four major Venezuelan television stations have not shown a single commercial ad. They do, however, run approximately 12 anti-Chavez advertisements per hour (about 100 per day). They are strikingly slick, smooth, moving, and obviously very professional and expensive. Imagine if ABC, CBS, NBC and CNN aired not a single commercial spot for 53 days, but instead ran 100

ads daily directed at removing President Bush from power, comparing him to Hitler and Satan. Imagine as well, that every day the networks invited the public to anti-Bush marches, indicating the hour and location of each daily protest. The use of the press to incite violence rather than to inform is very disturbing.

The press presents this conflict as arising from one clear and simple problem: the presidency of Hugo Chavez. We recognize and criticize the fact that Chavez has used inflammatory and divisive language, and that at times his followers have resorted to violence. Violence is not limited to one side; we unconditionally condemn it.

Chavez was elected by the largest majority of any recent election and during his tenure there have been four other transparent elections. The new constitution places a strong emphasis on human rights and the process that ushered it in was one of unprecedented participation. Our own low-income communities give testimony to the fact that this government has indeed given priority to the poor. Public schools and health care are now totally free and exempt from "collaboration fees." Increased percentages of the national budget have been given to health, education and housing, and for the first time we have spacious and attractive schools, hospitals, community centers and sports complexes in our own very poor communities.

It seems to us that the overriding motivation of the average participant in the opposition is an irrational fear that Chavez will somehow cause the poor majority to come streaming down from the hillside barrios and take over their lives. The poor do feel invited down, not to destroy or take over, but to participate in their country for the first time. Their very existence has been recognized; the value of their participation has been affirmed. This has mobilized them to take part in public life. Whatever happens to Chavez, they will remain a significant force.

The underlying cause of this conflict, however, is oil and the desire for control of Venezuela's huge oil reserves. It has turned an otherwise manageable political conflict into one that could spin out of control. PDVSA, the state oil company, provides the government with nearly half of its \$20 billion budget and the United States with about 15 percent of its oil imports. Many feel that the passage of a

law requiring the state to own at least 51 percent of any energy venture in Venezuela is what brought outside interests to the conflict and plentiful funding for the opposition.

As Maryknoll lay missionaries who have worked alongside the poor of Venezuela for 5-15 years, we are compelled to make all people of good will aware of this worsening crisis, and we ask for your support. We also

appreciate your continuing prayers for the Venezuelan people.

In peace,

Martha Benson, Phil Brady, Mary Jo Commerford, Maggie Han, Glenn Rabut, Peter Ree, David Rodriguez, Sami Scott and Lisa Sullivan—Maryknoll lay missionaries in Venezuela

Panama: Indigenous leaders attacked

On January 18 four Kuna indigenous political and spiritual leaders were killed by members of the Autonomous Defense Units of Colombia (AUC), in villages along the Paya and Pucuro rivers in the Darien region of southern Panama near the Colombian border. Three foreign journalists were also kidnapped, part of an ominous trend involving the AUC and the two main Colombian guerrilla groups, the FARC and the ELN.

Immediately, nearly 500 indigenous, including 324 children, fled in search of protection to Boca de Cupe in the central Darien region. The UN High Commission for Refugees, the Vicariate of Darien, UNICEF and the Panamanian Red Cross provided emergency relief for the refugees. Panama hosts 1,515 registered refugees and persons under a special humanitarian protection status, many of them in the Darien region. The majority are Colombian citizens.



A U.S. government spokesperson recently stated that the incursion of Colombian combatants into Darien highlights the difficulties that exist in controlling drug trafficking, adding that the U.S. government intends to send more aid to the border area of the Darien to combat the problem. President Bush has requested military aid for Panama in FY2004 in the amount of \$9 million as part of the Andean Initiative war on drugs and \$2.5 million in general military aid.

Meanwhile, a number of Panamanian press reports suggest that Panama could be in store for a remilitarization and that the “war on drugs” in Colombia has entered Darien. Action for Community and Ecology in the Regions of Central America (ACERCA) notes the “geopolitical importance of the Darien for the expansion of trade. It is the only break in the Pan-American Highway from Mexico to South America and is largely inhabited by indigenous peoples who have long resisted the expansion of the Pan-American highway Plan Puebla Panama from the North and Plan Colombia from the south are literally sandwiching the Kuna and Embera.”

A base camp has recently been built for a U.S. military civic action program in the Darien. It is located in the region of Santa Cruz, in the district of San Felix, in the western province of Chiriqui, very close to the Pan-American Highway. The base will accommodate about 400 reservists from Columbus, Ohio at a time. They are assigned to the humanitarian program, New Horizons 2003 and are working in the communities of Quebrada de Guabo, Hato Corotu, Cerro Iglesias and Quebrada Hacha, building health centers, classrooms and sanitary services and providing medical services. The 400 reservists are mostly engineers, doctors, electricians, plumbers and construction workers. Every two weeks they will be replaced by 400 new reservists until May 4 when the last group will return to Ohio.

With a budget of about \$16 million, New Horizons projects are already underway in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Belize, El Salvador, and other Latin American countries.

For additional information, contact ACERCA (acerca@sover.net), which is a project of Action for Social and Ecological Justice, P.O. Box 57, Burlington, VT 05402; (802) 863-0571; fax (802) 864-8203; <http://www.asej.org>

For more information on U.S. foreign policy in Colombia, contact the Center for International Policy, 1755 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Suite 312, Washington, D.C. 20036; tel: (202) 232-3317; fax (202) 232-3440; cip@ciponline.org; www.ciponline.org

Let Haiti live!

In less than one year, Haiti will celebrate 200 years of independence. For 190 of those years, Haiti has endured dictatorships, leaving institutions that were either weak, or brutal and corrupt. Although eight years of democracy in Haiti have brought substantial improvements to the lives of ordinary people, there is still enormous work to be done. Building adequate democratic institutions, reforming the justice system, and providing everyone with minimal health care, education and nutrition is a long-term process. Since 1997 de facto and since 2000 in specific response to Parliamentary elections considered flawed by many in the international community, an embargo on aid, including humanitarian aid, by the U.S. government and the international financial institutions has not helped.

From January 11-19, 2003, Haiti Reborn/Quixote Center coordinated a 21-member fact finding delegation to Haiti. The delegation, "Investigating the Human Effects of Withheld Humanitarian Aid," included TransAfrica Forum, Jubilee USA Network, Global Justice, Marin Interfaith Task Force on Central America, religious leaders, teachers and students from throughout the United States who joined with the offices of U.S. Reps. Donald Payne (NJ), Barbara Lee (CA) and Lynn Woolsey (CA) in the seven day investigative trip.

At the end of their trip, the individuals with diverse areas of expertise and far reaching constituencies unanimously declared: "The democratic government of Haiti must have immediate and unfettered access to international funding."

The delegation visited three geographical depart-

ments in Haiti and participated in various meetings, finding that the Haitian people are suffering without basic health services or even potable drinking water. The U.S. government and multilateral lending institutions have ceased funding the Haitian government's programs to provide the basic human rights of life, health and education.

For the last year and half, the U.S. government has provided funding to Haiti at a drastically reduced amount and only through non-governmental organizations.

Haiti's national maternal mortality rate rose from 450 in 100,000 births in 1997 to 513 this year. In Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince it is estimated to be more than 1,200 in 100,000 births. The national HIV/AIDS infection rate is 5.17 percent and is estimated to be 10 percent in Port-au-Prince. In a recent study of access to potable water in 147 countries, Haiti ranked at 147.

Faith in action:

Support the Let Haiti Live Coalition, which unites organizations and individuals to advocate for U.S. policies which respect the Haitian people's independence and self-determination. The Coalition is committed to building a dynamic and well-informed solidarity network that will make a concrete impact on U.S. policies and tangible contribution to the Haitian people's pursuit of democracy, human rights and equitable development. The objective of this coalition is to:

- ensure that U.S. policies maximize the development of Haiti's democratic institutions, while respecting the country's sovereignty, right to self-determination, and the governance through a democratic process.
- provide the U.S. American public with accurate information about Haiti's democratic transition, including direct information from grassroots organizations and other partners in Haiti.
- articulate the situation in Haiti through the media and other means, as well as developing and maintaining a dynamic solidarity movement in the U.S.

The Let Haiti Live Coalition's first priority is to obtain the release of \$146 million in Inter-American Development Bank loans that were approved, but then blocked by the U.S. The loans are earmarked for health care, basic education, potable water and rural road rehabilitation projects.

For a copy of the delegation report and more information about Let Haiti Live, contact: Melinda Miles or Eugenia Charles-Mathurin at Haiti Reborn/Quixote Center, phone: (301)699-0042, 240-432-7414 or email melinda@haitireborn.org.

U.S./Mexico: Mexican man killed by Border Patrol

The border between the United States and Mexico remains a dangerous region, particularly for Mexicans and U.S. citizens of Mexican heritage. Members of the U.S. Border Patrol, under increased pressure to maintain a secure boundary, often have harassed and threatened migrants and refugees. The following article, based on a report from Maryknoll missionaries who live and work in El Paso, TX, describes the February shooting death of a young Mexican man by the Border Patrol.

Nineteen-year old Juan Patricio Peraza Quijada, from Baja California, Mexico, was shot and killed by a border patrol agent on Saturday, February 22, 2003. Peraza was a guest at Annunciation House, a house of hospitality for immigrants and refugees located near downtown El Paso.

On the morning of February 22, he was speaking with two friends of his in the Annunciation House parking lot. According to witnesses, an unmarked border patrol vehicle pulled into the parking lot with two agents. (This goes against publicly-stated border patrol policy.) They approached Peraza and began to speak with him. Peraza handed the agents his wallet. The agents then asked Peraza to place his hands on their vehicle and they searched him.

Kerry Doyle, one of the directors of Annunciation House, approached the agents and asked them what they were doing. At this time, with the agents distracted, Peraza ran. It is important to remember that Peraza had been searched and therefore the agents knew that he was not armed.

One of the agents gave chase on foot, while the other apparently called for backup, as three or four other marked border patrol vehicles arrived on the scene in less than a minute.

Peraza was running down San Antonio Street when border patrol agents blocked him. Witnesses have said that there were six to eight agents in a semi-circle, weapons drawn, with Peraza approximately in the middle of the street.

Witnesses report that Peraza did have a pipe in his hand, but that at no time did he do anything to threaten the agents. He reportedly yelled at the agents, while backing up. At this time another border patrol vehicle arrived on the scene. One agent came out of the car, gun drawn and fired and struck Peraza twice, once in the arm and once in the abdomen. Peraza died within minutes.

That afternoon, before any investigation, the chief of the border patrol's El Paso Sector said that the shooting was justified and that the agent fired in self-defense. The

border patrol claimed that Peraza had thrown a ladder at the agents and that he was warned repeatedly to put down the pipe before he was shot. Not a single witness has reported seeing a ladder. All concur that Peraza never made any threatening gesture nor did he pose a threat.

There is concern now for the protection of witnesses who have talked to police (at least 15 to date), many of whom are having their immigration status questioned by the Border Patrol. One witness was actually picked up by the border patrol and taken into the INS Detention Center, but a lawyer arrived in time to stop the deportation of the woman and her children.

Witnesses who are still guests at Annunciation House have received grand jury subpoenas and some have already testified. These persons required transportation in the diplomatic vehicles of the Mexican consulate to assure their safety. The Mexican consulate reports that their embassy in Washington, D.C. is already investigating this case.

Border patrol harassment of Annunciation House continues. During the weekend of March 1-2, a border patrol helicopter circled low over the house for 30 minutes each day. Unmarked vehicles with darkened windows have been seen parked in the vicinity.

Faith in action:

Send a letter to Luis Barker, Chief of the El Paso Sector of the Border Patrol, 8935 Montana, El Paso, TX 79925, calling for an end to the intimidation of witnesses by the border patrol, and for an open and transparent investigation of the death of Juan Patricio Peraza Quijada.

For more information, contact the Religious Task Force on Central America & Mexico about its U.S./Mexico Border Outreach project, 3053 Fourth St. N.E., Washington, D.C., 20017; tel: (202)529-0441; jdietz@rtfcam.org. The Maryknoll Border Team provides short-term exposure trips (5-7 days) in El Paso, TX/Ciudad Juarez. For more information, contact mklborder@aol.com or visit www.maryknoll.org/MARYKNOLL/MMAF/mf_border.htm.

Nepal: Rebels, government announce truce

The Nepali government and Maoist rebels have announced a ceasefire, bringing hope for an end to the seven-year insurgency that has claimed more than 7,000 lives.

The rebels have been calling for an interim government, a multi-party political system and a new constitution that would preserve the constitutional monarchy.

Before the ceasefire was announced January 29, the rebels were reportedly active in 72 of Nepal's 75 administrative districts. However, they did not yet threaten the survival of the government, which controlled the major towns and cities.

The announcement came three days after the assassination in Kathmandu of the chief of Nepal's anti-rebel police wing. Many viewed the killing, in broad daylight, as an effort by the rebels to strengthen their hand before sitting down to negotiations.

The chairman of the underground Maoist communist party, Prachanda, said that his negotiating team would be led by senior Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai. The government has nominated Narayan Singh Pun, a senior cabinet minister, to head its team.

While the two sides have been in contact, no date or venue for formal talks had been set by mid-February.

Prachanda, meanwhile, said that to boost confidence in the peace process, the government should release jailed Maoist activists, provide information about those who have allegedly disappeared in police custody, call the army back to its barracks and work to frame a mutually acceptable code of conduct for the dialogue.

Prachanda, whose real name is Pushpa Kamal Dahal, said the Maoists were serious about the peace process, but he added, "If there are any indications of deception or conspiracy against us, we would break off the ceasefire and resume decisive war at any point."

Pun told the BBC that progress was being made, but slowly. "At the moment we're not talking as adversaries. We have managed to create a very friendly environment and friendly atmosphere," he said.

Nepal has limited strategic value to the United States and other foreign powers beyond the region. However, the U.S. State Department had expressed fear that Nepal

could become a failed state hospitable to terrorism.

"We don't want to see a vacuum or chaos in Nepal that mischief-makers could come and sit in," said one envoy. "This is a country where a little money goes a long way." To help forestall that possibility, the U.S. has pledged \$38 million in development aid and \$17 million in military training and equipment.

Democracy was restored in Nepal in 1990 after 30 years of absolute monarchy. Prachanda and other rebel leaders, who once were part of the political mainstream, launched their insurgency in 1996 after concluding that the country's brief experiment in democracy had failed.

Poverty, unemployment, low levels of education, caste discrimination and a poorly maintained infrastructure initially helped to attract thousands of Nepalis to the Maoists. Support for the insurgents was found mainly in rural villages and poor areas. More recently, however, the Maoists turned brutal, assassinating and sometimes mutilating perceived enemies.

As the violence escalated, Nepali villagers were often caught in the middle. The Maoists killed many innocent civilians and teachers whom they suspected were government informers, and army forces harassed innocent villagers in their hunt for Maoist sympathizers.

During the last peace talks in 2001, rebel negotiators and government ministers met three times. The rebels eventually withdrew after accusing the government of not listening to them and being too rigid in the negotiations.

Comrade Prabhat, a student leader in Jumla District, 250 kilometers west of Kathmandu, said the Maoists had been fighting because of the poverty all round. More than a year after the breakdown in previous negotiations, however, "It was time for peace talks," he added.

"We think that we can bring the changes we want through negotiation, a new constitution, an interim government, a round-table conference of political and intellectual forces," Prabhat said. "We may no longer be demanding a republic, but we want a proper democracy now to help the people."

North Korea: War by any other name?

Imagine this scenario: A country's leaders demand international acceptance, integration into the world's economy and the removal of foreign troops from the area. The description might equally fit Palestine, Iraq ... or North Korea.

The U.S. is pursuing multilateral efforts to pressure North Korea into suspending its nuclear weapons program. While the U.S. has repeatedly said it would not invade North Korea, Pyongyang urged its citizens Feb. 26 to be ready for war, saying that the country could be the U.S.'s next target after Iraq.

The confrontation has been escalating for months. North Korea admitted in October to having a secret nuclear weapons program. The U.S. pressured South Korea and Japan into cutting off supplies of heavy fuel oil to run electricity generators in December, just as the winter set in. North Korea responded by expelling UN weapons monitors, pulling out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and threatening to withdraw from the 1953 armistice that ended the Korean War.

The U.S. also made a threat -- subsequently withdrawn -- to suspend food shipments to North Korea, suspecting that the food was being diverted to the military. Food assistance has reportedly been feeding more than a quarter of North Korea's 22 million people.

Meanwhile, Pyongyang announced on Feb. 5 that it had restarted its plutonium-producing nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, 55 miles north of the capital. North Korea said it badly needed electricity from the plant, which had been shut since 1994.

However, U.S. experts say the five-megawatt plant is too small to generate meaningful amounts of electricity. They fear the plant will be used instead to produce weapons-grade plutonium. It is estimated that the plant could produce enough fuel in a year for a bomb the size dropped on Hiroshima.

Of more immediate concern would be the re-processing of 8,000 fuel rods extracted from the reactor and stored at the site since it was closed. The fuel rods are believed to contain enough plutonium for at least five nuclear warheads, the first of which could be ready in a month or so. U.S. officials say the necessary re-processing plant is still inactive.

To put further pressure on North Korea, the U.S. has considered seeking economic sanctions through the UN

Security Council. The U.S.'s ally South Korea, however, strongly opposes the idea.

Sanctions would achieve little against a country with a bankrupt economy and widespread famine, but they could dangerously raise tensions. North Korea has asserted that it would consider economic sanctions an act of war.

Pyongyang maintains 70 percent of its million-strong army within 100 miles of the Demilitarized Zone. Seoul itself is within range of North Korean artillery units. South Korean defenses include an army of 621,000 and the support of 37,000 U.S. troops.

The *Washington Post* reported that in May 1994, during the last stand-off with the North, the commander of U.S. forces in Korea told President Clinton that full-scale war would cost "52,000 U.S. soldiers dead or wounded in the first 90 days" and a million casualties overall.

The U.S. has given North Korea ample cause for worry. President Bush labeled the regime as part of an "axis of evil" in his 2002 State of the Union address, and he staked out a hard line in his National Security Strategy last September. That document declared the U.S. would never permit its military supremacy to be challenged, and it claimed the right to act preemptively -- alone if necessary.

Not surprisingly, North Korea is pressing for a non-aggression pact with the U.S. and would like to see U.S. troops withdrawn from the peninsula. South Korea's new president, Roh Moo-hyun, also called at one point for the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

The U.S.' position toward North Korea is clearly at variance with South Korea's "sunshine policy" of reconciliation with the North (see *NewsNotes* July/August, September/October, and November/December 2000). What has also become increasingly clear -- and increasingly difficult to defend -- is the U.S.'s double standard toward North Korea and Iraq: diplomacy vs. a possible preemptive war.

If North Korea sees Iraq laid waste, it might well decide that it has nothing to lose by proceeding with its nuclear weapons program. If that happens, the odds for another Korean conflict will increase dramatically.

Middle East: D.U. leaves poisonous legacy

Dr. Helen Caldicott, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee, presented a startling thesis six years ago. The Australian-born pediatrician maintains that the United States has conducted two nuclear wars: one against Japan in 1945, and the other in Kuwait and Iraq in 1991.

The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. At issue since 1991 is whether armaments hardened with depleted uranium poisoned soil, water, civilians and combatants on both sides during the Gulf War, causing lingering illnesses and an unknown number of deaths.

Depleted uranium is 1.7 times more dense than lead, enabling a shell to penetrate an armored tank. The shell then bursts into flame, killing most of the personnel inside. The explosion also produces tiny particles of depleted uranium.

Caldicott warns that the substance is a radioactive carcinogen and can cause cancer in the lungs, bones, blood or kidneys. She says particles can enter the body through inhaling, through a wound or through the food chain.

She also cautions that depleted uranium has a half-life of 4.5 billion years, meaning that areas of Iraq and Kuwait that were impacted by the substance will remain radioactive forever.

Caldicott is founder of Physicians for Social Responsibility, an organization of 23,000 doctors committed to educating their colleagues about the medical dangers of nuclear weapons and nuclear war.

After the 1991 conflict some 300 to 800 tons of depleted uranium in anti-tank shells and other munitions were left behind on Gulf War battlefields.

Iraqi Education Minister Fahad Salim al-Shaqra attributes serious health problems in his country to depleted uranium weapons. He told a health conference in Baghdad that cancer among children nearly tripled from 1990 to 1999, and congenital deformities in the southern Iraqi city of Basra increased four-fold in the same period.

Luay Qusha, chief doctor at Baghdad's Al Mansour pediatric hospital, likewise attributes a high rate of cancer, premature births and birth defects to exposure of parents to radioactive materials left over from the Gulf War. Health Ministry statistics indicate that abnormal births have increased 400-fold since 1991, according to *The Economist*.

The U.S. State Department, however, contends that depleted uranium poses no serious health risks.

The government stated last October that "Iraqi military use of chemical and nerve agents in the 1980s and 1990s is the likely cause of alleged birth defects among Iraqi children," adding that "[s]ince 1991, Iraq has refused to allow health inspectors to assess the alleged impact of depleted uranium."

Nevertheless, a sizeable proportion of Gulf War veterans themselves have won combat-related disability claims from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

More than 60 percent of the nearly 700,000 U.S. troops in the Gulf War were presumably exposed to depleted uranium. By mid-2000 the VA had granted Gulf War veterans a total of 192,000 disability claims on grounds including conditions allegedly related to exposure to depleted uranium.

In 2001 the U.S. government was reportedly funding nearly 200 studies of the so-called Gulf War Syndrome and its myriad symptoms at a cost of \$175 million. Suspected agents include the nerve gas sarin as well as depleted uranium.

In addition, the United Nations Environment Programme has been studying possible negative effects of depleted uranium weapons used in the 1994-95 conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A final report was expected in March.

While the studies continue, many believe with Caldicott that depleted uranium insidiously -- and indiscriminately -- affects civilians and one's own military forces as well as enemy soldiers.

Gulf War veterans say the attention is overdue. "They knew all along there were chemicals released in the theater of operations, but they didn't want to tarnish the victory," says former Pfc. Todd Kelly, 36, who received a 60 percent disability rating from the VA. "They should be honest about it."

Middle East: Can a wall promote dialogue?

At a time when European nations are reducing trade and currency barriers to form a closer union, the idea of constructing a barrier to separate Israel from the West Bank seems as outdated as the Berlin Wall.

The 96-mile-long Berlin Wall, built in 1961 to separate the Soviet sector from the Western sectors of that city, was dismantled 29 years later, though it took longer to bring the opposing political and economic ideologies of East Germany and West Germany together.

The wall that Israel is building in the West Bank will be three times as long as the Berlin Wall. Preparations began last June at Salem, a village west of Jenin in the northern West Bank.

The Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) reports that this section of the wall will stretch 72 miles, reaching Tulkarm and forming a loop around the city of Qalqilya, which lies just eight miles from Tel Aviv.

Israel has already encircled Qalqilya with a wall ten feet high and has confiscated most of the surrounding arable land. There is only one way out, and residents must apply to the Israeli military for permits to leave.

Poet Robert Frost wrote that he wasn't convinced of the philosophy that "good fences make good neighbors." In his poem "Mending Wall," Frost reasoned, "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know what I was walling in or walling out, and to whom I was like to give offence."

With respect to the Israeli wall, Qalqilya sits atop the largest aquifer in the West Bank, which makes its farmland among the most fertile in the territory. The aquifer has an estimated capacity of 13 billion cubic feet per year, of which Palestinians are allowed access to just 776 million.

By contrast, eight wells owned by Mekorot, Israel's national water company, draw an estimated 77,600 cubic feet of water *per hour* from the aquifer, Qalqilya resident Khaled Shanti estimates. The Palestinian Hydrology Group calculates that Israel consumes 75 percent of the renewable water resources found in the West Bank and Gaza.

The wall commonly encroaches on the occupied territories, at some points reaching as far as three miles east of the Green Line, Israel's boundary until the 1967 war. A

"matrix of control" including the wall and a system of roads, checkpoints and settlements strengthens Israel's hold on the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

Israeli control of the occupied territories, and co-option of their natural resources, can only frustrate the desire for peace and security, however. Palestinians will continue to resist such policies, which some believe contravene the Fourth Geneva Convention and its standards for the treatment of people under occupation.



Looking to Europe for a possible model, visionaries such as the Anglican cleric Naim Ateek have proposed a union of Middle Eastern states, with Jerusalem as its capital. Ateek, a Palestinian theologian, is the founder and president of the Jerusalem-based Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center.

However, even the European common market required decades to come to fruition after Jean Monet articulated his vision following World War II.

The U.S. Congress, meanwhile, has compromised the United States' role as an impartial peace broker by describing Jerusalem as Israel's "undivided and eternal capital." That language was included in the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 2003, which President Bush signed in September. However, the president said the U.S. still views the final status of Jerusalem as an issue to be resolved by the Israelis and Palestinians, and he said he considers the language pertaining to Jerusalem as advisory, not mandatory.

Given the current conflict, it's just possible that a wall separating two neighbors as they discuss their differences could eventually help them to become better neighbors. Like the East and West Germans, however, it is the Israelis and Palestinians themselves who will have to tear down the walls -- physical and philosophical -- that divide them.

An ancient philosopher seemed to understand the process as early as the third century B.C. He wrote that there is both "a time for building" and "a time for knocking down" (Qoheleth 3:3).

Iraq: Does Bush hold a "smoking gun"?

Despite holes in the U.S. case for war against Iraq, there might be a "smoking gun," after all - if you accept the premise of "Minority Report," the Tom Cruise thriller in which police use psychics to help arrest and imprison would-be murderers before they have a chance to kill. But in the present real-life scenario, the gun is in the hand of President George Bush.

The first phase of a U.S. war on Iraq could claim between 48,000 and 260,000 lives, according to International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. The IPPNW, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, estimates that post-war health effects could take another 200,000 lives. (See <http://www.ippnw.org/CollateralDamage.html>.)

UN agencies foresee a humanitarian crisis in a country already reeling from more than 11 years of economic sanctions. Emergency medical care might be needed for 100,000 Iraqis, shelter for 100,000 refugees and food for more than five million persons. (See <http://www.casi.org.uk/pr030107undoc.html> and Jan./Feb. *NewsNotes*.)

With coalition partners until recently comprising only the United Kingdom and Bulgaria, the United States could find itself with few friends to help fight a war. In addition, the U.S. would probably have to foot the bill, variously estimated at between \$200 billion and \$2 trillion.

Even as the U.S. government argues that invading Iraq could be necessary to augment its war on terrorism, the United States clearly remains vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Citizens face the incongruity of being asked to accept a planned \$200 billion missile shield while being advised to stock food and water and to keep plastic and duct tape on hand to seal their homes against a possible terrorist attack with chemical, biological or radiological weapons.

In a recently televised interview with Bill Moyers, historian Howard Zinn questioned the effectiveness of using massive force in the war against terrorism. The World War II pilot asked, "Are terrorists going to be deterred, are terrorists going to be scared if we react violently? No. They love it. ... They dote on having more reasons to commit more terrorism."

Even as the administration advances the argument for war against Iraq, it has made no call to reintroduce a military draft, no doubt recalling the anti-war demonstrations on

college campuses that led up to the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.

As for today's students, a Harvard University poll of 1,200 undergraduates nationwide found that 69 percent favored military action against Saddam Hussein, but 67 percent said they opposed reviving the draft.

When you're bombing, you bomb from 30,000 feet. And six miles up, you don't see any people. You don't hear screams. You don't see blood. You don't see limbs being torn from people. You just see a target. ... This is why huge numbers of people can be killed and they don't register as human beings to you.

Historian Howard Zinn, World War II pilot

Former UN arms inspector Scott Ritter has tossed out a challenge. Noting that the average age of a lance corporal is 20, the ex-Marine told University of Maryland students, "Don't blame Congress or Bush. You are the government. They just represent you. What they are doing is happening in your name."

Zinn offers an alternative vision. "What I'm suggesting is change our posture ... from a military superpower to a humanitarian superpower. We are enormously wealthy. Let's use that wealth to send medicine to Africa. Let's use that wealth to help change social and economic conditions around the world."

Whether President Bush could see himself in such a humanitarian role is doubtful. *Tikkun* magazine relates that the German news publication *Der Spiegel* ran a satirical cover portraying the members of the U.S. national security team as superheroes. President Bush was given a muscular Rambo body.

The U.S. ambassador visited the magazine, not to protest, but to say that "the president was flattered" — whereupon he "ordered 33 poster-size renditions of the cover for the White House. Each policy maker on the cover reportedly wanted a copy."

To read the transcript of Bill Moyers' interview with Howard Zinn, go to www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript_zinn.html. If you do not have access to the internet, contact the Global Concerns office and we'll send you a copy.

African Social Forum: Another Africa is possible

Over 200 African women, men and young people representing social movements, trade unions, peasants' organizations, NGOs and research institutions from 40 countries participated in the Second African Social Forum (ASF) held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from January 5-9, 2003. Below are excerpts from the "Addis Ababa Consensus" drafted at the forum.

"...The Forum observed that past and present economic policies implemented by African governments have failed to improve the lives of ordinary Africans. We concluded that only a dynamic civil society organized in strong and active social movements can and must challenge the neo-liberal political economy of globalization. The consensus was that we need to build a new African state and society, where public institutions and policies will guarantee cultural, economic, political and social rights for all citizens....

"... In that perspective, the African Social Forum commits itself to developing, promoting and popularizing, in a participatory manner, an alternative development paradigm, based on fundamental principles of democracy, human rights, gender equality and social justice. A development process designed and controlled by the African people and based on their historical experiences. That paradigm will therefore be built on the following principles:

- The maximum participation of the African working classes, peasants, women and youth in decision-making processes, at local, national and regional levels in matters that affect their lives.

- The use of African cultures, not only as means of resistance to foreign domination, but also as a tool for building the economic, social and political framework for the Other Africa.

- The rejection of privatization of basic social services in Africa. We demand of our governments that they not relinquish their responsibility of providing basic social services such as water, energy, health and education to the people. To subject these to the demands of profits of the private sector is a violation of the citizens' basic human rights.

- The rejection of Africa's illegitimate external debt. That debt has been

paid many times over. It is used to undermine Africa's self-reliant development and is the main cause for the continent's continued poverty. Therefore, the African Social Forum renews its call for the unconditional cancellation of that debt...

- The rejection of the processes of decision-making and dispute settlement of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the manipulation of our political leadership by the Quad countries [the U.S., Canada, Japan, and the European Union] to impose on Africa forced trade liberalization...

"... The ASF challenges African governments to remove agriculture from the WTO so that Africans are in control of agricultural production and food security..."

"...Africa is weakened by division and internal strife. These arise out of Africa's colonial past, foreign intervention, and the continuing poor African leadership that thrives on tribal and ethnic divisions. The ASF demands of African governments that they resolve differences among African peoples by peaceful and constructive means based on using Africa's indigenous resources and institutions..."

"...Africa is a continent, rich of its natural resources, its cultures and the creativity of its people. It is by relying on this tremendous richness that we will build Another Africa, one that is independent, self-reliant and prosperous. It is this unwavering faith that guides us in our struggle.

"The ASF reaffirms that globalization from below, thought out, owned and implemented by people's organizations, is both necessary and possible."

Addis Ababa, January 9, 2003

Tanzania's non-governmental organizations strongly criticize the pro-market reform policies, implemented in the mid-1980s, saying "[t]he poor, in particular in the rural areas, do not seem to have benefited from a decade and a half of pro-market reforms and enhanced macroeconomic stability." (NGO Policy Forum) This failure has led civil society to dub the 1990s as a "lost decade." Tanzanians are poorer today than they were 15 years ago. Surveys show that 20.4 percent of the rural population cannot even meet food requirements. One child in six in Tanzania today dies before the age of five.

Congolese conflict diamonds

Past issues of NewsNotes have reported on the link between diamonds and human rights abuses especially in Angola, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). These abuses have been at the hands of insurgent groups or unscrupulous governments which have used the trade of conflict diamonds to finance conflict and widespread terror. The following article, based on information provided by Amnesty International, updates the situation in the DRC, and suggests actions.

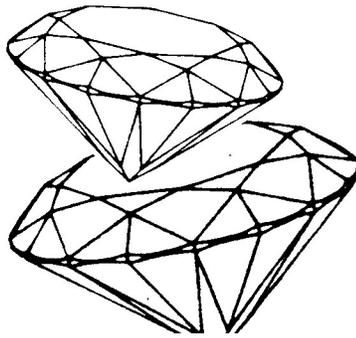
Since 1998 the DRC's war has created an estimated three million casualties either as a direct result of the conflict or because of the conditions created by it. Human rights abuses such as torture and sexual violence, unlawful killings, summary executions, and illegal detentions have been widely reported. Many of these abuses are linked directly to the illegal exploitation of the DRC's natural resources.

Efforts to achieve lasting peace continue with the Inter-Congolese peace talks between the national government and various rebel groups. However, continued waves of violence threaten hopes of ending the conflict in the immediate future. Zimbabwe, Rwanda and Uganda officially recalled their armies from the DRC last year, but numerous reports suggest that a number of troops from these countries remain in the Eastern Congo in civilian clothing, maintaining their control over key natural resources. A reported \$10 billion in resources have been extracted in the past four years. The looting that now continues creates an impetus to prolong the region's destabilization.

While the DRC's natural resources are looted with impunity, there is little incentive for peace. A global diamond certification scheme is the first step in implementing control over at least one of the DRC's natural resources. UN reporting and monitoring by a panel of experts is another step, but unless these steps are followed up with effective action, the international community will be turning a blind eye to the massive theft and looting of the DRC's natural resources, and thus rejecting the possibility of peace.

A global diamond certification system known as the Kimberly Process (KP) was to have come into force on January 1, 2003. So far it has been delayed and the U.S. has not yet made the deadline. The KP contains some critical weaknesses, including the absence of monitoring mechanisms, the narrow definition of conflict diamonds and the

exclusion polished stones and jewelry. Up until now, the diamond industry has failed to present a credible "chain of warranties" system, to document the trail of a diamond from where it is mined to where it is exported, through its cutting and polishing, until it is sold.



Millions of Africans risk the victimization made possible through the mining and trade of conflict diamonds as long as there is no strong, effective U.S. conflict diamond legislation. Without effective legislation, the United States will also fail to close off critical revenues to terrorist and other groups committing serious human rights abuses.

Amnesty International recommends that you contact your senators and representative; remind them of the human cost of the trade in conflict diamonds. Urge them to support strong, effective conflict diamonds legislation that includes:

- A broad definition of conflict diamonds
- Provisions for independent monitoring of the Kimberley Process and the industry's "chain of warranties"
- Provisions to cover polished stones and jewelry and,
- Provisions for the collections of accurate credible statistics on the diamond trade.

Faith in action:

Organize a postcard-writing campaign in your community. Call or write the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns to get free postcards to send to your senators urging them to support effective legislation to eliminate conflict diamonds.

Amnesty International USA launched a Valentine's Day campaign on conflict diamonds. Information and action suggestions can be found at: http://www.amnestyusa.org/diamonds/valentines_day.html

Kenya: New beginnings, signs of hope

An African proverb states, "The ordinary person talks, the one with wisdom acts." People in Kenya are doing more than talking. There has been a flurry of activity after the fair and peaceful elections of December 27, 2002, in which President Mwai Kibaki and the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) candidates for Parliament received 60 percent of the votes. A Maryknoll priest doing pastoral work with the sick and poor in the slums of Nairobi, including burying the dead, wrote immediately after the elections he was doubtful that things would change much. Another letter a month later expresses his amazement that the roads are being repaired and, for the first time, there was no hint of a bribe to get a body out of the mortuary.

The pledge of free primary education for all brought out an estimated 1.5 million children, previously out-of-school, on the first day of the school year in early January, demanding a place in the already over-crowded classrooms. Some had to be told to come back later, when new classrooms and teachers would be found. Resources are being sought and there is some response; for example, the World Bank has promised to give \$40-\$50 million for educational materials. There are pledges to help fund the proposed free health care in public hospitals and to support various health programs. Health Minister Charity Ngilu emphasized, "No real development can occur unless the well-being of Kenyans improves."

There are other hopeful signs. Street children and street families are being moved to institutions to assist them with basic necessities. Public Works Minister Raila Odinga has revoked all transactions involving the sale of government houses, which were carried out preceding the elections and sold for as little as 10 percent of their actual value. Land transactions have halted and the minister for Lands and Settlements, Amos Kimunya, has embarked on repossessioning irregularly allocated public lands. President Kibaki and others have spoken on how they will end corruption.

Torture victims, including new Cabinet ministers, visited the torture chambers in Nyayo House, Nairobi. Some broke down in tears, but they also broke into impromptu songs and loud chanting as they relived their ordeal almost too terrible to describe. Justice Minister Murungi promised that the cells will be turned into a "national monument of shame." The Nyayo House dungeons are symbolic of the question being raised by many Kenyans of how to handle past major crimes. Some of the victims of violence are speaking of forgiveness and reconciliation. Others insist that those responsible for the killings and tortures account for what they did and some justice be given to the victims. Then forgiveness and reconciliation can follow, and Kenya will be able to close the chapter of its dark history and proceed into the future. Certainly the massive economic crimes are equally important and cannot

be swept under the carpet, whether they relate to Goldenberg, the Kenya National Assurance, the Trade Bank and Exchange Bank, and the many other thefts chronicled by previously government bodies.

Whatever the credentials of human right lawyers and civil society activists in the new government, Kenya needs strong institutions, the primary one being a new constitution. The existing colonial structures must be changed radically, so that government leaders are accountable to the people and the poor and marginated have a voice in the discussions and decisions about development.

Despite the strong support for President Kibaki and NARC from most parts of the country, unity is a very fragile commodity in Kenya, given former President Jomo Kenyatta's inability to pull the country together and the harsh policies of divide and rule of Daniel arap Moi, his successor. The present leadership must continue to seek creative ways to unite the country. The on-going violence and massive unemployment are separate but inter-related challenges. There are groups of thugs who openly kill and rob, as well as many frustrated youth without any hope for a decent job who turn to violence with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons available. The new government promises the creation of new jobs, but formal employment will only take care of a small percentage of those presently unemployed and the big numbers entering the job market yearly. The rural population, especially the women who grow most of the food, needs special attention after the collapse of much of the agriculture infrastructure.

There was such initial good will and euphoria after the December 27 elections that some talked about a new independence. The activities and pronouncements of President Kibaki and his Cabinet indicate that a new beginning is in process. An active and informed civil society will be crucial to help craft new structures and programs, to encourage wisdom in the present leadership, and to make sure that proposed actions are implemented fairly, justly and inclusively.

Coffee: Nestle settles dispute with Ethiopia

According to the Washington Post, an estimated 11 million Ethiopians face the threat of famine this year. Just before Christmas 2002, while levels of drought and widespread hunger were on the rise, the Nestle Corporation was demanding a payment of \$6 million from the Ethiopian government. After consumer pressure through an Oxfam-sponsored campaign, Nestle dramatically reduced its claim to \$1.5 million and agreed to donate the money for famine relief.

In December 2002 Nestle demanded the Ethiopian government pay compensation for the Ethiopian Livestock Development Company (Elidco), an Ethiopian company nationalized in 1975 by the then military government. Four years ago, the government of Ethiopia sold Elidco to a local firm for \$8.7 million. A German company, Schweisfurth Group, held a majority share in Elidco. Since Nestle bought Schweisfurth in 1986, Nestle demanded that the Ethiopian company account for the shares of the German company it had purchased.

It is difficult now to verify the exact size of Schweisfurth's share in Elidco, but the Ethiopian government offered to pay \$1.5 million, which was a bit more than half the value of the company (including interest) at the time it was nationalized. Just before Christmas 2002, Nestle insisted that the payment be converted to the 1975 exchange rates, which added another \$4.5 million to the claim.

Oxfam launched its coffee campaign in mid-September, 2002 (November/December 2002 *NewsNotes*). One of its first actions was to hold a conference on the international coffee crisis in Addis Ababa. At the conference, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi denounced unfair trade practices remarking that Ethiopian farmers receive only one percent of what the consumer pays for coffee beans: "There cannot be a more damning indictment of the global trading environment than this."

Since Ethiopia is so heavily impacted by the coffee crisis, Oxfam followed the actions of the coffee giant Nestle with great interest and sprang into action. Action

alerts encouraged activists all over the world to write to Nestle and remind them that it was Christmas and that Ethiopia faced an impending famine. After hundreds of letters and some embarrassing stories in the press, Nestle dropped its claim, accepted the \$1.5 million offered and donated it back to Ethiopia for hunger relief.

Faith in action:

Follow Oxfam's campaign to make corporate coffee giants accountable. Oxfam is advocating for a Coffee Rescue Plan "to bring supply back in line with demand and to support rural development, so that farmers can earn a decent living from coffee." The plan is described in the Nov/Dec 2002 issue of *NewsNotes*. For details on sending emails to the coffee giants (Kraft, Nestlé, Sara Lee, and Procter & Gamble) see: www.maketrade-fair.com/stylesheet.asp?file=23012003183640.

Global Exchange is organizing a nationwide speaking tour for Tadesse Meskela, manager of the Oromia Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Union (OCFCU) in Ethiopia from April 7-22, 2003. Hoping to stop the farmers' great monetary losses to middlemen and exporters, Mr. Meskela worked with farmers, management and the Ethiopian government cooperative bureau to form a strong union. Several OCFCU cooperatives recently became Fair Trade certified. These co-op members use their Fair Trade premiums to help fund education, health and credit programs in their communities. To find out more, contact Valerie Orth, 415-558-6938, valerie@globalexchange.org

African women and the widow's mite

This International Women's Day (March 8) we celebrate African women, who, faced with incredible challenges, continue to give all they have to sustain life and proclaim hope. They are not unlike the widow of Luke's gospel who Jesus watched as she put her two copper coins into the coffer, after a parade of wealthy people had brought their offerings. Jesus said of her, "...[T]his poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had" (Luke 21:1-4). Although their contributions are often overlooked, African women are truly the backbone of African society.

Worldwide, Catholic bishops oppose Iraq war

During this time of crisis over military action in Iraq, Pope John Paul II has maintained a strong platform for peace. The clear words from the Vatican, reminding us that war is always a failure for humanity, have been joined by the voices of Catholic bishops around the world. Below are excerpts from just a few of the statements from different areas of the world where Catholic bishops have taken a public stand against military action in Iraq.

Japan

“... We, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan, openly declare that our fundamental position is opposition to all war ... Even if the United Nations should declare such a war to be legitimate self-defense, we oppose such a war.

“... In addition, we call upon the government of Iraq to abolish weapons of mass-destruction, to cease development of such weapons and to immediately and clearly prove to the world that it has done so.

“Moreover, we strongly urge other states to do what we have asked Iraq to do, to completely destroy any and all nuclear and other weapons of mass-destruction they have in their possession.

“Our world is facing crucial choices about war and peace, justice and security. Hatred breeds hatred, violence provokes violence; no peace is possible when violence is answered with violence. ... We must grope for a policy ... that will avoid the danger of war and seek peaceful solutions through a diplomacy of dialog and cooperation.

“And, should not Japan, which by its Constitution cherishes the idea of peace, have courage to energetically promote pathways of peace for international society? ...”

Southern Africa

“... All peaceful means of dialogue, negotiation, diplomatic pressure and appropriate political initiatives must be pursued under the leadership of the United Nations to bring about an effective but just response to the threat posed by the Iraqi regime.

“... An invasion of Iraq will worsen the plight of the people already sorely tried by more than twelve years of embargo, it will increase the risk of provoking a wider conflict, it will create a dangerous religious polarization between Christians and Muslims and more than likely it will fuel a new spate of terrorism around the world.

“... The fight against terrorism cannot be achieved through a war that will inevitably kill hundreds of thousands

of innocent people, and terrorize millions more. We strongly believe that one of the main causes for terrorism is the disregard for justified claims of peoples who feel socially, economically and politically excluded, exploited and oppressed. The great majority of peace loving people around the world want the problems of this world to be resolved through peaceful means, not through war. They expect the USA and the West to take the lead in this regard.”

Jerusalem, Baghdad and Sarajevo

“Our voice is weak, yet we wish to continue to be the voice of our people who suffered and continue to suffer war, oppression and injustice, and who live on our land and who tragically became a symbol of suffering, not only in past years, but at present as well.

“Our cities are not all holy cities such as Jerusalem, and even less so, Catholic cities, but they certainly are cities of martyrs.

“... There exists no violence, no terrorism and no war that would not entail further violence, hatred, destruction, suffering and death.

“... If war is destruction and death, inevitably the consequences are no less tragic: divisions, hatred and swelling numbers of refugees. To the entire world, they are those millions of refugees from Bosnia and from all former Yugoslavia; the unbearable living conditions of Palestinians, refugees in their own land or in foreign lands. In case of war, how many more Iraqi refugees would have to be added to those who sought a new hope for life by relinquishing this land which is bleeding from both the war and the embargo imposed on it many years back?

“... We know that in every corner of the world prayer assemblies and expressions of civilian peaceful resistance to invoke peace are multiplying. This is reason for much hope, hope in God who always lends an ear to the prayers of the meek, the weak and defenseless.

“Do not leave us alone because the world today needs to build up this hope.”

U.S. comes up short on aid for reconstruction

President Bush has signed a \$3.3 billion bill to help in the reconstruction of Afghanistan over the next four years. However, the aid program and the president's plan for rebuilding Iraq in the event of a war there also raises the question of the U.S.'s responsibility to other countries rent by violence in which the U.S. was involved.

Funds for Afghanistan include \$1.7 billion for job creation, landmine clearance, and improvement of agricultural, health care and educational sectors; \$1 billion to assist the international security force in Kabul, and \$300 million to help build a national army and a professional police force.

Afghanistan's minister of foreign affairs, A. Abdullah, complained last fall that his country had received just \$5 billion in pledges toward reconstruction until 2006, only half the amount recommended by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Abdullah also noted that donors' pledges amounted to just \$75 per capita for last year, compared with pledges of \$250 per capita per year in aid to post-war Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor.

Abdullah also noted that most of the aid in 2002 was for humanitarian assistance and said that Afghans should not be forced to choose between reconstruction and emergency relief aid.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's withdrawal in December of a \$50 million pledge toward rebuilding Afghanistan's main highway might indicate a split among the U.S.'s allies toward reconstruction in Afghanistan. The Saudis instead offered a \$30 million loan, which Afghanistan rejected. Afghan President Hamid Karzai had said rebuilding the highway was his top priority.

The World Bank reported that the aid situation in Afghanistan had improved by year's end, when some \$650 million had been channeled through UN agencies for small-scale recovery efforts. However, some larger reconstruction efforts such as power projects were delayed because of the need for detailed feasibility studies.

The \$3.3 billion Afghanistan Freedom Support Act of 2002 (S. 2712) declares as a matter of policy that the U.S. should "support efforts that advance the development of democratic civil authorities and institutions in Afghanistan..."

Although the United States reveres its own institutions, however, does the U.S. have the right to dictate a form of government to another people? The U.S. acknowl-

edges people's right to self-determination. Perhaps the U.S. would do better to facilitate wider access to education in other countries in order to empower local citizens to chart their own future.

The focus on rebuilding Afghanistan (and a "post-war" Iraq) also ignores past U.S. support for tyrannical dictators whose violence against their own people might be classified as crimes against humanity. Suharto in Indonesia, Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines and Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua, among others, come to mind.

U.S. foreign aid to Nicaragua increased from \$1 million per year to more than \$17 million per year between 1967 and 1979, including upwards of \$2 million annually in military aid. Somoza meanwhile amassed a personal fortune estimated at \$400 million. He was overthrown in 1979, but not before the country's 18-year civil war had claimed 50,000 lives. Despite U.S. aid, Nicaragua today ranks with Haiti as the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere.

Neighboring El Salvador received more than \$1 billion in U.S. military aid during a 12-year civil war in which 82,000 persons, mostly civilians, were killed or disappeared.

In Guatemala some 200,000 died and 50,000 disappeared, mostly Mayans, in 36 years of fighting. The country received more than \$80 million in U.S. military assistance during that period.

Many of the military officers implicated in human rights violations in Central America were trained at the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, GA. However, few convictions have been obtained since peace accords were signed in El Salvador in 1992 and Guatemala in 1996.

The U.S.'s reluctance at times to demand justice for oppressed peoples begs the question of U.S. aims. Does the United States set its highest priority on securing human rights for all, or does the country set greater importance on supporting acquiescent regimes in areas deemed critical to U.S. interests?

AIDS: The Lazarus effect

In his January 28 State of the Union address, President Bush announced a new initiative on AIDS which would increase U.S. funding for treatment, care and prevention to \$15 billion over the next five years. While the massive scale-up was welcomed by most AIDS activists, several questions remain.

President Bush spoke of accessible treatment as creating a "Lazarus effect," saying "When one patient is rescued by medicine, as if back from the dead, many others with AIDS seek testing and treatment, because it is the first sign of hope they have ever seen." While Bush was referring to the Lazarus who was raised from the dead in the Gospel of John, questions raised by AIDS advocates evoke the image of the other Lazarus, described in Luke's a parable, "who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table (Luke 19:21)."

According to the White House, \$15 billion triples the current U.S. commitment to fight AIDS internationally. Of this amount, \$10 billion would be new funds, beginning with \$2 billion in fiscal year 2004 and increasing thereafter. The proposal for the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria is \$1 billion.

In the past, the administration showed interest only in prevention programs, but the new plan devotes half of the proposed money to AIDS drugs (providing antiretroviral drugs for two million HIV-infected people, and care for 10 million HIV-infected individuals and AIDS orphans). Fifteen percent would pay for a range of support services to HIV-infected individuals and 10 million AIDS orphans. About one-third of the money would be dedicated to prevention programs. Twelve African countries, Botswana, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, and two Caribbean nations, Haiti and Guyana, are to benefit.

In his State of the Union address, when the president referred to the cost of HIV/AIDS medications dropping to as low as \$300 per person, per year, he was quoting generic prices, signaling a direct recognition of the important role that generic competition plays in lowering drug prices. Still, advocates for greater access to affordable medicines struggle to understand just what the administration has in mind since up until now, the U.S. position in global trade talks has been to discourage generic competition.

In December 2002, the U.S. stood alone in blocking an agreement on an unresolved issue involving patents and public health at the World Trade Organization (see

NewsNotes January/February 2003, p. 24). That same month, the Bush administration promised it would permit countries to override patents on drugs produced outside those countries to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases, yet since a dispute remains over what other drugs should be included, the exemption agreement is still a promise, not a reality.

Most public health advocates agree that the president's proposal is a far cry from the initial \$200 million U.S. contribution to the Global Fund, and the most a U.S. administration has proposed for AIDS funding ever. Still, many remain skeptical. Big announcements made in the past have turned out to be only a reshuffling of money designated for other programs. If such an announcement is unfulfilled it could leave millions of people living with AIDS tormented, just like Lazarus who, full of sores, lay in clear view the rich man.

We know from Luke's parable of Lazarus and the rich man, that when Lazarus died he was carried away by the angels to be comforted by Abraham while the rich man was tormented in Hades. When the rich man found out that there would be no way to relieve his own suffering, he begged Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers as a warning. But Abraham said, "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead." If this new AIDS plan turns out to be just another crumb thrown out in a world wracked with suffering, the "Lazarus Effect" triggered could be one the White House did not anticipate.

As details of the plan are revealed and the Congress crafts legislation to authorize the president's proposal, the Africa advocacy community will be looking closely to see that it includes: 1) an immediate contribution of \$3.5 billion for 2004 (advocates agree that the U.S. should make up for low contributions past years); 2) a U.S. contribution (\$1.75 billion) to the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, a proven, effective multilateral approach the crisis; 3) a clear U.S. position on generic drug competition and compulsory licensing; 4) a plan to further debt cancellation beyond the Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative (HIPC).

International Year of Freshwater: Right to water

Recognizing the importance of water resources to the planet's future, the UN General Assembly declared 2003 as the International Year of Freshwater. The purpose of the Year is to raise awareness, promote good practice, motivate people and mobilize resources in order to meet basic human needs and manage water in a sustainable way.

“Water is the center of the global debate. Freshwater is the interface between energy, health, food security and biodiversity,” says Koichiro Matsuura, director of UNESCO, which is coordinating the International Year of Freshwater.

The Year could be an opportune moment to deal with the issues of access to clean water, the “control” of water resources, and the reality that water belongs to Earth and all its species.

The 2002 UN Human Development Report estimated that 1.1 billion people lack access to safe drinking water, and twice that number do not have adequate sanitation. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, one of the few targets governments set was “to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water and the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation.”

Half the world's poorest countries will face moderate to severe water shortages by 2025. A new report, *Global Water Outlook to 2025: Averting an Impending Crisis*, by the International Food Policy Institute and the International Water Management Institute, finds that, if current trends in water policy and investment continue or worsen, we will soon face threats to the global food supply and increased environmental damage and health risks for all who lack access to clean water. The report calls for pricing water to reflect its cost and value.

How this is done, and by whom, is critical. Some say that water will be to the 21st century what oil was to the 20th. The “nature of water” is a matter of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

The World Water Council, self-described as an “international water policy think tank dedicated to strengthening the world water movement for an improved management of the world's water resources,” is organizing a World Water Forum in Japan in March. While providing an opportunity for governments, the private sector and civil society to dialogue and propose solutions to the water crisis, the Council's work has been met with caution by some NGOs, who are concerned about the Council's lack of

transparency and accountability.

On November 28, 2002, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which monitors the implementation of the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, declared that access to water is a human right and that water is a social and cultural good, not an economic commodity. It stated that the 145 countries that have ratified the Covenant (the U.S. has signed but not ratified) are now obligated to progressively ensure access to clean water, “equitably and without discrimination.”

“The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, affordable, physically accessible, safe and acceptable water for personal and domestic uses,” states the Committee document. The Committee did not opine on privatization of water services, although human rights experts provided it with examples of increased corruption, poorer water quality and higher prices where privatization has occurred. However, the Committee defined the public nature of water as “a limited resource and a public commodity fundamental to life and health.”

Shirley Varghese, of the NGO Freshwater Caucus of the UN's Commission on Sustainable Development, has urged that in making water available equitably, efficiently, and sustainably, countries need to address: allocation priorities; water use efficiency; demand management; community-based water augmentation (such as rainwater harvesting) and developing systems of incentives and disincentives and regulatory mechanisms. “Many measures are already being tried out in small communities...what is needed is more national commitment, more global institutional support and more emulation of these in other localities.”

UN Undersecretary General Nitin Desai said, “Water connects all the areas of sustainable development.” If the International Year of Freshwater is able to mobilize financial resources and political will around water as a basic human right and a shared heritage to be preserved for future generations, it will have made a difference.

For information, visit www.wateryear2003.org or www.waterobservatory.org

Resources

- 1) **Fair Trade Chocolate speaking tour:** Global Exchange will host a nationwide speaking tour for workers from the Kuapa Kokoo Cocoa Cooperative in Ghana from March 23- April 5. Kuapa Kokoo, meaning "Good Cocoa Farmers Company," is a Ghanaian cocoa co-op that is part of the fair trade system. "Fair trade" guarantees a just minimum price per pound of cocoa, prohibits child slavery and forced labor, and ensures that children have the opportunity to go to school. The speaking tour will feature a member of the Kuapa Kokoo Co-op who will provide a firsthand account of life on cocoa farms and the concrete impacts of local organizing to promote fair trade chocolate and cocoa. To find out more, contact Melissa Schweisguth, 415-575-5538, melissa@globalexchange.org. For more information, go to www.globalexchange.org/education/speakers/MaryAduKumi.html
- 2) **National Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice Conference:** Please join leaders from local religion-labor coalitions and religious denominations to strengthen local efforts and enhance public policy advocacy for workers. **May 18-20, 2003**, Washington, D.C. For more information, contact the National Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice, 1020 W. Bryn Mawr, 4th Floor, Chicago IL, 60660; tel: (773)728-8400; fax: (773)728-8409; www.nicwj.org; sara@nicwj.org
- 3) **New resources from the Jubilee USA Network:** Jubilee USA recently updated its education and action packet. Learn more about the debt crisis, World Bank and IMF policies, the current debt relief plan, advocacy strategies, and more. \$5. Contact Jubilee USA at (202)783-3566, or email coord@j2000usa.org. Also, ask for information about how your church or worship community can become a "Jubilee Congregation." For more information, contact Mara Vanderslice at (202)783-0129 or write mara@j2000usa.org
- 4) **Spiritual Perspectives on Globalization: Making Sense of Economic and Cultural Upheaval:** This book by Ira Rifkin considers the economic and cultural dynamic of globalization and its impact on our spiritual lives through the lens of eight faith systems, including Roman Catholicism, Islam, Judaism, the Baha'i faith, Buddhism, Earth-based and tribal religions, Hinduism, and Protestantism. It is a practical guide and an easy-to-read introduction on this controversial issue. Available from Skylight Paths Publishing, www.skylightpaths.com; Sunset Farm Offices, Route 4, P.O. Box 237, Woodstock VT, 05091; (802)457-4000; fax (802)457-4004. Price: \$16.95.
- 5) **Ten Plagues of Globalization:** Recently published by EPICA, this illustrates in a simple straightforward way ten drawbacks of the neoliberal model of globalization. With such a model in operation people all over the world are experiencing the negative consequences which are outlined in the book as: 1) growth in poverty and inequality; 2) greater concentration of income; 3) explosion of consumption and exclusion; 4) increase in unemployment and growth in the informal sector; 5) loss of labor rights and the double exploitation of women; 6) environmental deterioration; 7) less participation of poor countries in world trade; 8) economic domination of transnational companies; 9) financial crisis; and 10) decrease in international assistance and increase in foreign debt. In less than one hundred pages, *Ten Plagues of Globalization* gives a basic understanding of the negative impacts of the current state of global economy that heavily impact the majority of people in the developing world. Available in English at EPICA, the Ecumenical Program on Central America & the Caribbean; 1470 Irving Street, N.W.; Washington, D.C. 20010; tel: (202)332-0292; fax: 202-332-1184; email: epicabooks@igc.org; www.epica.org.
- 6) **Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader:** Available from Franciscan Press, this book, based on a course developed for the environmental studies major at Quincy University, is for anyone who seeks to understand eco-theology and environmental ethics in light of Franciscan spirituality and theology. This singular collection brings together the reflections on the environmental crisis by distinguished Franciscans from around the globe. The study questions, bibliography, glossary, listing of resources and action organizations, along with the suggestions for journal entries and reflection papers make the book appealing for use by undergraduates, adult study groups and all who identify with the Franciscan family. To order, call (217)228-5670; fax (217)228-5672; www.qufranciscanpress.com/; email: service@franciscanpress.com. Price: \$19.95.