

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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

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Peace *must* be possible

Once again the world has witnessed the devastation of war. We open this issue of *NewsNotes* with three reflections that underscore its tragic consequences. The first includes excerpts from the letters of former Maryknoll lay missionary Cathy Breen, who stayed in Baghdad throughout the war simply to “be with” the Iraqi people. After the U.S. troops entered Baghdad, Cathy wrote:

And so it goes. Anger, fear, relief, weariness, sadness, tears. I find tears coming that I can't stop in these last days. Today I spoke with one of the mothers here in the hotel. There are deep dark circles around her eyes. "We are so tired," she said wearily. "Twenty-five years and we are so tired. This is my country. We want no Saddam, no Bush. We are so tired."

So tired of war ... a world so tired of war...

The word of God and the gift of encounter with sacred, threatened lives around the world make it clear that peace must be possible, there must be another way. If we cannot see it then our lens is too narrow, our vision short sighted - our hope, our claim on life diminished.

I can't express the deep sadness and desperation that afflicts all of us here. Burnt cars, bombed and burning buildings, looting and shooting. A gun can be bought for \$3.00 on the street. Hospitals looted and roads blocked. Ambulances and police cars stolen. Hospitals no longer functional. The sick and dying turned away. There are no longer any statistics to be had. No records of birth, death, health or having studied. Books burned, no school or university. Stores closed, schools closed. Lawlessness and anarchy. No electricity.

The sick and dying turned away ...

A person who works with the Islamic Relief whose offices are in the hotel related having seen five bodies dead on the side of the street today in the city. Someone from our team saw the nurses digging graves for the babies in front of the Children's hospital as they can't get them to the cemetery.

Digging graves for the babies ...

The lens through which these experiences force us to look is very wide - it evokes from us a yearning for peace that goes beyond our national security or even the absence of war and terror. It cannot be accomplished by global control. It is much, much deeper than that - shalom, salaam - an integral well being that embraces all human beings and the rest of creation, drawing us deeper and deeper into the kind of right relationships reflected in the best impulses of every major religious tradition.



Yesterday the Baghdad School of Ballet and Art was looted... The piece of a shattered violin on the pavement greeted us as we approached the school.... In one of the rooms where the musical instruments are stored, Hishaam, a member of the symphony orchestra, picked his way through broken rubble of instruments. "I studied here. I taught here and then directed here. Why? Why?" Overcome with emotion, he couldn't go on. As I approached the entrance where the administration and classrooms were, the figure of a skeleton used in Anatomy class with an instrument case leaning on it was strewn by the front door. Tragically appropriate. Death of a civilization and culture. Here a couple of pianos had been dragged out into the foyer...I heard the sound of someone fingering one of the pianos ..., one that though broken still played! It was Majid, one of the instructors and also symphony orchestra member. I took a broken chair from a nearby room and silently placed it near him. He sat and began to play soulful songs that expressed his own grieving. And he played and he played and he played. On and on and on.

Death of a civilization and a culture ... Will the terrible loss of human life on both sides, the destruction of irreplaceable cultural treasures, the devastation of homes and hospitals and lives, the ecological damage, the psychological and physical injuries have a lasting impact? War is always a defeat for humanity! Can any lessons emerge from the rubble of Baghdad and Basra to help the human community avoid these scenes in the future? Perhaps we need new architects - the mourning mothers and broken musicians may help us find a place to start.

Struggling for peace: Lessons from Africans

The following reflection is written by Maryknoll Fr. Dave Schwinghamer, M.M.

As the events of recent months teach us, the waging of war also mobilizes the passion for peace. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the war-torn areas of sub-Saharan Africa. For the last 55 years Maryknoll missionaries, through extensive contact with ordinary African people, have witnessed both the spread of violent war and the relentless struggle by ordinary people to find a path to peace. Their efforts have taught us a great deal about this elusive human treasure.

Some members of Maryknoll have spent time serving the hordes of war-related refugees in Somalia, Sudan, and Tanzania. Others have ministered to communities in the midst of aerial bombardment in southern and central Sudan. Still others have counseled victims of mass communal violence in Rwanda and comforted the families of soldiers killed in the Uganda/Tanzania war. At the grassroots level in Mozambique and Zimbabwe, Maryknollers have worked with communities involved in the process of post-war reconstruction. At present, our peace advocacy efforts include action on two protracted conflicts: the civil wars in Sudan and Burundi.

In all these situations of conflict we have come to know dedicated African peacemakers – individual men and women who, often at great risk to themselves, carry on the struggle for a lasting peace. We are heartened, therefore, by the recent call by the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letter "A Call to Solidarity with Africa." If U.S. Catholics answer this call, they cannot help but come into contact with Africans who seek our solidarity and have some lessons to share with us on how to make peace.

For the last seven years I have been in contact with refugees from the central African countries of Rwanda and Burundi. I came to know the *wakimbizi* through Maryknoll's response to the refugee crisis evoked by the assassination of the president of Burundi in 1993 and the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Along with several other Maryknollers, I had the opportunity to live and work with the hundreds of thousands of refugees who still scramble to survive in UN administered camps in western Tanzania.

Through contact with these hardy farming people, I have come to learn about the causes of the conflicts that have engulfed their societies and to appreciate the many

solid peacemaking efforts undertaken by church, civil society groups, as well as individuals all over Africa. Here are some lessons about war and peacemaking that I think U.S. American peace advocates might draw upon from the experience of African peacemakers.



First, the place of peace is often found somewhere between vengeance and forgiveness. This place is called reconciliation. The efforts of South Africa to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) were based on the refusal to follow the impulse of retaliation against the crimes committed during the apartheid era. The TRC attempted to establish a restorative rather than a retributive form of justice as one of the basic building blocks of peace. Our post-9/11 United States might learn from this courageous effort to rely in a nonviolent path to dealing with social enemies.

Second, negotiated peace accords do not ensure permanent peace. African peacemakers have learned through the experience of Angola, Sudan, Rwanda, and Burundi that the sense of community and a will to reconcile cannot be imposed through accords but must grow out of a genuine transformation of the causes of conflict. U.S. citizens concerned about peace might try to keep this lesson in front of government leaders who are about to unveil a "roadmap" for peace in the Middle East. (*see page 21.*)

Third, small arms and landmines are the major weapons of mass destruction in Africa. The vast majority of them are imported. The leadership of the Catholic Church in Africa has made an explicit appeal to leadership of churches in the west to do something about this trade. Catholics should present this appeal to Catholic legislators as a pro-life issue.

Fourth, throughout Africa the "force more powerful" is slowly spreading. Peace groups and movements for nonviolent change are active and engaged in many countries. Their existence is sometimes very precarious. Their good efforts may seem small and immature compared to the extensive movement for peace in the U.S. Nevertheless, they not only deserve our solidarity, but through their tireless and often defiant challenge to authoritarian governments, they can teach us that realistic alternatives to violence, even in the most acute circumstance, are possible.

War's embrace

The following reflection on life during war is written by Kathy McNeely, a Maryknoll lay missionary currently on staff with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. In the mid-1980s, before joining Maryknoll, Kathy worked with Witness for Peace in Nicaragua. We invite others to share their reflections on the impact of war in their lives; if you are interested in sharing your stories, please send them to the Maryknoll Global Concerns Office at ogc@maryknoll.org, or use the mailing address found in the inside front cover..

It was April 1986, the hottest, driest time of year in Nicaragua. The *contra* had just attacked a small village and a nearby column of Sandinista soldiers rushed to its defense. Seven civilians were caught in the crossfire, one of them an 11-year-old boy. He was stretched out on a metal table. His forehead was bandaged where the bullet struck and his nose and mouth were stuffed with cotton and gauze. A photographer, Paul, and I escorted the boy's mother to the morgue. She stopped about ten paces from the table and sobbed. I stood at her side. Before I knew it her head was on my shoulder and I could no longer tell the difference between tears and sweat as my t-shirt took on a deep hue.

It seemed like an eternity as we stood there holding one another, as Paul moved around the table snapping shots of the boy, of her, of me. Nearly 16 years later, I cannot forget the scene. Two solitary figures stand before the sight and smell of senseless death and hold one another because somehow all life depends on that embrace.

In April in Nicaragua, heat and humidity build up before the rain falls in May. The season's naturally hot days are made even hotter by the fact that farmers, eager for the rain, prepare their fields by slashing and burning the weeds and tilling the black soil below. In the context of a war, the driest time of the year is the easiest time to move troops. Add to this an injection of \$100 million approved by the U.S. Congress in the summer of 1986, and you get a predictable and powerful *contra*-sponsored spring offensive. The *contra* moved from village to village slashing and burning, only their targets were not fields of weeds, but villages, homesteads and cooperatives where civilians lived.

Three of us were assigned to follow the spring offensive for the month of April. After each attack we would go to the village, photograph what we could, interview the survivors, record the names of the dead, and attend the funerals. The reports we composed were compiled and sent to Congress to let them know how U.S. tax dollars were being spent.

The memory of that embrace lives on in me because holding her at that moment was the only thing I could do. In fact, I held her because I needed to. Her embrace revived

in me a sense of humanity that the war was trying to snatch away. I had spent weeks moving from bedside to funeral, from one smoldering village to the next horrid attack, taking it in stride, focusing on getting the story back home. The more I focused on that mission, the less I allowed myself to feel the heartbreak. But in that morgue, the pain riveted through me; it ran through my body like water, sweated out my pores and rolled off my cheeks in boundless tears.

The boy's mother and I depended on one another to sustain life. In that shared embrace filled with sweat and tears we both came away comforted that humanity triumphed, that the war had not stolen from us our ability to touch and to be touched. We knew that by any other cast of the die it could have been one of us lying on that metal table with selected body parts stuffed with cotton and wrapped in gauze. We shared that human vulnerability, but somehow we were strengthened by it.

This experience comes alive for me as I read reports from Baghdad. I think of the troops on both sides, of the fear, pain and trauma they've just lived through. I think too about the people who were killed as they went about the routines of their daily lives, and about the many ways that families have been torn apart. As I read the letters from former Maryknoll lay missionary Cathy Breen and other non-Iraqi citizens there to accompany the people, I wonder whether they have at times felt defeated by death.

The war in Nicaragua never made much sense to me, nor to the people who lost family members, houses, farms and what little they owned. What did make sense was that embrace. It breathed new life into me when I had thought all was lost.

Today I pray that the world remember the humanity that an embrace offers. I pray that these memories flood the dreams and waking moments of our leaders who make decisions about unleashing even more violence. There is something deep in the human spirit, a spark of something that allows us to defy a war's power to take away our human instinct to love and nurture one another. This spirit that calls us to love and to embrace is what will revive us in these desperate times.

"All life is sacred"

The following statement was written by "Catholics for a Peaceful End to War and Terrorism," an ad hoc coalition of Catholic groups and individuals which was formed after the attacks on September 11, 2001.

In the weeks since the U.S. initiated the war in Iraq, we have witnessed once again the death and destruction suffered by a people made to endure the violence of war. ... [W]e spoke out at the start of this war to remind people that our own church leaders had characterized this war as unjust and immoral. ... We said then that, "All life is sacred, and we mourn the loss of any life – Iraqi or American, civilian or military."

In these past weeks we have witnessed scenes of tremendous violence and human suffering brought about by this war on our TV screens, on the Internet, and in our newspapers. We have seen bodies of victims, often innocent civilians, sometimes entire families, killed by bombs, shot at military checkpoints, or in the crossfire of battle. Homes have been destroyed, cities left without electricity, water, and telephones. Hospitals have been damaged by bombs and ransacked by looters. Medical personnel lament that they are overwhelmed with wounded and no longer have the medicines, equipment or bed space to deal with the injured. We have seen photos and heard stories from the National Museum of Iraq as looters robbed and destroyed the cultural heritage of Iraq and, indeed, the cultural roots of our common history.

And we have seen the faces of grieving family members of U.S. troops killed in this war, a war of choice, not of necessity.

Sadly, we also hear our national leaders — those who, against the will of the international community, decided to perpetrate this war — announce that they are not responsible or accountable for this destruction. We hear them proclaim that there will be no accounting for Iraqi casualties, combatant and non-combatant, nor an acceptance of responsibility for the collapse of social order and the chaos that is now being experienced in many parts of Iraq. ...

As people of a gospel faith, we cannot keep silent before so much death and destruction, before the suffering of the Iraqi people. Nor can we be silent as our government leaders fail to share with the world the real human costs of this war.

The gospel tells us that we must embrace truth, love our enemies, feed the hungry, care for the wounded ones on the side of the road, take responsibility for our actions and

their motivations. The U.S. must accept its "grave responsibility before God, [its] conscience, and history" by taking responsibility for the chain of events sparked by its decision to go to war.

We therefore call upon our government leaders to:

- stop the war in Iraq immediately and reject consideration of any new theater of military action;
- repudiate the immoral and dangerous policy of "pre-emptive war;"
- account for the casualties, both civilian and military, caused by this war, including allowing free access to human rights, humanitarian and other non-governmental organizations seeking to carry out this accounting;
- take responsibility for the social chaos caused by the war as well as our direct and indirect complicity in the destruction to Iraq's infrastructure, and do everything possible to restore electricity, water, sanitation and communications systems;
- ensure that hospitals and other health care delivery systems are immediately restored to full service;
- protect the population, the country's economic resources and cultural inheritance from injury and destruction by looting and vengeance;
- turn over humanitarian aid efforts in Iraq to the United Nations and/or other international agencies;
- begin immediately to clean up the lethal aftermath of our munitions, including depleted uranium, unexploded bomblets from cluster bombs, and other toxic or dangerous materials that pose a future threat to the Iraqi people.

We also call upon the UN to immediately lift the 12-year-old economic sanctions and to help empower Iraqis as soon as possible to determine the future of their own nation.

Tremendous damage has been caused by this war — to the Iraqi people, to the Arab world, to the reputation of the U.S. in the international community, to the UN and other international alliances and organizations, to the hopes of addressing the root causes of terrorism that afflicts our world and threatens our own people here in the U.S. We call upon the community of faith and the citizens of this country to reassess the role of the U.S. in the world. Are we a force for good, for justice and peace, or are we perpetrating and deepening the cycle of violence we claim to be fighting?

Mexico: 200+ women killed in Ciudad Juarez

Erika Abigail Loera Varela (16) reportedly was last seen on December 20, 2002 on Avenida de la Raza in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. On January 8, 2003, Esmeralda Juárez (26) left her work at a stall in Carranza market in central Ciudad Juarez and has not been seen since. Esmeralda is a student at the same information technology academy in the city from which, between 2001 and 2002, three young women also went missing only to be later found murdered and sexually assaulted.

Since 1993, over 200 women have been killed in Juárez. Many of the victims were raped and mutilated. To date, no one has been held accountable for the crimes.

In 1998 the National Commission of Human Rights (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos) issued a recommendation to the authorities requiring thorough and effective investigations to clarify the circumstances of the murders of women in Juárez, asking for all those responsible to be brought to justice, and for public officials who had failed in their duty to investigate these cases to also be investigated and punished. According to Amnesty International, however, the authorities have failed to comply.

Mexican authorities periodically have detained suspects in the murders. Although these detentions have been heralded by the authorities as the solution to the cases, they have failed to stop the killings and have been marred by irregularities and reports of abuse, undermining the confidence of the relatives of the victims and the community.

Amnesty International and many other Mexican and international organizations insist that the Mexican authorities, both at a state and a federal level, have an obligation to carry out thorough, impartial and prompt investigations into these patterns of violence against women, to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice, and to take appropriate measures to prevent similar cases from happening again. These measures must be transparent and effective if confidence in the judicial system is to be built and the pattern of murders ended. A pattern of such terrible

murders demands a fully integrated response from all relevant state and federal institutions to demonstrate that such crimes cannot and will not be tolerated.

Many of the women killed or “disappeared” in Ciudad Juárez were migrants, lived in marginalized communities, often with no support structure, and worked in maquiladoras. These cases highlight the link between economic globalization and violence against women. While globalization has created economic opportunities for women in some areas, increased poverty and the casualization of labor have led thousands of women to migrate in search of work, often in situations where they are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and violence, and where they are denied access to effective protection by the criminal justice system.

Faith in action:

Write to the ambassador from Mexico, urging him to ensure that authorities conduct an immediate, thorough, transparent and impartial investigation into the matter. Insist that these women deserve justice, as do all the women living and working in and around Juárez – that Mexican officials, both at the state and federal level, have an obligation to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice, and to take appropriate measures to prevent similar cases from happening: His Excellency Juan Jose Bremer Martino, Embassy of Mexico, 1911 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006; tel: (202)728-1600; fax: (202)833-4320; Mexembusa@sre.gob.mx

Border Pilgrimage: A journey of hope and life along the U.S.–Mexico border San Diego/Tijuana to El Paso/Ciudad Juarez, October 27–November 2, 2003

Sponsored by the Border Working Group, the Border Pilgrimage will start on October 27, in both San Diego/Tijuana and Brownsville/Matamoros. Along the way people on both sides of the border will build community, ask for forgiveness and provide and receive hospitality. There will be stops including Calexico, Yuma and Tucson where celebratory events will take place, and others can join the journey to El Paso/Juarez. Towns and organizations along the border are invited to participate by hosting

events. (Contact borderpilgrimage@yahoo.com to add an event to the pilgrimage.)

For more information, contact: Border Pilgrimage, Maryknoll Border Team, 109 N. Oregon #302 El Paso, TX 79901; 915-543-6771; borderpilgrimage@yahoo.com. To download an education packet on the border, go to www.maryknoll.org/GLOBAL/global.htm and click on “Updates on on-going issues.”

Brazil: "Movement of Those Affected by Dams"

The United Nations has declared the year 2003 as the "Year of Fresh Waters." In Brazil, many groups struggle to preserve and protect the water; however, the building of dams has greatly affected the quality and accessibility of water. The following article about the "Movement of Those Affected by Dams" is from *Sejup* No. 485 (April 4, 2003) <http://www.oneworld.net/sejup/>

"The Movement of Those Affected by Dams," part of the International Rivers Network, helps local communities to support their rivers and to encourage equitable and sustainable river development projects. In the 1970s, Brazil initiated the construction of large hydroelectric dams in order to generate energy for industries. Vast areas of land were expropriated. [Yet] today, more than 20 million Brazilians do not have electricity; 60 percent of these families are in rural areas. In addition, one million people have been forced off their lands due to dam constructions. Three and a half million hectares of land have been flooded. Those affected by dams include small farmers, indigenous peoples, river-dwelling populations, quilombo (former slave colonies) communities, and urban dwellers. Many of these people lost their cultural roots because of their expulsion from the land but have now organized to struggle for resettlement on new land as well as indemnity. Their goal is to help current groups affected by dam construction remain on their lands and to preserve nature with an energy policy that takes human and environmental needs into consideration.

Many studies conclude that dams do not attain their promised objectives — they produce less energy, generate less water, and irrigate fewer areas than promised. They normally are more expensive and take a longer amount of time to construct than is projected. Along with this, dams have not contributed to equitable or sustainable development; in contrast, they have increased misery and social inequality among the peoples affected by their construction. The construction of dams in Brazil has met the economic and political interests of dominant and elite national and international groups as well as the interests of electric companies and dam-construction industries. There are many viable alternatives to dams that have fewer social and environmental costs and that lead to the better administration of water resources.

A recent letter from the Campaign entitled "Waters without Dams in the Amazon Basin" used the examples of the Tucuruí and Lageado dams to illustrate some of the negative effects of dam projects, including:



- Disappearance of fish species (surubins, dourada, jaú etc), which are the basis for the diet of local populations, given the great quantity of biomass rotting in the water and the appearance of aquatic plants, which obstruct creeks; damming of rivers with the resultant impacts on the reproductive cycle of fish;
 - Expulsion of affected populations from their homes and lands, without guarantees of a minimal infrastructure needed for their dignified survival;
 - Loss of lands which bring life, employment, and cultural identity for traditional populations (indigenous peoples, riverbank dwellers, babaçu palm nut gatherers, etc.)
 - Loss of biodiversity, of the productive capacity of farms downstream and proliferation of mosquitoes in affected areas and in the region;
- Swelling of slums in nearby cities and an increase in urban violence and unemployment;
- Climate impacts, especially regarding rainfall and temperature;

Even after having experienced all these problems, the letter says, the same errors are being committed. The Environmental Impact Assessments often do not take the local population into account and are based upon fragmented studies which fail to consider the cumulative impacts of multiple dams in the basin.

Current struggles among Brazilian peoples negatively affected by dam construction include that at Uhe Itaparica, involving 6,050 families in Barra do Tarrachil, Pedra Branca and at Uhe Ita, involving approximately 400 families in Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, Santa Catarina.

The Movement of Those Affected by Dams has had some success in resettling people and halting the construction of new dams. However, the struggle to resettle populations or to stop the construction continues in many states including São Paulo, Mato Grosso do Sul, Goiás Tocantins, Amazonia, and Pará.

Faith in action:

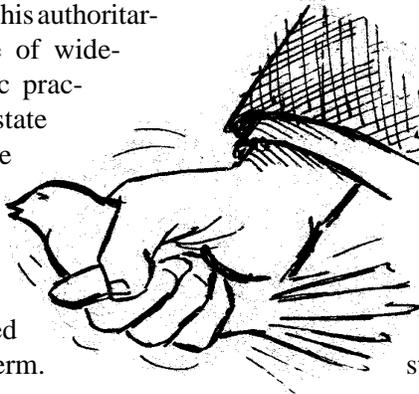
Send a letter that expresses your concern about the energy generation plans of the Advance Brazil program of the federal government. Letters may be sent to:

His Excellency President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva
 Her Excellency Minister of Mines and Energy Dilma Rousseff
 Her Excellency Environment Minister Marina Silva
 Address: Brasilia, D.F. Brasil 70.084-970

Peru: Extradite Fujimori

The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have joined Peru's Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, an umbrella group of over 60 of Peru's key human rights groups, in launching an international campaign: "Fujimori Extraditable." The campaign aims to educate the international community, gain the support of governments around the world, and encourage the Japanese government to extradite former President Fujimori. The timing of the launch corresponds with the anniversary of former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori's April 1992 "self-coup."

Fujimori fled to Japan in 2000 after his authoritarian regime collapsed under evidence of widespread corruption and anti-democratic practices. During his time as Peru's head of state he carried out a "self-coup" in which he closed the congress and the courts, and a shadowy death squad known as the Colina Group carried out massacres, disappearances, and executions. In 2000, the Fujimori regime conducted fraudulent elections for an illegal third term.



Fujimori has been indicted in Peruvian courts on charges of homicide and forced disappearance related to Peru's most notorious massacres – Barrios Altos and La Cantuta. He is also charged with "misuse" of \$15 million of public funds and two additional corruption and human rights

charges are in the pipeline. Although the Peruvian government formally requested Fujimori's extradition from Japan, the Japanese government has stated its unwillingness to extradite Fujimori, claiming that he is a Japanese citizen.

The campaign, Fujimori Extraditable, seeks to pressure the Japanese government to return Fujimori to Peru in order to stand trial for human rights violations and corruption. It also seeks to educate the Japanese public and international public opinion about the Fujimori case. The campaign is a civil society effort amongst human rights and citizen groups in Peru, the United States, and Japan. In Peru, the Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos is coordinating the effort.

Faith in action:

There are several ways in which individuals and organizations can be part of the campaign. Amnesty International is collecting signatures on a letter to Japan's Prime Minister and so far 13,000 individuals have signed on. To sign-on, go to <http://www.amnistia.org.pe/firmas/enindex.php>. U.S. groups are also encouraged to press the U.S. government to support international efforts to extradite Fujimori. Letters can be sent to Secretary of State Colin Powell at U.S. Department of State; 7th Floor; 2201 C Street, N.W.; Washington, D.C. 20520.

For more information on the campaign and how to join, please visit the WOLA website: www.wola.org/andes/Peru/fujimori_2.htm as well as the official Fujimori Extraditable campaign website: www.fujimoriextraditable.com.pe.

Venezuela: Ongoing saga

In the past year President Hugo Chavez survived two major attacks: a coup attempt in April 2002 and a prolonged general strike (called a "lockout" by some people) from December 12, 2002 to February 3, 2003. A recent article published by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) attributes the ability of the elected government to survive to the Venezuelans' "residual high regard for nonviolent solutions" and "the population's almost visceral respect for nonviolent solutions to political differences." The Venezuelan non-governmental organization Program of Education-Action in Human Rights (PROVEA) notes that Chavez all along had much more support than the opposition was willing to recognize – "remarkably high ratings" for any president in his fourth year in office.

Now the opposition is splintered and its leaders scattered around the Americas. Chavez, according to Maryknoll lay missionary Lisa Rodriguez, appears to be stronger than ever and oil production is almost back to normal, but the economy is in shambles.

Antonio J. Gonzalez Plessman of PROVEA, in an article published by the Washington Office on Latin America, reflects on the reasons why the strike lasted so long and why it failed to overthrow Chavez:

"Amongst the factors which help to explain the government's successful resistance are: a) important hard currency reserves which had accumulated in the Macroeconomic Stabilization Fund and in international reserves, b) lack of intervention on the part of the armed forces, c) international pressure against any outcome which could be interpreted as unconstitutional, and d) the support of an important proportion of the population...."

"The strike undoubtedly strengthened President Chávez's position but by no means enough to enable him to end the conflict. The opposition did not have enough strength to overthrow Chávez in the short run, but it was able to prolong the crisis and oblige the government to dedicate the greater part of its energies to the task of simply remaining in power.

"Responding to the demands of its supporters, the government has taken advantage of what it considers a victory to confront the opposition. Chávez is once again accentuating his aggressive style and has firmly stated his preference for the August referendum."

During the conflict, Chavez repeatedly reminded the opposition that the new constitution provides them with the possibility of ousting an elected official mid way through his term (through the "referendum revocatorio") and that they should use this solution rather than resort to a coup or chaos. Now that the opposition has lost its bid for ridding themselves of Chavez outside of the constitution, they hope to use this mechanism. The confusion comes from whose responsibility it is to take this on. According to the constitution, a certain number of signatures are needed to bring to the ballot this referendum (this cannot happen until Chavez completes half his term - August 19). Signatures could be collected at any time. The government claims it is the responsibility of those who want to oust the president to organize and collect the signatures; the opposition thinks otherwise - that the government should do the work. That is why there is an impasse now.

Meanwhile, danger is lurking at the Venezuelan/Colombian border.

For additional information, contact the Washington Office on Latin America, 1630 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009; tel: (202)797-2171; fax: (202)797-2172; email: wola@wola.org; web: www.wola.org.



Nicaragua: Civil society demands action

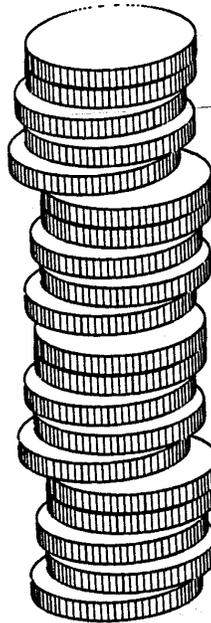
After more than 10 years of negotiations and various efforts, including in the Highly Indebted Poor Country framework, to reduce the external debt burden that plagued Nicaragua, by the end of 2002 the country still carried a foreign debt balance of US\$6.563 billion, 2.3 times the gross domestic product for that year. Now, according to civil society organizations, Nicaragua is facing an onerous and heavy burden due to the internal debt. At the end of 2002, Nicaraguan taxpayers owed domestic creditors a total of US\$4.122 billion, of which US\$1.470 billion is owed to the private sector and the remaining US\$2.652 billion to the public sector, principally to the Central Bank of Nicaragua (CBN).

This internal debt, which represents 1.6 times the GDP for 2002, has a number of illicit sources, such as the unjust confiscations of property in the 1980s (although there were also just confiscations), the fraudulent bank failures in the 1990s, and the arbitrary management of auctions of bonds issued by the government during the last administration.

These civil society organizations are concerned that part of the interim relief from the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative will be diverted for the payment of the internal debt. In accord with the Expanded HIPC Initiative redesigned by the G-7 in Cologne, Germany in June 1999, the interim external debt relief for highly indebted poor countries should be exclusively directed to finance poverty reduction projects. The reduction of the foreign debt and the reduction of poverty in poor countries are conditioned on the transparent use of the resources of the national budget and a growing participation of civil society in the solution of the economic and social problems in these countries.

In light of all of the above, making an important claim on their right to participate in decisions that will affect their lives and their communities, these groups have presented the following recommendations:

Nicaragua should prepare a strategy for the “sovereign exchange” of the domestic debt within the National Council for Economic and Social Planning (CONPES). This exchange implies reducing the payment of interest and deferring the payment of principal facing Nicaragua, given the insufficient resources in the National Treasury. The “sovereign exchange” of the domestic debt is nothing more than replacing the current certificates, which are earning high interest rates, with new bonds that have interest rates that are lower, but that are guaranteed, in principle, by tax collection. The sovereign exchange of the domestic debt would be “voluntary” in that the government would not



formally declare the end of payments on the domestic debt so that creditors would not carry out judicial action, alleging that there are sufficient reserves in the CBN.

In order to reduce spending by the governmental apparatus and to free up tax resources, first for the fight against poverty through investments, and secondly, to pay a “restructured” domestic debt, it is important to:

Prepare and approve, in an expedited fashion, a law to regulate salaries and pensions for retirement and resignation in the public sector (branches of government, autonomous financial and non-financial entities, and government enterprises) which will take effect beginning with the next budget exercise, and which will be incorporated into the Civil Service Law.

Regulate the use of the fleet of vehicles and fuel in the public sector (branches of government, autonomous financial and non-financial entities, and government enterprises), prohibiting the assignment of vehicles, except for the posts of Minister, Vice Minister, Secretary General and the Magistrates.

Regulate the use of mobile telephones, credit cards, trips and official missions outside the country in the public sector (branches of government, autonomous financial and non-financial entities, and government enterprises).

Due to the G-7’s condition to establish greater transparency in the management of public resources, the internal relief from payment of the foreign debt should be clearly identified in the budget in the section for income as grants from the donor community, and in the expenses section as projects for poverty reduction.

Request that governmental authorities establish an adequate mechanism for assuring the transparent use of the tax resources freed up from paying the foreign debt in

order to avoid the use of these resources for other purposes. An exclusive account of the National Treasury should be established in the Central Bank of Nicaragua which would be used for all the resources freed up from the payment of the foreign public debt, including the transfers which the Central Bank of Nicaragua would have to make to the Central Government under this budget category.

Request that the main granters of the interim relief on payment of the foreign debt, Germany, Spain, France and Italy, evaluate the assignment and use of their resources

donated for this relief, both in budget preparation and implementation, as well as in the implementation of the projects in the prioritized areas of the poverty reduction strategy.

The effectiveness of any debt cancellation programs will depend on the accountability of government decision-makers to the citizens of the country, especially the most impoverished communities. Deeper debt relief is desperately needed, but it also must be transparently managed.

Puerto Rico: Calling the U.S. Navy to task

The U.S. Navy says it has carried out its last bombing exercises on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques and is moving training operations to Florida and elsewhere in the United States. Local protesters say the move is a victory for their campaign against the live-ammunition exercises which first began in 1947, but the Navy said the decision was not influenced by public pressure.

The issue made headlines in 1999 after a stray bomb killed a civilian guard. Since then, more than 1,000 protesters have been arrested for trespassing on Navy land. On May 1, the Navy turned the eastern third of the island over to the U.S. Department of the Interior; it will become a wildlife reserve.

Navy Secretary Gordon England certified to Congress and President Bush that alternative methods and sites in Florida and North Carolina will be made available to replace the bombing range in Vieques.

Residents claim that the Navy has broken promises for economic development and other assistance in the past. They are determined to press the federal government to clean up the site. Recent revelations that a Navy destroyer sunk about 900 feet off the Vieques shore was used as a target ship for nuclear tests in the Pacific in 1958 and that chemical weapons simulants were tested on the island in the 1960s have helped their case. The Navy has also admitted to firing illegally 263 rounds of Uranium 238 (depleted uranium or DU) on Vieques. DU, with a half-life of 4,500 million years, is easily ingested into the lungs when dispersed in the air.

The Puerto Rico Health Department has revealed that cancer rates in Vieques - already 27 percent higher than the rest of Puerto Rico in the late 1980s - continued to rise in the 1990s. Studies show high levels of cadmium, lead and other contaminants in the island's soil and vegetation and in residents' hair samples.

It is essential that next steps in Vieques:

- involve local people in developing both interim and comprehensive land use plans for Vieques;
- employ local people in the restoration and conservation of the cultural and natural resources in the areas under discussion;
- hold the Navy accountable for a full and comprehensive clean-up of explosives and contamination in eastern Vieques, as well as for restoration of damaged ecology; and
- prohibit all military activities in eastern Vieques, except those absolutely required for contractors to conduct environmental remediation and restoration.

For additional information: www.viequeslibre.org, www.viequesvive.net, www.afsc.org/lac/puertorico.htm and www.forusa.org/Programs/puertorico/default.html

Faith in action:

Write to the Secretaries of the Navy and Interior, expressing satisfaction that the U.S. Navy is ending its operations on the island of Vieques and insisting that the U.S. government fully resolve the environmental and health crisis left on the island in the military's wake.

Hansford T. Johnson, Acting Secretary of the Navy, 1000 Navy Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20350-1000; Gale A. Norton, Secretary of the Interior, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240

Africa's food crisis: Another double standard

On April 7, 2003, James T. Morris, the executive director of the World Food Program (WFP), informed the UN Security Council of the \$1.3 billion humanitarian operation to feed Iraq's 27 million people. At the same time Morris pointed out that "there are nearly 40 million Africans in greater peril... [and] I cannot escape the thought that we have a double standard." As he continued, he questioned the Security Council "How is it we routinely accept a level of suffering and hopelessness in Africa we would never accept in any other part of the world?"

A lethal combination of recurring droughts, failed economic policies, violent conflict and the expanding impact of the AIDS epidemic were cited as the causes for the African food crisis in Morris's speech to the Security Council. "The scale of the suffering is unprecedented," said Morris, adding that what is currently needed, \$1.8 billion, is equal to all the resources the WFP collected last year for worldwide projects.

Morris asked the Security Council to take immediate responsibility for the current crisis so as not to repeat the slow response to the 1984-85 famine in Ethiopia. At that time, up to one million people died and the assistance that might have saved them simply arrived too late.

In southern Africa the impact of the AIDS pandemic, the peak of which is not expected until 2005-2007, is a major cause of food shortages. Morris reported that "[m]uch of Africa's political and technical talent is dying or emigrating," hugely depleting Africa's human resources." Although crop prospects are already better in southern Africa, more droughts are forecast and a permanent, low-grade food crisis could be the result of farmers dying of AIDS.

In Ethiopia and Eritrea drought contributed to the food shortages but conflict was another factor. During their recent war against each other, both governments were spending about \$1 million a day on the fighting. For Eritrea this added 900,000 displaced and economically vulnerable people to a caseload of 1.4 million who are now drought-affected. Two of three Eritreans are short of food and Ethiopia has the highest amount of people in need of food on the continent.

Angola also illustrates how violent conflict impacts food shortages. After the peace agreement was signed a year ago, the WFP could successfully reach almost double the amount of people it had during the war but "much of the country is littered with land mines [and this] makes access difficult and undercuts food production as vast stretches of

land are not yet safe for cultivation," said Morris.

Of course wars create refugees. The WFP joined the UN High Commission for Refugees in its concern that funding for food aid is insufficient for the more than 1.2 million refugees in Africa. Morris told the Security Council, "We urgently need more funds in the next several months to avert severe hunger among refugees."

Several countries that have housed refugees are having difficulties. The government of Tanzania warned that it may compel refugees to return home for fear that food shortages in camps will spark banditry and insecurity in refugee-hosting areas. In Kenya, a lack of funds has already forced WFP to reduce food rations by 25 percent with more cuts expected.



Kathe Kollwitz

Among other things, Morris called for 1) a substantial increase in financial support for investment in basic agricultural infrastructure, both micro and macro; 2) Funding of an African Food Emergency Fund - an immediate response account to be used at the very outset of food crises; 3) The donor community (especially the G8 countries) to make a major investment in Africa's children citing that the long-term future of Africa will depend greatly on a well-nourished, educated and skilled workforce.

Morris concluded his remarks by stating that war and conflict increase hunger, but they create situations that contribute to increasing hunger in the long term. War and conflict decrease productivity, increase HIV/AIDS, add to refugee and IDP movements and negatively impact Africa's children. "Their suffering cannot be any less to us than the suffering we see elsewhere in the world today. We must all do more to help."

To see Morris's statement, "Double Standards: Africa and the War on Iraq," go to: <http://www.wfp.org/index.asp?section=2>

Zimbabwe: Pray for peace

In their Easter 2003 pastoral letter, Zimbabwe's Catholic bishops critiqued President Robert Mugabe's government. The letter, representing the most critical stance that the Catholic Church has taken to date, directly accused the government of deliberately withholding food for political reasons "while people are starving." The bishops went on to say that the "government has failed to provide leadership that enables the creation of an environment that enhances truth, justice, love and freedom...Economic inequalities have become worse, the gap between the rich and the poor has continued to widen."

Although their country does not often make U.S. media reports, Zimbabweans continue to hope in spite of massive challenges such as the AIDS pandemic, hunger, poverty and violence. The following request to join Zimbabweans in prayer comes to us from missionaries living and working in the country.

These days the news about Zimbabwe continues to be depressing as it describes an ongoing, increasing spiral of hunger, economic crisis, violence and repression. What we need to remember about this news is that it is not new. Violence and repression of black Africans by others and by each other is an old pattern seen in: slave raids, colonialism, apartheid, wars of liberation, and political and economic exploitation. The only major differences throughout this pattern have been the degrees of violence and repression and who is repressing and violating whom.

What the news does not tell us is that throughout all of this violent history there has been a continuous strong thread of hope. This thread of hope is God's story where local, ordinary people have stepped into the breach at critical moments to ensure that the march toward freedom continues. These ordinary people have, time and again, chosen to ignore threats of violence, and even death, to resist complete submission non-violently. This has always been accomplished without any continuous structure, specific organization, or centralized leadership! By focusing on the drama of violence, corruption and hardships we have missed the greatest story, the tremendous unspoken, unorganized commitment of the ordinary people of Zimbabwe to a non-violent resolution of their difficulties. This is a remarkable sign of hope for all of us, something to be truly grateful for.

It is gratitude to God for his hand in all of this and the great inspiration that these people provide for all of us in these troubled times, that prompts us to request that you pray regularly for these people.

- Pray that their quiet voices will be heard and that non-



violent solutions will be sought and implemented. Solutions that will bring peace and renewed prosperity to this beautiful land and people. Solutions that will inspire the rest of Africa and the world to also seek non-violent solutions to their problems.

- Pray that all the leaders in this country and in all of Africa will be blessed with compassion and understanding for each other and work towards restorative justice.
- Pray that the world will help to end the economic injustices that are bringing people to the brink of starvation.
- Pray for Christ's victory over evil.
- Pray that there is rain for the next crop.
- Pray that the HIV/AIDS epidemic comes to an end.
- Pray for people and resources to help the million plus orphans in this country.
- Pray for African solutions implemented by Africans so that they can reclaim their birthright.

Faith in action:

Please pray and pass this message on through your existing prayer networks, establish new networks and let us know your thoughts and prayers. Perhaps, by praying and working together, we can help the people of Zimbabwe repeat the miracle of South Africa where prayer and hard work brought about the peaceful end to apartheid.

Sudan: Growing hope for peace

“Our future is dying in front of our eyes - as we look at the children dying of hunger, disease and war,” laments Kuol Beliew, a Southern Sudanese elder. This cry of despair, heard throughout much of southern Sudan, may turn to expectations for new life if mediation for peace succeeds. The following is an update on the slowly progressing comprehensive peace agreement.

The leaders of the two main warring parties, Sudan's President El Bashir and Dr. John Garang of the Sudan People Liberation Army (SPLA), met in Nairobi on April 2, 2003. Bashir and Garang reviewed the peace process and reiterated their confidence in the mediation taking place, reaffirmed their commitment to the cessation of hostilities and the facilitation of humanitarian assistance to needy areas. Both agreed to open better channels of communication. President Mwai Kibaki of Kenya, who initiated the meeting, urged them to accelerate the pace of negotiations so that their agreed upon goal, June 2003, could be reached.

Sudan's 20-year war has killed over two million southern Sudanese through armed conflict and in war-induced famine and disease. Throughout the war, Sudan acquired the dubious distinctions of having the largest displaced population in the world (4.5 million people), and of being the first and only African country on the U.S. Holocaust Museum's Committee of Conscience watch-list. Last July both Beshir and Garang signed the Machakos Protocol which called for religious freedom (freeing southerners from Shari'a or Islamic law) and an eventual referendum on self-determination, giving southerners the option of forming an autonomous state.

In early April, while Bashir and Garang were smiling and shaking hands, reports revealed that since January 2002, 550,000 Sudanese fled Government of Sudan attacks in southern oil-rich regions and that Khartoum continued to hinder humanitarian access to these displaced people. No matter how quickly the pace of the peace agreement proceeds, it is only the first step to peace. Oil has literally fueled the war. The government has depopulated oil-rich areas so to expand oil exploitation, while using oil revenues to support the war against the south. Currently displaced people are suffering hunger and malnutrition, not because they are poor, but because they were living on top of rich oil fields.

Resource and wealth sharing, is only one of the many contentious issues to be resolved before the peace agreement is final. There are major disagreements over political power-sharing during the six-year period before the refer-

endum. While the SPLA seems to have backed away from a rotating presidency, it demands the first vice-presidency with substantial powers. One of the most acrimonious points has been how to unify the national army. Khartoum has insisted on having one national army, according to Nhial Deng, leader of the SPLA delegation, while the South wants two during the interim period. Some feel that this dispute could stalemate the peace talks. How the agreement pertains to border areas like the Nuba Mountains, Southern Blue Nile and especially Abyei is also unsettled.

Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Sudan Gerhart Baum reported that, regardless of further commitments by the government of Sudan, there have been no improvements in human rights conditions this year. Despite this report, a recent resolution renewing the presence of this Special Rapporteur was defeated with a vote of 24 in favor, 26 against, and three abstentions at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Now there will be no official international observer for human rights in the oil-rich areas of Sudan during this difficult time as the peace process moves forward.

Blatant human rights violations galvanized churches and human rights groups around the world to demand that the UN Special Rapporteur on Sudan be renewed. Besides the killings and displacement of people in the oil-rich areas, plus the denial of international aid groups to needy people in parts of the Sudan, there are alarming reports of massacres and displacement of people by government backed forces in the western province of Darfur. People of faith and other groups around the world, concerned about the long-suffering people of the Sudan, have worked tirelessly to encourage a just peace with true security and development to the Sudan. They will now have to renew their efforts to get human rights monitors to Darfur and Southern Sudan so that the peace agreement brings about a peace that can be felt by the people who have already suffered enough.

For more information see the following web sites:
www.sudancare.org; www.db.idpproject.org;
www.sudan.net. www.darfurinfo.org

Tanzania: Anger mounts over selloffs

As privatization of state owned industry becomes a common occurrence throughout Africa, so too is the cry of opposition. Many Africans fear that economically dominant South Africa will monopolize businesses throughout the continent while crushing production and business development in host countries. Catholic Information Service for Africa (CISA) reports on a Tanzanian opposition party that attacked the wave of new investment from South Africa.

“...Criticism from the Tanzania Labour Party follows a number of high profile sales of former stateowned companies to South African investors. The latest is the sale of a 49 percent stake [of] Air Tanzania to South African Airways. Others include the National Bank of Commerce, Tanzania Breweries and Kilombero Sugar Limited.

“Opposition Member of Parliament Thomas

Ngawaiya, an outspoken critic of the influx of South African companies, said the tendency for some companies to import their raw materials is harming the economy. ‘If South Africans make business in Tanzania and they start exporting, I think our economy will grow, then our country will become rich,’ he said. ‘But if they bring in all the materials from South Africa our farmers will not earn anything from that end. At the end of the day maybe we are going to be another slave to South Africa.’

“...South Africa is not only making its presence felt in the newly privatized sector. It has opened the most successful mobile telephone operation in Vodacom. South African companies have also moved into tourism, health care and the supermarket business. South Africa’s economic presence in neighboring Kenya has also raised concerns.” (Source: ANBBIA, CISA)

Kenya: Inquest into Kaiser’s death opened

“Arise for it’s a new day” boasts the Lenten campaign sponsored by the Kenyan Episcopal Conference’s Justice and Peace Commission, and winds of change are certainly blowing. On April 2 Kenyan Church leaders welcomed Attorney General Amos Wako’s announcement to open a public inquest into the death of human rights activist Fr. John Kaiser.

On August 24, 2000 John Kaiser, a Mill Hill priest, was shot and killed in western Kenya. Since Kaiser was a U.S. citizen who died under suspicious circumstances, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) became involved. But concerns were raised as the investigation continued because FBI agents collaborated so closely with KANU government officials who bore much of the responsibility for the very human rights abuses that Kaiser highlighted in his work.

Although in its April 2001 report the FBI preceded its conclusions with the comment “this analysis is not a substitute for a thorough, well-planned investigation and should not be considered all inclusive...” it opined that the manner of death of Fr. Kaiser was “more consistent with a suicide than a homicide...” The immediate response of church leaders and human rights groups was to reject these findings and petition the attorney general for an official inquest. These appeals were ignored until now.

Under the new government led by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) Attorney General Amos Wako agreed to open the inquest, but expressed doubts that any new conclusion will be found. But human rights leaders are

hopeful that as the winds of change blow through Kenya and as the NARC government investigates other cases of national importance, that witnesses who were previously afraid to testify will come forward to speak against former KANU officials.

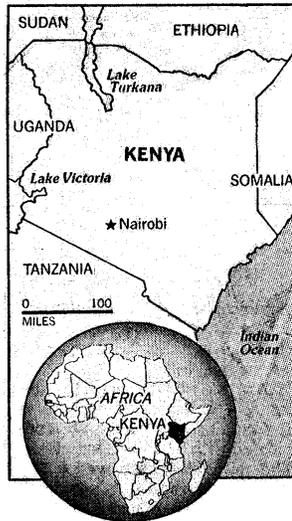
In the U.S. similar requests to review the FBI investigation were denied. The U.S. Department of Justice refused to review the FBI’s findings, saying that it stood by the conclusion of the FBI report. Fr. Kaiser’s niece has filed a Freedom of Information Request asking the FBI to hand over all documents relating to her uncle’s death. Sen. Mark Dayton, of Kaiser’s home state of Minnesota, sent a letter to the director of the FBI asking for prompt action on this request. Previously the investigation into Fr. Kaiser’s death was closely monitored by another Minnesota senator, Paul Wellstone, who was killed in a plane accident last October.

For more information see previous *NewsNotes* articles: March/April 2002, May/June 2001, January/February 2001, November/December 2000, September/October 2000.

Kenya: Reconciliation debate begins

What will bring justice, healing and unity to a country that seeks the truth about the mysterious deaths of political leaders, about the politically sponsored clashes that killed thousands and displaced tens of thousands, and about the economic crimes and public corruption carried out by the former Kenya African National Union (KANU) government? On the streets, in public fora and in the media, Kenyans are now debating the value and appropriateness of a truth and reconciliation commission. While few Kenyans want the extremes of blanket amnesties or only criminal prosecutions, there is still little consensus on the topic. The following article explores some of the elements of the debate as well as its emotional charge.

Central to the debate is the question of how truth is defined. Rev. Timothy Njoya speaks of a "truth and justice commission," quoting the Gospel of John (8:32), "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Although some would argue that Jesus referred to freedom from sin, the understanding of truth gleaned from Njoya's remarks seems closer to the Western idea of truth — the need to establish the crime and the appropriate punishment. Many Kenyans, however, would see truth as Kenyan philosopher, Phillip Mbiti, sees it: Truth builds better relationships, while falsehood destroys relationships.



Certainly human rights have become central to the thinking of many Kenyans. How to include them in the healing process in a manner which is culturally appropriate is still a challenge, especially when emotions are extreme. In early February a number of former detainees and victims visited the torture chambers of Nyayo House in Nairobi, Kenya, and relived the memories of the horror they endured. Some broke down in tears, remembering the beatings and humiliations, while others sang and chanted about their ordeal. Wanyiri Kihoro, spoke of how in 1986, for 24 of his 74 days in prison, he was kept without food or water and stark naked in the water-logged cells. The minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs pledged that the government would preserve the torture chambers as a monument of shame. Some question whether this is sufficient.

A number of Kenyans emphasize the concept of reconciliation as the key element, since it resonates with the culture. In a public debate for a truth and reconciliation commission, the human rights NGO Chemchemi Ya Ukweli reported that participants agreed that "reconciliation equals truth, justice, peace and mercy," and that reconciliation is the best way to heal and touch the hearts of all to overcome Kenya's culture of violence.

Amnesty remains a huge question for Kenyans. The

South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission had the power to grant amnesty, and of course this experience is looked to as an example. But the reality of South Africa was distinct from that of Kenya. While South Africa had two major antagonistic parties to reconcile, the white oppressors and the black oppressed, Kenyans have had years of hostilities created for political reasons. Some would argue that it is necessary to go back and reconcile the differences created through the favoritism shown by President Jomo Kenyatta (1964-1978). Others claim that all the focus should be on the rivalries created through the same process in President Daniel arap Moi's rule (1978-2002). Also questioned is whether it is right to take property and wealth from people who benefited from favoritism, as well as what would be appropriate compensation for the victims. Another difference between South Africa and Kenya is that in spite of the fact that Kenya does have many good, intelligent, dedicated church leaders and others who would do a good job, it does not have one outstanding individual like Desmond Tutu to lead the reconciliation process.

The people, on all levels, seem to have agreed upon three things. First, a truth and reconciliation commission should address the variety of crimes, brutalities, and violations of human rights which have taken place, at least since independence in 1964 (although some favor going back to colonial times as well), and that resources must be found to compensate the victims. Secondly, a new constitution must be put in place before such a commission is formed. The establishment of a new constitution will give the proper authority to the commission, set the parameters, and be a step to building trust in its execution. Thirdly, a truth and reconciliation commission is only part of a larger process of bringing justice, peace and unity to the country. It does not take away from the absolute necessity of setting up proper legal systems, honorable and accountable courts.

Agent Orange legacy: U.S. moral responsibility

War casualties in Vietnam continue 30 years after hostilities ended, as health officials there attribute more than one million cases of cancer, birth defects and other abnormalities to the residual effects of Agent Orange.

The U.S. used chemical weapons for nine years during the Vietnam War to defoliate trees and curtail food production. More than 3,000 villages were sprayed, putting two million to four million people directly at risk.

The U.S. military suspended its use of Agent Orange in 1971 after the component dioxin was linked to cancer. Nonetheless, the U.S. officially denied any connection for years, even though 10,000 U.S. veterans receive disability benefits related to the herbicide.

(In December 2001, President Bush signed a bill that presumed for the purposes of health benefits that every U.S. veteran who served in Vietnam was exposed to Agent Orange. Roughly 2.7 million U.S. soldiers served in Vietnam and Southeast Asia during the war years.)

Vietnam blames Agent Orange for more than 150,000 cases of birth defects and other health problems. However, the U.S. has insisted on verifiable figures, saying that the regime blocked scientific studies by outside researchers.

“You can’t just say, ‘There’s a bunch of malformed babies, it must be Agent Orange,’ There’s a lot of hard scientific work to be done,” says Dr. Arnold Schecter of the University of Texas-Houston School of Public Health.

Schecter, who has conducted research in Vietnam since 1984, says dioxin persists in the environment and still enters the food supply in Vietnam. The highly toxic chemical increases in intensity as it moves up the food chain.

A new study by the Columbia University School of Public Health, reported in the April issue of the journal *Nature*, could help verify Vietnamese claims. Based on a re-examination of military records, the study found the U.S. sprayed 21 million gallons of defoliants, or 10 percent more than previously thought.

Providing medical care to those thought to be victims of Agent Orange is a major financial burden. Two rehabilitation centers in Hanoi and Haiphong expend about \$150 per child, a year’s income for many in Vietnam. Meanwhile, the U.S. Veterans Administration gives more than \$1,000 per month to former U.S. soldiers exposed to dioxin.

The long-term threat posed by Agent Orange was illustrated during a conference last year in Hanoi. Researchers reported extremely high levels of dioxin in the blood of residents of Bien Hoa, a heavily sprayed area near a former U.S. airbase, more than 30 years after the spraying had ended.

Researchers said some of the highest levels — more than 200 times greater than average — were found in people born well after the spraying had stopped. Schecter estimates there are as many as 30 dioxin “hot spots” like Bien Hoa in southern Vietnam.

Dr. Le Cao Dai of the Vietnam Red Cross says 85 to 90 percent of the dioxin detected in Vietnamese came from contaminated food. He explains that, after an area was sprayed, the dioxin from Agent Orange contaminated organic matter in soil as well as river and lake mud. Humans were exposed to dioxin when they consumed contaminated animal, fish or shrimp products.

Many Vietnamese, as well as U.S. veterans, blame dioxin contamination not only for birth defects and cancers, but also for miscarriages, heart problems and diabetes.

Vietnam agreed not to press claims for compensation when U.S.-Vietnam relations were restored in 1995. However, the question of moral responsibility for potential lingering effects of Agent Orange remains.

Even as the U.S. and Vietnam prepared to begin joint studies on the effects of spraying on health and the environment, Vietnam’s foreign minister issued an urgent plea for assistance.

“(H)undreds of thousands are struggling with deadly diseases including cancer, mental disabilities and birth defects,” Nguyen Dy Nien told an NGO meeting last year in New York. “Tens of thousands of Vietnamese children, who are the offspring of victims of Agent Orange, are disabled, deformed, and mentally retarded.”

“Victims of Agent Orange and dioxin cannot wait for research outcomes,” he concluded. “They need material support to survive.”

“Independence” difficult to define

While billions of dollars have been spent purportedly to free the Iraqi people from tyranny, many other territories in the world still await their independence even though it could be granted without the burden of war.

The United Nations is urging self-determination for 16 non-self-governing territories, mostly archipelagoes, administered by France, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In 1960 the UN General Assembly declared that subjecting a people to foreign domination violates human rights, and it resolved to bring “to a speedy and unconditional end colonialism in all its forms.” The following year a special committee was established to make recommendations on the implementation of that declaration.

The object of UN concern is fewer than two million people in American Samoa, Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands (Malvinas), Gibraltar, Guam, Montserrat, New Caledonia, Pitcairn, St. Helena, Tokelau, Turks and Caicos Islands, U.S. Virgin Islands and Western Sahara. The territories range in size from five square kilometers (Pitcairn) to 266,000 (Western Sahara).

However, independence movements in other territories suggest that the UN list could be expanded. For example:

- After a ten-year civil war on Bougainville, Papua New Guinea last year granted the resource-rich island limited autonomy with a possible ballot on secession after 10-15 years.
- Human rights watchers have asked the UN to reexamine its endorsement of a 1969 referendum in West Papua, in which there was no dissent to the territory’s being incorporated as Indonesia’s 26th province.
- Curiously missing from the UN list is Tibet, which lost its political and religious freedom with the invasion of Chinese forces in 1951.

Efforts to expand the UN list of non-self-governing territories could meet opposition in the General Assembly, however, even among the so-called Special Committee of 24. An independent Tibet, West Papua or even Bougainville would likely be resisted by China or Indonesia, both current members of the committee charged with overseeing the movement away from colonial status.

The road to independence is usually long and, often, violent. The UN declared a Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (2001-2010) precisely because so little was achieved during the first decade. In 1994 Palau became self-governing in free association with the U.S. (East Timor became independent in 2002.)

Much more is at stake than nominal independence, however. Recently independent small states find themselves grappling with stronger adversaries over serious issues such as:

- Demand for compensation for harm to health and environment from U.S. nuclear tests on Bikini, Enewetak and other atolls of the Marshall Islands (independent in 1986)
- Research into possible radiation-induced disease in Fijian soldiers and others who witnessed British nuclear tests on Malden Atoll, Kiribati (independent in 1979)
- Possible lawsuit by Tuvalu (independent in 1978) against the U.S. or Australia for contributing to global warming, which is raising ocean levels and threatens to submerge the country’s nine coral atolls
- Controversy surrounding the Australian policy of sending asylum seekers to Papua New Guinea (independent in 1975) and Nauru (independent in 1968) (see *NewsNotes*, September/October 2002)

Human rights watchers, such as the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre in Suva, Fiji Islands, criticize colonial powers’ use of “short-term delaying tactics” to frustrate peoples’ desire for freedom. The PCRC includes free association, integration, trusteeship and special autonomy among those tactics.

No doubt the meaning of self-determination and its implementation will continue to be debated by both the UN and individual governments. While the will of the people should be consulted, it might be difficult to define a voting constituency at times.

Meanwhile, the PCRC is advocating the addition of at least five geographical areas to the UN list of non-self-governing territories: Bougainville, French Polynesia, Easter Island, West Papua and Ka Pae’aina — more familiar to most North Americans as Hawaii.

Iraq: Greed versus fear for U.S. oil companies

Since the U.S. has engineered a regime change as it wished in Iraq, it might be useful to review events that led up to the U.S. invasion and look for hints of where events in the Middle East might lead in the future.

The origins of the Iraqi invasion can be traced to the oil crisis of the 1970s, when a group of foreign policy strategists in Washington began to dream of U.S. world hegemony through control of the Middle East and its oil.

In 1975, Harper's magazine published an article headlined "Seizing Arab Oil." James Akins, ambassador to Saudi Arabia at the time, said the article described "how we could solve all our economic and political problems by taking over the Arab oil fields (and) bringing in Texans and Oklahomans to operate them." Akins took issue publicly with the idea, and he was fired later that year.

The U.S. continued to seek a larger role in the Middle East, and the 1991 Gulf War opened the door. After the conflict, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states no longer opposed a direct U.S. military presence in the region.

1997 saw the founding of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), which counted Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz among its members.

The Gulf War had left Saddam Hussein in power in Iraq, and some in the PNAC felt he posed a serious threat. In 1998 the group sent open letters to President Clinton and to GOP congressional leaders calling for "the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime from power," by force if necessary.

The Iraq invasion this year and the widely unchecked looting that followed left little doubt as to the United States' priority. Nearly every public building in Baghdad was ransacked or destroyed save the oil ministry, which enjoyed round-the-clock protection by U.S. troops.

Neoconservative strategists such as Robert Kagan see the U.S. in Iraq for the long haul. "When we have economic problems, it's been caused by disruptions in our oil supply," he told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, "If we have a force in Iraq, there will be no disruption in oil supplies."

"Controlling Iraq is about oil as power, rather than oil

as fuel," says Michael Klare, professor of peace and world security studies at Hampshire College. He told Mother Jones magazine that "[c]ontrol over the Persian Gulf translates into control over Europe, Japan, and China. It's having our hand on the spigot."

R. Gerald Bailey, who headed Exxon's Middle East operations until 1997, says oil companies felt caught in the middle. Executives were fearful that a war in Iraq might turn Arab states in the region against the U.S. and Western oil companies, but they also wanted their share if the oil was divided up.

David Long, a former U.S. diplomat in Saudi Arabia, adds, "It's greed versus fear."

That fear might be well founded. Just days after Saddam Hussein was toppled from power, millions of Muslims demonstrated in Iraq's cities to protest the presence of U.S. troops.

The Bush administration has promised to rebuild Iraq, help install a representative government and withdraw military forces as soon as possible. Secretary of State Colin Powell says there is no list of other countries to be targeted for invasion by the U.S.

On the other hand, Washington neoconservative Daniel Pipes co-authored a study three years ago that was critical of Syria, using language reminiscent of the run-up to the recent Iraq invasion.

The study, "Ending Syria's Occupation of Lebanon: The U.S. Role," called for using military force to disarm Syria of weapons of mass destruction and to end its military presence in Lebanon. Pipes has just been nominated by President Bush to the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Conservatives first proposed 30 years ago that the U.S. invade the Middle East to seize control of its oil. This year the U.S. invaded Iraq. With respect to Syria, are we now at three years and counting?



Middle East: A road map to peace?

Following the end of hostilities in Iraq, the U.S. and its "Quartet" partners – Russia, the UN and the European Union – prepared to release a proposed "road map" to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The road to peace thus far has been littered with failures: Oslo, Mitchell, Tenet. Palestinian terrorists target both Israeli soldiers and civilians. Meanwhile, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) daily visit death and destruction upon Palestinians.

The human rights situation in the occupied territories recently attracted greater attention in the U.S. with the death of Rachel Corrie. The 23-year-old U.S. peace activist was killed March 16 in Rafah, the Gaza Strip, by an Israeli bulldozer attempting to demolish a Palestinian home.

Israeli forces reportedly demolish 15 homes in the occupied territories every day. Soldiers and settlers injure more than 25 Palestinians daily. Since September 2000 Israel has confiscated land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem equivalent to three times the size of Manhattan.

The Quartet's road map aims to create an independent and viable Palestinian state alongside Israel within three years after it has been accepted by both sides. An initial step has already been taken with the naming of Mahmoud Abbas as the new Palestinian prime minister. However, the timeline might be overly ambitious. It will require a truly "willing coalition" including both Israelis and Palestinians to bring the road map to fruition.

Monitoring the implementation of the agreement could become a major issue. Israel hopes to deny Russia, the UN and the European Union a major role in judging compliance.

The Quartet had agreed that its members should do the monitoring but agreed, in view of Israeli reservations, to a U.S.-led monitoring mechanism. Diplomats say the current plan calls for a Jerusalem-based monitoring committee to be headed by a U.S. citizen who would report to the Quartet.

The genesis of the road map was a speech by President Bush last June in which he called for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The following details of the plan are based on a Dec. 20, 2002, draft.

In the first phase of the road map, the first six months, Palestinians would declare an unequivocal end to violence

and terrorism and reiterate Israel's right to exist in peace and security. They would also produce a draft constitution for Palestinian statehood and hold multi-party elections. Other Arab states would cut off funding for groups involved in violence and terrorism.

Israel would lift curfews and closures and would suspend deportations, attacks on civilians and demolition of Palestinian homes. Israel would also dismantle settlement outposts erected since March 2001 and freeze all settlement activity. The IDF would withdraw from areas it has occupied since Sept. 28, 2000, and Palestinian forces would be redeployed there.

In the second phase, also six months, the Quartet would convene an international conference to facilitate the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state with provisional borders. The Quartet would also promote international recognition of a Palestinian state, including possible UN membership. Other emphases would include meeting continued security obligations and finalizing the new Palestinian constitution.

The third phase, of two years' duration, would include a second international conference convened by the Quartet. The meeting would launch a process toward final resolution of issues including borders, Jerusalem, refugees and settlements. Arab states would move toward normal relations with Israel in the context of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace.

While the road map addresses many political concerns, Rachel Corrie's mother, Cindy, went to the heart of the conflict. After seeing photos of Israeli and Palestinian children who had died in the violence since September 2000, she declared: "I want the mothers of these children to know that I have looked at the beaming faces of each of their babies and that I know how much the world has lost with the passing of each one of them."

Cindy Corrie's depth of compassion will be essential to any lasting peace accord, no matter how much "regime change" is achieved on both sides. It is difficult to measure compassion – or even to define it – but the world will recognize it when it sees it. We'll be watching.

War on terror: PATRIOTism is challenged

While President Bush fought a war ostensibly to bring freedom to Iraq, U.S. Americans are in danger of losing the battle to preserve their own freedom at home.

The USA PATRIOT Act, passed in the wake of September 11, takes steps such as prohibiting money-laundering in offshore banks to aid in the fight against global terrorism.

However, other provisions threaten to erode civil liberties with new rules on domestic surveillance, immigration, monitoring of foreign students, definitions of new crimes involving terrorism and terrorist organizations, and information sharing between federal and local/state law enforcement and within agencies of the federal government.

Under the PATRIOT Act, the administration now has the power to:

- Conduct surveillance of religious or political groups without evidence of suspicious behavior.
- Access library records without notice to the target, even in the absence of suspicious conduct (librarians are subject to felony if they inform the target or any other third party of the investigation).
- Invade the attorney-client privilege by reduced standards for obtaining a warrant for eavesdropping on attorney-prisoner conversations.
- Indefinitely detain a citizen without charge and without access to counsel if the president names the individual as an "enemy combatant," with no judicial review of that categorization.
- Intercept the content, not just addresses, of e-mails or web sites, with lowered warrant standards; again, without probable cause for the surveillance.

Follow-up legislation to the PATRIOT Act the proposed Domestic Security Enhancement Act would put citizens' rights at still greater risk. Proposing more than 100 changes to the law, the bill:

- Further dismantles court review of surveillance, for example by terminating court-approved limits on police spying on religious and political activity (sec. 312), allowing the government to obtain credit records and library records secretly and without judicial oversight (secs. 126, 128, 129), and by allowing wiretaps without a court order for up to 15 days following a terrorist attack (sec. 103).
- Allows the government to operate in secret by authorizing secret arrests (sec. 201) and by imposing severe

restrictions on the release of information about the hazards posed by chemical and other plants (sec. 202).

- Further expands the definition of terrorism so that organizations engaged in civil disobedience are at risk of government wiretapping (secs. 120, 121) and asset seizure (secs. 428, 428); their supporters could even risk losing their citizenship (sec. 501).
- Gives foreign dictatorships the power to seek searches and seizures in the United States (sec. 321) and to extradite U.S. citizens to face trial in foreign courts (sec. 322), even if the United States Senate has not approved a treaty with that government.
- Unfairly targets immigrants under the pretext of fighting terrorism by stripping even lawful immigrants of the right to a fair deportation hearing and by stripping the federal courts of their power to correct unlawful actions by the immigration authorities (secs. 503, 504).

Diminishing the rights of any group diminishes the freedom of everyone. The Constitution guarantees due process not just to U.S. citizens, but to "any person."

Some citizens might argue, "If I'm not doing anything wrong, then I don't have anything to worry about." Just tell that to the first 1,000 persons who were detained following September 11, of whom FBI special agent Coleen Rowley says, "the vast majority...did not turn out to be terrorists."

Faith in action:

For further information and commentary, see the Friends Committee on National Legislation website at www.fcnl.org, or The Bill of Rights Defense Committee website at www.bordc.org.

Write to your lawmakers. Urge support for S. 609, "Restore the Freedom of Information Act." The bill reinstates public access to federal records while preserving the ability of the government to protect the public from damage to critical infrastructure. Urge support for HR 1157, the "Freedom to Read Protection Act of 2003." The measure would remove threats to the privacy of bookstore and library records under the PATRIOT Act, and restore congressional oversight of the FBI's use of secret surveillance warrants.

Child soldiers: Reps demand action from Powell

Thirty representatives signed on to a letter initiated by Reps. Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Frank R. Wolf (R-VA), co-chairs of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, asking Secretary of State Colin Powell to ensure that the U.S. government take specific steps to help end the use of children in war. The letter was part of a strategy to influence the UN Commission on Human Rights, which met in Geneva at the beginning of April.

Boys and girls are used in armed conflicts around the world, in the front line, as spies, messengers, porters, or to lay or clear landmines. Over two million child soldiers have been killed in armed conflicts, six million have been maimed or permanently disabled, one million orphaned, and 10 million psychologically traumatized. Approximately 300,000 children are currently fighting in armed conflicts on nearly every continent.

In their letter to Secretary Powell, the 30 representatives expressed pride in the fact that the U.S. formally ratified the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child "on the involvement of children in armed conflicts" on December 23, 2002. The protocol prohibits the forced recruitment of children under age eighteen, or their use in combat. The 30 representatives further expressed thanks for U.S. leadership on this issue at a January meeting of the UN Security Council where the U.S. pushed for stronger measures to monitor governments and armed groups using children in armed conflict, and to hold them accountable for their actions.

After thanks and congratulations, the representatives challenged the U.S. administration to do more to respond to the fact that "in more than 20 countries around the globe, children are coerced, driven by desperation, or compelled by societal pressures to take up arms and fight in war." They specifically urged the administration "to address three of the most appalling situations where children are being used in warfare:" Colombia, Burma and Northern Uganda.

In Colombia, representatives demanded that "[t]he United States...exert political pressure on all sides to demobilize all child soldiers and remove children from all related military or conflict activities. This includes not only guerrilla and paramilitary recruitment efforts, but also the use of children by security forces to gather information."

In Burma the demand was for the U.S. State



Photo of child soldier from Solomon Islands/ Amnesty International USA www.aiusa.org

Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor to undertake an independent investigation "into the widespread forced recruitment of children by Burma's national army." And if it is found that Burma's armed forces continue to forcibly recruit children, the representatives instruct the U.S. to urge the Security Council to consider appropriate measures such as targeted sanctions.

In Northern Uganda, where Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group at war with the Ugandan government, has abducted thousands of children for use as soldiers, representatives asked the Secretary of State to "urge the UN Commission on Human Rights to request the appointment of a UN special envoy for the abducted children in Northern Uganda. The envoy would be encouraged to conduct 'shuttle diplomacy' between the LRA and the Ugandan government with the aim of securing the release of all those abducted by the LRA as children, and to seek an end to future abductions."

For more information on child soldiers, contact the U.S. Campaign to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, c/o Rachel Stohl, Center for Defense Information, 1779 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036; rstohl@cdi.org, (202)797-5283; www.us-childrensoldiers.org. The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is a member of this coalition.

Faith in action:

Go to "Updates on on-going issues" page on the Maryknoll Global Concerns' office website: www.maryknoll.org/GLOBAL/global.org or write to us for a copy of the letter with the list of representatives who signed it. Send a letter of thanks to your representative if she or he appears on the list, and ask him or her to remain vigilant and demand follow up from Secretary Powell.

Take action to fight global AIDS epidemic

Authorizing bills to fight global AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria are now being debated in the House and just beginning to take form in the Senate. These bills suggest funding levels and set direction for U.S. programs abroad. But funding is decided later in the year by those decision makers who sit on the appropriations committees. Ultimately the success of any program depends on the resources that the U.S. is willing to contribute. This is why the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joins Church World Service in circulating the following action alert focused on congressional appropriators.

Ask Congress to appropriate \$3.5 billion to fight global AIDS, TB, and malaria

Appropriate \$3.5 billion to fight global AIDS, TB, and malaria NOW for real on-the-ground programs, of which at least \$1.75 billion is for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, without taking away precious resources from other development and humanitarian aid programs.

If your members of Congress sit on the House Appropriations Committee (to find out see: www.house.gov/appropriations/members.htm) or the Senate Appropriations Committee (appropriations.senate.gov), call them in their home office.

If your members of Congress do not sit on an appropriating committee, ask them to weigh in with the chairs of the foreign operations appropriations subcommittees in support of this same message above. The chair of the Foreign Operations Appropriations subcommittee in the House is Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-AZ). In the Senate, it is Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY).

Background: Why \$3.5 billion?

\$14.2 billion is needed globally to stop AIDS, TB, and Malaria in FY 2004, according to conservative estimates from the WHO, UNAIDS, Stop TB, Roll Back Malaria, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria (Global Fund). The United States' fair share of this amount is equal with its share of the global economy: 34.8 percent or \$4.9 billion. The U.S. should contribute at least 25 percent (\$3.5 billion) of this total.

Facts on AIDS, TB, and malaria

- AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria together killed nearly six million people last year.
- Today, 42 million people are living with HIV/AIDS. Ninety-six percent live in developing nations, with 71 percent in sub-Saharan Africa alone. More than a third are under the age of 25.
- Six to nine million people in the developing world today need AIDS treatment, yet only 250,000 of them have access to life-extending antiretroviral drugs.

- In sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS has already orphaned 11 million children. By 2010, that number is projected to reach 25 million, comprising 12 percent of African youth.
- India, China and Russia are among the five "next wave" countries where HIV is spreading rapidly. These five countries already contain half the world's TB cases, and because AIDS fuels TB infection, TB rates will skyrocket as AIDS spreads.
- Most of the nearly one million people killed by malaria yearly are children in Africa.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria

- Is an international, independent public-private partnership that localizes the design of a particular countries' AIDS, TB, and malaria response from within that country.
- Country proposals for AIDS, TB, and malaria programs receiving funding from the Global Fund are written in a collaborative effort between government, NGOs, and the private sector.
- Within three months of its creation, in April 2002, the Global Fund committed \$616 million to 40 countries over two years to tackle these three diseases. In January 2003, the Fund committed an additional \$866 million to 60 countries.
- The Global Fund has already approved grants to provide: antiretroviral treatment for 500,000 people in developing countries, care for 500,000 AIDS orphans and vulnerable children, treated mosquito bed nets for 30 million Africans, and tuberculosis treatment for two million people.

To learn more, see:

- Church World Services' "Facts Have Faces" project: www.churchworldservice.org/FactsHaveFaces/aidsfactsheet.htm
- The Maryknoll AIDS Task Force webpage: www.maryknoll.org/GLOBAL/AIDS/gc_aids.htm
- Africa Faith & Justice Network's webpage: afjn.cua.edu/news/CTFAHIVAIDS.cfm?nohead=1

SDRM: Debt debate continues

In response to the recurrent national debt crises of the last decade - including in Mexico, East Asian economies, Russia, Turkey and Argentina - the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has proposed a framework called the Sovereign Debt Restructuring Mechanism (SDRM). The SDRM and the already operative Heavily-Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative are efforts by the IMF and World Bank to respond to the growing international public pressure placed on government officials to do something about the deepening debt crisis.

The IMF proposal falls far short of the “fair and transparent arbitration process” included in the demands of Jubilee and other movements for a definitive resolution to the ongoing debt problem. Demba Dembele of the Forum for African Alternatives in Dakar, Senegal and the international Jubilee South coalition said, “It’s one more way for the IMF to control the fate of indebted governments. The institution that already makes loans and decides which countries are creditworthy would also be in charge of managing the appeals process and designing new economic austerity programs that will continue to starve the poor to feed the rich.”

The SDRM proposes a system that would allow a national government to request the convening of a disinterested international panel to negotiate with a government’s private creditors and arrive at a debt restructuring agreement. Once the agreement was approved by a majority of the creditors it would be enforceable on all of the country’s private creditors. Under existing procedures, any single private creditor can refuse to accept a re-structuring arrangement and instead attempt to sue a national government for full payment of the debts under the original repayment terms.

The Jubilee USA Network welcomed the IMF’s admission that the crisis of unsustainable debt burdens in developing countries has not been resolved, but shared the concerns of many partners in the global South that the SDRM is not only inadequate, but also potentially harmful to the people of indebted nations. A Jubilee USA statement rejects the SDRM for the following reasons:

- SDRM applies only to debts claimed by the private sector. To be fair, the IMF and World Bank must put its share of the debt portfolio on the table too.
- SDRM puts the IMF at the center of the process: it would convene the “independent” panel, determine whether a country legitimately needs the assistance provided by the mechanism, and help design and monitor the policies that debtor countries would commit to at the time of re-structuring.

- A “standstill” provision that would have allowed governments to suspend debt payments without the threat of legal action during the time that the restructuring is negotiated has been removed from the latest version of the SDRM proposal.

The Jubilee USA Network believes a primary issue that must be addressed is the illegitimacy of much of the existing debts — the decades of loans to unaccountable dictators which were stolen with the knowledge and even collusion of the creditors, the loans for the tools for suppressing democracy, or the loans for wasteful and harmful failed development projects. The SDRM proposal would not assess the legitimacy of the debts.

“If an international debt-insolvency mechanism is to be created,” the Jubilee USA Network believes, “it must be a much more fair and transparent international arbitration process (FTAP) that could apply to all indebted countries, not just those the IMF deems insolvent. An FTAP would be truly independent of all creditors’ influence, provide for transparent citizen participation in the process of public debt cancellation, and would be empowered to declare certain debts illegitimate.”

Furthermore, according to Jubilee USA, several problems with the current HIPC initiative are in desperate need of correction, and none of these continuing problems with HIPC are addressed by the IMF’s SDRM.

- Not only were the future economic growth projections of HIPC countries over-optimistic and the debt-sustainability threshold of 150 percent debt-to-exports too high, but also commodity prices for major exports from the HIPC countries have fallen on world markets. This has lowered economic growth rates even further, and plunged many HIPCs deeper into debt unsustainability.
- The current official debt-sustainability threshold still leaves a level of debt burden that prevents the HIPC countries from having enough revenues left over to effectively achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

- The HIPC initiative continues to be contingent upon countries implementing the highly controversial structural adjustment economic policy reforms that have largely failed to either reduce poverty or achieve high rates of economic growth for over 20 years. Further, the PRSP process circumvents NGOs and civil society groups from proposing alternative policy choices in their national PRSPs.
- Countries continue to fail to comply with IMF structural adjustment conditions, and have continuously fallen “off-track” in the HIPC process.
- Some non-participating creditors have brought lawsuits against HIPC countries to prevent the cancellation of their debts.
- Additional “topping up” financing from bilaterals should not be used until the structure of HIPC is fixed.
- Not enough heavily-indebted poor countries are included in the 42 HIPC countries; there are several other countries that are also in desperate need of debt cancellation.

To fully address the debt crisis, the HIPC countries would need full debt cancellation, but a bill currently being discussed in the U.S. Congress would move the HIPC Initiative in the right direction.

Faith in action:

Ask your members of Congress to support House bill HR 1376, introduced by Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ) and Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA) and similar Senate proposals, like that attached to the Senate AIDS bill by Sens. Rick Santorum (R-PA) and Joe Biden (D-DE). HR 1376 would provide an additional \$1 billion dollars in debt relief annually to countries that currently qualify and preclude some of the most harmful IMF conditions on debt cancellation.

Defense Authorization Bill: Multiple threats

The Defense Authorization bill now before the U.S. Congress is one tool for implementation of the National Security Strategy promulgated by the Bush administration last September. First among many issues of great concern is the sheer size of the budget request: \$379.9 billion in discretionary budget authority - \$15.3 billion above FY 2003 without including the cost of the war on Iraq. Furthermore, the administration's request could bring us closer to the development and testing of new nuclear weapons.

The Bush administration has been studying possible uses for nuclear weapons in preemptive strikes and intends to develop nuclear “bunker busters,” which have already received some Congressional funding. In addition, the administration is pushing hard to repeal the current 10-year ban against research and development of “low-yield” (less than five kilotons) nuclear weapons. This is approximately one-third the size of the Hiroshima bomb.

In February, the House Republican Policy Committee released a document that calls for expedited preparations for underground testing, expanded nuclear capability, and granting the president options to use both conventional and nuclear weapons in preemptive strikes.

Moving forward with the development of new nuclear weapons greatly increases the likelihood of resumed testing, a breach of a 10-year moratorium in the U.S. on such

testing. Arms control advocates are concerned that the administration is using doublespeak when it pushes to develop low-yield weapons while professing no intent to produce them. This is especially apparent given the administration wants to shorten the time to prepare for nuclear testing. Once the funding and support get locked in, it will become harder and harder to stop the march toward resumed nuclear testing or even use.

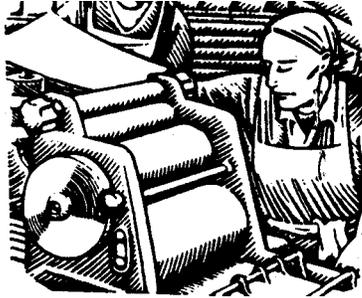
Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA) will introduce an amendment to gut the \$15 million in the Bush '04 budget for the nuclear bunker buster, called the “Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator.”

Faith in action:

Contact your representative, urging him/her to support the Markey amendment that would cut the \$15 million for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, or “bunker buster.” This is expected to be voted on next month during House floor consideration of the '04 defense authorization bill and/or the energy and water appropriations bill. In addition, please urge your representative and senators to maintain the ban on low-yield nuclear weapons research. If you write a letter it's always better to write to the district office, since mail is very slow in reaching their Washington, D.C. offices.

Resources

- 1) **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.



- 2) **Stopping War Where It Begins: Organizing Against Militarism in Our Schools:** Sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee's Youth and Militarism program, this conference will be held **June 27-29, 2003** in Philadelphia. Designed for all those who believe that schools should be about education, opportunity, building social justice and teaching peace. Workshop and panel topics will include: youth/peer organizing and ally support work; countering JROTC proliferation; No Child Left Unrecruited (Behind) Act; presenting alternatives to military enlistment; strategies/approaches to counter-recruitment work; recruitment and ROTC on college campuses; military recruiting and race, gender and ethnicity; and conscientious objection and draft registration. For more information on the conference contact: AFSC Youth & Militarism Program, 215-241-7176; youthmil@afsc.org.

- 3) **"All Come Bearing Gifts:"** The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services, along with Catholic Legal Immigration Network, present the annual national migration conference, **July 6-10, 2003** in Washington, D.C. It is intended to enable participants to: educate policy makers to the challenges and abuses refugees, immigrants, migrants, and people on the move face throughout the world and in this country; increase capacity for resettlement of refugees; understand the scourge of human trafficking and its many victims; provide a vibrant and sustainable welcoming ministry in dioceses and parishes in service

to immigrants, refugees, migrants and people on the move; and replicate best practices being employed by the various service networks. For more information, contact the USCCB/Migration and Refugee Services at (202)541-3352; 3211 Fourth Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017; or go to www.usccb.org/mrs/index.htm

- 4) **"A World on the Brink: A Gated Empire or Global Solidarity?":** Pax Christi USA will hold its annual national assembly **August 1-3, 2003** at St. John's University, Jamaica, NY. Keynote speakers will be Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and Pax Christi International President, and Njoki Njehu, director of 50 Years is Enough. Some of the seminars offered include: "The Spirituality of Vulnerability," "Operation Endless Deployment," "Pacem in Terris at 40," and "God, Globalization and All God's Children." For more information, contact Pax Christi USA at www.paxchristiusa.org, or call (814)453-4955. PCUSA's mailing address is 532 W. 8th Street Erie, PA 16502.

- 5) **The Iraq Briefing Book** was produced by the Iraq Policy Working Group, a diverse group of national and international religious, humanitarian, public interest and arms control organizations who are working with Congress to promote effective policies on Iraq (including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns). The briefing book provides information about a wide range of issues related to a possible war with Iraq, and was hand-delivered to the offices of every new member of Congress in January 2003. The briefing book is available only through the internet; to download portions of the briefing book, go to www.iraqbriefs.org.

- 6) **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.