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Due to ongoing security measures, there is a significant delay in delivery of mail to Congressional offices. It is advised that constituents either use email or fax, or send mail to Congresspersons’ home offices, rather than to the Washington, D.C. office.
The U.S. elections: Peace and security, part two

In this issue of NewsNotes we continue our reflection on topics of concern in the approaching U.S. elections, looking again at those related to peace and security. Our intent is to evaluate the proposals of political parties and their candidates through a lens held by the communities around the world where Maryknoll missioners live and work, and by the values articulated in the Gospel and in Catholic social teaching.

Weapons proliferation

While the U.S. admonishes or attacks those seeking weapons of mass destruction (WMD), it develops new more “usable” nuclear weapons and is the number one arms dealer in the world. This double standard sets the United States outside the international community and makes it impossible to speak with moral or legal authority on proliferation issues. The U.S. underfunds its own nonproliferation efforts such as the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, which safeguards nuclear weapons, materials, and knowledge in the former Soviet Union. At the same time small arms and landmines, manufactured in the U.S., are the “weapons of mass destruction” in Africa, Central America and other places where they take lives and limbs every day.

Suggested questions for candidates
• Would you oppose the development of new U.S. nuclear weapons including so-called “mini-nukes”? 
• Would you pursue arms control talks with other nuclear powers to reduce the dangers posed by our nuclear arsenals and bring the U.S. into compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty? 
• What action would you take to curtail U.S. arms exports, including sales of small arms and light weapons?

Military spending

Military spending exceeds $400 billion per year, while spending for nonviolent means of conflict prevention and resolution is miniscule. Excessive and wasteful spending has built armed forces that cannot address the primary threats today. Meanwhile, nonmilitary foreign aid and domestic social programs are cut as poverty, injustice, and human insecurity persist worldwide. This situation can only lead to more violent conflicts.

Suggested question for candidates
• How would you restructure the federal budget to promote human security (employment, healthcare, education, housing, etc) at home and abroad?

Military training

The U.S. is increasingly building relationships with other countries through military training programs. Every year U.S. forces train about 100,000 foreign soldiers in at least 150 institutions within the U.S. and in 180 countries around the world. Since 9/11, the U.S. has offered police or military training to a growing list of countries said to be at the front lines in the fight against global terrorism. Yet, the U.S. has trained soldiers who are known abusers of human rights. Graduates of one such program, the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA), now known as the Western Hemispheric Institute for Security and Cooperation (WHISC), have been implicated in murders, rapes, and torture. The identity of the SOA as a training ground for assassins requires its closure, and the system of controls and follow up for other programs is inadequate.

Suggested questions for candidates
• What problems do you see with U.S. training of foreign military and police forces? 
• Would you vote to close the SOA (now WHISC)?

The “war” on drugs

The U.S. has spent billions fighting the “drug war” around the world, producing no significant results on our streets. The focus on crop eradication in countries like Colombia, Bolivia, Afghanistan and interdiction along supply routes does not work. The U.S. is using a military strategy to solve a socio-economic problem. The war on drugs will continue to fail because it does not address demand in the U.S., the role of organized crime internationally, nor the poverty and lack of economic alternatives in the producing and transporting countries.

Suggested questions for candidates
• What changes would you make to the U.S. drug control policy? 
• How would you respond to the global epidemic of drug trafficking and abuse?

Specific conflicts

Beyond the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. plays a role in many other situations of conflict around the world. Too often, rather than being a force for peace, the U.S. exacerbates the conflict through military aid or training, unjust economic policies, arms sales or political positioning. Candidates for national office in the United States must make very clear their proposals for ending the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and for positively engaging other conflicts in a way that moves them toward a peaceful resolution.

Suggested questions for candidates
• What would your administration do in Afghanistan and Iraq? 
• How would you contribute to a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? 
• What should the U.S. role in Colombia be? 
• How would you use U.S. power for preventive diplomacy and nonviolent conflict resolution to promote human security?

The “economic justice” section of the election guide will be published in the July-August NewsNotes. Please visit www.maryknollogc.org for the entire document in Word format, or contact us for a copy. MOGC staff
U.S. administration shortchanges Latin America

The following analysis by the Latin America Working Group (LAWG, www.lawg.org) indicates that the Bush administration’s budget for fiscal year 2005 contains some discouraging news for Latin America.

Major programs for humanitarian assistance in Latin America, providing aid to address poverty and fund development, are greatly reduced in President Bush’s budget proposal for FY2005. Child survival programs for Latin America were cut almost 12 percent ($17.2 million), to $130.3 million. Development assistance programs, which support agricultural assistance, microenterprise, and other programs, were cut almost 10 percent ($26.1 million), to $241.7 million. The Inter-American Foundation, which provides funding for small-scale projects, was cut by six percent ($1 million) to $15.18 million. A need for additional assistance for Haiti may produce some shifts that further strain budgets for the rest of the region.

Complicating the aid picture for Latin America is that the two major new international aid initiatives proposed by the administration, the Millennium Challenge Account and contributions to the global fight against HIV/AIDS, contain relatively little funding for Latin America. In addition, some of the increases in these accounts are offset by cuts in regular humanitarian and development programs. Interaction, an association of aid agencies, asserts that regular humanitarian and development accounts were cut by nearly $400 million from last year’s levels and that the president’s HIV/AIDS initiative is offset partially by a decrease of $350 million in U.S. contributions to the Global Fund set up internationally to provide resources to address the AIDS pandemic.

Neither the Millennium Challenge Account nor the president’s HIV/AIDS initiative provide much assistance to Latin America. The Millennium Challenge Account provides funding only to countries that meet certain strict criteria and with a per capita income of less than $1,415 in 2005, which leaves out most Latin American nations. The president’s HIV/AIDS initiative is limited to 14 countries, of which only two, Haiti and Guyana, are from the Latin American and Caribbean region.

One area of funding for Latin America remains steady – military assistance. Military aid to Latin America now nearly equals total economic aid. Foreign military financing reaches $126.5 million in the 2005 request for Latin America, of which $108 million is for military training and equipment for Colombia. International Military Education and Training (IMET), which funds training of Latin American security forces, holds at $14 million. Substantial military aid continues to be included in the Defense Department’s counter-drug aid to the region.

For FY 2005, the administration once again requests a whopping $731 million for the Andean Counternarcotics Initiative (ACI), of which $463 million is devoted to Colombia, substantial sums to Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, and smaller quantities to Brazil and Venezuela. While this package includes funding for alternative development programs that help small farmers switch from drug crops to legal crops, as well as for judicial reform, over 65 percent of the total within ACI is for military and police aid. In looking at this percentage, it is important to realize that the ACI is only one source of military aid for the Andes, and therefore the actual military/development aid balance is even more skewed.

Almost 78 percent of the total U.S. aid to Colombia can be expected to be military and police aid (when the $108 million in foreign military financing, $1.7 million in IMET, and at least an estimated $100 million in the Defense Department’s budget are added to the Andean Counternarcotics Initiative). For Colombia, it’s not “guns and butter,” but “guns, guns, guns and butter.”

Although the administration has presented an immigration proposal, it has also continued to increase the Department of Homeland Security’s budget for security measures along the U.S. border with Mexico. Many of these plans are described as national security measures, but meet requests from the Border Patrol that have been pending since before September 11, 2001. First in line is a $64 million increase in spending on technology for the border – primarily remote video surveillance cameras and a new $10 million budget to begin flying unmanned drones. Overall, there is a $224 million (10 percent) increase in the border security budget. While some of this budget will go to guarding the northern border with Canada, less than 10 percent of the Border Patrol’s budget has traditionally gone to security there.

Also complicating the political message in President Bush’s immigration reform proposal is a large increase in the budget for immigrant deportation. Though the proposal would provide visas for workers who are currently in the country – giving them legal status without disrupting the availability of workers – his FY 2005 budget proposes a $100 million increase for the detention and removal of illegal migrants currently in the U.S.

While security consistently gets boosts in the 2005 budget proposal, domestic preparedness appears to be taking some serious hits. Though the Federal Emergency Management Agency gets an overall increase in its budget of $1.8 billion dollars, almost all of the increase is dedicated to bio-defense – preparing the U.S. against a biological attack. In the meantime, non-natural disaster funds have been slashed by $220 million (32 percent). Following this trend, the Office for Domestic Preparedness, which funds
first responders (such as local police and firefighters), is taking a significant cut in its funding of $805 million (19 percent). The biggest cuts come to state and local grants; citizen corps; and state and local training, exercises, and technical assistance. All in all, programs promoting national defense get big boosts, but on-the-ground programs to respond to an emergency are dealt a setback.

Peru: Inequality in income distribution

Recently, the national agenda of Peru has been marked by political instability and the struggle against corruption, but extreme social and economic inequality is also of enormous consequence. The following is based on a March 25 Peru Solidarity Forum article by Pilar Arroyo.

The distribution of income in Peru is one of the most unequal in the world. Pasco Font and J. Saavedra in Reformas Estructurales y Bienestar, una mirada de los noventa (Lima, Grade-Cepal 2001) maintain that the poorest 20 percent of the people in Peru receive six percent of the national income, while the richest 20 percent receive 48 percent. This is in part due to the fact that labor unions have been weakened and workers have lost their bargaining power. Between 1991 and 2000 the percentage of industrial workers represented by unions dropped from 33 percent to only 6.2 percent.

It is also due to the many tax breaks given to big companies during the Fujimori era and the fact that former president Alberto Fujimori gave preference to indirect taxes. The result has been that the tax contribution of those with smaller incomes is proportionally higher than that of people with higher incomes. In 2001, as the value of mining exports rose to almost $3.2 billion, the industry paid only $90 million (2.8 percent of the total) in taxes. And likewise, according to information provided by the Department of Economy and Finances, banks paid no income taxes between 1999 and 2002.

With such meager income it is difficult for the state to meet the needs of the Peruvian people in the areas of education, health, infrastructure and security.

In the past, proposals for the redistribution of income were considered communist or naïve, but the growing gap between the rich and the poor that is resulting from the current global economic model makes such a redistribution a necessity. A recent report of the International Labor Organization (ILO, www.iolo.org) on the social dimensions of globalization said, “Another important role of the state resides in limiting the impact of globalization in terms of inequality in the distribution of the income through progressive taxation, policies on salaries, social programs and other mechanisms.”

Even proponents of the so-called “Washington Consensus” acknowledge that there is a great need to improve the distribution of income. The neoliberal model carries much of the blame for the current situation and alternative models must be developed, but in the meantime, there are a number of steps that can be taken, such as
• tax reform, including some form of financial transaction tax;
• reordering national budget priorities, including reducing the percentage dedicated to payment on the external debt (at present 25 percent) and reordering defense spending;
• requiring payment of taxes where wealth is generated, not where companies have legal residence, allowing regions to count on higher incomes - the Law on Fiscal Decentralization says that 50 percent of the resources generated by the general sales tax (IGV) and certain other taxes will be assigned to the regions in which they really were collected; and
• reorienting public sector purchasing to increase the percentage of domestic product purchases. For example, the state spends approximately US$500 million a year purchasing farm products, but 70 percent of these are foreign products, including oats, soy and milk powder.

In addition to redistribution of income, Peru’s economy needs jobs. Peru has experienced economic growth in recent years, but the growth has not created jobs because much of it has been in mining, a sector in which the cost of job creation is very high. Even steady growth without job growth creates political instability, since jobs, says Maryknoll priest Tom Burns, are the bottom line for people, not growth.

For additional information, contact the Peru Solidarity Forum, Jr. Daniel Olaechea 175, Jesús María, Lima – Perú, Lima Telefax 261-2466 / 261-7619; psf@millicom.com.pe; www.psf.org.pe
Bolivia: Impunity for human rights violations

Since the resignation of former Bolivian President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, (Goni) in October 2003, the new government of President Carlos Mesa has faced a multitude of major challenges. Prior to Sánchez de Lozada’s exile, more than 70 people died as the Bolivian military responded to street blockades by firing into crowds of demonstrators. That was not the first instance of such attacks by Bolivian security forces against unarmed civilians, yet impunity continues for the military. In addition, the intense debate over the exploitation and sale of Bolivia’s natural gas is far from resolved.

When President Mesa took office, he promised Bolivians a referendum on the hydrocarbons industry. The referendum is supposed to be extensive and include questions about the reform of the Hydrocarbons Law, its financing, access to gas for home use, conversion of natural gas for use in vehicles, the strengthening of the national petroleum corporation, and the possibility of whether, in this context, the energy resources should be sold to foreign markets. But in early March, Alvaro Rios, the minister of Hydrocarbons and Mining, resigned and was replaced by an official from Goni’s first administration. The resignation of Rios threw the national referendum on hydrocarbons into doubt and complicated further one of the most volatile issues in Bolivian national life.

(AIN) March 3/26

Also, in February, a military tribunal acquitted four soldiers alleged to have shot at unarmed civilians a year ago during public protests in La Paz; military personnel have refused to testify in civilian investigations of the October 2003 violence. Congress has thus far failed to move toward prosecuting the former president for those incidents.

A recent Andean Information Network (AIN) report recalled the protest from February 12-13, 2003 in La Paz that left 31 dead and approximately 200 injured. Video footage from that demonstration showed military officials targeting and shooting civilians, yet the military justice tribunal recently announced the acquittal of the four soldiers who were shown on the videotape, prompting protests by the victims’ family members, human rights organizations and many others.

Since 2001, high-profile human rights cases have been transferred to the Bolivian military tribunal, despite the fact that the Bolivian constitution and law do not authorize military jurisdiction in human rights cases. The Catholic Church, the Permanent Human Rights Assembly and the Human Rights Ombudsman’s office have repeatedly insisted that legal investigations be carried out within the civilian court system. But military personnel have consistently refused to cooperate in investigations carried out by the attorney general’s representatives in the region, asserting that they are only answerable to internal military investigations. The military legal process does not provide for transparent court proceedings. None of the cases that have gone to military tribunals has resulted in a conviction.

The AIN report refers to the U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights practice (February 25, 2004) that acknowledges the Bolivian government’s “delay in completing effective investigations and identifying and punishing those responsible for either civilian or security force deaths,” with a resulting perception of impunity in human rights cases. “Ironically,” continues AIN, “although the report acknowledged a lack of progress in all major cases, and especially those in the Chapare coca growing region, the State Department has yet to invoke the Leahy Amendment, which provides the U.S. the means to ensure that U.S. funds do not go to security forces that commit gross human rights violations. It requires that these abuses be investigated and the responsible parties face prosecution. To strengthen this legislation, in January 2004 the U.S. Congress approved language in the foreign operations bill that makes respect for human rights and military and police forces’ participation in legal investigations a prerequisite for the disbursement of U.S. funds to these units:

Provided further, That funds appropriated under this heading that are available for assistance for the Bolivian military and police should be made available for such purposes subject to a determination by the Secretary of State, and a report to the Committees on Appropriations, that the Bolivian military and police are respecting human rights and cooperating with investigations and prosecutions of alleged violations of human rights.

In writing final language for the bill, the House of Representatives-Senate conference managers noted that:

Despite repeated assurances by successive Bolivian governments that human rights cases would be properly investigated and the individuals responsible appropriately punished, little has been done and impunity remains the norm for members of Bolivian security forces who commit violations. The managers urge the Secretary to give higher priority to these justice issues.

Faith in action:

Clear accountability for human rights violations is essential to avoid further injury and loss of life in Bolivia and to maintain the legitimacy of the Mesa administration. Please write to the U.S. State Department, Andean Region Office, urging implementation of the Leahy Amendment and the language included in the 2004 Foreign Operations Bill. For additional information, write to the Andean Information Network at paz@albatros.cnb.net.
El Salvador: Election aftermath

On Sunday, March 21, Salvadorans went to the polls and voted in Tony Saca of the ARENA party as their new president. Maryknoll lay missioner Gigi Gruenke described the election day scene in her community in rural El Salvador. Her reflection is a fitting introduction to a brief analysis from the SHARE Foundation (www.share-elsalvador.org/) on the election results.

“… At the overcrowded polls …, Tina, the widow of Don Tino, cast her vote. Candelaria, who has spent over a year recovering from multiple fractures on both of her legs due to osteoporosis, also arrived to vote. This she did even though her borrowed wheelchair lost a wheel in the process. Evelio, Don Tino’s neighbor who is 36 years old and also suffering from advanced kidney failure, arrived to cast his vote, along with 90-year old Don Lencho, 89-year old Doña Elena and thousands of other impoverished rural families.

“The passion in these people and their neighbors for change was palpable. They want decent public health care for people like themselves who are too poor to pay; they want opportunity via a government which will support Salvadoran agriculture and open national markets for local corn, beans and other products; they want affordable and decent public education for their children; they want dignified jobs and hope for their children…

“By 8 p.m. Sunday evening the sad news was in: the massive effort of the people hadn’t achieved a victory, a change in government. The fear tactics of the well-financed government election campaign, the biased press and media coverage … People say that ‘fear’ won. But hundreds of thousands of people weren’t afraid and aren’t afraid. They will continue to struggle these next five years. It won’t be easy to gain better lives - even minimal improvement - but then who promised it would be: certainly not Jesus, and not his loving martyred follower, Archbishop Romero.”

From the SHARE Foundation:

In the final count, Tony Saca of ARENA won 57 percent of the vote, while Shafik Handal of the FMLN received 37 percent. Voter turnout was 67 percent, representing just under 63 percent of all citizens of voting age, according to a report by the SHARE Foundation on which the following analysis is based.

Many election observer delegates were shocked by the number of poor who chose to vote for ARENA. The results from March 21, however, are consistent with traditional voting trends in El Salvador. Speaking in general terms the middle class and “organized” poor tend to vote for the FMLN – a fact demonstrated by the number of urban municipalities and municipalities in former-conflicutive zones governed by the FMLN. By contrast, ARENA tends to get the vote of the poorest and wealthiest sectors of the population…

ARENA was able to capitalize on the public’s association of Handal with his role as a leader from the civil war – an era that much of Salvadoran society would prefer to forget. By contrast, Saca, with no prior political involvement and no connection to the war, was cast as the forward-looking candidate. This was compounded by the fact that Handal has had a bitter relationship with the media, while Saca owns many of El Salvador’s major radio stations and is closely aligned with the two mass circulation daily newspapers and the three most prominent television stations.

Dagoberto Gutierrez, of the Salvadoran Ecological Unity, reflected that the FMLN was unable to persuade voters with its slogan “Vote for Change.” Gutierrez suggested that no one fears change as much as the extremely poor and extremely rich, since they have the most to lose … ARENA successfully cast the FMLN’s proposed change as both uncertain and potentially volatile. The clearest example was their assertion that an FMLN win would lead to the severing of good relations with the U.S., which would result in the deportation of Salvadorans in the U.S. and cut off of direly needed remittances …

But there are hopeful signs. Despite the electoral loss in March, the FMLN more than doubled the number of votes it received in the 1999 presidential elections, jumping from 343,000 votes in 1999 to just over 800,000 in 2004. Considering the resources invested to disparage the FMLN and acknowledging that Shafik Handal was an ideal target for ARENA propaganda, the FMLN’s results were impressive …

Given the highly charged and highly participatory character of these elections, both ARENA and the FMLN have their work cut out for them … For ARENA the challenge will be to prove that the free trade, neo-liberal economic model will spark the dynamic growth that it has been promising for over 15 years.

Meanwhile, the FMLN must hold on to the nearly 400,000 additional voters who backed Handal this March. In November the FMLN will elect new party officers … The challenge will be to promote new leaders capable of maintaining the values of the party while shedding some of its more controversial baggage.

The days and weeks following the elections have been marked by large protests. Thousands of people have flocked to the streets and paralyzed the highways to bring attention to their lack of access to water, with many of the protestors wearing ARENA t-shirts. ARENA purportedly has the privatization of water, along with health care, on its short list of things to do. If this is any indicator of what’s to come, we can likely expect a turbulent five years in El Salvador. However, as the social movement has repeatedly demonstrated in the past, crisis often produces opportunities. MD
Haiti: Another difficult transition

On April 20, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called for a broad new UN mission in Haiti that would include 6,700 troops, over 1,600 international police and experts to help turn the Caribbean country into a “functioning democracy.” Calling the last UN mission to Haiti “too brief and fraught with both international and domestic hindrances,” he said that the new UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti would include experts on human rights, HIV/AIDS, gender and civil affairs, and would work in partnership with the Haitian people and with regional organizations, including the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of American States (OAS). Transfer of authority is expected to take place on June 1.

Despite the yet-unclarified role of the United States in the ouster of President Jean Bertrand Aristide on February 29, 2004, the interim government of Prime Minister Gerard Latortue is moving ahead with full U.S. backing. The people of Haiti have watched their hard-won democracy replaced by a government that does not represent the peasants or working class. Instead, this government disproportionately represents Haiti’s tiny, wealthy and powerful elite.

The “interim” government is tasked with overseeing democratic elections for the country and in early April signed an agreement relating to the process of transition with some, but not all, of the other political players. Meanwhile, thousands of Lavalas supporters are in hiding and the general sense of insecurity in the country is extremely high.

On April 5, Secretary of State Colin Powell gave Washington’s strong backing to Haiti’s interim leaders, offering rhetorical support and new aid to smooth the country’s return to constitutional rule. The U.S. plans to send a seven-member team to advise the interim government on security issues. In addition to an ongoing $52 million economic development and humanitarian assistance program, the U.S. administration committed to a three-year jobs program, which promised to provide tens of thousands of jobs in Port-au-Prince, Cap Haitien, Gonaives and other locations as needed. The United States also promised to allocate $9 million for elections and democracy building to support activities of the OAS Special Mission for Strengthening Democracy in Haiti.

It is ironic that even before irregularities in the May 2000 elections led to the withholding of aid to the Haitian government, the U.S. government had been channeling aid through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and reinforced this position after the OAS raised questions about the run-off elections. The European Union and the InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB) followed suit. As a result of the U.S. example, the government elected during the elections of 2000 began its tenure without access to bilateral or multilateral funding from the majority of the world’s creditors. The IDB’s resident representative in Haiti, Gerard Johnson, told a Haiti Reborn/Quixote Center delegation in January 2003, “If you don’t have a government, you don’t have a country. You can’t lend only to NGOs.”

Other activities for which the U.S. has apparently suggested that aid may be available now that the government of Haiti is back “in favor” include support for government efforts aimed at the full observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms; efforts to professionalize the Haitian National Police through special training and assistance; and support for Haiti’s new Truth, Justice and National Reconciliation Commission. The U.S. Treasury Department will send an assessment team to determine the technical assistance needed by the Haitian Ministry of Finance. The United States is prepared to assist Haitian authorities in the recovery of assets that may have been illicitly diverted. The U.S. administration also says it will seek to expand humanitarian assistance to ensure that the medical and nutritional needs of Haiti’s most disadvantaged people are met. Since the latest crisis began to unfold in February, the U.S. has sent $3 million to provide badly needed medical and food supplies.

Meanwhile, a delegation sent to Haiti by the National Lawyers’ Guild found conditions there especially precarious. Their report described a general sense of insecurity due to killings; curfews; the lack of police or any form of working judicial system; patrols of private, heavily-armed militias; the doubling or tripling of food and fuel prices; the fall of the Haitian currency against the U.S. dollar; an abnormal lack of electricity in the cities; and the unauthorized return of uniformed and armed soldiers from the Haitian Army decommissioned in 1994 for its historical oppression of Haiti’s poor. Although a 3,600-member multinational military force (U.S., French, and Canadian marines) is present in Haiti, its patrols at the time were confined to the city of Port-au-Prince. Finally, the delegation found overwhelming evidence that the victims of threats and violence have been supporters of the elected government of President Aristide and the Fanmi Lavalas party, elected and appointed officials in that government or party, or employees of the government, including police.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) also issued a statement in March calling for control of Haiti’s northern region, where a large number of journalists and government officials have gone into hiding out of fear for their safety. Vowing to end impunity, Haitian justice officials have promised to prosecute abusive
former members of the government of President Aristide, but have shown little interest in pursuing abusive leaders of the rebel forces. HRW called on U.S. forces to arrest human rights criminal and bring them to justice.

At the end of a 15-day fact-finding mission on April 7, Amnesty International (AI) also reported that Haiti is mired in human rights abuses, political vengeance and fear. AI found evidence of intimidation and rights abuses across the political spectrum, despite the presence of a multinational peacekeeping force. The group was pointedly critical of the interim government. The delegation interviewed Haitians of many different persuasions, who expressed a profound sense of insecurity and fear for their own safety from one or the other of the armed elements, including thugs, armed pro-Aristide gangs, nonpolitical armed gangs, ex-military authorities, former rural police chiefs responsible for past abuses and individuals who participated in the 1991 coup that removed Aristide.

**Faith in action:**

Support Haiti Solidarity Week, May 15-23, coordinated by Haiti Reborn, a project of the Quixote Center: www.haitireborn.org. Check the same website for ongoing action suggestions in solidarity with movements for democracy, human rights and peace in Haiti. Weekly updates from Haiti Reborn are also available. MD

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**Mexico: UN condemns Juarez murder probe**

In the past ten years, over 300 young women have been murdered in the Ciudad Juarez area in northern Mexico, near El Paso, TX. Almost all of the victims were from poor families; many toiled in maquilas in the area, or held jobs as domestic workers. Despite urgent pleas from victims’ families, broad international attention, and a recent U.S. Congressional delegation, little actual progress has been made on the cases. Several people have been arrested and held as suspects, but those leads evaporated as it has been proven that they were coerced and tortured into false confessions; one suspect, now recognized as innocent of the charges against him, died in prison. The following article is the UN Wire’s English translation of a piece that originally appeared in the French daily Le Monde.

A recent UN report on the investigation into the murders of hundreds of women in the Mexican city of Ciudad Juarez has made devastating accusations against local and state authorities and their handling of the case, which it says is tarnished by the city’s underbelly of crime, Le Monde reports.

The northern border city has gained notoriety from the case involving the unsolved murders of more than 300 women over a 10-year period, many of whom were also raped, tortured and mutilated.

Despite the savage nature of the murders, according to the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the investigation has been tempered by passiveness and illegality seen in the obstruction of studies, the slowness in investigating disappearances, falsification of evidence, harassment of the victims’ families and the use of torture to obtain confessions.

Even the exact number of victims is disputed, with “official sources” saying 321 women were murdered, the Institute of Women in Chihuahua saying 326 and Amnesty International saying 370.

The committee believes that drug trafficking lies at the heart of the murders.

Ciudad Juarez, a city of 1.5 million inhabitants, has its “door open for illegal immigration and drug trafficking,” the report says, fuelling an environment of “organized crime, drugs, the trafficking of women, illegal migration, whitewashing, pornography and prostitution.”

The committee has therefore recommended that the Mexican government sign a protocol with the United States to carry out a joint investigation into the crimes in hopes of casting out a wider net for the perpetrators.

**Faith in action:**

Urge your representative to sign H. Res. 466, which conveys the sympathy of the House of Representatives to the families of the young women murdered in Ciudad Juarez, and encourages increased U.S. involvement in bringing an end to these crimes.

For more information, go to the Washington Office on Latin America’s website, www.wola.org. Also, see NewsNotes articles from November-December 2003, September-October 2003, and May-June 2003. JC
New findings analyze violations by SOA graduates

Kate McCoy, a member of the Maryknoll Lay Mission Association Class of 2003, contributed the following article based on her research as a graduate student in sociology. She and her husband have been assigned to Venezuela. The results of her study were presented in a press conference conducted by SOA Watch in Washington, D.C. in March 2004.

Most readers of NewsNotes are probably familiar with the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC), formerly known as the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA). In its 58-year history, the School has trained over 60,000 Latin American military and security forces, including many who went on to commit heinous violations of human rights, such as the murders of the six Jesuit priests and their two companions and the four churchwomen in El Salvador. Maryknoll priest Fr. Roy Bourgeois has dedicated much of his career to exposing the abuses committed by graduates of the School and building a social movement to close it once and for all.

The main response of the Army (and later the Department of Defense) to these accusations is that only a very small percentage of the School’s graduates are human rights violators, and that most have clean records and actually go on to help strengthen democracy and human rights in their home countries. Within the movement to close the School (led by SOAWatch, the organization that Fr. Roy founded), this has come to be known as the “bad apples argument,” i.e., why let a few bad apples spoil the whole barrel?

As a graduate student in sociology last year, I used my master’s thesis as an opportunity to see whether human rights abusers tend to be just a random assortment of SOA graduates. I conducted a statistical analysis of the human rights records of approximately 12,000 graduates of the school from six countries (Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama and Peru) over a 40-year period (1960 to 2000, the most recent year for which data was available). The results were startling. While proponents of the School claim that it offers professional training that is actually the antidote to human rights violations, the results showed that the more training students received at the School, the more likely they were to violate human rights after wards. That is, students who took two or more courses at the School were almost four times more likely to commit abuses than students who took only one course at the School. This implies that SOA training actually worsens human rights—a damning indictment of the School.

A second result of the study also flew in the face of conventional wisdom. While the Army implies that human rights violations result from inexperience and a lack of professional formation, the results showed just the opposite: those students with the most experience and prestige (i.e., those of higher rank) were more likely to commit abuses than those less experienced counterparts. Students who attended the School as officers were more than three and a half times more likely to commit human rights violations than those who first attended as enlisted. In essence, this means that the School’s best and brightest were also the most likely to commit abuses.

Finally, since the beginning of the SOAWatch movement, the Army and Department of Defense have enacted a series of reforms to respond to the movement’s critiques. These reforms—which opponents of the School label as window dressing—have included removing offensive training manuals (the so-called Torture Manuals) from the curriculum, adding human rights material to the curriculum, and even closing the School in 2001 and re-opening it with a different name and a modified mission. With each reform, proponents of the School assured opponents that human rights violations were a thing of the past; part of the Cold War legacy of Counterinsurgency and Low Intensity Warfare. To test this claim, I compared the rates of human rights violations among students who graduated during and after the Cold War (1989). The results showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups of students, meaning that there is no evidence whatsoever to back up the Army’s claim that the School improved over time. That being the case, we must also call into question the seriousness and effectiveness of the post-2000 reforms, such as the change to the School’s name.

Hopefully these findings—1) that more SOA training makes people more likely to commit human rights violations; 2) that officers who attend the School are more likely to violate human rights than enlisted persons; and 3) that the School failed to show any improvement in human rights over time—can help the movement to close the School, and also help to establish the need for some system of oversight and human rights monitoring of the other 100,000 foreign troops and security forces who receive training through similar programs in the U.S. each year.

**Faith in action:**

Urge your Congressional representatives to fully support the Latin America Military Training Review Act of 2003 (H.R. 1258), sponsored by Rep. James McGovern (D-MA). H.R. 1258 calls for the closure of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC), the successor institute to the School of the Americas (SOA), and a full assessment of all Defense Department training in Latin America.
Fifty years after the great strike of 1954 that began with banana dock workers and snowballed into a nation-wide action, much has changed and nothing has changed in Honduras, according to a report from Rights Action. Control exercised by transnational fruit companies remains firm. Assassinations by company paramilitary forces continue. Impunity is the order of the day.

On March 13, 2004, Cesar Virgilio Pinot was shot and killed by the private security forces of the Tela Railroad Company in the palm plantation Toloa Empalme, in Tela, department of Atlantida, Honduras. The plantation is owned by Agro Oriental - a palm oil production unit related to the Tela Railroad Company, which is a subsidiary of the U.S.-based Chiquita Brands International, Inc. One has to pass through it in order to reach the communities of Kilometro 32, La Tomasa, Villafranca and La Union.

Inhabitants of these four communities are organized in an Association of Independent Palm Producers, allowing them to obtain better prices for their product and to work and to maintain their independence from the transnational corporation. Virgilio was on his way to the community of Kilometro 32 to participate in a community meeting to address the impacts of mining on the environment. The ‘Martires de Guaymas’ cooperative has recently been involved in organizing and raising awareness about the dangers of open pit mines using cyanide solution extraction methods on human health and the environment.

Cesar Virgilio Pinot never made it to the community meeting. He was attacked by the private elite security forces of the Tela Railroad Company, armed with AK47s (illegal weapons for private individuals, including private security companies.) Another Martires de Guaymas member, Jose Neptaly Lopez, was shot twice in the leg and subsequently captured.

The following day, national police agents - accompanied by members of the same private security force – arrested Osman Alexander Blanco Duarte, Wilton Rene Blanco Duarte and Antonio Baquedano Ramo for the murder of Virgilio. All four captured are independent palm producers from the communities of Kilometro 32 and Villafranca and are also Martires de Guaymas members. They were arrested despite the fact that members of the private security force, who were permitted to give their testimony anonymously and through criminal investigation agents, had admitted to killing Virgilio in self-defense.

No case file was opened, nor was an autopsy performed, although both are routine procedures for homicide cases in the region. In fact, Virgilio’s body disappeared for over a week, with authorities denying all knowledge of his whereabouts until 10 days later when they admitted to Virgilio’s family that the body had been buried in the general cemetery in Tela.

Meanwhile, the accusations against the prisoners had changed. They have been charged by public prosecutor Jacobo de Jesus Erazo with ‘illicit association,’ more commonly known as the ‘anti-gang law,’ reformed last year to give police and judicial authorities almost unbridled power to determine who is guilty of this ‘illicit association,’ without requiring concrete proof of any other crime. The reformed law clearly violates several constitutional guarantees and is currently being challenged on this basis.

A further arrest was made on March 18, when Jose Medardo Reyes Mondoza was detained for the same charge. The five are accused of belonging to a band of car thieves, armed with AK47s, who rob, assault and terrorize the local population. The local population, however, has shown their complete support for the political prisoners. Community organizations, local authorities and even political party candidates have come forward to attest to their honesty, innocence and leadership. The judge, however, accused the defense - Martires de Guaymas activist and lawyer Marcelino Martinez - of orchestrating a show of community support and ordered the detention of the five prisoners until trial.

On the other hand, national and international attention and pressure seems to have made some headway. On March 26, an arrest warrant was ordered for one of the company security agents allegedly involved in the murder, Jose Cayetano Vargas, who was detained. State authorities also announced an ‘independent’ investigation into the case.

Prospects for an objective investigation or the impartial application of justice, however, continue to look rather bleak. Events to date have shown that authorities from different police and judicial institutions have worked to cover up the case instead of investigate it.

**Faith in action:**

Please send urgent appeals calling for a complete investigation into the assassination of Cesar Virgilio Pinot and insisting that the guards accused of his murder be brought to trial to:

- Honduras Ambassador to U.S., Mario Canahuati, embassy@hondurasembassy.org; fax (202)966-9751
- U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, Larry Palmer, fax: 011(504) 238-4446

with copies to:

- Chiquita Brands International, Inc., 250 East Fifth Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202,
- Martires de Guaymas/Copinh, fax: (504)783-0817; marcelinomartinezespinal@yahoo.es, copinhonduras@yahoo.es  MD
Atrocities in Darfur must stop

On April 1, Dudley Conneely, a friend of Maryknoll missioners, visited families at the Abu Zar School in Darfur, Sudan, which serves as a shelter and a makeshift camp for internally-displaced persons (IDP). The families, ethnically Massalat, fled their villages in early 2004. The majority sleep outside under the elements in an open patio, while mothers, small children, elders and sick occupy the small cramped classrooms. The following update includes some of what Conneely saw in his visit to the IDP camp in Darfur. Other sources include Human Rights Watch and BBC News.

“The incessant wails of children echoed through the patio and flies covered the mouths and eyes of infants and children; they seemed too tired and malnourished to swat them off.” Compared to other camps, these people have the advantage of some shelter, while hundreds of thousands of IDPs live under the elements in the sweltering open desert. Still, “[t]he misery and poverty bring you to your knees.”

Approximately three million people in the Darfur region have been severely impacted by the activities of government-backed militias, many times working with government forces. Some one million people have been forced to flee from their homes in Darfur. Many have gone into neighboring Chad. Refugees speak of rape, arbitrary killings, and the destruction of homes. In early April, the UN Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Jan Egeland, reported of an organized, “scorched-earth” policy of ethnic cleansing in Darfur.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports that massacres take place regularly throughout the region. On April 23, a HRW release reported that in early March, pro-government militia and government forces acted jointly to round up and detain 136 men from the Fur ethnic group. All 136 were later executed.

The Sudan Organization Against Torture says that the Sudanese government has not only allowed militia groups to commit these atrocities with impunity, but it has worked with them using its air force to bomb villages and its own troops to drive out the population. For example, the government armed forces bombed Mahajrea village between 3:30-7:30 p.m., April 4, east Nyala, southern Darfur state. The military used two helicopter gunships and one military plane, killing at least four civilians and injuring one civilian. These bombings terrorize the population, causing panic, flight and displacement.

On April 1, while Conneely visited the IDP camp, Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA) introduced a concurrent resolution, H. Con Res 403, condemning the Government of Sudan for its attacks against civilians in the Darfur region. One week later, Sens. Sam Brownback (R-KS) and Russell Feingold (D-WI) introduced a similar resolution in the Senate. The resolution also calls on the international community to condemn the Sudanese government for the attacks in Darfur and to demand that they cease; urges the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the affected area; and insists that President Bush direct the United States’ UN representative to seek an official UN investigation to determine if crimes against humanity have been committed in the Darfur region.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has talked about Darfur with a sense of foreboding, drawing parallels with the situation before the Rwandan genocide. On April 7, people around the globe commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. Governments and peoples of the world were not only filled not with remorse, but with resolve that a genocide or holocaust would never happen again. Still, the situation in Darfur worsens.

**Faith in action:**

Call or write Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and ask him to 1) continue to support the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development’s (IGAD) peace process between the north and the south; 2) exert strong pressure on the Government of Sudan in Khartoum to seek a political settlement in Darfur which includes the cessation of the reign of terror being carried out by both the government troops and the government-supported militias; and 3) pressure the Government of Sudan to consent to unimpeded humanitarian access to the Darfur region where more than three million people have been affected.

Urge your senators to co-sponsor S. Con. Res. 99 and your representative to co-sponsor H. Con. Res. 403. *CH*
What future for Rwanda, 10 years after genocide?

Justice and reconciliation are difficult to define, and, in many cases, even more challenging to achieve. This certainly is the case as we remember the Rwanda genocide on its tenth anniversary, when hundreds of thousands of its people, Tutsi and many moderate Hutu, were killed. The depth of the atrocity is hard to comprehend. A group of Maryknoll missioners in Nairobi, Kenya, met to pray shortly after the details of the killings came out. Such brutality was incomprehensible to the missioners’ experience in the Africa they had come to know. Their response was confusion, silence and tears. The following reflection was contributed by a missioner who still struggles to understand what went wrong.

How do Rwandans handle such horror -- personally, legally and culturally? How do the survivors -- those beaten or raped or relatives of those killed, who are experiencing bitterness and hatred -- come through such trauma? Have the souls and minds of the perpetrators been dehumanized? Can communities come together to heal the victims and bring the perpetrators to true repentance?

The gacaca courts (Kinyarwanda for “justice on the grass”) have been established to help handle the 115,000 accused perpetrators still remaining in Rwandan jails and communal lockups. A small number have been tried by the regular courts, which lack both financial and human resources; others have died in prison during the last ten years. The present gacaca courts are an adaptation of a traditional form of solving problems, similar to indigenous restorative forms of justice found throughout sub-Sahara Africa. How successful they will be in contributing to the process of bringing peace and reconciliation to Rwanda remains to be seen.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania, based on a Western retributive system, has mixed reviews. The ICTR has arrested 66 of the 81 people indicted for genocide-related crimes and convicted only 18 in 10 years. This is hardly satisfying Rwandans who say that some 300 ringleaders live abroad. The Rwandan president, Paul Kagame, has a strained relationship with the Tribunal. His Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) brought an end to the genocide but human rights groups say they carried out reprisal killings of as many as 30,000 people in the process. Kagame refuses to let the ICTR touch any of his army.

Kagame is right to blame the United States, Belgium, France and the United Nations for their inaction. A small number of trained and armed troops could have stopped most of the killings. He noted that the U.S., UK, and Belgium have apologized, and he has accepted their apology, but he blames senior French officials for having “the audacity not to apologize.” Kagame, who inaugurated a genocide memorial in April 2004, swore that the genocide would never happen again.

Certainly the international community can prevent any future genocide. Human Rights Watch (HRW) gives guidelines based on lessons learned from Rwanda. They include reacting promptly and firmly to preparations for the mass slaughter of civilians; paying attention to the media in situations of potential ethnic, religious or racial conflict; being prepared to silence broadcasts that incite violence and alert to negative models in nearby regions. With the presence of the United Nations and other humanitarian groups throughout the world, and with the technology of instant communication, genocide should never be allowed to take place again. (To read HRW’s report, go to http://hrw.org/campaigns/rwanda/, then click on “Rwanda: Lessons Learned” on the right-side menu).

Perhaps the underlying issues are the deep fear that the Tutsi rightfully have for their survival and the equally powerful apprehension the Hutu have about the Tutsi, who have a long history of acting as if they are inherently superior and have a right to rule the country with all the privileges that entails. Archbishop Desmond Tutu touched on this in his own inimitable way when he visited Rwanda one year after the genocide and spoke at a huge rally. He said that “the history of Rwanda was typical of a history of ‘top dog’ and ‘underdog.’” The top dog wanted to cling to its privileged position and the underdog “fought like an enraged bull to topple” the top dog. Tutu emphasizes that this cycle of reprisal and counter-reprisal had to be broken with restorative justice, a key element of which is forgiveness. (See Tutu’s book, No Future Without Forgiveness, published October 2000, ISBN 0385496907.)

CH
Burundi: Peace or a façade?

These two articles are taken from a report written by David Lewis, originally published on the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) website, www.irinnews.org. Lewis can be contacted at P.O. Box 36650, Kigamboni, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; tel. (255)22-260-1472. Several Maryknoll missioners, including Fr. Dave Schwinghamer and lay missioner Merwyn DeMello, have worked or currently are working in the refugee camps mentioned in the following articles.

Ten years after Burundi’s bloody civil war began, following the assassination of Melchior Ndayaye, the country’s first democratically elected president, there are signs that peace might finally be returning to the tiny central African country, where at least 300,000 people have been killed.

In November 2003, the country’s largest rebel group, the Conseil national pour la defense de la democratie-Force pour la defense de la democratie (CNDD-FDD) faction led by Pierre Nkurunziza, and the government finally signed an all-encompassing peace deal, which aims to address the fundamental question of reforms in the army, and the war has come to end throughout most of the country.

The only exception being the hills surrounding the capital Bujumbura, where another rebel group, Agathon Rwasa’s Forces nationales de liberation (FNL), remains outside the peace process and is embroiled in a brutal war with the army and, some analysts say, the CNDD-FDD.

Nonetheless, after several failed repatriation attempts in previous years, optimism has spread to the refugee camps in western Tanzania, where, among many of the 320,000 Burundians

Burundian refugee family returns home

Assembled outside their mud hut in Nduta refugee camp, in Kibondo district, western Tanzania, Jean Njebarikanavyo, his wife Generose and their eight children represent many of those returning home today. Farmers from Ruyigi province, they fled Burundi eight years ago after fighting in the hills around them made life there too dangerous.

Jean says life in the camps has been bearable. He mentions the common complaint that the food is not enough, but says that he can supplement this through doing work for people, as he is a carpenter. But they are sick of life in the camps, and want to get back to their farm on the hills in Buteze commune.

“We have heard about the peace, but know nothing about the politics. No, we just want to get back to the place where we have memories of home,” he said.

With an indifferent shrug of his shoulders, he adds: “If there the war comes back, we will just have to leave again.”

Many of the refugees that return home say that in the months since the latest peace deal was signed, they have been reassured about the improved security that they hear about on the radio or through people they know that have gone back to assess the situation at home.

Indeed, once arriving in Burundi, Jean Njebarikanavyo and his family unload themselves and their belongings from the trucks, spend the afternoon going through the process of registering as returnees, pick up their three-month repatriation package of food and non-food items and then head off to the communes.

By the time they get to Buteze, their cooking and farming items, as well as their tools, had all been lost in the process. There was little they could do and they got on with their journey as they were not alone and, in any case, there was still a long way to go.

The distance refugees have to walk once they have been deposited in the commune is another issue. The 14 kilometers [a little less than nine miles] Jean and his family have to walk appears to be a long way, especially given the load, which adds up to about 700 kilograms [over 1,500 pounds], but there are others that have to walk 30 kilometers [nearly 19 miles].

Jean knew that the land he had worked in the years before fleeing the war was still unoccupied. His father, who had remained in Burundi and still lived next door, had somehow got in touch when he was in the camps and told him so.

Like most other returnees, his house had been destroyed by the army years before, in case the rebels had tried to use as shelter themselves. But his father was letting the family of 10 sleep in his house. Other families without relatives are being welcomed home and looked after in the same manner by neighbours, but not all are lucky enough to find their land unoccupied.
living in camps in Kigoma and Kagera regions, there is a growing genuine desire to return home and rebuild their lives.

Previous peace deals have also been followed by a slight increase in returns but, more often than not, they have been treated with skepticism by most of the refugees. Refugees have also left in the past, feeling that they were being pushed out by a government that often blames them for insecurity and environment degradation in the west of the country.

But, while many of the more educated among the largely Hutu refugees are still waiting to see whether elections take place and the army is reformed, many humanitarian workers believe this latest wave could be the beginning of the final return home of the world’s second largest refugee population.

There are plenty of questions, however, over what awaits them on their return. Many are returning to the east of the country, where, during a decade of conflict, some areas have been inaccessible to humanitarian workers, let alone development work. Medical services are stretched, schools are run down and most of the refugees will come home to find their houses destroyed.

Access to land, especially for those who have been away for longer, is already and will become a serious issue for a group of people largely made up of subsistence farmers. This will be exacerbated if and when the Burundians who have been living in Tabora, Tanzania since fleeing ethnic fighting in the 1970s return home.

A traditional system that existed before colonial times and is known as Bashingantaha, translated as “the maker of justice, the defender of equity and guardian of order,” is being revived and increasingly used to settle disputes. But observers say that, with greater numbers of refugees returning, land disputes are becoming more frequent and, sometimes, being resolved violently.

The general feeling is that while the problem may not be significant now, preparations need to be made to avert a potential crisis.

**Faith in action:**

Contact the U.S. State Department and request that they fully support the peace process in Burundi and the repatriation of refugees so that the refugees can begin new lives with enough resources. CH

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**Protests block Belgium arms transfer to Tanzania**

In January 2004 Pax Christi International joined several Belgian and British non-governmental organizations to protest a proposed military material transfer to Tanzania. The military material was to be used to build a factory in Mwanza, on the shore of Lake Victoria. New Lachaussée, the company to have profited from the transfer, designs and produces integrated assembly units used to manufacture ammunition and detonators. Activists demanded that Belgium not support a company that had helped to proliferate arms and ammunition in this conflicted region of Africa.

The Belgium supplying company, New Lachaussée, part of the Forrest Group, was criticized by a United Nations Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The panel presented its findings to the UN Security Council in October, 2003. Their report clearly identified a strong link between economic exploitation and the illegal flow of arms in the DRC (see NewsNotes - November/December 2003).

The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) identified Tanzania as one of a transit country for illegal arms’ flows into the DRC. The abundant availability of arms has added fuel to the conflict and has contributed to a worsening humanitarian and human rights crisis, particularly in the eastern DRC. At least three million people have died in the DRC’s five-year conflict. Over the past year, the Ituri province, in the eastern DRC, has suffered 75 percent of the killings as well as a mass exodus of people fleeing violence. In fact, 90 percent of the country’s total number of internally displaced since 1998, fled from the Ituri Province.

The Pax Christi and Belgian NGO activists aimed to block the sales license, stop the proposed transaction and open up a debate about federal weapons transfer laws. Their actions included public protests, letters and phone calls to members of Parliament and the generation of negative publicity through an aggressive media strategy. All these actions made a clear link between New Lachaussée and the suffering incurred in the DRC.

Protestors achieved two of three of their goals in February, 2004, when the Belgium government announced that it would not issue the license, and cancelled the proposed arms transfer to Tanzania. This was an impressive victory for these groups who joined to make their voices heard — an inspiration for all people working for peace.

For more information see: http://www.eca-watch.org and the coalition’s letter of protest at Pax Christi International’s website: http://www.paxchristi.net/PDF/AF03E04.pdf. CH
Kenya: Settlement demolished for city by-pass

Over 100,000 residents of informal settlements (slums) in Nairobi, Kenya have been threatened with eviction in the past few months. Such evictions will increase violence, insecurity and poverty for these Kenyans. Maryknoll lay missioner Christine Bodewes, a lawyer, has spent the last six years working closely with other church groups and non-governmental organizations to stop this inhuman scenario in Nairobi’s informal settlements. The following article is based on a joint position paper written by the Campaign Against Forced Evictions in the Informal Settlements in Nairobi (which includes Bodewes) on the Kibera informal settlement published March 14 and available, in its entirety, at: www.maryknollogc.org.

Currently, over 160 slums are home to over two million people in Nairobi. Residents of Nairobi’s informal settlements constitute 55 percent of the city’s population and yet they are crowded onto only five percent of the total land area. These staggering statistics have their historical roots in the failure of the State to provide for low-cost housing for the poor. As a result, the majority of Nairobi’s residents have encroached on unoccupied land, including land set aside for road reserves, railway lines, forests and public utilities, where they have put up semi-permanent structures.

On February 8, tractors demolished the settlement commonly referred to as Raila Village in Kibera to make way for a new city by-pass. There was no demolition notice, consultation or resettlement plan. Approximately 400 structures were demolished. This single eviction caused the internal displacement of over 2,000 people and millions of shillings in property losses.

The government justifies the evictions with the need for the by-pass, and a government decision that it is dangerous for people to live so near the rail and power lines. That position is indisputable. However, the historical context for the informal settlements makes the current situation extremely complex, requiring any solution to consider the history and origins of slums.

Most structure owners in affected slum areas have paid a “fee” to the local administration including chiefs, village elders and the police in exchange for “official permission” to use the land. These irregular allocations by the local administration are normal business in the informal settlements. As recently as February 19 this year, Kenya Railways was issuing receipts for “rent” paid by people occupying plots located on the rail line. People have occupied space near the rail line and/or under power lines for decades with the government’s full knowledge and sanction.

United Nations Habitat Director Anna Tibaijuka had an agreement with former President Daniel Arap Moi to support slum upgrading in Nairobi. When the new government took office, an official memorandum of understanding was entered into with the Minister of Roads, Public Works and Housing in January 2003. Miloon Kothari, the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing to the UN’s Commission on Human Rights, visited Kenya at the invitation of the government. He pointed out that the evictions were done in flagrant violation of international laws to which Kenya is a signatory.

Local church leaders including Ndingi Mwana’a Nzeki, the Archbishop of Nairobi, and Archbishop Giovanni Tonucci, the Apostolic Nuncio to Kenya, have expressed their concern. Carindal Renato Martino, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, on a visit to the Kibera slums, called for respect of the human rights of slum dwellers and stated that every effort should be made to provide alternative accommodations before an eviction.

Faith in action:

Write a respectful letter to the Kenya ambassador to the U.S., Yusuf A. Nzibo, 2249 R Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008, and to the Kenya Ambassador to the UN, Dr. Judith Mbula Bahemuka, 866 United Nations Plaza, Room 486, New York, NY 10017, and ask for the following:

1. An immediate halt to all forced evictions in Nairobi, Kenya.
2. In-depth consultations with all affected communities to find adequate alternative housing or resettlement. CH
AU parliament elects Tanzanian woman president

Africa’s first pan-continental parliament, open to all 53 countries, was inaugurated in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on March 28. Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano, the current Africa Union chairman, swore in 202 legislators from 41 countries. The first step by the members of parliament was to elect Tanzania’s Gertrude Mongella as president of their parliament, perhaps a clue to the tone and approach of its future.

Mongella is a veteran politician of her country, ambassador and educator, who in her 34-year career has strongly supported the advancement of women. The move reinforces the strong image of the African Union as determined to advance gender equality. Half the members of the 10-person African Union Commission are women.

The legal steps towards creating the Pan African parliament were taken at the Africa Union summit in Maputo, Mozambique in July 2003. Five members were selected by each country. At least one of the five had to be a woman, but several delegations chose two or more women, for which Chissano expressed the gratitude of many.

The Nigerian delegation leader made a powerful speech in Mongella’s favor, asking whether there was any point in any other candidate being put forward; this was seconded by Sierra Leone. The Ghanaian delegation said they had intended to put their candidate up for the parliament’s presidency but that “imbued with the spirit of unity, solidarity and sharing” they had decided to withdraw in favor of Ms Mongella. The Sudanese delegation wanted to propose a candidate also, but agreed to withdraw “on the will of the house.” The concession brought the house down, and there were several minutes of banging, cheering, clapping and impromptu dancing by the women.

Then an official ballot took place with 166 votes for Mongella (13 abstained and 21 voted against). In a graceful speech she stressed her commitment to women’s equality but praised the men for having adopted most of the changes needed to reach that vote. Then promising to be guided by the principles of partnership between men and women, and she firmly sent everyone off to lunch. CH

The New Africa Union

The rejoicing of the Parliament members may be short lived for no fault of their own. The Parliament is part of the larger new Africa Union (AU) which began in 2002, replacing the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which had limited power and resources. An ultimate aim is for the AU to have a single African parliament, court of justice and central bank, although leaders acknowledge it will be several years before these goals are realized. Sources for the following reflection include allAfrica.com and Pambazuka News.

The challenges facing Africa are staggering, for example, negotiating better global terms for Africa around debt, trade and aid. For the Africa Union as a whole, effective ways and organs to create peace, security and stability for the continent are critical. The African Parliament itself must find the resources to legislate laws, monitor compliance of African states to agreed standards of governance, human rights and gender equality. In its initial stages the parliament will have only consultative and advisory powers, but over time it will evolve into an institution with legislative powers, elected by all the people in each country.

At the spectacular opening ceremony, South African President Thabo Mbeki said, “The time has come that we must end the marginalization of Africa. We must end many centuries in which many on our globe despise the people of our continent.” UN Secretary General Kofi Annan urged patience, noting the underdevelopment of Africa’s economy, with poor infrastructure, the debt burden and the many conflicts. “To build a successful union in such conditions will require great stamina and iron political will,” he remarked. CH
Thailand: Burmese asylum seekers endangered

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has urged Thailand to stop forcing refugees and migrants to return to Burma if their life or freedom might be put at risk. HRW also called on the Burmese government to end the alleged human rights abuses that drive people to seek asylum in Thailand.

Thailand hosts an estimated one million Burmese migrant workers and thousands of refugees and asylum seekers. The country has taken an increasingly hard-line stance toward its Burmese guests, sending up to 10,000 a month back to Burma. In addition, under intense pressure from the Thai government, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stopped screening new asylum seekers in January.

Nevertheless, HRW reports that serious human rights violations in Burma continue, including forced labor, arrests for peaceful expression of political views, rape of ethnic minority women and children by government soldiers, conscription of child soldiers, and forced relocation of villages.

HRW describes the situation in its report “Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy Toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants.” The report is available online at www.hrw.org/reports/2004/thailand0204/.

“Thailand shouldn’t be toughening its stance towards Burmese refugees when there has been no improvement in the abysmal conditions causing them to flee Burma,” says Brad Adams of HRW’s Asia division. “Thailand should not allow commercial or diplomatic interests to interfere with the ability of Burmese to seek safety in Thailand.”

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who has been forging closer ties with Burma, was displeased when protesters demonstrated in front of the Burmese embassy last year in Bangkok. At least 26 were arrested after protests in June and September.

“The Burmese are entitled to stage protests against their government in camps we provide. They can say what they want,” Thaksin said. “But it is not right that they come to Bangkok and protest. We do not like any situation that we cannot control.”

At present Thailand hosts 142,000 Burmese refugees and asylum seekers in 10 refugee camps along the Thai-Burmese border. Another 4,000, recognized by the UNHCR, live in Bangkok and other urban centers. Thailand has signaled an openness to resettle the urban refugees abroad. However, HRW is concerned that Thailand might in turn intensify its crackdown on undocumented Burmese migrants and seal the border to new asylum seekers from Burma.

HRW says the U.S. seems committed to resettling the 4,000 Burmese urban refugees and asylum seekers. However, the proposal has no provision for the 142,000 Burmese refugees living in camps.

Thailand has not ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. HRW still contends, however, that to forcibly return refugees to Burma violates an internationally recognized principle prohibiting refoulement. The Convention states that no refugee should be returned to a territory where his/her life or freedom would be put in jeopardy.

Thailand takes a narrower view, limiting its protection and assistance to “people fleeing fighting.” HRW fears the government might start rejecting Burmese asylum seekers who are fleeing persecution for their pro-democracy activities in Burma. They would then be considered illegal immigrants in Thailand and face possible deportation to Burma.

Already, HRW says, increasing numbers of Burmese are being arrested in Thailand on immigration charges “following peaceful actions such as labor strikes, protests, hunger fasts, overseas speaking tours and other political activities.” The Immigration Department reported that, of 189,486 migrants arrested during 2003 in Thailand, 115,633 were Burmese nationals.

Even deportees who are not asylum seekers or subject to political persecution face punishment under Burma’s strict anti-emigration policies. Illegal emigration carries a sentence of up to seven years’ imprisonment and possible heavy fines.

Since the UNHCR has stopped screening potential refugees, it will be more difficult to protect even those Burmese with valid asylum claims who are detained prior to deportation. Many will return to Thailand even at great personal risk in an endless, costly and frightening cycle: arrest, detention, deportation, payment of bribes, re-entry, re-arrest.

Faith in action:

Contact the Royal Thai Embassy at 1024 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007. Ask that Thailand ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol; broaden its definition of refugees; allow the UNHCR to resume Refugee Status Determination for asylum seekers from Burma; and stop the forcible return of asylum seekers to Burma.

Write to the embassy of Burma (Myanmar) at: The Union of Myanmar, 2300 S Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008. Ask that the government establish the rule of law and respect the human rights of all of the people of Burma; release political prisoners, including members of the opposition National League for Democracy; end the widespread use of forced labor by the military; and stop conscripting children under the age of 18 for the armed forces. JK
China: HIV/AIDS crisis threatens health, economy

Chinese health authorities say the country will provide free AIDS tests for its population of 1.3 billion, and free treatment for those suffering from HIV/AIDS who cannot afford it.

Health officials acknowledge that 840,000 Chinese are HIV-positive, and 80,000 have full-blown AIDS. The UNAIDS agency has warned that the number suffering from HIV/AIDS in China could rise to 10 million by 2020 unless more aggressive prevention efforts are implemented.

In its announcement April 14, China’s Ministry of Health offered no details on how many people might take advantage of the offer, how much money was being allocated or who would be eligible for free medicine and treatment. It was reported, however, that the number of government clinics in Beijing offering AIDS tests has increased from four to 22.

Until recently, AIDS tests in China were limited to centers treating sex workers and drug addicts. But with rapid growth in the infection rate last year among the general population, health authorities decided to offer tests to persons outside of the high-risk groups.

Public awareness of HIV is low. Recent surveys found that 20 percent of the population have never heard of the disease, and 40 percent do not realize that condoms can help prevent transmission.

The Ministry of Health believes the number of HIV cases in China rose 30 percent last year. Even this estimate might be conservative, however, because fewer than one in 10 of those thought to have the disease has taken a test, and many local authorities have played down the incidence of HIV to avoid the associated stigma.

China faces a monumental task. Vice Minister of Health Wang Longde says both the government and the public need to better understand HIV/AIDS in order to confront the epidemic. At a meeting April 5 of the Ministry of Health AIDS Expert Consultants committee, Wang cited a number of challenges:

- Efforts to fight HIV/AIDS have been hampered by weak local leadership, unclear responsibilities and a failure to implement policy
- Risk factors that contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS have not been brought under control
- The national health budget has not been sufficient to effectively confront the epidemic
- Various sectors of the health system such as testing and treatment need to cooperate more closely if the epidemic is to be brought under control

The UN warned in April that Beijing was not doing enough to halt the spread of HIV, which it said could undermine China’s efforts to alleviate poverty for hundreds of millions of people. Progress has been noted, however. Recent successes – as well as remaining challenges – are described in “A Joint Assessment of HIV/AIDS Prevention, Treatment and Care in China,” a report prepared by the Ministry of Health and the nine cosponsors of UNAIDS, released in December 2003 and available online at www.casy.org/engdocs/new_joint_en.pdf.

The report noted that investment in AIDS treatment and care in China has increased dramatically since the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) in July 2002. Recent breakthroughs include eliminating import duties for imported anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs, and making domestically produced ARV drugs more readily available through increased cross-sectoral cooperation.

In addition, new laws and regulations – such as HIV testing at blood banks – have been promulgated since 1995 to ensure a secure blood supply. Public education about HIV/AIDS has also improved. For example, several national campaigns have been organized around “World AIDS Day” on December 1.

Overall, however, researchers reported a dramatic increase in the epidemic. The main transmission routes were intravenous drug use and, in the past, the sale of blood and plasma.

The report said although the adult prevalence rate was less than 0.1 percent, the epidemic had spread to 31 autonomous regions and municipalities. The study team also noted inadequate information about HIV/AIDS among the public, severe social discrimination and an increase in high-risk behavior.

The report said that unbalanced economic development had contributed to poverty in different areas of China. “If we are not able to impact these risk factors, the AIDS epidemic will not be controlled and there will be both serious individual and socio-economic repercussions,” it concluded. “The AIDS epidemic will become a serious problem threatening national security and prosperity, social stability and economic development.”

Faith in action:

Although the Global Fund has been an effective force in fighting AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria in 121 countries, President Bush has proposed a 64 percent cut in the U.S. contribution for 2005. Sign onto a letter to your senators and congressperson found on the Global AIDS Alliance website at http://takeaction.stopglobalaids.org/, urging lawmakers to restore the full U.S. contribution to the Fund. 

JK
Middle East: Visa delays hamper Church ministry

Israeli delays in granting visas to Roman Catholic clergy and religious “are pointing to the fact that the Church is being slowly but surely strangled” in the Holy Land, a Church official says.

At the end of March the visa applications of 138 Catholic priests and religious were awaiting action in Israel’s Interior Ministry, according to Assumptionist Father Robert Fortin, director of the Ratisbonne Institute in Jerusalem. The figure was up 60 percent from a year earlier. Many of those awaiting visas were Arabs.

Delaying or denying visas for clergy and other Church personnel can leave seminaries, churches, hospitals and educational institutions understaffed, Fortin warned. He said the Catholic Church operates 151 institutions in the Holy Land – including 33 parishes, seven hospitals, 11 dispensaries, eight orphanages, five homes for the elderly, seven homes for the handicapped, 70 schools, five theological seminaries and five institutions of higher learning.

Visas are sometimes refused even to members of secular institutes or to volunteers, without whom some institutions could not continue to operate, Fortin added.

In the past, the visas of priests and religious assigned in the Holy Land were automatically renewed. The problem of visa delays affecting clergy and Church staff began under Israel’s previous government, when a conservative Shas party member headed the Interior Ministry. Although a member of the liberal secular Shinui party took over the post a year ago, the visa situation has not improved.

Fortin described the visa problem at a meeting of the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations March 30 at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute. He said the delays in granting visas fail to respect guaranties in the Fundamental Agreement between Israel and the Vatican signed in December 1993.

Article 3 of the Agreement states: “Israel recognizes the right of the Catholic Church to carry out its religious, moral, educational and charitable functions and to have its own institutions, and to train, appoint and deploy its own personnel in said institutions or for the said functions to these ends.” The complete text of the Agreement can be found online at http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/anti-semitism/holysee.html.

Fortin said of the 138 applicants waiting for visas, 54 were from Western and Asian countries, and 84 were from Arab countries including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria as well as Palestine. Most of those awaiting visas had submitted their applications six to eight months earlier, although some have been waiting since September 2002, he added.

Fortin said it is difficult to renew residence visas of Iraqi, Lebanese and Syrian religious even when they have been in Israel for a long time. He said two of the cases involve Syrian nuns who have been in the country for more than 50 years. One is 82 years old and the other is over 70.

Yet, Fortin said, since Catholic institutions in the Holy Land primarily serve Arabs, the Church must call upon Arab and Arabic-speaking personnel from neighboring countries.

Fortin also said visas are systematically denied to anyone stationed in the occupied territories, for example Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Ramallah, Bir Zeit or Gaza. “The denial is of greater significance,” he added, “because to enter and leave areas under Palestinian control one must pass through Israel and therefore be in possession of a valid Israeli visa.”

Latin Catholic Patriarch Michel Sabbah, a Palestinian, says the visa issue “concerns the survival of the churches here … which means it’s an existential question for the Church.” The Latin Patriarchate – the Roman Catholic diocese – includes Jerusalem, Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan and Cyprus.

“(T)he Church is being seriously stymied in the training, appointment and deployment of its personnel and consequently in the operation of its various institutions,” Fortin said. As a result, religious authorities “are very preoccupied about the future of its institutions. Also, they decry having to waste so much time and so many human resources to obtain so little.”

Faith in action:

Write to the Israeli ambassador to the U.S. Express your concern that Israel’s visa policy toward Catholic priests and religious in the Holy land violates the spirit, if not the letter, of the “Fundamental Agreement Between the Holy See and the State of Israel” (Dec. 30, 1993). Ask that the visa applications be treated expeditiously so that the local Church can continue its many educational and charitable ministries, welcome students pursuing Biblical studies, and train candidates for the priesthood and religious life. Ambassador Daniel Ayalon, Embassy of Israel, 3514 International Drive, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008. JK
Middle East: Reduced aid for Palestinian refugees

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) hopes a special conference June 7-8 in Geneva will help boost declining contributions relative to the growing refugee population it serves.

Co-sponsored by the Swiss Government and UNRWA, the meeting is expected to attract 65 donor nations and to highlight issues including children, housing and economic development.

UNRWA, which serves more than four million Palestinian refugees, is funded by voluntary contributions. (The U.S. is UNRWA’s largest single contributor.) Peter Hansen, UNRWA commissioner general, says donations have slipped from $200 per refugee 20 years ago to about $70 today. The UNRWA budget for 2004 was $330 million.

UNRWA delivers food and other emergency assistance to 1.3 million refugees in Gaza and the West Bank alone – or about 40 percent of the population, Hansen said recently. Sixty percent of Palestinians in the occupied territories live in poverty, and more than 50 percent are unemployed, he added.

Despite the desperate need, UNRWA has had to cut its emergency food distribution in the West Bank and Gaza from 60 percent of daily requirements to 40 percent, and will have to further reduce it to 20 percent unless additional resources can be found, Hansen said.

Without more assistance, malnutrition is certain to increase, he said, noting that malnutrition stood at 17 percent in Gaza late last year. Meanwhile, Hansen warned, the mood among Palestinian refugees is one of growing “hopelessness, cynicism and despair.”

(UNRWA's director of operations for the West Bank painted a similar picture in January for six visiting U.S. church representatives from Washington, D.C. Anders Fange, Jerusalem, said contributions to UNRWA during the third year of the current intifada had met only half of the agency’s request. Fange said that, despite the high unemployment among Palestinian refugees, UNRWA had to cut back its job-creation efforts in order to meet the need for emergency food aid.)

Hansen said UNRWA is witnessing “the pernicious effects of donor fatigue,” making an emergency appeal necessary. He expressed the hope that the Geneva conference in June would help UNRWA address the serious humanitarian problems facing Palestinian refugees.

The World Bank reported in May 2003 that 92,000 Palestinians had lost their jobs in Israel and the Israeli settlements, and another 105,000 jobs had been lost elsewhere in the occupied territories – a situation certain to be exacerbated by construction of the separation barrier in the West Bank. The report also estimated that real per capita income in the territories had fallen by 46 percent.

UNRWA’s staff of 24,000 – most of them refugees themselves – nevertheless continue to provide education, health care and social services to Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. UNRWA’s education program serves 651 schools and 490,000 pupils. The agency also recorded more than nine million visits to its medical clinics in 2002.

Too often, however, UNRWA services and access to UNRWA facilities are disrupted by violence. Refugee camps in Gaza and the West Bank have seen frequent incursions by Israeli Defense Forces, causing loss of life and destruction of Palestinian property and infrastructure. Hansen said six UNRWA staff members lost their lives within a year due to the fighting.

Israeli roadblocks prevent doctors and nurses from reaching health centers and clinics, and interfere with the delivery of humanitarian supplies, he said. Even ambulances are delayed or prevented from bringing patients to hospitals for prompt medical care.

Hansen also said thousands of refugees were rendered homeless in 2002 and 2003 due to the demolition of more than 600 shelters in Gaza and nearly 100 in the West Bank. UNRWA undertook reconstruction projects in Jenin, Khan Younis and Rafah, but it could not keep pace with the rate of destruction, he added.

Hansen acknowledges Israel’s right and obligation to ensure the safety and security of its citizens, and he condemns suicide bombings that target innocent civilians as “totally unacceptable.”

“But how was the security of Israeli citizens improved by bombing, shelling and destroying refugee shelters?” Hansen asks. “Why was it necessary to humiliate thousands of Palestinians at checkpoints, to prevent farmers from reaching their fields and harvesting their crops? How did that contribute to security?”

Faith in action:

Contact your senators and congressperson, and insist that the U.S. fulfill the role of an impartial peace broker in the Middle East. Point out that the humanitarian issues affecting Palestinian refugees cannot be resolved without a comprehensive Middle East peace agreement. The U.S. should promote the removal of Israeli settlements from the occupied territories, the sharing of an undivided Jerusalem by Israelis and Palestinians, and the coexistence of two secure and independent states – Israel and Palestine. JK
Iraq: Terrorism, kidnappings leave reconstruction in doubt

Terrorism abroad – notably the March 11 train bombings in Spain – and a spate of kidnappings of foreigners in Iraq have raised uncertainty over the future of reconstruction efforts in that country and the unity of the U.S.-led coalition.

In April three Japanese – two aid workers and a photojournalist – were kidnapped in the southern Iraqi town of Samawah. They were threatened with execution unless Japan withdrew its troops from Iraq. However, Japanese military spokesmen said they would not withdraw, and the hostages were released unhurt after a week in captivity.

The three were among dozens of foreigners kidnapped in Iraq in recent weeks. At least one, an Italian, was executed by his captors.

“Terrorists just want to create confusion. They are trying to make the (Japanese) Self Defense Forces withdraw,” Japan’s Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi told reporters. “I think this was part of such scare tactics.”

In April about 530 Japanese troops were in southern Iraq, the vanguard of a planned deployment of 1,100 army, navy and air force personnel. Their mission was to purify water, rebuild roads and carry out other reconstruction. The non-combat force represented Tokyo’s largest mission abroad since the end of World War II.

Before Koizumi announced last December that he would send military personnel to Iraq, polls showed that as much as 88 percent of the Japanese public opposed such a deployment. However, the prime minister argued that “(w)e won’t have fulfilled our responsibility as a member of the international community if we contribute materially and leave the manpower contribution up to other countries.” A survey shortly before an initial deployment in January showed public opinion almost evenly divided.

Meanwhile, Spain’s new prime minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, insisted that he would pull 1,300 Spanish troops out of Iraq by May 27 unless there were a UN mandate. In contrast to his predecessor, Zapatero called the invasion of Iraq “disastrous,” and he accused President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair of “organizing a war with lies.”

The wave of kidnappings of foreign workers left the pace of reconstruction in Iraq in doubt. Russia’s top contractor, Tekhnopromexport, said it would pull its 370 employees out of Iraq after five Ukrainians and three Russians – employed by another Russian firm – were kidnapped in Baghdad and released after 19 hours.

The presence of Japanese troops in Iraq is politically sensitive. A critical U.S. ally, the country’s U.S.-drafted constitution renounces the use of force to settle international disputes. Many see that language as an important guard against a resurgence of Japanese militarism.

Japan’s Self Defense Forces number 240,000, and the country’s military budget is about $40 billion. Small numbers of Japanese troops, in a non-combat role and with a UN mandate, have previously been sent to Cambodia and East Timor. However, no Japanese soldier has fired a shot or been killed in combat since World War II.

Critics of the troop deployment in Iraq say it violates the constitution, and they fear the troops could be drawn into the fighting. The government worries about a possible public outcry if military casualties occur, but it says the deployment is needed to help rebuild Iraq.

The Japanese hostage crisis was ironic. Late last year Samawah was considered fairly peaceful. In addition, the week before the advance team arrived, the Japan Defense Agency asked that all Japanese media “depart immediately from Iraq and give serious consideration whether or not to travel to Kuwait.”

Like photojournalist Soichiro Koriyama – one of the three Japanese kidnapped and released – about 100 Japanese journalists reportedly arrived in Samawah in advance of the soldiers.

Meanwhile, after being schooled in the Iraqi culture, Japanese military personnel were forbidden to eat pork or drink alcohol on their base in Samawah. To help blend in with the locals they were even encouraged to grow moustaches. The leader of the advance troops, Masahisa Sato, sported a full moustache early on. “What a magnificent moustache,” a local resident was quoted as saying. “He looks just like an Iraqi!”

Regardless of such outward appearances, however, recent events indicate that even well-meaning foreigners involved in reconstructing Iraq are apt to be viewed with suspicion or, worse, cast in the role of enemies.

Faith in action:

Call, fax or email your senators and representative. Urge that the U.S. seek a new UN resolution that would end the occupation of Iraq, place international security forces under a UN mandate, and work out a more legitimate political transition process with Iraqis. JK
In the past three years, the atmosphere for migrants in the U.S. has become increasingly stressful, both for those with legal papers and for those without. Recently, federal legislation has been proposed that would treat a wide range of immigrants as criminals and subject some to groundless arrests. Human Rights Watch (HRW, www.hrw.org) sent a letter to U.S. legislators in April, asking them to reject these proposals. Following is a report from HRW on these projected laws.

On Thursday, April 22, the Senate Immigration Subcommittee considered the Homeland Security Enhancement (HSEA) Act. The proposed law—similar to the Clear Law Enforcement for Criminal Alien Removal (CLEAR) Act under consideration in the House—would authorize state and local police officers to investigate, arrest, and detain non-citizens whom they decide are “unlawfully present.”

“Police officers would be hard-pressed to accurately determine a person’s legal status given the extreme complexity of federal immigration law,” said Alison Parker, senior researcher in Human Rights Watch’s U.S. Program. “The proposed legislation would place huge burdens on local police, and it would subject immigrants to unfair arrest.”

For example, a police officer might stop a foreign student, ask to see her passport, find an expired visa inside and make an on-the-spot judgment that she is unlawfully present in the United States. But that same student might well have a valid student visa form on file with the federal government, granting her permission to remain in the country for another year. Under the proposed laws, however, the student could end up arrested and detained alongside common criminals in a local jail.

Human Rights Watch agrees with the local police departments and officials that oppose this legislation. Many law enforcement officials recognize that the additional burden of immigration enforcement responsibilities would drive a wedge between them and the communities they are supposed to protect.

Another disturbing aspect of the proposed laws is they fail to address whether detained non-citizens would be granted hearings, and if so, which court would hear their cases. In the federal system, non-citizens detained on immigration charges have hearings before judges who specialize in immigration law and procedure.

“The proposed legislation would create a two-tiered system of justice. Immigrants detained in the federal system would have the right to a hearing, but those arrested by local police would have no guarantees of judicial review,” Parker said. “The potential for abuse is rife.”

In addition to arbitrary arrests and detentions, Human Rights Watch also warned that handing state and local officials such powers will yield:

- Disproportionate fines imposed on undocumented immigrants in amounts that are too harsh given the impoverished conditions of many immigrants;
- Unjust and arbitrary deprivations of property since the proposed legislation would allow state and local officials to take the property of persons whom they have decided are unlawfully in the United States;
- No remedy for violations of victims’ civil rights because the laws give officers immunity from any lawsuits alleging civil rights violations;
- Increased vulnerability of immigrant women and children to domestic abuse since the legislation might keep immigrants from contacting police about abuses they have suffered for fear that they—or undocumented relatives who may live with them—will be arrested;
- Unchecked authority to deport immigrants without hearings because, on its face, the CLEAR Act would provide state and local officers with an unfettered power to deport non-citizens. This power could potentially be used to deport refugees who have entered the country without valid documents to a place where they fear persecution—a serious violation of their rights.

The letter to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives can be found online at: http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/04/21/usdom8473.htm.

**Faith in action:**


Write to your representative and ask him/her to reject the CLEAR Act, HR 2671. Write to your senator and ask him/her to reject the HSEA Act, S. 1906. Remind them that many police officials are concerned that new responsibilities mandated by these bills would compromise local officials’ ability to ensure public safety and to sustain positive community relations.


JC
World Bank, IMF can afford total debt cancellation

The international community has rallied behind the Millennium Development Goals, and widely accepted that debt-servicing capacity should be assessed relative to the country's need for achieving the goals. Despite this, conditions in most HIPCs (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) continue to deteriorate. Rather than spend all possible resources on basic needs such as health and education, the HIPCs are still servicing unsustainable levels of debt. A recent study by the New Economics Foundation for the Debt and Development Coalition Ireland demonstrates the capacity of the international financial institutions to pay for 100 percent debt cancellation for the world’s poorest countries using their own resources. The executive summary follows.

While the G7 nations have promised to cancel debt owed to them, both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have pleaded poverty in a bid to abrogate their responsibility towards the HIPC nations. They have said that any additional debt cancellation through the use of their resources would seriously endanger their financial soundness and sustainability.

However, using rigorous financial analysis this paper shows that both the IMF and the World Bank have ample resources to cancel all the HIPC debt. We show that they could finance this debt cancellation without in any way jeopardizing their normal operations.

Specifically this report finds:

- that the IMF has largely identified sources of funds for the $2 billion (Net Present Value - NPV) of the HIPC debt that it has already committed to cancel. Of this, more than half has come directly or indirectly through donor country contributions and the balance through the investment income from off market gold sales.
- that the World Bank has only identified sources to fund less than half of its existing commitment of $6.4 billion (NPV) to the HIPC debt cancellation effort. Of these resources, more than half have come through donor country contributions and the balance through income transfers from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).
- that the IMF has enough resources to fund the cancellation of all of the $5 billion (NPV) of additional HIPC debt owed to it. In fact, the IMF can afford the cancellation of even more debt.
- that the IBRD has enough resources to fund the cancellation of all of the $13 billion (NPV) additional HIPC debt owed to the World Bank group.

While trying to highlight their self proclaimed paucity of resources, the IMF and the World Bank have sought to underplay their considerable financial strength, which is underpinned by their distinctive political and financial structure and their special role within the international financial system. They have incorrectly made implicit comparisons with the private sector to highlight their “poverty.”

However, their unique status based on implicit guarantees from donor (mostly G7) countries makes them highly resource rich. We compare both the IMF and the IBRD with the private sector after suitably factoring in these guarantees. We find:

- that both the IMF and the IBRD derive significant financial benefits from the implicit guarantees provided by donor countries which makes them far more resource rich than their closest private sector counterparts;
- that factoring in the benefits of these implicit guarantees, both the IMF and IBRD are overcapitalized and hence inefficient in relation to levels of financial prudence in the private sector;
- that credit analysts and other debt market professionals have privately confirmed this finding.

As the two institutions have enough resources to afford 100 percent HIPC debt cancellation, we recommend specific mechanisms to finance this. These mechanisms successfully address all the concerns (some genuine) that these institutions have raised about the impact of 100 percent debt cancellation.

We recommend:

- that the IMF should sell some of its gold reserves directly into the market as recommended in the report and use the proceeds to bankroll the full cancellation of the HIPC debt owed to itself;
- that the IBRD mobilize its internal resources by using a combination of retained earnings and future income allocations as recommended in this report to fully bankroll the total cancellation of the HIPC debt owed to the World Bank group.

In response to the growing call for 100 percent debt cancellation, the IMF and the World Bank have written a joint paper criticizing the concept and claiming how it would seriously jeopardize their finances. This report rebuts these arguments.

The IBRD has often implied that if it allocates additional resources towards HIPC debt cancellation, its much-valued AAA credit rating would be threatened. It has also implied that allocation of these additional resources would drive up its borrowing costs significantly. However, through the analysis of the
serious problems at the African Development Bank (AfDB) throughout the 1990s and their limited market impact, we show that the real anchor behind the credit-worthiness of multilateral development banks such as the IBRD is political in nature.

In the 1990s, the AfDB was beset with financial and operational problems of such a serious nature that if it were a private institution, its viability would definitely have been questioned. However, because of the unique nature of the political and financial guarantees that the AfDB enjoys (similar to the ones that the IBRD has), it managed to hold on to its AAA credit rating with Moody’s, one of the most respectable credit rating agencies in the world. Also, its cost of borrowing in the private capital markets did not go up significantly.

For a copy of the full report see: http://www.debtireland.org/resources/Can-the-World-Bank-amd-IMF-Cancel-debt.htm

For more information see:
- Debt & Development Coalition Ireland: www.debtireland.org
- Jubilee Research (UK): www.jubileeresearch.org
- Jubilee USA Network: www.jubileeusa.org
- Jubilee South: www.jubileesouth.org

A principled approach to international trade

On February 24, 2004 Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) introduced H. Res. 532 expressing a sense of the U.S. House of Representatives that the U.S. should adhere to moral and ethical principles of economic justice and fairness in developing and advancing U.S. international trade treaties, agreements and investment policies.

Last November Rep. Kaptur led a delegation to Mexico to experience first-hand the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement. She claimed that expanding NAFTA to Central America through the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) will only result in job loss in the United States “without improving the standard of living for workers in some of the hemisphere’s poorest countries.” Kaptur believes that “there has never been a more crucial time to draw attention to the human face of this infamous agreement.”

Negotiations on CAFTA were completed on February 20, 2004. At any time after May 29, when President Bush signs the agreement, CAFTA can be sent to Congress for a vote. Capitol Hill insiders say that the administration will not send CAFTA to Congress for a vote until they are confident they have the votes to pass it. Since U.S. jobs are a major election campaign issue, CAFTA may be a risk for an administration seeking re-election.

Although it is unclear exactly when Congress will vote to approve or reject the agreement, Rep. Kaptur would like her colleagues to adhere to certain moral and ethical principles as concrete guidelines while voting on this agreement and other U.S. trade and investment policies. H. Res. 532, based on a set or moral principles closely resembling those of outlined by the Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment in 2001, resolves the House of Representatives to adhere to five basic principles in “evaluating, approving, and advancing all United States trade and investment treaties, agreements, and policies.”

1. International trade and investment should support the dignity of the human person, the integrity of creation and our common humanity.

2. International trade and investment activities should advance the common good and be evaluated in the light of their impact on those who are most vulnerable.

3. International trade and investment policies and decisions should be transparent and should involve the meaningful participation of the most vulnerable stakeholders.

4. International trade and investment systems should respect the legitimate role of government, in collaboration with civil society, to set policies regarding the development and welfare of its people.

5. International trade and investment systems should safeguard the global commons and respect the right of local communities to protect and sustainably develop their natural resources.

H. Res. 532 was referred to the House Committee on International Relations and the Committee on Ways and Means. For approval, the resolution requires significant support from members of Congress.

Faith in action:

Urge your representative to co-sponsor H. Res. 532, expressing a sense of the U.S. House of Representatives that the U.S. adhere to moral and ethical principles in advancing U.S. international trade agreements and investment policies. For a sample letter, go to www.maryknollglobal.org or contact the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC).

For the text of the interfaith statement on trade and investment, see: www.tradejusticeusa.org/about/eng-prin.htm or contact the MOGC for the English version.

Proposed exemptions for Department of Defense

In late April, religious leaders were invited by the Fellowship of Reconciliation to sign the following letter to Reps. Duncan Hunter (R-CA), chair of the House Armed Services Committee, and Ike Skelton (D-MO), ranking minority member of the House Armed Services Committee, in reaction to proposals to exempt the Department of Defense from provisions of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA); the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA); and the Clean Air Act.

Dear Representatives Hunter and Skelton:

As representatives of the faith community, we call on you to protect the integrity of our environment and our health. We are saddened and alarmed by the Department of Defense’s (DOD) request for new exemptions from federal statutes that protect the health of military personnel, civilian employees, and military neighbors from hazardous waste, toxic contamination, and air pollution. We urge you to reject these unnecessary and dangerous proposals.

The scope of the Department’s proposed exemptions from the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA); the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA); and the Clean Air Act is dramatic: 8,000 military ranges; 25 million acres; and more than 20 toxic substances. If the proposed exemptions are adopted, affected communities and states would lose virtually any ability to protect themselves and their citizens from hazardous waste, toxic contamination, and air pollution. We urge you to reject these unnecessary and dangerous proposals.

Toxic contamination and air pollution created by military operations are proven threats to human health and the environment. Toxic contamination emanating from military munitions and firing ranges poisoned the sole drinking water aquifer for half a million residents of Cape Cod. The toxic munitions constituent perchlorate has contaminated groundwater or surface water on or off at least 40 DOD facilities, and has entered drinking water supplies off-base in at least two cases. Munitions constituents that would become exempt from most regulation under DOD’s proposals are known to cause reproductive damage, impair fetal development, and damage the nervous system and organs.

A broad consensus of affected communities, states, environmental and public health organizations, and municipal and public works associations has opposed the proposed blanket exemptions. The three laws in question already contain provisions allowing case-by-case exemptions to preserve national security. Perhaps most troubling is the statement by DOD representatives to state officials that the proposals to preempt state authorities that protect public health are “not a matter of readiness, but of control.”

As people of faith, we believe that each life is a gift, entrusted to our collective care and responsibility. It is unacceptable and immoral to sacrifice our children’s health in the name of national defense. The risks posed by the Department of Defense’s facilities to the health of our communities and the integrity of creation are both clear and well-documented. Our security and well-being as people and as a nation must begin with our health and with our water, air, and soil.

We ask you to oppose the Department of Defense’s request for new exemptions from RCRA, CERCLA, and the Clean Air Act; to use all means at your disposal to ensure that these unnecessary and dangerous proposals are rejected; and to ensure that the cost of our security is not the health and welfare of those who live near our military facilities.

Faith in action:

Write a similar letter to Congressmen Hunter and Skelton, with a copy to your own Congressional representatives. You can send letters using www.house.gov; letters sent the U.S. postal service are usually delayed. Hunter’s fax number is (202)225-0235; Skelton’s fax number is not available. Call his Washington, D.C. office at (202)225-2876. To contact your member of Congress, call the Capitol switchboard at (202)224-3121. MD
Resources

1) Pax Christi Festival of Hope: The Festival of Hope will be held May 22 – 23 at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ. It concludes a week of meetings of the Pax Christi International Council, which is the highest decision-making body of Pax Christi International. Approximately 160 delegates will gather from around the world to map out areas of cooperation and shape common strategies for peacemaking. A highlight of the weekend will be a global consultation, “From the War on Terrorism to Inclusive Security,” which builds on a Pax Christi consultation in July 2003 on “Preemptive Peace: Beyond Terrorism and Justified War.” Another opportunity being offered are workshops on topics such as indigenous rights, update on Northern Ireland, India-Pakistan, promoting nonviolence in a Middle East context, Iraq, Colombia, Haiti, and reconciliation in the African Great Lakes Area. A peace bazaar with displays from Pax Christi International member sections and affiliated organizations will be open most of the weekend and on Saturday night there will be a barbecue and social with entertainment. Other events include a Pax Christi International Peace Award Ceremony and a Liturgy of Peace and Reconciliation. The Festival will close with lunch on Sunday. Registration is $65. For more information, contact Pax Christi USA at www.paxchristiusa.org, info@paxchristiusa.org or call (814)453-4955.

2) Bethlehem Besieged: Stories of Hope in Times of Trouble: The Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb shares his personal experience of the Israeli siege and occupation of Bethlehem in April 2002 in this new book from Fortress Press, Minneapolis. Bethlehem Besieged is due to be released June 1. Raheb, a Palestinian, has been pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem since 1988. In April 2002 his home, the church, and the International Center of Bethlehem that he founded and directs were hit by shells from Israeli tanks and soldiers. Raheb’s family has lived in Bethlehem for hundreds of years. The book attempts to put a human face on the ongoing conflict through the personal stories of Raheb, members of his family and his community. His efforts to publicize the Palestinians’ plight have taken him around the world, and he is a frequent speaker in the U.S. His book can be ordered online at: www.fortresspress.com/store/category.asp?CLSID=105282; or contact Fortress Press at (800) 328-4648; P.O. Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440-1209.

3) Colombia in Crisis resource series: This six-page resource from Church World Service highlights individuals who are organizing to restore peace and promote human rights in their country. It also includes background information on U.S. policy in Colombia, its impact and alternatives. First copy is free; multiple copies are 40 cents each. Please pre-pay. Church World Service, P.O. Box 968, Elkhart IN, 46515. For bulk rates call (800)297-1516.

4) Global AIDS: Facing the Crisis: This six-page packet from Church World Service, one of its “Facts Have Faces” series, focuses on the AIDS pandemic, which has undermined the social and economic fabric of entire nations, especially in Africa. This packet raises up some of the activists in African communities who are dealing with the crisis in important ways. First copy is free; multiple copies are 20 cents each. Please pre-pay. Church World Service, P.O. Box 968, Elkhart IN, 46515. For bulk rates call (800)297-1516.

5) Jubilee USA 2004 organizing kit: This new action and organizing kit for 2004 includes contributions from SOA Watch, Witness for Peace, Africa Action, the AFL-CIO and many others. It links debt, trade, health and peace so as to “make the links to break the chains.” The documents (articles, flyers, and analysis) are easily copied to be used for outreach in local communities. Email Jubilee USA at coord@jubileeusa.org or call (202)783-3566 for a copy.

6) Oikocredit: Founded in 1975 by the World Council of Churches, Oikocredit (from the Greek word “oikos” for community, and the Latin term “credo,” which means to believe) provides loans to individuals and groups in poor countries who are considered “unbankable” (those who have no collateral nor assets). Recipients are able to start small businesses and pull themselves out of poverty, which, due to their lack of “credit,” would have otherwise been impossible. Oikocredit does not ask for donations, but rather, asks for investment loans. In the 28 years since its inception, Oikocredit has never failed to return to investors their full principal plus interest. For more information on Oikocredit and its programs, contact them at P.O. Box 11000, Washington, D.C., 20008; tel: (202)265-0607; office.us@oikocredit.org; www.oikocredit.org