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HIV/AIDS: Growing closer to keeping the promise

Thanks to globalization, people are discovering just how interconnected we all are, no matter where in the world we live. What is done in one place impacts people in another. In a real sense we are coming to better understand St. Paul’s analogy of the human body: “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if [one] member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” (1Cr 12:26) As we continue to examine what it means to love our neighbors in a shrinking world during this election year, we turn our attention to our brothers and sisters infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS and other preventable diseases.

Maryknoll missioners, committed to working with the poorest and most marginalized people around the world, have often found themselves accompanying people living with HIV and AIDS. These missioners report that the policies of wealthy countries, including the United States, directly impact the lives of people they see daily. As voters in the U.S. we have a responsibility to elect not only a president who will champion the research, investment and compassion needed to respond to pandemics like AIDS, but to elect and hold accountable members of Congress who will do the same.

An estimated 33 million people still live with HIV/AIDS, 25 million have died and more than 15 million children worldwide have been orphaned. In many communities devastated by AIDS where Maryknoll missioners work, as in the U.S., stigma is still a major obstacle to overcoming this disease, and prevention efforts have not caught up with the high rate of transmission. More than six million people, many of them children, die each year of tuberculosis, malaria and AIDS for lack of medicines.

On July 30 President Bush signed into law HR 5501, the Tom Lantos and Henry J. Hyde United States Global Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Reauthorization Act of 2008, as a legacy for its two authors, Hyde who died at the end of November 2007 and Lantos who died in February 2008. The legislation authorizes a continuation of the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief authorizing $48 billion for global health programs (AIDS, TB and malaria) over the next five years.

Since presidential candidates Sens. John McCain and Barack Obama both co-sponsored the Senate version, White House support for the measure is assured. However, as an authorization bill, it provides no actual funding on its own. Congress must appropriate funding on a year-by-year basis, making Congressional leadership critically important.

The approved legislation is not likely to begin with full funding in 2009. Senate and House appropriations subcommittees approved funding for AIDS, TB, and malaria at 2002-2007 appropriation levels under the original PEPFAR bill which dispersed $15 billion over five years. While the recent appropriations for 2009 do not reflect the higher amounts authorized this year, they also omit any specific spending on strengthening health care, a crucial element now needed to fight these diseases, and do not provide for any significant increase for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, a crucial means of leveraging more money from non-U.S. donors.

The new Congress will be confronted with this shortfall as soon as they take office, since the 2009 budget may not be finalized until next February.

In this shrinking world, our common humanity depends on new Congressional and White House leadership on AIDS and other preventable diseases. As the world comes closer to keeping the promise to eradicate AIDS by 2015, we also grow closer to becoming part of one healed body – no longer suffering but rejoicing in its wholeness.

Faith in action:

You can raise awareness around the call for the U.S. to maintain its leadership in fighting global AIDS by organizing activities in your local community.

Join people all over the world in prayer as they observe World AIDS Day, December 1. Plan a special order of worship on that day or the weekend before or after. You can find several ecumenical worship service outlines in English and Spanish at the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance website: http://www.e-alliance.ch/wad.jsp. Other worship resources, including prayers, images, and sermon ideas are also available at: http://www.e-alliance.ch/hiv_resources.jsp.

Maryknoll AIDS prayer cards are available in several languages. To order, contact the Maryknoll AIDS Task Force, P.O. Box 311, Maryknoll, NY 10545, 914-941-7575.
Cambodia: Khmer Rouge leaders could be tried soon

The first of five former Khmer Rouge leaders, aged 65 to 82, could go on trial before a UN-backed tribunal beginning in September. Two other top leaders, Pol Pot and Ta Mok, have died since the Khmer Rouge were overthrown by Vietnamese forces nearly 30 years ago. One measure of the tribunal's success will be the sense of closure it provides the Cambodian people. From 1975 to early 1979 at least 1.7 million died through starvation, disease or execution as the Khmer Rouge tried to build an agrarian utopia.

The five face a variety of charges including crimes against humanity. The first defendant scheduled for trial is Kaing Khek Iev, also known as Duch. He was director of Tuol Sleng prison, or S-21, where an estimated 16,000 prisoners were tortured before they were executed in the “killing fields” outside of Phnom Penh. Now 65, Duch has been in detention for more than nine years.

Duch has insisted he was only following orders to save his own life. “I was under other people’s command, and I would have died if I disobeyed it,” he told a government interrogator after his arrest. His trial is expected to run through 2008 and possibly into early 2009.

The other four defendants are expected to face trial later. Nuon Chea, 82, was deputy secretary of the Khmer Rouge and Brother No. 2 in the regime. The prosecution alleges he directed “forcible transfers of the population, enslavement, forced labor and other inhumane acts.” Khieu Samphan, 76, was the Khmer Rouge head of state but says he was only a figurehead with no real power.

Ieng Sary, 82, was Pol Pot’s brother-in-law and served as foreign minister for the Khmer Rouge. His wife, Ieng Thirith, 76, was the regime’s minister of social affairs.

Pol Pot, Brother No. 1 and the Khmer Rouge’s prime minister, died in the jungle in 1998. Ta Mok, the group’s military chief, died in custody in 2006.

The Khmer Rouge regime fell after Vietnamese forces captured Phnom Penh in January 1979. However, the Khmer Rouge continued to fight from the countryside until the final units surrendered to the Cambodian army 20 years later.

Ieng Sary became the international face of the Khmer Rouge after its defeat by the Vietnamese, spending years at the UN defending Pol Pot’s legitimacy. In 1996 he became the first senior leader from the Maoist regime to defect. He was granted a royal pardon, but its validity could be tested with his arrest. After his surrender, Ieng Sary and his wife lived quietly in the capital of Phnom Penh.

The tribunal itself – officially the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia – was created in 2004. It is a Cambodian government-UN hybrid comprising both local and international judges.

“This is one reason everything takes so long,” says Rupert Skilbeck, former head of the tribunal’s Defense Support Section. “There is no clear legal process in Cambodia even for relatively simple cases, let alone for complex ones [like this].”

The tribunal’s original budget was $56.3 million for three years, with the UN providing $43 million and the Cambodian government $13.3 million. However, the budget has since grown to $143 million for a five-year term ending in 2010.

The U.S. has not provided any funds directly to the tribunal. However, it has contributed more than $7 million over the past decade for the work of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, an independent group that collects evidence of Khmer Rouge crimes.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Scot Marciel says the U.S. strongly supports bringing former Khmer Rouge leaders to justice but expresses concern over whether the tribunal can meet international standards of justice.

The Church teaches that true peace is possible only through forgiveness and reconciliation, but that mutual forgiveness does not eliminate the need for justice. “On the contrary,” it says, “justice and truth represent the concrete requisites for reconciliation. … [Moreover, the right to peace] ‘encourages the building of a society in which structures of power give way to structures of cooperation with a view to the common good.’” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, n. 518)

The tribunal could prove to be an important step in the long process toward forgiveness and reconciliation. “My father was killed at S-21. This man [Duch] signed on top of my father’s confession,” says Sothea Sambath. “I really wanted to see his face, to look him in the eyes, and to see the beginning of justice.”
Hong Kong: Olympics highlighted human rights abuses

With the world’s attention turned to China during the recent Olympics, Hong Kong’s Catholic diocese’s Justice and Peace Commission urged the Chinese government to improve the country’s human rights situation. The following story, “Catholic commission highlights human rights abuses in China,” was published by the Union of Catholic Asian News, http://www.ucanews.com, on Aug. 15.

The Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) of Hong Kong diocese has used the occasion of the Beijing Olympics to highlight China’s human rights record.

On Aug. 13, the commission demonstrated outside the Chinese government’s Liaison Office, and placed an envelope containing a statement addressed to the Chinese government on the iron railings in front of the office.

The statement urges the government to improve human rights and allow greater religious freedom in the mainland, and to honor the promises on human rights and press freedom it made when it applied to host the Games.

The statement includes a list of people detained as a result of trying to protect local residents’ farmlands and houses, which Chinese officials took over for construction work relating to the Olympics, as well as human rights activists such as Hu Jia, who was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment.

It also calls for the release of underground Catholic priests and bishops, including Bishop Su Zhimin of Baoding who has gone missing since October 1997, and detained Bishops Shi Enxiang of Yixian and Yao Liang of Xiwanzi.

In late July, to mark the occasion of the Aug. 8-24 Olympics in Beijing, JPC distributed 6,000 copies of China’s Human Rights to local parishes and Catholic schools. The booklet highlights human rights violations such as evictions due to construction of Olympic facilities, the maltreatment of people petitioning the central government, labor rights, press and religious freedoms, use of the death sentence, and democratic development in Hong Kong.

JPC says in the booklet’s preface that it hopes the Beijing Olympics will be a starting point for the improvement of human rights in the country.

Or Yan-yan, JPC’s project officer, told UCA News more copies may be printed and sent to schools in early September when classes resume after the summer break. That also would coincide with the Paralympic Games for disabled athletes, set to take place Sept. 6-17 in Beijing.

At Hong Kong’s St. Francis of Assisi Church on Aug. 2, JPC held a games day consisting of competitions, group sharings and faith reflections. The special day attracted about 30 participants from various parishes and church schools.

Or said the games day activities hopefully would help trigger concern for human rights victims and the country. The games, she pointed out, were designed to reflect the plight of various vulnerable groups, including land evictees and rural migrant workers whose plight the Chinese government deliberately ignored when it spent a lot of money hosting the Olympics.

In one activity, Patrick Poon Kar-wai, a JPC member, played the role of a mainland reporter who had to tell a petitioner of the central government in Beijing he “cannot report” news about the petition.

Poon told UCA News his performance expressed the frustration of mainland reporters who want to reveal the truth but were prevented from doing so by authorities. If news reports affect the vested interest of officials, he said, the reporters could be suppressed or even convicted.

Another participant, Janet Leung, president of the Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students, told UCA News that contestants who drew lots containing the words “human rights” were barred from taking part in the tug-of-war game. This signified that human rights activists are prevented from living a normal life in the country, she said.

A catechumen surnamed Kwok, who also joined the games, told UCA News the Beijing Olympics honor all Chinese people, but injustices linked to the event must be addressed. Otherwise, she said, “the event will remain superficial.”
East Timor: Bilateral report falls short of justice

The report of the bilateral Commission of Truth and Friendship (CTF), organized by Indonesia and East Timor [Timor-Leste] following widespread violence in 1999, hardly lives up to its name. The report, Per Memoriam Ad Spem (From Memory to Hope), concludes that militia groups and Indonesian forces committed crimes against humanity in East Timor. However, it fails to provide for individual accountability or to compensate victims, and it narrowly focuses on the events of 1999. The East Timor and Indonesia Action Network (ETAN) urges the UN Security Council to create an international tribunal to try those accused of crimes against humanity during Indonesia’s entire 24-year occupation of East Timor.

Indonesia invaded neighboring East Timor in December 1975, and more than 100,000 Timorese civilians were killed in the ensuing 24-year occupation. In 1999 the East Timorese went to the polls in a UN-sanctioned referendum, and nearly 80 percent voted for independence. In the same year Indonesian forces and the Timorese militias they had created laid waste to the country. They murdered more than 1,400 people, forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands, and burned or destroyed 75 percent of East Timor’s buildings and infrastructure.

The report of the CTF, mandated to look only at 1999, “is clearly a political document, resulting from compromises between Indonesian and Timor-Leste commissioners, rather than a definitive, objective statement of events,” says John Miller, ETAN’s national coordinator. “For example, it insists on a false even-handedness between violations by pro-Indonesia and pro-independence forces.

“Nine years after Indonesian soldiers and the militia proxies they commanded ravaged Timor-Leste, senior Indonesian officials in charge of those events enjoy promotions, active political careers or cozy retirement,” Miller says. “Failure to bring these people to justice continues to undermine human rights and the rule of law in both countries.”

The CTF found that the Indonesian military, as an institution, was responsible for crimes against humanity. However, the commission says it did not exercise its power to recommend individual amnesties because none of the alleged perpetrators told the complete truth or fully cooperated.

A joint statement by human rights NGOs in East Timor, Indonesia, the UK and the U.S. cites what they consider serious flaws in the CTF report. These include “a mandate that put a priority on rehabilitating the names of accused perpetrators over justice or compensation for victims; prohibitions on assigning individual responsibility or on recommending prosecutions or creation of judicial bodies; inadequate witness protection; and a narrow focus on events in 1999.”

As a result, the NGOs say, and despite the intent of the two nations to find “definitive closure,” the commission is by design “inadequate for the task of identifying the truth or obtaining closure in any meaningful sense of the word.”

“Establishing and admitting institutional responsibility is important, but the repressive policies in Timor-Leste in 1999 were directed and carried out by individuals,” Miller says. “An international criminal tribunal would be the most effective means to bring those individuals to justice. It would send a clear message to those who might consider or conduct such crimes in the future. We urge the UN Security Council to create one.

An independent East Timor commission released a lengthy report earlier on human rights violations from 1974 to 1999, but its recommendations – including accountability and compensation – remain largely unimplemented. The 2,500-page report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR), released in 2005, also called for an international tribunal if Indonesia did not act promptly to hold accused perpetrators accountable.

East Timor and the UN tried to investigate and prosecute serious crimes in East Timor, but Indonesia’s refusal to cooperate on evidence, witnesses and extradition limited the effectiveness of the process. The effort formally concluded in 2005. Of the nearly 400 persons indicted, 70 percent of them – including General Wiranto and other high-ranking Indonesian military officials – enjoy sanctuary in Indonesia.

In many cases, the families of victims feel ignored by the government and see only dim prospects for justice. Says Rita Pereira dos Santos, who lost several family members to militia attacks on Liquica, “It is like we are being killed all over again, not in a direct sense like the victims of 1999, but maybe this type of suffering is even worse because it is enduring and we will think about it forever.”
Middle East: Ships breach blockade to reach Gaza

Two boats carrying more than 40 activists from 17 countries breached an Israeli naval blockade and reached the Gaza Strip on Aug. 23. The activists, who said they hoped the landing would lead to improved conditions for Gaza’s 1.4 million residents, had sailed from Cyprus on the 36-hour journey. Organizers said the boats left for Cyprus Aug. 28 with seven Palestinians including a father and his 16-year-old son, who hopes to be fitted with a prosthesis after losing his leg to an Israeli tank shell.

The activists included Jeff Halper, coordinator of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (www.icahd.org) and a dual Israeli-U.S. citizen; Lauren Booth, sister-in-law of former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, now an international Middle East peace envoy; Greek Member of Parliament Tasos Kourakis, and Anne Montgomery, an 81-year-old U.S. American nun.

The human rights advocates said they sailed to the Gaza Strip to challenge Israel’s blockade and to protest what they called Israel’s “illegal” and “immoral” siege of the territory.

About 2,000 Palestinians, many of them singing, came out to greet the visitors at the seaport near Gaza City. “It was really amazing. There were kids swimming out to see us and boats sailing out to meet us,” Halper said. “It took us a day and a half to get here, and most of the activists got seasick, but the people here were so happy when we arrived.”

The activists carried a symbolic cargo of 200 hearing aids and thousands of balloons for Gaza children. Halper said frequent sonic booms from Israeli aircraft over Gaza have damaged the hearing of many children. The Palestinians had asked for 9,000 hearing aids, but the group could not afford to buy that many, he added.

Halper spent three days in Gaza before entering Israel through the Erez border crossing. Police detained him there on Tuesday for violating a military order prohibiting Jewish civilians from entering Gaza. He was released the following day. His attorney said Halper had not met with any individuals hostile to Israel, but only wanted to promote human rights by bringing humanitarian supplies to Gaza.

Halper said the action was part of an “historic moment” because it breached psychological barriers. “[T]his shows that it’s possible to make a connection between the two peoples without the interference of governments, and shows that there is a partner on the other side,” he said. He told reporters, “Now that we’ve come through, what’s the excuse to keep the third boat out, or the tenth boat, or the 100th? We did break the economic siege of Gaza.”

“There are people here yearning to live in peace with us, yearning for freedom,” Halper said. “All these restrictions, they’re not just for security reasons, they’re symptomatic to something much, much deeper.”

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Aryeh Mekel said Israel had decided not to stop the boats from landing in Gaza in order to diminish media attention. “We took away the drama,” Mekel said. “They came, they were welcomed, but what will they do tomorrow? They were hoping for a long confrontation with Israel – now they won’t have it.”

As Israeli officials labeled the activists as “propagandists” and a “handful of provocateurs,” the Foreign Ministry asked, “How does such a delusional journey promote peace? What kind of contribution does this journey make to the promotion of ideas of reconciliation and compromise? None.”

The activists were the first foreigners to reach the Gaza Strip by sea in more than a year. Israel imposed a blockade on Gaza in June 2007 after the militant group Hamas took control of the territory by force. Since then Israel has strictly limited the goods allowed into the area. More recently Israel has eased its blockade, allowing in more humanitarian goods and medical equipment under an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire that took effect in June.

Halper says the U.S.-based Free Gaza movement had worked for two years to arrange and finance the August voyage. While Israeli officials say groups can provide humanitarian aid to Gaza residents through existing land crossings, the Free Gaza movement is reportedly planning to send two more ships soon from Cyprus laden with food for Gaza.

As one of the activists, Palestinian American Huwaida Arraf, said in Gaza, “We recognize that we’re two humble boats, but what we’ve accomplished is to show that average people from around the world can mobilize to create change. We do not have to stay silent in the face of injustice. Reaching Gaza today there is such a sense of hope, and hope is what mobilizes people everywhere.”
Kenya: Women organize after violence

The organization “Kibera Women for Peace and Fairness” was started at the peak of the post-election violence that rocked Kenya after the disputed presidential election; the Kibera slum was one of the worst-hit areas. When the police went into the slums looking for boys who had purportedly pulled down the Kenya-Uganda railway line that runs across Kibera and ended up killing eight women and two girls, the women of Kibera decided to tell the whole world what was and is happening in Kibera.

“She makes up the majority of women in the Republic of Kenya yet her participation is next to zero! She is vulnerable to disease, poverty, abuse, name it all, yet her income cannot allow her rescue! She works from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m., yet her income cannot change her life, nor can it cater efficiently for her children’s education!”, the statement read. “In case of violence, she is the one who suffers most, as witnessed in the recent post-election violence. She may not be part of the protesting team, but still has to suffer from teargas by the police, property destruction, and assaults by the community youth. These women are finally united to ensure that the world recognizes our presence and helps us come out of our agony. We want a better life.”

Over 400 women are now members of Kibera Women for Peace Fairness, working together on such issues as HIV/AIDS, culture, entrepreneurship, women’s rights and protection, and sports.

To increase their visibility, they organized the Slum Women’s Voice Day on August 16 in Nairobi’s Uhuru Park and articulated some of their goals, including:

1. Community peace forums: “We are looking forward to holding 12 community forums for 100 community persons at every session. These forums will be in the various Kibera villages and coordinated by the community leaders. These forums will hopefully see over 1,200 Kibera residents develop a forgiving spirit and be ready to embrace other individuals and communities, as it was before the post-election violence. We intend to make people aware of better way of protesting rather than destroying property and killing others.”

2. Resettle the slum’s Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs): “Among the slum women some are internally displaced due to the recent post-elections violence. These women have no money to return to their rural areas, and we would like to help them in that regard. Our first phase of implementation will see 50 single women IDPs settled back in their homes and helped to develop a living. This will also help in decongesting slum settlements, which are currently over-congested with IDPs. Most of these women are older and longing to go back and settle in their ancestral lands, which they left some years ago to look for jobs.”

3. Establishment of a revolving fund: “Most of these women have lost their businesses and livelihoods, so this fund will loan to members to help revive their lost businesses. They will return this money with a little interest at the end of the grace period, and the money will then be loaned to others.

“The women will also establish a saving scheme, in a program akin to a pension fund, aimed at giving them some funds to invest with back home. All members will be required to take money once the pension matures, go back home to the rural areas, build a house, and resettle.

“The post-election violence taught women that one should have a home to go back to after town life. Many people who lost contact with their rural homes are still in camps to date as they have nowhere to go. We would like to encourage our women not to cut links with their original home areas. These are women whose life standards do allow them to acquire land in the urban settlements, so it is good they have a place they call home.”

4. Rights awareness of gender-based violence (GBV) workshops: “We intend to hold several workshops to train slum women on human rights and gender-based violence. These women who are mostly the victims of this violence are not even aware when they are being abused, and how to seek
Justice. All current members of Kibera Women for Peace and Fairness will have a chance to participate in these forums, know more about GBV, and use it to manage their lives positively.

5. “Girls Speak Out” forum for 200 Kibera girls: “The girls of Kibera were very much affected by the post-election violence; some are still IDPs. We want to give these girls a chance to express themselves on how they were affected by violence, how they can move on, and how to be more careful next time such a thing happens. Some of these girls were raped, some lost their parents and people who were very close to them, so they need to heal and reconcile with the communities where they live.”

Kibera Women for Peace and Fairness has mobilized hundreds of women to condemn police brutality and to call for peace and restraint and scores of young artists to draw peace messages all over Kibera. They have held weekly women’s peace talks called “We Speak Out” to help women in the process of healing. They have organized talks on the impact of the violence on people living with HIV and AIDS. They hosted IDPs and talked to their neighbors about receiving them back, distributed foodstuffs to them and escorted them to their houses. Along with International Medical Corps, they have sponsored daily medical camps in various Kibera communities.

According to Kibera Women for Peace and Fairness, “Nairobi is cosmopolitan, our organization has no religious or tribal barriers. We believe that women can change the world. We are completely against projects being imposed on us, we want to be part and parcel of various projects aimed at improving our lives, linked to the Millennium Development Goals.”

For more information see www.africafiles.org.

East Africa: Pastoralists and climate change

In its newly released report quoted in the box on page 10, Oxfam International writes that pastoralists in East Africa’s arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) need to be empowered to adapt to, and survive, climate change. “Pastoralists across East Africa are starting to learn to live with the reality of climate change, adapting as they can to its impact.”

The report says that climate change has manifested itself in these areas with successive poor rains, frequent droughts and unpredictable and sometimes heavy rainfall, causing floods and disease. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change model for East Africa shows a two-to-three degree Celsius increase in temperature for the region by the 2080s and more intense rainfall during the October-December rainy season sooner than that. This could be good news (increase in the productive potential of land with more rain) and bad news (loss of land to agricultural encroachment, loss of cattle to heat stress, spread of diseases that thrive in the wet season).

However, climate change is only one of the problems the pastoral communities are forced to face. Others include political and economic marginalization, inappropriate development policies based on experience in the temperate grasslands and stable conditions of North America, and increasing resource competition. John Letai, the regional Pastoral Livelihoods Coordinator for Oxfam International in Kenya, calls pastoralists among the poorest and most vulnerable people, marginalized on the basis of geographical remoteness, ethnicity and livelihood. Letai added that the introduction of alternative livelihood options for the pastoralists, whereby grazing land was used for crop cultivation and conservation, was not benefiting them. “We need to empower them [pastoralists], by formulating and implementing policies in their favour,” he said.

“Governments in the region have, historically, had little economic and political interest in promoting pastoralists’ interests, as they tend to see pastoralists as a ‘minority vote’ that isn’t worth winning,” the report said. In Kenya, the government has expressed its commitment to the arid areas, creating the Ministry for the Development of Northern Kenya and Arid Lands, headed by Mohammed Ibrahim Elmi. “Pastoralists are the best custodians of the arid areas,” Elmi said. He said the government had not done enough to improve the lives of pastoralists in ASAL areas. “For the past century pastoralists in Kenya have suffered the consequences of poor decisions taken by those charged with planning and decision-making.” (IRIN, Aug. 19)

The minister said there was need to improve pastoralists’ access to healthcare, education, support for livestock production and marketing, rural elec-
trification, tourism, energy supply and debunking the myths associated with pastoralism.

According to an August 18 field mission report, “Pastoralists living on the edge in Kenya,” released by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, climate change also plays a crucial role in inter-ethnic conflicts among the pastoralist communities in northern Kenya. Thousands of environmental refugees flee from drought, which results in pasture and water shortages for livestock. The report says pastoralists living in the ASAL areas are bearing the brunt of adverse consequences, particularly food insecurity due to droughts, floods and livestock diseases.

“There is a humanitarian crisis looming in Northern Kenya as pastoralists have resorted to eating wild fruits and gum arabica to contain hunger. This is a community which has been self-reliant on food as the majority of them were farmers,” the OCHA report said, adding: “It is about time donors and government reconsider their strategies and empower pastoralist communities by directing funding support to pastoralists’ institutions.” In its report, Oxfam recommended that governments within East Africa protect the land and resource rights of pastoralists, eliminate inappropriate development policies and provide support to the pastoralist communities through cash payments in place of food aid. “Pastoralists can and should play a role in shaping their own future,” Oxfam said.


Zimbabwe: Catholic Church, other groups speak out

“Talks between the opposing political parties in Zimbabwe have struggled to move forward since a July 21 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) promised to find a lasting solution to the country’s deepening political, economic and humanitarian crisis through dialogue.

The MOU committed the parties to interim measures, including to issue statements condemning violence, take “all measures necessary to ensure that the structures and institutions it controls are not engaged in the perpetration of violence” and “eliminate all forms of political violence, including by non-state actors” as well as ensure the safe return of internally displaced persons and enable humanitarian and social welfare organizations to render assistance.

Despite this, violence against the opposition has continued and humanitarian access has still not been given to organizations working in the field.

Zimbabwe Watch in the Netherlands (www.
zimbabwewatch.org) and Europe External Policy Advisors (www.eepa.be) in Belgium created a very helpful compendium of the positions of 14 important Zimbabwean civil society organizations with a summary of the main issues they address, the benchmarks against which to measure the legitimacy of the negotiations’ outcome and specific recommendations to political parties, the facilitator and the international community. It provides an excellent reference for the international community and is available at www.maryknollogc.org.

Despite the exclusivity of the talks, the compendium writes, civil society welcomed the talks and hoped their views would be taken into consideration. They support a transitional government and consider a government of national unity as a subversion of the will of the people. They are encouraging the talking parties to take transitional justice issues seriously and bring perpetrators of violence to justice. They are also calling on the international donor organizations and countries to consider reengagement in the event that the talking parties come up with an arrangement acceptable to the people of Zimbabwe.

The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference also issued a very important statement, calling on the negotiating parties not to rush into a government of National Unity, but to urgently dismantle instruments of violence, reject impunity and usher in a new political culture in which accountability, inclusiveness, transparency, healing and reconciliation are paramount. Their statement was summarized by AfricaFiles (www.africafiles.org). The full statement, plus one issued by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, are available at www.maryknollogc.org.

“The crisis in Zimbabwe is one that was caused by exclusion from power and from the people’s right to participate in the processes that affect their lives and from the benefits of growth and development,” said the bishops, in their statement which was made available on August 15. “We therefore think that the negotiators should not rush into establishing a government of national unity,” said the bishops. Rather, they should agree on a transitional arrangement, which in 18 months or so, will lead to the construction of a new Constitution which will then be the basis for fresh elections that are free and fair.

In their statement the bishops said, “From the colonial times to the post-independent times, governments have failed to facilitate the construction of a society that is respectful of the dignity of all persons and guarantee security, justice and peace. Instead, economic, political and social exclusion has encouraged the development of racism, negative ethnicity, gender discrimination and pessimism for the youth.” The bishops said, “Politically, Zimbabwe has grown to be a deeply divided, unequal society where those in power work to protect their privileges by privatizing national state institutions and processes. The impartiality and national character of the executive, the judiciary, and the legislature have been compromised. We have seen the judges, magistrates; the police, the army and other security forces take more and more party political positions at the expense of the security and freedom of citizens.

“With the deepening of the political crisis, we have seen the growth of hate language in the media and at political gatherings culminating in intimidation, sexual abuse, rape, violence and gruesome killings of citizens.”

They called for an immediate halt to all intimidation and violence and said that if it recurs it should be “prosecuted swiftly in accordance with transparent and impartial justice.” The bishops said that all political prisoners should be vetted and released immediately. “They are not to be offered an amnesty since they have not been convicted of any crime,” said the statement. The Catholic leaders also urged for an end to “hate speech and hate language,” and said there should be an “immediate freeing of media space and promotion of free access to that space.” They further called for assistance to all internally displaced persons and assurance of their safety “to enable them to return to their homes, and the immediate lifting of the ban on the activities of NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and other civil society organizations to enable churches and civil society organizations to operate freely.”

In a commentary on the current political talks taking place in South Africa, the bishops said, “While we think that the ongoing negotiations are positive, we also think that they could be more inclusive in order to enhance their legitimacy and acceptance.”
Tanzania: Bomani mining committee issues report

Two Canadian companies, Barrick Gold Corporation and Tanzania Royalty Exploration (TRE) Corporation, control over 50 percent of Tanzania’s gold projects. Barrick owns three of the seven major gold mining projects in Tanzania; TRE controls over 60 percent of the mining rights in the mineral rich area of Lake Victoria. These and other foreign corporations have made windfall profits out of the more than $2 billion earned in gold exports in the past decade when tax exemptions were de rigueur. (See NewsNotes, May-June 2008.)

The Bomani Commission, created last year to investigate the mining sector, issued its report early this summer, making numerous recommendations on how Tanzania can increase income from the mining of gold, diamonds, tanzanite and other minerals.

According to Miningreview.com (June 3), Tanzania, Africa’s third-biggest gold producer after South Africa and Ghana, wants to benefit from record metal prices by boosting government revenue from mining to pay for schools and hospitals. Finance Minister Mustafa Mkulo said, “Most mining companies operating in the country are currently exempted from payments, including a 30 percent corporate tax and customs duties.”

When the committee report was issued, chairman Mark Bomani claimed, “Our committee studied mining industries in other African nations and made recommendations to put Tanzania on a par with these ... The panel found that Tanzanian royalties on the value of gold and diamond exports were half those in Ghana and Botswana.”

The committee said that Tanzania should increase royalties and grant fewer tax exemptions for new investors. “Everything in the report is already being implemented in one or other African country,” Bomani claimed. The report also recommends “timely and fair compensation for communities displaced by mining, as well as procedures for repairing environmental damage...Other proposals may result in amendments to current rules that allow duty-free equipment imports, fuel-levy relief and other tax concessions, but the committee rejected a windfall tax on company profits, as this would be difficult to implement.”

Those opposed to the reforms say that raising mining taxes in Tanzania will work against the government’s efforts to attract foreign investment. Instead, according to the Tanzania Chamber of Mines, the government should improve on infrastructure in order to attract more foreign companies.

Meanwhile, according to the East African (Aug. 2), Canada is moving to safeguard its business interests in Tanzania through negotiations towards a Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPA), which aims to provide greater predictability and certainty for Canadian investors considering investment opportunities in Tanzania.

According to mining experts, the country has about one billion ounces of gold yet to be exploited. At present, only four percent of Tanzania’s gold potential is being exploited despite the country being Africa’s third largest gold producer.

Water lawsuit dissolves

For the second time, an international tribunal has ruled against a British water company trying to win $20 million in damages from the government of Tanzania. Biwater Gauff Limited (BGT) through its affiliate City Water had entered into a 10-year contract with the government of Tanzania in 2003 for the improvement of water and sewage infrastructure in Dar es Salaam. When the firm failed to deliver, the government terminated its contract in May 2005 and City Water sued.

Earlier this year the arbitration panel of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, based in London, found in favor of the Tanzanian government. The tribunal ordered City Water to pay millions in damages and legal costs.

In July, the Hague-based International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) ruled that Tanzania’s government had violated its bilateral investment treaty with the UK by expelling City Water, but that there were no damages to award as the company had no value at the time the contract was broken.
Northern Uganda: Peace process stalled

Recent advances in Uganda and the surrounding region are at risk of reversal if the ongoing decline in U.S. and international attention and engagement continues. Lacking any credible pressure to sign the final agreement negotiated through the Juba process, Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) leader Joseph Kony has been able to carry out attacks in both eastern Congo and south Sudan, exacerbating insecurity in already volatile areas and abducting hundreds of civilians. A surge of engagement aimed at restoring the prospects for a resolution of the crisis is needed to avoid the return to pervasive insecurity and displacement.

In July, Kony renewed direct contact with mediators for the first time since refusing to sign the Final Peace Agreement (FPA) in April and May. He expressed a desire to end the conflict, a move welcomed by the Ugandan government, which insists that the FPA simply awaits Kony’s signature. However, plans for meetings between Kony and mediators have since fallen through, with long periods of silence from Kony, increasing skepticism of the rebel leader’s intent to sign the peace deal.

Meanwhile, LRA attacks on civilians in the region continued, especially in the DR Congo and South Sudan. The Congolese are increasingly eager to confront the LRA militarily, while South Sudanese officials urge more patience with the peace process. Prospects for responsible and credible military pressure on the LRA are elusive, as regional militaries and UN peacekeepers lack the capacity to confront the rebels in their remote hideouts.

UN special envoy Joaquim Chissano briefed the UN Security Council on the LRA conflict in June. However, divisions among Council members regarding the appropriate role for the International Criminal Court (ICC) prevented it from taking formal action on the issue.

Several South Sudanese officials accused the Ugandan military of carrying out attacks on Sudanese civilians, exacerbating tensions between the governments and leading to South Sudan Vice President Riek Machar telling the Ugandans to withdraw their forces from Sudan. However, South Sudan President Salva Kiir later disagreed, allowing Ugandan forces operating in its territory to remain.

Meanwhile, when the ICC head prosecutor sought an arrest warrant for President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan on charges including genocide, Sudanese officials warned that the move could have “a direct negative impact” on the peace process between the LRA and Ugandan government. (See “ICC prosecutor wants to arrest Sudan’s Bashir,” page 21.)

At the same time, improved security has allowed over 130,000 Acholi displaced persons in northern Uganda to return to their homes this year, while the Ugandan military has agreed to withdraw troops from IDP camps in some districts and relocate them to protect borders. But funding for early recovery projects in war-affected communities is scarce, and lack of basic services in return areas is keeping many people in the camps.

In July, the U.S. Congress approved $17.5 million in the 2008 supplemental appropriations bill in new funding for reconstruction programs in northern Uganda to help displaced communities return home and rebuild their lives.

The U.S. diplomat appointed to support the Juba process and regional security, Special Adviser for Conflict Resolution Tim Shortley, has been reassigned as Director of Sudan Programs at the State Department. Shortley retains his responsibilities to address the regional LRA threat in his new job.

Faith in action:

Please write to Tim Shortley, Director of Sudan Programs, U.S. Department of State. Ask him to support appointment of a full time U.S. diplomat to address the LRA threat and increased U.S. funding to ensure that the Ugandan government rebuilds war-affected areas. Send a copy to your member of Congress.

For information, see www.resolveuganda.org.
El Salvador: Gearing up for elections in 2009

Things are already starting to heat up in El Salvador in anticipation of elections early next year. Salvadorans will vote for 262 municipal mayors and 84 Congressional deputies on January 18. On March 15 they will elect their president. In a country with so much power concentrated in the presidency, Salvadorans and outside observers are giving most of their attention to the latter vote. For the first time in 20 years, the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) is favored to beat its opponent from the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) party. Observers are alarmed about increasing violence against people tied to the FMLN, and the role the U.S. will play remains a concern for many based on its interference in past elections.

Opinions abound about the FMLN’s newfound electoral popularity; one reason is their choice for presidential candidate, Mauricio Funes. He is a widely known and respected journalist most famous for his editorial program, “Sin Censura,” which he hosted from 1997 to 2003. The program was known for being quite critical of the ARENA government. He also worked as a correspondent for CNN for many years. Funes will be the first FMLN candidate who is not a former guerrilla from the civil war and who has few ties to the party historically. He takes a more centrist approach than past FMLN candidates, promising not to pull out of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) or to reverse the 2001 decision to use the U.S. dollar as the Salvadoran currency. At the same time, Funes has promised to improve ties with Venezuela and Cuba, as well as with China. Currently, El Salvador is one of a few countries in the world to recognize Taiwan instead of mainland China. In most polls, Funes has a lead of over 20 percentage points.

The other main political party, ARENA, which has been in the presidency since 1989, has launched former police chief Rodrigo Ávila as its candidate. Most known for twice being the director of the National Civil Police, Ávila, also studied at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. Called “Attila” by critics for his strong hand tactics against criminals, Ávila has focused principally on responding to the epidemic of violence confronting El Salvador. Polls show that Salvadoran voters put violence and the economy as their two overwhelming priorities. Statistics show that crime rates have increased 1.54 percent since the mano dura or “get tough” policies were established in 2004, but Ávila’s image as a strongman reassures many Salvadorans traumatized by the level of violence in their communities.

Human rights organizations are concerned about an apparent upsurge in political killings. At least 23 FMLN activists and trade unionists have been murdered since March 2006 with no one being punished. Police and justice officials tend to view most killings of young men as gang-related and do not investigate. Officials also tend to consider social protestors as “communists” or “terrorists.” The new “anti-terrorism” law is very broad and has been used to accuse ordinary protestors of being terrorists and threaten them with long prison sentences.

Many are concerned about what the U.S. might do to change this election’s outcome. Many in the U.S. government think that a FMLN victory will strengthen Chavez in Venezuela and increase the leftist movement in Latin America. A delegation organized by the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) spoke with Ambassador Charles Glazer on June 27 this year. In their report, they wrote, “When asked directly if the U.S. government had intervened in the 2004 presidential elections on behalf of the ARENA party, Glazer replied in the affirmative. When asked if such intervention would occur again, he said ‘no.’”

Unfortunately, there are some signs already of a willingness of the U.S. government to interfere in the elections. A January 2008 U.S. intelligence report stated, “We anticipate that [Hugo] Chavez will provide generous financing to the FMLN in El Salvador in their attempt to secure the presidential elections of 2009.” This report made the front of most Salvadoran newspapers and drew out a statement from Funes that the FMLN will not accept money from Chavez. In another early advance, the Department of Justice (DOJ) accused CISPES of having illegal ties to the FMLN, which, if true, would mean that the organization would have to register as a foreign agent. This charge is reminiscent of similar charges against CISPES in the early 1980s. The DOJ is at-
tackling CISPES as it is one of the principal solidarity organizations and does a good deal of education and mobilizing of U.S. citizens around Salvadoran issues, especially U.S. interference in elections.

Rumors have surfaced that the U.S. might threaten to rescind protective status for Salvadoran immigrants in the U.S. if the FMLN wins in March. This severe intimidation, if enacted, would have a dramatic effect on the Salvadoran economy: Currently, over 20 percent Salvadorans live in the U.S.; the remittances that El Salvador receives from abroad represent nearly 20 percent of the country’s GNP and many families depend on them for survival. Similar threats were made to Nicaraguans in 2007 when they elected Daniel Ortega, but no such actions were actually carried out and the same is expected here. It will be important to closely monitor U.S. actions in El Salvador to assure that their elections take place without outside interference.

**Faith in action:**


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### Bolivia: Requests for extradition continue

On June 9, in reaction to the U.S. granting of political asylum to Bolivia’s former defense minister Carlos Sánchez Berzain, tens of thousands of people protested in front of the U.S. embassy in La Paz. The demonstration highlighted the increasing tension between the U.S. and Bolivia over the likely extradition request for former Bolivian president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (Goni), defense minister Sánchez Berzain, and hydrocarbons minister Jorge Berindoague. The official presentation of the extradition request should take place in the coming months, beginning a new phase of the case. Human rights and religious organizations will pressure the next U.S. administration to fulfill the extradition.

The extradition request is based on the events of “Black October,” the 2003 public demonstrations when 67 people were killed and hundreds were injured by the military under the direction of Sánchez de Lozada and his ministers. On October 17, 2003, the three men fled to the U.S. where they have remained ever since. The former president has been living a mere 10 minutes away from the White House in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Sánchez Berzain lives in Key Biscayne, FL and Berindoague in Moraga, CA.

An official decree signed by Sánchez de Lozada and his cabinet, ordering the army to take control of the gas, oil, and pipeline facilities, states that “the State of Bolivia guarantees indemnification for any damage to property and persons which might occur as a result of the fulfillment of the objective of this present Supreme Decree.” Ironically, those who promised the indemnification are now trying to escape responsibility.

Although the defendants have portrayed the charges as motivated by the personal vengeance of Evo Morales against Sánchez de Lozada and Sánchez Berzain, in fact, two-thirds of Congress voted to begin the case against them in 2004, before Morales was elected to the presidency. That Congress was dominated by Sánchez de Lozada’s political party and allies and the vote took place during the administration of Carlos Mesa, Sánchez de Lozada’s former vice president. Other government ministers and military members are also responding to charges from the case.

In addition to the extradition process, family members of 10 people who were killed in 2003 are suing Sánchez de Lozada and Sánchez Berzain, using the Alien Tort Statute and Torture Victim Protection Act as well as Florida and Maryland state laws to try the case in U.S. civil courts. Sánchez de Lozada won the first round when the judge accepted his lawyers’ petition to move the venue from Maryland to Miami. Instead of responding to specific charges in the case, Sánchez de Lozada and Sánchez Berzain accuse Morales of political persecution and are trying to turn the case into an international cause by blaming Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez for being conspirators behind the protests in 2003. Defense lawyers may believe these types of arguments will carry more weight with a Miami-based judge or jury.

The protests in Bolivia in early June this year erupted when Sánchez Berzain’s lawyers revealed the fact that the former defense minister had been granted political asylum by the U.S. Homeland Se-
Bolivia: Update on recall referendum

On August 10, Bolivians voted in a recall referendum for the president, vice president and department prefects (similar to U.S. state governors). President Evo Morales received support from 67.41 percent of the voters. Three prefects were revoked in the departments of Cochabamba, La Paz and Oruro. An analysis on the blog Incakolanews (http://incakolanews.blogspot.com) points out that the results of the elections show a much broader support for Evo Morales than thought.

The principal opposition to the president is said to come from four departments. Yet, only three of nine departments voted against Evo Morales: Tarija (50.17 percent “no”), Beni (56.28 percent “no”) and Santa Cruz (59.25 percent “no”). By aggregating further, the analysis shows that 57.9 percent of the vote against Evo came from the city of Santa Cruz itself. All of the other provinces of the Santa Cruz department voted in favor of Evo by 53.1 to 46.9 percent.

This shows that Santa Cruz’s claim to be leading a groundswell of opposition to the national government is not true. Outside of the city of Santa Cruz, there is overall support for the government. As the Incakolanews analysis states, “The time has come to recognize Santa Cruz for what it is, namely a city bent on anti-democratic behavior and not the centre of some oppressed nation that deserves the world’s attention.”
HIV/AIDS: Challenges to faithful responses

From Aug. 3-8, the 17th International AIDS Conference (IAC) was held in Mexico City, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of the Declaration of Alma Ata (the promotion of health for all people and primary health care) and the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The first IAC to be held in Latin America, it was attended by more than 24,000 persons.

A pre-conference organized by the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, a network of faith based groups, was held July 30-Aug. 2. Its theme, “Faith in Action – Now,” pointed the 450 participants to the urgency of moving religious beliefs to concrete and immediate action, a challenge given the diversity of backgrounds, theologies and perspectives on the response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Some participants felt inspired by what they heard and saw, and others expressed a need for a more developed and articulated theology around AIDS.

Participants, including large numbers of active and vocal youth, as well as representatives of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered communities, were encouraged and trained to take advocacy messages to the IAC on issues such as access to medicines, travel restrictions, children’s medicines and workplace issues. In addition, participants were introduced to advocacy campaigns for pediatric diagnostics and treatment, spearheaded by Caritas Internationals and joined by other faith based organizations. Some participants met with pharmaceutical companies later during the main conference to express these concerns.

Despite the fact that Catholic organizations have provided 25-40 percent of the caregiving in many countries, Catholic input to the pre-conference was quite low. Given that, it was heartening to have Guatemalan Bishop Gabriel Penate Rodriguez attend both conferences. A major outcome of the pre-conference was a proposal to develop a Catholic AIDS network for sharing information, networking, pastoral reflection and exploring our theological roots in light of the AIDS pandemic.

At the IAC, hundreds of plenaries, workshops, panels and poster presentations dealt with scientific, economic, social, behavioral and policy aspects of prevention, treatment and care, funding, special populations and human rights, criminalization of AIDS and more. Across from the main conference site, the Global Village housed an array of international NGOs in a lively, sometimes raucous and colorful setting of booths and conversational areas where theatre, workshops, selling of crafts and even prayer sessions raised up a multitude of aspects of the pandemic. Marches against homophobia, for universal access, and for women living with AIDS brought the world’s demands to the streets of Mexico City, and a large demonstration in the main conference hall drew attention to the millions of death caused by AIDS-related tuberculosis.

For every two people on treatment, there are five new infections; in many places, 25 percent of infected persons do not know their status; again the call was made for comprehensive prevention and the combination of prevention and treatment. Women and violence against women was a theme often heard, and finally, there were sessions on children, the most invisible and vulnerable group, for whom prevention, treatment, testing and care have been sorely neglected, but for whom stigma is a road to death. The general consensus now is that orphaned children should be cared for within family systems (as opposed to orphanages or institutions), meaning that families must be supported for this to happen.

Stigma, discrimination, and the exclusion of vulnerable groups were also frequent themes, voiced by representatives from groups of men who have sex with men, sex workers, transgendered persons and people who use drugs. The Mexican government was congratulated for its anti-homophobia campaign, as well as for lifting the restrictions against importing HIV medicines. While the U.S. was praised for the recent increases in PEPFAR and the lifting of travel restrictions, it was also reported from the Black AIDS Institute that the numbers of African Americans living with HIV are higher than previously reported (nearly 600,000), and that the U.S. has no national strategy to respond to the AIDS epidemic.

Questions about the use of resources and for whom the conference is actually held were raised due to the IAC’s exorbitant registration fee; very few grassroots activists from Africa and Asia attended, but there was no lack of government officials and professionals, as well as NGOs.

HIV and AIDS are indeed lightning rods for all major justice issues: poverty, debt, rights of women and children, trade, racism, human rights, compassion for all. It is crucial that people living with the
Unity necessary to de-contaminate Navajo land

Why are we getting a bone with no meat? This question was posed by Teddy Ness, a member of the Navajo Nation, at “Uranium Mining and the Navajo Nation,” a conference sponsored by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Gallup, NM, on August 13.

The question refers to inadequate clean up work on Navajo land contaminated by waste material from uranium mining. According to Ness, a small area of land near his house contains an unacceptable level of uranium contamination. This was supposedly remediated last March by covering the area with six inches of fresh soil. The work was conducted by the EPA and paid for by the federal Superfund. Predictably, when heavy rains arrived, the new top soil was washed away leaving the contaminated soil exposed once again. A bone with no meat!

The Superfund, managed by the EPA for response to situations of hazardous waste, has responded effectively in various instances around the U.S. However, the size of the task on Navajo land in New Mexico is daunting. Contaminated material, dangerous to human health and the environment, has been accumulating since 1944. Over 500 abandoned mines require various levels of attention. Perhaps most startling is the contamination of water from 21 wells and the threat of contamination of the underground aquifer. Numerous cases of kidney disease, leukemia, lung, and bone and stomach cancer due to exposure to radioactive material in the soil, atmosphere and water have been cited.

At the conference, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley said, “The work of remediation and reclamation to be done on Navajo land is monumental. It cannot be done by the Navajo people alone. It requires the cooperation of the federal government and the private companies that mined the area in years past without properly disposing of waste material. Fortunately, today marks a new level of cooperation with the federal government.”

This noteworthy event was the result of a hearing of Navajo representatives with the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee. At the hearing it was apparent that the scope of the problem was enormous and that only concerted and integrated efforts could possibly bring about a lasting solution. Chairman Henry Rep. Waxman (D-CA), therefore, called for the immediate development of a five year integrated plan on the part of five government agencies: the EPA, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Indian Health Services, the Department of Energy and the Nuclear Regulatory Board.

At the conference, it was clear that correct disposal of contaminated waste material will not be achieved in five years. However, the direction was set and there was a commitment to remediate the most dangerous sites as soon as possible.

During his remarks, Shirley stated categorically that the Navajo Nation opposes all new uranium mining on its land. Absolute vigilance in this regard is required because, with the end of the era of cheap oil and the climate change crisis, nuclear power fueled by uranium is again being proffered as an energy solution. According to the Nuclear Regulatory Board, private companies have submitted approximately 25 new applications for licensing for uranium mining. It would seem that other forms of renewable energy would offer safer and altogether more satisfactory solutions to the climate change crisis.
Trade: Elements for fair, just policies

An increasing number of U.S. Americans are becoming aware that, in order to benefit more people and to honor the environment, current trade agreements must be changed. The Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment (IWG), a coalition in which the MOGC is an active member, wrote the following statement as a guide toward what we envision is necessary to make the existing trade model more fair and just. The IWG has recently published an alternative policies document, “Trade as if people and Earth mattered: A working document on alternatives,” which provides more details of the desired changes.

International trade can be one engine of economic progress for developing countries. But the United States and developing countries alike need fair and just trade agreements that are genuinely shaped to meet the goals of sustainable development and poverty reduction. …

Trade policies and agreements must put people first. They should further genuine social and economic development for our neighbors around the world while preserving and creating good jobs here at home. They must support -- not hinder -- governments in adopting policies to protect public health and the natural environment. Trade policies must strike a balance between creating a predictable structure for international trade and preserving the policy space necessary for governments to foster and secure economic, social and human development for all their citizens.

A new trade framework should include the following key elements:

- Ensure that trade agreements are formulated with full democratic accountability and citizen participation both in the United States and U.S. trading partners.
- Require (pre and post) country impact evaluations to assess the effects of provisions in trade agreement on key issues such as poverty eradication, job growth, food security and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.
- Respect the right of peoples and nations to democratically determine their own agricultural and food policies.
- Fully respect the right of developing countries to safeguard and nurture their own domestic economies and the livelihoods of their people through the implementation of trade policies, regulations and mechanisms which promote and protect their own small-holder farmers, urban workers, and domestic manufacturers.
- Prioritize long-term ecological sustainability and the stability of the climate, and protect and conserve the richness and diversity of the natural world.
- Exclude provisions that require the liberalization or deregulation of essential public services, such as water, health care and education.
- Reject intellectual property rights restrictions which make it more difficult for people in developing countries to have access to affordable essential medicines, as well as intellectual property provisions involving patents on seeds and other life-forms.
- Exclude the undemocratic provisions known as “investor-state” law suits, in which international investors are able to sue host governments in unelected international tribunals over actual or potential loss of future corporate profits resulting from democratically enacted domestic policies and regulations.

Crafting trade policies that will foster the wellbeing of our global neighbors and the natural environment will also improve U.S. well-being. We call on the new president and Congress to look to long-term U.S. interests in a more secure, stable and just world, in which poverty and inequality are declining and all people have the resources needed for lives of dignity, sufficiency and community participation.

Faith in action:

Call or write your senators and representative and ask them to read the alternatives document. Ask that they cosponsor and vote for the Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment (TRADE) Act introduced by Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Rep. Mike Michaud (D-ME). This bill contains many of the changes advocated for in our alternatives document.
Trade: WTO talks collapse again

On July 29, the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations in Geneva collapsed with no advances. In fact, negotiators have made little progress in the WTO process since 1999 in Seattle, when protestors outside negotiations and African representatives frustrated with the process were able to force an end to the discussions. Despite ministerial level negotiations in 2001, 2003, and 2005-08, fundamental conflicts continue.

After the failed talks in Geneva, Bolivian trade advisor Pablo Salon expressed the frustration of many Southern countries when he pointed to three areas that were unacceptable: the negotiating process, substantive conflicts and missing items in the negotiations, the same issues that caused previous negotiations to fail.

With 185 countries involved, the WTO negotiating process is incredibly complicated. To simplify, most noteworthy negotiations take place in what are called “green room” negotiations. In Geneva, only 35 countries were invited to the negotiations at all, yet even there, a smaller group of seven -- the U.S., European Union, Japan, China, Australia, Brazil and India -- was formed that held most of the significant negotiations. Although changes must be approved by all members of the WTO, countries not involved in the green room negotiations are strongly pressured to accept decisions made there without amendment. For years, even before 1999, countries not included in these green room negotiations have complained loudly about rules being established without their input.

Yet the substantive conflicts represent an even tougher challenge. A principal complaint from the global South is that the North is unwilling to make any real cuts in its agricultural subsidies while demanding large cuts from Southern governments. In Geneva, the U.S. offered to lower its maximum allowed level of domestic subsidies to $15 billion per year. But as it currently only spends a little over $7 billion on subsidies, this was basically a non-offer. In the meantime, the U.S. demanded that Southern countries lower their industrial tariffs by 40 to 60 percent while Northern countries would only reduce theirs by 25-33 percent. This goes completely against the proposed goal of the Doha development round of placing developing countries’ needs at the heart of the work program.

Another key conflict was over special safeguard measures (SSM) in agriculture that allow countries to temporarily restrict imports to protect native farmers from import surges that have decimated rural communities in the past. With the current food crisis, this theme was especially important to countries in the South, yet the U.S. demanded excessive usage requirements that would make it practically impossible for Southern governments to implement SSM. While this dispute played an important role in ending the negotiations, many, including India’s trade minister, Dr. Mari Pangestu, opined that the bigger issue was cotton. She said that the U.S. focused on the SSM issue in order to blame countries like India for being the holdouts on SSM, while avoiding negotiations on cotton where the U.S. is more clearly the holdout and would have been blamed for derailing the negotiations. In all WTO negotiations, countries jockey to not be seen as the one responsible for the negotiations’ failure.

Yet even if the negotiations had been successful, key problems facing the planet today would not have been addressed. In many ways the WTO continues to debate issues of the past. As the imminent end of cheap oil approaches and climate change increases due to fossil fuel use, the idea of negotiating to find ways to increase international trade is antiquated and illogical. Societies around the world need to be concentrate on how to localize their economies in preparation for a future of prohibitively high fuel prices. By securing rules that encourage increased trade, the WTO makes it even more difficult for governments to develop policies aimed at localizing food and energy production, even while this becomes a critical goal for all societies.

As Bolivian president Evo Morales said in an open letter to WTO members, “Foreign trade must be a complement to local production. In no way can we favor foreign markets at the expense of national production.” The reality of pending peak oil and climate change means that we should abandon the idea of increasing global trade and instead begin negotiations of how human society will be able to locally provide their basic necessities while assuring dignified lives for all.
The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has requested a warrant for the arrest of Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir to try to stop the bloodletting in Darfur. It marks the first time the court, based in The Hague, has sought to arrest a sitting head of state for alleged war crimes. The controversial move follows the refusal of the Sudanese government to turn over a government minister and a janjaweed militia leader for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur. The charges stem from violence that has claimed as many as 400,000 lives since 2003 in the western Sudanese province.

The ICC’s Luis Moreno-Ocampo presented evidence in July that Bashir had committed genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur. The allegations followed a three-year investigation requested by the UN Security Council. Ocampo says the charges are bolstered by the testimony of more than 100 witnesses in 18 countries.

The ICC already issued arrest warrants in April 2007 for Ahmad Harun, Sudan’s minister for humanitarian affairs, and Ali Kushayb, a janjaweed militia leader. Amnesty International says the warrants refer to attacks allegedly carried out by Sudanese armed forces and the janjaweed on four west Darfur towns in 2003 and 2004. About 1,000 civilians died. The two men face more than 40 counts including persecution, murder and forcible transfer.

One diplomat says Ocampo’s effort to have Bashir arrested grew out of Sudan’s “complete lack of engagement or any response to the [earlier] indictments.” He says the president’s refusal to turn over Harun and Kushayb “adds evidence to the allegation of command responsibility for those killings.”

In his legal arguments, Ocampo accuses Bashir of a genocide campaign that killed 35,000 people outright, at least another 100,000 through a “slow death” and forced 2.5 million to flee their homes. He says his evidence shows Bashir masterminded and implemented a plan to destroy the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa people because of their ethnicity.

“Al Bashir is the president. He is the commander-in-chief,” Ocampo says. “Those are not just formal words. He used the whole state apparatus, he used the army, he enrolled the militia/janjaweed. They all report to him, they all obey him. His control is absolute.”

The role of the ICC, to which the U.S. is not a party, is under constant scrutiny. Some critics contend the threat to make arrests could harm peace efforts in certain conflict situations. As Ocampo prepared to seek a warrant against Bashir this summer, Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, co-authors of Darfur: A New History of a Long War, warned that the threat of arrest could harden Khartoum’s opposition to a UN peacekeeping mission. They asked, “Does this not invite retaliation, including against humanitarian agencies? … [H]istory shows that dictators often learn that power is their only protection and that nothing, and no one, can be allowed to stand in the way.”

Before arrest warrants were issued for Harun and Kushayb last year, former assistant secretary of state Stephen Rademaker wrote, “Critics of the ICC predicted early on that it would be more a hindrance than a help to ending most conflicts. The threat of prosecution would rarely motivate both parties to stop fighting, they argued, but in many cases it would be powerful enough to convince at least one side that it was better off continuing to fight.”

Some diplomats and UN officials fear that authorizing an arrest warrant for Bashir now could provoke a wave of violence against the joint UN-African Union peacekeeping force (UNAMID) currently operating in Darfur, or even prompt Khartoum to order all international peacekeepers in Sudan out of the country.

There are around 9,500 UNAMID troops and police in Darfur and another 10,000 UN peacekeepers in other parts of Sudan. UNAMID’s mandate was extended on July 31 for another year, and the UK has appealed for an expansion of UNAMID to its planned full strength of 26,000.

ICC supporters say the continued violence in Darfur justifies putting more pressure on Bashir. “The pattern of crimes in Darfur does indicate responsibility at the highest level of Sudan’s government,” says Richard Dicker of Human Rights Watch.

Dicker says he considers the request for an arrest warrant “a huge step in limiting the impunity for horrific acts committed against innocent people in Darfur,” and he says it sends the message that “no one is above the law for these kinds of crimes, including a sitting president.”
The Church also recognizes the ICC’s potential contribution to world peace. It cites the ICC’s role “to punish those responsible for particularly serious acts such as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression. The Magisterium has not failed to encourage this initiative time and time again.” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, n. 506)

ICC judges are not expected to rule on an arrest warrant for Bashir until October or November. The conflict in Darfur has claimed an estimated 300,000-400,000 lives. Fighting began in 2003 when ethnic African rebels took up arms against the Arab-led Sudanese government, accusing it of neglect and discrimination. The government is accused of arming the janjaweed as a counterinsurgency tactic, while the militiamen are blamed for widespread rape and killing of Darfur civilians.

Despite controversy over the ICC’s role in Darfur, Ocampo says he has little choice. For more than five years, he says, millions of civilians have been uprooted from their ancestral lands, their means of survival destroyed and their land taken by new inhabitants. “In the camps Al-Bashir’s forces kill the men and rape the women. He wants to end the history of the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa people,” he says. “I don’t have the luxury to look away. I have evidence.”

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**Justice Asunder**

The following poem was written by Emily Thrush, who worked with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns as an intern with the Discipleship Year program.

stifled humanity –
sequestered indefinitely
sold for bounty –
silenced.

strained,
strung,
stretched,
scavenged for details, sources secondary.

savagery:
“saving lives,” yet
selling out the soldiers while
shamelessly gutting the law.

shocked strangers
shrink; terror abides
shadows loom
suffering strengthens.

seldom seen:
safety. In its
stead,
systematic barbarism.

sunlight scorches,
sleep disrupted
screaming daily
sounds heard nowhere.

sincerity neglected
suspects shrivel
secrecy reigns
sentencing suspended.

supreme court ruled
senate overturned
semblance of justice lacks
shred of authenticity.

suicide watch high
successful on occasion.
still they languish
striving for soul’s release.

slowly attention mounts
small groups push for more
steady message: dignity,
sacred life for all.

sadly Power resists
shrouds ugliness with lies
speaks of “saving American lives”
seduces public with Fear.

sleeping society awaken.
snatch back the convictions
said to be foundational.
sing honestly of justice for all.

sever the severe
soberly confess, redress, return.
sanctify the wretched
serve the sick

seal the taverns of indecency
step into the light of humanity
sustain the progress with
spiritual review.
Resources

1) “Short takes on a shrinking world” video invitational: Tell the next U.S. president how to shape foreign policy! As part of our 2008 election project, high school and college-aged youth are invited to submit videos or PowerPoint presentation that highlight issues of importance in the next president’s foreign policy agenda. Participants may submit one 60-90 second video or PowerPoint presentation incorporating one of the election project’s five themes: climate change; global economy; migration/immigration; HIV/AIDS; and peace and sustainable security. Entries will be accepted from August 15 until November 27, Thanksgiving Day. Videos/PowerPoint presentations will be reviewed by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns’ staff to determine appropriateness of content and message. Those that meet the criteria will be posted on the website and made available for educational purposes. For information on how to submit entries for “Short-takes on a shrinking world,” email the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns at ogc@maryknollogc.org or call 202-832-1780, or visit our website at http://www.maryknollogc.org

2) The Not On Our Watch Christian Companion: Biblical Reflections on the Mission to End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond: Drawing from the rich Christian humanitarian tradition as well as from traditions of public political involvement, this resource provides biblical reflections on ethical issues as well as practical guidance for action to create change in Darfur. Each chapter constitutes a weekly study session—eight in all—designed to guide group discussion and reflection about Darfur and the movement to end genocide. Each session includes a biblical passage for reflection, a lesson applying the passage to Darfur, a weekly action step, and vignettes by refugees and people from many walks of life who have awakened to the problem of genocide and become active in the Darfur movement. $7.50. For more information, email book@darfurchristianaction.org; visit http://darfurchristianaction.org; or write the ENOUGH Project, 1225 Eye Street NW, Suite 307, Washington, D.C., 20005; 202-682-1611.

3) Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation Conference: A Decade of Seeking Peace: Pursuing Hope, Security and Human Dignity: This year, the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF) celebrates 10 years of service with its 10th International Conference and Awards Banquet on October 24-25 in Washington, D.C. Since 1998, HCEF has worked to sustain the presence of Arab Christians in the Holy Land, to contribute to their well-being, and to develop solidarity between them and their fellow Christians elsewhere in the world. HCEF promises a wide array of highly informative and inspirational speakers and panelists that include H.B. Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Patriarch Emeritus of Jerusalem; Most Rev. Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington; and Anna Baltzer, Jewish American author and Fulbright Scholar. HCEF will also be launching H.B. Sabbah’s new book, Faithful Witness: On Reconciliation and Peace, at the conference. Register online at http://www.hcef.org/, or by calling (301) 951-9400 ext. 219.

4) Promote CNS columnist in your diocesan paper: Catholic News Service (CNS) columnist Tony Magliano writes a biweekly syndicated social justice and peace column which addresses timely economic, social and political issues from the perspective of Catholic social teaching. His columns challenge readers to make decisions based on the radical teachings of the Gospel and the church’s social doctrine. Unfortunately, many diocesan newspaper editors choose not to regularly publish his columns. But you can help change that. Please contact your diocesan newspaper editor and urge her or him to regularly publish Magliano’s CNS column. Explain that his justice and peace column is a much needed, and highly useful instrument, in helping average Catholics understand and apply the richness of Catholic social teaching to the problems facing our nation and world.