



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

A bi-monthly newsletter of information on international justice and peace issues

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UN Report: Hopeful Actions for a Code Red Climate

In August 2021, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a new report on the precarious status of Earth's changing climate.

A new UN climate report paints a grim picture of the conditions facing life on Earth if humans do not act immediately to drastically reduce carbon emissions. Global temperatures are getting so hot, the report says, that Earth is on track to surpass damaging levels of warming in about a decade.

Calling it a “code red for humanity,” the United Nations says the report demonstrates “incontrovertibly” that global temperature rise over the past 200 years has been driven almost entirely by human activity. It explains how the next decade will be crucial for reducing planet-warming emissions, and that the greater the warming the more intense the extreme weather — hurricanes, wildfires, floods, and heat waves — and the more likely the impacts will be irreversible.

Hope and motivation to move forward can feel fleeting in the wake of such grave news.

In an article for Sojourner's Magazine, Avery Davis Lamb and Karyn Bigelow, co-executive directors of Creation Justice Ministries, reflect on finding hope amid the climate crisis: “Hope is not optimism. It is not the expectation that everything will turn out in the end. Nor is it the belief that we are doomed, despite our best efforts. Rather, hope is the possibility that through truth-telling and holy action, we might turn back to God. To have Christian hope is to act in courage, claiming what we know and what we can do.”

“Let's tell the truth: We know what is happening. We know it is bad. We know who is causing it. We know how to change it,” Davis and Bigelow write. Let this be a source of our hope.

The scientists behind the report explain that we can still act to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. In November, world leaders will gather in Glasgow, Scotland, for the annual UN climate negotiations. They plan to make formal pledges for robust climate action over the next five years that will collectively limit warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels, as agreed upon in Paris in 2015. But achieving this will take political courage in the face of powerful economic forces, such as corporate influence and dependence on fossil fuel profits.

Financial assistance from wealthy countries and corporations will also be necessary to build climate resilient infrastructure, jobs, and food systems and to prevent the worst outcomes for the most vulnerable. Communities and countries facing irreparable loss and damages

will need help financing recovery or relocation, largely with support from wealthy countries such as the United States whose economies have benefited the most from fossil fuel consumption.

The Biden administration and Democrats in Congress have named climate action as a top priority. Pres. Biden has a plan to keep the Earth's warming to 2 °C. However, implementing these plans will be a challenge, given the Democrats' slim majority in Congress.

Nevertheless, the remaining tenure of this Congress offers a window for advocates to achieve various forms of climate action. This starts with the budget reconciliation bill from which Congress can reprioritize spending, revenues, deficits, and debt. This budget only needs a simple majority to pass and is filibuster free. House leaders face pressure to write and pass the reconciliation plan before they approve the infrastructure bill which the Senate passed in August.

The \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill offers a possibility for supporting climate resilient infrastructure. While some politicians and organizations hailed the legislation as climate ambitious, others noted it included too little funding for programs such as zero-emissions public transportation and that it allocated some money to unproven climate technologies or harmful solutions that benefit fossil fuel companies. The House plans to vote on the infrastructure bill by Sept. 27.

Another promising sign is that investors and corporations are shifting away from fossil fuels and into environmental and social investments. According to the U.S. Energy Information Agency, oil and coal consumption is declining and 70% of new investments in the power sector are going to renewable energy.

The Catholic Church also offers hope. The Vatican has launched a seven-year program called the “Laudato Si' Action Platform” to help individuals and Church institutions implement Pope Francis' 2015 landmark encyclical's call to ecological conversion. Pope Francis plans to attend the climate negotiations in Scotland..

As Bigelow and Davis conclude in their article, “... the journey of Christian hope is a spiritual survival strategy. Perhaps by the grace of God and the work of our hands, we might have hope.”§

Faith in action: Sign the Catholic Climate Covenant petition for climate action: <https://bit.ly/3gPiBNG>

Just Transition For Defense Industries

The Institute of Policy Studies' National Priorities Project offers ways to transition the U.S. military away from environmental destruction and toward more sustainable jobs. This article by Shea Leibow is reprinted with permission. <https://bit.ly/3gR4iYG>

As public opinion shifts toward the belief that climate change is a global emergency, the pressure escalates to transition away from fossil fuels. This year, President Biden put forward a plan to create millions of good-paying clean energy jobs, the Keystone XL pipeline was cancelled, and the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), a group previously resistant to considering a transition to clean energy, released a report detailing their demands for a clean energy transition.

These moves to transition away from the fossil fuel economy have widespread implications in other sectors of the U.S. economy. The U.S. defense industry, for example, is another economic system that has proven to be unsustainable.

As National Priorities Project's No Warming, No War report describes, the U.S. military is one of the biggest polluters in the world, producing around fifty-nine million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions annually. Military bases serve as a major source of these emissions, and the 800 U.S. military bases across the globe ensure that this pollution is not confined to the continental U.S. The act of warfare itself is extremely carbon-intensive and ecologically destructive as well — and this is not to mention the military's track record of fighting wars for oil.

Despite the environmentally destructive impacts of the military, it also serves as the largest employer in the United States. How then can we make a plan to transition defense workers and communities out of this deeply unsustainable economic system?

This is where the concept of Just Transition comes in handy.

The Climate Justice Alliance defines Just Transition as a concept that details how to move from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. The concept centers the workers and frontline communities impacted by this transition.

Given that the fossil fuel and defense industries have both proven to be disastrous for our planet and communities, it's useful to identify lessons from the ongoing fossil fuel transition that may be applicable to a Just Transition away from the defense economy.

Lessons from Past Transitions

The transition away from coal in the Appalachian region resulted in massive job loss, worker displacement, and increased regional poverty. A key failure of this transition was its reactive and short-sighted nature.

- **Recommendation #1:** Just Transition plans must be made preemptively, before layoffs are imminent.
- **Recommendation #2:** A Just Transition plan must include short-term support for dislocated workers (such as

relocation support, insurance, and wage replacement).

- **Recommendation #3:** A Just Transition plan should also include long-term support such as robust legislation, coordination and advisory boards, robust funding, and strong social services.

The Navajo Nation was hit in 2019 with the closures of a coal-fired power plant and its accompanying coal mine, both of which were major sources of employment for Diné (Navajo) people. However, this shock was lessened by the Kayenta Solar Project — a Navajo Nation-run solar facility built in 2016, which now provides local jobs and energy to 36,000 Navajo Nation homes.

- **Recommendation #4:** Local workers and frontline communities must be able to shape Just Transition plans to accommodate their local economic, cultural, and environmental circumstances.

- **Recommendation #5:** There should be informed consent and ongoing consultation throughout the transition process — or, better yet, community groups should be in leadership roles in the transition.

- **Recommendation #6:** A Just Transition plan should prioritize the diversification of local economies, especially through the expansion of sustainable sectors. As the Labor Network for Sustainability's (LNS) Just Transition Listening Project highlights, to achieve a Just Transition on a national scale, state and federal governments will need to provide support.

- **Recommendation #7:** Government bodies must ensure that dislocated workers receive re-training and guaranteed employment as they leave their positions. As the LNS report highlights, "A new job waiting is typically the best transition plan."

- **Recommendation #8:** Federal resources must be allocated to support worker and family relocations out of transitioning regions, or the government must ensure that attainable, decent jobs are moved to the transitioning regions.

Crafting a plan for a massive economic shift is intimidating — ensuring that all workers and communities are taken care of, even more so. However, legislation and regional plans for a defense Just Transition do not need to be pulled out of thin air. The ongoing efforts to transition economies, workers, and communities out of the harmful fossil fuel economy provides insights into what works and what doesn't.

Understanding the concept of Just Transition as a tool that can be applied to unsustainable economic systems such as the fossil fuel economy and the defense economy allows us to work holistically and strategically to build a brighter future. §

Economy of Francesco Initiative Progresses

The Economy of Francesco, Pope Francis' initiative for young people committed to reimagining a just economy, will convene a global virtual gathering on October 2. Read more about the Economy of Francesco: <https://bit.ly/3Dy8Dd9>

Two years after its founding, Pope Francis' Economy of Francesco initiative is alive and thriving. The initiative, begun by Pope Francis in May 2019, is an opportunity for "all young people who feel called to commit themselves to an economy attentive to the least and capable of caring for the planet, to build together a process of global change and give life to a new season of economic thought and practice."

Economy of Francesco unites young entrepreneurs, economists, and change makers to share experiences of their grassroots initiatives for economic transformation, to build alliances, and to share pathways toward a better world. This second year of the initiative has included a flurry of activities, with events ranging from workshops to webinars, entrepreneurial trainings, summer schools, and direct actions, all in preparation for the second global meeting on October 2.

The final document of the Economy of Francesco's first global meeting in November 2020 established 12 themes or "villages" to guide the initiative's work. The villages represent key areas where transformation is needed to create a truly sustainable and just economy and society, such as the sharing of technologies, decent work for all, the end of tax havens, equal opportunities for women, and the end to war.

All 12 villages have worked to define their priorities for future initiatives that will be further clarified in the October meeting.

The villages are transparent about their processes and progress in defining goals and planning for implementation. For example, the Policies and Happiness village has shared information about how they developed their three main proposals for action. They share notes and "mind maps" from their meetings, as well as videos of their discussions with global thought leaders, such as Indian scholar and activist Vandana Shiva and American economist Jeffrey Sachs.

The three main proposals from the Policies and Happiness village so far are 1) to create small-to-medium sized sustainable cities focused on local ecology and sustainability; 2) to create a Child Flourishing Index to help guide decision makers to best benefit future generations;

and 3) to engage in what they call participatory, inclusive mapping, or to map the assets, connections and relationships within communities in order to foster local collaboration and a sense of belonging.

The different villages' proposals are wide-ranging in scope and topic. The Energy and Poverty village suggests the formation of Casas di Francesco, communities of mixed ages and backgrounds where people can live out the Economy of Francesco, serving as places of innovation for Economy of Francesco ideas and local catalysts for change.

Another group, the Business and Peace village, proposes removing weapons producers from stock exchanges and increasing the number of universities with Peace Economics disciplines. As more villages submit their work and proposals you can read them here: <https://bit.ly/3yrr13K>.

While the Economy of Francesco mostly focuses on economic issues, its members, moved by the concerning situation in Afghanistan, called for global mobilization on Saturday, August 28, to show solidarity with Afghan women. They invited participants in marches and other visible actions around the world to use the symbol of a piece of blue cloth to represent the more constraining type of burqa favored by the Taliban that may soon be forced on Afghan women.

The Economy of Francesco has an archive of videos of their activities around the world where you can find rich discussions with many of the world's leading thinkers in different areas related to economic and social transformation. The videos provide a sense of the hopeful energy and potential of these young people acting to create a better world.

As the Economy of Francesco leaders say in their announcement of the October meeting, "the Pope's call to live the Economy of Francesco as a vocation, a culture and a covenant, resonates even more urgently" in the face of global challenges. While some may consider their goals to be utopian, the Economy of Francesco leaders reply, "we believe [our vision] is prophetic and therefore [it is important] that we can ask, ask and ask again, because what seems impossible today will seem less so tomorrow thanks to our commitment and our insistence."§



U.S. Border: Title 42 and MPP Remain

Two Trump-era policies severely restricting access to asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border have remained or been recently reinstated, to the dismay of immigrant advocates.

The Biden administration has maintained or reinstated two border policies initiated by the Trump administration, despite its campaign promises to swiftly address the near-total breakdown of processing of asylum seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border.

While the Biden administration had begun to wind down the Trump administration's Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) or "Remain in Mexico" policy, on August 24 the Supreme Court ruled to uphold a lower court decision that will result in the reinstatement of the policy.

The MPP policy requires asylum seekers to be returned to Mexico to await the adjudication of their asylum claims rather than being allowed to remain in the United States. It has resulted in asylum seekers being forced to wait in dangerous and unsanitary conditions, such as sprawling tent camps, in northern Mexican border cities.

In response to the Supreme Court decision, Las Americas Immigrant Resource Center in El Paso, where Maryknoll lay missionary Heidi Cerneka works as an immigration attorney, wrote:

"As the Biden Admin ended MPP, the silver lining for our Mexico team was being able to help with the entry of thousands of asylum seekers... That joy is gone for now. The fight gets a little harder tonight... There is no gentler MPP. We need the Administration to renew their commitment to humanity at the border and take action now."

In addition, the Biden administration has kept in place the Title 42 health order which, citing COVID-19 concerns, allows border officials to bypass asylum procedures to immediately deport asylum seekers. In an op-ed in *The Hill*, Dylan Corbett, director of the Hope Border Institute in El Paso, Texas, wrote, "To be clear, Title 42 was never about public health; last year a high caliber group of 172 public health experts rightly termed Title 42 'xenophobia masquerading as a public health measure.'"

"It will take political courage, but the Biden administration must adhere to the law and our international humanitarian obligations by rescinding Title 42 and fully restoring asylum at the border," concluded Corbett. §

U.S. Immigration and Budget Reconciliation

The Fiscal Year 2022 budget resolution proposals recently passed by the House and Senate include opportunities for citizenship for many undocumented U.S. residents.

Democrats in Congress are gaining ground in their efforts to include pathways to citizenship for some of the 11 million undocumented U.S. residents in the developing budget resolution package for Fiscal Year 2022. The passage of this legislation would be a huge milestone for immigrant communities, as this is the closest Congress has come in decades to widely expanding opportunities for undocumented immigrants to regularize their status.

On August 24, the House of Representatives passed a \$3.5 trillion budget resolution that includes opportunities to apply for legal permanent status for many undocumented immigrants, including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders.

On August 12, the Senate passed a template for this budget plan, and the new House bill further lays out what the final budget package could look like. The Democrats plan to use a special process called budget reconciliation to pass these packages, for which they only need a simple majority vote. But this could be tricky, given their narrow margins in Congress.

Immigrant advocacy and legal aid groups expressed

their excitement about the progress of these bills. Regarding the passage of the Senate budget resolution, Anna Gallagher, executive director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, said, "Today, we celebrate. We hold our CLINIC staff, affiliates, their staff and clients and immigrants across the United States in a virtual embrace. Our country is one step closer to making it official: a path to citizenship is a path to respecting immigrants' human dignity and a permanent place in their permanent home."

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops also expressed support for the expansion of pathways to citizenship included in the package: "...we are pleased that the resolution sets up an opportunity for many undocumented persons to receive legal status. For decades, the bishops of the United States have been proponents of such reforms. Undocumented people living in the United States are frequently at risk of mistreatment and exploitation because they lack legal status." §

Faith in action: Send a message to your Members of Congress urging them to support positive immigration reform today: <https://bit.ly/3DB3bq0>

Guatemala: Addressing Roots of Migration

Guatemalan groups expressed disappointment with Vice Pres. Kamala Harris's visit to the country in June.

Vice President Kamala Harris's June visit to Guatemala and Mexico was meant to highlight the Biden administration's plan to address the root causes of U.S. immigration, particularly from Central America's "Northern Triangle" of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. But community leaders from the remote Guatemalan department of El Petén worry that U.S. authorities have not yet demonstrated a willingness to tackle the deep and complicated roots of such migration, which inevitably involve the violent history of U.S. interventionism and economic interests in the region.

Vincentian Father Flavio Tercero, who worked for many years in El Petén (including with Maryknoll Brother Marty Shea), and Guatemalan lawyer Ramón Cadena recently spoke with the National Catholic Reporter (NCR) about a statement they wrote (excerpted below) in anticipation of Harris' trip. In detailed and pointed commentary, NCR's Tom Roberts reports that Cadena appreciated Harris' emphasis on the need for Guatemala to care for its people, end corruption, and stop human trafficking, but that "he was disappointed at the limited contact she had with grassroots groups and representatives."

During the 39-year Guatemalan civil war, subsistence farming families were relocated to El Petén from other regions by the government. Then, in the 1990s, the land was declared a protected area. The new law meant that oil interests and other large-scale "mega-projects" from dams to eco-tourism can operate there, but the farmers cannot.

Given no recourse and nowhere else to go, families in El Petén are violently and systematically displaced.

Burned out of their homes, their crops destroyed, pursued by the military, they are precisely the kinds of desperate families who often migrate through Mexico to the United States. According to Tercero and Cadena's statement, as of 2019, El Petén had the fourth largest rate of emigration of the regions of Guatemala. Yet, despite repeated requests, the El Petén regional representatives were not represented among the groups Vice President Harris met with, while groups more closely aligned with powerful state and private interests were.

The snub was nothing new. In August, MOGC staff spoke with Tercero, Cadena, and a handful of community leaders from El Petén who asked not to be named because they could be targeted by military and paramilitary groups in the region. They recounted decades of attempts to call international attention to their plight, only to be ignored by officials from the United States and other embassies, the United Nations High Commission, and Guatemala's Catholic hierarchy.

The leaders from El Petén say that U.S. efforts to address the root causes of migration must consider the experience and insights of communities like theirs, or else money aimed at economic improvement will only fuel corruption, impunity will continue to enable their persecutors, and desperate families fleeing violence will continue to seek refuge in the United States.

As long as their voices are ignored, one leader told MOGC, "When Vice President Harris says to Guatemalans, 'Do not come,' we do not hear the message that we should stay in our country to build a better future. The message we hear is that the poor and victims of violence have no value, and we will be punished." §

Guatemala: Statement on Migration and El Petén

The following is an excerpt of an English translation of a May 25 statement by Fr. Flavio Pereira Tercero and lawyer Ramón Cadena analyzing the root causes of migration in Guatemala, especially the El Petén region, in anticipation of U.S. Vice Pres. Kamala Harris' June 2021 visit to Guatemala.

A very important visit will happen in Guatemala, Central America soon: the Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris, will be in Guatemala and Mexico June 7-8. Will she present a set of conditions to persuade the Guatemalan authorities to respect and defend the struggle against impunity and for the rule of law, and thus stop forced migration? Or will her visit be the same as others before it, aimed at convincing authorities to stop forced migration by militarizing their borders? We hope, of course, that the former will happen – that,

as a well-known defender of civil and women's rights, Kamala Harris will maintain her reputation and defend migrant children, women, and men with a human rights approach.

When we talk about stopping forced migration, we must have a clear picture of the root causes of such movement. The goal of allowing people to remain in their communities requires a profound understanding of the realities in the places where forced migration begins.

Guatemala has 22 regional departments, each with

its own circumstances which force people to migrate. Whether communities face violence or social conflict due to land disputes, or in response to so-called “mega projects” (hydro-electric plants, mining, tourism infrastructure, etc.), or as a result of organized crime or narco-trafficking, the result is the same. Violence prompts young people, women, and children to flee their communities in search of a better future elsewhere.

People have to flee to other countries (mainly to México and the United States) in order to protect their lives and seek better futures for their children. Stopping this migration is a very difficult task. It will depend on the strength of local institutions, how corruption and impunity are fought, the honesty and transparency of authorities in the use of scarce economic resources, and the extent to which authorities respect the social, economic and cultural rights of the people, as well as their political and civil rights. It has been repeatedly stated that Guatemalan authorities must protect the people living in their territory and make every possible effort to stop forced migration. Instead, now they are persecuting, criminalizing, and arbitrarily detaining community leaders and human rights defenders.

Until human rights abuses stop, forced migration will continue. While this is not a mathematical formula, it speaks to the reality facing the people. Social sciences research has proven that there is more migration in poor countries, where human rights are violated against women, children and the elderly, than in rich countries where human rights are respected. This thesis must be taken into account when addressing the root causes of migration.

Let us consider the situation facing people living in the largest and northernmost department of El Petén, one of the most complex in Guatemala. To stop forced migration, all aspects of the situation must be addressed through an integral approach. In 2019, El Petén had the fourth highest rate of emigration of the 22 departments in the country. Located in the jungle along the border with México, many people must pass through it to enter Mexico en route to the United States in search of a better future. As one community leader who decided to migrate said: “My future is a better place to live in.” He added, “Migrating to México and then to the United States as an irregular worker is dangerous. But less dangerous than living in El Petén, where the justice institutions do not exist and impunity, organized crime, and narco-trafficking surround us.”

Among the most vulnerable communities are in the towns of La Libertad and San Andrés, near Laguna del Tigre. Once one crosses an invisible line, one enters

the Laguna del Tigre environmental protected zone, in the north of the department. This invisible boundary is easily identified by the large buildings of the Perenco oil company and by a Guatemalan Army checkpoint, purportedly there to provide security in the region, but in reality to provide security to Perenco and to prevent communities living far to the north inside Laguna del Tigre from bringing in the necessary materials for their livelihoods. This repressive atmosphere leads local residents to migrate to México and the United States.

One of the worst realities facing the people of El Petén is the exclusion they have suffered for years at the hands of the Guatemalan state. In the 1970s, Guatemalan authorities invited people to come to the northern part of El Petén, as part of a repopulation and development project. Years later, in the 1990s, the area was declared an environmental protected zone, prohibiting the presence of human beings. Treated as objects without rights and not as human beings, the government began to force residents to leave the area. “If they don’t do so, they will face forced evictions” a Guatemalan official said, asking not to be named for security reasons.

The communities organized themselves to protect their human rights, but the forced evictions prevailed and continue in the region today. According to public records, there are around 129 cases of forced evictions pending. A few examples of forced evictions include the communities of Nueva Esperanza, expelled around 2012, Laguna Larga, evicted four years ago (June 2 2017), and Pollo Solo in August of 2018.

The people of Laguna Larga moved to the border with México and are now living under extremely inhumane conditions in the jungle. The Guatemalan authorities have not been able to provide a sustainable solution for this community. In other words, the communities brought to El Petén in the 1970s have suffered constant threats of forced eviction since the law establishing the protected zones passed in the 1990s.

A total of 57 communities (around 60,000 people) live in the protected zone, under the threat of forcible expulsion. The mayors of La Libertad and San Andrés are both accomplices in this dreadful crime. We ask ourselves: what human being can stand this threat or this torture? In November of 2016, a representative of these communities presented to the authorities a proposal for solving the uncertainty and implementing a development project in the protected zone which would allow the communities to remain on the land. These local leaders dialogued about their proposal with Guatemalan authorities briefly at the beginning of 2017. But the dialogue was suspended after a few months, and the authorities

have not been willing to restart it. The threat of eviction is the only prospect the Guatemalan government has given these communities and this threat will continue to be one of the root causes of forced migration.

What future can people find if the land they live on and depend on for their livelihood is not registered under their name and if they face the possibility of being forcibly evicted from the region? This reality must be con-

sidered when analyzing the root causes of forced migration if the government of the United States wants to stop or diminish migration into its territory. We hope that this article will be a helpful resource to inform the U.S. Vice President of the situation in the department of El Petén, where right now forced migration is the only solution local communities have for securing their future. §

U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan

Afghans and U.S. faith groups navigate great challenges as they respond to the crises surrounding the U.S. military withdrawal.

In the last two weeks of August, the United States military withdrawal and evacuation of U.S. citizens, allies, and other vulnerable Afghans concluded while the Taliban formed a new government in Afghanistan. Details of a terrorist attack outside the Kabul airport, and a retaliatory U.S. attack on members of the Islamic State affiliate ISIS-K, continued to emerge. As the situation unfolded, religious groups scrambled to respond to both emergent and long-term needs of the Afghan people.

Immediate efforts by MOGC and partner advocacy organizations focused on Afghans in danger of being targeted by the Taliban. These included those eligible for Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) after collaborating with U.S. forces, but also journalists, women's rights activists, ethnic minorities, and others. Multi-faith groups urged the United States to ensure safe passage for those wishing to evacuate and to offer them a welcoming home.

In responding to the crisis, aid and advocacy organizations sought to collaborate while navigating the crucial distinctions between their roles. Humanitarian aid work demands political neutrality to help the most vulnerable under whatever group may hold power, while human rights advocates are often called to stand publicly with communities and individuals persecuted precisely for political reasons. In a conference call with MOGC and other faith-based advocacy groups, a representative of one religious aid organization currently working in Afghanistan pointed out that some Afghan groups are pursuing war crimes charges against the United States in the International Criminal Court, and could accuse groups advocating for SIVs of protecting persons who aided and abetted war crimes.

An increasing concern for organizations who will continue their work in Afghanistan is how U.S. sanctions of the Taliban may be interpreted now that the group has taken power. As the cases of Iran, Venezuela, and other sanctioned countries have demonstrated, even so-called

“smart” or targeted sanctions that officially exempt humanitarian groups can indirectly hamper the efforts of healthcare providers and aid organizations who depend on impacted financial institutions and risk punishment for paying taxes or otherwise doing business deemed to violate sanctions. The U.S. Treasury Department has begun discussions with aid groups, expressing an interest in ensuring their work be allowed to continue.

Among the courageous Afghan staff carrying out the bulk of the aid and peacebuilding work for international NGOs are many women. International diplomatic pressure must be applied to the Taliban, particularly through the United Nations, to allow these women to continue their vital work, especially in serving other women and girls.

Finally, faith groups and other peace advocates discussed what peacebuilding in Afghanistan might look like going forward. Often these are conversations that began 20 years ago in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. But 20 years of war have made the work more challenging than ever. Nearly 40 million Afghans will remain in Afghanistan after the evacuations have ended. Among them are civil society leaders who have spent the war pursuing nonviolent alternatives and preparing for peace. After numerous failures, we must give them the support they need. §

Faith in action: Contact the Biden administration to urge them to generously welcome Afghan refugees and provide humanitarian aid on the ground.

Visit: <https://bit.ly/3k4zi8s>

Explore a list of ways to help Afghan refugees from Women for Afghan Women.

Visit <https://womenforafghanwomen.org/> and click on “Resources and Other Ways to Help”

Pax Christi International Statement on Afghanistan

Pax Christi International issued a statement, excerpted here, on the situation in Afghanistan. Read the whole statement here: <https://bit.ly/3mESht8>

Pax Christi International and its member organizations are deeply concerned about the situation in Afghanistan where Taliban forces have seized control of the capital and the rest of the country.

Harsh rule by the Taliban two decades ago and atrocities committed in recent weeks in areas under their control have intensified the fear and sense of abandonment. This is especially true for those who have served the government, civil society organizations who have painstakingly worked for reforms, and women who have taken huge risks associated with defending their rights to education, free expression, and participation...

As an international peace organization with a deep commitment to nonviolence, we are heartbroken by what decades of war and violence have wrought. Immediate attention to physical and human rights protections for the most vulnerable; accountability for atrocities; and diplomatic efforts to engage the Taliban...are essential. But a deep reflection on the failure of war and the need to invest in effective tools for building just peace must also be undertaken nationally and internationally.

Urgently, we call on the Taliban to remember and to act in accordance with your own dignity as human beings, to honor what you have promised—not to take a path of retaliation and to create a secure environment...

With equal resolve, we call on the international community, particularly the United States, working with the United Nations and other multilateral bodies to:

- ensure human rights protections and provide for the safe evacuation of vulnerable Afghan populations;
- provide for visa/immigration accommodations for Afghans everywhere...;
- provide immediate aid for neighboring countries that will inevitably host Afghan refugees and coordinated protocols for prompt resettlement to third countries...
- increase significantly and negotiate reliable access for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan...and;
- ensure the participation of Afghan civil society groups in making decisions about humanitarian aid and the resettlement of refugees.

In particular, we call on the United Nations to remain fully engaged in the crisis, including at the Security Council level...Careful thought should be given to what nonviolent strategies for the protection of vulnerable communities and, in particular of women and girls, could be applied in Afghanistan now...

Finally... Pax Christi International calls on all people of goodwill to pray for the people of Afghanistan and to engage in every effort to end the suffering that the Afghan people have endured through decades of unending war. §

Philippines: Human Rights and 2022 Elections

Human rights and peace organizations are deeply concerned about Philippine President Duterte's attempt to remain in power after the 2022 elections.

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's party has announced that he will be a candidate for Vice President in the elections scheduled for May 2022. This move is widely understood as a way of bypassing the Philippines' term limit laws and effectively remaining in power. As Duterte has been accused of widespread human rights abuses, the prospect of his remaining in government has human rights and peace advocates deeply concerned.

Duterte's government has overseen a bloody "war on drugs" in which thousands of extrajudicial killings of traffickers and addicts alike have been carried out with impunity. Many Filipino children have been orphaned by such killings, while thousands more are imprisoned, subjected to torture and dangerously unhealthy conditions, particularly during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The Philippine conference of Catholic bishops has condemned the violence to no avail.

During the Duterte years, members of religious congregations and other Church organizations working to serve and protect victims of abuse have at times found

themselves the victims of "red-tagging" – false accusations of terrorism and insurgency used to criminalize and even violently attack. The fight against actual armed insurgent groups is used as justification for martial law and sweeping government crackdowns on violent and nonviolent groups alike.

In August, MOGC joined a group of faith organizations convened by the U.S. branch of the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, ICHRP-US, to express solidarity with the people of the Philippines and advocate for their human rights. The group is preparing a letter and petition to members of Congress, asking them to stop U.S. assistance to the Philippine military and national police, to hold hearings on the human rights impact of U.S. support for the Duterte government, and to pass the Philippine Human Rights Act. The group plans to launch a signature campaign in anticipation of the anniversary of the 1972 declaration of martial law by then-Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos on Sept. 21. §

Letter on Rohingya Genocide Determination

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns was one of 95 organizations to sign onto this letter calling on Secretary of State Antony Blinken to name the treatment of the Rohingya in Myanmar as genocide. Read the whole letter here: <https://bit.ly/3gGwOfD>

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to urge you to publicly determine that the state of Myanmar has committed genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya people...

The February 1st coup by the same military that perpetrated abuses against the Rohingya, and the ongoing abuses by the Myanmar military against the Rohingya, other ethnic groups, and the Burmese population in general, only underscore the importance of recognizing the military's past crimes against the Rohingya for what they are. We have welcomed your attention to the coup and the sanctions measures you have imposed on those responsible. While the coup does not impact the factual and legal basis for a possible genocide determination, it does underscore the importance of the United States speaking forthrightly about gross abuses of human rights when they occur. Such action is critical in sending signals to governments and the Myanmar military, that

abusers will be held accountable. Such signals also play a critical role in deterring further abuses.

In the case of the Rohingya, the evidence of genocide and crimes against humanity is clear and convincing and has been amply documented. As prominent legal and human rights experts, including former high-level State Department and White House officials (two of whom are now serving in senior positions in the Biden administration), concluded in a letter in August 2020:

“[We] believe the information and assessments produced so far compels the United States, in its capacity as a government and not as a court, to publicly express its view that genocide has been committed and may be continuing against the Rohingya of Myanmar.”

The military coup places an increased urgency on this request as the last trappings of democratic restraints on the military are pulled away...”§

Myanmar: Famous Nun Helps COVID Patients

The following article, excerpted here, was first published by UCA News on August 13. Read the whole article here: <https://bit.ly/2XSMAgP>

It is not unusual for Sister Ann Rose Nu Tawng from the Sisters of St. Francis Xavier congregation in Myanmar to risk her life.

“I have no fear of dying even if I may get infected with the Covid-19 virus,” the Catholic nun told UCA News in between nursing coronavirus patients at a church-run care center in Myanmar's remote Kachin state.

In February, in an image that resonated around the world, Sister Nu Tawng was seen kneeling in front of police officers in Myitkyina, the capital city of Kachin state, trying to protect young protesters seeking refuge in the clinic she works at after the country was rocked by public unrest against the military coup. She repeated the brave act in March.

She has since shifted her focus to helping sick patients from pandemic-stricken villages that health workers cannot reach. Donning personal protective equipment (PPE), the nun is determined to give moral and medical support to victims.

From early morning until late evening, Sister Nu

Tawng is preoccupied at the clinic where people with symptoms of Covid-19 rush from the nearby villages to get tested and treated.

Many rural people who have contracted the virus have no other option as state-run hospitals are turning them away due to a lack of health workers and beds.

“I can't sit idle. I have seen the difficulties people are facing on the ground,” the nun said.

Since June, she has been regularly reaching out to Buddhist and Christian houses in nearby villages, and also health camps around Myitkyina, to help people with Covid-19 tests, oxygen support and blood pressure checks besides counseling them.

Her mobile phone keeps ringing throughout the day as people call for help. “I don't feel tired despite being preoccupied with daily tasks. I feel this is my duty,” she said. §

Maryknoll Society on Enacting *Laudato Si'*

Fr. Frank Breen, MM, summarizes a major paper issued by the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers calling on its members to listen to, identify with, and respond to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

In June 2019, Pope Francis declared a global “climate emergency,” warning of the disastrous effects of global warming and stating that a failure to act quickly to reduce greenhouse gases would be a “brutal act of injustice towards the poor and future generations.” The Fourteenth General Chapter of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers unequivocally shares Pope Francis’ concern, affirming the scientific conclusion that climate change is real and presents an existential threat to all life on Earth.

Our Christian faith and our love for the poor compel us to respond to the cry of the Earth, its people, and its creatures. Ecological sin means ignoring our interconnectedness and interrelationship with the Earth, with fellow human beings and with future generations.

Our response must be immediate, because delay will add to the world’s suffering and make any remedies all the more difficult and must be both personal and communal. It must result in concrete action in and with the communities where we live and serve. Living and preaching an integral human ecology is the new face of contemporary mission. From now on, Maryknoll seeks to integrate the care of creation in all that we are and all that we do.

To truly hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor we must open the doors of our hearts and minds and be willing to hear the painful moaning of Jesus on the Cross. “Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ (Which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’) As Christians, we are called to realize our oneness with the Suffering One – to identify with Christ, the poor, and all creation.

The details of climate change’s impact can be daunting. Diminished fresh water availability, coastal area flooding, and crop failures are but a few of the projections that scientists are noting. As global warming proceeds, ocean temperatures are rising, massive coral reefs are dying and fish populations are declining. Human communities dependent on the ocean for food sources will be left hungry. All across the world, we are witnessing heatwaves and extremely powerful storms, and such climate extremes will intensify in years to come.

In connecting the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor, Pope Francis presents an integral human ecology as the new face for contemporary mission, which recognizes that all creation is interrelated and that our

good stewardship is a Christian imperative. We do not just inhabit the Earth, but we are of the Earth. When the Earth suffers exploitation, we all ultimately suffer, but this is most evident in those who are impoverished and living on the margins of society. Our very existence and salvation depend on taking seriously our responsibility to promote integral ecology.

On May 24, 2020, Pope Francis declared the year of *Laudato Si'*. In an effort to galvanize concrete action by Church institutions, the Vatican launched a seven-year concrete action project with seven major goals: 1) response to the cry of the Earth; 2) response to the cry of the poor; 3) ecological economics; 4) the adoption of a simple lifestyle; 5) ecological education; 6) ecological spirituality; and 7) community commitment. This initiative is called the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform and can be accessed at: www.LaudatoSiActionPlatform.org.

In this spirit of responding to Pope Francis’ call, the Maryknoll Chapter concluded with a long list of recommendations, including setting aside one percent of the Society’s annual budget designated for actions that combat climate change. Other recommendations include fossil fuel divestment, transitioning to fully electric or hybrid cars, eliminating use of single-use plastic items, and meeting through virtual means to reduce both road and air travel.

The Maryknoll Society should establish an advisory committee of Society Members and appropriate laity with scientific background, which can provide leadership at all levels with evaluations and recommendations based on the directions of *Laudato Si'*, facilitating the goal of directly linking the values of an integral human ecology with Maryknoll’s prime purpose of evangelization.

Maryknoll will conduct educational seminars for all its members, collaborate with religious and other organizations, and actively participate in the Vatican’s long-range program of promoting *Laudato Si'* as well as the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, many of which intersect with an integral ecology.

Maryknoll Society members are also invited to live simple lifestyles, preach and teach about care of creation, and even become directly attuned to nature through gardening or another action. All should become familiar with updates from the Catholic Climate Covenant, the primary arm of the Catholic climate movement in the United States. §

Conscience and Vaccine Acceptance

Dr. Don McCrabb, chair of the Catholic Cares Coalition and executive director of the U.S. Catholic Mission Association, wrote the following article on conscience and the Church's encouragement of COVID-19 vaccines.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “conscience is a judgement of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he (or she) is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed.” (CCC 1778).

When faced with accepting the vaccine, a person must decide if the vaccine is good or bad. It may seem silly, but it is good to step back and consider how we make moral decisions. Get the facts, weigh the benefits and the risks, pray, decide, and act.

COVID-19 is a virus that causes people to get sick and even die. The World Health Organization declared it a pandemic – meaning that this virus is spreading all over the world and it is difficult to contain. As Catholics, we are concerned about the health and well-being of ourselves, our families, and our neighbors. We are concerned, too, about the health and well-being of everyone in the world.

Perhaps a dose of humility here. Our health care professionals did not know a lot about COVID-19 when it first showed up in the US late 2019 and early 2020. They have learned a lot since then but there is still a lot they do not know. For example, most people recover from COVID-19. Nevertheless, some people who have recovered from COVID-19 are now suffering from other medical conditions. Nevertheless, according to Statista, 517,575 people have died of COVID-19 in the United States as of March 17, 2021. Fifty-three percent of those people are 65 or older.

There are now three vaccines available in the United States and more are on the way. The vaccine, according to our health care professionals, is the best way to avoid getting the virus. Pope Francis, and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, has stressed the value of getting the vaccine – both for our own good and the good of others.

Still, we hear of friends and family members who are hesitant to get the vaccine. Still others resist the vaccine and there are even some who are hostile to the vaccine. It seems like every hour there is a new story in the news or on social media.

The challenge today – even with so much information so quickly available over the internet – is to distin-

guish facts from opinion. Do you know the source of the information? Is it a trustworthy source? Is the information provided confirmed by other trustworthy sources?

One of the controversies with the vaccines is the use of cell lines scientists created last century from the remains of an aborted baby. Pope Francis, and the US Bishops, have taken this reality into consideration. The Ethics and Public Policy Center pulled together “pro-life” Catholic scholars that have affirmed that it is morally acceptable to receive the COVID-19 vaccines. You can read their statement for yourself – it is only three pages long and very informative.

You also need to know yourself. Perhaps you have a medical condition that may make the vaccine – which is good for most people – bad for you. It is always best to consult with your doctor if you are not sure. Of course, there is more to you than your own medical history. Have you developed a bias against the vaccine? Do you mistrust the medical experts because people you are close speak poorly of them, or political or religious leaders you follow have spoken against them?

The work of conscience is to examine the facts for yourself. The vaccines have become a political issue and we need to see through partisan posturing and make a moral

decision before God and God alone.

Saint John Henry Newman said, “Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ.” It is our responsibility to gather the relevant information and to make an act of conscience. We may still have questions, and we may not be absolutely sure – because we just do not have all the facts – but we must make a decision and be confident that we have added up moral issues to the best of our ability.

Need a refresher on conscience formation? Consider this video (<https://bit.ly/38MbCAJ>) done by Catholic Central for a youth and young adult audience. The bishops also have an article (<https://bit.ly/3kJgOKX>) on conscience that you may find helpful. The discussion on conscience can be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1776-1802).

At the end of the day, you decide. A moral decision is a decision we make before God, for our good and the good of others. §



Get vaccinated.

Tell your friends and family to get vaccinated.

Find a vaccine near you: vaccines.gov

A graphic from the Catholic Cares coalition:

www.catholiccares.org

Campaign for Global Vaccine Access Continues

Faith leaders in the United States continue to call on the U.S. government and global leaders to ramp up access to COVID-19 vaccines, especially for impoverished countries around the world.

With many countries facing huge COVID-19 vaccine shortages and increasing rates of disease incidence thanks to the more dangerous Delta variant, the need for a massive global vaccination campaign grows more dire.

On July 20, an interfaith coalition of organizations organized a prayer vigil on Capitol Hill to call attention to the issue. Several Catholic leaders spoke at the event, including Dr. Don McCrabb, executive director of the United States Catholic Mission Association and chair of the Catholic Cares Coalition, a group of Catholic organizations promoting vaccine access in the United States and abroad, of which the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is a member.

“In a global emergency, profits and politics need to be set aside for the good of the people,” said Dr. McCrabb. “The coronavirus is not the Titanic, everyone can live — there are more than enough lifeboats for every person on the planet.”

Following the vigil, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns organized a coalition of over 80 faith-based organizations to issue a joint letter to the Biden administration urging them to take several immediate steps to advance global vaccine access.

The letter addressed to President Biden stated, “We write today as organizations representing diverse faith traditions and people of conscience working to address the

health, social and economic challenges facing people around the world, including the United States, resulting from COVID-19... While we know that you face significant pressure to do otherwise, we encourage you to continue to be a strong voice for vaccine equity, technology transfers, and broad distribution and production capacity around the world. Specifically, we implore you to:

- Continue to distribute the surplus doses the United States has purchased to COVAX-AMC (for distribution to lower-income countries) and to “hot spots” around the globe; and prioritize worldwide distribution of vaccines

to those without access before considering booster shots for the already vaccinated.

- Express strong support for the TRIPS waiver for vaccine recipes and expand this to include waivers for testing, treatments, and PPE as India, South Africa, and 150 other WTO parties have proposed. The vaccine patent alone is not sufficient to manufacture vaccines, let alone the other tools necessary to contain COVID-19.

- Launch and invest in a global vaccine manufacturing program of scale and urgency to end the pandemic. This should be a whole-of-government approach to source and produce materials and train personnel, with regional manufacturing hubs around

the world. This program should include a pledge to immediately share the knowledge, technology, and intellectual property to make safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, tests, and treatments available to everyone by or before Spring 2022.

- Support technology-sharing initiatives such as the World Health Organization’s COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP).

- Encourage the EU and G20 to fully support these efforts.

On behalf of the global common good we must all do our part, as governments, civil society, and private enterprises, including pharmaceutical companies, to ensure that everyone everywhere can receive a vaccine and a chance to live a full life, to live in peace, to live in a healthy environment, and to work and receive an education.

We will continue to walk alongside individuals and communities suffering from the interconnected repercussions of the global health pandemic. We will look to and pray for your leadership to shape a U.S. policy response that supports a just recovery — one that begins with global vaccine equity.”

Faith in action: Send a letter to President Biden urging him to take action to further global vaccine access: <https://bit.ly/3jINryM>



MOGC staff members Dan Moriarty and Chloe Noel attended the interfaith vigil for vaccine access on July 20.

Resources

1. On **September 21**, International Day of Peace, join the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns at noon (Eastern) for a **30-minute webinar, “Nonviolence & the Web of Creation.”** This event is a part of the Pax Christi International’s Catholic Nonviolence Days of Action, September 21 – October 2. Register here: <https://bit.ly/NonvCreatSept21>
2. Sign this **petition** from the Laudato Si’ Movement (formerly Global Catholic Climate Movement) expressing your commitment to **bold action against climate change**: www.thecatholicpetition.org
3. To learn about ways to **help Afghans fleeing the Taliban takeover**, explore this resource page on the Afghanistan Evacuation from the USCCB: <https://justiceforimmigrants.org/afghanistan/>
4. Read this powerful interview with **Kathy Kelly**, peace activist, on the situation in Afghanistan in the National Catholic Reporter: <https://bit.ly/3Bvwj05>
5. Join the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers’ Advanced Missionary Discipleship Formation Program for a **virtual seminar, held October 14, 19, and 21**. Through live reflection sessions, join us in reflecting on our call as missionary disciples and the question, “Who is not at the table?” <https://bit.ly/3DxIMIG>
6. Explore this new report on the lived experiences of migrants and refugees published by Hope Border Institute in El Paso, Texas, **“Witness to Forced Migration: The Paradox of Resilience.”** <https://bit.ly/3t0QqQD>
7. Read **Pope Francis’ message** for the 107th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (Sept. 26): “The Holy Spirit enables us to embrace everyone.” <https://bit.ly/3kFnUA3>
8. The **Season of Creation guide** by the Laudato Si’ Movement (formerly GCCM) offers resources and ideas for celebrating care for creation from September 1 to October 4. <https://bit.ly/3jvBIOc>
9. Read the latest commentary and analysis from the **Washington Office on Latin America**. On the impacts and needed policy response to climate change on Central America: <https://bit.ly/3js9pAg>. On the ongoing political repression in Nicaragua: <https://bit.ly/3zyJYTw>
10. Explore a list of ways to help **Afghan refugees from Women for Afghan Women**. Visit <https://womenforafghanwomen.org/> and click on “Resources and Other Ways to Help”
11. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War will host a webinar, **“Eliminating the Existential Threat of Nuclear Weapons” at 11:00am EDT on Sept. 30**. For more information and to register, go to <http://www.ippnw.org/eliminating-the-threat>
12. Join a webinar on September 16 at 12pm ET, organized by CIDSE, a group of Catholic justice and peace organizations of which MOGC is a member, to learn more about the upcoming **UN climate conference (COP 26) in November in Glasgow, Scotland**: <https://bit.ly/3mHTosd>
13. From Sept. 4 to 18, join World Without War for their **International Day of Peace Virtual Film Festival**. The festival will span 3 weekends in September. RSVP at <https://bit.ly/38nw9v0>
14. Watch this **webinar recording** from the USCCB’s Justice for Immigrants campaign in honor of **National Migration Week** (Sept 20-26): <https://bit.ly/2WANqOY>
15. Read this letter to Congress issued by the **Catholic Cares Coalition**, a group of Catholic organizations of which MOGC is a member, calling for global and national COVID-19 vaccine access: <https://bit.ly/3jtlncX>
16. Watch a webinar from the Friends’ Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), **“Dismantling Racism and Militarism in U.S. Foreign Policy,”** held September 17 from 11:30-12:30 pm ET. Register here: <https://bit.ly/3zwFBbg>
17. Time is running out for millions of people who are already losing their lives, their homes and their livelihoods to climate change. Have a look at this powerful UN photo exhibit, **Humans in the Climate Crisis**: <https://bit.ly/3yF7QDL>
18. Watch and share this short video from Pope Francis announcing the theme for this year’s **World Day of Migrants and Refugees (Sept. 26)**, “Towards an Ever Wider We.” <https://bit.ly/3kFS8D6>