



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

# NewsNotes

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

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## A new year, an ever-increasing hope

*Always there was hope, because the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendor of the children of God. Up to the present, we know, the whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth. (Romans 8: 21-22)*

The new year dawned as the old one ended – with war and threats of more war, with poor communities under water or suffering extreme weather phenomena, with terrorism, families wracked by violence, refugees fleeing for their lives turned away at our borders, and politicians enamored of fear-mongering and a language of hate. In times like these, we are challenged to not give in to despair, and, as St. Paul says, to “always be ready ...to account for the Hope that is within you. (1 Peter 3:15)

Yet as people of faith we believe in love, not hate; we believe in the redemptive power of non-violence and compassion; and we come together as children of God facing the new year in hope.

We are continuing to learn from *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical: to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor and to transform ourselves and our world from a “throwaway culture” and a “culture of indifference” to a “culture of care” that includes care of oneself, care for others, and care for the environment.

Last month, a new global solidarity on climate change emerged in Paris during the UN climate talks. For the first time, 195 nations agreed that Earth is in a climate crisis and that we must act now to slow global temperature rise. The Paris agreement puts us on a path to solutions to save lives and significantly diminish the threat of climate change to the world's impoverished people and God's whole creation.

This is a new beginning, but just a beginning. There is still a long road ahead to ensure that climate action, when applied, is equitable, just, and fair. Many people are doing what they can to change their lifestyles and

reduce their use of fossil fuels, but all of us can do more. Furthermore, governments and corporations must also act decisively if we are to succeed in saving our planet.

We are also beginning a Year of Mercy, following Pope Francis' call to “show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us.” Pope Francis urges us to become “practitioners of forgiveness, specialists in reconciliation, experts in mercy” by reflecting on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Jesus taught that we live as his disciples when we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.

For more than one hundred years Maryknoll missionaries have joined in the struggles for justice of poor and indigenous communities, migrants, refugees, and those on the margins of society. As strangers ourselves, we have been welcomed, and we have embraced new cultures and new languages. Even during times of injustice and violence, we have witnessed the triumph of the human spirit and the presence of Jesus among us.

As we welcome this new year and search for signs of hope, we recall the words of Dorothy Day,

whom Pope Francis highlighted in his speech to Congress last September:

“If we had faith in what we were doing, making our protest against brutality and injustice, then we were indeed casting our seeds, and there was the promise of the harvest to come.” (*The Long Loneliness*)

And we cherish the faithful witness and the words of hope of Maryknoll Sister Maura Clarke: “We have so much to give thanks for. In spite of all the problems about us, the lack of jobs, the terrible injustice against the poor, the contrast of the very rich having so much and the millions of poor not having the security of the next meal, we feel an ever-increasing hope which only belongs to those who know that Christ is here...How very privileged we are to love and work among the poor.” §



## COP21: Civil society groups protect our common home

*The following article was written by Chloe Schwabe (pictured below), the Faith-Economy-Ecology program director for the Maryland Office for Global Concerns. She and three Maryknoll Sisters were official observers at the Paris Climate Summit (COP21). The Sisters' reflections are also published in this issue of NewsNotes.*

The Paris Climate Summit (COP21) concluded on December 12, exceeding expectations of what might be politically possible. The success of the talks was due to the strong voice of vulnerable countries, advocacy by non-state actors, and U.S. deals negotiated beforehand with India and China.

The agreement has the goal of “holding the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels...” but also an aspirational goal of limiting the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, “recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change.”

The recognition of the aspirational goal of 1.5C is due to the strong presence of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, representing 20 island nations in Asia and the Caribbean, Central America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The agreement acknowledges that we are going to surpass the goal of 2C, but through mitigation efforts, we could possibly limit temperature increase to 1.5C.

Advocates from the Vatican, multiple faith groups, and young adults also played a role in the call to limit global temperature rise to 1.5C. Young adults carried out actions in the “blue zone” (where the delegates met) and around the city of Paris, each person marked with a black circle around one eye and using a hand signal representing 1.5C.

Concerns over the 2C goal is also why the agreement includes language on “loss and damage” – or what happens when mitigation and adaptation efforts are not enough, when small island nations and coastline communities go underwater, or farmers in dry climates can no longer grow food. These scenarios require a mechanism to provide insurance for farmers, and a coordinated response to the needs of homeless and stateless refugees. The Paris agreement makes the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (established at the UN Climate Change Conference in Warsaw in 2013) permanent.

One sticking point was that the U.S. insisted on language to ensure it would not be liable for compensation ensuing from loss and damage. UN climate talks will continue to address this issue in the future.

Before the talks began, each country submitted a

pledge, detailing plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This brought the world closer to the 2C goal, with some scientists estimating that the pledges bring us to 2.7C. But through advocacy by environmental groups, and the U.S. and vulnerable countries, all countries have to review their pledges every five years and consider more ambitious commitments. The first review will be in 2018.

Another remarkable sequence of events occurred over the inclusion of human rights language in the agreement. Near the end of the talks, on Human Rights Day, December 10, negotiators released a draft of the agreement in which all references to human rights were

“bracketed” – meaning under threat of being deleted from the final agreement. This included the rights of indigenous peoples, migrants, children, persons with disabilities, and people in vulnerable situations and under occupation. Civil society representatives held a sit-in in the country pavilions space with signs and chants in support of human rights and 1.5C. The atmosphere was electrifying. In the end, human rights language was included in the Adaptation section of the

legally binding agreement; and indigenous, labor, women, and intergenerational rights and the rights of nature were included in the preamble. While not legally binding, the preamble sends a signal that human rights must be taken into account throughout the agreement.

People of faith participated in these campaigns by leading prayer services and vigils, joining advocacy meetings with delegates, and participating in actions. It was the largest faith presence at any previous COP and the moral voice was critical to the outcomes.

Maryknoll was right in the center of it all. We shared stories from Bangladesh, the Philippines, El Salvador, and Zimbabwe, and described how climate change impacts communities Maryknoll missionaries serve.

We celebrate this historic moment and yet realize that the work has just begun. The Paris agreement gives us direction and energy to ensure the goals of the agreement are realized and strengthened in the years to come. We encourage you to join us on the Path from Paris. Read our post-Paris statement and study guides at [www.maryknollogc.org/tag/path-paris](http://www.maryknollogc.org/tag/path-paris).





## COP21: Climate change, development

*Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns staff member Sr. Claris Zwareva attended the Paris Climate Summit (COP21). Sr. Claris serves as Maryknoll's representative at the United Nations where the Maryknoll Sisters and the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers have consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. In the following article, Sr. Claris examines the links between the Paris agreement and the new sustainable development goals.*

On September 25, the UN General Assembly formally adopted 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) designed to end poverty and hunger by 2030. The SDGs are expected to shape political policy worldwide for the next 15 years.

Two months after the launch of the SDGs, the Paris Climate Summit addressed Goal 13 of the 17 SDGs: "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts."

Over-exploitation of natural resources, the dumping of toxic wastes into water sources, as well as increased carbon emissions that cause global temperature rise, are factors that impede sustainable development. Climate change forces not only people but also birds and other animals to migrate in search of safer habitats. How can sustainable development flourish under such conditions?

The description of Goal 13 states, "Climate change is now affecting every country on every continent. It is disrupting national economies and affecting lives, costing people, communities and countries dearly today and even more tomorrow." Poor and vulnerable people experiencing the significant impacts of climate change attended the Paris Climate Summit and constantly reminded negotiators from the 195 countries in attendance that millions of lives are at stake.

Because no nation is exempt from contributing carbon emissions, all 195 countries assumed responsibility to combat climate change according to their national capacities, which follows the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), a cornerstone of

sustainable development. States equally share the common concerns of humankind and the burden of protecting common resources, with differentiated responsibility that addresses unequal economic and material situations and financial capacities, as well as historic contribution to the climate crisis.

Although highly celebrated, the Paris agreement is just one step toward more intense climate actions that will support the SDGs. The survival of whole societies and their biological support systems are at risk. At one event during the conference, a woman from Papua New Guinea said, "We are losing our lands as the ocean continues to rise. In a matriarchal society such as ours, a mother bequeaths land to her daughter. What lands will I hand over to my daughter? What will I leave her as our land is being swallowed by the rising ocean?"

"I have listened to the people – the young, the poor and the vulnerable, including indigenous peoples, from every corner of the globe," UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said. "They seek

protection from the perils of a warming planet, and the opportunity to live in a safer, more bountiful world. They have demanded that world leaders [take action] to safeguard their wellbeing and that of generations to come."

The hope is that Goal 13 of the SDGs will empower member states to take action based on the Paris agreement. In particular, we need intense education programs at all levels of society, as well as institutional capacity-building measures that enable countries to transform into cleaner, more resilient economies. §



*Peace pole at the Maryknoll Ecological Sanctuary in Banguio City, Philippines.*

## COP21 Learnings

*Maryknoll Sr. Marvie Misolas was an official observer at the Paris Climate Summit (COP21) representing the Maryknoll Sisters. The following is her reflection, written on the last day of the talks, before the release of the final agreement.*

Two weeks went by quickly at the Paris Climate Summit. This was the first time I attended a UN climate conference, though I have attended UN conferences on other topics. My official status was observer.

To my surprise, I did not have access to many discussions and meetings, which were limited to negotiators representing 195 countries. This was different from the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, which was more inclusive of observers.

My time was spent learning and listening at multiple side events that clarified many confluences in the draft documents being negotiated. Keywords such as adaptation, capacity-building, climate finance, compliance, loss and damage, mitigation, monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV), national reporting, Paris Outcome, REDD/REDD+, technology mechanism, technology transfer, transparency, and human rights, were tossed back and forth by negotiators, and the subjects of side events, informal discussions, and press conferences, as parties and advocates brought issues out into the open.

Climate change is a catalyst, a groaning of the planet and of us all. We cannot separate ourselves from Mother Earth; our existence is dependent on her ecosystems' health. Humans have crossed the threshold of her planetary boundaries.

I think the majority of us who attended the Paris Climate Summit understood this, but, as French President Francois Hollande said in his speech during the opening ceremony, "This challenge is the sum of our selfishness, our perceptions, our resignation. This challenge is built on indifference and powerlessness but it is not insurmountable."

These words were operative until the final hours of negotiations, when powerful nations like China and India demanded weakening the goal of restricting global temperature rise.

Negotiators representing vulnerable countries like the Marshall Islands and those who support their right to survival are committed to keeping global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial level.

Whatever the final outcome of the Paris agreement, we cannot go back to a "business as usual" lifestyle. All of us on the planet must live a life respectful of planetary boundaries and of the needs of future generations.

I left Paris and returned to Manila with renewed hope, strength, knowledge and inspiration, to change myself and my relationship with the Earth. I join Filipinos and millions others who are facing climate disasters and the need to adapt and change, to live a life respectful of the planet. §



*Maryknoll Srs. Rebecca Macugay and Marvie Misolas with Naomi Klein, (right), author of "This Changes Everything," in Paris, November 30, 2015. Photo courtesy of Sr. Marvie.*



# COP21 and the Feast of the Epiphany

*Maryknoll Sister Rebecca Macugay was an official observer at the Paris Climate Summit (COP21) representing the Maryknoll Sisters. The following is her reflection on the talks.*

Epiphany is a journey narrative. The magi from the East followed a star that mirrored the light that burned within them, the energy that made them set out on a long and tortuous journey. What they were looking for is not certain, but they were surely experiencing meaning and wholeness as they mindfully discerned the pathways shown by the star.

Maryknoll Sisters celebrate our Foundation Day on this feast day. The Feast of Epiphany sheds light on our missionary vocation. We embark on life journeys to engage in whole-making and on the way, we are made whole.

Journeys have particular points where convergences happen. They are meetings of minds and hearts, gatherings that enlighten, even as we go through struggles; and ultimately they create community. At such times, we discern the design of God in our lives.

The Paris Climate Summit (COP21) was an experience of convergence. Representatives of 195 nations and many more civil society and faith groups came together because of their deepening awareness of the diminishing quality of life on Earth due to climate change – not the climatic changes that happen periodically in the natural evolution of the planet but the consequences of human activities that disregard God's gifts that sustain and nurture life. The recognition of anthropogenic climate change manifesting itself as extreme weather patterns, pollution of air, water, and land, and the loss of biodiversity was the core purpose of the conference.

We live in a society whose main activity is to extract, produce, consume, throw away, and extract some more. This pattern benefits some whose lifestyles are upheld as the norm to which many hope to achieve. Meanwhile, the toll on our environment is degradation, and for most of our sisters and brothers in the world, poverty, marginalization and violence.

The Global Footprint Network produced data which suggests that if everyone on the planet consumed as much as the average U.S. citizen, we would need four earths to sustain us.

Climate change can cause us to despair: "It is too big a problem to tackle; we are powerless in the face of

it." Indeed, climate change is a concern that is global (perhaps even cosmic) in its proportion. Yet, it is our concern. The health of our common home is our responsibility.

Christiana Figueres, the executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), posed this challenge to the participants of COP21: "We the people have caused the problem and so we the people need to exercise responsibilities for the solutions." She was a voice of hope and encouragement as she enumerated the capacities humans have developed: technology, scientific research, global outreach, organizing capabilities. She said the universal climate agreement to be adopted in Paris "needs to be a resolution for implementation. Watch the evolution of kaleidoscopic efforts."

We are at a crossroads in our journey as planetary citizens. We are being called to divert from a "business as usual" approach to our endeavors. Pope Francis shared this call in his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*.

In the January 2016 issue of *Sojourners* magazine, Walter Brueggemann writes that Pope Francis has given "enormous impetus to the narrative of possibility" and we need to embrace a "narrative of hope that affirms that good futures are available when we act responsibly."

The mandate for COP21 was to create a new international agreement that will enable a path toward a low carbon climate for a resilient and sustainable future. This is a serious call to extricate ourselves from our comfortable norms and "business as usual" mindset and behaviors.

The Paris agreement has much to be desired, but it is a turning-point document, an instructive springboard for conversations about taking care of our common home and our common breath of Life.

Presently, God's revelation in the whole of creation is a lament, a plea for wholeness. Our faith calls us to live in a mindful state of being with our surrounding and each other. Epiphany is God's compassionate presence in our midst. We are nature. We are God's epiphany. Let's continue our journey in search of wholeness in God's Love. §



## Africa: Conference on land grabbing

*Just prior to the arrival of Pope Francis for his first pastoral visit to Kenya, a network of Catholic justice and peace organizations met in Limuru, Kenya, for a major conference on land grabbing and just governance in Africa.*

Land grabbing is most often described as the acquisition of large areas of land by international firms, governments, or individuals. Land grabs have increased since 2008, when the worldwide spike in food prices prompted investors to look more toward the Global South, particularly Africa, for land to produce food and biofuel for export. This is a growing concern in Africa. Pope Francis referenced land, along with labor and lodging, in a speech he gave in Nairobi in November.

Pope Francis' speech coincided with an important Catholic Church-sponsored conference on land grabbing that took place in Limuru, Kenya. Five Catholic advocacy organizations – Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN), Africa Europe Faith Justice Network (AEFJN), Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) and Catholic International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity (CIDSE) – brought more than 150 representatives from 40 countries, including people directly involved in land grabbing struggles. Below is a preliminary report on the conference prepared by AFJN, the main inspiration for this meeting.

“A new scramble for Africa akin to the frenzy that followed the Berlin conference of 1885 and the partitioning and colonization of Africa is on; farmlands and minerals are the biggest attraction. The increasing discourse of land scarcity, the rising cost of food and the growing demand for biofuel and mineral resources have enticed multinational corporations to engage in shady land deals in developing countries. The finance industry now turns to farmlands for high returns on their investments. There seems to be a systematic takeover of natural resources from developing countries as part of global restructuring to ensure continuous supply of goods and raw materials needed in the developed countries.

“We are witnessing the biggest land grab in modern history. A report by *The Guardian* and data from Land Matrix, Global Land Project, Oakland Institute, GRAIN, and several other sources paint a grim picture of tens of millions of hectares of land grabbed from the developing countries for pennies through shady deals. As of

June 2012 about 227 million of hectares (876,000 square miles) of land – the equivalent land area of California, Oregon, Washington, and the eastern U.S. states stretching from Maine to Florida, plus Wisconsin, Illinois, West Virginia and the District of Columbia – have been grabbed from developing countries through shady deals that dispossess the people of their land, their livelihood and their identity and drive them further into poverty.

“According to a 2011 publication by NuWire Investor, one hectare (2.47 acres) of land costs \$32,000 in the U.S.; whereas foreign investors grab it for less than the price of Starbucks coffee in Africa. The deals are sealed for 39-99 years between investors and African political leaders who discard the wisdom of their ancestors: We who are alive now do not inherit the land from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children and mortgage the resources of future generations for a bowl

of soup. Investors and their collaborators act with impunity; they violate the rights of the local people and relocate them to reservations, threaten their livelihoods and that of future generations. Some interfere with water supply sources and destroy the ecological system. Sound familiar?

“Like the purported reasons paraded by the chieftains of the 19th century scramble for Africa (commerce, liberation and civilization), the chieftains of the new scramble peddle enticing noble reasons for dispossessing

African people of their land: increasing food production, creating jobs and improving their standards of living. They, in their infinite wisdom, know what is good for Africa and their magnanimity in designing a better life for the African people knows no bounds. But history has repeatedly revealed the hidden agenda behind these claims.

“Recall the scramble for Africa following the Berlin conference of 1885, Australia and the Aborigines, and South Africa under apartheid. This is a déjà vu. This time it is more intense, with more exploiter-participants and achieved through devious legal contracts. Is this designing a better life for Africa or a design to ensure Africa's continuous assistance to the developed world?” §





# Africa: Pope Francis and the Periphery

*During his first visit to Africa, Pope Francis gave two important speeches to non-church groups that were remarkable in their global message about peace, poverty, and the environment.*

Of the 19 speeches Pope Francis gave during his six-day visit to Africa, two were given to non-church groups. The first was to the staff of the UN Environmental Center in Nairobi, Kenya, and the second to a group of Muslims in a mosque in Bangui, Central African Republic (CAR). At both of these venues, the popular pope used the platform of a pastoral visit to address global issues from the perspective of those on the periphery and, by doing so, made the periphery the lens for viewing the global realities of climate change and violent conflict.

Just four days before the opening of the Paris Climate Summit, Francis' speech at the UN Environmental Center echoed environmental concerns outlined in *Laudato Si'*. First came a call to safeguard the rich biodiverse lungs of our planet, which in Africa include the Congo Basin. Here, Francis linked African environmental movements with those in the Latin American region of the Amazon and called for support for "those international agencies and civil society organizations which draw public attention to these issues."

A second concern centered on how to respond to the challenge of climate change. Here Francis linked *Laudato Si'* with his statements made at the UN in which he said our response to the challenge of climate change "needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged" (L.S., 93) and "the misuse and destruction of the environment are also accompanied by a relentless process of exclusion." (speech to the UN)

Francis then laid out his hope for the Paris Climate Summit: "[The] achievement of a global, transformational agreement based on the principles of solidarity, justice, equality and participation that target the three interrelated goals of lessening the impact of climate change, fighting poverty and ensuring respect for human dignity." For this vision to become a reality a new "culture of care" must emerge that includes care for oneself, care for others, and care for the environment.

Two other concerns unfolded in Francis' wide-ranging speech: urbanization and international criminal trafficking. Again, Francis laid out a vision of what should be strived for as urban populations in Africa explode. Urban slum dwellers should have the basic rights of land, lodging and labor – realities that escape many in the crowded Kibera area of Nairobi where Francis made a visit and spoke freely with young people whom

he urged to avoid the lures of drug trafficking and crime. To the well-heeled elites at the UN Environmental Center Francis stated a clear challenge: "We cannot be silent about forms of illegal trafficking which arise in situations of poverty and in turn lead to greater poverty and exclusion."

The final stop of Francis' Africa tour was Bangui, the capital of CAR. While geographically this former French colony sits in the heart of Africa, most would have trouble finding it on a map, and many wondered why the pope insisted on visiting this war-torn nation. Once again, the deeper purpose of his visit came to light: to make the concerns of those who are excluded and marginalized a focal point for the global Church.

In the Catholic cathedral, Francis urged his followers to become "practitioners of forgiveness, specialists in reconciliation, experts in mercy," no small task in a nation locked in bitter inter-religious conflict. His appeal "to all those who make unjust use of the weapons of this world, I make this appeal: lay down these instruments of death!" was met with a roar of approval.

The next day at Bangui's Koudoukou mosque, Francis spoke to the Muslim community, greeting them as friends and standing with them in prayer directed towards Mecca. He went out of his way to link his pastoral visit to the larger task of interreligious encounter that is so needed in CAR. He then told the audience that he considers Muslims and Christians to be brothers, and that brotherhood has "consequences in how we consider ourselves and conduct ourselves." As he has done throughout the world, Francis also called for a refusal of hatred, revenge and violence, especially violence perpetrated in the name of a religion or of God.

Finally, Francis praised both Muslims and Christians for playing an important role in re-establishing harmony among all citizens of CAR and reminded them of the many acts of solidarity they had shown to their fellow citizens by welcoming them and defending them during this latest crisis. A few weeks later in northeast Kenya this bold religious solidarity was on display. When a bus was attacked by Al Shabaab militants and Muslim passengers were told to separate themselves from non-Muslims, they refused to do so and even went so far as sharing their religious garb with non-Muslims so they would not be identified easily. §

# Myanmar: Cardinal Bo's concerns for peace

*The following interview with Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, the leader of the Catholic Church in Myanmar, was published by the Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN) on December 2.*

Myanmar's Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon has raised his concern on the smooth transition of power from the ruling military-backed government to Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy after the party's landslide victory in the November 8 polls.

The cardinal's comments come as Suu Kyi, the Noble Peace laureate who co-chairs the NLD, met with President Thein Sein and Myanmar's military's Chief General Min Aung Hlaing separately on December 2.

"I hope that the country will move forward in a transition to democracy if Suu Kyi reconciles with all stake holders — the ruling-USDP members, government and the military," Cardinal Bo told ucanews.com in an exclusive interview at his Yangon residence.

Despite promises of a clean handover by the military, Cardinal Bo said that it was still difficult to determine the motives of the military who ignored election results in 1990 that the NLD won, plunging the country into two decades of darkness.

"The election was a very peaceful one but my main concern is on the motives of the military and how they are thinking or planning the power transfer, despite the military and the government promising a smooth transfer power," said Cardinal Bo, 67.

The cardinal, who was named the country's first cardinal by Pope Francis in February, regularly speaks out on human and religious rights and political issues.

Ahead of elections, Cardinal Bo detailed the attributes voters should seek in choosing candidates in a 10-point guide. These included an ability to work with "different ethnic groups and religions" in the Buddhist-majority country.

"President Thein Sein and Suu Kyi have openly discussed the smooth transfer of power to a new govern-

ment and how to approach the transition," a statement from the presidential office on December 2 read.

The NLD and military are yet to release statements about meetings.

The NLD won 390 seats in Myanmar's parliament November 8, surpassing the 329-seat threshold needed to gain a 51 percent majority in parliament — ensuring the party will be unimpeded in choosing Myanmar's

next president in a parliamentary committee vote scheduled for February.

At least 20 Christian candidates from the NLD were elected to parliament out of some 1,000 Christian politicians who sought seats. However, many smaller parties from seven ethnic-based parties did not fare well, as electors opted to vote for the NLD over local groups.

Gint Kam Lian, a Christian politician from the Zomi Congress for Democracy party in Christian majority Chin state, who won a federal upper house seat, said the talks were a positive move toward national reconciliation.

"We hope that Suu Kyi and the military's chief discussed the possibility of a con-

stitutional amendment on a clause that bars her from becoming the president," he added.

"The people have a strong desire for her becoming president and an agreement on amending it would help the country's peace process," said Gint Kam Lian. §



*Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, the leader of the Catholic Church in Myanmar.*

## Asia: Poor people bear brunt of climate change

*The following is an excerpt from an article published by the Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN) on December 7 about a new report by the Asian Development Bank on the impact of climate change on poor communities.*

A recently released Asian Development Bank (ADB) study, “Global Increase in Climate-Related Disasters,” revealed that climate-related disasters are linked not only to people’s increased exposure and vulnerability, but also to changes in temperature and rainfall resulting from rising greenhouse gases.

“Policymakers and economic advisors have long held the view that climate action is a drain on economic growth,” notes Vinod Thomas, coauthor of the study and director-general of Independent Evaluation at ADB.

“But the reality is the opposite: the vast damage from climate-related disasters is an increasing obstacle to economic growth and wellbeing.”

A statement released by ADB on November 27 emphasizes “three implications” inherent in the findings of the study.

First, climate impacts are not just concerns for the distant future, but are already being felt.

Second, all countries are experiencing damage caused by climate-related disasters — rich and poor. However death tolls are especially high among poor people who are more likely to live in harm’s way, such as in flood-prone areas.

Thirdly, it is a mistake to think that climate action — such as switching from fossil fuels to cleaner renewable sources — will hold back economic growth.

The study also found that the frequency of intense climate-related disasters over the past four decades is associated with population exposure, measured by population density and with people’s vulnerability to these events, measured by their income levels.

“The evidence is telling us that hazards of nature are increasingly turning into disasters because of human action,” says Ramon Lopez coauthor of the study and professor of economics at the University of Chile.

“We found that disasters are exacerbated by cli-

matic impacts at the local level as well as by climate change globally.”

Disaster risk estimates in the study illustrate some potentially big impacts. For a country facing the average of nearly one climate-related disaster a year, if carbon dioxide concentrations continue to rise by the current annual rate of 2 parts per million (or by 0.5 percent) from the already high 400 parts per million, that would see a doubling of the frequency of floods and storms in 17 years.

The three countries the study reviewed at high risk of climate-related disasters, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand have on average seven of these episodes a year.

Any further increases in CO<sub>2</sub> would hit these countries hard, as would be the case for other disaster-prone countries such as Bangladesh.

“The implication is that a big part of the actions for disaster risk reduction will have to be preventive in nature, in addition to those that are reactive, such as relief and rebuilding efforts,” says Lopez.

“The relationship between climate change and the frequency of intense natural disasters provides an immediate and tangible reason why actions by countries and the global community must be urgent and decisive,” says Thomas.

The first half of this decade featured deadly climate-related disasters, among them floods in Thailand in 2011 and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013.

The year 2014 was the Earth’s warmest since records began, and 2015 could turn out to be hotter. While scientists hesitate to link any one of these occurrences to climate change, the association is compelling. §

To read the article in its entirety, go to <http://www.ucanews.com/news/displaced-poor-bear-brunt-of-climate-change/74727>.



*Children gather water in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Photo by the Development Planning Unit, University College London / Licensed CC BY 2.0.*



## Brazil: Worst environmental disaster in history

*Southeastern Brazil has been devastated by toxic mud due to a dam that burst at an iron-ore mine in November. Brazil is calling it the worst environmental disaster in its history.*

A disaster of truly epic proportions began on November 5, near Mariana in southeastern Brazil. A dam securing a large tailings pond (where undesired rocks, sediment, and chemicals from mining processes are stored) breached, releasing a wall of 62 million cubic meters of toxic mud and water.

The avalanche of toxic sludge buried a nearby town and poisoned hundreds of miles of the River Doce that provides water to hundreds of thousands of people. The disaster has exposed the inadequacies of government regulation of mining operations and is part of a global trend of worsening mining disasters.

Due to the surprisingly low number of fatalities for such a large accident (17 dead and two missing) and the fact that the Paris terrorist attacks happened soon after, the disaster has received little public attention. Yet the effects from the accident are massive. The town closest to the breach, Bento Rodrigues, was buried under many feet of mud, erasing it from the map. The mud flooded into the River Doce and turned the entire river brown.

The next most affected city is Governador Valadares, inhabited by 280,000 people. The Governador Valadares municipal government cut off the water supply, leaving people dependent on trucks bringing in water of questionable quality. Tens of thousands of people who depend on the river for their livelihoods have also suffered losses.

The Brazilian water agency, Agencia Nacional das Águas, said that the presence of mercury, arsenic, copper, and zinc in the water make it untreatable for human consumption. The river passes by at least 23 cities, leaving half a million people without water service.

More than 300 miles of river have turned dark brown with floating debris. The water has become so dark that sunlight cannot penetrate to the river floor, thus stopping the photosynthesis of algae, and resulting in such low oxygen levels that life cannot be sustained.

Perhaps even more concerning is the effect the disaster is having on the nutrient-rich mouth of the River-Doce. The toxic mud is causing serious problems where

the river reaches the Atlantic Ocean, which is one of the most important spawning points for fish around the world.

Unfortunately, the effects of the disaster are likely to remain for decades. For life in the river to return, the mud will need to thin out and drain to other areas. This can only happen with rain. Yet the region is in the midst of a severe drought, which will seriously delay the recovery.

The United Nations criticized the government of Brazil's reaction to the disaster. Three weeks passed before the government released any information about risks from the contents of the mud.

There was no central government spokesperson providing information, which resulted in conflicting statements from local, state and federal governments and agencies.

Samarco, the mining company responsible for the disaster, has reiterated that its operations were licensed and had in fact been inspected in July, and the dams holding the tailings ponds were reported to be "in a condition of total security." *The Guardian* reported, "The state body responsible for monitoring the country's dams, the

National Department of Mineral Production, checked each of them only once every four years... and only has 220 inspectors charged with monitoring 27,293 sites nationwide."

The disaster in Mariana is part of a larger and worsening mining reality around the world. An interdisciplinary study of mining waste spills, released in July, shows that mining waste spills are growing in size and severity. "Half (33 of 67) of serious tailings dam failures in the last 70 years occurred in the 20 years between 1990 and 2009." They tie the increased rate of failure with the increasing use of extra large tailings ponds, a cost-cutting measure.

There are safer ways to store or dispose of the refuse from mines, but they are more expensive than tailings ponds and companies will not use them on a large scale unless required. With already weakened economies, few governments are likely to pass laws that will make their minerals more expensive internationally. §



*The town of Bento Rodrigues after the disaster. Photo by Senado Federal / Licensed CC BY 2.0*

## Brazil: TIAA-CREF and Land Grabbing

*In November, a report was presented by the Social Network for Justice and Human Rights, a human rights organization in Brazil, and GRAIN, a food sovereignty NGO, about land grabbing in Brazil by TIAA-CREF, at the International Seminar on Land Grabbing, at City University of New York Graduate Center.*

New York-based pension fund giant TIAA-CREF has been linked to massive land grabs and environmental destruction of the cerrado, the vast savannah on the frontier of the Amazon rain forest. A recent report by Brazil's Social Network for Justice and Human Rights and GRAIN, a food sovereignty NGO, shows how TIAA-CREF has evaded Brazilian law to spend hundreds of millions of dollars acquiring farmlands from a notorious "grileiro" or land grabber.

A summary of the report is available at [www.grain.org/article/entries/5336-foreign-pension-funds-and-land-grabbing-in-brazil](http://www.grain.org/article/entries/5336-foreign-pension-funds-and-land-grabbing-in-brazil).

The financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent surge in food prices spurred many private equity funds, banks, and agribusiness corporations to buy farmland as a secure investment with high returns. Often taking advantage of unclear land titles of indigenous peoples and small holder farmers, through the complicity of corrupt local governments, millions of acres of land have been bought in Africa and Latin America and turned into vast industrial agriculture plantations for export commodities and biofuels. The report states:

"This global land grab is a massive transfer of vital food producing resources from poor rural communities to wealthy global elite. Through these deals, families and communities are losing their farms and forests, while farming and pastoral systems that produce food for local people are being wiped out to make way for industrial plantations producing food for export. Many of these land deals are happening in countries where food insecurity and access to land and water are already at critical points. The people who are dispossessed of their lands or affected by the new large-scale plantations are rarely consulted, as many of the deals are negotiated and signed between foreign investors and government officials behind closed doors. With so much at stake, it is no wonder that protests are erupting in many areas where the lands are being grabbed, at times resulting in violent clashes and even deaths."



*An indigenous family displaced from their land by the expansion of agribusiness in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. Photo: Cristiano Navarro / GRAIN*

TIAA-CREF has been one of the largest investors in farmland, spending \$2.5 billion acquiring land overseas between 2007-2014. While it prides itself in promoting social responsible investment, TIAA-CREF's land acquisitions in Brazil follow a pattern of shell companies or subsidiaries that evade Brazilian law intended to limit such extensive foreign ownership of farmland. In spite of its pledges to transparency, TIAA-CREF refuses to disclose the locations of its Brazilian landholdings and the details of how it acquired them.

However, the report documents four farms bought by TIAA-CREF that were linked to Euclides de Carli, a Brazilian grileiro accused by indigenous farmers, human rights groups, and legislators of violently forcing people off their farms and destroying their crops. A number of communities told the researchers of being expelled from their lands repeatedly and having their access to water cut off.

In addition to the human rights abuses associated with land grabbing, the environmental degradation is considerable: the deforestation of the savannahs and pollution of the waterways from pesticides and agrochemicals associated with industrial farming are widespread. The indigenous communities interviewed by the human rights researchers reported polluted drinking water and wells from aerial spraying of pesticides and an increase in cases of cancer, respiratory problems and skin diseases.

Though it claims to promote socially responsible and sustainable investment in land, TIAA-CREF does not appear to be following its own standards in Brazil; the report concludes, TIAA-CREF "is in effect 'outsourcing' land grabbing to local businessmen well known for their violent and illegal tactics for evicting people. Small farmers and indigenous people in Brazil are paying much too high a price to support the pension funds of workers in the U.S., Canada and Sweden." §

# Guatemala: Former military officers arrested

*MOGC's Sustainable Pathways to Peace and Security intern Nicholas Alexandrou contributed to this article.*

In early January, Guatemalan police arrested 18 people on charges of crimes against humanity, as part of an ongoing investigation into forced disappearances that occurred between 1981 and 1988 against indigenous communities.

The surprising crackdown comes a week before the ceremonial inauguration of President Jimmy Morales and a few days before former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt faces a retrial over genocide charges for a series of massacres committed against the Mayan indigenous Ixil between 1982 and 1983. This could be a difficult predicament for incoming President Jimmy Morales, as close associates from his party were among those arrested.

Among the detained are Edgar Justino Ovalle Maldonado, a current Congressman for the National Convergence Front (FCN). Maldonado, who was director of national intelligence from 1982-83 served in the Guatemalan department of Alta Verapaz, where numerous mass graves have been exhumed.

Reaction to the arrests among human rights activists has been a mix of surprise and optimism. The Convergence for Human Rights (DDHH), a coalition of organizations focused on human rights in Guatemala, released a statement expressing happiness and support for the public prosecutor team and the attorney general for this significant moment in the search for justice and fight against impunity.

The timing of the arrests may be related to the re-

cent passage by the U.S. Congress of US\$750 million in funding for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, which includes conditionalities for combating impunity.

According to the funding bill for 2016, participating Central American countries must comply with human rights and corruption rules to receive U.S. monies. Congress is obligated to withhold 50 percent of funding from any country that fails to meet certain human rights conditions, such as the protection of civil society, local consultation processes for marginalized communities, accountability among security forces (both civilian and military), and strengthening the civilian judicial system. These conditions are to act as a countermeasure to abuses by security forces.

Congress is also obligated to withhold 25 percent of funding to any country that fails to improve border security or fails to cooperate with U.S. government agencies in repatriating those who “do not qualify” as refugees based on international laws. “Improving border security” remains vague and could potentially undermine the sovereignty of the recipient nation given U.S. security interests on border enforcement.

While the funding bill recognizes the importance of respecting human rights and the challenges related to both institutional corruption and impunity, there remain concerns over the effectiveness of this spending along with Congressional and administrative priorities on border security and repatriation. §

## **Obama administration authorizes raids on Central America migrant families**

In January, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security began carrying out immigration raids of Honduran, Guatemalan and Salvadoran children and adults who missed their hearings and therefore were given deportation orders in absentia. These children and adults arrived to the U.S. in the context of a still unfolding humanitarian crisis affecting hundreds of thousands of people as a result of unprecedented levels of violence, insecurity and a systemic lack of opportunity for dignified lives. Fewer than 30 percent of unaccompanied minors in court have lawyers. The current raids mark a new low in the broken U.S. immigration system.

People of faith across the U.S. are outraged at the treatment of these children and families fleeing violence, and communities have begun to offer sanctuary to them as they did during the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s. In the January 1 issue of *National Catholic Reporter*, Maryknoll Sister Jean Fallon commented: “The majority are now refugees, and the United Nations said they are refugees.” They deserve support and a refuge, not deportation.

### **Faith in action:**

The Groundswell Movement has created a petition to President Obama, urging him to stop the raids on Central American refugees. Sign the petition at <http://bit.ly/StopRaids>



## Catholics tell Congress: Welcome Syrian refugees

*The following is a joint statement by Catholic organizations, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, regarding the Syrian refugee crisis. The statement was sent to every member of Congress on November 20.*

As national Catholic organizations advocating for justice and peace, we speak from the experience of our members who serve on the ground around the world with those who are suffering, including refugees fleeing from violent conflict. We know their stories, their heartbreak, their fear, and their persistent efforts to survive, even flourish.

We repudiate the recent attacks in Beirut, Paris, Baghdad, Raqqa and in too many other places around the world. We know families and communities are suffering and our prayers are with them. We deeply believe that violence will not prevail and that the memories of those who have been killed will inspire sustainable solutions to such horrific violence.

We cannot, however, let our grief and fear blind us to the desperation and despair of another group of victims: the millions and millions of refugees fleeing for safety from Syria. For many years, people in Syria and Iraq have been inundated with violence in their home countries and fleeing from the same type of violence we saw in Beirut and Paris. The world watched with horror as the body of a three year old Syrian boy washed onto Turkey's shore, yet families continue to lose their lives daily as leaders debate how to respond.

Pope Francis proclaimed that "refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women, and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes...the flesh of Christ is in the flesh of the refugees: their flesh is the flesh of Christ."

That many governors and presidential candidates

would have the United States stop accepting Syrian refugees or accept only Christians is both deplorable and a form of structural violence. The faithful response is to open our hearts and our homes to Syrians of all faiths in recognition of our sacred call to protect and nourish life.

To reject Syrian refugees out of fear would be wrong. The U.S. government handpicks and thoroughly vets the refugees who resettle here. All refugees resettled in the United States undergo rigorous security screenings by the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Department of Defense and multiple intelligence agencies; these include biometric checks, forensic testing, medical screenings and in-person interviews.

This is not an either/or situation. The United States can continue to welcome refugees while also continuing to provide an environment of safety. We must do both.

Further, we strongly urge your support for the diplomatic efforts being made in Vienna to de-escalate the violence in Syria, which will be a



*Syrian refugees pass through Slovenia on their way to Germany, October 23, 2015. Photo by Robert Cotič / Licensed CC BY 2.0.*

significant step to mitigating the refugee crisis.

In sum, it is precisely the willingness to welcome the other, i.e. the virtue of hospitality, and the practice of inclusion, that groups like ISIS oppose. If we refuse to welcome refugees in urgent need, we risk becoming like those we claim to deplore. We pray that in your discernment, compassion for the plight of refugees will touch your hearts.

For a complete list of Catholic organizations endorsing this statement, go to <http://maryknollogc.org/statements/catholic-groups-send-letter-congress-welcoming-syrian-refugees>. §

## Israel/Palestine: Fears of third intifada

*Since the riots on the Temple Mount in mid-September, seemingly random street violence has spiked. Israeli forces have responded with harsh crackdowns.*

Attacks by individual Palestinians against Israelis with simple weapons like kitchen knives and scissors are on the rise – by the end of November, the Israel Defense Forces reported 100 stabbings, 37 shootings, and 22 car ramming since September. Those carrying out attacks have largely been men in their teens or 20s targeting Israelis and then being killed or badly injured by Israeli forces.

The response from Israel has been blanketed and severe – from October through December, the Palestine Red Crescent reports having treated 489 people with live bullet injuries, 140 with rubber bullet injuries, 602 afflicted with tear gas, and 107 beaten during raids by Israeli forces. This developing trend, along with increasing demonstrations and riots, has sparked rumors of a possible third intifada, called the “knife intifada” by international media, or the “popular intifada” by some Palestinians.

Shin Bet, Israel’s internal security agency, reports that these youths are acting “based on feelings of national, economic and personal deprivation,” rather than an organized offensive, noting that in some cases the attack provides a way to escape a “bleak reality which they perceive is unchangeable.” Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) Brigadier General Guy Goldstein said at an academic conference that he believed the violence would not end “unless there is some significant change, partly if not mostly on the diplomatic front” – a comment which received much attention as it was perceived to reveal the IDF’s opposition to Prime Minister Netanyahu’s current strategy to quell the unrest with force.

In recent months Secretary of State John Kerry has also been critical of Netanyahu’s government, saying quite candidly in an interview published in *The New Yorker*, “It is not an answer to simply continue to build in the West Bank and to destroy the homes of the other folks you’re trying to make peace with and pretend that that’s a solution.” President Obama has also expressed the sentiment that Israel’s settlement expansion is an



impediment to peace, yet the administration is considering a recent request from Netanyahu for an increase in aid from \$31 billion to \$50 billion over 10 years, perhaps as a concession for the Iran nuclear agreement.

Meanwhile, in 2015, the international community at large has shown increasing support for recognition of Palestine as a state, and treating it as such. Since the UN General Assembly vote to recognize Palestinian statehood in 2012, dozens of nations have officially recognized Palestine, including the Vatican. Last June the Vatican took it one step further, signing its first treaty with the Palestinian Authority. This is an unprecedented agreement between the Vatican and a Muslim-majority country, outlining provisions for religious freedom in Palestine (meaning, protection for Christians), and also affirms the Holy See’s support for a two-state solution to the conflict with Israel.

In early January, Makarim Wibisono, the UN Special Rapporteur for the Palestinian Territories on the situation of human rights, regretfully submitted his resignation, stating that his “efforts to help improve the lives of Palestinian victims of violations under the Israeli occupation have been frustrated every step of the way.” After repeated attempts to access the West Bank and Gaza to act as an “impartial and objective observer” he said that he felt he had no choice but to leave his post with the hope that his successor will be given more access. He noted that the State of Palestine was fully cooperative with his mandate throughout his tenure.

With a steady stream of bad news coming from the region it is easy to become disillusioned, yet every day there are also signs of peace and hope. The Parents Circle Families Forum – a group of Israelis and Palestinians whose family members have died in the conflict and who work together for reconciliation and a better future – continues to be a symbol of the bond of humanity in the face of adversity. For an inspiring story, visit: [www.theparentscircle.com](http://www.theparentscircle.com). §



## Trade: TPP text finally released

*The following article examines the text of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal, which has the potential to affect the lives of millions of people in 12 countries.*

On November 4, the text of the TPP trade deal, which has been negotiated in secret for the last six years, was finally released. It contains many of the same provisions that have compelled the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns to oppose past trade deals, though in some areas there are improvements. In other areas, the negotiators have reverted from past agreements and failed to meet the standards set in the bipartisan May 10, 2007, agreement between the George W. Bush administration and the U.S. House of Representatives that was the foundation for some gains in agreements with Peru, Colombia, Panama, and South Korea.

The TPP will limit access to affordable medicines due to restrictions on biologic drugs (often live cultures and used to treat life-threatening conditions such as AIDS and cancer). There will be a five-year period of data exclusivity on biologics before companies can access the data and begin developing generic versions. The TPP will also include 20-year patent extensions on any change to the formula, such as from a pill to a liquid gel cap.

All participating countries will be expected to have the same standards on medical patents after a certain time period, although it is unlikely that the standard of living in some of the countries will rise within the time frame in order for its citizens to afford brand name medications.

The TPP also includes a chapter on investment that details the controversial investor-state dispute settlement mechanism (ISDS) which allows foreign corporations to sue countries for lost profits if they perceive a threat to their investments, such as when El Salvador imposed a mining moratorium and Australia and Uruguay passed a plain packaging law on cigarettes. These

lawsuits can have a chilling effect on regulation in countries with similar laws or proposals. It can weaken rule of law and the principle of subsidiarity. Also, ISDS only allows corporations to sue. There is no way for affected communities to sue corporations under this provision or to even file a formal grievance.

The agreement immediately places Vietnam, Brunei, and Malaysia on labor action plans (LAPs) due to anti-union crackdowns, human rights violations, and trafficking respectively. However, based on the experience of the implementation of the LAP in Colombia,

it is unclear if the LAP can be fully enforced. Colombia continues to have a high numbers of threats against workers who try to form unions as well as assassinations of union members.

Unfortunately, trade negotiators were not able to secure a labor action plan for Mexico, despite an increase in violence, human rights abuses, and labor violations in recent years.

There is concern that the TPP could increase income inequality and hunger in rural areas due to an increase in export of genetically engineered seeds. In 2014, the U.S. trade representative threatened to withhold development aid in an attempt to undermine El Salvador's food security program that allowed farmers to save seeds. If the TPP forces farmers to purchase genetically engineered seeds, they could become trapped in a cycle of poverty. At the same time, the TPP does have some protections to promote local and regional food procurement for the first time, which is an improvement.

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, through the Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment, will share more of what is inside the TPP trade deal in a three-week webinar series starting in late January. Register for the series at [maryknollogc.org](http://maryknollogc.org). §



*A woman at the weaving loom near Chau Doc, Vietnam Photo by Alex Ch. from Zurich, Switzerland / Licensed CC BY 2.0*



# Food Security: U.S. trade policy and farmers

*On December 11, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns was one of 17 faith-based and food security organizations who wrote to Michael Froman, the U.S. trade representative, calling for a change in the Obama administration's trade policy, leading into the tenth ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Nairobi, Kenya.*

Concerned that U.S. trade policy is favoring the interests of transnational corporations and agribusiness over small holder farmers and the food sovereignty of developing nations, 17 faith-based and food security organizations wrote a letter to Michael Froman, the U.S. trade representative, which states: "U.S. trade policy should enhance countries right to feed their peoples."

The letter was widely quoted by representatives of African NGOs at the tenth ministerial meeting of the WTO who were advocating for transparency in trade agreements and food sovereignty.

The letter also states:

"While we recognize the complexity of the many issues being negotiated in the lead up to the December 15-18, 2015 Nairobi Ministerial of the World Trade Organization (WTO), as faith, development and food policy organizations, we especially want to weigh in on issues related to global food security. We should learn from the 2008 food price crisis, as well as the persistent rounds of price volatility that have followed. These problems will be exacerbated by climate change, financialization of agricultural commodities, and competing demands (especially among crops used for food, fuel or feed) that make it hard for the poorest countries to rely on trade for an affordable supply of basic grains. We urge you to:

"Support developing country efforts to confront volatility in international markets for agricultural goods. The WTO Agreement on Agriculture failed to provide workable proposals to end dumping or import surges. As a starting point, the U.S. should support a functional Special Safeguard Mechanism, without making that support dependent on other concessions on market access. The surges are a documented reality under the current rules, not a prospective risk should further market access be granted.

"Agree to a permanent decision on the G33 proposal regarding food stocks programs to support food security that allows developing countries to provide support to small-scale farmers and poor consumers, while keep-

ing in mind the need for rules that restrict every country from dumping excess supplies in external markets. Several of the groups listed below weighed in on this in a letter to the White House dated October 15, 2015.

"Agree to the modest disciplines proposed by the EU and others on the U.S. practice of monetizing international food aid. As you know, our organizations and many others as well have long called for the U.S. to join the rest of the international community in ending this practice, which has a high risk of disrupting local markets for small-scale producers. Those disruptions often worsen the long-term problems of food insecurity and rural livelihoods that that it is food aid's short-term

objective to alleviate. There are other, smarter and more efficient ways for the U.S. to support food security around the world.

"More generally, we urge you to support a transparent and inclusive multilateral process to resolve these pressing issues. U.S. trade policy should enhance countries' rights to feed their peoples. It should not advance negotiations that leave most countries out of decisions that they then may have to adopt as a fait accompli at a later time. The U.S. should take leadership to call for an open process involving all stakeholders to arrive at solutions for these urgent

concerns in ways that include the interests of developing and developed countries alike."

The seventeen signatories on the letter are: Action Against Hunger, ActionAid USA, American Jewish World Service, Bread for the World, Church World Service, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice, Mercy Corps, NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby, Oxfam America, PLANT (Partners for the Land & Agricultural Needs of Traditional Peoples), Presbyterian Church USA, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries, United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society, World Food Program USA. §



## Resources

1) **Maryknoll Mission Institute 2016:** Join continuing education and renewal programs for missionaries and others engaged in cross-cultural ministries, sponsored by the Maryknoll Sisters Congregation, in Monrovia and Los Altos, California and Maryknoll, New York. For a description of programs for 2016, contact the Maryknoll Mission Institute at (914) 941-7575, [missinst@mksisters.org](mailto:missinst@mksisters.org), or go to <https://maryknollsisters.org/program-plan-for-2016/>.

2) **Yet Another Victim of the American Dream: Honduran Migrants Speak Out:** The Latin America Working Group produced this video of six courageous migrants sharing their personal experiences of the horrors they faced on their journeys north. The video aims to raise awareness of why these migrants risked their lives fleeing their homelands and what hardships they faced along the way, and advocates for more just immigration policies in the United States and Mexico. It is available in English at [lawg.org/MigrantsSpeakOut](http://lawg.org/MigrantsSpeakOut) and in Spanish at [lawg.org/MigrantesComparten](http://lawg.org/MigrantesComparten).

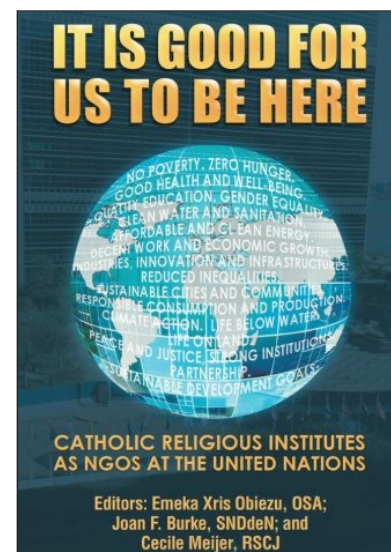
3) **Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2016:** Plan now to attend Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) in Washington, D.C., **April 15–18**. The theme is “Lift Every Voice! Racism, Class and Power.” In a major U.S. election year when lives, votes, and the global economy are at stake, followers of Christ ask, “Who has a voice?” Join other Christians in responding, “Everyone!” during a weekend of workshops and information, followed by a visit to Capitol Hill on Monday, April 18. More information is available at [www.advocacydays.org](http://www.advocacydays.org), or contact the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.



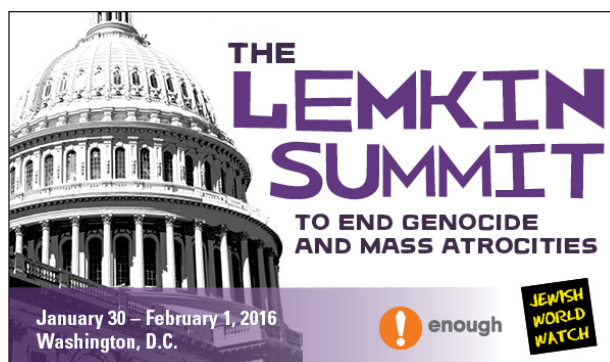
4) **The Global Land Grab: A Primer:** Download the second draft of the Transnational Institute’s popular primer on land grabbing, and the economic, so-

cial, and political issues related to large-scale land investments in the Global South. [www.tni.org/files/download/landgrabbingprimer-feb2013.pdf](http://www.tni.org/files/download/landgrabbingprimer-feb2013.pdf).

5) ***It Is Good for Us to Be Here: Catholic Religious Institutes as NGOs at the United Nations***, edited by Emeka Obiezu, OSA, Joan Burke, SNDdeN, and Cecile Meijer, RSCJ. Catholic women religious sisters, priests, and lay associates representing a multiple of Catholic organizations, including Maryknoll Sr. Claris Zwareva, write about their presence within the system of global governance at the United Nations. Available in Kindle app and hardcopy at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).



6) **Lemkin Summit to End Genocide and Mass Atrocities:** This three-day conference in Washing-



ton, D.C. from **January 30–February 1**, is on efforts to counter mass atrocities and genocide by the U.S., civil society groups, and change-makers on the ground. Conflict areas include Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and South Sudan. For more information, go to [www.enoughproject.org/events/lemkin-summit-2016](http://www.enoughproject.org/events/lemkin-summit-2016).