



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

# NewsNotes

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

**July-August 2016**

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Current status of bills:  
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Capitol switchboard:  
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[www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov)

# Laudato Si': First anniversary

*The following article examines the impact of the encyclical Laudato Si' one year since its publication.*

June 18 marked one year since the publication of Pope Francis' landmark encyclical, "*Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home*," in which he spoke with urgency about the desolation of our planet and a 'throwaway culture' that is not only affecting the climate, but is devastating the lives of millions of its inhabitants who are displaced, impoverished and marginalized by an economy of exclusion and the "globalization of indifference."

"I wish to address every person living on this planet" Francis wrote, appealing for a global dialogue to seek solutions to this global crisis: "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change." (LS 13)

How has the world responded, particularly Catholics, and what has changed in this year? It is hard to exaggerate the significance of *Laudato Si'* in Catholic social teaching. Never before has a papal encyclical had the worldwide and ecumenical response that this letter of Pope Francis received. His call for "ecological conversion" has resonated around the globe. Polls indicate that about a third of Catholics have read or are aware of *Laudato Si'* and that number say their views on the moral responsibility to fight climate change are influenced by the Holy Father.

Clearly the encyclical had a significant impact on the Paris climate talks, and 900,000 Catholics were inspired to sign the Catholic Climate Petition organized by the Global Catholic Climate Movement, of which Maryknoll is a member. While some dioceses have developed implementation plans and many parishes have held *Laudato Si'* study groups, the U.S. church lags behind others, such as the Philippines.

"I think it has proven to be really transformative," said Tomás Insua, co-founder of the Global Catholic Climate Movement. "But there's definitely a long way to go to get this encyclical to really sync in our Catholic identity and really drive transformational change."

Meanwhile our Common Home continues to be in crisis. Along with the increasing routineness of mass shootings, terrorist bombings and never-ending war, Earth and its inhabitants continue to break records:

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recently announced that May 2016 was the 13th consecutive warmest month on record — the longest streak since global temperature records began in 1880.

The last time the planet's monthly temperature was below average was February 1985, meaning that if you are under 30, there has never been a month colder than average in your entire life.

As noted elsewhere in this *NewsNotes*, wars and persecution drove over 65 million people from their homes in 2015 and one in every 113 people globally is now either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee — unprecedented in modern history.

"At sea, a frightening number of refugees and migrants are dying each year. On land, people fleeing war are finding their way blocked by closed borders," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi.

"The willingness of nations to work together not just for refugees but for the collective human interest is what's being tested today, and it's this spirit of unity that badly needs to prevail," UN Sec. Gen Ban Ki Moon said.

"We're stuck here. We can't go on and we can't go back," said Hikmat, a Syrian farmer driven from his land by war, now living in a tent outside a shopping center in Lebanon with his wife and young children. "My children need to go to school, they need a future," he added.

According to the UN, more than 125 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, a level of suffering not seen since World War II.

These are the vulnerable and excluded that concern Francis in *Laudato Si'*. Clearly in this year since the encyclical came out much has changed for the worse, as much as there have been some notable advances. We continue to be challenged by the crisis our Earth faces just as we are inspired by Pope Francis' words and example.

"Human beings", he writes, "while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start....by developing our individual, God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world's problems." (LS 205/220)§

**Faith in Action:** Watch a 5-minute video on *Laudato Si'* with your church group and family: <http://bit.ly/CAFODLaudatoSi>.

Celebrate World Day of Prayer for Creation on September 1 <http://catholicclimatemovement.global/>

# Nonviolence and Just Peace: Afghanistan

*The following reflection was written by Merwyn de Mello, returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner, for the Non-violence and Just Peace conference held in Rome, April 11-13.*

From 1994–2013 I served as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner in Japan, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and the U.S. Since 2014, as a Mennonite Central Committee international service worker based in Kabul, Afghanistan, I am an advisor to the peacebuilding project of International Assistance Mission (IAM), a Christian NGO, with a 50-year presence in country.

My journey in faith brought me to Afghanistan, a country plagued by war over the last four decades. Shows of strength and power exacerbate and protract the cycles of violence that have direct, structural and cultural manifestations.

Direct violence is most visible in the active fighting between government forces and/or local security forces and armed opposition groups in many of Afghanistan's provinces. Structural violence can be seen in the judicial system when rulings are overturned without due process and in governmental institutions where power and wealth are consolidated into the hands of a few who determine how the needs of those with less power are met.

Cultural violence can be seen in the attitudes and beliefs that legitimize direct and structural violence. In Afghanistan, because of four decades of intense violence, people under 40 years of age have not known peace. Violent solutions to conflict are witnessed daily. For example, a study by the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) showed that 92 percent of Afghan women believe that husbands have the right to beat their wives.

We recognize that the perpetration of violence does not happen in isolation but is often linked directly to the experience of violence. Individuals, communities, and whole societies can be caught up in cycles of violence, unless deliberate steps are taken to break out of the cycle.

The culture and philosophy of active nonviolence shapes our Peacebuilding Project activities dedicated to the goal of greater peace and stability in Afghan homes, communities and organizations. We look for pathways for peace in Afghan culture, traditions and faiths.

Participants tell us they not only value diversity in their communities, but also accept, appreciate and celebrate it. Afghan society is characterized by diversity. There are seven major ethnic groups and two main languages, and numerous minority ethnic groups and languages.

Islam is the national religion, but Sikhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Sufism are also present. Among Muslims, the majority are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school, a smaller number of Shi'a, and few Twelver (Imamis) and Ismaili Muslims. Afghanistan has been able to hold its ethnic diversity in balance for centuries, possibly through oppressive means, but also through networks of relationships that emerge when people live in close proximity. Throughout our work, we are sensitive to the need for building a language and a culture of diversity in Afghanistan.

Our work integrates concepts of trauma healing and cycles of violence into our peacebuilding curriculum. Trauma for Afghans often involves lack of food and water, lack of shelter, imprisonment, serious injury, sudden fleeing, forced separation from family, murder of family members, and rape. We partner with organizations that have community mental health programming to connect individual trauma healing and collective healing from historical trauma.

Participants use conflict resolution skills in their day-to-day lives, especially to address tensions between traditional and modern cultural norms. We promote indigenous methods and tools that are culturally and religiously appropriate. We incorporate Islamic principles of nonviolence into our peacebuilding work. We promote incorporating peacebuilding processes into Shuras and Jurgas, community-based institutions that are intertwined with the lives of people in Afghanistan.

To promote the teaching and practice of nonviolence in the Catholic Church, we need to:

- Examine our structures and social hierarchy to find areas that need to be turned upside-down for the practice of nonviolence to take root;
- Work in partnership with faith traditions that practice nonviolence in order to institutionalize the principles and practice of nonviolence in Catholic institutions;
- Connect people practicing nonviolence at all levels of society in order to promote a web of change agents that fosters a culture of nonviolence;
- Invest in building a 'stock exchange' of people and resources to be freely accessed as needed, particularly in conflict areas. §

## Peacemaking: Influence of religion

Researchers from the University of Arkansas invite people working as peacemakers around the world to take part in a survey entitled “Successful peacemaking: Effective tactics, peacemaker motivations, and the influence of religion in conflict resolution.” The following is a summary of the key findings thus far:

Researchers analyzed survey data from 95 international peacemakers considered “high priority” – defined as working in conflict zones or traveling there periodically – on their most effective strategies, greatest successes, motivations, commitment, and views on religion’s role in peacemaking. The most prevalent countries of peacemaking in the sample were: Columbia, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Israel, Iraq, Uganda, and Syria. Three key findings emerged:

First, peacemakers most often find success through connecting with people in conflict areas. Peacemakers say dialogue is their most effective strategy, followed by empathy, capacity building, and education. Peacemakers see relationship building as the highest form of success they can achieve.

Second, peacemakers working in both religious and secular conflicts see religions as valuable for conflict resolution. In fact, individuals working in conflicts with a strong and visible religious space are more likely to see religions as a potential tool for resolution than as a cause of the conflict. Even those working in secular conflicts believe that religion is a potential solution in their work. Also, the use of religious tactics is the single greatest predictor of peacemakers’ belief in their future success.

Third, peacemakers’ level of commitment to

conflict resolution is influenced by their motivations. Respondents to the survey were motivated most often by a sense of calling, followed by feelings of shared humanity, personal connection to the conflict, and a larger sense that war is wrong. While peacemaking is a demanding field of work with high rates of mental and physical exhaustion and burnout, the data from the survey show that those who are internally motivated to engage in peacemaking – by a religious calling or a sense of duty – are significantly more committed to their work than those who engage because of an external factor, such as a personal connection to the conflict.

**Faith in action:** The survey is still active. To complete the survey in English, go to:  
[www.surveymonkey.com/r/PeacemakingStudy](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PeacemakingStudy).

**Other languages:**

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Peacemaking\\_Arabic](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Peacemaking_Arabic)

[https://fr.surveymonkey.com/r/Peacemaking\\_French](https://fr.surveymonkey.com/r/Peacemaking_French)

[https://es.surveymonkey.com/r/Peacemaking\\_Spanish](https://es.surveymonkey.com/r/Peacemaking_Spanish)

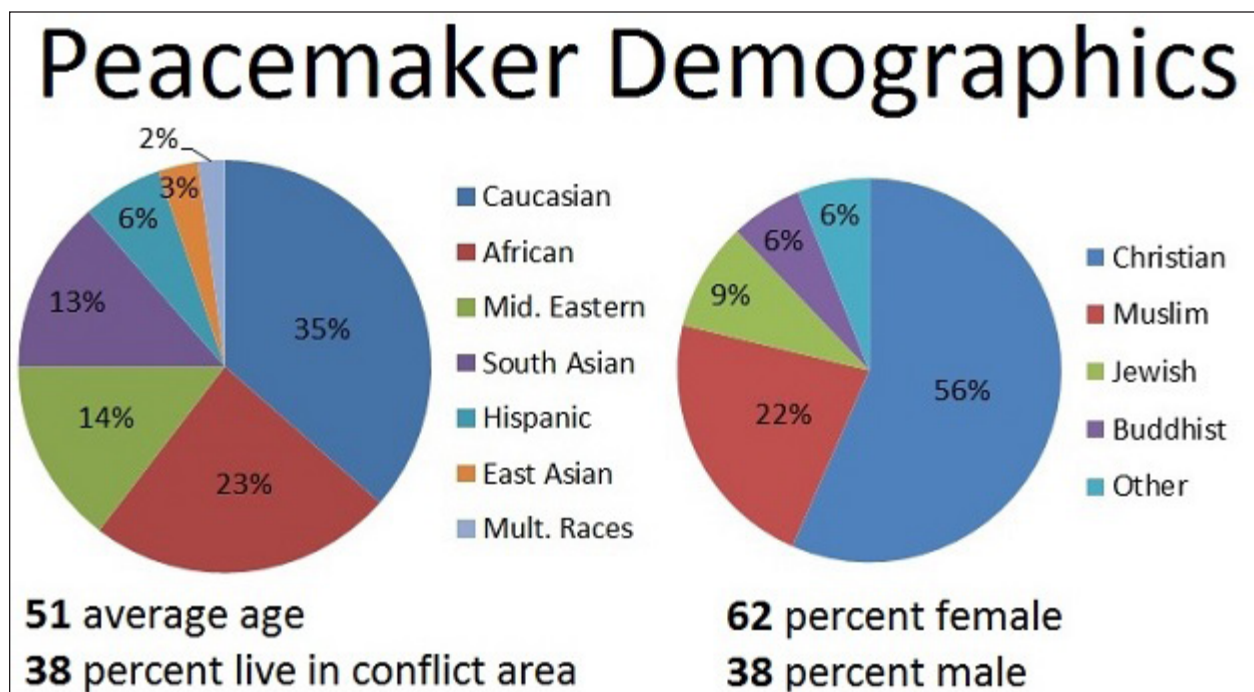
**For an infographic of the survey results, go to:**

<http://bit.ly/PeacemakersInfographic>.

**For a six-page report, go to:**

<http://bit.ly/PeacemakersReport>.

**For more information, contact Dr. Rebecca Glazier at**  
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# Nuclear disarmament: Lessons from Hiroshima

*August 6 marks the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Despite President Obama's visit to Hiroshima in May, where he called for a "world without nuclear weapons," nuclear weapon spending by the U.S. is at an all-time high. In May, Pax Christi International Washington Working Group (which includes the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns) hosted a webinar entitled "Nuclear abolition and why we as U.S. Catholics should work for it at this time." The following is an excerpt from the opening talk by Joan Chittister, O.S.B.*

"Where has the spirituality of peace as we have known it in modern history come from? What has happened to it? And where are we now?"

"The material is best framed by two proverbs: First, 'If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.' In other words, life is a question of compass points, one of which is surely spirituality. But there have been times in history when other compass points have taken precedent – the compass point of power, money . . . Our compass point . . . is the life of Jesus . . . and our commitment to the coming of reign of God and our own personal responsibility to the building of the peaceable kingdom." . . .

"This means to say that the search for world peace has always been allusive. . . . We have always had to deal with factors that make it difficult if not impossible. Nevertheless, this search for peace has become more dangerous than ever and therefore, more urgent than ever and probably more universal than ever.

"During World War II, the peace reality that I was given was shaped by what the Church calls the 'theology of the just war.' They taught us that there was a clear difference between combatants and non-combatants, legal targets and illegal targets. They taught us that a fair fight was a just fight. To be fair, a fight had to be seen as proportional, meaning no army would use more than the amount of force necessary to deter evil or to control an enemy. We learned that wars were winnable and surrenders could be choreographed. We even prayed after Mass for the conversion of the enemy. It never crossed our mind to pray for our own conversion because we knew that justice was on our side and we kept the rules in a rule-based society, from Canon law to international law to national law. We were sure those rules were right.

"But then came Hiroshima. Hiroshima not only obliterated a city and all its citizens but it also obliterated the very possibility of proportionality. It destroyed the distinction between military and civilian targets. Hiroshima was wiped out, left a mass of black ash in minutes. The black ash was made up of civilians who lived in that city and were pursuing a normal day's work.

"This great nuclear weapon made no distinction between combatants and non-combatants because it

extinguished the line between them. More than that, it extinguished the line between the moral and the immoral in warfare. If you could ever seek to make any kind of argument for the clear justification and morality of any war, it obliterated even the argument in favor of the just war theory itself." . . .

"One weapon wiped out almost 2,000 years of thinking about what justice, if any, could be maintained in a wartime world. The immortality of war was clear for everyone to see. It wasn't simply wartime now that was blatantly evil. Worse than that – it became a muddled peacetime that has left us up to our national max in destruction, a willingness to invent and apply devastation, a senseless approach to both friend and enemy alike.

"Nuclear weaponry and its commitment to mutually assured destruction, mutually assured immorality, mutually assured devastation of the globe, has drained the national economy and is blocking the world from human development. Nuclear politics threaten the life of the globe by either mass murder or conscious suicide. You can commit nuclear suicide – and aren't we? And won't it be? And can it ever be anything else?" . . .

"We still sit in the glow of the old theology that tells us that as long as we are ritually regular we are spiritual. While we pay for, applaud, and celebrate what is destroyed between us and it. And yet our compass point tells us that we see Jesus transcend both church and state to create a vision that goes beyond either a religious definition of life or the state's claims to control life. But Jesus' vision is to bring all life to fullness in God and to bring humanity to the fullness of what it means to be human – both of them summed up in one sentence: 'Peter, put away your sword.'

"Power, force, domination, and destruction won't do it but it does make clear the meaning of the second proverb that teaches that *what we do is what we become spiritually*. The proverb tells us 'If we stay on the road we are on, we shall surely get to where we are going.'"§

**Faith in action:** Listen to a recording of the webinar in its entirety: <http://bit.ly/PXINuclear>. Tell President Obama we need a world free of nuclear weapons: <http://bit.ly/NuclearFree>.

# Global migration crisis: From bad to Brexit

*The following article examines the passage of the referendum in the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, commonly known as “Brexit.”*

The global migration crisis has strained economic resources, fueled radical politics, and now in all likelihood will fundamentally break a solidarity in Europe forged out of the ashes of the Second World War. Despite Pope Francis’ repeated appeals for mercy for the millions of migrants coming to Europe, mostly from the Middle East and parts of Africa, some European nations have limited their responses to what UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon has described as “border closures, barriers, and bigotry.”

On June 23, citizens of the United Kingdom (U.K.) voted to leave the European Union (E.U.). The BBC and The New York Times reported that polling data indicated many of those who voted to leave the E.U. did so despite being aware of the economic gains brought to the U.K. by immigrants and by relations with the E.U. They interviewed many Brexit supporters who described this as an emotional vote against immigration.

That emotion was directed at the European Union, a political and economic union of 28 European states that was formed after the Second World War as a means for promoting peace on the continent by opening borders and pooling resources. As the number of people in the world displaced by conflict has grown to new heights, support for the E.U. has plummeted not only in the U.K., but also in France, Spain, Germany, and not surprisingly, Greece, which is the landing spot for the majority of boats carrying migrants to Europe.

The report by the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) entitled “Global Trends,” released just days before the Brexit vote, said that the number of people displaced globally in 2015 – 65.3 million – is the highest in recorded history. The report said three countries – Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia – produce most of the numbers; and one out of every 113 people on Earth is now either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee. It also said children make up 51 percent of the world’s refugees in 2015.

The report described refugee conditions as “worsening, with many becoming destitute, girls being forced into early marriage, half of all refugee children out of school, many forced to beg on the streets, or becoming

the victims of exploitation, including sexual abuse.” “The willingness of nations to work together not just for refugees but for the collective human interest is what’s being tested today,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon said, in response to the report.

The Brexit vote is a monumental fracture in global solidarity in response to the migration crisis in Europe – what Pope Francis has described as “the worst humanitarian disaster since the Second World War.” It signals a sense of fear and a rejection of what Pope Francis has called “the culture of encounter.” In 2013, Pope Francis said the Holy Spirit impels us to open doors and communicate the encounter with Christ. “Let us ask ourselves today: Are we open to ‘God’s surprises?’ Or are we closed and fearful before the newness of

the Holy Spirit? Do we have the courage to strike out along the new paths which God’s newness sets before us, or do we resist, barricaded in



transient structures which have lost their capacity for openness to what is new?”

“A culture of encounter demands that we be ready not only to give, but also to receive,” Francis said in 2014. “What does it mean for us, as disciples of the Lord, to encounter others in the light of the Gospel? In spite of our own limitations and sinfulness, how do we draw truly close to one another? These questions are summed up in what a scribe once asked Jesus: “And who is my neighbor?”

The Brexit vote also signals a desire for control and a rejection of hope. “Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out,” Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si’*, “that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems.” In his Easter message, Francis said, “Today, amid so much darkness, we need to see the light of hope and to be men and women who bring hope to others.”§

**Faith in action:** Sign a petition by UNHCR asking UN member states to “work together and do their fair share for refugees” at the General Assembly’s High Level Meeting to address the large movements of refugees and migrants on September 19: [www.unhcr.org/refugeeday/us/petition](http://www.unhcr.org/refugeeday/us/petition).

# Trafficking: End Modern Slavery Initiative

*The following article describes the End Modern Slavery Initiative, an amendment currently attached to the Senate version of the National Defense Authorizations Act.*

Congress has the opportunity to launch a massive global initiative to end human trafficking. Buried in the National Defense Authorizations Act in the Senate is an amendment to fund the End Modern Slavery Initiative. This initiative has the potential to gather enough funding and organize across enough sectors (government, religious, nonprofit and business) to take on the multi-billion dollar global slave trade industry. This is by far the largest effort to date focused on combating human trafficking.

Senator Bob Corker, a Republican from Tennessee, introduced the legislation. According to Senator Corker's website, the legislation will authorize the establishment of a non-profit grant-making foundation in Washington, D.C., to be known as "The End Modern Slavery Initiative Foundation" that will fund programs and projects outside the U.S. that must:

- Contribute to the freeing and sustainable recovery of victims of modern slavery, prevent individuals from being enslaved, and enforce laws to punish individual and corporate perpetrators of modern slavery.
- Set clear, defined goals and outcomes that can be empirically measured;
- Achieve a measurable 50 percent reduction of modern slavery in targeted populations.

The initiative will seek to raise \$1.5 billion, more than 80 percent of which will come through matching funds from the private sector and foreign governments. U.S. funds must be matched by \$500 million from foreign governments and \$250 million from the private sector. The remaining \$500 million will be raised by

The End Modern Slavery Initiative Foundation from additional private sector contributions.

In addition to raising funds and distributing it to anti-trafficking organizations at the grassroots level, the initiative will move the U.S. government to channel diplomatic support and additional resources for law enforcement, rule of law, economic development

and training assistance in support of anti-trafficking efforts. This is a powerful component of the initiative – the rule of law is vital to protecting the rights of victims of human trafficking and ensures their access to justice. Justice for victims of trafficking goes beyond criminal justice, as victims need to be able to claim their rights in civil and administrative proceedings as well.

While the End Modern Slavery Initiative amendment is in the Senate bill, it is not in the House version.

There is hope that it will

remain in the final bill that will be negotiated between the House and Senate in conference committee. Staff members of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joined other faith-based organizations concerned about trafficking on a lobby day to ask members of Congress to support the inclusion of the End Modern Slavery Initiative amendment.

The conference committee hopes to settle on a final version of the bill by July 15. §

**Faith in action:** Ask your senators to support the End Modern Slavery Initiative in the final version of the National Defense Authorizations Act: <http://bit.ly/EndModernSlaveryInitiative>.



# Africa: GMOs no solution to hunger

*Africa Faith & Justice Network (AFJN), Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN), Caritas Nigeria, and Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) issued the following joint statement.*

At the conclusion of the conference on “Just Governance: The Nigerian Bio-Safety Law, GMOs, and Implications for Nigeria and Africa,” we, from diverse faith-based bodies and civil society organizations from Nigeria, Africa, and other parts of the world, affirm that organic foods are healthy, nutritious and a vital aspect of human rights to food and food security.

Informed by robust presentations by specialists and panelists and spontaneous contributions by participants, we strongly object to the release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Nigeria, convinced that GMOs are not the solution to hunger.

Nigeria’s fertile land guarantees the nation food sovereignty. Hunger is due to bad governance, poor infrastructure for preservation and distribution of food and lack of adequate all-round support to small-holder farmers who constitute over 70 percent of farmers in Nigeria. We, therefore, strongly recommend to the Nigerian Government to invest more in agriculture.

The Nigerian Bio-Safety Law, in its present form, is a recipe for the destruction of Nigeria’s ecosystem, food cultures, and systems. The process leading to its passage was devoid of critical input and public participation that would have enabled Nigerians to determine and protect their food cultures and systems. It lacks legal safeguards for protecting their rights.

The public hearing at the National Assembly did not meet an acceptable, minimum, global standard and best practices in a democratic society. It was just a formality to create the semblance of a democratic process and skewed in favor of [GMO-producing] trans-national corporations. The government should not only introduce appropriate mechanisms but also repeal laws which legalize and adopt GMO seedlings and food products and marginalize Nigerian farmers.

Furthermore, the Nigerian Bio-Safety Law is not in the interest of Nigerian farmers and the wider public because it facilitates the introduction of GMOs on a massive scale and violates the precautionary principle, which forms the basis of the African Union’s revised African Model Law on Biodiversity, to which Nigeria is a signatory.

We adopt the comments of Health of Mother Earth Foundation and Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria on the relevant sections of the Bio-Safety Law and strongly suggest their incorporation into the Nigerian Law to safeguard the rights of

Nigerian citizens and protect Nigeria’s ecosystem.

The potential socio-economic, cultural and ethical impacts of GMOs are enormous and diminish the positive impacts of small-holder farmers who are feeding the country; promoting cultural practices, community well-being, traditional crops and varieties; reducing rural unemployment; engendering trade; raising the quality of life of indigenous peoples; and re-affirming food security.

Aware that the UN recognizes socio-economic consideration as a key element in biosafety negotiations and decision-making processes (Protocol on Socio-Economic Considerations; Article 26), we, therefore, appeal to the government to conduct a socio-economic impact assessment of GMOs before taking any measures that could destroy Nigeria’s agricultural sector.

The concerns about GMOs are not only about safety for consumers but also about the more damaging systematic appropriation of the rights to seeds by trans-national corporations that deprives farmers of their traditional rights to seeds, in favor of patents held by multinational corporations (South-South Dialogue Conference).

There has been intensive and sustained propaganda on the positive contributions made by GMOs on food security; but little attention given to the inherent risks and hazards of industrial mono-cropping and consumption of GMOs, such as, loss of biodiversity, destruction of live-stock, land grabbing, land and environmental degradation, communal conflicts over land and loss of rights. Therefore, there is an urgent need to present the true and full picture to Nigerians.

Industrial agriculture has no real contribution to national food sovereignty of Nigeria. It is part of the Western development and capitalist economic regime bent Africa remaining a cheap resource continent and market for finished products. More fundamentally, the GMO project is anti-creational. It disturbs, contradicts and destroys the ecosystem. God created every plant and vegetable with its seed in it.

We implore our policy makers to learn from the experience of Burkina Faso and other countries that are rejecting GMOs and their false gospel of agricultural development. We maintain that Nigeria’s food sovereignty lies in investing aggressively in agriculture, empowering small-holder farmers, and practicing agro-ecology that is sustainable and environment-friendly. §

## Cambodia: Human rights abuses

*The government of Cambodia is currently implementing one of the worst crackdowns against the opposition political party and human rights organizations in recent years.*

The ruling party in Cambodia, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), has made aggressive moves in recent months that international groups describe as a campaign to intimidate political opponents before the 2018 election. In March, the UN special human rights envoy for Cambodia, Rhona Smith, said the contentious and at times violent political situation has pushed Cambodia "close to a dangerous tipping point." The situation has continued to deteriorate.

On May 26 the government deployed armed paramilitary forces to the headquarters of the opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP). There they attempted to arrest Kem Sokha, leader of the CNRP, despite his immunity as a lawmaker. Sokha was not present and so escaped arrest. He had been summonsed over an alleged extramarital affair with a hairdresser in a case widely seen as politically-motivated. The U.S. embassy said on its Facebook page that the U.S. government was "deeply concerned" and called on the government of Cambodia to "refrain from using unnecessary force."

This incident comes a few weeks after four human rights workers and an election committee official were detained for allegedly bribing the hairdresser to deny the purported affair with Sokha. The five face 5-10 years in prison if convicted. Amnesty International has identified them as prisoners of conscience.

The government has repeatedly blocked a peaceful "Black Monday" campaign that calls for the release of the five detained rights defenders. As demonstrators dress in black to mourn the state of human rights, police have repeatedly blocked them from gathering. On May 9 and 16, Phnom Penh police detained at least 13 people, including human rights and land activists, holding them for up to 12 hours. Other public actions calling for release of the five have also been repressed. Around the country, groups collecting petition signatures have been subjected to questioning and arrest.

These developments show a marked deterioration of the protection of the rights to freedom of expression, speech and assembly in Cambodia. These freedoms are guaranteed under the Cambodian Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Cambodia is a state party.

In response to this deteriorating human rights situation, Maryknoll missionaries in Cambodia joined 40 other international NGOs in signing a public appeal

to the government of Cambodia to stop human rights abuses. The letter follows:

We, the undersigned international NGOs, recognize the Royal Government of Cambodia's commitment to global agreements and frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We note that the quest for sustainable development is reflected in policy documents such as the 2014-2018 National Strategic Development Plan and the "Rectangular Strategy" of the Royal Government of Cambodia.

We share the commitment and belief that progress in achieving SDGs and other social, economic, environmental or political goals requires strong social systems through which citizens interact with each other and with their government.

Recent events, however, lead us to believe that a number of civil society organizations that promote accountability and transparency have been considered by the government as a threat to the stability of Cambodia.

We believe these organizations make important contributions to human development, and a stable society ready for growth and prosperity. We believe that the international charters to which Cambodia is a signatory (such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) recognize democratic values including the freedom of expression and the right to a fair trial. We also believe that the Constitution of Cambodia similarly provides a framework for protection and respect of rights.

While maintaining a spirit of partnership and cooperation, we appeal to the Royal Government of Cambodia to:

- Promote, protect, and respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of Cambodian people enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenants to which Cambodia is a party.
- Ensure Cambodian citizens are not arrested where their actions have not contravened law and where their actions are the expression of their rights.
- Ensure there is no judicial harassment against Cambodian citizens who are working to protect people's rights.
- Ensure there is space for democratic participation, advancement of human rights, and development processes.§

## Syria: A memoir of a mission of peace

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns intern Maggie Heidepriem contributed to the following review of *Never Can I Write of Damascus: When Syria Became Our Home*, a memoir by Theresa Kubasak and Gabe Huck about their seven-year mission of peaceful presence among the Syrians, Iraqi and Palestinian refugees in Damascus, newly published by Just World Books.

In response to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, teacher Theresa Kubasak and retired publisher Gabe Huck felt called to live in solidarity with the many Iraqis who found refuge in Syria. Responding to that call took them on a seven-year journey of encounter which they describe in wonderful detail in their new memoir, *Never Can I Write of Damascus: When Syria Became Our Home*.

When they first arrived in Syria in 2005, Kubasak and Huck struggled to find a way to offer some form of restitution to the Iraqi refugees forced to flee their country because of the actions of the United States. While learning Arabic and acclimating to their surroundings, they lived in the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus, once home to over 100,000 Palestinians who fled their homeland in 1948.

Through stories, photos, and drawings, their memoir conveys their grief for a place which is now a memory – Yarmouk refugee camp was largely destroyed during fighting between the Syrian army and opposition groups in 2014. The few thousand remaining residents remain under occupation by ISIS forces and have been subjected to starvation and cold winter temperatures with little protection.

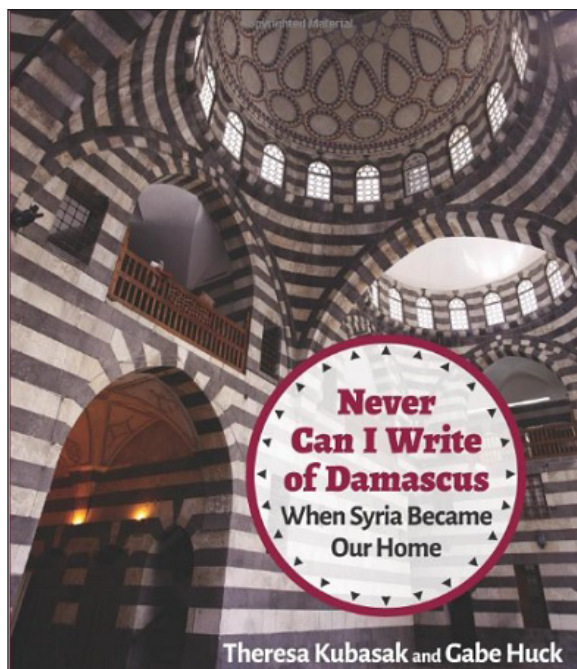
Two years into their mission and after careful discernment, Kubasak and Huck started the Iraqi Student Project in 2007 to prepare young refugees for admission to U.S. colleges. They devoted the next five years to assisting students in navigating the admissions process of American universities, as well as preparing throughout each school year leading up to their departure for college.

Sixty of their “graduates” won admission to colleges all around the U.S. While organizing writing workshops, literature circles, and several other innovative lessons, the couple absorbs the Syrian culture and

offered hope and direction to hundreds of students.

The book includes anecdotes from many Syrians, Iraqis, and Palestinians they encountered, including several pieces written by students for the Iraqi Student Project. They depict the struggles, sorrows, and desires each individual faced. A fourteen-year-old in Damascus writes:

“We felt so much and finally our emotion has spilled out,  
spilled and flowed away to a hidden place.  
Only the good-hearted know where it is.  
We want bread, not blood.  
We want justice, not commands.  
We want peace, not truce.”



Today, many of the Syrians who had graciously welcomed Kubasak and Huck to Damascus are now refugees themselves, and the already displaced Iraqis and Palestinians are refugees twice over. As the civil war in Syria rages into its sixth year, thousands of civilian have died and millions of Syrians are fleeing to neighboring countries in a desperate attempt to seek safety.

Kubasak and Huck offer readers an intimate picture of daily life in the heritage-rich country of Syria in the period just before and after the 2011 eruption

of unrest there. Through big and small actions, they demonstrate what a brave and generous spirit can create. This memoir arrives at just the right moment – as countries around the world are searching for a depth of character that matches the breadth of the needs of the millions of people caught up in the largest humanitarian crisis in recorded history.§

**Faith in action:** *Never Can I Write of Damascus: When Syria Became Our Home* is available for sale at <http://justworldbooks.com>.

# Immigration: Supreme Court deadlocked

*The following article was written by Alfonso Buzzo, Peace Fellow with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.*

Families and thousands of children, many of them unaccompanied, are coming to the U.S. to escape death in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador in the form of sexual exploitation, forced gang conscription, corruption, and impunity. The region's death toll in 2015 tallied nearly 17,500, the highest global homicide rate outside of a war zone. Instead of treating these victims of violence humanely, the Obama Administration emphasizes border security, detention and deportation.

In June the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns was one of more than 200 faith groups that sent a letter to President Obama asking him to stop deportations and provide "Temporary Protected Status" for these people fleeing violence. Now that the Supreme Court ruled 4-4 on *U.S. v. Texas*, this request is more pressing than ever. The deadlocked Supreme Court leaves in place an injunction on President Obama's 2014 executive actions on immigration.

President Obama's two immigration policies – "Expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals" (DACA+) and "Deferred Action for Parents of Americans" (DAPA) – would have granted temporary permission to live and work in the country to more young people who immigrated to the U.S. as children and to undocumented parents of children who are U.S. citizens. The Supreme Court ruling leaves approximately five million people in the shadows of our economy and our communities.

As the leader of the executive branch, President Obama directs how and when raids, detentions, and deportations are deployed. He can make sure that families and communities are kept together by declaring a moratorium on deportations immediately. §

**Faith in action:** Send a letter to President Obama asking him to declare a moratorium on deportations: <http://bit.ly/NotoDeport>.

## Honduras: Berta Cáceres on military "hit list"

*The following is an update on the investigation into the murder of Berta Cáceres in Honduras on March 3.*

Berta Cáceres, the Honduran environmental activist and indigenous leader, appeared on a "hit list" distributed to U.S.-trained Special Forces units of the Honduran military months before her assassination, a former soldier has told *The Guardian* newspaper.

Lists featuring the names and photographs of dozens of social and environmental activists were given to two elite units, with orders to eliminate each target, according to First Sergeant Rodrigo Cruz, 20.

Cruz's unit commander, a 24-year-old lieutenant, deserted rather than comply with the order. Cruz – who asked to be identified by a pseudonym for fear of reprisal – followed suit, and fled to a neighboring country.

"If I went home, they'd kill me. Ten of my former colleagues are missing. I'm 100 percent certain that Berta Cáceres was killed by the army," Cruz told *The Guardian*.

Winner of the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize in 2015 for a campaign against the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam, Cáceres reported death threats to international human rights delegates.

According to Cruz, Cáceres's name appeared on a list given to a military police unit in the Inter-institutional Security Force, which last summer received training from 300 U.S. marines and FBI agents.

Five men have been arrested for her murder, including Maj Mariano Díaz Chávez, an active-duty major in the Honduran army. Díaz is reported to be a graduate of the elite Tesón special operations course which is partly taught by US Special Forces.

Annie Bird, director of Rights and Ecology, which documents human rights abuses in Honduras, said: "Cruz's testimony suggests death squads are targeting political opposition, but the justice system is so broken, and directly controlled by figures implicated in corruption, that there is no one who can credibly investigate."

On June 14, the Berta Cáceres Human Rights Act in Honduras – which would suspend U.S. security aid until human rights violations by security forces cease – was introduced to Congress by Rep. Hank Johnson.

Cáceres's daughter, Bertita Zúñiga, said Cruz's testimony strengthened the family's calls for an independent international investigation to find the intellectual authors.

"This shows us that death squads are operating in the armed forces, which are being used to get rid of people opposing government plans. It shows us that human rights violations are state policy in Honduras." §

**Faith in action:** Ask Congress to support the Berta Cáceres Human Rights Act: <http://bit.ly/BertaAct>.

# Panama: Barro Blanco hydroelectric dam

*The following article was written by Alfonso Buzzo, Peace Fellow with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.*

In May, Generadora del Istmo, the company that owns and operates the Barro Blanco hydroelectric dam in Panama, opened the floodgates and inundated six hectares of indigenous territories. The Panamanian Public Services Authority (ASEP) authorized the flooding.

The indigenous Ngäbe people, directly affected by these actions, have spoken out in resistance and in defense of their sacred land, despite violence and ongoing threats by the Panamanian authorities.

Panama did not sign the International Labor Organization's Convention 169 that requires "free prior and informed consent" from indigenous peoples at any phase of a project that threatens their territories and culture. This leaves indigenous people in Panama vulnerable to displacement from development projects.

In February 2015, the Panamanian government temporarily suspended the construction of the dam after recognizing shortcomings in the agreement with the Ngäbe people. One year later, with the suspension now lifted, construction of the dam is nearly complete and local communities fear illegal forced eviction from their homes.

As derived from the right to property protected under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that Panama has signed and ratified, indigenous people have rights to adequate housing, to possess, use, and freely enjoy their traditional lands and territories, and to not be forcibly removed from them.

Barro Blanco, a project registered under the UN's Clean Development Mechanism, is financed by two European state-owned banks, the German Investment

Corporation and the Netherlands Development Finance Company (FMO), as well as by the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI). CABEI and FMO are also responsible for financing another controversial dam, the Agua Zarca in Honduras.

In March, 2016, Berta Cáceres, the internationally-respected indigenous and environmental rights advocate, was assassinated while leading the Lenca indigenous community in resistance against the construction of the Agua Zarca dam.

"We, the affected communities, have never given our consent to Barro Blanco. This project violates the Panamanian Constitution and our indigenous rights.

ASEP has not warned us about the imminent flooding that will destroy our crops, some of our houses, and kill our livestock," declared Manolo Miranda, spokesperson of the Movimiento 10 de Abril (M10), a group representing indigenous peoples directly affected by the project.

"Panamanian authorities must protect the rights of the Ngäbe people who have not consented to this project," said Alyssa Johl, Senior Attorney at the Center for International Environmental Law. "We urge the Panamanian government to ensure the personal safety and security of the Ngäbe people and otherwise fulfill their human rights obligations. The world is watching."



*A member of the Ngäbe indigenous community paints with traditional materials. Photo available in the public domain via wikimedia commons.*

**Faith in action:** Sign a petition organized by Rainforest Rescue against the impending forced relocation of the indigenous Ngäbe people: <http://bit.ly/29mv7S7>.

# Venezuela: Calling all to the table

*The following reflection about the current political and economic upheaval in Venezuela was written by Lisa Sullivan, a returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner, who continues to live and work in Venezuela.*

For 32 years I have called Venezuela home. Its mountains have given me beauty, its barrios have given me music, its struggles have given me purpose, and its people have given me love.

Its Bolivarian Revolution gave me hope. How could I not feel hope when most of my neighbors that have been historically marginalized were now going to school or getting medical attention?

But today, this is what I see from my porch: neighbors digging frantically in barren, already-harvested potato fields, hoping to find a few overlooked little spuds. *Rastreando*, they call it. It is an act of desperation to find food, because for months, the shelves of the stores have been bare.

This crisis is real, brutal, and threatens the health, well-being and future of too many Venezuelans today, especially those most impoverished.

How did the nation with the world's largest oil reserves come to this? The answer depends on who you ask. The opposition blames Nicolás Maduro, the president of Venezuela since 2013. Maduro blames the US. The press blames socialism. The ruling party blames capitalism. Economists blame price controls. Businesses blame bureaucracy. Everyone blames corruption.

Most would agree, however, that the underlying culprit is a three letter word. Oil – the source of 95 percent of Venezuela's exports. Oil – the cash cow that funds easy, cheap imports. Oil – the export giant that deters domestic production of all other products.

Having traveled extensively in this lush and fertile country, it is difficult to believe that Venezuela imports more than 70 percent of its food. But I shouldn't be surprised. Quite simply, for decades, it has been much cheaper to import food than to produce it.

At least that was the case when oil prices were high. As recently as two years ago, the price of oil was about \$115 per barrel. This February, Venezuelan crude oil plummeted to barely \$23 per barrel. That is only \$3 more than the approximately \$20 cost of extracting it. So, when the profit per barrel of oil goes from \$95 to \$3, it's like your salary going from something like \$50,000 a year to \$1,600. Could you feed your household?

With oil prices crashing, Venezuela can no longer afford to import food. In fact, the food and medicine that do reach Venezuela these days never actually reach the average person, especially the average poor person. Large portions of imported food and medicine are being siphoned off by corrupt businesses, bureaucrats, military, and black-marketers.

Rebuilding domestic agriculture and production is the long-term solution. But this may take years – perhaps decades. Venezuelans are hungry now.

What is to be done?

Dialogue among the government and the opposition is a good start. But it is not enough. The long-term solution to Venezuela's problems must come from all sectors of Venezuela. The vast majority want to see less political rhetoric and more economic action. The currency system must undergo radical change. Impoverished people need guaranteed access to food, but not by subsidizing the product (which ends up in the hands of the corrupt), but subsidizing families.

Unfortunately, the government's response has been anything but optimal. For instance, President Maduro recently signed a decree creating the Strategic Zone of National Development Mining Arch of Orinoco (OMA). The Orinoco belt, an area rich in gold and other minerals, is also the home to indigenous people, fresh water and sensitive ecosystems. As the Washington Office for Latin America has argued, "this decree violates international human right provisions upheld by the national constitution of 1999, such as ILO's 169 convention on the rights of indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent to any development project in their lands."

At the same time, the crisis has birthed numerous creative grassroots initiatives and productive solutions that merit attention. The people of Venezuela are busy. They are busy planting food, using alternative medicine, sharing, developing a barter system, and creating hundreds of products from recycled or locally-sourced renewable sources. These kinds of initiatives may not solve the immediate food crisis but, in the long term, they have the potential to open the door to a new kind of society in which we can all survive and thrive. §

# Sustainable peace: Ending torture

*On June 22-23, members of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns attended the 19th Annual June Torture Survivors Week conference and advocacy day in Washington, D.C., organized by Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC).*

The conference began with keynote speaker Juan Mendez reflecting on his six-year term as UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. He lamented the lack of sufficient funding for his position, which limits him to visiting only one or two countries per year to analyze the treatment of prisoners and publish a report of recommendations for the governments – one of the main functions of his position. Mendez also noted the challenge of only being able to visit countries that extend an invitation to him. This prevents him from investigating governments who may be the worst offenders and, in a sense, punishes those who make a goodwill attempt to improve their treatment of prisoners. In his tenure he has visited Mexico, Brazil, Uruguay, Morocco, Western Sahara, Tajikistan and Georgia, among others. He did not receive responses to requests he made to Iran, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Following Mendez's lecture, a panel composed of Ghanaian political analyst Nii Akuetteh, Ethiopian journalist Simegnish Mengesha, and Sudanese human rights activist and torture survivor Adlan Ahmed Abdelaziz spoke about a range of issues, including U.S. support of African dictators throughout history, essentially condoning torture and inhuman treatment. Mengesha described the Ethiopian government's crackdown of demonstrators in the Oromo region. Abdelaziz spoke about the ongoing conflict in Sudan and suggested that the U.S. government tie sanctions against the Sudan government to human rights violations, not just joint intelligence cooperation.

The afternoon was dedicated to educating the audience about the urgent need to expand the eight asylum offices around the U.S. which process asylum cases. Thousands of applications are filed each year and until recently, asylum seekers waited three or four months from the time they filed the application until having an interview with an officer who either grants asylum or refers the case to immigration court. Largely due to the influx of Central American refugees, the backlog of asylum applications has risen dramatically – from 33,000 to 144,000. Asylum officers are over-

whelmed by the number of “credible fear interviews” and by temporary reassignments to the Middle East as Refugee Corps officers. Survivors are now waiting up to three years for interviews. In the meantime, these individuals often lack stable housing and employment and face the burden of not knowing the fate of separated family members.

As part of TASSC's initiative, participants had the opportunity to put their concern into action by meeting with staff members of Congressional offices on June 23. Survivors shared their personal accounts of abuse and asked for Congressional support. Janel, a man from Cameroon, described being imprisoned and tortured by the government for participating in the Cameroon Renaissance Movement, a nonviolent political party. He was able to flee to the United States and begin the asylum process. Over a year has passed since Janel submitted his application, leaving him fearful for the safety of his family back in Cameroon.

Other survivors shared similar heartbreaking stories to Congressional aides. Together with representatives from the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and other faith-based and civil society groups, they asked Senators to sign Resolution 432, a statement which encourages respect for human rights and democracy in Ethiopia. This resolution could set a precedent for pressuring coun-

tries which receive U.S. aid to uphold human rights at home. Additionally, Senators and Representatives were asked to write letters to the director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Leon Rodriguez, calling his attention to the desperate need to finance approximately 270 more asylum officers this year, as well as to urge the House and Senate appropriations committees to distribute funds for the 25 new judge teams required to meet the demands of the increase in asylum cases. The additional asylum officers and judge teams would drastically reduce the length of time between submission of the asylum application and the interview and eliminate the backlog.

If taken, these actions would bring survivors of torture considerably closer to obtaining justice both in the U.S. and in their home countries. §



## Economic justice: IMF's failed policies

*The following article describes the study "Neoliberalism: Oversold?" published in the June issue of Finance & Development by the International Monetary Fund.*

A new study by three members of the research department of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has stirred some controversy. The study, entitled "Neoliberalism: Oversold?" shows that policies required by the IMF for many countries have actually had negative effects on both countries' economic growth and their ability to address human needs. The authors found that two principal policy recommendations—allowing free movement of capital across borders and austerity policies—have had questionable positive influences and clear negative consequences.

In the late 1970s, the debts of many countries in the global South to banks in the global North exploded after the United States raised its interest rates in an effort to quell rising domestic inflation. Many countries were unable to maintain their debt payments and the "international debt crisis" was born. In response, the IMF bought much of the debt and guaranteed the indebted countries' payments. In exchange, the IMF demanded political and economic reforms known as "structural adjustment programs." Economic theory suggested that these policy changes would improve economic performance, but this study shows that the negative effects of these policies have been underestimated.

One of the central policy changes required of most countries was to open national markets, especially financial markets, to international competition. The theory was that this would increase efficiencies and economic output. Yet the study found that "Although growth benefits are uncertain, costs in terms of increased economic volatility and crisis frequency seem more evident." The authors add, "In addition to raising the odds of a crash, financial openness has distributional effects, appreciably raising inequality."

The other central policy requirement was "fiscal consolidation," more popularly known as austerity measures—cutting back on government spending through a combination of privatization of public services, increasing taxes and/or lowering government spending in all areas except debt payments. The authors write, "the notion that fiscal consolidations can be expansionary (that is, raise output and employment), in part by raising private sector confidence and investment, has been championed by [various economists]."

However, in practice, episodes of fiscal consoli-

dation have been followed, on average, by reductions rather than by expansions in economic output. On average, a consolidation of one percent of GDP increases the long-term unemployment rate by 0.6 percentage points and raises by 1.5 percent within five years the Gini measure of income inequality.

Increased inequality not only results in poorer living conditions for many, but also in decreased economic growth—the very goal of the IMF. As the authors explain, "Since both openness and austerity are associated with increasing inequality, this distributional effect sets up an adverse feedback loop... [as] there is now strong evidence that inequality can significantly lower both the level and the durability of growth."

Indeed, as the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and others have argued the negative effects of these policies outweigh any predicted benefits. As Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research has documented, these policies have had significant negative effects on economic growth and quality of life around the world, especially in low and middle-income countries.

Comparing three 20-year periods (1980-2000, when neoliberal policies were forced on many countries through IMF structural adjustment programs and the two-decade periods before and after when alternative economic policies were more common), Weisbrot shows that in Latin America, GDP growth per capita averaged 3.3 percent per year from 1960-1980, plummeted to 0.3 percent during the "lost decades" of 1980-2000 and increased in the following twenty years to 1.9 percent annually.

Weisbrot explains, "the long-term slowdown in growth experienced by the vast majority of developing countries during the post-1980 era was associated with a noticeable decline in the rate of progress on health indicators, including life expectancy and adult, child, and infant mortality."

Unfortunately, though the IMF has become more open to publishing alternative opinions like this, it is unlikely to result in any change in policy. The U.S. retains its veto on important votes and industrialized countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) form a voting bloc that holds a significant majority of the votes. §

# UN: World Humanitarian Summit

*On May 22-23 the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit took place in Istanbul, Turkey.*

2015 was a remarkable year for international diplomacy and multilateralism, culminating in two major compacts on climate change and the global development agenda: the Paris climate agreement and the UN sustainable development goals. In 2016, international efforts focus on an area that will likely prove even more contentious and where the international system is fraying badly under the weight of current crises: the system of providing humanitarian relief in response to both man-made and natural disasters.

The World Humanitarian Summit was notable for its attempt at inclusion. Nearly 9,000 people – aid workers, civil society professionals, small and large CEOs and NGOs, celebrities and state leaders, including Angela Merkel – attended. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon called the summit a “turning point” in a longer process of overhauling the international community’s woefully inadequate response to humanitarian crises – but that will depend on following through on the nearly 3,000 commitments made at the conference.

To prepare for the World Humanitarian Summit, organizers consulted with more than 23,000 stakeholders – heads of state and government, representatives of affected communities, aid organizations, global opinion leaders, private sector leaders and others from 151 countries – in what some called an 18-month conversation. Their report on the consultation process, “Restoring Humanity: Global Voices Calling for Action,” champions a vision of a world whose “fundamental humanity is re-affirmed and restored, where no one confronted by crises dies who can be saved,” – in essence, a world that puts people and principles at the heart of humanitarianism. This inclusive consultation process resulted in five major areas for action, each presenting an ambitious goal for future humanitarian action: dignity, safety, resilience, partnership, finance.

The lengthy consultative process uncovered many tensions and opposing views. Unlike the UN-sponsored meetings on climate change and the sustainable development goals, the World Humanitarian Summit was not an intergovernmental meeting with a formal negotiation process between UN member states. Some felt the process of multi-stakeholder participation led to mixed expectations about what the summit would achieve. Would it be just a feedback mechanism for voicing concerns about humanitarian interventions? How would the summit engage with those who are

tasked with implementing its recommendations?

Another issue that produced tensions was the debate over humanitarian values and what humanitarian action means and how it is related to development assistance. Throughout the consultation process some pushed to remove the distinction between humanitarian and development assistance. This irked some humanitarians.

After the consultation period, Ki Moon issued a preparatory document entitled “One Humanity: Shared Responsibility,” in which he put forth an eloquent and compelling account of the current challenges to humanity arising out of the many humanitarian disasters of our present time. For Ki Moon terror and the deliberate brutalization of women and children, aerial bombardments and indiscriminate shelling of residential neighborhoods, those fleeing war and destruction and millions on the move in search of a better life are all too familiar realities for large sections of humanity. The present international humanitarian aid system is buckling under the pressure from these realities. The world needs a new blueprint.

In late May the 9,000 participants of the World Humanitarian Summit debated the proposals made by Ban Ki Moon in “One Humanity.” Ki Moon calls for the articulation of a vision for change that is grounded in the key value that unites us: our common humanity. He outlines in detail certain core responsibilities critical to delivering a better kind of humanitarian service for humanity: (a) political leadership to prevent and end conflicts; (b) uphold the norms that safeguard humanity; (c) leave no one behind; (d) change people’s lives – from delivering aid to ending need; and (e) invest in humanity. In the final documents of the summit each core responsibility is further defined in terms of core commitments.

In a summary of the summit’s proposals entitled “The Chair’s Summary” the secretary-general declared that “the participants have made it emphatically clear that humanitarian assistance alone can neither adequately address nor sustainably reduce the needs of over 130 million of the world’s most vulnerable people. A new and coherent approach is required based on addressing root causes, increasing political diplomacy for prevention of conflict resolution, and bringing humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts together.”§

# UN: New plan for ending HIV/AIDS epidemic

*Following the UN civil society hearing on ending HIV/AIDS in April, ministers, heads of governments, and civil society representatives gathered in June for a UN High Level Meeting on ending HIV/AIDS.*

On June 8, member states at the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Ending AIDS adopted the “Political Declaration on Ending AIDS.” The document is a blueprint that will guide action to accelerate ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2030.

“The decisions made here,” Michel Sidibe, executive director of UNAIDS said, “including the commitment to zero new HIV infections, zero AIDS-related deaths and zero discrimination, will provide the springboard for the implementation of an innovative, evidence-informed and socially just agenda that will end the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2030.”

To achieve these goals, however, specific time-bound targets named in the declaration must be reached by 2020. While everyone present was in accord that eliminating HIV/AIDS from human life is a priority, reservations still remain around certain terminology. HIV has cultural, religious, and legal implications because of its sexual mode of transmission which touches on not only cultural mores but also legal statutes.

As we closely examine the concerns expressed in the declaration, we believe it necessary to engage the question about the value of human life in a world plagued by HIV/AIDS. Affirming life means uniting and sharing resources to end the world’s worst global epidemic, that which Nelson Mandela once described as “worse than a war.” To end the suffering of those who have HIV/AIDS, we need to change attitudes that stigmatize and discriminate against those affected by the disease.

Loyce Maturu, a young woman from Zimbabwe who has lived with HIV/AIDS most of her life, spoke about her experience with those present in the General Assembly. Loyce’s story is like that of many orphans and young people who, after losing their parents, become victims to verbal as well as physical abuse and suffer from feelings of hopelessness and even suicidal tendencies.

Loyce’s experience in Zimbabwe is one example of the stigmatization, discrimination, violence, and abuse surrounding the HIV/AIDS epidemic that are enabled when a society reacts with fear and a legal system safeguards tradition, cultural norms, and religious beliefs above its duty to protect the integrity of human life. This is a worldwide phenomenon that those living with HIV/AIDS bear when others know their status. Unless affected people are fortunate enough to find a listening ear, as Loyce did, they may lose hope.

The declaration raises concerns about the increasing rates of infections in some regions, especially sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Infection rates are high in these regions, especially among women and girls of childbearing age. Middle and low income countries also have high incidences of HIV infections that could worsen if the epidemic continues.

HIV/AIDS is a social disease that requires a joint effort. People of faith have cared for those affected by HIV and continue to do so in the spirit of Christ who said, “I desire mercy not sacrifice” (Mt9:13). This attitude challenges those legal frameworks that maintain the status quo while neglecting to protect the integrity of the human person.

Small beginnings can result in large achievements in the same way that Maryknoll Sister Kathleen Barbee’s project has


done for AIDS orphans in Zimbabwe. The Mavambo (Genesis) project has brought new life for children orphaned by AIDS, some of whom themselves live with HIV/AIDS and would not have had the chance to return to school if not for Sister Kathleen’s project. The project does not violate any cultural or religious norms and it offers the children hope for full lives. §

**Faith in action:** Watch a video of an interview with Maryknoll Sister Kathleen Barbee about her ongoing work helping children with HIV/AIDS in Africa: <https://youtu.be/R3-COyTCvo0>.



*Maryknoll Sister Kathleen Barbee with children in Zimbabwe. Photo courtesy of the Maryknoll Sisters.*

## Resources

- 1) **Nonviolence and Just Peace conference final statement:** All individuals and organizations are invited to endorse "An appeal to the Catholic church to re-commit to the centrality of Gospel nonviolence." Add your name at: <http://bit.ly/NVJustPeace2016>.
- 2) **Pax Christi USA National Gathering 2016:** Plan now to attend the national gathering of Pax Christi USA in Linthicum, MD, **August 12-14**. The theme will be "Building the Beloved Community: Addressing the Signs of the Times with Bold Conversations Leading to Transformative Actions." Speakers include Lisa Sharon Harper, Chief Church Engagement Officer for Sojourners, Dr. Adrienne L. Hollis, PhD, Esquire, Director of Federal Policy and Kerene Taylor, Federal Policy Associate for WE ACT for Environmental Justice, and Rev. Rocco Puopolo, S.X. of Global Youth Mission Services, Xaverian Missionaries. Learn more and register at: <https://paxchristiusa.org/programs/nationalgathering2016/>.
 
- 3) **International Financial Institutions and Human Rights:** Organizations are invited to sign on to this joint statement by over one hundred civil society groups (including MOGC) calling on international financial institutions to respect human rights and to do everything within their powers to support an enabling environment for public participation in which people are empowered to engage in crafting their own development agendas and in holding their governments, donors, businesses, and other actors to account. [http://rightsindevelopment.org/?page\\_id=4691](http://rightsindevelopment.org/?page_id=4691).
- 4) **World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation:** Last year, Pope Francis announced that the Catholic Church would join the Orthodox Church in marking the prayer day on **September 1** each year. Learn more at: <https://seasonofcreation.info/> Find prayer resources at: <http://catholicclimate-movement.global/>.
- 5) **"Global Trends":** Read the new report by the UN High Commission on Refugees on the global migration crisis: <http://bit.ly/UNHCRGlobalTrends>.
- 6) **An NGO response to the periodic report of the U.S. to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child:** Read this report by ECPAT-USA concerning the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights Of The Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography: <http://www.ecpatusa.org/2016-alternative-report/>.
- 7) **First thematic report from IPES-Food:** Read this new report entitled "From Uniformity to Diversity: A paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems." <http://www.ipes-food.org/reports>.
- 8) **Five key takeaways from the TTIP leak for food and farming systems:** The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy offers this six-page analysis of the proposals raised in the TTIP leak. Download the report at: <http://bit.ly/298MTpI>.
- 9) **Venezuelan Politics and Human Rights:** Read and follow this blog hosted by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA). It is a unique resource for journalists, policymakers, scholars, activists and others interested in understanding Venezuelan politics and human rights. <http://venezuelablog.tumblr.com/>



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