



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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

**March–April 2016
Vol. 41, No. 2**

Laudato Si' – A prophetic challenge.....	3
Global migration crisis: Update from UN.....	4
Trade: WTO rules against climate action.....	5
Trade: Customs bill and human trafficking.....	6
Nuclear disarmament and the Francis factor.....	7
Mexico: Pope Francis calls for open hearts.....	8
Guatemala: Indigenous peoples' rights.....	9
Guatemala: Political transition and protests.....	10
El Salvador: Breakthrough in case of Jesuit martyrs.....	11
Bolivia: End of the Evo era.....	12
Brazil: Update on the mining dam disaster.....	13
Honduras: ¡Berta Cáceres presente!.....	14
Nepal: One year after the earthquake	14
Philippines: First environment summit.....	15
Israel/Palestine: Life in a Palestinian village	16
Africa: U.S. launches trade policy review.....	17
Africa: A continent on the rise	18
Resources	19

Published by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: Peace, Social Justice & Integrity of Creation

200 New York Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001

Phone: (202)832-1780 Fax: (202)832-5195

ogc@maryknoll.org www.maryknollogc.org

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns:
Peace, Social Justice and the Integrity of Creation
<http://www.maryknollogc.org>

Maryknoll Sisters Maryknoll Lay Missioners Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers

Gerry Lee, director..... glee@maryknoll.org
 Anna Engelmann..... aengelmann@maryknoll.org
 Susan Gunn..... sgunn@maryknoll.org
 Dave Kane..... dglobalcitizenkane@gmail.com
 Chloe Schwabe..... cschwabe@maryknoll.org
 Sr. Veronica Schweyen, MM..... vschweyen@maryknoll.org
 Fr. Dave Schwinghamer, MM..... dschwinghamer@gmail.com
 Sr. Elizabeth Zwareva, MM..... ezwareva@mksisters.org

MOGC Washington
 200 New York Ave., N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20001
 (202)832-1780
 ogc@maryknoll.org

MOGC Maryknoll NY
 P.O. Box 311
 Maryknoll, NY 10545-0311
 (914)941-7575
 ogc@maryknoll.org

MOGC UN Office
 777 First Ave., 10th Fl.
 New York, NY 10115
 (212)973-9551

To contribute to *NewsNotes*, please contact Susan Gunn at sgunn@maryknoll.org.

Take action - Email, call, fax or write U.S. decision makers

President Barack Obama
 The White House
 Washington, D.C. 20500
 www.whitehouse.gov

Ashton Carter
 Secretary of Defense
 The Pentagon
 Washington, D.C. 20301
 (703) 695-5261 phone
 www.defenselink.mil

Jim Yong Kim
 President
 World Bank Group
 1818 H Street, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20433
 www.worldbank.org

Vice President Joe Biden
 The White House
 Washington, D.C. 20500
 vice_president@whitehouse.gov

Loretta Lynch
 Attorney General
 U.S. Department of Justice
 Washington, D.C. 20530
 (202)353-1555 phone
 AskDOJ@usdoj.gov
 www.justice.gov

Christine Lagarde
 Managing Director
 International Monetary Fund
 700 19th Street, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20431
 www.imf.org

White House Comment Desk
 (202) 456-1111 phone
 (202) 456-2461 fax

John Kerry
 Secretary of State
 2201 C Street, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20520
 (202) 647-6575 phone
 (202) 647-2283 fax
 www.state.gov

Samantha Power
 U.S. Representative to UN
 799 United Nations Plaza
 New York, NY 10017
 (212) 415-4000 phone
 www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov

Current status of bills:
<http://thomas.loc.gov>

Capitol switchboard:
 (202) 224-3121

www.congress.gov

Laudato Si' – A prophetic challenge

On February 28, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns brought Columban Father Sean McDonagh to the Maryknoll Mission Center in New York, to speak at an event celebrating the release of Fr. McDonagh's Orbis book, "On Care for Our Common Home, *Laudato Si'*: The Encyclical of Pope Francis on the Environment."

Father Sean McDonagh, Irish Columban priest and eco-theologian, began his environmental activism as a missionary in the Philippines in the 1970s, where he witnessed the devastating deforestation of indigenous lands in Mindanao. At an event at Maryknoll celebrating his new book published by ORBIS, Fr. McDonagh spoke of both the continuity of *Laudato Si'* with the social doctrine of the Church and the surprising newness of Pope Francis' vision.

In the encyclical, Francis quotes from Pope Benedict and St. John Paul II and other predecessors, clearly demonstrating that concern for the earth and environmental degradation has been part of the social teaching of the Church for decades. Fr. McDonagh spoke about two additional aspects of *Laudato Si'* that represent significant new teaching by Pope Francis: First, climate change and destruction of nature is not only an urgent concern but a moral imperative. Francis says that indeed, it is a sin that "the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth." (*Laudato Si'* 21)

Fr. McDonagh said another significant new teaching in *Laudato Si'* is the Earth and its creatures have "intrinsic value in themselves independent of their usefulness" (140). The view of humankind's dominion over creation for our use (and abuse) is a mistaken reading of sacred scripture. In his book, Fr. McDonagh writes:

"In many ways *Laudato Si'* is an attempt to redefine the relationship between humans and the rest of creation, so that we can soon reach a point where the basic needs of all humans will be met in a way that does not endanger the rest of creation or irreversibly damage it . . . He presents the earth as a sister 'who now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with

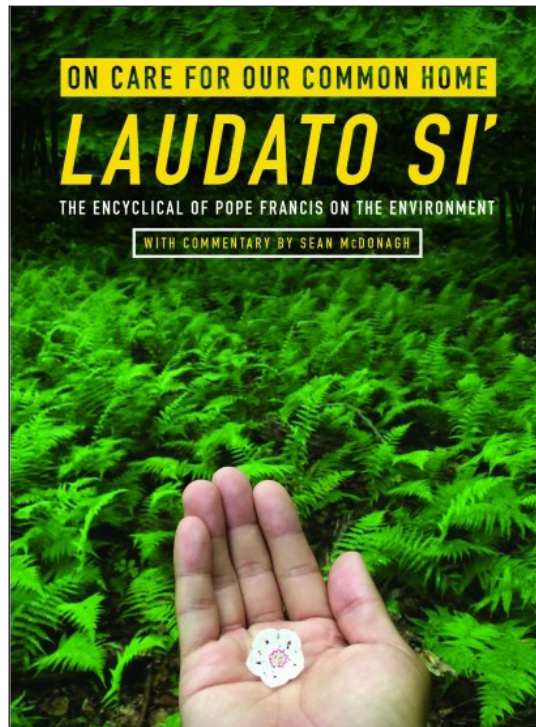
which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.' (*Laudato Si'* 2)"

Fr. McDonagh sees this encyclical as the first attempt to capture the full extent of the modern ecological crisis and the urgency to reverse course: "Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth." (*Laudato Si'* 161) "These are certainly very strong words from a pope," Fr. McDonagh wrote. "Hopefully, they will arouse Catholics, people of other faiths, and people of none to begin the daunting task of protecting our planet and caring for the poor."

"I began these reflections by stating that *Laudato Si'* was one of the most important documents to come from Rome since the beginning of modern Catholic social teaching at the end of the nineteenth century," Fr. McDonagh writes in his book. "Pope Francis' mission in writing the encyclical was to ensure that every human being can live in dignity and peace, with his or her basic needs met while, at the same time, protecting planet Earth. If Pope Francis' encyclical encourages and helps sustain this process,

the outcome will be a great victory for humans, for other creatures, and for the planet itself. If, however, the invitation to be part of this new world fails and humans continue with the exploitative behavior that they have shown in recent years, it will be tragic for humans, for other creatures, and for the planet. The stakes are very high. In fact, they could not be higher!" §

Faith in action: "On Care for Our Common Home, *Laudato Si'*: The Encyclical of Pope Francis on the Environment with Commentary by Sean McDonagh" is available for sale at www.orbisbooks.com



Global migration crisis: Update from UN

The following article was written by Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns staff member Sr. Claris Zwareva. 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.

The United Nations estimates that there are more than 60 million displaced people around the world, the largest number since the World War II era and since the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees agency (UNHCR) came into being. If refugees and migrants formed one country they would be the 24th largest country in the world. The UNHCR 2014 annual report refers to them as “a nation of the displaced.”

Many organizations including the Maryknoll Sisters, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, and Maryknoll Lay Missioners are helping refugees and migrants around the world. People are forcibly displaced from their homes mainly due to conflict, war, persecution, and disasters exacerbated by climate change. All migrants suffer tremendous difficulties, but women, children, and the elderly are most vulnerable to being subject to human trafficking, forced labor, and exploitation.

Aware of the dire conditions that refugees and migrants face along the way and at their destination, the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI-NGO) hosted a panel discussion in February to discuss the refugee crisis and to rethink and strengthen the response. Of the almost 40 million refugees registered with UNHCR, 51 percent are children under the age of 18 who find themselves deprived of their right to education. Lack of education for children impairs progress toward sustainable development and impedes building capacities in communities. Having lost everything that they ever owned, refugees live with feelings of up-rootedness, emptiness, and lack of identity.

The Syrian refugee crisis is the biggest humanitarian emergency that the United Nations is responding to today. More than 4.6 million people have fled Syria and a staggering 7.4 million are internally displaced. A

drought lasting more than five years has wreaked havoc in a country weakened by strife.

During the panel discussion, the UNHCR reported on its work in 120 countries partnering with nongovernmental organizations as well as with governments in addressing the needs of refugees and migrants. They presented a video of refugees and migrants, including people from Iraq, Syria, Myanmar, the Philippines, Somalia, and Afghanistan. Fear, desperation, and a deep longing for security was inscribed on their somber faces. You can watch the video online at <https://vimeo.com/140171048>. The panel also included testimony from refugees and representatives from nongovernmental organizations with experience working with refugees that reminded participants that we all have a duty to help.

The UN Secretary General will host a high-level summit on the crisis in September. The goal is to ensure that migrants and refugees benefit from the commitments member states made in

the 2030 sustainable development agenda – to leave no one behind. Member states are also expected to reaffirm their commitment to fully implement the 1951 Refugee Convention, including the principle of non-refoulement. The concept of non-refoulement prohibits member states from returning a refugee or asylum seeker to territories where there is a risk to his or her life or freedom on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

When given the opportunity to respond to the panelists, a representative of a civil society organization reminded us all that refugees, migrants and asylum seekers are our brothers and sisters; and all visitors to the United Nations are greeted by a mosaic based on a work by American artist Norman Rockwell entitled “Golden Rule.” The art work depicts people of different nationalities standing together with the words “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” inscribed on the surface. §



“Refugees welcome” graffiti in Dresden, February, 2016. Photo by Flickr/Denis Bocquet and licensed in the creative commons 2.0.

Trade: WTO rules against climate action

The following article examines the World Trade Organization's recent ruling against India's national solar mission, a major initiative to promote ecologically sustainable growth while addressing India's energy security challenges.

On February 24, the World Trade Organization (WTO) ruled against the government of India's national solar mission, an initiative designed to reduce the cost of solar power generation in the country. The United States brought the complaint forward despite seeming out of step with the Obama Administration's climate policy, especially as we approach the likely ratification of the Paris climate agreement in April. In fact, India's justification for the initiative is that it is a critical piece to meeting their commitment to cut carbon emissions as part of the United Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) climate agreement.

According to Ben Beachy at the Sierra Club, since the program began in 2010, India has gone from nearly no solar energy capacity to become one of the world's fastest growing solar energy producers. The total capacity of India's installed solar power projects reached 5,000 megawatts in February and is projected to reach 100,000 megawatts by 2022. Solar companies have been flocking to India to join the program and meet the requirement that they use solar components produced domestically. The WTO suit brought by the U.S. was against the "buy local" preference in the law.

The ruling raises questions about whether U.S.

state-level efforts to create renewable energy programs and green jobs under the Clean Power Plan could also be at risk for a counter suit by India or a suit from other nations under the WTO. The ruling was cited under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). It essentially permits countries to bring suits based on antiquated WTO rules that are out of step with the global effort to address climate change. It also jeopardizes preferences for state or local workers or goods.

Similar language limiting "buy-local" preferences is included in the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement. If the TPP is enacted, we may see more conflicts between clean energy programs and trade. India has already started asking the U.S. to justify other state-based renewable energy projects such as Michigan's Clean, Renewable, and Efficient Energy Act, which gives preference to Michigan manufacturers, and Los Angeles' Solar Incentive Program, which offers incentives for the production of renewable energy and local solar energy job creation.

Over multiple decades we have seen incidences of trade laws trumping efforts to protect and improve the common good. As the U.S.

Congress and other nations' legislatures consider improving the TPP, they will also need to consider whether they want to protect and grow local jobs for a clean energy future. §



Small-scale solar panels at the organic Nallayan (Good Shepherd) Farm in India's southernmost state of Tamil Nadu provide energy for water pumps, lights, and other applications. Photo: Flickr/PWRDF and licensed in the creative commons 2.0.

Trade: Customs bill and human trafficking

The following article details how the customs and trade enforcement bill recently signed by President Obama stymies progress to combat human trafficking, climate change, and occupied territories.

At the end of February, President Obama signed the customs and trade enforcement bill that had languished in Congress since this summer's politically charged vote over a package of trade legislation known as "Fast Track."

A positive amendment included in the customs bill closes an 80-year loophole that allowed goods made with trafficked and slave labor to be imported into the United States. The Tariff Act of 1930 prohibits the importation of goods made with forced, child, or prison labor. However, a loophole in the 1930 law allowed companies to import slave-made goods if producers in the United States couldn't meet consumer demand. This has allowed slave-labor cocoa, cotton, and shrimp to be sold in stores across the United States.

Despite the long-overdue victory, the customs bill includes an amendment that weakens other strong anti-trafficking language in the Fast Track legislation. The "No Fast Track for Human Traffickers" amendment would have prohibited Fast Track trade privileges for any "Tier 3" country in the State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons report. Tier 3 status indicates that a country has serious human trafficking problems and is not making significant efforts to fight the scourge of modern-day slavery. The new language in the customs bill allows the president to write a letter and request a waiver for a Tier 3 country to participate in a fast-tracked trade deal.

This is particularly relevant to the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement. When the "No Fast Track for Human Traffickers" amendment unanimously passed the Senate Finance Committee last Spring, senators did not realize that Malaysia, one of 12 countries in the TPP, was on the State Department's Tier 3 watch list. When legislators were unable to remove the amendment from the Senate's bill to authorize the TPP, they included a watered down version of the anti-human trafficking amendment in the House customs bill.

Also, when the State Department released its Trafficking in Persons report for 2015, they upgraded Malaysia to a Tier 2 status, removing any controversy over its participation in the TPP. Human rights and faith advocates widely criticized the report as being politically motivated to ensure Malaysia's participation in the trade

agreement. The TPP is also criticized for being a docking agreement, meaning that other countries can join including Thailand, which is also ranked as Tier 3.

Unfortunately, the customs bill contains other poison pills that the Republican-controlled House wanted in the Fast Track trade bill passed last summer. While the White House says the customs bill was meant to strengthen trade enforcement rules, it actually allowed legislators to further weaken environmental and social policies in Fast Track. The Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment sent a letter to members of Congress asking them to oppose the rollbacks to environmental, immigration, and human rights policies.

Another poison pill prevents Fast Track trade authority with countries that have policies permitting boycott, divestment, or sanctions (BDS) against Israel. This past summer, faith groups, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, sent a letter to the White House to raise concerns about the BDS amendment because it implies support of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory. Inclusion of the anti-BDS amendment condones Israel's violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention's prohibition against a nation transferring its civilians into occupied territory. Language that refers to the occupied Palestinian territories as "Israeli-controlled territories" changes nearly 50 years of U.S. foreign policy without discussion, and ultimately threatens the peace and security of the Israeli as well as the Palestinian people. §

Faith in action: The Washington Interfaith Staff Community Working Group on Human Trafficking offers a Interfaith Trafficking Toolkit for several faith traditions, including prayers, scriptures, statements, fact sheets, and ideas for local faith communities to take action. Download the Interfaith Trafficking Toolkit at <http://bit.ly/2016InterfaithTraffickingToolkit>.

The Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking has embarked on a national postcard campaign against human trafficking in our seafood supply chains. Send postcards to Costco and StarKist urging vigilance to ensure that the seafood we eat is not tainted by slave labor. <http://bit.ly/LentenPostcardCampaign>.

Nuclear disarmament and the Francis factor

Since the beginning of his papacy three years ago, Pope Francis has repeatedly named nuclear disarmament as a major goal, alongside addressing climate change and welcoming migrants. All three issues are essential to Francis' vision expressed in Laudato Si', for a "culture of care which permeates all of society."

In the months leading up to and after his speech to the United Nations general assembly in September, Pope Francis has strongly advocated for a renewal of efforts for a world without nuclear weapons. This is despite the belief by many officials of Western governments and non-governmental organizations that disarmament and non-proliferation advocacy was a relic of the past.

In December 2014, the Vatican submitted a paper calling for total nuclear disarmament to the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. On Easter Sunday 2015, Pope Francis publicly prayed that the prospective multi-nation deal to halt Iran's nuclear weapons program would be "a definitive step toward a more secure and fraternal world." And finally, in September, the pope issued a call to action in his speech to the United Nations, especially as that event happened to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's historic UN speech calling for "never again war, never again war."

"An ethics and a law based on the threat of mutual destruction – and possibly the destruction of all mankind – are self-contradictory and an affront to the entire framework of the United Nations, which would end up as 'nations united by fear and distrust,'" the pope said in his speech to the UN general assembly. "There is urgent need to work for a world free of nuclear weapons, in full application of the non-proliferation Treaty, in letter and spirit, with the goal of a complete prohibition of these weapons."

A few weeks after Pope Francis' speech to the UN and the signing of the Iran nuclear agreement, the UN established the "UN working group on nuclear disarmament," an open-ended working group to address concrete effective legal measures, provisions, and norms that will need to be concluded to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons.

Progress has continued in 2016:

In January, Pope Francis raised the issue again in his speech to the Vatican's diplomatic corps: "[The Iran nuclear deal] represents for the entire international community an important achievement; it reflects a powerful collective realization of the grave responsibility incumbent on individuals and nations to protect creation, to promote a 'culture of care which permeates all of soci-

ety.' It is now essential that those commitments prove more than simply a good intention, but rather a genuine duty incumbent on all states to do whatever is needed to safeguard our beloved earth for the sake of all mankind, especially generations yet to come."

On January 28, in a surprising reversal of policy, Japan agreed to join the UN working group on nuclear disarmament, even though Japan still does not support a treaty banning weapons of mass destruction. The first session of the working group was held in Geneva in February, with two more sessions scheduled for May and August. The group plans to present a recommendation on nuclear disarmament at a meeting of the U.N. General Assembly in October.

Another surprise came in February when the U.S. government declassified the fact that the United States stored nuclear weapons on Okinawa during the Cold War. Although suspected for decades, the subject has been controversial because Japan's leaders and U.S. officials consistently denied the presence of nuclear weapons on Japanese territory. It became a "known secret" in 2010 when the government of Japan admitted that previous administrations had lied to the public and confirmed the existence of secret Cold War-era agreements allowing the U.S. to bring nuclear weapons into the country in violation of Japan's non-nuclear policies.

A strange twist in the declassification is the existence of U.S. Air Force photographs of nuclear weapons on Okinawa that have been publicly available for over 25 years. The National Security Archive of George Washington University posted the first formally declassified document, along with several of the photos originally released in 1990, which had gone unnoticed until now.

Looking forward, we continue to advocate for a halt to the construction of naval base to host nuclear submarines on Jeju Island in South Korea. And we support the Smarter Approach to Nuclear Expenditures (SANE) Act, a bill that would scale down, delay, or cancel a variety of obsolete U.S. nuclear weapons programs. §

Faith in action: Ask Congress to support the SANE Act by using this form created by Peace Action. <http://bit.ly/SANEAct>

Mexico: Pope Francis calls for open hearts

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

In February, Pope Francis completed a six-day pastoral visit to Mexico. With five key moments, the pope addressed the full spectrum of Mexican society and delivered a clear moral message about corruption and poverty, violence, and migration that transcends national boundaries and speaks to the whole world.

First, he admonished both the government and the Catholic clergy on issues of corruption and systemic poverty. President Enrique Peña Nieto, who remains deeply unpopular over his mishandling of the drug violence and failures in tackling corruption, extended an official state welcome to Pope Francis at the National Palace. Francis spoke candidly to government officials there, criticized them for serving their own needs over the needs of the majority of Mexican people.

"Experience teaches us that each time we seek the path of privileges or benefits for a few to the detriment of the good of all, sooner or later the life of society becomes a fertile soil for corruption, drug trade, exclusion of different cultures, violence and also human trafficking, kidnapping and death, bringing suffering and slowing down development," the pope said.

Francis was equally critical when he spoke to Catholic clergy gathered at the National Cathedral. "Do not allow yourselves to be corrupted by trivial materialism or by the seductive illusion of underhanded agreements," he said. "Do not place your faith in the chariots and horses of today's Pharaohs, for our strength is in the pillar of fire which divides the sea in two, without much fanfare."

Second, he addressed two forms of violence: the long-standing systemic violence in the Church toward indigenous communities, and the violence by organized crime and drug trafficking, especially toward the youth. In Chiapas, one of Mexico's poorest and predominately indigenous states, Francis celebrated Mass with tens of thousands of Mexico's indigenous people. He implemented his new decree authorizing the use of indigenous languages in liturgy by including readings, prayers, and hymns in the three main indigenous languages of Chiapas: Tzeltal, Tzotzil and Chol, which are

spoken by just over a million people. He repeated his apology first offered in Bolivia last year: "Some have considered your values, culture and traditions to be inferior," he said. "Others, intoxicated by power, money and market trends, have stolen your lands or contaminated them. Forgive me. Today's world, ravaged as it is by a throwaway culture, needs you!"

In Michoacán, the most violent state in Mexico, Francis addressed the violence by organized crime and the drug trade. He spoke directly to young people, imploring them to resist the allure of easy money by joining the drug trade. He continued with remarks addressed to Mexican authorities, criticizing them for not providing young people with employment or basic services,

pushing them toward work in the drug trade. "It is hard to feel the wealth of a nation when there are no opportunities for dignified work, no possibilities for study or advancement, when you feel your rights are being trampled on, which then leads you to extreme situations," he said.

Third, he expressed solidarity with migrants by celebrating Mass alongside the border fence that divides Juarez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas. In his homily, he acknowledged the thousands of migrants who have died trying to reach the United States, and he called on

world leaders to care for the more than 60 million migrants around the world. He said they should measure this tragic global phenomenon not by numbers and statistics, but by names and stories and families, and that those running from danger should not be criminalized. "They are 'cannon fodder,' persecuted and threatened when they try to flee the spiral of violence and the hell of drugs," he said. "Let us together ask our God for the gift of conversion, the gift of tears, let us ask him to give us open hearts like the Ninevites, open to his call heard in the suffering faces of countless men and women. No more death! No more exploitation! There is still time to change, there is still a way out and a chance, time to implore the mercy of God." §



Pope Francis joined thousands of Mexico's indigenous people in celebrating Mass in three languages native to them on February 15. Photo: Flickr/Marko Vombergar/ALETE-IA, and licensed in the creative commons 2.0.

Guatemala: Indigenous peoples' rights

In February, Maryknoll Sister Ann Braudis joined fellow Maryknoll Sister Eva Canales in Guatemala to investigate human and land rights violations perpetrated against poor and indigenous people. The following article was writing by Sister Ann.

The investigation by Maryknoll Sisters of human and land rights violations perpetrated against poor and indigenous people of Guatemala is premised on the understanding that the Maryknoll Sisters' future-oriented vision of "One Earth Community" requires work for environmental accountability and economic justice today. At the outset of the investigation, we hoped to see what was happening, listen to the people and express solidarity with them.

In December 2015, the U.S. Congress appropriated 750 million dollars for the Alliance for Prosperity, a plan to promote development and peace in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. The aid package is intended to stem the flow of undocumented migrants and unaccompanied children from these three countries to the U.S. by improving the quality of life at home.

However, the plan neglects to answer the question: *What kind of development do the people need and want?* This question is of exceptional importance to the indigenous people of Guatemala, a plurinational state that claims to respect the rights of indigenous people, including the universal right to free, prior, and informed consent in the face of development projects that affect the environment and their ancestral domain.

According to Claudia Samayoa, a Maryknoll Affiliate and Guatemalan human rights advocate, there are differing understandings of development for rural Guatemala where the majority of indigenous people live:

One understanding is that people need educational centers, health centers, a justice system to process land claims and other legal issues, and credit to facilitate investment in local projects. These services are guaranteed by the constitution but due to old style politics, rural poverty and a sense of hopelessness is everywhere.

The other understanding of rural development in

Guatemala involves exploiting natural resources for large-scale industrial development. Such plans deplete national resources while offering little benefit, and often great detriment, to the local population, further entrenching rural poverty.

One case of human and land rights violations we investigated was located in the town of Sayaxche, el Petén, a remote area of Guatemala where Maryknoll missionaries previously worked and a toxic spill from a drainage container used by the African palm oil company Reforestadora de Palma del Petén (REPSA) occurred in April. The spill contaminated the local river, on which the people there depend. All of the 23 species of fish and

other river life, and animals dependent on the river, died.

In Sayaxche, we met with Saul Paau, a Guatemalan human rights activist, and 30 women and men from local Q'eqchi Mayan communities. The community members were invited to speak of what was important to them and what they wanted people beyond their borders to know. Nearly

everyone spoke; their stories were heart-rending and traced years of abuse. The following is some of what we learned.

After 30 years of civil war, the 1996 Peace Accords authorized tracts of rural land to be made available to indigenous people for agricultural development. Three years later, the government abandoned these efforts and began to sell the land to foreign and domestic companies for investment and development.

Palm oil companies have cultivated more than 80 percent of the land surrounding and in the town of Sayaxche. The production of edible palm oil is a large monoculture process that uses large quantities of water and toxic pesticides, and is destructive to the soil. Palm oil production has taken over and rendered infertile land



Members of the indigenous community of Sayaxche. Photo courtesy of Sr. Ann Braudis, MM.

needed to cultivate corn, beans, and rice for local consumption; and REPSA has diverted most available water to irrigate the palm oil trees. REPSA's palm oil reaches the U.S. in products like ice cream, soap, and shampoo, as well as bio fuel which is in ever increasing demand.

Community members spoke about social divisions caused by pay-offs to government officials and REPSA's hiring of non-local laborers who do not directly suffer the negative effects of the palm oil production, and who have few income alternatives. They also spoke about the strong presence of the military, which has defended the efforts of REPSA and the palm oil industry in general; and their suspicions that REPSA undertook some local construction projects in lieu of paying taxes. The projects are hailed by some community members while others see them as further evidence of fraud and manipulation.

Community members raised numerous other concerns related to human and land rights violations, including concern for the children who are ill due to the contaminated environment, and for the murder of Roberto Lima Choc, a newly elected member of the town

council who, in September, denounced REPSA in a legal motion about the toxic spill. He was immediately shot and killed. Roberto was 28 years old.

At this writing, contrary to the assurances of REPSA, the river remains contaminated. A court case against REPSA is pending. The people are insisting that the company be permanently shut down. They are prepared for more loss of life!

The conditions that brought about the years of violence and civil war are still in effect today. To a large extent, the indigenous people remain landless and almost voiceless. The government uses the military to control them just as it did with U.S. support during the civil war. The newly elected president of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales, has spoken in support of the Alliance for Prosperity, aid that the people of Sayaxche say has never reached them.

The culture and evolutionary trajectory of a people is integral to lasting development. Development needs to be sustainable and regenerative on all levels so that future generations may live in health and with a sense of well-being and purpose. §

Guatemala: Political transition and protests

Since his inauguration in January, former comedian and now President Jimmy Morales has faced an intense Congressional transition and renewal of mass protests in Guatemala. The following article was written by Sustainable Pathways to Peace and Security intern Nicholas Alexandrou.

Since Jimmy Morales' victory in the presidential election in September, members of the Guatemalan Congress have been shifting allegiances, mostly to the nationalistic and conservative National Convergence Front (FCN) – the party of President Morales. Some have labeled them “transfuga,” or turncoats, because they defect from one party to another.

A significant number of members of former President Oscar Perez Molina's Patriotic Party (PP) and the right-wing Renewed Democratic Liberty Party (LIDER), which is the majority party in Congress, have joined the FCN. The FCN has experienced a 136 percent increase in delegates, moving it from the fifth to the second largest party in Guatemala. Ironically, the FCN now includes a significant group of lawmakers who had been affiliated with the previous administration.

President Morales has broken a campaign promise not to allow defecting lawmakers into his party. Even worse, the acceptance of defectors may breakdown communication between leadership of the FCN and the

President. In a press conference, the head of the FCN in Congress, Javier Hernandez, defended his acceptance of the defectors, saying that he didn't make promises that he would not accept “turncoats,” “unlike what the President promised.”

In addition to the chaotic transition in Congress, thousands of workers and campesinos took to the streets of Guatemala City in February. Protesters demanded both political and economic reforms, paralyzing traffic in the process. Demonstrators publicly presented a manifesto to Congress and President Morales that included a demand for “respecting the constitutional rights of workers,” as well as agricultural reforms, cancelation of projects that exploit national resources, and nationalization of the electrical grid, among other things. They also called for a “dignified budget” for the Ministry of Health to purchase medicine and improve health networks.

President Morales' lack of political experience and support from former military hard-liners makes his administration's response to these tensions uncertain. §

El Salvador: Breakthrough in case of Jesuit martyrs

After almost thirty years of impunity, there may finally be some measure of justice for the six Jesuit priests and two women murdered by the Salvadoran military in San Salvador in 1989. The following is an excerpt from an article written by Geoff Thale and Sarah Kinoshian that was originally published by the Washington Office on Latin America.

“A U.S. judge’s February 5 decision to extradite a high-level military officer to Spain means that a Spanish court of law will likely hear evidence and pass judgment on a group of Salvadoran military officers for their role in one of the most emblematic cases in the country’s civil war. Although the trial will take place in Spain, it will have repercussions in El Salvador—for domestic politics, for the rule of law, and for human rights.

“When finally extradited, Salvadoran colonel Orlando Montano will face charges in Spain, where he and sixteen other Salvadoran military officers have been indicted for their role in planning and carrying out the murders of the Jesuits, five of whom were Spanish citizens. Because Spanish criminal procedure dictates that a trial may only proceed when one defendant is physically present in court, the case has been stalled. So, while it may be some time before Colonel Montano exhausts his last appeal and is actually sent to Spain, the decision means that the case against him and the remaining officers will go to trial.”

... “Now, in El Salvador, Colonel Montano’s imminent extradition is sparking new developments.

“In January of this year, the Spanish court renewed its request that the Salvadoran government detain sixteen retired officers while a formal extradition request was filed. But, until the Montano decision, El Salvador’s National Civilian Police (PNC) had taken no action. Then, on February 9, three days after the Montano decision, they made the four arrests. Since then, the PNC has announced they are searching for the other twelve defendants, including the then-commander of the top military academy and several former senior commanders in the armed forces. El Salvador’s president, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, has urged the defendants to turn themselves in.

“While this is a positive step towards justice, it is just an initial one. The four arrested military men were

among the group that had been tried in 1991. While it is encouraging that any arrests have been made, it is quite telling about the political sensitivity of the issue that no senior officials have been captured. It remains to be seen if other arrests are made. The arrests also mean that El Salvador’s Supreme Court will have to revisit its previous decision that the amnesty law prevents the extradition of the military officers; it is not yet clear how they will rule.

“The recent arrests have already struck a nerve in El Salvador, where there has been pushback against the arrests and the possibility of extradition. The detained soldiers’ families held a press conference denouncing the arrests and calling them politicized. The conservative ARENA party and two of its small allied parties held a meeting with President Sánchez Cerén to express their opposition.”

... “In the coming weeks, we will see if the arrests truly bring an end to impunity in this emblematic case and what implications, if any, this will have for human rights cases in the country.

The decision to extradite Colonel Montano could lead to a significant change in how El Salvador approaches historic human rights cases, and an even broader impact on the rule of law. At the very least, Colonel Montano’s extradition will likely lead to a public trial in Spain, where he and other military officers, whether present or not, are finally held accountable for their actions in the Jesuit case.”

“Despite the complicated political uncertainties surrounding this case, it is important to note that the ruling for Colonel Montano’s extradition is an extremely important step for human rights and the rule of law. While it would be best if this trial were taking place in El Salvador, holding the trial in Spain may bring a measure of justice and open the way for future domestic prosecutions.” §



Painting of Jesuit martyrs by Mary Pimmel-Freeman, on display at Rockhurst University.

Bolivia: End of the Evo era

In February, voters in Bolivia rejected a ballot measure that would have allowed President Evo Morales to run for president for a third term. Maryknoll Fr. Gene Toland, director of the Maryknoll Center in Cochabamba, Bolivia, wrote the following reflection on this historic vote.

Embracing the end of an era, voters in Bolivia rejected a constitutional amendment that would have allowed President Evo Morales to run for a third term in 2019. The electoral commission ruled that voters rejected the proposal by 51 percent to 49 percent.

Before the vote, President Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president, repeatedly expressed that he had the strong support of social movements and rural people. During his ten years as president, he used more equitably distribution of natural gas revenues to reduce poverty levels and spurred the creation of an indigenous middle class. But he misjudged the feeling held by many voters that ten years is enough for any government, even if they are not strongly against the ruling party.

This vote was not the win of an opposition party or even a unified movement other than on this one issue of not changing the constitution to allow for a third presidential term in 2019. The opposition in Bolivia is, in the words of one commentator, an "abstraction." It consists of multiple factions none of which have the national support of the official party. The motives for voting No were varied and reflected a wide divergence of political positions. The overall motive was to strengthen the institution of a democratic form of government.

While he says he accepts the results and looks forward to going back to the tropical area outside of Cochabamba to work his farm and play football (soccer), this defeat comes as a jolt to him and the Movement Toward Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo; MAS) political party. Evo Morales became a sort of "brand name" for the party these past ten years. MAS party members now face the challenge of finding a candidate with the

charism and name recognition of Morales. The party has been vertical in its structure and intolerant of diversity of opinion. A series of capable people who began with the party ten years ago have left it in recent years.

Possible candidates for the presidency could include a disillusioned former member of MAS, or someone like Carlos Mesa, a respected journalist, who served a short time as president before Morales, or Luis "Lucho" Revilla, the current mayor of La Paz. But only the MAS party has the national scope to run a successful presidential campaign. It is doubtful that a more politically conservative candidate could win the presidency. The

general feeling of Bolivian society is that the country will never return to the more conservative era that existed before Morales took office in 2006. For all the disagreement with this government the majority of Bolivians recognize that the country has advanced during Morales' presidency, especially for the majority of indigenous citizens.

What does this referendum vote say about a government with the strong backing of social movements? I believe well-organized and focused social movements can run a

country well, as long as they have the capacity to be a government for all, to compromise in the interest of the common good. They cannot be a kitchen cabinet outside of the government. Rather, they must work within the messy process called democracy. When President Morales took office in 2006, the MAS party was not prepared to govern like that and has paid the price of losing some of its most talented supporters. The MAS party now has four years to build on the good they have done and serve the long-term interests of the country, or flounder under the pressure of disagreement. §



President Morales leads a march of the Central Obrera Boliviana, the largest union of Bolivia, in 2013. Photo: Flickr/Eneas de Troya and licensed in the creative commons 2.0.

Brazil: Update on the mining dam disaster

The following article is an update on the environmental crisis in Brazil caused by a dam that burst in November, killing 17 people, displacing thousands, and polluting the River Doce with toxic mud. See our previous article, Brazil: Worst environmental disaster in history, in the January-February issue of NewsNotes.

Since the devastating mining disaster in November, governmental and non-governmental groups in Brazil, as well as Samarco, the company responsible for the mine, have issued statements and reports on the causes and effects of the disaster. Samarco is defending itself on a number of fronts while the two principal owners of Samarco, Australian BHP Billiton and Brazilian firm Vale, have so far avoided any charges or responsibility. The human and environmental effects continue to be severe.

Initially, the Brazilian government announced it would fine Samarco the equivalent of \$265 million. Weeks later it increased the fine to nearly \$5 billion and started efforts to charge Samarco for the cost of temporary housing for displaced residents. In a rare exception, Brazilian police are seeking a court order to arrest six Samarco executives for alleged negligence. The police chief of Bento Rodrigues, the town nearest the dam that was buried under toxic mud, told a newspaper in Sao Paulo that there is enough evidence to charge Samarco executives with homicide. “The crime of homicide occurred, we will decide if it was voluntary or involuntary,” police chief Rodrigo Bustamente said to reporters.

Samarco also faces lawsuits filed by thousands of people who lost their livelihoods along the River Doce. A rainstorm nearly three months after the disaster led to a mudslide of residue materials that required evacuating workers at the mine, though the mudslide did not go beyond the Samarco property.

Independent investigations have uncovered irregularities on the part of Samarco that made the disaster worse. A report by the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights said that more timely action could have saved lives and possessions. The company had no audible alarm system, though it is required

by law. Despite a 10-hour window between the breach and the mud reaching the nearest town, neither Samarco nor local government agencies issued an official warning to residents about the impending disaster. Samarco had a “dam emergency action plan” in place that included simulations with downstream communities, but they did not carry them out. Ultimately, the company lacked qualified personnel to respond to the disaster.

Unfortunately, the environmental effects of the spill are likely to remain for decades. “[The] mud will form a very hard cover due to the presence of iron,” said

Leila Menegasse, professor at the Geosciences Institute of the Federal University in Minas Gerais. It will be difficult for rain to penetrate it and loosen the mud. Also, the mud will cover vegetation and make the area sterile for a long time.

Organizations aiding affected communities report that diarrhea and vomiting, respiratory problems, skin diseases, and conjunctivitis from contact with the mud and dust are common. The biggest problem most survivors are facing is the trauma of losing homes and livelihoods.

“The first thing that came to me when I saw those fish dying, was, my life is over and my river died, said Benilde Madeira, a local fisherman. “I don’t know how I will pay my bills, I don’t know how I will survive. I don’t know, I don’t know, I just don’t know.”

Unfortunately, Maryknoll missionaries hear stories of suffering due to environmental disasters in many countries. The fundamental driver behind so much destruction is humanity’s tendency to consume more and more. Mines like this only exist to satiate this demand. Cellular phones, computers, even solar panels and wind turbines are made of metals dug up in mines around the world, all too often in precarious and dangerous conditions. §



An abandoned car in the village of Bento Rodrigues in November. Photo by Senado Federal and licensed in the creative commons 2.0.

Honduras: ¡Berta Cáceres presente!

The following is a statement by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns on the assassination of Berta Cáceres in Honduras on March 3.

We are shocked and saddened to learn of the assassination of Honduran environmental activist and indigenous leader of the Lenca people, Berta Cáceres.

Berta Cáceres' faithful leadership of the Council of Indigenous Peoples of Honduras (COPINH) reflected not only her dedication to nonviolent resistance to illegal logging and mega-projects that devastate the environment but also her deeply felt belief in the rights of indigenous communities to their land and livelihoods.

As co-founder and coordinator of COPINH, Cáceres organized communities in peaceful protest against illegal logging and violent oppression from the Honduran police forces, most recently in the Gualcarque River basin. Cáceres was awarded the Goldman Prize in 2015 after she led a peaceful campaign to stop one of the world's largest dam builders from constructing the Agua Zarca Dam, which would have cut off the ethnic Lenca people from water,

food and medicine.

Pope Francis highlights in *Laudato Si'* the sacredness of land for indigenous peoples and the importance of local ecosystems to cultural identity. The pope names environmental exploitation and degradation as not only harmful to creation but also to social structures. Large-scale hydroelectric dams and other large-scale projects cause irreversible harm to the Earth and impoverished communities. The Agua Zarca dam is no different.

We join the international environmental advocacy community in mourning Berta Cáceres, and extend our deepest condolences to all of Berta's family, friends, and colleagues. §



Photo of Berta Cáceres courtesy of the Goldman Environmental Prize.

Faith in action: Urge U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to assist the government of Honduras in finding and holding accountable the murderers of Berta Cáceres. <http://bit.ly/BertaCaceresPresente>

Nepal: One year after the earthquake

The following article is an update on the work of Maryknoll Father Joe Thaler in Nepal, one year after a massive earthquake struck the country.

On April 25, 2015, Nepal was struck by a devastating earthquake. The quake and subsequent avalanches and aftershocks killed more than 9,000 people and injured more than 23,000. Hundreds of thousands of people were made homeless with entire villages flattened across the country.

Maryknoll Father Joe Thaler has served in Nepal for 30 years and has come to know generations of families who have participated in his many different projects that provide income, health care and nutritional staples. Father Joe was out of the country on the day of the earthquake (April 25) but he returned home to Kathmandu very soon after. Over the past year, he has been helping the people of Nepal recover from this terrible disaster.

While all the projects overseen by Father Joe were destroyed during the earthquakes, plans were quickly put into action to revitalize some of them. Father Joe continues, with his staff, to help rebuild the lives of the people in many villages.

Recently, Father Joe wrote about the people who live in the village of Bhimtar. Father Joe shared numerous stories of people who have come together to help one another in different ways, from the cleanup after the earthquake to the rebuilding of new homes. Thanks to generous donations, Maryknoll has been able to support the purchase of building materials for the construction of new homes in Bhimtar. One example is the home of the Majhi family. With support from Maryknoll, the Majhi family was able to purchase bricks for building a new home. Four neighbors helped to clean away the previous house destroyed by the earthquake and build a new house. The Majhi family plans to help their neighbors do the same. Father Joe wishes to extend their thanks to everyone who supports the work of Maryknoll. §

Faith in action: To learn how you can support the work of Father Thaler and the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers in Nepal, visit <http://bit.ly/MaryknollNepal>.

Philippines: First environment summit

The “First Philippine Environment Summit: Breakthroughs and Innovations toward Sustainable Development” was held in Manila in February to address environmental issues that impact sustainable development. More than 1,000 participants from various sectors of society in the Philippines attended the three-day conference. The following article was written by Maryknoll Sister Marvie Misolas, who was a part of the planning process and a speaker at the summit.

Almost two years ago, I was asked to facilitate a planning session for the board of directors of Green Convergence Philippines, a coalition of environmental NGOs and individual environmentalists. Focused on the theme “One Vision, One Earth,” we identified the need for a summit on the environment in the Philippines, to bring together representatives from government, academia, faith groups, and civil society organizations to highlight the importance of concerted action to effectively resolve environmental problems. The three-day summit was successfully held in Manila in February. The theme was “Greening Together, Growing Better.”

The summit was co-hosted by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) thanks to the strong support of DENR Secretary Ramon Paje. Secretary Paje was especially supportive of the summit’s aim to convene stakeholders of the country’s environment, not only to dialogue about deeper environmental issues but also to showcase solutions and innovations implemented in the Philippines. He envisioned the possibility of institutionalizing the summit as an annual event. This way, he hopes, whoever holds the position of Environment Secretary will be held accountable to the Filipino people and the environment. Other major stakeholders in the environmental movement including renewable energy sectors, sustainable development institutions, environment NGOs, television networks and the Maryknoll Sisters joined the summit as sponsors.

Secretary Paje delivered his annual State of the Philippine Environment address where he highlighted the successes of his six-year term in the office. The National Greening Program of the country topped the list. The five-year reforestation program aimed to plant 1.5 billion trees in 1.5 million hectares of deforested and denuded land. To the joy of the summit participants, he reported the discovery of 400 islands in the eastern part of the Philippines, detected by satellite mapping radar. He clarified the issue of prospective power plants which were approved prior to his term of office. He promised that under his leadership, no new power plants will be approved, and no environment clearance certificates will be issued to operate new coal power plants.

The summit also included keynote addresses by renowned environmentalists Vandana Shiva and David Suzuki. Also, Secretary of Education Armin Luistro highlighted the greening of education and schools, creating a new generation conscious of their role in protecting and respecting nature.

Former Manila Archbishop, Cardinal Rosales gave an inspirational talk on the role of the Church in the southern Philippines where there is rampant deforestation by powerful illegal loggers. He said the Church has risen to protect the environment, even to the martyrdom of pastors and members of their staff, whose blood marks the injustices done to land and the environment. He further said that the Church has been fighting all these abuses, long before Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

Plenary sessions featured working, sustainable innovations in three areas: food safety using organic agriculture, management of natural resources such as clean air and water, renewable energy, and sustainable transportation systems, and a sustainable economy through greening the economy and eco-governance.

At the closing ceremony, I gave a summary presentation of a national project I have been working on with the DENR since 2014 which was honored at the summit as one of 14 local government unit (LGU) eco-champions for excellence in environmental governance and practices. I also highlighted the excellent eco-governance of the 13 other LGU eco-champions. All 1,663 LGUs in the Philippines were surveyed as to their compliance to 13 Philippine environmental laws and regulations such as Climate Change Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Disaster and Risk Reduction Management Act, the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act. A total of 172 responded to the survey. Of those, 14 LGUs were recognized as eco-champions.

Exhibitors at the summit showcased projects on low-impact water management technology, solar energy technology, bioremediation and organic cleaning of pollutants and other eco-system management and restoration, and organic farming. The Maryknoll Ecological Sanctuary in Baguio was among the exhibitors. §

Israel/Palestine: Life in a Palestinian village

On February 23 two Palestinians from the village of Wadi Foquin and the Palestinian coordinator for the district of Bethlehem spoke at a congressional briefing on the living conditions for the residents of this Palestinian village in the West Bank. They appealed to the U.S. Congress to put pressure on Israel to halt the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank.

Ahmad Sokar, the mayor of Wadi Foquin, joined a panel of speakers on Capital Hill to speak about the effects of illegal settlements on life in the village of Wadi Foquin – a similar presentation to the one he gave at a congressional briefing a little over a year ago. He gave a brief synopsis of Wadi Foquin: in 1948, his village of 1,300 people encompassed 2,400 acres; last year 740 acres remained; today, only 475 acres are left. Wadi Foquin lies largely in “Area C” of the West Bank, the area that is under complete control of the Israeli government. Beitar Illit was an “outpost” established in 1989 on a hilltop not far from Wadi Foquin by a small group of Israeli families. Beitar Illit has since grown to a city of an estimated 60,000 Israeli settlers. In the same time period, not only has Wadi Foquin been denied the opportunity to expand, but the Israeli government has confiscated 80 percent of its land for the illegal expansion of Beitar Illit, with plans for further confiscations and no recourse for the people of Wadi Foquin.

The area has been mainly farmland for 800 years, with its residents largely subsisting as farmers and herders. Since the land confiscation of Wadi Foquin began, 150 farming families have been affected. Of the 1,200 sheep that were herded around the village in the past, only 200 remain. The land in this area is fertile due to a number of natural springs that provide the village and surrounding areas with a reliable water source – a precious commodity in the desert region. Unfortunately, because of the settlement’s large residential apartment buildings built into the hillsides surrounding the village, sewage from Beitar Illit drains into Wadi Foquin’s natural springs and farmland, rendering the water unpotable and farmlands useless.

Mayor Sokar showed pictures of a playground in his village that Israeli authorities ordered closed. Meanwhile, within view is a much larger playground for the children of Beitar Illit which the government has allowed to remain open. Additional expansion plans for the settlement include confiscation of the only road to access Wadi Foquin.



The village of Wadi Foquin. Photo courtesy of Friends of Wadi Foquin.

Another panelist, Professor Kifah Manasra of Al Estiklal University, described how Israeli security forces routinely use harassment techniques directed at women in an attempt to stop them from traveling, even to and from work and school. And, she reported, it is effective: many Palestinian families are wary of their daughters working or going to school outside of their towns if it involves having to pass through security checkpoints. When asked if the panelists still support a two-state solution given the deteriorating situation for Palestinians today, panelist Shukri Radaydeh, director of the Bethlehem Local Governorate, vehemently replied that Israel would not allow a one-state solution because of the demographics: if Israel were to welcome Palestinians as citizens, they would soon outnumber Jewish Israelis and become the majority. Mr. Radaydeh went on to say “They don’t want a one-state solution. They don’t want a two-state solution. They don’t want to give us equal rights. They don’t want to stop expanding settlements. They have a radical government in power and they don’t believe in peace.”

The final panelist was Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, general secretary, United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society, who visited Wadi Foquin last fall. She named the major issues of concern as the lack of access (to land, roads, resources and development), the palpable trauma exhibited by residents of this and other villages being squeezed out by settlements, and the ongoing violations of human rights at checkpoints, in building the separation wall, and other measures in the name of security. She highlighted actions taken by the United Methodist Church in support of righting injustice in the region, including a boycott of products produced by companies operating in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The panel was sponsored in part by the Faith Forum on Middle East Policy, of which the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is a member. For more information and opportunities to support the people of Wadi Foquin, go to www.friendsofwadifoquin.com. §

Africa: U.S. launches trade policy review

Last June, Congress mandated that U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman examine ways to advance trade relations with African nations beyond one-way trade preferences. In response, Ambassador Froman held a hearing in Washington, D.C. in January.

US foreign policy toward the countries of Africa rests on three aspirations: peace, prosperity, and democracy. One policy aimed at fostering prosperity in Africa is a piece of legislation called the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which provides trade preferences to imports from some sub-Saharan African nations. “Trade not aid” is the catch phrase of this policy since its inception in 2000.

In June 2015, Congress extended the AGOA for another ten years. Today, according to the U.S. Trade representative, the question is whether we also need to develop new trade policies for the new Africa of the 21st century. To answer this question, the US Trade Representative Michael Froman invited experts representing business, the U.S. Congress, think tanks, labor and trade organizations to a “Beyond the AGOA” hearing. Their testimonies offered ways to move toward more permanent, reciprocal trade and investment arrangements and away from the tariff wavers approach of AGOA.

Ambassador Froman began the hearings by explaining why expanding trade with Africa makes sense for the United States. Even though Africa currently represents only 3 percent of all global trade, during the next five years sub-Saharan Africa’s GDP is forecast to grow 30 percent faster than the rest of the world. This growth underlies the reason the U.S. not only extended AGOA but seeks to expand trade with Africa. By 2030, a quarter of the world’s workforce and almost a quarter of its consumers will live in Africa.

Ambassador Froman listed the reasons why he believes that deeper trade and investment ties with Africa will serve U.S. policy interests. First, it will expand the market for U.S. exports. Also, he believes it will advance U.S. peace and security interests by preventing conflicts. Third, it will alleviate poverty. Finally, it will stress democratic governance, economic growth and strong labor and environmental standards.

Deepening trade and investment with the United States should, in the “beyond AGOA” framework, also benefit the economies of African countries. The recent slowdown in economic growth in China has caused commodity prices, and subsequently, the demand for African exports, to fall. Between 2014 and 2015, China’s imports

from African countries dropped from \$110 billion to \$50 billion. In the next decade, African traders will have to find new sources of demand not based primarily on the export of commodity resources. The U.S. wants to be one of these sources of demand but, Ambassador Froman pointed out, “the policy environment matters.” The old tariff preference policies of the AGOA era are “not sufficient to generate significant new trade and investment.” To move beyond AGOA, a new policy environment needs to be created that addresses matters such as prohibitive duties, intellectual property protection, and standard conformity with international norms. Capacity constraints like thick borders and poor infrastructure need to be dealt with, too, as well as the development of regional economic communities like the Tripartite Free Trade initiative. Policy reform is the new watchword for trade and investment in Africa.

Indeed, the U.S. has already begun to move beyond AGOA through its Trade Africa initiative with the East African Community – Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. On a recent visit to Rwanda, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Penny Pritzker, was accompanied by several senior executives of the President’s Advisory Council on Doing Business in Africa who are charged with making recommendations to the president and the secretary of commerce on policy steps that can strengthen commercial engagement between the U.S. and African nations. In a report on their visit with the president of Rwanda, Secretary Pritzker noted that the United States expressed disappointment that President Kagame has chosen to run for a third term in 2017. At the same time, the U.S. praised Rwanda’s contributions to peacekeeping. Ironically, not too long after that visit, the UN reported that Rwanda was recruiting and training Burundian refugees to oust neighboring president Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi.

In its push to promote a new kind of mutually beneficial trade relationship with African nations, the U.S. is forthright about wanting African governments to create a new policy framework that facilitates American trade and investment programs. The U.S. is challenged to link these proposals with demands for good governance and democratic practices. §

Africa: A continent on the rise

The following article describes eight positive trends on the African continent.

News about Africa often falls into the negative categories of war, famine and disease. There are, however, positive developments that present a different picture of contemporary life in the 54 nations of the world's fastest growing continent. Below are eight such trends.

Democratic elections are becoming ordinary: In 2015 sixteen countries in Africa held national elections including Nigeria, the continent's most populous nation. According to Nii Akuetteh, a well-known Ghanaian-American commentator, "... Nigeria's recent embrace of democracy and Jonathan's classy role define Africa's most important—and uplifting—story of 2015."

Intra-African trade is expanding:

Last June twenty-six African nations formed the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA). TFTA is considered by regional policymakers and some analysts to be a game changer for the African trading system and the more than a half billion citizens of the member states. Indeed, the deal is expected to be the launching pad for the establishment of the even more ambitious Continental Free Trade Area that is expected to cover all of Africa.

Plans for electrification abound: One needs a score card to keep track of the major projects to help electrify Africa. To mention a few: Power Africa (USA); New Deal for Energy in Africa (African development Bank); Energy Africa Campaign (UK); Sustainable Energy Fund for Africa (Denmark, Italy, UK, USA); Electrification Financing Initiative (EU); African Energy Leaders Group. Since 2000, sub-Saharan Africa alone has seen rapid economic growth and energy use has risen by 45 percent.

Remittances exceed foreign aid: According to the International Fund for Agriculture Development, the remittance flows to and within the continent reach \$40 billion per year. But most remittances are informal and impossible to track so the absolute amount is probably

much higher. According to Hong Kong-based Ghanaian academic Adams Bodomo, Africans living outside the continent send more money home to their families than is sent by traditional Western aid donors in what is called Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Ebola has been brought under control: According to the WHO, Africa as a whole is now clear of the killer Ebola virus. As of January 14, 2016, the number of Ebola cases stood at 28,637. Worldwide 11,315 deaths from Ebola have been reported.

The African Union has a plan for Infrastructure expansion: In January 2012, the Africa Union put in

place its "Plan for Infrastructure Develop in Africa," (PIDA). This ambitious program aims to develop a strategic framework to provide a solid base for prioritizing, harmonizing, financing, and implementing effective regional and continental infrastructure projects. The objective of PIDA is to accelerate the implementation of regional and continental infrastructure by 2040. Energy, transport, information and communication technologies (ICT) and transboundary water resources are the main infrastructure

components that will be put in place.

Cell phones proliferate and stimulate banking: In Tanzania, for example, 73 percent of adults own a cell phone and in Kenya, 61 percent of mobile owners use their device to transfer money. In Malawi, 90 percent of the rural areas have some form of mobile phone coverage that is second generation (2G) of technology for the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM), the world's most prolific mobile phone standard.

South Sudan joins the East African Community: On March 2, the East African Community, a regional economic federation, welcomed South Sudan as its newest member. This decision by Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi has both economic benefits and historical significance. §



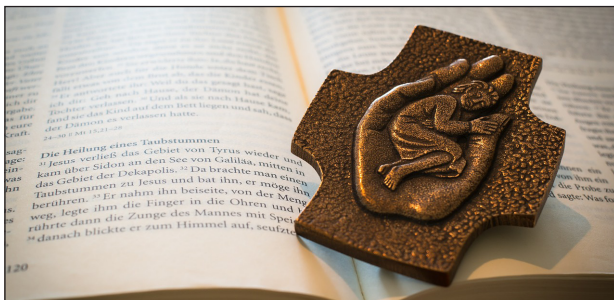
Mobile phone store in Sumbawanga, Tanzania. Photo by Flickr/Helmet Spudich and licenced in the creative commons 2.0

Resources

- 1) **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, or contact the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.



- 2) **El Salvador’s violence: No easy way out:** In response to the spike in violence in El Salvador, the Center for International Policy and the Latin America Working Group Education Fund have produced an eight-part series to explore the different sources and dynamics of the violence in El Salvador. Read it online at <http://bit.ly/LAWGEISalvadorViolence>.
- 3) **Lenten Reflection Guide, Forty Days with Scripture and *Laudato Si’*:** The Lenten Reflection Guide from the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns contains reflections, questions, prayers, and actions based on each week’s Gospel reading and the teachings of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si’*. Use this guide individually or in small groups to reflect upon our life patterns, to pray more deeply, and renew our spirits to face the realities of our world. Download the guide at <http://bit.ly/MaryknollOGCLentGuide>.



- 4) **Path from Paris:** The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns offers *Path to Paris*, a two-page flyer to answer the questions: What is climate change? Why is climate change an issue of faith? What is in the Paris Climate Agreement? What can people do to support it? Download at <http://bit.ly/PathfromParis>.
- 5) **Marrakesh Declaration and Call to Action:** Read and share this significant pledge of support by Muslim scholars and intellectuals from more than 120 countries for the protection and freedom of religious minorities in Muslim-majority communities. The declaration was issued in January by the gathering of mostly Sunni Muslims but also some Shia in Marrakesh, Morocco. It represents an effort to respond to the rise of extremist groups in the Muslim world. The statement appeals for going beyond simple tolerance to affirmative cooperation that confers “full protection for the rights and liberties to all religious groups.” It also calls for concrete actions to achieve this goal. Read more at www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/marrakesh-declaration.html.
- 6) **On Care for Our Common Home, *Laudato Si’*: The Encyclical of Pope Francis on the Environment, with commentary by Sean McDonagh:** In this new book from Orbis, the full text of *Laudato Si’* is enhanced by reflections by Father Sean McDonagh, an Irish Columban priest and eco-theologian who has worked to raise awareness of the connections between justice and peace issues, environmental sustainability, and faith. Copies are available for sale by Orbis Books at www.orbisbooks.com.

