



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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Arms Trade Treaty: Global victory for women, girls.....	3
Honduras: Impunity results in loss of support.....	4
Guatemala: Genocide trial continues.....	5
Venezuela: Can “Bolivarian Revolution” continue?.....	6
Haiti update.....	8
Kenya: Reflections on recent election.....	9
Zimbabwe: Serious impediments to election process.....	10
Palestine: Human rights update.....	11
New deal for engagement in fragile states.....	12
UN: Remembering transatlantic slave trade.....	13
Food aid: Local purchase timelier, less costly.....	14
Trans-Pacific Partnership concerns.....	15
From fear of austerity to faith in God’s abundance.....	16
Guantanamo: Closure is far overdue.....	17
Labor: Follow principles on business, human rights.....	18
Resources.....	19

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We are excited to announce that as of May 28, 2013, Gerry Lee (former Maryknoll lay missioner and member of the lay missioners' leadership team) will be the next director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. Welcome, Gerry!

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Arms Trade Treaty: Global victory for women, girls

On April 2, the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) passed with an overwhelming number of United Nations' member states voting in its favor (154), including the United States. The U.S. encouraged the General Assembly vote after consensus had been blocked. The three nations that voted against the Treaty and that had blocked consensus are Iran, Syria and North Korea, all consistently tied to human rights violations and atrocities.

A particular element of the Treaty that is cause for much celebration is the inclusion of language that protects women and girls from armed gender-based violence (GBV). In the Preamble of the ATT, it states "that civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict and armed violence."

In the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, violence against women and girls is defined as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women [or girls], including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

Under Article 7.4 of the Arms Trade Treaty, GBV is included as a binding criterion for considering whether or not to export arms. The exporting party must consider the overriding risk of potential violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), international human rights law (IHRL) and must take into account the risk that the transfer will be "used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children."

Ray Acheson notes in the Arms Trade Treaty Monitor (6.9) that the binding criterion in Article 7 of the Treaty "requires states to act with due diligence to en-

sure the arms transfer would not be diverted to non-state actors such as death squads, militias, or gangs that commit acts of gender-based violence."

Despite success in officially and explicitly linking GBV with the global arms trade, much work still needs to be done to improve the overall status of women and girls around the world. In Paragraph 118 of The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it is noted that

... violence against women throughout the life

cycle derives essentially from cultural patterns, in particular the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices and all acts of extremism linked to race, sex, language or religion that perpetuate the lower status accorded to women in the family, the workplace, the community and society (page 11, Article 39 of the Report of the Expert).

Unfortunately, even within the final text of the ATT, a perpetuation of patronizing language and concepts continues. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and Global Action to Prevent War are among the groups lamenting the language used in the Preamble of the ATT, which lumps women and children into the same category, ignoring the distinction and insinuating that women are vulnerable by their very nature. It is telling that it must be stressed that women in

and of themselves are not vulnerable, but rather become so under horrific circumstances -- particularly in areas where illicit arms trafficking and trade occur, and armed individuals and groups use weapons to terrorize communities, and to rape and assault women and girls.

Also, and most unfortunately, the above organizations note that women's participation and agency within the political, disarmament and peace processes is omitted from the Treaty's final text and that this perpetuates the notion that women are only victims, vulnerable in and of themselves, which continues a patronizing tone and attitude toward women.

WILPF and Global Action to Prevent War voice



Photo courtesy of Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers

their disappointment that GBV was not linked to IHL and IHRL in the final text of the ATT, although it had been included in an informal draft from March 22, 2013 which stated that “recognizing acts of gender based violence may constitute violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law.” (<http://gapwblog.wordpress.com/2013/04/08/gender-based-violence-in-the-arms-trade-treaty/>)

If the above statement had been made in the final text’s Preamble, it would have strengthened the case not to export arms where GBV was likely to occur because it would have been linked directly to a violation of IHL and/or IHRL. Having noted this, another critique the organizations point out is that the term “overriding risk” (instead of “substantial risk”) that is used in Article 7.3 could allow the exporting party to go on with an arms transfer due to other factors that may be deemed more important than the risk of violations of IHL and IHRL.

Despite the above-mentioned critiques, the organizations celebrate and applaud that GBV is now a binding criterion that States must consider before exporting

arms. This Treaty has the potential to positively impact women and girls around the globe. The fewer arms that get into the wrong hands will allow for women and girls to more easily and safely engage in social and political spheres of life. The struggle for gender equality continues, but the Arms Trade Treaty is another piece that helps strengthen the overall global empowerment of women and girls.

Faith in action:

Call on President Obama to sign the ATT. The first day for UN member states to ratify is June 3; encourage the president to be among the initial signatories.

A number of U.S. senators are in the same company as Syria, Iran and North Korea, opposing the ATT. Contact them and voice your disappointment in their present dissent of the ATT and encourage them to ratify the Treaty. Senators James Inhofe (R-OK), Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Max Baucus (D-MT) are among those opposing the Treaty. §

Honduras: Impunity results in loss of support

Honduras continues to experience the highest levels of violence in the world with 92 deaths per 100,000 people (compared to a global average of 6.9 per 100,000). Sadly, members of the Honduran police and military not only have been unable to decrease it, but are often themselves perpetrators of the violence. The country’s National Autonomous University has documented 149 civilians killed by police in the last two years. Concerns over such human rights abuses are leading governments and multilateral lending agencies to reconsider their financial support to Honduras until the situation improves. A controversy currently rages between the U.S. State Department and Congress over security aid to the country, and a growing global campaign is pressuring the World Bank to cancel a loan to a company involved in the killing of farmers in order to take their land.

Honduran president Porfirio Lobo Sosa generated controversy in May 2012 when he appointed Juan Carlos Bonilla, known as “El Tigre,” to be the chief of police despite numerous allegations against him for corruption and involvement in extra-judicial murders. According to the Associated Press, a 2002 report by police internal affairs accused then police prison inspector Bonilla of three extrajudicial killings — and linked him to 11 more deaths and disappearances that it said were part of

a police policy of “social cleansing.” He was tried and acquitted on one of the three charges in a process where prosecutors experienced threats and intimidation. “The rest of the cases, like most crimes in Honduras, were not investigated.” Three months after Bonilla’s appointment, the U.S. Congress froze an estimated \$30 million in security assistance to Honduras due to concerns over Bonilla as well as the lack of investigations into killings by police and military. The Leahy Law – named for Vermont Sen. Patrick Leahy – prohibits U.S. military assistance from going to foreign military units that violate human rights with impunity.

The State Department responded with a report assuring that it had “established a working group to examine thoroughly the allegations against (Bonilla) to ensure compliance with the Leahy Law,” and that, “While this review is ongoing, we are carefully limiting assistance to those special Honduran law enforcement units, staffed by Leahy-vetted Honduran personnel who receive training, guidance, and advice directly from U.S. law enforcement, and not under Bonilla’s direct supervision.” Based on these guarantees Congress restored most of the assistance.

But a March 30 Associated Press article titled “U.S. aids Honduran death squads” showed that the State De-

partment may have lied about Bonilla's connections with groups receiving money. The article states that, according to a top Honduran government security official, "Honduran law prohibits any police unit from operating outside the command of the director general." He said that is true in practice as well as on paper."

According to the article, some of the assistance "will go to the Gang Resistance Education and Training program under the director of community policing, who also told the AP that he reports directly to Bonilla." "I only report to the director general, all of the programs of the Honduran police are directed personally by him," said Otoniel Castillo, a police sub-commissioner. "He has a personal and intense closeness to all projects of international cooperation, especially because of his good relationship with the U.S. Embassy."

With this new information, Sen. Leahy and others have demanded and are waiting for an explanation from the State Department. Depending on the response, Congress may freeze the assistance once again.

Not only U.S. security assistance but also private investments and international loans are being withdrawn from Honduras because of concerns about the human rights situation. The region experiencing the highest levels of violence is the Bajo Aguan in the north of the country where at least 91 people have been killed over land disputes in the last three years. Alternative fuel mandates in the European Union and United States have

created massive global demand for agrofuels. In Honduras, the result has been huge growth in the number and size of palm oil plantations and increasing conflicts over land. Miguel Facusse is the owner and CEO of Grupo Dinant, a palm oil company notorious for perpetrating violence against farmers in the region.

The German development bank DEG cancelled a loan to Grupo Dinant in 2011 due to concerns about the assassinations. The same year a wholly owned subsidiary of French energy company Electricité de France, SA cancelled a contract to buy carbon offsets from the company.

Yet the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a part of the World Bank, continues to provide a \$30 million low-interest loan to Dinant. The first half of the loan was given in 2009 with the second disbursement scheduled to go out later this year. An alliance of human rights and environmental organizations has launched a campaign to convince the IFC to cancel the rest of the loan. More than 66,000 people have signed a petition to the World Bank asking to rescind the loan.

Faith in action:

Sign the petition to the World Bank demanding that it cancel the loan to Grupo Dinant: <https://www.rainforest-rescue.org/mailalert/909/honduras-world-bank-palm-oil-loans-linked-to-murders> to sign. §

Guatemala: Genocide trial continues

During the recent trial of former president Efraín Ríos Montt and former chief of military intelligence Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, observers felt as if they were on a rollercoaster ride as the trial took many twists and turns. The two men are being prosecuted for genocide and crimes against humanity, for violence committed against Ixil communities in the Guatemalan highlands from March 1982-August 1983. The trial, which marks the first time a former head of state has been prosecuted for genocide in the courts of the country where the crimes occurred, began on March 19.

Brother Marty Shea, MM, who attended most of the proceedings throughout the month, wrote this on April 11, "U.S. Ambassador Arnoldo Chacon was present at yesterday's hearing – and an encouraging statement of U.S. support for the judicial process appeared in this morning's *Prensa Libre*: 'We urge all Guatemalans to respect the legitimacy and integrity of this process.'"

One week later, on April 16, a lengthy three-page ad appeared in the same Guatemalan newspaper (*Prensa Libre*) explaining that the genocide trial was a farce. It named international groups like the Maryknoll missionaries and the Archdiocesan project "Recovery of the Historical Memory" as responsible for propaganda that led people to believe that the government was at fault for the violence that Guatemalans experienced during its long years of internal conflict. This ad placed all the blame for the violence on rebel fighters and featured photos of Guatemalan soldiers wounded at the hands of guerrilla forces.

On April 18, day 20 of the trial, after 100 witnesses and 60 experts had testified, attorneys for the defense called for an annulment of the trial and stormed from the courtroom. They accused the tribunal of violating the April 3 decision in which Judge Yassmin Barrios had provisionally accepted all the evidence proposed by the defense – the defense team insisted that the trial should

have been suspended at that time in order to allow for all of the evidence to be assembled, and the judge ruled that it was acceptable for the trial to proceed.

Although Judge Barrios rejected the defense's charge of violation, Judge Carol Patricia Flores accepted it, announced that the genocide trial was "annulled," and resolved that the tribunal should return to the state it was in on November 23, 2011. The decision would nullify all of the testimonies heard from April 3 on.

According to the April 19 entry on the website "The Trial of Efraim Rios Montt & Mauricio Rodriguez Sanchez," "The judge's resolution stunned many in the courtroom. Edgar Pérez, representing victims group AJR, asked Flores directly, 'How can you do this to the victims?' He reminded her that they had been waiting 30 years for justice, and that both the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights and the Guatemalan Constitution guaranteed the right to a speedy trial. The ruling left the victims in a state of 'defenselessness and impunity.' Pérez asked that Flores withdraw her ruling.

"Prosecutor Orlando López told the judge that she had 'made a mockery of the victims, and a mockery of justice.' An ongoing judicial process could not be legally blocked. He pointed out that the ruling by the Constitutional Court did not in any way indicate that the case could be returned to an earlier phase and restarted, and said she had overreached in her interpretation of the court's order. ...

"[Judge Flores] agreed that the situation was 'lamentable' but said she had no choice but to suspend the genocide trial. 'I am not denying access justice to victims and I am not mocking them. I am resolving what corresponded to me to decide.' ... She asserted that was simply complying with the ... Court's ruling....

"Several hours after the hearing, Guatemala's At-

torney General Claudia Paz y Paz held a press conference and accused Judge Flores of issuing an 'illegal ruling' by ordering the halt to the genocide trial. She said the Constitutional Court ruling of April 3 ordered the admission of evidence on behalf of the defense, not a stop to the proceedings. Paz y Paz said her office would act immediately to reverse the ruling."

During a reconvening on April 19, Judge Barrios stated that the tribunal had actually complied with the Constitutional Court's order and the trial would proceed. Public defenders would be appointed in the absence of the defendants' lawyers, and the proceedings would resume after the courts resolved the legal issue at hand. These decisions would be taken up by the Constitutional court. Since the suspension of the trial, victims and their supporters, national and international human rights groups, have urged the proceedings to move forward. Nobel Peace laureates, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Jose Ramos Horta, Jody Williams and Rigoberta Menchú, joined their voices on April 23 calling for a legitimate, independent and transparent judicial process in Guatemala.

Finally, the trial resumed on April 30, but most of the time was spent sorting out who would represent the defendants. When the trial was halted on April 18 and the defense attorneys walked out, the court assigned lawyers to represent both Rios Montt and Rodriguez Sanchez. With the resumption of the trial, re-instated attorney Francisco Garcia Gudiel will represent Rios Montt and newly appointed public defender Otto Ramirez will represent Rodriguez Sanchez.

As the trial continues, Guatemalans hold hope that those responsible for the genocide that killed their loved ones will be served with justice. For extensive updates on the trial go to <http://www.riosmontt-trial.org/>. §

Venezuela: Can "Bolivarian Revolution" continue?

The death of President Hugo Chavez on March 5 led many to question whether the "Bolivarian Revolution" of significant social and economic changes could continue without Chavez's larger-than-life presence. Hoping to return to power after 14 years as the main opposition coalition, the Democratic Unity Roundtable chose state governor Henrique Carilles to run against Chavez's vice president Nicolas Maduro in the presidential election on April 14. After the hurried but energetic campaign, Maduro won by a narrow margin (50.8 percent to 49.0 percent), a result that led Carilles to call for a recount of all ballot boxes even though 53 percent of them had already been verified through Venezuela's elec-

toral system. While the National Electoral Council has declared Maduro to be president and political leaders from around the world have congratulated him on being elected, the Obama administration refuses (as of this writing) to acknowledge the results. Judging from the administration's reaction to the elections and statements by new Secretary of State John Kerry it appears likely that relations between the two countries will not improve nor worsen. But if Maduro is able to continue improving the lives of Venezuelans and unite Latin American countries while addressing pressing problems with violence and economic imbalances, it is possible that the Bolivarian Revolution could continue for many years.

U.S. media coverage of the elections were consistently one-sided, presenting only negative information about Venezuela while ignoring significant positive changes that have occurred there in the last decade. USA Today perhaps best represented this imbalanced reporting, describing Chavez's presidency as having "left Venezuela with high unemployment, soaring inflation, food shortages and falling petroleum production in a country with the world's highest proven oil reserves. Its \$30 billion fiscal deficit is equal to about 10 percent of the country's gross domestic product."

While these are some problems facing Venezuela today they are hardly crises with unemployment more than six percent lower than when Chavez became president (eight percent in 2012 vs. 14.5 percent in 1998) and inflation much lower than in the 1990s. While overblowing Venezuela's problems, USA Today and most other mainstream sources failed to show any positive news such as the facts that since 2004 poverty in the country was cut in half, extreme poverty fell by 70 percent, and real per capita income grew by almost 2.5 percent annually. Over the last eight years, inequality fell sharply, illiteracy was eradicated, and millions of Venezuelans with lower incomes have much better access to health care and education (one in three Venezuelans is currently enrolled in high school or university). Infant mortality in Venezuela has been reduced from 21 per 1,000 babies to 13, the third lowest rate in South America. As the Center for Economic Policy Research's Mark Weisbrot points out, "these numbers are not in dispute among economists or other experts, nor among international agencies such as the World Bank, IMF or United Nations. But they are rarely reported in the major Western media."

Indeed, to listen to most U.S. media, one could wonder how Chavez and his political allies were so popular as to win 15 of the last 16 elections in the country. But Latinobarometro, an in-depth annual survey of Latin Americans on issues such as democracy, trust in government, economic outlook, etc., has consistently shown that Venezuelans during Chavez's presidency are more likely to believe that their government is democratic and "governs for the majority" than people in most neighboring countries.

The U.S. decision to not accept the election results has not helped in any way. Venezuela is recognized worldwide for its high quality electoral system with Jimmy Carter describing it as the best in the world. Votes are made and stored on touch screen computers, then printed out, verified by the voter and deposited in urns. Immediately after the vote, 53 percent of urns, chosen randomly, are recounted to verify that the printed votes

are the same as those recorded on the computer making the system as very resistant to fraud. This is done even though a simpler three to four percent recount would be enough to statistically verify the results.

Despite knowing this, the Obama administration has held out recognition of Maduro's victory until 100 percent of the urns are recounted. This is the opposite reaction that the U.S. had with an even closer election in 2006 in Mexico, a country with a much less sophisticated voting system than Venezuela. There, when Felipe Calderon won by only 0.2 percent amid much more serious charges of fraud, President Bush quickly called to confirm Calderon's "victory" and carried out an international campaign to convince other countries to recognize his presidency.

It is highly unlikely that the recount of the remaining 47 percent of urns will change the result. One economist estimated that chance to be about one in 25 thousand trillion. But by refusing to acknowledge Maduro's victory, the U.S. has given extra energy to the opposition's intractability, leading violent protests resulting in at least seven deaths. Perhaps this is foreshadowing of the difficulties Maduro will face, similar to what Chavez faced in his first six years as president when the U.S.-supported opposition repeatedly refused to accept election results, and carried out a short-lived coup in 2002 and worker lockout by oil company executives in 2002-2003 that decimated the Venezuelan economy.

Originally the Spanish government and Jose Miguel Insulza, Secretary General of the Organization of American States (but not the OAS as an organization) were the only others to join the U.S. in not recognizing Maduro's victory, but now even those two holdouts have ceded that Maduro is the legitimate president of Venezuela, leaving the U.S. completely isolated once again in its resistance to Venezuelan democracy.

The close election results show how important Chavez's personal charisma was in bringing in votes. Maduro, with a much quieter and reserved personality, has not been able to solidify the same amount of support either within Chavez's party, the PSUV, or with swing voters. It will be important that he deal fairly and transparently with the opposition while addressing growing inflation and worsening violence. Judging from the shifts Maduro has made in his Cabinet, these two issues will be the special foci of the government. Perhaps the bigger question is whether the U.S. and members of Venezuela's opposition will allow the Maduro government to function or will again resort to sabotage and other means to undermine it. §

Haiti update

The following update is provided by Maryknoll Affiliate Renate Schneider who coordinates Haiti Connection, a non-profit that focuses on health and education needs in Haiti.

In Haiti, rumors abound, therefore it is nearly impossible to get a good handle on what is happening in the country, and especially in the government. A few signs are hopeful, but others are not. Some programs that the government takes pride in appear good at first glance, but when analyzed more closely, one can see that they hinder development rather than promote it.

For example, the current government has established a national social assistance program called "Ede Pep" (Help the people), which basically is a transfer of cash to people in need. In a country where 57 percent of its 10 million people exist on less than US\$1 a day and 82 percent on less than US\$2 a day, the cash transfer that Ede Pep provides seems like a good thing. Those who have received cash include 25,000 handicapped people and 25,000 elderly. In addition, 57,000 destitute mothers have also received cash, and 22,000 university students will receive 2,000 gourdes (US\$47.62) a month to help with their educational expenses. 400,000 solidarity baskets -- containing items that can feed a family of five for 10 days -- have been delivered.

But do these one time or limited time gifts really constitute development? For example, the 2,000 gourdes that the students receive -- do they foster the development of the educational system in Haiti? First of all, the money goes directly to the students and not to the universities. Needs in Haiti are great, so it is almost certain that the money will not go solely to pay for school fees. In addition, the program will last only for a limited time. Would that money not be better spent improving elementary schools which suffer from lack of materials? Or increase the salary of teachers who are paid poorly and often not on time? The impact money thus spent could be greater than simply giving cash stipends. To a number of Haitians it seems that the government is buying the support of these sectors of the population, something they say happened under former president Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier.

More recently, Finance Minister Marie-Carmelle Jean-Marie and Communications Minister Regine Godfroy resigned. Both are very competent women who cited a lack of support as the reason for their resignation. Jean-Marie had tried to establish transparency in

her office and apparently was rebuffed in her effort. In January, Richard Morse, leader of the Haitian musical group RAM and a cousin of President Michel Martelly, resigned his position as special counsel to the president. Morse, who had accompanied Martelly during the elections and his first year in office, explained, "I left because of corruption in the palace and infrastructure sabotage." As an example he mentioned that workers filled drainage canals before the rainy season which caused flooding. They did this in order to attract aid money. Morse said he spoke to the minister, but nothing was done.

While no one can expect these practices to change from one day to the next, that they occur at the highest level of government is disturbing. What is clear is that there are people in Haiti who are not interested in development but rather profit from the lack of it. The poor road infrastructure allows the few people who control the movement of goods to set the prices for those goods. So they have little interest in a decent road infrastructure which would benefit more people but threaten their position as the ones in control.

In the beginning of this writing I also mentioned hopeful signs. Of the people living in camps since the January 2010 earthquake, 79 percent have been relocated. While the relocation process has some problems, in general this is quite an accomplishment. The airport has been rebuilt and is now a modern facility that meets international standards. In Port au Prince a number of large hotels have been constructed and are open for business. While these do not directly benefit people who are poor, they do encourage foreigners and others to visit Haiti and find a place to stay that provides a comfortable environment. Of course, while this would encourage greater business growth and help address the problem of unemployment, we hope that any such development is done in an ecologically sustainable manner, protective of water sources and the soil.

In addition, solar powered streetlights are more and more in evidence, not only in Port au Prince, but also in the provinces. In Haiti where electricity is still rationed, this means a lot. They provide a sense of security and also allow students to study under the streetlights when they have no electricity at home.

The most hopeful sign of course is the irrepressible spirit of the Haitian people who still produce vibrant art, sing songs that express their life experiences and above all stubbornly maintain their faith on God. §

Kenya: Reflections on recent election

The following reflection on Kenya's recent election was written by Fr. Joe Healey, MM. For the perspective of Maina Kiai, a Kenyan who is the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, see the National Endowment for Democracy's website, <http://www.ned.org/events/implications-of-the-kenyan-elections>.

The *New York Times* describes multiparty democracy in Africa as “messy and unpredictable.” But in the past three months Kenya gets an “A” for effort.

After the terrible post-election violence in 2008, the whole world was watching if Kenya could elect a new president and government in peaceful, just and fair elections. The comparatively peaceful election in March has helped restore Kenya's image as one of Africa's most stable democracies. Even though many Kenyans are very loyal to their ethnic group values, in their hearts they wanted peace more than anything else.

Bonny Otieno, 32, a transporter in Kisumu in Western Kenya, said, “Politics is over and we've embarked on nation building.” While this is a bit overstated, it points to a basic truth. Politics will always be in the African people's blood, but the ordinary Kenyan people just want to move on with their lives and the future of Kenya. Going back to past mistakes doesn't serve the common good right now.

Some key road signs:

- The March 4 general elections went off relatively peacefully, yet with the fear of more International Criminal Court (ICC) investigations hovering in the background.
- The 6-0 vote by the Supreme Court (composed of judges of different ethnic groups) on the election petitions was decisive and muted some of the main opposition candidate Raila Odinga's criticism. It was clever that the judges' full report came two weeks later after the people's passions had cooled down.
- Inflammatory messages on Twitter and Facebook (mainly attacks against the opposition candidates and other ethnic groups) provoked many comments and discussion and show the emerging power and influence of the social media and social networks.
- Some headlines remain troublesome like “New senators want extra powers, more money.”
- New President Uhuru Kenyatta (fourth in the young country's history and a Catholic) and Vice President William Ruto announced the first four (out of a total of 18) Cabinet secretary positions on April 23.

This slow unveiling process cools down political passions. Parliament approved a 28-member Parliamentary Committee on Appointments team to vet the nominees. As a “first,” the public is also expected to participate in the vetting process with this committee collecting their views regarding the suitability or otherwise of the Cabinet nominees.

- The ICC remains, in international sports lingo, “a sticky wicket.” Thirty-one of Africa's 54 nations are signatories to the Rome Statute establishing the court's authority. Kenyatta's indictment by the court for allegedly organizing violent gangs after the last election complicate relations with Western states because of their policy of having only “essential contacts” with inductees. But the West's position is softening and diplomats say there could be latitude in how to define these contacts if Kenyatta and Ruto, who also faces charges of crimes against humanity, continue to cooperate with the court.
- Many African analysts now say that they doubt the case against Kenyatta will go forward. What witness, a popular refrain goes, will be willing to testify against a sitting president in charge of the nation's security forces? The U.S. has little interest in pushing Kenyatta and Ruto's cases at the ICC due to Kenya's strategic geographic location in the fight against global terrorism and its role in the region.
- In this election process the Catholic Church came off as more positive than in 2007-2008. There was a good focus on civic education through the 2013 Kenya Lenten Campaign. In recent weeks the secular press in Kenya has also been more positive about the role of the Catholic Church and church leaders.

A final challenging story: I was watching President Kenyatta's inauguration speech on television with a Kenyan priest from Malindi Diocese, a very poor area in northeastern Kenya. When the president delivered a long list of things he planned to do, including giving laptops to Grade One schoolchildren, the priest said, “In Malindi we need classrooms and desks, not computers.” He pointed out that for children studying outside under a tree there is no way they can improve their handwriting while balancing a sheet of paper on their laps.

The bright future is open in Kenya, but the challenges are daunting. Worldwide, if you follow the Kenyan newspapers on the internet, check out the best read daily feature – the political cartoons -- especially Gado in the *Daily Nation*. Sometimes a drawing is worth a thousand words. §

Zimbabwe: Serious impediments to election process

Though the date has not yet been announced, Zimbabwean voters are expected to go to the polls for parliamentary and presidential elections before August 29. As election time draws near, memories of the violence that accompanied the 2008 elections and its aftermath, as well as a languishing process to enact the constitution supported by 95 percent of the voters in March of this year, have Zimbabweans preparing for the worst.

Five years ago, in 2008, after two runoff elections plagued by political intimidation and violence, presidential challenger Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change party (MDC) pulled out of the race. However, he did sign the Global Political Agreement (GPA), established in 2009. Under the GPA, a power-sharing government was formed where Robert Mugabe of the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party remained president and Tsvangirai became prime minister. Their task was to implement political reforms and to improve the human rights and living conditions for Zimbabwean citizens.

In a GPA referendum in March 2013, Zimbabweans voted overwhelmingly in favor of a new draft constitution. One of the most popular aspects of the new constitution sets a limit of two five-year terms for the president. (Mugabe has now served as president since 1987.) The Aljazeera news service quoted schoolteacher Petronella Dzikiti, who said as she cast her ballot, "We don't want a situation like we have today, where some of us knew one leader as a child who remains there when we are grown-ups."

The draft constitution also reduces the president's power; it prevents presidential veto of legislation passed by Parliament and requires two-third parliamentary support to declare public emergencies. It also establishes a peace and reconciliation commission, an independent prosecuting authority and an anti-corruption commission. Once enacted, the new constitution is set to offer greater protection against malicious arrests and prosecution; it will introduce new courses of redress for victims of violence and intimidation and pave the way for the establishment of a functioning human rights commission.

In mid-April Zimbabwe celebrated its 33rd year of independence. As President Mugabe's ZANU-PF party boasts of its central role in winning this hard-fought liberation, its messages are questioned by a younger generation that knows little of the struggle but sees that a majority of people suffer under economic stagnation that has only worsened since the replacement of foreign

currency for the Zimbabwean dollar in 2009.

The Robert F. Kennedy Center for Human Rights (RFK Center) hosted a delegation of human rights observers in early April to assess Zimbabwe's human rights. Delegation members also looked for ways to assist the country's stakeholders to ensure the active participation of civil society in a peaceful election.

The delegation observed a clampdown on civic organizations engaged in voter registration and mobilization campaigns. They found that ZimRights and other youth-focused organizations have been continuously raided, have had their meetings disrupted, and their leaders arrested on bogus grounds, often on the pretext of "fabricating voter registration documents" and for conducting "activities that threaten national security."

Delegation members also expressed concern that because the reforms intended in the GPA agreement have not been implemented, the president continues to command an unchecked monopoly on the military and security forces. A pattern of intimidation, violence, and detention against ordinary employees of civil society organizations and human rights leaders continues, which presents a serious obstacle to the electoral process. The RFK Center reports that since August 2012 more than 20 civil society organizations have been targeted by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP).

The European Union recently eased sanctions against Zimbabwe, believing that the August election is on course. For the majority of Zimbabweans, the sanctions are not crucial to their income and well-being; human rights observers argue that sanctions, which primarily affect only the extremely small minority of wealthy Zimbabweans, should be maintained until an election date is set and the reforms outlined by the new constitution are put in place.

In March, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a pastoral letter, "Zimbabwe elections 2013 and the God of second chances." While they acknowledge the gains of the past, having "closed the door to colonialism and opened another to independence" in 1980, the bishops caution that Zimbabwe cannot rest on the successes of the past: "The patriotic fervor, national pride and the once lofty and romantic ideals of independence seemed to be lost, at least in the considered view of many of our nationals, in the stark reality of a nation divided, traumatized and impoverished by this political, economic and social crisis."

Read the entire text of the bishops' statement on the MOGC website. §

Palestine: Human rights update

The following piece was prepared by Sr. Jean Fallon, MM, who has participated with Christian Peacemaker Teams in Hebron in recent years.

The latest news from Palestine is the April 13 resignation of Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. This leaves a big gap – President Mahmoud Abbas must now replace Fayyad or form a new government with the aim of national reconciliation between the PA and Hamas, which never recognized Fayyad's authority, continuing instead to recognize its own prime minister, Ismail Haniyeh.

In his first public comments since he resigned, Fayyad called for a general election to rebuild the political system. The Palestinians “need ... a general election, as the only way to rebuild our political system and achieve our national goals.” Fayyad did agree, however, to serve as “caretaker” until the next prime minister is named.

The interim government must deal with Israel's escalating violent repression of the Palestinian people of the West Bank. In recent issues of its Weekly Report on Israeli Human Rights Violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) presents examples of the extent and kinds of pressure being exerted by Israeli military courts, the military on the ground and the settlers whom they protect. The problems have intensified lately with the elections of more pro-settler members of Knesset, now the most pro-settler government in the history of Israel.

During the period between April 4-10, according to the PCHR, 11 Palestinians were wounded, 59 “abducted” and 350 olive and almond trees cut by Israeli troops. Note that abducted is a term used to indicate Palestinians of all ages who are arrested without warrants or any legal basis. They are held in military prisons and if they have a trial it is in a military court with only military witnesses.

On April 5 President Abbas issued an urgent warning to regional and international parties about the intensification of illegal incidents by Israel within the West Bank and Gaza. Palestine needs the political and economic pressure of other nations to change the situation into one where peace can take shape and justice can be restored.

According to a recently released report compiled by Christian Peacemaker Teams, International Solidarity Movement, and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Israel and Palestine – all groups working in

Hebron – since the start of February, there have been 47 detentions or arrests of children age 15 and younger by soldiers in H2, the portion of Hebron under Israeli military control. The March 20 arrest of 27 children outside an elementary school has drawn attention to the extreme vulnerability of children living in occupied Hebron. Human rights workers in the city point out, however, that the mass arrest is far from an isolated event.

The report, “Occupied childhoods: Impact of the actions of Israeli soldiers on Palestinian children in H2 (Occupied Hebron) during February, March and April 2013,” documents the alarming increase in soldiers violating the rights of children to access education, to play, to have a parent, guardian or lawyer present when detained, and to move freely on their streets. The report calls upon duty bearers [defined as state or non-state actors with obligations] to assure the human rights of children are respected. Specifically it illustrates the urgent need to bring enough pressure to compel the State of Israel to change its policy vis-à-vis children in the Old City and H2. This extends to all children in Palestine since, as occupying power, Israel is responsible for abiding by international law and for protecting the specific rights of all children.

Along with frequent incidences of land confiscation and olive/almond tree destruction, other events have caused serious concern: the lack of freedom to make religious visits to Jerusalem and the increasing attacks on holy sites such as monasteries and mosques.

To visit Jerusalem, most Palestinians require an Israeli issued permit. This is despite the fact that East Jerusalem lies within the Green Line and is considered part of the West Bank; in reality it has been annexed by Israel. Palestinians without Israeli identification cards are separated from the city by the apartheid wall and a series of checkpoints manned by Israeli soldiers.

Most Palestinian Christians from the West Bank and Gaza were denied the opportunity to visit holy sites in Jerusalem during Holy Week and Easter; according to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Christian parishes from the Bethlehem and Ramallah areas received only 30 percent and 40 percent of the permits they requested. “The fact that so many Palestinian Christian communities are denied their simple human right to worship freely in their own capital city is unacceptable,” said Hanan Ashrawi of the PLO.

Increasingly, aggressive behavior by Jewish settlers towards Christian churches and mosques occurs unrestrained by Israeli military or police. On April 19,

New deal for engagement in fragile states

The following article is written by Marie Dennis.

South Sudan, Haiti, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, East Timor – over 40 countries, most in Africa and Asia, are identified by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as fragile states, with weak capacity to carry out governance functions, and inability to develop mutually constructive relations with society.

Seth Kaplan, writing for www.fragilestates.org, adds that political identity divisions should be specifically named as a characteristic of fragile states, pointing to Syria as a case in point: “Only countries that are both sociopolitically divided (by ethnicity, religion, clan, etc.) and lack a reasonably effective government apparatus are structurally fragile.”

The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding’s New Deal represents an international consensus on the five key dimensions of fragility: legitimate politics (inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution); security; justice; economic foundations (employment and livelihoods); and revenues and services.

Recognizing that violence and state fragility are significant obstacles to sustainable development, discussions around a post-2015 global development framework include significant attention to peace, security, human rights and justice – concerns notably absent from the millennium development goals (MDGs).

According to the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, “The nature of violent conflicts has changed dramatically in recent decades. The predominant form of violent conflict has evolved from national armies fighting each other (inter-state wars); to armies fighting for independence, separation or political control (intra-state or civil wars); to various forms of violence, involving non-state actors such as rebels, gangs and organized crime.” They can be driven by a wide range of political, economic, social and environmental factors, such as socio-economic inequalities, joblessness, human rights abuse, political exclusion and corruption.

At the same time, “the consequences of violence on development are significant and long-term. Violent conflict causes death, disease and displacement, destroys physical and social capital, damages the environment, decreases school attendance and discourages investment. The effects are both immediate and long-term.”

The Task Team also notes that the concept of development has broadened over time, “from a narrow fo-

cus on economic growth in the 1950s to an emphasis on basic needs in the 1970s to a broad view in the 1990s that emphasizes human development, human security and, more recently, freedom ...” They suggest that the overall framework of the post-2015 development agenda include peace and security, sustainable socio-economic or human development, and cross-cutting issues from socio-economic inequalities to political exclusion and that a specific target on violence also be specifically.

The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (www.pbsdialogue.org/about/), comprised of conflict-affected states, their development partners and international organizations, brings partners together in an open policy forum to:

- Share peacebuilding and statebuilding experiences, good practices and challenges
- Identify, agree on, and implement a set of peacebuilding and statebuilding goals and commitments
- Build political momentum for change and trust between fragile and conflict affected countries, development partners, and civil society

A major outcome of this forum is the New Deal on Engagement in Fragile States (www.newdeal4peace.org), which the International Dialogue proposed at the 2011 High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. The peace and security goals (PSGs) of the New Deal, relating specifically to the characteristics of fragile states, are 1) Legitimate politics - Foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution; 2) Security - Establish and strengthen people’s security; 3) Justice - Address injustices and increase people’s access to justice; 4) Economic foundations - Generate employment and improve livelihoods; and 5) Revenues and services - Manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery.

The PSGs will guide the identification of peacebuilding and statebuilding priorities at the country level and will inform the national vision, plan and implementation. They also will guide international funding decisions to help ensure that all fragile countries, and their key peacebuilding and statebuilding priorities, are properly supported.

The New Deal will be implemented initially in seven self-nominated pilot countries (Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Timor-Leste) and was endorsed by 35 countries and six international organizations, including the UN Development Group and the World Bank. §

UN: Remembering transatlantic slave trade

On March 25, the international day of remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, the United Nations organized a series of events that reminded the world of the slave trade that raged for 400 years and claimed the lives of millions of people. On this occasion UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon exhorted the world “never to forget this global crime against humanity ... the torture, rape and killing of innocent men, women and children, the families that were separated, the lives that were uprooted, and the horrific conditions on slave ships, plantations and at slave markets.”

According to UNESCO, “The transatlantic slave trade is often regarded as the first system of globalization. ... [It] was the biggest deportation in history and a determining factor in the world economy of the 18th century. Millions of Africans were torn from their homes, deported to the American continent and sold as slaves. ... [Often] known as the triangular trade, [it] connected the economies of three continents. It is estimated that between 25-30 million people, men, women and children, were deported from their homes and sold as slaves in the different slave trading systems. In the transatlantic slave trade alone the estimate of those deported is believed to be approximately 17 million. These figures exclude those who died aboard the ships and in the course of wars and raids connected to the trade.



“The trade proceeded in three steps. The ships left Western Europe for Africa loaded with goods which were to be exchanged for slaves. Upon their arrival in Africa the captains traded their merchandise for captive slaves. Weapons and gun powder were the most important commodities but textiles, pearls and other manufactured goods, as well as rum, were also in high demand. The exchange could last from one week to several months. The second step was the crossing of the Atlantic. Africans were transported to America to be sold throughout the continent. The third step connected America to Europe. The slave traders brought back mostly agricultural products, produced by the slaves. The main product was sugar, followed by cotton, coffee, tobacco and rice.”

The appalling transatlantic slave trade was not just perpetrated by foreigners but was facilitated by fellow Africans who were instrumental in capturing and selling other African people. Tribal and regional divisions

among peoples made it possible to depersonalize “the other” who was then perceived as an object to be used. The precarious journey and the dangers they confronted took the lives of the many people who had been stripped of their identity, piled into ships and transported under inhumane conditions. Many were thrown overboard and drowned in the oceans. Those who survived were marketed to plantation, mine and factory owners. Indeed the global economy highly benefited from the labor of slaves, who were treated like any other commodity, bought and sold or disposed of easily.

Of course, despite the fact that the transatlantic slave trade has ended, slavery in the form of human trafficking continues to thrive. Its victims are among those who are most vulnerable, deceived by the promises of better jobs and better living conditions. Women and children are used as objects when they are trafficked into prostitution; migrant workers are lured to foreign lands through the promises of better paying jobs and a better future.

Using people as means and not as ends in themselves not only constitutes modern day slavery, but also violates universally acknowledged human rights. Progress that uses people as commodities is liable to collapse because it lacks the reason for its existence, the wellbeing of all human beings. We are motivated to act towards a world that is free from all forms of slavery not only due to the remembrance of the emancipation of past slaves, but also because modern slavery still exists.

Faith in action:

In April, the Advisory Committee of the White House Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships released its recommendations for combatting human trafficking. The 40-page report, “Building partnerships to eradicate modern-day slavery,” is available in PDF format on the White House’s website, and lists 10 specific program recommendations that the federal government should implement, including that all federal government suppliers and contractors be required to abide by guidelines that ensure that their goods and services are slavery-free, and that a new corps of volunteers be created specifically to provide capacity to help map and coordinate local responses to human trafficking. Find the report at http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/advisory_council_humantrafficking_report.pdf. §

Food aid: Local purchase timelier, less costly

The following article was written by Jennifer Svetlik, who worked with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) for several months this spring.

In late February, the MOGC signed onto a statement along with other advocacy organizations urging “bold reform” on food aid from the Obama administration. It specified:

“When 870 million people around the world go hungry every day, making every food aid dollar count is not only a responsible use of taxpayer money, it is a moral imperative. For that reason, it is critical that any reforms seek efficiencies rather than cuts... Making every dollar count for hungry people means adding flexibility to our overseas food assistance so that proven methods such as local and regional purchase (LRP) are part of the food aid toolbox.”

Local and regional purchase of food aid has had the attention of the MOGC for years because of its potential to be quicker, less costly, serve local economies and engage small-scale farmers.

Under the 2008 Farm Bill a five-year, \$60 million pilot was created to fund 21 LRP projects in 19 countries. Late last year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a 142-page report (with 250 pages of annexes) offering the findings from this pilot project, which evaluated the cost, timeliness, and market impact of LRP in emergency and development assistance projects.

The results indicate that LRP is timelier and more cost effective than shipping food aid from the United States. Local purchase has a cost advantage because of lower costs for transport, storage, and handling of aid. A related report out of Cornell University compared nine of the LRP pilot projects against corresponding U.S. food aid shipments and found that the cost savings of LRP averaged 50 percent.

Purchasing in local markets allowed for speedier delivery than shipping from overseas. The report out of Cornell found LRP to average 62 percent faster than transoceanic shipments. Given that an increasing percentage of food aid is used for emergency projects, in which efficient purchase and quick delivery is a top priority, using LRP more frequently just makes sense.

The USDA report notes additional benefits of LRP: “Sustained food aid procurement in developing countries can stimulate market development, spur investment in food processing industries, and enhance farmers’ productivity. LRP also often results in foods more suited

to beneficiaries’ tastes.” The pilot employed multiple forms of LRP -- procuring food locally for distribution or giving vouchers to beneficiaries to purchase food in local markets themselves. Vouchers also provide an opportunity for small-scale farmers to sell their harvest as food aid in a way that large-scale producers are not interested.

The report also examined the extent to which LRP might increase prices or price volatility in the markets in which purchasing took place. The report asserts, “USDA can be confident that its locally and regionally procured food aid had negligible and fleeting impacts, if any, in procurement markets. There were no instances of procurements where the evidence unambiguously suggested that market impact was probable or confirmed.” One-fifth of the projects had a “possible” impact on market price, while the rest’s impact was determined “unlikely.”

The majority of purchases in the pilot projects (58 percent) were sourced competitively, while the remainder used direct purchase, often targeting farmers’ organizations (FOs). Direct purchases took the most time, because participants began to work with FOs during the planting season. For this reason, direct purchase was generally used for development, not emergency projects.

The report comments that FOs “may not currently be the most efficient suppliers of food to the market but it is important to foster a commercial orientation among farmers that encourages them to pool their resources, achieve economies of scale, and collectively increase the value-added they draw from their labors. Their supply is often a learning process in which it is worth investing, rather than the best organized of the options available.”

Commenting on women’s participation in FOs, one of the report’s annexes says that women have been targeted for subsidies and trainings but their active participation had remained limited, “attributed in part to traditional gender roles: marketing was said to be considered a men’s activity.” It is good that the report notes these efforts and barriers; the next step is to find new ways to address them.

LRP invests in the people who need food aid to be able to feed themselves rather than make them dependent on aid in the future. It makes government dollars more efficient and effective – an all-around smart program.

Read the USDA report at fas.usda.gov/info/communic.asp and the Cornell report at tinyurl.com/Cornell-LRP. §

Trans-Pacific Partnership concerns

The following article was written by Jennifer Svetlik, who worked with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) for several months this spring.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) made headlines again in March as Japan was welcomed into the trade negotiations, despite protests from Japanese rice farmers concerned the treaty could undermine their livelihoods. Japan's entry means that the agreement will cover one-third of global trade and 40 percent of the world's economic output. It could be the largest regional free-trade agreement (FTA) in history, engaging 12 countries while allowing for others to quietly join in the future.

The TPP is unique not only for its size but also because the negotiating terms have been kept secret; governments have refused to release negotiating texts and opportunities for public input have been limited. Without their own chapter, rules related to agriculture, food systems and food safety are woven throughout the agreement and what is known of their content raises concern for members of society who seek greater control of their food systems. (See "Trans-Pacific Partnership: Secret negotiations," *NewsNotes*, November-December 2012.)

Food sovereignty, a term originally coined by Via Campesina, is defined as "the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture systems; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade... [and] restrict the dumping of products in their markets... Food sovereignty does not negate trade, but rather, it promotes the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of peoples to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production."

There is a global movement for food sovereignty; in the U.S., more people are shopping at their local farmers' markets and in Brazil, farmers are growing food for local school lunch programs. At a national level, Ecuador, Bolivia, Mali, Senegal and Venezuela, among other countries, have explicitly included "food sovereignty" in their constitution or development plans. These policies offer preference to local markets over imports and local producers over corporations.

However, passing legislation and amendments is easier than confronting global trade laws, which these

countries do not control. For this reason, the opportunity to advocate for food sovereignty within an FTA is of utmost significance.

The Social Organizations of the Americas recently published a statement, onto which the MOGC has signed, rejecting a trade agreement which would favor corporate rights over those of citizens and threaten food sovereignty.

The statement expresses concern that the TPP "threatens national food production and food security" through "the negotiation of agricultural subsidies, as well as the promotion of production for export

monoculture that leads to land concentration, constitutes a threat to the traditional production of foods by medium and small farmers, affecting the production and culture of local communities and farmers." The statement demands greater involvement in the negotiations by all of society, especially those most affected by the TPP.

In *Who's at the Table? Demanding Answers on Agriculture in the Trans-Pacific Partnership*, Karen Hansen-Kuhn notes that the agricultural sector in all of countries engaged in the TPP is dominated by a few corporations. Four companies control 83 percent of the U.S. meat industry, for example, and at the international level, three companies control 57 percent of the commercial seed market.

Hansen-Kuhn writes, "Trade policy should start from such goals as ending global hunger, enhancing rural and urban incomes and employment, and encouraging a transition to climate-friendly agriculture. The burden of proof should be on governments to demonstrate that the commitments being negotiated in the TPP will advance the human rights to food and development."

The TPP has great future significance. Vice President Biden has said that these trade deals are "shaping a new standard that then becomes the metric by which all future trade agreements are measured." If this is to be true, we must demand a trade system which promotes and protects food sovereignty.

A 17th round of talks is currently scheduled for May in Peru; negotiations are formally scheduled to conclude this year. §



President Obama at TPP meeting, November 2012, by Pete Souza [Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons]

settlers took over a monastery in a village near Ramallah and raised an Israeli flag over the building. A priest, Aziz Raei, said that Israeli settlers used force to occupy the monastery and its adjacent chapel in al-Taybeh, a Christian village in the central West Bank.

Faith in action:

Read the entire report on “Occupied childhoods” at

the CPT website, <http://www.cpt.org/cptnet/2013/04/11/al-khalil-hebron-new-report-documents-loss-childhood>. Consider signing up for Middle East Notes, a bimonthly collection of news reports and updates on Israel-Palestine, compiled by Fr. Jack Sullivan, MM and distributed by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. Contact us to sign up. §

From fear of austerity to faith in God’s abundance

The following article was written by Jenn Svetlik, who worked for several months with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns; Marianne Comfort with the Sisters of Mercy; and Eli McCarthy with the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. A very similar version was published on the Faith-Economy-Ecology-Transformation blog in early April.

We’re told that these are lean times. The United States no longer can afford to guarantee a secure retirement for elderly people, safety-net supports for low-income citizens nor assistance to impoverished nations, the message goes.

But as people of faith, we believe in a God of abundance. And as we look around, we see incredible riches in our midst.

Consider the concentration of wealth on Wall Street, even following the Great Recession: In 2010, the assets of the six largest U.S. banks equaled 62 percent of U.S. gross domestic product – up from 18 percent in 1995, according to members of the Senate Banking Committee.

What if the United States implemented a tiny tax on the most risky, high-volume transactions in this financial sector?

This type of tax has been recommended by the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which has called on governments “to consider...taxation measures on financial transactions through fair but modulated rates with charges proportionate to the complexity of the operations, especially those made on the ‘secondary’ market.”

Pope Benedict XVI also prophetically taught in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* that “economic growth has been and continues to be weighed down by malfunctions and dramatic problems. The technical forces in play... the damaging effects on the real economy of badly managed and largely speculative financial dealing...leads us today to reflect on the measures that would be necessary to provide a solution.”

Such a solution is being proposed in the form of a financial transaction tax (FTT) of less than 0.5 percent on the buying and selling of stocks, bonds, derivatives, futures, options and currencies. Some economists estimate it could generate hundreds of billions of dollars each year. (See “Why a financial transaction tax is a good idea today,” September-October 2012 *NewsNotes*.)

On April 17, Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN) reintroduced a bill which is being called a tax for the people, rather than on the people. The bill would create tax on transactions over \$300,000, ensuring that low- and middle-income households would not be impacted. Those who would be affected are a new type of investor called high frequency traders. These traders use complex computer programs to buy and sell thousands or even millions of times every second.

The FTT would not only raise lots of money. It also could slow down such high-volume trading, which has had destabilizing effects that played a role in the recent recession and foreclosure crises, and subsequent unemployment rates and government bailout money. Around the world, this type of trading has played a role in food price spikes, resulting in starvation and conflict.

Dozens of faith groups have signed onto a coalition promoting the FTT called the Robin Hood Campaign. For Catholics, the campaign’s name evokes not theft from individuals but a conviction to uphold the priority for people who are poor and marginalized by addressing a core set of habits contributing to the increasing inequity between the rich and poor.

Under the recent sequestration, 700,000 women and children in the United States will lose food assistance, and unemployment benefits have been cut nearly 10 percent. The burden of our nation’s financial problems should not be placed on the most vulnerable through cuts to vital safety net programs. The FTT could help alleviate the financial burden of global crises and contribute to a healthy future for humanity and the planet.

To advocate for the FTT with other faith-based groups visit robinhoodtax.org. §

Guantanamo: Closure is far overdue

As of early May, it is believed that at least 100 men held at the U.S. military detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba are participating in a hunger strike; 23 are being force fed. While prisoners at Guantanamo have fasted to protest their detention and/or treatment over the 11 years of the facility's use, this current strike began in February as a response both to a new, harsher team of guards and to the fact that the imprisonment appears to be open-ended with little hope for release.

Eighty six of the 166 detainees at Guantanamo have been cleared for release. According to the Washington Post (May 2), "The process of slowly emptying the facility by sending detainees home or finding them third countries in which to live has been moribund for a year. The administration blames the paralysis on congressional restrictions, but the defense secretary can still act by certifying that a particular transfer is in the national security interests of the United States. Attorneys for the detainees said the administration should move quickly to exercise that option."

On April 30, Kathy McNeely of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, along with leaders from 37 other faith-based organizations, signed a letter to President Obama and all members of Congress, describing the desperate situation at Guantanamo and calling on them to expeditiously move to close the prison there. (During a press conference earlier that day, the president had reiterated his belief that the U.S. needs to close the detention center.)

The letter, organized by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), states:

"We are deeply concerned about the ongoing existence of the Guantanamo Bay detention center and the indefinite detention without trial of many of the people imprisoned there. As representatives of U.S. faith groups, we oppose torture and indefinite detention without trial because they are contrary to the inherent dignity of the human person. As the nation's most visible and painful symbol of torture and indefinite detention, Guantanamo Bay is a constant reminder of a deep moral wound that will heal only when it is permanently closed.

"In 2008, both major party candidates, you and John McCain, promised to close the prison at Guan-

tanamo. Two days after your inauguration, you issued an executive order mandating that Guantanamo be shuttered within a year.

tanamo. Two days after your inauguration, you issued an executive order mandating that Guantanamo be shuttered within a year.

"Unfortunately, more than four years later, our government has not kept its commitment to close Guantanamo. Congress passed, and you signed, legislation placing restrictions on transferring detainees out of Guantanamo. This year, the Department of State shut down the office responsible for closing the prison. More recently, reports indicate that the military has requested almost \$196 million to upgrade facilities at Guantanamo.

"In this time of austerity, instead of spending nearly \$200 million to upgrade facilities at Guantanamo, our leaders should move forward with transferring detainees and closing the prison there. It is particularly troubling that the 86 cleared detainees remain imprisoned there – in many cases for years after they were cleared. The desperation and hopelessness felt by many of the detainees has recently sparked a hunger strike that is spreading among the detainees – highlighting the growing human tragedy of the detention center.

"Guantanamo Bay is a place where our government tortured prisoners, and it continues to be a place where many are detained indefinitely without trial. We believe that our government has a moral obligation to close the prison at Guantanamo. We hope that you share this belief and that you will act expeditiously to close Guantanamo."

Faith in action:

June is Torture Awareness Month. Plan one or more event with your parish/community on the topic of the use of torture and specifically on the situation at Guantanamo. Find resources and suggestions at NRCAT's website, www.nrcat.org. §



Labor: Follow principles on business, human rights

In most of the world, May 1 is the day to celebrate workers. This year's commemoration included memorials for the at least 650 people who were killed in the terrible collapse on April 24 of a factory in Bangladesh, a disaster that could have been avoided had the building's owners not shirked their responsibility to provide a safe environment for workers. This responsibility requires a financial expense and due diligence, two things often avoided in order to promote better profits and earnings for shareholders.

Despite huge accelerations in profits for some large business owners, most workers continue to struggle to earn enough to provide for their families. According to an AFL-CIO report, CEOs of major corporations in the U.S. earn 354 times the pay of average U.S. workers. The gap has increased dramatically: 30 years ago, wages of CEOs in the U.S. averaged 42 times more than U.S. workers, and 20 years ago, they averaged 201 times the pay of workers. Ten years ago, the gap was 281 times.

In addition to the wage gap, a recent study by the United Nations finds that gaps exist “in implementing new safeguards among businesses based in the United States, both in terms of their domestic and international operations, to ensure the protection of human rights of workers and communities affected by those operations,” according to an article published on May 4 by InterPress Service (IPS) (“UN finds ‘little appreciation’ for human rights among U.S. businesses,” by Carey L. Biron.)

Recently, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights spent 10 days observing companies in the U.S.; its final report will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in June 2014.

“With a few exceptions, most companies still struggle to understand the implications of the corporate responsibility to respect human rights,” Puvan Selvanathan, the current head of the Working Group and one of the two members on the U.S. trip, said at the end of the mission. “Those that do have policies in place, in turn, face the challenge of turning such policies into effective practices.”

According to the IPS article, “Selvanathan and his colleague, Michael Addo, focused on gauging U.S. adherence to and regulatory changes following the 2011 adoption of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. These principles offer the first international standards aimed at ameliorating the negative rights impacts of global business.

“Although the United States is a signatory to the

Guiding Principles, Washington has not yet come up with a national plan for their implantation, a gap highlighted by the Working Group and long emphasized by civil society. ...

“In late April, ... a group of civil society groups sent a brief to the U.S. State Department outlining a series of recommendations to bring the country closer in line with the Guiding Principles and to strengthen related indicators.

“The brief’s three central recommendations, in addition to developing a national implementation plan, include strengthening remedies for human rights violations. It also calls on regulators to mandate that U.S. corporations incorporate human rights into their ‘due diligence,’ the legally mandated inquiries that companies must take ahead of a business sale or agreement. Currently, such a step regarding human rights impact is not required. ...

“Selvanathan and Addo pointed to ‘significant gaps’ in oversight, regulation and enforcement in the context of U.S. attempts to conform to the Guiding Principles. Yet they said the responsibility goes beyond government officials.

“‘There is negligible awareness of the Guiding Principles generally among U.S. stakeholders,’ they note in an eight-page concluding statement ... ‘and, it seems, little appreciation of human rights being material to the conduct of business in the U.S.’


“Speaking with reporters and civil society on [May 1], the Working Group voiced particular concerns regarding low-wage agricultural workers, lack of free and prior informed consent for Native American communities engaging with big business, and harmful practices by the domestic extractives industry.

“Indeed, Selvanathan and Addo reserved some of their strongest language for these issues. For instance, they reported having heard “allegations of labor practices in low-wage industries with migrant workers, particularly within the services sector, that would be illegal under both U.S. laws and international standards.’ ...”

Faith in action:

Read the entire article about the UN observation team on CommonDreams.org. Consider signing a petition at Avaaz.org in response to the tragedy in Bangladesh; the petition asks the CEOs of fashion brands to commit to pay for routine, independent inspections and safety upgrades for supplier factories. https://secure.avaaz.org/en/crushed_to_make_our_clothes_control/?dLVAIab §

Resources

- 1) **Remembering the past with gratitude, living the present with enthusiasm, embracing the future with confidence and hope, June 14-16:** Pax Christi USA will hold its annual conference and 40th anniversary celebration in Atlanta, GA. All are welcome to attend. Speakers include Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and Rev. Bryan Massingale, STD. There will be workshops and a visit to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for a prayer ritual. Learn more and register at the Pax Christi USA website, www.pax-christiusa.org.
 
- 2) **Many borders, one body in Christ, June 16-20:** This four-day conference for Catholic social justice ministry is sponsored by the Roundtable Association of Catholic Diocesan Social Justice Directors, and will focus on migration/immigration. Speakers include Bishop Gerald Kicanas (Tucson), Archbishop Ulysses Macias (Hermosillo, Mexico), Fr. Dan Groody, CSC (University of Notre Dame), and Rev. John Fife (co-founder of the Sanctuary Movement), and will include a Cultural Competency Training, border trips, and sessions on Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) community organizing and economic development projects. Additional sponsors include CCHD, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services, the Justice, Peace and Human Development department of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and JustFaith. Learn more at the Roundtable's website: <http://www.catholicroundtable.org/>.
- 3) **“Do the Math” movie screenings, house parties:** “Do the Math” is a 42-minute documentary produced by 350.org about the rising movement in the U.S. to change the terrifying maths of the climate crisis and challenge the fossil fuel industry. While it is set in the United States, the maths the film outlines apply globally -- making it important for all of us to watch. It is in English with the option of subtitles in Chinese, French, German, Portuguese or Spanish. 350.org encourages people to host “Do the Math” screenings on May 16 but other dates are also possible. Learn more about the film and organizing tools at <http://act.350.org/signup/math-movie/>.
- 4) **EAD 2013:** Were you unable to attend Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) 2013, At God's table: Food justice for a healthy world? Or do you want to relive the EAD experience? Or are you interested in downloading plenary speaker presentations? Then be sure to check out EAD's website under “2013 National Gathering” -- click from the speaker and worship, etc. menu at the right. Videos from speaker presentations, written copies of texts, participant photos and background resources on the U.S. Farm Bill – currently being debated in Congress – are all available on EAD's website, <http://advocacydays.org/2013-at-gods-table/>
- 5) **Praying Pacem in Terris:** A prayer, study, action guide from Pax Christi USA: Pope John XXIII's encyclical Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth) helped to root the growing Catholic peace movement in the United States and gave birth to Pax Christi USA 10 years after it was written. On PCUSA's 40th anniversary and the 50th anniversary of Pacem in Terris, PCUSA has designed a prayer, study, action process that interweaves the encyclical with its four initiatives. This free resource includes a leader's guide, background sheet, reference sheet, prayer services for four months, discussion questions, and action suggestions. Go to the Pax Christi USA website to download the “Praying Pacem in Terris” resource, www.paxchristiusa.org.
- 6) **President for a day:** This new interactive web game was developed by ActionAid USA -- users have an opportunity to make policy choices to end the global food crisis while playing the role of U.S. president for one day. The user completes a quiz comprised of colorful graphics and interactive images representing various policy choices that impact food security. At the end of the quiz, a newspaper is generated with headlines demonstrating the combined outcome of the entries. The point of the website is to demonstrate to wider audiences how corn ethanol mandates, climate change, foreign aid, and agricultural models impact food security. Find it at www.presidentforaday.com.