



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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

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

ogc@maryknoll.org www.maryknollogc.org

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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
 Judy Coode..... jcoode@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 Avenue, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20001
 (202)832-1780
ogc@maryknoll.org

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

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

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

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

Chuck Hagel
 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

Eric Holder
 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

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
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Argentina loses appeal against vulture funds

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision not to hear the Argentine government's appeal in its case against hedge funds leaves that country in a very difficult situation, much like when the country defaulted on \$81 billion of debt in 2001 (see "Debt trial of the century," September-October 2013 NewsNotes for background on the case). Many are watching closely to see how Argentina will react to the decision.

The lower court's ruling requires Argentina to pay "holdout" creditors (popularly called vulture funds) \$1.3 billion, which would give them a 1,380 percent aggregate return to their investments. (They were not satisfied with Argentina's offer of a 148 percent return.) If Argentina pays the full amount required, it is likely that other creditors who had previously renegotiated with Argentina for much lower payments will demand a payout similar to what the vulture funds receive. This would require more than \$15 billion immediately (half of Argentina's international reserves) and \$120 billion over time, which would likely lead to another default.

(Wikipedia defines vulture funds as private equity or hedge funds that invest in debt considered to be very weak or in imminent default. "Investors in the fund profit by buying this debt at a discounted price on a secondary market and then suing the debtor for a larger amount than the purchasing price. Debtors can include companies, countries or individuals ... strategically profiting off of debtors that are in financial distress.")

In pushing its case, Argentina had a wide range of international support, from the U.S., Brazilian, French and Mexican governments, to the World Bank and the American Bankers Association. These supporters submitted letters to the Court urging it to hear the case due to concerns that the lower court's decision could wreak havoc in the global economy. In its letter, the U.S. government wrote, "[T]he district court's interpretation... could enable a single creditor to thwart the implementation of an internationally supported restructuring plan, and thereby undermine the decades of effort the United States has expended to encourage a system of cooperative resolution of sovereign debt crises."

The decision is especially troublesome because in the 13 years since the default, the Argentine economy was able to rebound impressively from its crisis. Despite warnings from many economists that a default

would worsen the economy, it was only three months after declaring default that the economy began a long and impressive recovery. After 10 years GDP had grown by 94 percent in real terms, the highest growth rate in the Western hemisphere. Argentina was also able to greatly improve social indicators with unemployment as well as poverty and inequality rates plummeting.

Mark Weisbrot with the Center for Economic Policy Research points out that "Argentina's experience also calls into question the popular myth that recessions caused by financial crises must involve a slow and painful recovery. Argentina's financial crisis and collapse were as severe as that of almost any country in recent decades, and yet it took only one quarter after the default to embark on a rapid and sustained recovery."

In addition to the lawsuit, vulture funds are pursuing other means to pry the money from Argentina. One, Riverstone Group, has used its political influence in its hometown of Manchester, NH to have state senator Lou D'Alessandro present a bill allowing the state liquor board to halt the sale of Argentine wine until the debt is paid to Riverstone. Another fund tried to seize the Argentine president's plane, Tango 01, while it was in the U.S. for maintenance. Another temporarily seized an Argentine ship and tried to seize parts of Argentina's rocket program in order to be repaid.

Yet creditors need to be cautious about forcing countries into impossible debt situations. Germany was loaded down with such enormous debt after World War I that its economy crashed leading to the election of Adolf Hitler and his Socialist Nationalist party. Learning their lesson, allied forces worked out a much more manageable solution after World War II with the London Debt Agreement of 1953.

While individuals with too much debt have options like declaring bankruptcy - a solution that benefits not only debtors, but creditors and the larger economy as well - sovereign nations have no such option, which has led to decades of suffering for citizens of debtor nations. This case shows the desperate need for such an option and hopefully will help create momentum for creating such a mechanism. Surely it is more important for millions of Argentines to be able to avoid hunger and poverty than for hedge funds to receive exorbitant profits.

Learn more about vulture fund cases involving other countries at Jubilee USA's website, www.jubileeusa.org/vulturefunds/vulture-fund-country-studies.html. §



Honduras: Five years post-coup

In the five years since the 2009 *coup d'état*, Honduras has descended into a state of violence that has touched nearly every aspect of society. Young people are fleeing the country in record numbers, sparking media attention in the United States as U.S. Customs and Border Patrol have



been unequipped to adequately deal with the influx of minors. The youth are not only fleeing the violence, but also the stagnant economy that promises little future for the next generations. In a 2013 report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), the authors find that Honduras now has the most unequal distribution of income in Latin America and that nearly 100 percent of economic growth since the coup has flowed into the pockets of the richest 10 percent. Social spending has plummeted since the coup and extreme poverty has increased by over 25 percent. Unemployment, underemployment, and the number of Honduran workers being paid less than minimum wage have all gone up over the

last five years. It is no wonder then that youth are leaving, fleeing the violence, impunity, and economic model that only benefit the powerful. We work and pray every day for a new Honduras and for a U.S. foreign policy that prioritizes human rights, standing in solidarity with those who confront

impunity and put their lives on the line as they dare to dream of a better world.

The following opinion piece originally was published on June 29, 2014 by Radio Progreso, an independent radio station (see *NewsNotes* May-June 2014) and Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación y Comunicación (ERIC), a social analysis and action center. Both organizations are directed by Padre Melo, a Jesuit priest who (along with the staff) has often come under threat from the post-coup Honduran authorities. Eben Levey, who has worked with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns as an intern since September 2013, translated the article from its original Spanish:

“On June 28, 2009, Honduras awoke to the announcement of a *coup d'état*, which five years later continues to manifest its tragic effects on democratic institutions and on the life of a citizenry trapped by impunity and violence that governs, controls, blackmails, and permanently threatens society.

“In the post-coup Honduras, just in the last year, there were 109 massacres, 6,757 homicides, that is to say, 563 homicides per months, and on average, 19 victims per day. In the post-coup Honduras, femicides increased from 512 to more than 600 in 2012 and 2013. In the post-coup Honduras, members of the National Police assassinated 149 people between January 2011 and November 2012.

“In the post-coup Honduras, more than 32 journalists and media workers have been assassinated with impunity. In the post-coup Honduras, 765 students from primary schools, secondary schools, and universities have been assassinated between January 2010 and May 2014. In the post-coup Honduras, just during the government of ‘Pepe’ Lobo, 3,901 boys, girls, and youth under the age of 23 were assassinated, and through the third month of the current government, that number is near 270.

“In the post-coup Honduras, impunity has been strengthened by tainted justice and an amnesty law that favors those who attacked democracy and human rights. In the post-coup Honduras, those who committed the coup remain in power as if they were national heroes, and they maintain control over the key institutions of justice and security.

“In the post-coup Honduras, the fatal trinity of impunity, corruption and concentration of power has deeply wounded the heart of the country and denies all justice. In the post-coup Honduras, the country is sold in pieces, and the natural resources of communities are, without any consultation, given away to businesses and unscrupulous businessmen who are often more than willing to use violence against the communities.

“However, in the post-coup Honduras, thousands of victims continue to demand justice, fighting directly against impunity and those impunity protects, they continue defending their territories with their lives, and they continue to rebel against despair and suffering to yell ‘ENOUGH!’ And this almost desperate cry comes from within the souls of millions of people driven by the dream of a Honduras free from fear, free from violence, free from misery. Step by step, slowly, we are building from the quotidian community struggles a shared Honduras based on justice and solidarity.” §

Chile: Government rejects mega-dam project

The following article was prepared by Richard Coaxum, an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns' Faith Economy Ecology project.

On June 10, Chile's government made a historic move in rejecting the proposal for an \$8 billion dam, the HidroAysén, which was to be built to alleviate the country's growing energy usage. The public and environmentalists celebrated the decision. The proposed project would have built five dams on Chile's two largest rivers, the Baker and Pascua, in the Aysén region of southern Chile. Environmentalists note that the resulting transmission line from the dam would have an impact on 14 national parks and protected reserves thus displacing indigenous populations and scarring the nearly pristine landscape.

Patagonia, the region where the proposed project would have been built, is viewed by the Chilean people as a national treasure. Roughly 100,000 visitors a year come to Aysén to enjoy the pristine wilderness, accounting for between five to 10 percent of the regional economy. The Chilean Patagonia—from Pumalín south to Torres del Paine—generates \$80 million to \$120 million a year from eco-tourism. Villages like Puerto Bertrand, which lies where the Baker flows into the waters of Lago General Carrera, rely heavily on outdoor activities such as trekking, rafting, and fishing. Environmentalists argue that not only would the dam disturb the local environment, but it would have devastating impacts on the regional indigenous economy.

However this is not the only reason for the past eight years of demonstrations and protests in opposition to the proposed project. As the Chilean people and government soon discovered, the dam proposal was “lacking sufficient plans to accommodate those who would be displaced and the quantification of damage to the environment and wildlife was inadequate,” said Environment Minister Pablo Badenier as he announced the proposal rejection. The negative press from the dam has also caught the attention of potential investors. Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA), the large Chilean bank, announced in a statement that it is “not considering financing [this project] due to its high social and environmental risks.”

HidroAysén's own environmental impact assess-



Photo of December 2012 demonstration against HidroAysén dam courtesy of Greenpeace Chile.

ment (EIA), which is required for government approval of mega-projects, failed to account for glacial lake outburst floods in the rivers, which can result from the reservoirs of water being introduced via volcanic activity, earthquakes, or simply melting because of rising temperatures. The glaciers, which were supposed to be a source of energy, have begun to recede at an exponential rate due to climate change.

As Patagonia Adventure Expeditions owner Jonathan Leidich notes, placing five reservoirs in the glacial lake would cut off fluid circulation of water, thus increasing the temperature of the glacial lake and the rate of glacial melting. According to Leidich, a glacial lake outburst flood could dump 100,000 cubic feet of silt into the reservoir, disrupting the functioning of the dam and displacing nearby residents.

With these environmental factors and with the lack of a relocation plan weighing heavily on the mind of Chilean people, it is unsurprising that a 2011 opinion poll done by the newspaper *La Tercera* reported that 74 percent of Chileans are against the HidroAysén (although 81 percent of the Chileans polled stated that energy production was indeed a priority moving forward for the country's future.)

The project would also have brought 4,000 new workers into the county of roughly 5,000 residents. Most would live in Cochrane, a village of just 2,800. The community fears that the increased population from outside the community will have social impacts such as an increase in alcohol consumption, sexual assault, prostitution and crime. This is unfortunately a common problem in other extractives or mega infrastructure projects in the U.S. and globally.

Fortunately for Chile and opponents of the HidroAysén dam, Chile is blessed with the resources for a plethora of other clean energy options which could help to tackle the country's growing energy needs without the dam. For example, in the deserts north of Santiago, Chile's capital and largest city, there is the potential for solar, wind, and geothermal power to be developed.

A diverse set of alternative energy plants located nearer to Santiago and the more populated areas of Chile would also reduce transmission costs. Chile has plenty of options for renewable energy, but the HidroAysén, with the tremendous impact that it would have on a region thus far untouched by massive development, does not need to be one of them. §

El Salvador: Struggles continue around mining

The following article was prepared by Maryknoll lay missionary Joe Hastings, who lives and serves in El Salvador. The mural at right is painted in the town of San Isidro.

Gold mining in El Salvador is an issue that is both daunting and hopeful. It is hopeful because El Salvador has held at bay the El Dorado gold mine, which, according to polls, most Salvadorans do not want and consider too high a risk for the country's precious water supply. Data from the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN in Spanish) clearly shows the mine's potential threat to the country's surface water, 90 percent of which is already contaminated, according to their 2007 report. It's hopeful because a wide cross-section of Salvadorans, from campesinos to federal officials, are actively engaged – some heroically – in stopping the mine. Their hope was strengthened on March 9, when the country elected a new president who pledged to protect water and monitor mining.

The issue is daunting as well, because the coffers of the OceanaGold mining company – formerly known as Pacific Rim – which owns the El Dorado mine, are deep, and locals claim that money is used to influence politicians, win popular support in communities desperate for funds, and intimidate opponents. It's daunting because a decision on the legal future of the mine is now out of the hands of the Salvadoran government and sits in the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), a World Bank “court” in Washington, D.C., far away from the voices of anyone who lives in the threatened areas of El Salvador.

In March I joined a delegation to raise awareness of the mine's threat to water, agriculture and government transparency in El Salvador. We met with Hector Barrios, attorney and activist in San Isidro, a typical small town in Cabañas, the poorest province (department) of El Salvador, and located a mere 10 miles down the road from the El Dorado mine. People in Cabañas make their living on small farms, and they can't do that without water. In just the exploratory stage of the El Dorado mine, Pacific Rim's drilled “test” wells to find out if there was enough underground water to operate the mine. These wells depleted the water in local hand-dug wells that families depend upon. Local authorities blamed this water loss on “dry years,” but expert hydrologists (both Salvadoran and international) point to a mine's drilling.

How much water are we talking about? By Pacific Rim's own estimates, the El Dorado mine would use



about 73 million gallons of water each year, or about 237,000 gallons a day. The mine site sits high in the Rio Lempa watershed, which irrigates about 45 percent of the nation's arable land, so a threat to water there is a threat to El Salvador's farming, ranching, and fishing.

Pacific Rim's own statements also admit that for every ounce of gold extracted, one ton of rock must be crushed and “removed.” A lot of rock? Yes, especially when Pacific Rim itself claims a potential five to 25 million ounces of gold over the mine's projected 10-year life-span. At a current price somewhere north of US\$1,250/oz., the El Dorado mine would bring significant fortunes to its owners and investors.

Given the potential environmental damage, the MARN did not approve Pacific Rim's permit to operate the mine, so in 2009 Pacific Rim took the government of El Salvador to the World Bank's court, seeking US\$301 million for profits on its investment, which it claims it was unjustly denied. OceanaGold, an Australian company, purchased Pacific Rim in 2013, and continues the suit. El Salvador is optimistic, as they have received favorable judgments from the ICSID before, but past is no guarantee. A verdict is expected in 2015.

For area residents, pushing back against the mine is dangerous. The local community center bears a mural of Marcelo Rivera, a schoolteacher who was very active in opposing the mine. Rivera was “disappeared” in June 2009, and his body later discovered – tortured and strangled – dumped down a well. (See the short documentary “The Mysterious Death of Marcelo Rivera” by Jamie Moffat.) Intimidations continue. Hector Barrios and his family have received several threats, and at a May forum in San Salvador on the issue, El Salvador's Federal Attorney for Human Rights, David Morales, reported that Pacific Rim/Oceana Gold's presence in Cabañas has coincided with a rise in violence in towns around the mine, and that journalists reporting on the activities of mining companies have received threats as well.

But these threats haven't deterred local people in fighting for their future. They use every method to raise awareness of the mine's threat to water, painting murals conveying their concern for the region's water, and helping young musicians record songs on the issue.

The Salvadoran Catholic bishops' conference has stood by its 1997 unanimous statement against the mine, stating simply that "metallic mining is not viable in the country," and that "no material benefit is can compare with the value of human life." Caritas El Salvador, the human development agency of the Salvadoran Catholic Church, has consistently opposed the mine, knowing

that the livelihood of many Salvadorans, especially of those who are poor, is tied to good stewardship of the country's water and arable land. Local community agencies have carefully studied the mines' claims of job creation and found them wildly exaggerated. So Caritas has joined many local groups in educating about the mine's potential threats, about the importance of preserving the nation's water supply, and creating events for Salvadorans to make their opposition to the mine known to their government. Their message is summed up in a popular poster seen around the country: "We can live without gold. We cannot live without water." §

Ecuador: Forest-saving proposal scrapped

Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa recently placed the final nail in the coffin of his 2007 Yasuni-ITT proposal to preserve a pristine nature and indigenous reserve. In early June he declared that the proposal had failed and he would open the area to oil extraction by Petroamazonas, a subsidiary of Ecuador's national petroleum company Petroecuador.

The proposal was the first of its kind from a head of state – Ecuador would not extract oil from the Yasuni national park if the international community donated half of the value of that oil, approximately \$3.6 billion, to a fund managed by the United Nations Development Program. It was an ingenious plan to preserve an important part of nature while not losing the potential money for Ecuador's development.

UNESCO identified the park as a biosphere reserve in 1989 because of the incredible amount of biodiversity it contains. Though the size of Delaware, it contains more tree and animal species than in all of North America. The Tagaeri and Taromenane people also live in the area, two of the last groups in the world to voluntarily live in isolation.

In August of last year, President Correa announced that "the world had failed us" referring to the \$363 million in cash, debt cancellations and in-kind donations that had been raised to protect the park, far short of the required \$3.6 billion. While the international community certainly fell through on its side of the bargain, Correa must assume part of the blame as well. As potential donors investigated the possibility of contributing to the cause, they found that the park is not as pristine as portrayed; it is surrounded by oil wells some that have been operating since the 1990s. In addition, throughout the process, Correa often referred to a "plan B" if enough

money was not raised, leaving many potential donors concerned that Ecuador would not follow through with the deal. The fact that the world entered into a financial crisis months after Correa announced the proposal was also an important factor in the failure of the scheme.

When he initially announced the failure of the proposal in August 2013, Correa indicated his interest in granting drilling rights in the area to Petroamazonas, but in response to strong pressure from Ecuadorian and international movements, said that he would hold a public referendum on the issue if they were able to collect signatures of five percent of registered Ecuadorian voters (approximately 583,000), as required by the constitution for such a referendum.

In early April, campaigners presented almost 760,000 signatures to the national electoral council; however, a large number of signatures were thrown out for questionable reasons including the size of the paper and color of ink. The identities of a number of signature collectors also disappeared while in the hands of the electoral council, resulting in the discarding of all of the signatures that they had collected. In the end, the council threw out almost 60 percent of the signatures and denied the request for a referendum. That decision is being appealed but it appears clear now that the government is moving forward with drilling in the area. Oil is expected to start flowing by early 2016.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has shown that at least two-thirds of the world's oil reserves must remain in the ground if we are to avoid warming the planet by more than two degrees Celsius. The Yasuni-ITT plan served as an example of how that could be done without sacrificing potential human development. Its failure represents a severe setback in the struggle for a sustainable planet. §

Guatemala: Resurgence of impunity

The following article was written by Eben Levey, who has served as an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns since September 2013.

As has been reported in these pages in recent years, Guatemala still struggles to come to terms with the crimes against humanity and mass killings committed during its 36-year internal armed conflict that ended with negotiated peace accords in 1996. The historic conviction for genocide of ex-president Efraín Ríos Montt in May 2013 was a brief moment in which justice broke through the entrenched barriers of impunity that continue to define Guatemalan politics. However, just 10 days after the conviction, Guatemala's Constitutional Court overturned the conviction on obscure technical grounds and ordered a retrial to start again from the beginning.

In the meantime, Guatemala's powerful right wing, in reaction to the challenge to impunity, has since maneuvered to prevent another such victory for justice. In particular, the leading force in the crusade against impunity, Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz, was forced out of office seven months before her term was due to expire. Paz y Paz had been appointed Attorney General in December 2010; her predecessor was removed from his post after only 17 days in office in June 2010 amidst widespread allegations of connections to organized crime. According to the Guatemalan Constitution, attorneys general serve terms of four years, with the possibility of re-appointment. Thus, everyone expected that Paz y Paz would serve through December 2014.

However, in February of this year, the Constitutional Court ruled that Paz y Paz would be relieved of her office in May as a result of a case brought against Paz y Paz by corporate lawyer and wealthy businessman Ricardo Sagastume. In the technical ruling, the Court agreed with Sagastume that Paz y Paz merely stepped in to fulfill the term of her predecessor rather than beginning her own term, thus cutting her time in office seven months short. As reported in *The Guardian*, "War criminals, corrupt officials and drug traffickers let out a collective sigh of relief in Guatemala... after another controversial ruling by the constitutional court appeared to fly in the face of justice and accountability."

Paz y Paz was, for a period of time all too brief, the symbol of hope in a country still searching for effective accountability. Human rights defenders and others deeply invested in the continuation of Paz y Paz's strides toward justice hoped that the nominating commission made up of lawyers, law school deans, and the president

of the Supreme Court would name Paz y Paz as a candidate for reappointment as they examined and graded a number of possible candidates for the position. However, although Paz y Paz received the second highest score according to the nominating commission's rubric, they decided to exclude her name from the short list of six candidates submitted to President Oscar Perez Molina, drawing concern from the international observers who had been closely watching the nominating process.

On May 17, Perez Molina replaced Paz y Paz with Thelma Esperanza Aldana Hernández, a judge who had been a member of the Guatemalan Supreme court. Aldana Hernández takes the post with zero prosecutorial experience, and news reports in Guatemala suggest that she will likely shift the focus of the office away from human rights and organized crime to focus instead on street crime. Furthermore, there are serious doubts as to whether Aldana Hernández will continue to pursue the Ríos Montt genocide trial that is due to resume in January 2015. The Center for Independent Media of Guatemala (CMI Guatemala in Spanish initials) has documented that Aldana Hernández is very closely tied to the Frente Republicano Guatemalteco (FRG), the right-wing political party founded by Ríos Montt in 1989 and currently led by Zury Ríos Montt, the ex-dictator's daughter.

Finally, reflecting the power of genocide-deniers in Guatemalan politics, the national legislature passed a non-binding resolution on May 14 that declared that genocide never occurred during the 36-year armed conflict. The resolution directly contradicts the findings of a 1999 United Nations investigation, which concluded that genocide and human rights violations were widespread during the conflict in which roughly 80 percent of the victims were indigenous and over 600 massacres occurred in indigenous villages and regions.

In the year since Ríos Montt's genocide conviction was overturned, Guatemala's reactionary right has been quite successful in undoing the steps taken toward justice and accountability. The unseating of crusading Attorney General Paz y Paz, her replacement with a right-wing former judge who has indicating little willingness to continue prosecutions against human rights violators, a vicious media campaign against human rights defenders and justice advocates, and the recent genocide-denying resolution: these events over the past year indicate that Guatemala is hardly progressing in the struggle for justice. Rather, the quest for justice for the countless victims of Guatemala's armed conflict has been besieged by a powerful right wing for whom impunity remains. §

Sudan: War in the north continues

As South Sudan's fractious leaders struggle to fend off a potential civil war, the other Sudan – the Republic of the Sudan – continues to wage a vicious military campaign against civilians in the Nuba Mountains area of Southern Kordofan province. The same aerial bombing techniques used in previous campaigns are once again targeting schools and hospitals.

Maryknoll missionary priest Tom Tiscornia, who lived through and witnessed some of the bombing of the earlier conflict, now lives in Gidel, Sudan near the recently bombed Mother of Mercy hospital. In a recent email he reported about an attack by the Sudanese airforce: “Well, today we were in and out of the foxholes. Just after the Form 2 Christian Religious Exam, around 10:30 am, we were in the holes outside the secondary school for half an hour as the Antonov bomber continued to circle over. Later at 1:30 pm we were in the holes again near our home -- this time the bombs hit near our primary school with over 500 students, really close -- too close for comfort, the kids have to be scared out of their minds. Again, just half hour ago a MIG flew by here at the hospital. I'm back into another foxhole. While in the hole at the secondary one of the students asked me, 'Why are you here - aren't you afraid?' Fear is a part of the life for the people of Nuba. Be well and keep us in your prayers.”

In its June 25 update on the situation in South Kordofan, Amnesty International (AI) reports that the renewed attacks on villages in this region that borders South Sudan may constitute war crimes. AI bases its assessment on satellite images that show homes, hospitals and schools like the one where Fr. Tiscornia teaches have been targeted. This photo (right) shows part of a bomb shelter. The school is in the background. The students and teachers have taken to digging even more foxholes in preparation for future bombing raids.

The current bombing attacks in the Nuba Mountains coincide with the planting season, a strategy to prevent food production which in turn leads migration out of the area. At the same, the government of Omar Al-Bashir makes sure humanitarian assistance is prohib-



ited from entering the “war zone.” Like their neighbors in South Sudan, residents of the Nuba Mountains are facing a humanitarian disaster. AI estimates that over 800,000 people are displaced or otherwise affected by this military operation dubbed “Decisive Summer.”

According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) (<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/horn-of-africa/sudan/198-sudans-spreading-conflict-i-war-in-south-kordofan.aspx>) the dynamics of the current war in Sudan are different from those of earlier conflicts. Now the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) is better armed and larger than in the past and has made alliances with similar groups in Darfur such as the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF). The Government of Sudan's forces have also been expanded to over 30,000 soldiers. But in the present conflict, they are losing support of some traditional allies. The ICG notes that “Arab tribes that previously supplied militias that did much of the fighting no longer support the government wholeheartedly; significant numbers have joined groups fighting Khartoum. The conflict shows every sign of strategic stalemate.”



As with many other conflicts in Africa and around the world, some of the root causes can be found in the political marginalization of certain groups, the loss of access to farming and grazing land due in part to land grabs, and the long list of unimplemented promises of political and economic inclusion. Hopefully, these and many other important security and development issues will be on the agenda of the U.S./Africa Leaders'

Summit that will take place next month in Washington, D.C. (See related article on page 10.) §

U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit

Momentum is building for a first ever meeting between President Obama and the heads of state of Africa. The U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit will be held August 4-6 in Washington, D.C., with 48 African leaders, along with their spouses, invited to attend. The president announced plans for this meeting last year in Cape Town during a speech that outlined the kind of partnership he hopes to establish with the continent. Various civil society groups are also planning events to coincide with the presence of so many visitors from the African continent.

According to government officials, the Summit will be a different kind of gathering: less speeches and more discussions and dialog between the administration and the presiding heads of state of those nations with which the U.S. has relations. The interchange with these leaders will take place around a "shared agenda": A White House press release on the Summit indicates that President Obama "looks forward to welcoming leaders from across the African continent ... to further strengthen ties with one of the world's most dynamic and fastest-growing regions. The Summit will build on the progress made since the President's trip to Africa last summer, advance

the Administration's focus on trade and investment in Africa, and highlight America's commitment to Africa's security, its democratic development, and its people."

This Summit is one of President Obama's most important initiatives towards Africa and is a further step in the development of his foreign policy stance as outlined in the June 2012 policy statement U.S. Strategy Towards Sub-Saharan Africa. (Read more in *NewsNotes*, September-October 2013). During his 2012 trip to four African nations, Obama is said to have been impressed with the amount of progress that had been made in the treatment of those with HIV and AIDS and in the protection of human rights. He also came home more aware of the difficult crises and turmoil in South Sudan, Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the Central African Republic but also cognizant of the willingness of African leaders to dialog on these crises. Since last summer, the U.S. has appointed former Wisconsin senator Russ Feingold as a special envoy for the DRC, sent Secretary of State John Kerry to twist arms in the South Sudan, and helped transport peacekeeping troops from Burundi to the Central African Republic.

What does the U.S. hope to achieve from this sum-

U.S.-Africa Summit: The missing agenda

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns intern Kelly Kundrat contributed to this piece.

The U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit will include presidents of Ethiopia, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea, where many Torture Abolition and Survivors' Support Coalition (TASSC) members are from. Some of these invited countries constitute dictatorships, where individuals with dissenting opinions, those who oppose the ruling political parties, or are simply critical of the government, are harassed, arrested, or even tortured. Noting that this summit's goals are both economic and political, the Obama administration should include the promotion of universal human rights as part of the agenda.

On June 26, the Congressional Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held an open panel in recognition of the annual International Day in Support of Survivors of Torture. Torture survivors from Ethiopia, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea told their stories, highlighting the human rights abuses within those nations:

From Ethiopia: "... One of my goals it to change the way Congress and the American people see Ethiopia—the Ethiopian government does a good job of hiding the truth about what is happening in our country [...] I was arrested on June 10, 2005. Four armed federal policemen raided my home [...] They dragged me into their vehicle and beat me with a police baton on my head and back. At the police station, they threw me from the car on to the ground injuring my knee and elbow." This survivor also experienced 15 days of solitary confinement while he bled from the injuries. He was tortured simply because he campaigned for a parliamentary candidate.

From Equatorial Guinea: "They tortured me for four months, day and night. Police came into my cell at night. It was a dark, dirty cell with more than a hundred other prisoners, almost all political prisoners. They would call my name, drag me into a separate room, beat me with batons and guns. They would kick me and demand that I give them names of people in the opposition. I kept saying I didn't know anyone, I was just an engineer. My right ankle is permanently deformed from the torture, and it hurts all the time whenever I walk."

mit? First, the meeting is a chance to help educate U.S. residents about Africa's people as well as about the depth of the U.S. involvement in Africa and its security and economic interests there. Secondly, it will be an opportunity to showcase especially the U.S. government's plans for fostering the development of electrical energy through investment by private companies like Symbion Energy. The U.S. would like to promote Africa as a strategic partner and not as a continent in crisis. The basis of this partnership, from Washington's point of view, should be built on the public-private partnership model of development. Indeed, while civil society groups have been told they will not be part of the official Summit, representatives from trade and investment organizations have been invited to attend.

What about the involvement of civil society organizations in the Summit? In April, four civil society organizations wrote President Obama a letter welcoming his decision to call the meeting. They also made a direct appeal to allow official space for African civil society activists. Unfortunately, while there is talk of a

civil society forum in conjunction with the Summit, so far no official space has been provided. However, some departments in the government have expressed openness to listen to input from civil society. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), for example, has asked for recommendations about what to talk about with African leaders. They are looking for very specific suggestions on what to do, e.g. that each U.S. embassy in Africa meet with civil society groups in Africa prior to the Summit. Organizers of the Summit claim that they are open to receiving input from civil society on issues such as land grabbing in Africa and problems of corruption and lack of good governance. Civil society representatives from Africa say they would like to see both the opportunity to participate in the meetings of the Summit and an agenda that includes issues like human rights and not just security and economic concerns. Another key concern of African civil society groups is how the U.S. has been critical of the policies of many African countries only to have these criticisms swept under the rug before the Summit takes place. §

Philippines: Building resilient communities

The following article was written by Maryknoll Sr. Marvie Misolas. See her article, "Philippines: Climate crisis," in the January-February 2014 NewsNotes.

Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) is a familiar phrase nowadays all over the Philippines. Filipinos regularly experience multiple natural and human caused calamities ranging from earthquakes, tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, flash floods and landslides, super typhoons and fires and drought. The negative effects of climate change add to the increased and extreme occurrence of weather related disasters in the Philippines because of its location and being archipelagic (groups of islands). Named typhoon of the century, Haiyan (local name: Yolanda) made landfall in November 2013 in the central Philippines, leaving more than 2,000 people dead and unaccounted, over two million people homeless, with damages costing several billions of pesos. The realization of the lack of preparedness to extreme disasters necessitated the nation to reflect and pause of lessons learned. It cannot be business as usual.

Republic Act of the Philippines No. 9729, known as the Climate Change Act, mandated the establishment of Climate Change Commission (CCC) as the policy-making body of the national government "to coordinate, monitor and evaluate the programs and action plans of

the government relating to climate change." The CCC, with the Local Government Units (LGUs), issued the National Climate Change Action Plan of 2010, strategizing actions for adaptation and mitigation from 2011 to 2028. The plan's seven priorities are: 1) food security; 2) water sufficiency; 3) ecological and environmental stability; 4) human security; 5) climate-friendly industries and services; 6) sustainable energy; and 7) knowledge and capacity development.

It is under human security (#4) and knowledge and capacity development (#7) that all government units are mandated to conduct risk and hazards preparedness assessment and capacity building to Filipino people. It is now being implemented in both private and government agencies through workshops and trainings on disaster risk preparedness and disaster management. One of the models being used for training is the community-based risk reduction management (CDBRRM) model. The principle of CDBRRM aims to harness the strength of local communities being the locus of experience of such disasters. It taps to the resilience of the people. In one of the training session, the participants prepare their geographical community map and identify areas of vulnerability to different kinds of hazards. Disaster management equips leaders to respond to a disaster event methodically and orderly, reducing chaos and conflict.

Beginning May of this year, I have been a part of the Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan's CBDRRM program in Payatas, Quezon City, an urban poor area. Many of the residents lived off and work in the garbage dumpsite. This disaster preparedness training program is for a period of one year, exclusively to local executives and their staff in Payatas. Payatas is home to the largest garbage dumpsite in Metro Manila, also popularly known as "Smokey Mountain." In 2000, super typhoon Milenyo (local name), caused a devastating trash-slide, burying more than 200 people who lived near the dumpsite. Aside from trash-slide, Payatas is also under the constant threat of a methane gas explosion, from one of the closed sections of the dumpsite turned into a methane gas plant managed by a private company. Payatas is also adjacent to the Marikina East Fault Line; a 7.2-magnitude earthquake is projected by national and international geoscientists to happen anytime. An earthquake of this magnitude will affect Payatas. Because of these threats, Payatas is considered high risk and one of the most vulnerable communities in greater Manila area.

One of the area leaders, Beth (not her real name), lived next to the creek in Payatas. During the typhoon Ondoy (international name: Ketsana) in 2011, a flash flood happened at mid-morning without warning, although there had been non-stop heavy rain at that time

and the creek was starting to overflow. They were lucky to get to a safe place with only the clothes on their backs. Her house and the pigs in her pigpen were washed away. Having no other place to rebuild, her family went back and built another sub-standard housing next to the creek. When asked why she joined the CBDRRM training, Beth responded that she wants to know what to do, and help her family and her neighbors by sharing what she learned with them, if and when another disaster happens again. She also hopes that there will be a safer area where her family could relocate. According to Quezon City ordinance, areas around watershed, creek and spring are natural waterways and may not be used as dwelling zones because of flood vulnerability and the effects of human encroachment such as pollution to these natural ecosystems.

Last June 9 was the CDBRRM Simulation Drill – all areas in Payatas and their local executives who were trained put in action what they have learned. I was assigned to observe Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan (SLB) as participating NGO, in order to give a report to the drill master and provide feedback of the whole process.

Capacity building in the grassroots level in densely populated and urban poor areas in Metro Manila may well be the most viable approach to reinforce people's resilience and adapt to impacts of climate change. §

Thailand: Military coup disrupts democracy

On May 22 General Prayuth Chan-ocha (right) led the Thai army in a coup which ended for the time being Thailand's experiment in electoral democracy. After shutting down a dozen television stations and thousands of community radio stations, the military controlled the public's access to news, imposed martial law, and detained both government and opposition leaders.



This coup ended seven months of street protests and political impasse between the government of the elected Pheu Thai party and the old establishment which had taken to the streets when it became evident that they didn't have enough popular support to win elections.

The economic impact of the political crisis and the subsequent coup are threatening to dry up foreign investment and the tourism industry on which Thailand depends. Even before the coup the state planning council announced that the Thai economy had lapsed into recession.

Behind the political and economic uncertainty loom royal succession worries: the era of the revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej is coming to an end. At 86-years old, the king is frail and seldom appears in public. His heir apparent, Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, is something of a playboy and widely unpopular among Thais.

Thailand's last coup, in 2006, lasted a year. Many observers fear this one will last a lot longer. Meanwhile, Thailand was condemned in June as one of the worst countries in the world for human trafficking in the U.S. State Department's annual report on trafficking of persons. This report followed a series of revelations in the press of government officials selling Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to human traffickers, as well as forced labor in Thailand's seafood industry. The State Department report states that thousands of trafficking victims end up in Thailand as migrants from neighboring countries "who are forced, coerced or defrauded into labor or exploited in the sex trade."

A link to the State Department report is found on the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns' website. §

Japan: Bishops condemn Article 9 reversal

In the January-February 2014 NewsNotes, Fr. James Mylet contributed "Japan: Constitution's Article 9 revisited," which gave a brief update on the troubling possibility that the anti-war components of Japan's constitution could be annulled. On July 1, the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe approved changes that could lead to Japan's use of military force in overseas missions and to allow Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense.

According to a Union of Catholic Asia News (UCAN) article on July 4, Japan's Catholic bishops issued "a strongly worded statement addressed to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe" and "called on the government to 'review and repeal the cabinet's decision at once' to allow Japan's Self-Defense Force to carry out military operations with other nations."

The bishops released their statement on July 3, two days after Japan's cabinet had announced its "reinterpretation" of the constitution.

"In their statement," continued the UCAN article, "the bishops pointed out that previous governments had recognized that participation in collective self-defense was 'constitutionally unacceptable.'

"The bishops claimed that the Abe government's decision 'trampled on the constitution' and was 'a denial of constitutionalism.' The bishops said that for the nearly 70 years since the end of World War II Japan's citizens have respected and taken pride in the Preamble and Article 9 of the constitution that call for peace and renounce war.

"We, the Catholic Church, are convinced that it is false to think that security can be ensured by military buildup and the use of force," said the [Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, CBCJ] statement. The bishops went on to say, "Moreover, the latest backtracking on the principles of the Peace Constitution obstructs the easing of tensions in East Asia so that dialogue and trust among nations will be beyond our reach."

"The bishops emphasized that peace 'can be built by sincere reflection upon history and apology followed by forgiveness' and 'We must not abandon the hope to avoid war and armed conflict through dialogue and negotiation.' However, at a July 1 press conference, Prime Minister Abe expressed the government's view that 'this cabinet decision does not in any way change the principles of the constitution.'"

Pax Christi, the international Catholic peace movement, also posted a statement expressing its very strong

regret of the decision. "Pax Christi International and many of its Member Organisations, including the Japan Catholic Council for Justice and Peace (CCJP) [and the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns], have been campaigning for many years in keeping the original wording of the Constitution which reads: 'Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. To accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognised.'

"Now, with the changes to the interpretation of Article 9," the statement continues, "a Cabinet-approved document allows for the use of force as a means of self-defense not only when Japan comes under military attack, but also when a nation with a close relationship to Japan comes under attack. This move taken by the present Japanese government means a historical turning point in post-war Japan and a weakening of its commitment to constitutional nonviolence.

"[We are] deeply concerned about this decision Article 9 has been a sign of hope for a world that yearns for deep, inclusive and lasting peace. It has encouraged dialogue and diplomacy, helping Japan to become a stabilizing factor in East Asia rather than a threat to neighboring countries. We strongly encourage the Japanese government to address 'territorial disputes' in accordance with the spirit of Article 9 rather than to revise such an important and visionary article from the Japanese Constitution. ...

"We affirm our conviction that amending Article 9 from the Japanese Constitution or changing its interpretation is disrespectful of the will of the majority of the Japanese people and it would be a significant step in the wrong direction. Rather, the commitment represented by Article 9 to build peaceful international relations based on reconciliation, equality, and mutual respect should serve as a model for the world.

"Pax Christi International has endorsed the Global Article 9 Campaign and invites all its Member Organisations to sign and further distribute the international online petition 'Prime Minister Shinzo Abe: Save Japan's Peace Constitution.'"

See more at: <http://www.paxchristi.net/news/pax-christi-international-statement-article-9-japanese-constitution/3381#sthash.3kw14z32.dpuf>. §

Iraq: Urgent need for regional political solution

As the progression of violence in already-violent Iraq commanded the attention of the world, Pope Francis joined the call to prayer and expressed his hope for “security and peace and a future of reconciliation and justice where all Iraqis, whatever their religious affiliation, will be able together to build up their country, making a model of coexistence.” Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako, who lives in Baghdad, called for a day of “fasting and prayer for the restoration of security and stability in Iraq,” and insisted that “the best solution to all these problems is the creation of a government of national unity” to strengthen “the rule of law.” The following piece was submitted by Marie Dennis, co-president of Pax Christi International.

Given the history and consequences of U.S. interventions in Iraq, U.S. faith communities and peace groups spoke out quickly and clearly:

Pax Christi USA wrote: “In response to the recent unrest in Iraq and the possibility of the crisis continuing to spread, Pax Christi USA is unequivocal in its assertion that U.S. military intervention will not achieve the peace and stability that the people of Iraq deserve. A military solution—whether it include air strikes or ground troops or an increase in the flow of weapons into Iraq—will only serve to increase the suffering of the Iraqi people, not alleviate it. Furthermore, military intervention increases the risk of widening the conflict in the region. [We call] for a fully inclusive international diplomatic process to address this crisis. The crisis ... is regional in nature and requires a multi-lateral diplomatic response initiated by the United Nations and including regional authorities like the Arab League. The hope for a peaceful solution lies in an effort which addresses the political concerns of all the major factions in the region. We believe that the unfolding tragedy in Iraq is a direct, if unintended, consequence of the U.S. invasion and occupation of that country...” (<http://paxchristiusa.org/resources/crisis-in-iraq>)

Bishop Richard E. Pates of Des Moines, IA, chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Committee on International Justice and Peace, wrote in a letter to U.S. National Security Advisor Ambassador Susan E. Rice, “Our nation bears a special responsibility toward the people of Iraq. The U.S.-led invasion and occupation unleashed both sectarian conflicts and extremism in Iraq, two tragic unintended consequences that have profound and continuing repercussions for the people of Iraq ... It is appropriate that the administration

is urging political leaders in Iraq to form an inclusive government. ... It is critical that all ethnic and religious groups are represented at the table of governance so that the common good of all is served. Extremists have been exploiting the divisions born of exclusion and the weakening of the rule of law. In addition to seeking a political solution in Iraq, it is critical to do so in Syria. The U.S. should work with the international community ... and all responsible parties in Syria ... to obtain a ceasefire, initiate serious negotiations, provide impartial humanitarian assistance, and encourage efforts to build an inclusive society in Syria.” (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/global-issues/middle-east/iraq/upload/letter-nsa-rice-iraq-2014-06-19.pdf>)

Phyllis Bennis, writing in *Foreign Policy in Focus* (June 20, 2014), made specific proposals for a U.S. response in lieu of military action. She wrote: “Iraq is on the verge of full-scale civil war along the fault lines set in place when U.S. troops invaded and occupied the country more than a decade ago. We need to demand that our government do five things right away: First, do no harm. ... [End] the threats of airstrikes, bring home the evac troops and Special Forces, and turn the aircraft carrier around. Second, call for and support an immediate arms embargo on all sides. ... U.S. regional allies [must] stop providing weapons and money to various militias. Third, engage immediately with Iran to bring pressure to bear on the Iraqi government to end its sectarian discrimination, its violence against civilians, and its violations of human rights. Fourth, ... get the UN to take the lead in organizing international negotiations for a political solution to the crisis ... Those talks must include all sides, including nonviolent Syrian and Iraqi activists, civil society organizations, women, and representatives of refugees and displaced people forced from their homes. ... Building on the success of the ongoing nuclear negotiations with Iran, Washington should continue to broaden its engagement with Tehran with the goal of helping to bring the Syrian and Iraqi wars to an immediate end. Fifth, get help to the people who need it. The Iraq war is creating an enormous new refugee and humanitarian crisis, escalating the crisis of the Syrian war, and spreading across the entire region....”

Faith in action:

Write to National Security Advisor Susan Rice (at the White House) urging the U.S. to broaden its engagement with Tehran with the goal of helping to bring the Syrian and Iraqi wars to an immediate end. §

UN: Report on fifth biennial meeting on SALW

In 2001 the UN Program of Action (PoA) laid the foundation for action countering the illicit trade and uncontrolled circulation of small arms and light weapons at national, regional and global levels. After more than a decade since the adoption of PoA, member states are still concerned about escalating violence perpetrated through the use of illicit weapons. From June 16-20, at the Fifth Biennial Meeting (BMS5), representatives gathered to discuss the implementation of PoA and the International Instrument to Enable States to Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (International Tracing Instrument, or ITI).

The illicit manufacturing, transfer and circulation of small arms and light weapons and their excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread in many regions of the world impede the provision of humanitarian assistance to victims of armed conflict. Weapons proliferation also poses a serious threat to peace, reconciliation, safety, stability and sustainable development at all levels. Representatives of non-governmental organizations actively engaged in promoting the elimination of small arms and light weapons from the hands of unauthorized persons were active at BMS5: They delivered statements about the negative impact of small arms and light weapons, (such as deplorable acts of armed violence in schools), and about the need to establish peace and security for sustainable development. David Wheeler from Sandy Hook Promise spoke about his six-year old son Benjamin, who was one of the young victims of the December 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut. Other civil society representatives, including one for the International Red Cross, spoke about the cost of human suffering caused by firearms. The civil society hearings helped country delegates with deliberations that culminated in the issuance of the outcome document.

In the context of BMS5, states considered the implementation of the PoA and the ITI; the need for cooperation on the national and international level is essential in implementing measures to combat and eradicate the

illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Cooperation will also be necessary in programs to prevent and reduce the devastating consequences of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons on children.

Although the 13-page outcome document mentions the inclusion of women in policymaking, planning and the implementation processes, the leniency of this measure does not speak to the human suffering that women have endured in conflict situations where they have been beaten, raped, trafficked or killed. As the delegate of Uruguay pointed out, no matter how civilians acquire firearms, their use constitutes a violation of human rights. Women's rights have been violated for a very long time and their inclusion need not be limited to the areas mentioned in the document but must expand to include rigorous education programs to eliminate violence from its roots. Education must start at home and in schools so that no child will lose his/her life because of armed violence perpetrated by another child.

Violence begins in the hearts of people and it is there that disarmament must begin; states must fulfill their obligation to protect their citizens starting with education for disarmament as the most effective tool that will help uproot small wars before they even begin. To this end, the United Nations Department of Public Information has launched a 2014 publication, *Action for Disarmament: 10 Things You Can Do!*, a book that draws the attention of young people around the world to promote international peace and security through disarmament. In this way children will grow up knowing how to respect their own lives and the lives of other people, and in accord with the UN Charter, "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women...," realizing that no human person has the power to end the life of another human being. Life's dominion belongs to the one who brought it into being, God who is the author of all living beings.

To obtain the resource *Action for Disarmament: 10 Things You Can Do!*, call 1-703-661-1571, email: publications@un.org; or visit the website: <https://unp.org/disarmament/>. §

United Nations report on military expenditures

Since 1981, many countries have regularly reported their military expenditure to the UN. This information is publically available in a database found at <http://www.un-arm.org/Milex/Home.aspx>; charts indicate spending by military branch and by category (operation and maintenance, procurement and construction, etc.)

Migration: Crisis on two borders

The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) recently published Mexico's Other Border Security, Migration, and the Humanitarian Crisis between Guatemala and Mexico. Below are excerpts from its executive summary:

“Along the U.S.-Mexico border, especially in south Texas, authorities are stunned by a sudden wave of migrants from three Central American countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The U.S. Border Patrol is on track to apprehend over four times more citizens of these countries in 2014 than it did in 2011.

“An alarming number of them are unaccompanied children. In the first eight months of fiscal year 2014, Border Patrol encountered 34,611 children from those three Central American nations traveling without adult relatives -- up from less than 4,000 in 2011. ...

“The real humanitarian emergency is not just in south Texas shelters and detention facilities. It runs along the entire migration route to the United States, from the violence-torn slums of Central America, to Mexico's treacherous train lines and crowded detention centers, to the forbidding deserts on the U.S. side of the border where hundreds die each year. ...

“On this southern border, [WOLA] found a sharp rise in migration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and especially Honduras. Officials and migrant shelter workers are encountering dramatically more women, children, and families bound for the United States. Their numbers are taxing an already fragile system trying to provide humanitarian assistance to this vulnerable population. The migrants are being forced out of their countries of origin by unemployment, lack of economic opportunities, and some of the worst criminal violence in the world, including intolerable levels of homicide, extortion, abuse, and recruitment by street gangs. Almost no migrants mention being motivated by any

perception of changed U.S. immigration policy or lax border security.

“As *Mexico's Other Border* describes, it is easy to cross the border from Guatemala or Belize into Mexico, whether by wading, taking a raft, walking through the countryside, or passing through an official crossing. WOLA staff crossed four times without having to show a passport. The majority of the cocaine consumed in the United States also crosses here. Once in Mexico, though, Central American migrants face an official border security strategy that is hard to define, at times contradictory, and unevenly implemented; but the policy has clearly been tightening, often with U.S. backing.

“Mexican border security toughens inland from the borderline. Roads and rivers are heavily policed: in one 140-mile stretch of highway near the border, WOLA's staff passed through 11 checkpoints run by nine different federal and state agencies. Security forces' presence and capabilities are increasing, with U.S. backing, in both Mexico and Guatemala. However, these law enforcement, military, migration, investigative, and intelligence agencies are poorly coordinated, suffer from endemic corruption, routinely extort migrants, and manage to stop only a tiny fraction of U.S.-bound drugs.

“The southern border has two lines of northbound cargo trains that are policed far less than the highways. For tens of thousands of Central American migrants these trains are the main option for getting across Mexi-

In June, Maryknoll Sister Dee Smith, who lives and works in Guatemala, wrote us a heartbreaking note:

“A young woman, ‘Beatriz,’ is the first cousin of two co-workers of ours ... She left her small village of Flores Costa Cuca, Guatemala [in May] to migrate illegally to the U.S. She is a single mother of a four-year old boy whom she left with her parents. Her intention was to build a better future for her son as she had no employment opportunities in Guatemala. She called the family three or four times on route through Mexico to say she was safe and optimistic of arriving at the border within the month. She was travelling in a small group of eight people including two couples from the village. They all crossed the border in southern Texas and were walking towards the main road to be picked up by the truck when she started with convulsions and coughing up blood. She died on the spot just 20 minutes from the roadside. The tragedy is the group had to leave her there and walk to the pickup. One of the couples took her cellphone and began calling the numbers to inform the family of what had happened.

This happened [in mid-June] and up to this moment they haven't recovered the body. That's the REALITY of forced migration for many of our people in Central America ... As you can imagine we are all devastated at what has happened and the anger it generates in us because the injustice is tremendous, yet we feel impotent.”

co. The long ride atop the train is physically dangerous, and the lack of security leaves migrants at the mercy of Central American gangs, Mexican cartels, bandits, kidnapers, and corrupt officials. Migrants traveling on the trains and along Mexico's highways are easy victims, as reporting crime to the police means risking deportation. The stunning frequency of kidnapping, extortion, human trafficking, rape, and homicide puts the plight of Central American migrants in transit through Mexico atop the list of the Western Hemisphere's worst humanitarian emergencies.

"As the situation worsens, Mexico, the United States, and Central American nations need a new approach to security and migration in the 'first crossing' zone. Following the U.S. prescription of barriers, patrols, soldiers, and technology, though, could do more harm than good.

"There is already a significant security presence in southern Mexico: statelessness is not the issue. Instead, in a situation where enforcement personnel are poorly trained, have little coordination, and are not held accountable for corruption or abuse, adding still more uniformed personnel, checkpoints, and surveillance could increase abuses and trigger more violence, without actually reducing migrant flows or trafficking.

"The most promising solutions are the most difficult to implement politically. The United States needs a comprehensive immigration reform that sets clear rules for pathways to citizenship and addresses agriculture work programs, immigrant and work visas, and future immigration flows.

"Mexico should expand the use of humanitarian visas and similar mechanisms so migrants who are victims of violence or abuse, and unaccompanied minors, can go to the authorities without fear of deportation. Mexico's judiciary and internal control units need dramatic improvements so that they may investigate and sanction officials who commit human rights violations and other abuses, and to stamp out corruption, the oxygen that sustains violent criminal groups. And Central American governments and elites need to start protecting their citizens against violence and investing in education and job creation at home. These recommendations will be either a heavy lift or slow to implement. In the meantime, *Mexico's Other Border* recommends several smaller steps that governments can take now, if not to solve, then at least to mitigate the abuses and begin to address the crisis of border security and migration in the Mexico-Guatemala border zone. These include the following:

- Using U.S. assistance to help Mexico dramatically

increase the presence of judicial, prosecutorial, and investigative bodies to crack down on organized crime and gang activity in the border zone, and the widespread official corruption that sustain them. A functioning criminal justice system, able to enforce rules clearly and fairly, is indispensable.

- Greatly increasing cooperation between Mexico's law enforcement, immigration enforcement, and judicial agencies that too often work separately, and distrustfully, in the border zone.
- Strengthening accountability mechanisms for Mexico's police at all levels and the National Migration Institute.
- Terminating the involvement of Mexico's armed forces in citizen security tasks that civilian agencies could just as easily perform in the border zone, and ending U.S. support for such involvement.
- Prioritizing U.S. assistance to Central America violence prevention, institutional strengthening of the criminal justice system, and support for efforts to combat corruption and strengthen internal and external controls over police forces. The U.S. should also develop a strategy to address the economic factors driving high rates of migration from Central America and how U.S. assistance can help mitigate these factors.
- Reducing obstacles faced by Central American migrants with strong claims to asylum or refugee status, both in Mexico and in the United States.
- Launching a bottom-up reform of Mexico's National Migration Institute.
- Developing alternatives to mass detention of apprehended migrants, especially children. The crisis of Central American migration at the U.S.-Mexico border must not become a pretext to intensify a buildup along a border that has seen a doubling of personnel and spending in the past eight years. And it most certainly should not encourage similar 'hard' security measures in the fragile Mexico-Guatemala border zone."

Read the entire report on WOLA's website, http://www.wola.org/publications/mexicos_other_border, or contact WOLA for a copy: 1666 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20009; (202) 797-2171.

Resources available from the Latin America Working Group include videotaped interviews with two human rights workers, Sr. Leticia Gutiérrez and Juan José Villagomez, who describe reasons people are migrating from Central America, and the perils they face in Mexico. Watch the videos (in Spanish with English captions) at www.lawg.org/action-center/lawg-blog/. §

Detainees held in “iceboxes”

Brittany McKinley, an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, contributed to this article.

On June 26, as part of the commemoration of Torture Awareness Month, a delegation of torture survivors, members of the Torture Abolition and Survivors’ Support Coalition (TASSC), visited the offices of members of Congress to urge them to support legislation that would stop the inhumane treatment of immigrant detainees through the use of ice box detention cells.

One of the survivors, a man from Afghanistan who had worked as an interpreter with the U.S. Army before receiving death threats from the Taliban, told staff in Rep. Mark Meadows’ (R-NC) and Sen. Orrin Hatch’s (R-UT) offices about his efforts to obtain asylum status in the U.S. Like many asylum-seekers, he was placed in detention; he was kept in a frigid short-term cell pejoratively called a *hielera* — Spanish for freezer or icebox — before being moved to a long-term detention center for 22 months. These “icebox” cells are kept at extremely cold temperatures in hopes to coerce detainees — who are not given blankets or warm clothing, but rather a thin sleeping mat — into agreeing to deportation. Another TASSC member, Konjet from Ethiopia, described her horrific experience in an icebox: There was no privacy, no information about their immigration status, no blankets were given, a cold floor, the restroom was a hole in the middle of the floor, and they were only fed a small sandwich once a day. Furthermore, detainees are not given any sort of medical attention or legal representation.

This inhumane treatment further psychologically damages people like Konjet and the Afghan translator, who are dealing with the effects of having been tortured. Yet, thousands of torture survivors have been detained in short-term holding cells operated by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), then transferred to long-term jail-like facilities used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Survivors in detention can be re-traumatized because the jail-like facilities in these detention

centers can resurface painful memories of the prisons, military camps, police stations and secret jails that their government used to torture them. Many of the survivors, who are unfamiliar with the English language and afraid of being thrown in federal prison, sign Expedited Removal Orders given to them by the CBP, which waive their rights while in custody. These orders are signed without the knowledge that the detainees would be sent back to the countries from which they are seeking asylum. CBP officers threaten the detainees with more time in the “icebox” or a trip to federal prison if the order is not signed.

Faith in action:

Part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), CBP does not allow visitors to see these short-term detention cells. Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) are pushing legislation to establish standards for the treatment of immigrants held in CBP facilities. Both Sen. Boxer’s Humane Short-Term Custody Act (S. 1817) and Rep. Roybal-Allard’s Protect Family Values at the Border Act (HR 3130) would require oversight of the CBP by having the DHS Inspector General examine the facilities every year. These inspections would ensure that standards such as adequate climate control, potable water, access to toilets, access to medical care and special treatment for pregnant women, among other things, are being adequately met. Rep. Roybal-Allard’s bill not only includes the enforcement of standards seen in Sen. Boxer’s bill but would also require physical and mental screenings of detainees, immediate physical health needs addressed by healthcare professionals, the ability to make a complaint with the Office of the Inspector General as well as the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, and prompt notice to make a telephone call at any time after their arrest. Contact your senators and representative and urge their support of S. 1817 and HR 3130, respectively. §

Resource: The Biblical Basis for Advocacy to End Hunger

Bread for the World (BFW) offers this resource for individual study or for small spiritual-formation groups seeking to learn more about how the Bible talks about hunger and advocacy. *The Biblical Basis for Advocacy to End Hunger* includes Bible verses and references to people and stories that illuminate the call to end hunger through advocacy. The brochure can be used as the basis for a conversation in churches or communities, about how God calls us to end the brokenness of hunger and poverty in our world. It is available online for download; free print copies can be ordered through BFW. Online comments are welcome to learn if and how the resource was useful: <http://blog.bread.org/2014/04/updated-resource-the-biblical-basis-for-advocacy-to-end-hunger.html>. Bread for the World, 425 3rd Street SW, Suite 1200, Washington, DC 20024, (800) 822-7323

Free trade: Threat to food safety, security

Alex Bianco, an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns' Faith Economy Ecology project, contributed to this article.

Hunger is a daily reality for billions around the world. Food security – or access to and the availability of nutritious food – for all people can only be achieved through good development policy that prioritizes local economies and sustainable food systems.

In addresses to the Food and Agriculture Organization, both Pope Benedict XVI in 2009 and Pope Francis in 2013 asked us to examine and ensure policies that eliminate food insecurity, including support for small farmers and cooperatives.

However current international trade policies actually are harming solutions to global hunger and food security. Trade agreements remove preferences for local economies, and instead increase income inequality, displacement of farmers, and prioritize profit over the common good. The U.S. is currently negotiating two trade agreements, one with the European Union (EU) and the other with nations of the Pacific Rim, representing roughly 80 percent of the global economy and 1.3 billion people around the world. The results of these agreements will affect food security as well as the safety of food globally.

The Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) seeks to strengthen the political and economic bond between the U.S. and the EU. However, because tariffs between the two continents are already so low, TTIP is really about developing trade rules that the U.S. and EU can agree upon for conceptualizing and implementing future trade agreements with developing nations.

In the context of food policy, TTIP will focus on weakening food safety standards in Europe. With the completion of this deal, big food and big agribusiness companies will seek to challenge food labeling laws, eliminate restrictions on genetically modified foods and undo years of progress in food and environmental standards in Europe.

An influx of foreign foods and goods from the EU being imported at a lower price will also threaten “buy local” movements occurring throughout the U.S. and the EU that give preferences to food and other items made locally to support local economies and minimize climate change.



The Obama administration is also negotiating the TransPacific Partnership (TPP), an agreement with 12 countries in the Pacific Rim. The pact includes Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. Due to the inclusion of Canada and Mexico it is often seen as a way to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA.)

Little information has been shared with the public about the TPP, an extremely un-transparent agreement. From what is known, the treaty seems to follow a model similar to NAFTA: The U.S. is allowed to continue to subsidize key crops while preventing other nations from using trade barriers such as tariffs or local purchasing preferences to protect their own foods. The result is that cheap agricultural products from the U.S. are introduced into foreign markets and destroy local farming economies in those countries.

These policies have real impacts. In June 2014, the U.S. threatened to hold back funding from the already approved Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) aid package over El Salvador's Family Agriculture Plan (FAP). According to Inside U.S. Trade, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative says that the plan is outside of the spirit of the Central America Free Trade Agreement, although it would not say how it actually was in violation of the agreement.

The Family Agricultural Plan ensures food security for small farming families by supporting the development of local seed production so that farmers can procure seeds at an affordable price while strengthening the local economy. International seeds companies can also provide seeds but so far their prices are double those from domestic seed production. Giving in to the MCC and providing conditioned aid is seen as harming Monsanto, which until the FAP provided 70 percent of the seeds to farmers. Fortunately, due to global solidarity pressure, the MCC backed down from conditioning the aid package in July 2014.

Between the TPP and TTIP, we are seeing a trend of profits before people, a model that is monopolizing agriculture policy both in the U.S. and abroad. While almost all of the countries in the TPP have free trade agreements with the U.S., they should pay very close attention before renegotiating those agreements under the TPP. Or perhaps negotiate the TPP to actually serve the needs of their own people rather than the interests of corporations. §