



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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Iraq: An urge for alternatives to military action

After decades of war and conflict, the people of Iraq continue to endure great suffering. On August 27, the following letter was sent to President Obama, signed by more than 50 faith-based academics, clergy and organizations, many of which, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, are members of the Faith Forum for Middle East Policy.

... [We] write to express our deep concern over the recent escalation of U.S. military action in Iraq. While the dire plight of Iraqi civilians should compel the international community to respond in some way, U.S. military action is not the answer. Lethal weapons and airstrikes will not remove the threat to a just peace in Iraq. As difficult as it might be, in the face of this great challenge, we believe that the way to address the crisis is through long-term investments in supporting inclusive governance and diplomacy, nonviolent resistance, sustainable development, and community-level peace and reconciliation processes.

Pope Francis has affirmed that “peacemaking is more courageous than warfare,” and more recently said that “it is licit to stop the unjust aggressor. I underscore the verb ‘stop;’ I don’t say bomb, make war -- stop him.” But how, we ask?

In addition to the complex factors spilling over from the civil war in Syria and pressure from other neighbors, decades of U.S. political and military intervention, coupled with inadequate social reconciliation programs, have significantly contributed to the current crisis in Iraq. More bombing will ultimately mean more division, bloodshed, recruitment for extremist organizations, and a continual cycle of violent intervention.

The current state of crisis and the breakdown of state institutions in Libya provide another stark example of the failure of a militarized strategy. Like Libya, the air strikes in Iraq will ultimately fail to build and maintain sustainable peace in the long-term.

We understand and deeply share the desire to protect people, especially civilians. However, even when tactics of violent force yield a short term displacement of the adversary’s violence, such violence toward armed actors is often self-perpetuating, as the retributive violence that flares up in response will only propitiate more armed intervention in a tit-for-tat escalation without addressing the root causes of the conflict. We see this over and over again. It is not “necessary” to continue down this road of self-destruction, as Pope Francis called the hostilities of war the “suicide of humanity.”

There are better, more effective, more healthy and more humanizing ways to protect civilians and to engage this conflict. Using an alternative frame, here are some “just peace” ways the United States and others can not only help save lives in Iraq and the region, but also begin to transform the conflict and break the cycle of violent intervention. To begin, the United States should take the following steps:

- **Stop U.S. bombing in Iraq** to prevent bloodshed, instability and the accumulation of grievances that contribute to the global justification for the Islamic State’s existence among its supporters.
- **Provide robust humanitarian assistance to those who are fleeing the violence.** Provide food and much needed supplies in coordination with the UN.
- **Engage with the UN, all Iraqi political and religious leaders, and others in the international community on diplomatic efforts** for a lasting political solution for Iraq. Ensure a significantly more inclusive Iraqi government along with substantive programs of social reconciliation to interrupt the flow and perhaps peel-back some of the persons joining the Islamic State. In the diplomatic strategy, particularly include those with influence on key actors in the Islamic State.
- **Work for a political settlement to the crisis in Syria.** The conflicts in Iraq and Syria are intricately connected and should be addressed holistically. Return to the Geneva peace process for a negotiated settlement to [Syria’s] civil war and expand the agenda to include regional peace and stability. Ensure Iran’s full participation
- **Support community-based nonviolent resistance strategies** to transform the conflict and meet the deeper need and grievances of all parties. For example, experts have suggested strategies such as parallel institutions, dispersed disruptions, and economic non-cooperation.
- **Strengthen financial sanctions against armed actors in the region** by working through the UN Security Council. For example, disrupting the Islamic State’s \$3 million/day oil revenue from the underground market would go a long way toward blunting violence.
- **Bring in and significantly invest in professionally trained unarmed civilian protection organizations** to assist and offer some buffer for displaced persons and refugees, both for this conflict in collaboration with Iraqi’s and for future conflicts.

- **Call for and uphold an arms embargo on all parties to the conflict.** U.S. arms and military assistance to the government forces and ethnic militias in Iraq, in addition to arming Syrian rebel groups, have only fueled the carnage, in part due to weapons intended for one group being taken and used by others. All armed parties have been accused of committing gross violations of human rights. Along with Russia, work with key regional players such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait to take independent initiatives and meaningful steps towards an arms embargo on all parties in the conflict.
- **Support Iraqi civil society efforts to build peace, reconciliation, and accountability at the community level.** Deep sectarian and ethnic divisions have long been exacerbated by various factors, including the U.S. military intervention in 2003. Sustainable peace will require peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts from the ground up. ... §

Latin America united against Israeli attacks on Gaza

Latin American nations have had strong negative reactions to Israel's Operation Protective Edge, the term used for its recent military operation against Hamas, threatening to set back Israeli-Latin America relations that had been growing in recent years.

In an attempt to diminish its dependency on Europe, Israel has been trying to strengthen its economic relations with a number of Latin American countries. Trade with many Latin American countries has been growing rapidly in the past decade: In February, Israel gained status as an observer nation to the Pacific Alliance, a trade coalition consisting of Mexico, Chile, Colombia and Peru. Weeks before the Gaza incursion, Israel signed a bilateral trade agreement with Colombia. Brazil has ramped up its trade with Israel, importing fertilizers and drone airplanes.

The attack on Gaza which began on July 8 aroused strong reactions in Latin America. Bolivia, which had already cut diplomatic relations with Israel after another military invasion into Gaza in 2008-09, heartily condemned the attack. President Evo Morales asked the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to prosecute Israel for crimes against humanity and terminated a 1972 agreement with Israel that allowed its citizens to enter Bolivia without a visa. While announcing this decision, Morales stated, "We are saying, in other words, that Israel a terrorist state."

Venezuela, which also cut relations with Israel in 2009, supported Bolivia's initiative in the UN and declared that it and other members of the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of Our America (ALBA) would establish orphanages for Palestinian children whose parents had been killed in the attack.

When Israel initiated its ground assault on Gaza on July 17, Ecuador withdrew its ambassador to Israel. Brazil followed with the same measure a week later, and on July 29 Chile, Peru, Nicaragua and El Salvador all

announced the withdrawal of ambassadors from Israel. Chile also suspended negotiations of a bilateral trade agreement; President Michelle Bachelet condemned the attacks as "collective punishment" that "violate the principle of proportionality... an indispensable requirement for the justification of legitimate defense."

While meeting on July 29, four of the five members of the Southern Common Market, Mercosur (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela) issued a strong statement in which they "energetically condemn[ed] the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip, which in the majority affects civilians, including children and women." Paraguay, the fifth Mercosur member, issued its own statement the next day calling for an "immediate end to aggression and hostilities in the Gaza Strip."

As Farid Kahhat, a Middle East expert at the Catholic University of Peru, pointed out, "It isn't only the nations with left-leaning governments that have recalled their ambassadors... This transcends ideologies." Colombia, while initially stressing the responsibility of Hamas for the violence without mentioning an Israeli role, later stated on July 22 that it "rejects the military offensive by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip" and expressed condolences for "victims of Israel's retaliatory actions."

Latin America has set itself apart from other regional blocs in its outspoken condemnation of the Israeli attacks in Gaza, though according to Michael Shifter with the Inter-American Dialogue, it is not surprising given that, by 2011, 11 Latin American governments had recognized Palestine as a state. (At least 19 currently recognize Palestine officially.) What remains to be seen, now that Israel and Gaza have agreed to a long-term ceasefire, is how long it will take for countries to reestablish relations with Israel and if they will be able to return to strengthening their economic and political ties. §

Brazil: Deforestation decreases

While unable to win the World Cup this year, Brazil has become the champion in another, more important area, becoming the country with the largest reductions in the rates of deforestation and carbon emissions. In less than a decade the country went from being the world's worst deforester to making the greatest strides in forest preservation. Two recent reports by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) and Science magazine show how Brazil's success has been the result of advances in technology as well as the collective effort of government, business and civil society.

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso began the efforts in the late 1990s by expanding the amount of land set aside as protected areas. Today, 50 percent of the Amazon is protected with 50 percent of that land classified as indigenous reserves. But it was during the administration of Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva that deforestation rates began to plummet.

Lula's success at reducing poverty rates and greatly expanding the middle class provided the political space to take on the difficult task of reducing deforestation, a task that requires taking on strong agriculture and ranching lobbies. Many Brazilians no longer saw the destruction of the Amazon as a necessary evil to address the social and economic problems of the country.

Environmental organizations provided an important impetus in 2006 with Greenpeace's release of “Eating up the Amazon,” an exposé of the soybean industry and its links to deforestation, global warming and slave labor. As the UCS explains, “[w]ithin weeks [of the release of the report], the soy industry responded through its two main trade associations, the Brazilian Association of Vegetable Oil Industries and the National Association of Cereal Exporters. They declared a moratorium on deforestation, pledging not to buy any soybeans produced on Amazon lands that were deforested after June 24, 2006.” Even with record high soy prices, satellites showed there was no additional deforesting to grow the crop, yet overall soy production increased 50 percent between 1996 and 2005 by increasing yields per hectare and planting more frequently during the year.

In 2008 the federal government began an interesting and effective sort of collective punishment to pressure farmers to stop cutting down trees. If a certain area, about the size of a county in the U.S., was found to have deforestation rates above a defined threshold, then no farmer in that entire county would have access to cheap-

er lines of credit from the government. This created significant peer pressure among farmers to stop cutting down trees.

A dynamic similar to the soy moratorium occurred with cattle ranchers in 2009 when Greenpeace and Amigos da Terra released two studies connecting the spread of cattle pastures and Amazon deforestation. While not reacting as quickly as soy producers, after more pressure from international financiers and national and state governments, slaughterhouses did eventually agree to only buy meat from registered ranchers. This registration required ranchers to give the GPS coordinates of their land holdings so as to be able to be monitored by satellite. Ranchers who cut down trees illegally had their registrations rescinded.

Improved satellite technologies have been essential in Brazil's efforts to decrease deforestation. By overlaying satellite pictures of where deforestation is occurring with maps of land ownership, the government and civil society are able to see who is responsible for the destruction. Regulators are now able to scan territories in real time so as to be able to quickly respond when someone is cutting down or burning parts of the forest.

While Brazil's successes have been significant, there is no guarantee that the success will continue. Confident after so many advances, the government made a commitment in 2009 to reduce deforestation in the Amazon by 80 percent by the year 2020, compared to the average between 1996 and 2005. Since making that commitment, deforestation rates continued to fall slowly until 2013 when there was a surprising 28 percent leap in deforestation rates.

Many blame the changes to the Forest Code made by Congress and signed by President Dilma Rousseff in 2012 that include amnesty for small-scale farmers from penalties for excessive deforestation on their land before 2008, diminishing the amount of land that must be protected on the banks of rivers and creeks, and other reductions in the amount of land that must be protected by private land owners.

It is unclear if these changes were the main cause of the increase in deforestation, but they are being challenged in court by an independent public defender's office claiming that many of the changes in the law infringe the Brazilian Constitution. Regardless of how that case is settled, the story of Brazil's success in reducing deforestation shows that everyone must act to help; no one should wait for another to act. §

Guatemala: Communities attempt to block dam

Chloe Schwabe prepared the following report, thanks to information shared by Maryknoll Affiliates Rosa Beatriz Castañeda and Cecilia Garces.

In mid-August, the Guatemalan government deployed over 1,500 police to Monte Olivo to evict 160 families of the community *9 de Febrero* in order to allow the construction of the Santa Rita dam to go forward. As helicopters flew overhead, police destroyed homes and assaulted residents, leaving several people injured. Five people were arrested in Monte Olivo, as well as two others in nearby Raxruhá. In response, hundreds of people blocked the highway leading to the proposed site. In an ensuing conflict, three men were killed, allegedly by police gunfire, and more than 50 people were injured, including six police.

Since 2010, the government and the Hidro Santa Rita SA company have allegedly intimidated and even murdered community members. In the last year, two boys were murdered, one man escaped an assassination attempt, and five others were shot in April leaving one dead.

This is not the only case of violence related to hydroelectric dams in Guatemala. The community near the Chixoy Dam, the largest hydroelectric dam in Guatemala, is still trying to get reparations after more than 400 community members were murdered in 1982 through four massacres when they resisted the project. The company received funding from the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank to both develop and sustain the dam. In 2010, the Guatemalan government and the Organization of American States agreed on a reparations plan, but it has yet to be implemented. There are now many international cases like the Chixoy Dam where the evidence points to World Bank mega-dam projects doing more harm than good for communities.

The Santa Rita dam project similarly is being done in the name of sustainable development but through private funding and certification from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which has approved it as a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) project. The CDM designation is intended to support projects that wouldn't otherwise go forward, by helping poorer countries sustainably develop while allowing industrialized nations to purchase the "offset" towards their goals of reducing the emissions.

In the case of the Santa Rita dam, the project was approved by the UNFCCC in June 2014 and an agreement was signed on July 30 between Guatemalan President Otto Pérez Molina and Hidro Santa Rita SA, right

before the latest round of protests, evictions and violence.

A serious concern about the project was the consultation process. When the company first sought approval from residents for the project, they invited only eight of the 22 affected communities in the area to participate. Typically Mayan communities in an area make decisions together. In the end, nearly all the communities opposed the project because of the consultation process and the destruction that the dam will cause the river that sustains the communities. They submitted a formal letter to the UNFCCC's CDM board to complain that the consultation was flawed and that they did not give their free prior and informed consent to the project, a violation of the International Labor Organization's Article 169 adopted by the Guatemalan government. The board ruled that the consultation had been completed fully and correctly. This was the first case to ever be reviewed by the CDM for improper community consultation.

Another critique is that it does not meet the CDM project criteria of "additionality." Additionality means that the project would not otherwise go forward without the financial support from the sale of the carbon credits. Currently, 30 percent of the electricity in Guatemala is from hydropower thus the project probably would have gone forward, much like the majority of CDM-designated projects. Until recently, the majority of proposed CDM projects were hydropower dams. They were just surpassed by wind farms but will still likely account for the majority of carbon credits.

One question about CDM projects, and hydroelectric projects in particular, is whether or not they will actually reduce carbon emissions or improve the lives of communities. Hydroelectric plants take energy to operate. Furthermore, carbon credits do not incentivize polluting countries from actually reducing their own pollution – they just buy more credits to fund more energy projects. Based on past projects, it is unlikely that affected communities will benefit from the generated power.

Finally, the Inter-American Human Rights Court and NGOs such as Carbon Markets Watch have expressed ongoing concern regarding human rights violations related to the Santa Rita project. On August 27, 2013, the same day that the two boys were killed and another man escaped an attempted kidnapping, residents met with a representative from the Inter-American Human Rights Court. Human rights violations in Alta Verapaz are happening as both the CDM board is considering reforms to the program and as the UNFCCC and key

stakeholders are establishing rules and financing for the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

The GCF will likely become *the* source of public funding to assist developing countries to adapt to and mitigate the worst effects of climate change. Already the GCF is seen as a marked improvement to past climate financing schemes based on its governing document. It explicitly acknowledges the importance of country own-

ership, multi-stakeholder engagement, direct access to funding, and gender sensitivity. Questions remain about whether the GCF will make the same mistake as the CDM and fund big dams and fossil fuel projects. But its success will also depend on whether countries give robust commitments to meet a total goal of \$100 billion by 2020. The U.S. has yet to announce its commitment. §

Migration crisis in U.S.

The following article was written by Eben Levey, who worked with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns from September 2013 through August 2014.

In recent weeks, the “crisis” of undocumented minors migrating into the U.S. has been given prominent media coverage. The increase in the number of minors crossing the U.S.-Mexico border has not only reinvigorated the debate over immigration reform, but it has also exposed the inadequacies and often inhumane conditions that migrant detainees are kept. However, the story that is often missing from the news is the violence, instability, and a lack of opportunities that are driving migration from Central America into the United States.

Responding to the inadequacies of detention facilities, President Obama has proposed a massive increase in funding to better house detained migrant children. Without examining the conditions that these minors are fleeing, the proposed funding increase does very little to reunite children with family already living in the U.S., and it entirely avoids the fact that the majority of these children ought to be considered refugees rather than “illegal aliens.” By U.S. law, persons fleeing violence, likely torture, death, or persecution due to being a member of a definable at-risk group should qualify as refugees with the protections and services that entails. A recent report published by the Immigration Policy Center overwhelming points to violence as the reason for migration - leaving a situation of near certain death, sexual abuse, or physical violence for a journey through Mexico that is harrowing and fraught with risks.

The IPC’s report also documents the trends in child migration. According to their findings, of the nearly 60,000 child migrants that crossed the U.S. Southwest border between October 1, 2013 and June 15, 2014, 29 percent were traveling from Honduras, 24 percent from Guatemala, 23 percent from El Salvador, and 22 percent from Mexico. It is no accident that Honduras, with the highest murder rate in the world and the greatest degree

of political instability and corruption in the region, is the nation of origin for the highest number of child migrants.

In a meeting in Washington, D.C., the director of Casa Alianza, a Honduran youth services NGO, spoke about the cases that his agency deals with daily. He said that the murder rate for young men between the ages of 16-20 is far higher than the murder rate of the country. Not only are young men faced with threats if they refuse to join gangs, the state authorities have begun to treat all youth as a criminal element, thus increasing the danger for anyone brave enough to remain at home in gang controlled territory.

Contrary to what many believe, it is not a misunderstood interpretation of U.S. immigration rules [such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) memorandum] that drives this migration flow; motivating factors are violence and lack of opportunity in home communities, and the need to remove oneself from a dangerous situation. Furthermore, the IPC study found that child migrants are going to destinations where family members or family friends already live. Thus, if family members live in Costa Rica, it is far more likely that the unaccompanied minors go to Costa Rica than to the U.S.

The stories of migrant children have reinforced the notion that compassion and peace building are desperately needed within all of our communities. For those of us committed to God’s work and to protecting God’s creation, we must not forget our calling to side with those who are marginalized and impoverished. The current focus then ought not be on the “crisis” of child migration as seen from the U.S., but rather on the conditions in home communities, the dangerous journey that migrants must make through drug cartel controlled territories, and the role that U.S. policy plays in fomenting violence and instability. Only by changing the conversation to focus on how to build peace and a more just global economy will we achieve substantive change for the benefit of those who are fleeing and searching for a better life. §

Migration: Where are Nicaraguan children?

A central cause of the recent dramatic increase in the number of unaccompanied children immigrating into the U.S. through its border with Mexico is the high level of crime and violence in the principal “sending countries” – Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador (collectively referred to as the Northern Triangle) and Mexico (see related article on page 7). Yet neighboring Nicaragua, with the lowest per capita GDP in the region, has been able to maintain markedly lower levels of violence. While the specific history of Nicaragua has much to do with the lack of violence, its police system, dubbed “a new security paradigm” by some, could offer ways forward for its more violent neighbors.

The high rates of violence in the Northern Triangle were created in part by U.S. immigration policy. In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the “Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act,” which militarized the U.S.-Mexico border and expanded the list of crimes for which immigrants could be deported. Perhaps the most significant impact of this policy change was that thousands of Central American youth who had become involved in gangs, especially in Los Angeles, were deported to their home countries. On arrival, without any sources of support, they sought each other out and re-formed their gangs, now on an international level, beginning the reign of mega-gangs like Mara Salvatrucha and Mara 18 that continue to wreak havoc in the Northern Triangle. As few Nicaraguans were living in Los Angeles (they tend to concentrate in Miami and Northern California), Nicaragua did not experience the same influx of gang members.

Another important factor for lower rates of violence in Nicaragua has been its successful anti-crime policies that include community policing, neighborhood watch groups and identifying and helping at-risk youth. When the Sandinistas took power in Nicaragua in 1979, they cleaned out the police forces, removing large numbers of corrupt officials and changing their orientation from that of repression to working together with community groups; the same never happened in the countries of the Northern Triangle where revolutionary struggles were unsuccessful. While the peace accords in El Salvador and Guatemala called for cleaning up and modernizing the police forces, this never happened on a significant scale. As a result, police forces in these countries are not trusted, and are often feared by the population. While Nicaragua’s national police director, Aminta Granera, is a popular public figure with approval ratings

near 80 percent, in Guatemala only 15 percent of the population have “some” or “a lot” of confidence in their police forces. In Honduras, people have come to refer to the security forces as “insecurity” forces due to their high levels of corruption and unnecessary violence perpetrated by them.

Former Managua police chief Francisco Bautista describes how Nicaragua’s poverty is also a factor in preventing the influx of international gangs: “Our economy represents a mere six percent of Central America’s GDP, and this is not of strategic interest for organized crime, which is used to moving money around in strong economies where they can camouflage money laundering and weapons purchases.”

National police chief Granera describes perhaps the key reason why they have been so successful: “Our policing model is a model that is preventative, proactive, communitarian, deeply rooted in the heart of the community, and I think that that is its greatest strength, and that is what makes the difference.” Unfortunately, governments in the Northern Triangle have not yet tried this new approach in their own countries. Guatemala and El Salvador have recently decided to further entrench their failed repressive police system while Honduran security forces continue to target not only at-risk youth, but also members of social movements, for violent repression.

Despite the corruption and ineffectiveness of police forces in the region, the U.S. continues to send hundreds of millions of dollars for arms and training, most recently through the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). While a small portion of this aid has been earmarked for community policing and other initiatives that have been successful in Nicaragua, the bulk of the money aims to continue failed, repressive police models. As Florida International University professor Jose Miguel Cruz points out, “the U.S.-trained institutions are the worst able to deal with crime.”

Alex Main with the Center for Economic Policy Research summarizes the responsibility of the U.S. in this situation: “[P]undits here in the United States have asserted that the border crisis is ‘not our responsibility.’ The evidence on the ground in the Northern Triangle suggests the contrary. The militarized drug war that the United States has promoted and funded in Mexico and Central America has further unleashed repressive, abusive security forces and undermined the civilian institutions that might hold them accountable. It’s time to change our policies toward these countries in their interest and our own.” §

Japan: Fukushima clean-up challenges

Three years after the Fukushima disaster, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe seeks to have his country's decommissioned nuclear power plants restarted and made active again. The following article was prepared by Richard Coaxum, who interned with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns during the summer of 2014.

In March 2011, Japan's Fukushima region suffered from both natural and man-made catastrophes in the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear reactor disasters. The resulting damage prompted Japan's then Prime Minister Naoto Kan to urge the country to wean itself off of nuclear power and seek to utilize more renewable energy.

Kan was not alone in his assessment. Upon seeing the destruction wrought in Fukushima, Niigata's Bishop Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi stated, "People have been deprived of the ordinary life, and for many of them it will be impossible to get it back. Most people do not care for the daily struggles of the people of Fukushima, but even if we are not directly responsible for the disaster, we have the responsibility to make new choices on the subject."

When asked about potential cleanup of the facility following the disaster, Juan Carlos Lentijo, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, responded, "In my view, it will be nearly impossible to ensure the time for decommissioning such a complex facility in less than 30-40 years as is currently established in the roadmap."

Power plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) is hindered in its clean-up efforts due to resulting waste and fatally high levels of radiation, both the results of the melted fuel and contaminated water from the reactors which must be kept cool in order to keep the plant safe and stable enough to clean it.

As is typical with operators of nuclear reactors, TEPCO faces the lack of storage space for the radioactive waste. The need for storage was made more urgent after shifting from underground pools (three out of seven which have leaked contaminated water) to steel

tanks which are now near capacity. While seeking replacement storage space there was still unimpeded flow of radioactive runoff -- about 400 tons of contaminated water per day at the power plant.

TEPCO's problems have been exacerbated by its inability to meet the deadlines to have the water surrounding the facility cleared out. Its solution -- diverting groundwater into the sea to keep it from becoming contaminated in the reactor basements, a process which was approved by local fishermen -- has not helped alleviate the storage needs.

The sea diversion method has serious consequences: One of the radioactive isotopes, Strontium-90, which is linked to cancer, has been found in the water

where Japanese fishermen work. Due to Strontium-90's half-life of 30 years and its ability to be stored in fish bones, South Korea banned seafood imports from eight Japanese prefectures near Fukushima. Additionally, scientists in the United States have found cesium, a radioactive isotope linked to the Fukushima plant, in the kelp off the coast of San Diego.

To treat the contaminated water, TEPCO and the Japanese government invested in the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS), a filtration method that could eliminate most of the radioactive isotopes from the outgoing water. But, despite the Japanese government's 15 billion yen (US\$146 million) in the system, the ALPS has been plagued with corrosion and liquid leaks leading to technical delays which spurred Naomi Hirose, the power plant's president, to miss one of his scheduled deadlines to have the water at the site treated by March 31, 2015.

The damages and cost of the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster makes it quite evident that the nuclear fuel cycle is unsafe because it contributes large amounts of radioactive waste which cannot be disposed of safely, placing not only workers, but also local families at risk of continued exposure to radioactivity. §

**"Based on the Gospel,
the tradition of Catholic social thought,
and new insights into the inextricable dependence of
humans on the long-term sustainability
of the entire community of life,
we believe that these threats far outweigh
the benefits of using nuclear energy
to mitigate global warming."**

**-- Nuclear energy: Its dangers outweigh its benefits,
a statement of the**

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, March 2012

Assessing U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit

The first ever U.S.-Africa Leaders' Summit, held August 4-6, has come and gone. Assessments of the Summit's impact are now underway both in the United States and in Africa. In effect, there were two different Summits: the official government-sponsored, business-oriented Summit and a series of alternative gatherings and forums such as Empowered Africa: A Progressive Dialogue sponsored by Howard University and several Africa-affiliated organizations, networks and university departments. Evaluations of the Summit by government, business leaders and civil society organizations vary.

News of the Summit had to compete with publicity about the outbreak of Ebola in several West African nations as well as some very controversial behavior during the Summit by security agents of at least three African nations. A local resident captured one such incident when he filmed a security agent from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) stomping on a demonstrator protesting the DRC delegation to the Summit on the streets of downtown Washington, D.C. This agent was not arrested and was allowed to return to the DRC.

True to its intended focus, the official Summit was dominated by business concerns. The U.S.-Africa Business Forum played a dominant role in the organization and implementation of several key events during the three day gathering. A shorthand description of the Summit could be: developing a public-private partnership between the U.S. government/business interests and African nations. An essential element of such a feature of this investment-oriented foreign policy is the promotion of a friendly commercial and legal environment in which U.S. corporations can do business.

This approach is typical of the Obama administration's orientation towards Africa. Where Bill Clinton is said to have favored programs like the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act as the way to promote development, and George W. Bush's legacy regarding Africa will be the PEPFAR health program, President Obama is taking a different approach, marked by an emphasis on policies to complement the limited resources the U.S. government is devoting to programs designed to attract foreign investment, such as Power Africa and Feed the Future. The belief is that investments by foreign companies like General Electric (\$2 billion for power projects) will drive growth which will create opportunities for meaningful development. Critics of this simplistic way of thinking say that while economic growth in Africa is essential, nothing important will happen in the

next 10 years without a deeper transformation of African economies' structures. (See "2014 African Transformation Report: Growth with Depth" on the African Center for Economic Transformation website, <http://acetforafrica.org/>.)

There was more to the Summit than discussions about economic development. Understanding that widespread violence undermines progress and development, Summit organizers included updates on ideas and programs that aim to combat terrorism and the spread of lawlessness. Two new initiatives were announced by President Obama: the Africa Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership (A-Prep) and the Security Governance Initiative. The first program will spend \$110 million annually for 3-5 years on equipment, transportation and logistics that would allow African militaries to move more quickly into conflict zones. Six countries will share the money for this program: Senegal, Ghana, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. A much smaller amount – \$65 million for the first year – will go to Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Tunisia, for local security services and the promotion of democratic governance. (See related article in March-April 2014 *NewsNotes*.) Unlike the Defense Department's AFRICOM program, this initiative will be based in the State Department.

Some believe that one danger in such programs is that the continent of Africa, with its more than one billion inhabitants and 54 nation-states, with numerous interrelated challenges, will be viewed through a narrow and distorting lens of counter-terrorism.

In the end, not only were the civil rights of members of the diaspora living in Washington trampled upon by agents of the DRC government, the official Summit itself dealt very little with human rights issues, despite a forum held June 18-20 in Washington, D.C., organized by Amnesty International USA, Freedom House, Front Line Defenders, Open Society Foundations, and the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights. The event brought together leading African human rights defenders who focused on three broad themes: the rule of law, transparency and accountability, and discrimination against marginalized groups. Participants formulated a Plan of Action which highlighted concerns that should have been integrated into the Leaders' Summit and offered concrete policy recommendations that link respect for human rights and broader development objectives.

Learn more at <http://www.we-are-africa.org/rec.html>. §

Liberia: Militarization of fight against Ebola

The following report was written by Ezekiel Pajibo, who was an active member of the resistance movement against then-dictator Samuel Doe in Liberia in the 1980s; Pajibo was imprisoned for his work, landing him on the list of Amnesty International's prisoners of conscience. He now lives in South Africa.

The news out of Liberia these days is not comforting. Only 11 years ago the country ended a brutal civil war in which more than 250,000 were killed. Liberia's war years introduced new semantics in terms of how war is conducted: Child soldiers, conflict diamonds, conflict timber, the use of natural resources to support and prolong warfare all became common place. Charles Taylor, the war time president, became the first African leader to be tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity. He was convicted, and currently serves his sentence in a British prison.

After the war, Liberia captured international attention by electing Ellen Johnson Sirleaf the first woman president in Africa. The darling of Washington, London, Paris and other western governments, she was toasted, praised and celebrated. It appeared that the country once known for military dictatorship, for the barbarity of warfare, for backwardness had turned the corner and had become a new nation, looking forward to the future with certainty.

However, in its final report in 2009, the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in

2005, recommended that President Sirleaf not seek re-election due to findings that she was complicit in supporting Charles Taylor's reign of terror and mayhem. International figures and organizations ignored the TRC report and Mrs. Sirleaf went on to win a second term.

Since her re-election, claims of corruption have bedeviled her administration. Yet she remains a darling of the West. Feted by Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, the Harvard-educated Sirleaf has been honored by several U.S. universities.

After more than 10 years of peace, however, the conditions of those who are impoverished have not improved; unemployment remains at a staggering 70 percent. The World Bank and other multilateral agencies spoke highly of economic improvements, citing the GDP as proof that the economy was on the rebound, but the abject poverty of the vast majority of Liberians was ignored.

Several social indices presented themselves. In the last two years, the number of Liberian students who sat for aptitude tests failed miserably. Last year, several thousand students sat for a placement exam to enter the only public university in the country. They all failed. Critics of the government continue to point out that the Sirleaf administration is failing in its responsibility to respond to the needs of the Liberian people. Their admonitions were dismissed.

The outbreak of the Ebola virus appears to be the final breaking point. In late February, Liberia's neighbor Guinea announced the epidemic. Liberia's opposition figures prevailed on the government to develop a response, but there was none.

It was not until July when the outbreak had become an epidemic that the government became seized of the situation. It was too late to act. Liberia health infrastructure is close to non-existent. In fact, since 2006, the government of Liberia has not prioritized health or education. Instead, its priority has been getting international investment into the country. In the view of the government, private investment was the engine of economic growth and by extension



improvement in the lived conditions of Liberia's poor majority. Never mind the fact that a US\$16 billion investment in the country did not improve unemployment and more than 70 percent of Liberians were living in absolute poverty with little or no access to education and health facilities.

The response of the Liberian government to deal with the crisis was the proclamation of Emergency Power, the introduction of a curfew and the quarantine of mostly poor communities. What this means in actuality is the criminalization of poverty and the militarization of the government's response.

Accordingly, road blocks have appeared around the country, the military presence is pronounced and poor people are going without food or water. When they protest, they are gunned down. Prices of basic goods have skyrocketed and people who are poor are dying from hunger. Some reports suggest that more people are dying from other diseases because hospitals have been shut down given the fact that most health workers are refusing to report for work. In many cases, health workers do not have the necessary resources to adequately deal with the epidemic. More than 60 health workers are among the more than 400 dead in Liberia since the outbreak. Other infrastructural impediments include an almost impossible access to clinics, grossly inadequate ambulance services and many clinics' lack of laboratory equipment for proper diagnosis of the disease. What is

more, in some instances body bags are not available to bury the dead and hospitals have no gloves, goggles, or disposable syringes to attend to the afflicted.

What the Ebola virus outbreak has demonstrated and the international community refuses to consider is the fact that President Sirleaf's administration was not interested in improving the general welfare of Liberians. It was interested in meeting the dictates of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank so that the country would become a destination of foreign direct investment. Liberia's recent discovery of oil sufficiently demonstrates the point. As well, foreign direct investment in the country has largely been in the area of palm oil plantation by Malaysia and Indonesia, and mining – Chinese and Indians interests – none of which employ a value chain that ensures Liberia and its people are the primary benefactors.

Thus the inability of the Liberian government to effectively manage the Ebola crisis makes clear its devotion to embracing a neoliberal economic model instead of attending to the basic needs of its people: an opportunity to acquire skills, easy and affordable access to health services and employment opportunities to become productive and thereby create a prosperous society. The spread of Ebola is a condition of impoverishment and highlights the absence of an economic framework that puts the people of Liberia first. §

HIV-AIDS: Report from XX Int'l Conference

The following is an excerpt from a report written by Fr. Joe Fedora, MM, who attended the 20th International AIDS Conference, held July 20-25 in Melbourne, Australia; he lives in Lima, Peru, where he accompanies people who live with HIV and AIDS. A link to the report in its entirety can be found on the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns website. (Contact the MOGC for a hard copy if you do not have access to the internet.)

Approximately 12,000 delegates participated [in the conference] – a reduction by nearly half the number present at the 2012 conference in Washington, D.C. I suspect distance along with government and NGO budget cuts played a role in the reduction. ... [Fr. Fedora noted the lack of Latin American representation; only a few participants from Spanish-speaking countries were present, and, he writes, "If there was any literature or information in Spanish, I couldn't find it."]

Some facts about the state of the HIV epidemic:

In 2013:

- 35.3 million people were living with HIV worldwide, including 3.3 million children.
- The global prevalence rate (the percentage of people aged 15-49 who are infected) was 0.8 percent.
- There were 2.3 million new HIV infections, including 260,000 children.
- Approximately 95 percent are in low- and middle-income countries.
- About 700 infections a day are in children under 15 years of age.
- An estimated 6,000 new HIV infections a day are in adults aged 15 years and older, of whom:
 - Almost 47 percent are among women, and about 39 percent are among young people (15-24)
- 1.6 million people died from AIDS-related illnesses.
- Although the testing capacity has increased over time; the majority of people with HIV are still unaware that they are infected.

- As of 2013, approximately 13 million people have access to antiretroviral treatment, about 37 percent of those infected with HIV.

Since the beginning of the epidemic:

- 78 million people have been infected with HIV.
- Approximately 39 million people have died of AIDS-related illnesses.
- It is estimated that each day 6,000 individuals worldwide are infected with HIV. That's one person infected every 25 seconds.

Many of the countries hardest hit by HIV also suffer from other serious issues, for example, infectious diseases, poverty and food insecurity.

HIV and tuberculosis

- HIV is the strongest risk factor for the development of tuberculosis (TB). One third of people living with HIV (PLHIV) are co-infected with latent TB. People co-infected with TB and HIV are 21-34 times more likely to develop active TB disease than people living without HIV.
- In 2011 it was estimated that 79 percent of TB and HIV co-infection occurs in sub-Saharan Africa.
- TB is estimated to cause one in four AIDS-related deaths. In 2011, approximately 430,000 people died of HIV-associated TB. A majority of these deaths occur in Africa, where the mortality rate from HIV-related TB is more than 20 times higher than in other world regions.
- With inexpensive drugs, TB is both preventable and curable. Evidence has shown that early initiation of [anti-retroviral treatment, ART] significantly reduces the risk of death amongst HIV-positive people who are co-infected with TB.
- Of the TB patients who were known to be HIV positive in 2011, 48 percent (over 258,000) were enrolled on ART.

Women at higher risk of HIV infection

- In 2013, women represented approximately 57 percent of all adults living with HIV worldwide. Women are biologically more susceptible to HIV. In addition to suffering from gender inequalities, discrimination and violence can also increase their vulnerability to infection.
- Young women (aged 15-24) have an especially high risk of acquiring HIV, with infection rates twice as high than in young men. In 2013, about half of all PLHIV were women, and in 2010, young women accounted for 22 percent of all new HIV infections.

HIV is the leading cause of death of women of reproductive age and every minute, a young woman is newly infected with HIV.

- Several structural factors – including poverty, discrimination and stigma – interact to prevent a better access to essential information, prevention and treatment services amongst these vulnerable communities.
- In addition, in 2010, in low- and middle-income countries, only 24 percent of young women and 36 percent of young men responded correctly when asked five questions on HIV prevention and HIV transmission. Despite an increase in HIV-related knowledge, globally, less than 30 percent of young women have comprehensive and correct knowledge of HIV. ... An aggravating factor in the lack of basic HIV knowledge amongst women is that they account for two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults of which there are 796 million.

Trends in the last decade

- The number of PLHIV has increased from 31.7 million in 2003 to 35.3 million in 2013, as a result of continuing new infections, people living longer with HIV, and general population growth.
- The global prevalence rate (0.8 percent in 2013) has leveled since 2001.
- The number of people newly infected with HIV has declined in the last decade, contributing to the stabilization of the epidemic. The estimated numbers of children acquiring HIV in low- and middle-income countries have decreased from 536,000 in 2000, to 320,000 in 2012.
- The number of AIDS-related deaths has also declined in the last decade. In 2013, the number of AIDS-related deaths – 1.6 million – fell down from a peak of 2.2 million in the mid-2000s, due a growing availability of ART.
- At the end of December 2009, since the advent of Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) in 1996, it is estimated that HAART has saved an estimated 14.4 million life-years worldwide.
- As of April 2011, 47 countries, territories and areas imposed some form of restriction on the entry, stay and residence of people living with HIV. However, in a more positive development, China, Namibia and the U.S. lifted their HIV-related travel restrictions in 2010, while Ecuador and India clarified that no such restrictions were in place.
- The number of pregnant women living with HIV has remained relatively stable since 2005. §

Water and the Keystone XL Pipeline

The following article was written by Christiana Z. Peppard, Ph.D.; it was prepared in response to readers' reactions to the World Watch column in the May-June Maryknoll magazine, which focused on the faith community's actions to protest the proposed Keystone XL pipeline.

The tar sands of Alberta, Canada, are a tantalizingly proximate source of crude oil that can be deployed to help sate the rather gluttonous energy appetite of the United States. Extraction of bitumen from Alberta's tar sands is controversial on social and environmental fronts in the U.S. and Canada—even as it is considered desirable by strong economic and political interests in both countries.

Recently, a new concern has crested into public consciousness: What is the water impact of KXL? Two themes percolate here: the question of fresh water depletion, and the possibility of contamination. As Yale E360 pointed out, the extraction process uses profligate quantities of fresh water:

In 2011, companies mining the tar sands siphoned approximately 370 million cubic meters of water from the Athabasca River alone, which was heated or converted into steam to separate the viscous oil, or bitumen, from sand formations. That quantity exceeds the amount of water that the city of Toronto, with a population 2.8 million people, uses annually.

Moreover, this use of water is known as “consumptive use”: it cannot re-enter the watershed in meaningful ways after production of crude oil. (Even if the water is re-used in the extraction process, it is not suitable to re-enter ecosystems and is certainly not potable for domestic use.) Like mountaintop removal for coal, extraction of Alberta's tar sands is a form of strip mining that has destroyed ancestral lands and left toxic byproducts that pollute the area's remaining ecologically sensitive Boreal forests and wetlands. And this form of crude oil burns dirtier—emitting more greenhouse gases—than other types of fossil fuels.

For most U.S. residents, however, the ecological impacts of crude oil extraction from tar sands are out of sight and out of mind. Here, attention focuses primarily on the as-yet unconstructed northern segments of the KXL pipeline, which since 2012 have been under scrutiny by governmental agencies and environmental watchdogs. Recent furor focuses on potential water impacts of the proposed segment that passes through the northern part of the Midwestern United States.

In 2011, the proposed pipeline segment was approved by the state of Nebraska but was denied a permit by the federal government in January 2012, for reasons that included potential damage to sensitive soils and possible contamination of important groundwater sources.

The biggest hydrological concerns center on two specific subterranean formations: the High Plains Aquifer, an enormous storehouse of groundwater that includes the Ogallala Group and is a source of water for nearly 30 percent of the country's agricultural products; and the ecologically sensitive Sand Hills region, whose shallow groundwater could be especially susceptible to contamination in the event of a spill. In rejecting the KXL application in 2012, the federal government indicated that more thorough environmental impact assessments were needed and that re-routes of the pipeline should be considered to avoid possible deleterious impacts on vital groundwater supplies.

A re-routed version of the pipeline was proposed by Keystone and approved by Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman in 2013. According to those entities, the re-route “avoids the Sand Hills,” where shallow groundwater might quickly be contaminated by any potential spill. The proposed pipeline would still “cross the High Plains Aquifer, including the Ogallala Group” but, the company insists, “impacts on aquifers from a release should be localized and Keystone would be responsible for any cleanup.” With the Sand Hills issue circumvented, Keystone is betting on the low probability of an Ogallala-region spill and efficacious cleanup of any such event. This raises the question: What is the likelihood of a spill, and what impacts on the aquifer could it entail?

Analysis of the likelihood of spills differs between Keystone and the U.S. federal government's assessments. A 2010 federal survey notes that “spills are likely to occur during operation over the lifetime of the proposed project” from “the pipeline, pump stations, or valve stations,” and it estimates a rate of “1.18—1.83 spills greater than 2100 gal/yr for the entire Project.” (Spills of any size were estimated at a frequency of 1.78—2.51 per year.)

Unsurprisingly, TransCanada's estimates of spill frequencies were significantly lower, concluding that 0.22-1.38 per year were likely from the pipeline itself. Their estimate did not include leaks from valve stations—a significant omission, since according to the government, “the existing Keystone Oil Pipeline System has experienced 14 spills since it began operation in June 2010,” one of which occurred at a North Dakota

pump station and leaked 21,000 gallons of crude oil.

Beyond number games, what are the chemical components and toxicological implications of potential spills in these regions? Crude oil from tar sands is known as bitumen, and in order to transport it smoothly it must be mixed with other chemical products known as diluents to create a composite product known as “dilbit.” Leaks of other dilbit pipelines, such as Michigan’s 2010 Enbridge spill, suggest that oil plus diluents can leak into surrounding areas; according to the EPA, those additional chemicals include “benzene, naphtha or natural gas condensate” and can leave traces of “polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and heavy metals,” which “could be slowly released back into the water column for many years after a release and could cause long-term chronic toxicological impacts.” The Natural Resources Defense Council describes dilbit as “a more abrasive and corrosive mix” than conventional oil sources. A study released by NRDC in 2011 indicated that Alberta’s pipeline system for tar sands crude oil had 16 times the number of spills resulting from pipe corrosion when compared to U.S. onshore pipelines for conventional oil sources.

TransCanada has skirted the federal government’s request for advance disclosure of those chemicals, insisting instead that, “in the event of a spill, appropriate authorities would have timely access to product characteristics.” The company has also agreed to absorb all spill-related costs and will offer, on request, chemical testing of well water for landowners with crops or livestock within 300 feet of the pipeline. The company assures farmers that once the pipeline is installed, crop growth could continue short of the fifty-foot right-of-way perimeter.

Defenders of KXL rightly point out that segments of the pipeline already exist and exhibit little to no evidence of groundwater contamination. Critics respond that the scale and centrality of the Ogallala Aquifer has no parallel in the pipeline’s southern sections.

On the one hand, the Ogallala Aquifer is rapidly declining in volume due to agricultural demand. Possible



The red line is the revised route for the pipeline through Nebraska. The original route is shown as a dashed line. The area shade with orange slashes is the region defined as the Sand Hills.

leaks, crashes, and human error.

Lobbyists and classical economists suggest that the short-term benefits of job creation and proximate sources of crude oil are worth staking a limited risk to the aquifer. But ecological economists, water advocates, and environmental policy strategists correctly observe that the use of tar sands as a fuel source does little to move the U.S. economy off of fossil fuel reliance; and the economies of the Midwest depend upon the integrity of soils and water sources, for which there are no viable substitutes.

What is to become of the proposed re-route of the KXL pipeline? The federal permitting process is in a state of limbo and will likely remain so until after the U.S. election season, while politicians rhetorically deploy the KXL debate to their constituencies in the short-term pursuit of re-election.

Citizens need to focus on longer-term horizons. Proximate fossil fuel supplies that power our economies and create jobs are valuable in today’s energy economy. Is it worth risking the integrity of economically productive and life-supporting groundwater sources? Who stands to benefit, and who will bear the burdens? §

Models to curb carbon yield different results

The following article was prepared by Richard Coaxum, who was an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns from June-August 2014.

As the global community begins to recognize the dangers of climate disruption, some industrialized nations are starting to implement policies to help alleviate some of the stress put on our planet. A few examples of the different mechanisms and their effectiveness are below.

The Canadian province of British Columbia (BC) implemented a carbon tax in 2008 with the support of the business community and environmentalists. The tax began at \$10 per metric ton of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases and increased at a rate of \$5 per year up to a cap at \$30 per metric ton reached in July 2012. At the tax's launch, all BC residents received a Climate Action Dividend which was a one-time payment of \$100. The government also provides a Climate Action Tax Credit (CATC) to assist low-income residents. The CATC awards \$115.50 for each parent and \$34.50 for each child annually.

The carbon tax has been so successful in BC due to its revenue neutral design, meaning that the money gathered from the tax is then returned to the populace via tax breaks. Since its implementation in 2008 the carbon tax has generated roughly \$1 billion a year in revenue with most of that money returned to the populace in the form of personal tax breaks and business tax cuts.

BC's carbon tax is proving successful in raising revenue, dropping refined petroleum consumption by 17 percent since its inception, and reducing CO₂ emissions by six percent over the course of five years (2007-2011).

Australia took a different approach; its tax was aimed squarely at the country's top 348 carbon producing companies, most of which are in the fields of mining and electricity. Unfortunately, since the companies were not required to pay for their pollution from their bottom line, they passed the cost on to consumers. Widespread

opposition to higher energy prices forced legislators to repeal the tax on July 17, 2014.

In 2005, the European Union implemented a cap and trade method, the Emissions Trading System (ETS), as an alternative to a carbon tax. Lauded by business communities as a viable option to help combat climate change, the EU ETS provided industry workers a great deal of flexibility in implementing changes. It has grown to become one of the main tools of the EU's climate policy expanding to cover 11,000 factories, power stations, and other installations which had a net heat exceeding 20 megawatts.

However, it has come under fire for its failure to create the desired envisioned change. Designed to set an overall cap

on carbon emissions for roughly half of the industries in Europe, the EU ETS allowed companies under its jurisdiction a regulated amount of pollution permits which could be traded from company to company, while slowly lowering the cap and number of permits, effectively making carbon more expensive.

The program, however, has failed. According to *The Economist* in April 2013, "Partly because recession has reduced industrial demand for the permits, and partly because the EU gave away too many allowances in the first place, there is massive overcapacity in the carbon market. The surplus is 1.5 billion-2 billion tonnes, or about a year's emissions. Prices had already fallen from €20 (\$30) a tonne in 2011 to €5 a tonne in early 2013."

Furthermore, the structure of decision-making in the EU hampers efforts to reform the EU ETS since all 27 countries would need to agree on said changes as well. The flexibility that the program provided ended up being its downfall as it failed to raise the cost of carbon.

These examples have served as policy incubators for the world on how best to address greenhouse gas emissions. So far, the BC carbon tax has been the most effective program to regulate carbon with its revenue-neutral mechanism and tax credits for low-income residents. §



Photo of coal power plant in Germany by Arnold Paul/Creative Commons

Nuclear disarmament: Urgent and possible

September 26 is the first International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. The aim of the day is to enhance “public awareness and education about the threat posed to humanity by nuclear weapons and the necessity for their total elimination, in order to mobilize international efforts towards achieving the common goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.” The following article was prepared by Marie Dennis.

For decades, faith-based and civil society organizations have sustained attention to the need for nuclear disarmament through serious research, creative organizing and effective advocacy. After a long hiatus, broken only by the slow step-by-step approach of U.S.-Russia bilateral negotiations, increased attention to the urgent need for nuclear disarmament is beginning to balance what, since the end of the Cold War, has been a singular focus on nonproliferation.

Multiple important events have taken place in the past year to reignite momentum toward the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Among them were several meetings of and a report from the Open Ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament; two successful international conferences in Norway and Mexico on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear war, with another planned for Vienna in December 2014; movement, if very slow, toward a conference to establish a weapons of mass destruction free zone in the Middle East; and the Republic of the Marshall Islands lawsuits filed in The Hague and in California against all nine nuclear-armed nations (United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, North Korea) for their failure to honor their disarmament obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). These efforts will continue.

The United Nations Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) was established by the UN General Assembly in November 2012 following widespread frustration at the lack of progress in other forums, including the Conference on Disarmament, which has not been able to negotiate any disarmament agreements since the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1996.

Open to all UN member states as well as to international organizations and civil society groups, the OEWG met over 15 days in May, June and August 2013. The OEWG “opened the door” to multilateral negotiations by bridging long-standing differences, floating new ideas and finding common ground between non-nuclear States, allies of nuclear weapon states and those nuclear-

armed states that participated.

According to UNFOLD ZERO, which was launched at the UN in New York on May 7 of this year by a coalition of NGOs with the participation of the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the process of the OEWG was a “breath of fresh air” compared to other official forums. Governments discussed issues in a non-confrontational, exploratory way. Civil society groups were able to participate fully in the deliberations leading to a final consensus report. In October 2014, the UN General Assembly will decide whether to resume working sessions of the OEWG.

Also in recent months, the humanitarian consequences of producing, maintaining or using nuclear weapons have received unprecedented attention. The research and educational efforts of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and other organizations point clearly to the catastrophic impact of launching even a few of the weapons. They write, “Nuclear weapons are the most destructive, most indiscriminate, most inhumane instruments of mass murder ever created. Their use – and even their possession – goes against every principle of international humanitarian law. In fact, it is likely that humanity could not survive a nuclear war using even a fraction of the arsenals in existence today.”

The Vienna Conference planned for December 8-9, 2014 will give voice again to non-nuclear states insisting on the urgency of eliminating the extreme danger to the human community and planet Earth presented by the 16,300 nuclear weapons that now exist.

The next Review Conference for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty will take place in 2015. Reaching Critical Will presents excellent background material on the NPT, including a summary of progress toward implementation of 64 specific commitments made by governments which were party to the NPT at the last Review Conference in 2010.

Finally, in response to the Marshall Islands lawsuit, the U.S. filed a Motion to Dismiss on July 21 in the federal court in Oakland, CA. On August 21, the Marshall Islands submitted its 15-page response to the U.S. Motion to Dismiss. Pax Christi International, with other Nuclear Zero partners, submitted an amicus brief in support of the Marshall Islands case. The long legal process in the U.S. and The Hague resulting from this courageous effort on the part of the Marshall Islands will help give important context to the many opportunities to promote nuclear disarmament in the coming year. §

Shareholders call for worker rights, safety

The following article was prepared by Cathy Rowan, who is the Corporate Responsibility Coordinator for the Maryknoll Sisters. The Maryknoll Sisters and the Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers are members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR).

After the April 2013 collapse of Rana Plaza in Bangladesh (shown in photo at right), in which nearly 1,200 garment workers lost their lives, ICCR organized a coalition of over 200 institutional investors worldwide to promote reform of the global apparel sector to guarantee the safety and well-being of workers. In particular, the coalition calls for the support of the Rana Plaza Trust Fund, set up to help victims of the disaster, and for apparel companies to sign the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety. Signers of the Accord make binding commitments to undertake the changes in the apparel supply chain needed to ensure worker safety.

This summer, ICCR Senior Program Director David Schilling attended the annual shareholder meeting of the apparel company Ralph Lauren and spoke at a rally prior to the meeting. What follows are his reflections on attending the meeting:

The responsibility of companies to respect and protect the rights of workers in their global apparel supply chains became the central theme of Ralph Lauren's shareholder meeting on the morning of August 7, 2014 in New York City. ... ICCR members supported a shareholder proposal sponsored by the AFL-CIO requesting that the company conduct a human rights risk assessment. The collapse of Rana Plaza in Dhaka precipitated the filing of the resolution when the management of Ralph Lauren refused to join the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, a legally binding agreement endorsed by over 180 global companies that seeks to implement systemic reforms in the Bangladeshi garment sector. Evidently, Ralph Lauren management feels they are doing enough on human rights issues and told their investors they prefer to "go it alone."

Nazma Aktar, a garment factory worker since the age of 11 and now leader of the Bangladeshi worker rights movement Awaj (which means "voice" in Bangla), made a heartfelt and eloquent presentation of the proposal to Mr. Lauren and the board. Nazma had worked

at the Tazreen Fashions factory, where a November 2012 fire killed over 100 workers. She flew in from Bangladesh in order to give her testimony and to help raise awareness about the plight of apparel factory workers in low-cost countries like Bangladesh. Nazma helped put a face on the human risk Ralph Lauren was being asked to

assess and to make real the importance of having workplace safety protocols in place wherever in the world the company is sourcing or manufacturing.

"Human rights risks for companies doing business in Bangladesh have become a central concern after the tragedy at Rana Plaza On that fateful day, 1,138 garment workers were killed and 2,515

more were injured," Nazma told the board of directors, senior management and shareholders of Ralph Lauren. "Before the collapse, many garment workers expressed concern that there were growing cracks in the walls. But they were told they must go back to work or they would not be paid for the month and would be fired."

Workplace safety is only one of the issues Bangladesh garment factory workers face – excessive hours, forced and bonded labor, slave wages, sexual harassment, denial of the right to freely associate and bargain collectively – these are everyday realities in global supply chains that the board members and management of every apparel company must acknowledge and commit to eradicate.

"In addition to what one company can do to protect human rights of workers, it is time to collaborate with other brands/retailers and stakeholders. A good example of an effective collaborative effort is the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety made up of 180 companies and local and international unions. Is the company willing to join the Accord?" I asked.

There were signs of an opening but we will see.... We are hopeful that we will soon be able to report to Nazma that the long journey from Bangladesh and her tireless efforts on behalf of its garment workers were worth it. We are hopeful that Ralph Lauren will understand the life and death risks they run every day they don't sign the Accord. And that Nazma's personal testimony helped to remind them of their corporate responsibility to value their workers lives and well-being, before profits. §



Resources

1. **Global Day of Action on Climate Change, September 21:** In a few weeks, heads of state will meet at the UN in New York City; during this time, activists will gather to show that the people are standing up in their communities, organizing, building power, confronting the power of fossil fuel corporations and shifting power to a just, safe, peaceful world. This will be a massive public witness; learn more at www.350.org. To join and march with Maryknoll on **Sunday, September 21**, contact the Global Concerns office at 202-832-1780 or email ogc@maryknoll.org.
2. **Annual vigil to close the School of the Americas/WHINSEC:** This year's vigil to call for the closing of the U.S. Army's School of the Americas/Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (SOA/WHINSEC) will be held **Nov. 21-23** in Columbus GA. (This year will mark the 25th anniversary of the November 16, 1989 assassination of the six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter in El Salvador.) Learn more about the weekend's workshops, events, speakers, musicians and more at the SOA Watch website, www.soaw.org.
3. **Faith in Food: Changing the World One Meal at a Time:** Edited by Sue Campbell and Susie Weldon and a project of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, this book combines essays, scripture, story-telling, recipes, initiatives, and general wisdom in one beautifully produced publication, all seeking to change our relationship with what we eat and how we obtain our food. Altogether this is a groundbreaking collaboration among Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Sikhism, and Hinduism, alongside secular organizations, to get people thinking, acting and eating with a new consciousness. It includes an essay on Maryknoll's work on the impact of excessive speculation in the food commodities market. Paperback (\$24 full price) is available directly through the U.S. distributor, Trafalgar Square Publishing (1-800-888-4741) and can also be ordered from Barnes & Noble.
4. **Unaccompanied Migrant Children Resource kit:** The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has this 13-page PDF available which includes copies of statements from Pope Francis and several U.S. bishops; analysis of the current crisis; information on how to view the situation the context of Catholic Social Teaching; and an action alert to use to contact Congress. Find it at the USCCB's website, <http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/unaccompanied-migrant-children-resource-kit.cfm>, or contact the Global Concerns office if you need a hard copy mailed to you.

A Maryknoll Liturgical Year: Reflections on the Readings for Year B

Maryknoll missionaries' experiences of crossing into new cultures and sharing life with new communities bring fresh meanings of the sacred scripture to light. In this third volume of reflections that explore the readings of the liturgical calendar, readers find life described in its fullest – the deep pain and struggle that people endure, as well as the hope for a new heaven and a new earth. This collection elevates stories of reconciliation, of inter-religious collaboration; stories of ways in which groups have overcome their differences to take on projects that serve the common good.

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