



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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

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Synod for the Amazon: What to expect

The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian Region is scheduled to take place in Rome from October 6-27 on the theme, “Amazonia: new paths for the Church and for an integral ecology.”

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis refers to the Amazon and Congo Basins as the “lungs of our planet.” According to the working document for the Synod for the Amazon, available on the Synod’s website at <http://www.sinodoamazonico.va>, the Amazon rainforest, covering much of northwestern Brazil and extending into Colombia, Peru and six other South American countries, provides 15 percent of freshwater globally and contributes to global wind currents.

Concerns for the environment in the world’s largest tropical rainforest, unmatched in its biodiversity and influence on the health of the entire planet, and concerns for the human dignity of vulnerable indigenous communities there – communities with deep cultural traditions and spiritual wisdom on living in peace and balance with all of creation – led Pope Francis to announce in 2017 that a Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region would work “to identify new paths for the evangelization of God’s people in that region.”

The working document indicates that key discussion points for the three-week meeting in Rome in October will be the threats to life in the Amazon region by environmental destruction and exploitation, by the systematic violation of the fundamental human rights of the Amazon population, in particular, by the violation of the rights and traditions of indigenous peoples, such as the right to land, to self-determination, to consultation and prior consent, and possible suggestions for greater access to the Eucharist in a region with few priests.

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns has launched our series of two-page bulletins called *One Amazon, Many Voices* which will examine topics to be discussed at the Synod and their connections to the lived experiences of Maryknoll Missioners. It is our hope that the bulletins will be a useful tool for learning, reflection, and action by readers. Find *One Amazon, Many Voices* online at <http://bit.ly/OAMV2019>

The first issue of *One Amazon, Many Voices* examines “Indigenous Wisdom” and includes a reflection written by Maryknoll Father Paul Masson and Ms. Tania Ávila of the Maryknoll Mission Institute in Cochabamba, Bolivia. It also highlights our partnership with REPAM (Red Eclesial Panamazónica; in English, the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network), a Catholic Church network that promotes the rights and dignity of people living in the Amazon and a key force behind the Synod.

This Synod is precedent setting in two ways.

This is the first time a Synod of Bishops will focus on topics brought to prominence in *Laudato Si'*. It will focus on a vast territory of land with special characteristics for all of humanity and will address indigenous and environmental matters. For three weeks, the Church will place its spotlight on the periphery and on integral ecology, and conduct a theological discussion on lessons to be learned from Amazonia on ways to balance technology, consumption, and ecology.

Also, the process for this synod is quite different from others in that it promotes the concept of synodality, a way of being that values inclusion and emphasizes listening and learning from the grassroots. Pope Francis described the process in depth at a ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops in 2015. “A synodal church is a listening church, aware that listening is more than hearing. It is a reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn,” the pope said.

For this Synod, Pope Francis utilized REPAM to carry out a listening process in the Amazon region that he began with his visit to Puerto Maldonado in Peru in 2018. REPAM offered material gathered from hundreds of consultations with indigenous leaders, laity, secular groups, and church leaders to the Synod to inform the working document, “Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology” released June 17.

While the Synod’s participants are mostly bishops, there will also be a delegation of indigenous leaders and a few lay people to bring insights from the Amazon.

Teachings of Francis and the periphery

In the introduction, the working document describes its structure, suggested by REPAM, as built on three conversions Pope Francis invites us to undergo: a pastoral conversion described in *Joy of the Gospel*; an ecological conversion introduced in *Laudato Si'*; and a synodality as described in the *Apostolic Constitution*.

In addition to papal documents and Gospel teachings, the working document introduces the indigenous concept of “*buen vivir*” (“good living”) as an expression of integral ecology. The document says, “The integration of creation, of life considered as a totality, is the basis of traditional culture that is translated from generation to generation through listening to ancestral wisdom – a living reserve of indigenous spirituality and culture.”

Challenges in the Amazon

The working document names challenges to be examined by the Synod. The concept of “development” projects is questioned, especially concerning who benefits and who suffers violence. Certain industries are called out: mining and logging, hydro-electric dams, and large-scale agriculture. It even mentions conservation projects that are more concerned with protecting ecosystems than human and territorial rights. The document decries the criminalization of people who protest these projects, and violence against people who speak out.

The document highlights the special vulnerability of people who have left the Amazon to live in urban areas as well as the vulnerability of communities living in voluntary isolation, especially women in these communities, who are often preyed upon by narcotraffickers and workers associated with extractives industries.

An integral approach

The Synod introduces new terms in the document to reflect systems challenges that require wholistic solutions. One chapter deals with “integral health” recognizing that human health and the health of other species are deteriorating due to the extractive industries that introduce new diseases, toxic exposures, and deforestation. Clean water, air, food, and access to gathering, hunting and fishing are named as essential to integral health. Access to indigenous and traditional medicines is also named.

Another chapter deals with “integral education” as a means of learning from and teaching each other. The document shares that “indigenous communities have a teaching-learning method grounded in oral tradition and experiential practice.” This is an education based on encounter, that unites care for the earth with a commitment to those who are poor and vulnerable.

Yet another chapter names “integral personal conversion” that “recognizes personal and social complicity in the structures of sin, unmasking the ideologies that justify a lifestyle that assaults creation.”

New ways of mission

The Synod recognizes past actions by the Church that caused deep wounds in indigenous communities and should not be repeated, and calls for a missionary Church that values intercultural dialogue and listening to both peoples and nature. It calls for an evangelization grounded in respect for local cultures and an openness to incorporating local culture to enrich the Christian experience. This is a Church that goes out in both geographical and cultural ways, that is prophetic and is in solidarity with communities and their territories under threat.

New ways of mission are proposed to expand ac-

cess to the Eucharist in a region with few priests. In some circumstances in faraway communities the Synod will consider the ordination of elders, preferably indigenous men, even if married, to respond to the need for pastoral and sacramental care. The document names the need to identify types of official ministry that can be conferred on women, but goes no further.

What not to expect

Surprisingly, climate change is not featured prominently in the document, even though the protection of the Amazon and the destruction of it are consequential to the impacts of climate change. While the Synod was previously billed as not just about the Amazon, but also other vulnerable biomes, Pope Francis has affirmed that this Synod must stay focused on the Amazon given its global influence. Hopefully the Church in other regions can build upon the outcomes of the Synod to protect the people and ecosystems in their biomes. This is something that REPAM encouraged at their Integral Ecology summit at Georgetown University in March 2019.

Reactions to the Synod

Faith-based and secular allies already committed to protection of rights, territories, and ecosystems have expressed appreciation for the Synod but there are others who see it as a threat. Conservatives within the Church, such as German Cardinal Walter Brandmüller, have criticized the Synod’s approach. Brandmüller wrote a letter recently in which he called the Synod paganistic and an attempt to turn the Church into a secular NGO.

Some political leaders in the Amazon region view the Synod as an attack on their sovereignty. The government of Brazil has been most vocal, as documented in our article, “Brazil: Bolsonaro challenges the Catholic Church.”

As stated in the working document, many people who defend the Amazon face serious threats. Brazil has been named in multiple consecutive years as the country with the most murders of land and environmental defenders, according to Global Witness. Currently some members of the CIMI (the Catholic Church’s Indigenous Missionary Council) are in hiding for fear of their lives.

Despite this opposition, there is still much support for the Synod from inside and outside of the Church. The Brazilian Bishops have expressed significant support, especially Cardinal Pedro Hummes, president of REPAM, who Pope Francis appointed as General Rapporteur for the Synod. The Peruvian Bishops also have expressed support and Cardinal Pedro Barreto serves as vice president of REPAM. Grassroots activists, indigenous leaders, and others plan to convene in Rome during the Synod to express their support for the meetings. §

Brazil: Bolsonaro challenges the Catholic Church

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's opposition to the Catholic Church is coming to a head over the Amazon.

Jair Bolsonaro is the first Brazilian president to participate in the March for Jesus that united close to three million evangelicals in Sao Paulo this year. In his speech, he thanked the faithful for their support and said, "You were decisive in changing the destiny of this marvelous homeland Brazil."

A Catholic, Bolsonaro has actively courted evangelical voters, even being baptized in the Jordan River by Pastor Everaldo Pereira, president of the conservative Social Christian Party, and continues to receive the support of many important evangelical leaders. Yet he has a rockier relationship with the Catholic church, which he considers to be part of the opposition due to its longstanding support of marginalized communities and, historically, the Workers Party.

Since its foundation in 1952, a time of the burgeoning of liberation theology, the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB, in its Portuguese initials) has indeed been known for its progressivism at the grassroots as well as episcopal levels. While the hierarchy has become more conservative and inward facing since the 1980s, the grassroots continue to be active, though with a much smaller impact.

Despite this shift, Bolsonaro, who often waxes nostalgically of the days of the dictatorship (when the Church was more outspoken), still sees the CNBB as part of the opposition. A video released during the 2018 electoral campaign showed Bolsonaro talking about the need to reduce the size of indigenous reserves in order to increase economic development and complaining about the support indigenous communities receive from the United Nations as well as the Brazilian bishops' Indigenous Missionary Council (Conselho Indigenista Mission, CIMI) and the CNBB, calling them "the rotten part of the Church, to speak in clear Portuguese."

The Bolsonaro administration is especially concerned about the Synod for the Amazon, an assembly of Catholic bishops that will take place in Rome in October. The bishops and invited guests (religious men and women, indigenous community leaders) are expected to discuss environmental, indigenous and climate change issues as well as church issues in the nine Latin American countries that make up the Pan-Amazon region. The administration views the Synod as an attack on national sovereignty and is concerned that the Synod will be an opportunity for the Church to criticize the Brazilian government in an international setting.

"We are worried and want to neutralize that there," said Augusto Heleno, chief minister of the Institutional Security Cabinet (known as the GSI in Portuguese). "The question will be the object of careful study by the GSI. We are going deep into this." Members of the military and intelligence officers have participated in preparatory meetings for the Synod, never speaking, but attending workshops and taking notes.

Bolsonaro even requested that he be able to participate in the Synod, something that has never been done by a head of state. Retired Bishop Erwin Krautler, an Austrian-born missionary who led the Diocese of Xingu in the Brazilian rain forest from 1981-2015 and one of the authors of the working document for the Synod, asked rhetorically, "What will a representative of the government say when we are talking about new paths for evangelization?" The CNBB instructed Bolsonaro to send his request through the Vatican's embassy in Brasilia.

With no invitation to attend and no way to participate in the Synod, Bolsonaro is reportedly considering organizing a rival symposium in Rome to "show Brazil's concern for the Amazon and its indigenous peoples" days before the bishops meet.

In May, the CNBB held elections for new leadership and there was a possibility that the conservative wave that put Bolsonaro in office would bring in conservative leaders who would focus more on internal church issues instead of social realities. Yet Archbishop Walmor Oliveira de Azevedo, a moderate from the state of Bahia, won the vote indicating that the bishops will maintain their support for indigenous and other marginalized communities as well as the environment, which, with the current administration, means inevitable conflicts with the government.

For example, Bolsonaro's desire to create a "Dubai in the Amazon" where the government would encourage and partially finance five economic poles in the region: biopharmaceuticals and cosmetics, tourism, defense, mining, and fisheries would inevitably create conflicts with communities there and the Church that supports them.

"It's not that the Church is against the government," explains Maryknoll Lay Missioner Flavio Jose Rocha, a Brazilian, "but the Church is committed to upholding human dignity and when government policies worsen the lives of people, we are called to respond based on gospel values."§

United Nations: Forests and climate change

The global community gathered at the United Nations in New York in May to take action on behalf of the world's forests.

The 14th session of UN Forum on Forests (UNFF14) took stock of progress in implementing the UN Strategic Plan for Forests, which provides a global framework for sustainably managing all types of forests and trees, halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation, and increasing forest area by 2030.

With an estimated 1.6 billion people – or one quarter of the overall population – dependent on forests for subsistence, livelihood, jobs and income, forests are essential for human well-being, and play a vital role in promoting economic growth. Forests are also increasingly important to combat climate change.

“Forests have an important role to play in both climate change mitigation and adaptation,” the UNFF14 Panel Concept Notes state. “Forests constitute a vital part of the carbon cycle, absorbing, removing, recycling and storing large amounts of carbon dioxide through trees, understory vegetation and soils. Wood products also store or ‘fix’ significant amounts of carbon. The resilience and adaptive capacity of all types of forests helps reduce the risks of natural disasters and climate change.”

Ministers from Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Ecuador, India, EU, and others, shared their best practices, challenges and gaps in forest-based solutions to climate change. Civil society organizations representing numerous stakeholders, including scientific and technological communities, small forest landowners and farmers, women, indigenous people, etc., were welcome to share their best practices as well.

During the upcoming UN General Assembly in September, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will convene a Climate Summit in which “nature-based solutions” to climate change will be discussed. Many of these solutions focus on forests and life on the land.

During discussions at the UN Forum on Forests, participants noted that forests play a vital role in limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius in order to avoid the most devastating effects of climate change as examined in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

(IPCC) Special Report. Forests are essential for their carbon sequestration or carbon dioxide removal.

Participants noted that the links between climate and forests need to be addressed in international, national and sub-national policymaking. Climate change related threats to forests include increased drought, fire, wind, flooding, erosion, and pests and disease. Sound policymaking needs to be science and evidence-based and recognize the role forest ecosystems play in climate change adaptation and mitigation. In order for policy to be effective, broader issues of land use, energy, sustainable production and consumption, means of implementation and governance, need to be addressed.

It is essential that communities have agency in the development and implementation of forest programs and that women are included. For example, in Antipolo, a city east of Manila, in the Philippines, women participate in the implementation and management of reforestation and afforestation programs that are part of the community-based watershed conservation project in an area known as the Marikina Watershed Protected Landscape. The programs aim to address rural and indigenous livelihood, water security, disaster risk reduction and nature-based resilience.

Women in the community have taken leadership roles in collecting seeds/wildlings, setting up seedling nurseries, participating in government meetings and capacity building workshops, planting and monitoring and selling seedlings to the government. Women and men in the community have organized small-scale coop stores that sell necessities such as rice, oil, sugar and vegetables from their common garden. During meetings, men and women share how their lives have been impacted and changed, no longer cutting trees to make a livelihood and instead protecting the trees and forest. Women and men in the community have become the agents of climate adaptation and resilience. §



Maryknoll Sr. Marvie Misolas (right) and a farming family in the Philippines. Photo courtesy of Sr. Misolas.

UN: Concerns over nominee for U.S. Ambassador

At a Senate Foreign Relations hearing on June 19, Kelly Knight Craft, the current U.S. Ambassador to Canada, and nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, was questioned about her hundreds of absences and conflicts of interest related to extensive investments in coal and other fossil fuel industries in light of the UN's priority focus on combating climate change.

President Donald Trump's nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Kelly Knight Craft, together with her husband, holds investments in 54 different energy companies, and is estimated to be worth close to \$1.2 billion. These numbers come from a 2018 financial disclosure form Knight Craft had to file with the State Department and the Office of Government Ethics to serve in her current position as U.S. Ambassador to Canada and were reported in PassBlue, an independent journal focusing on United Nations matters.

Knight's husband, Joseph Craft III, is president, chief executive officer and director of Alliance Resource Partners, a publicly traded coal producer. According to Passblue, through acquisitions and internal development, Alliance Resource Partners has grown into the second-largest producer of coal in the eastern United States, with about 1.7 billion tons of reserves in six states. An April 2018 Securities and Exchange Commission filing showed that Joseph Craft owns or controls 44,773,040 shares of Alliance Resource Partners, worth more than \$900 million.

At a Senate Foreign Relations hearing on June 19, Senator Edward Markey of Massachusetts observed that Knight Craft's disclosure form showed her personal holdings in oil, coal and gas assets were worth more than \$63 million. Because of the structure of the standard financial disclosure form, a solid estimate of the Crafts' net worth is hard to pin down, but a good guess would be \$1 billion to \$1.2 billion.

The Crafts showered Donald Trump's presidential campaign and the Republican Party with millions in campaign contributions in 2016. Since then, they have spoken in support of the president's pro-coal agenda — despite its deadly impact on the environment and the health of billions of people around the world. President Trump named Knight Craft the U.S. Ambassador to Canada in 2017. Presumably, Trump expects the couple to continue contributing large amounts of money to the Republican Party through the 2020 elections.

Knight Craft was nominated to the UN job partly because she had won Senate confirmation before, when she was appointed ambassador to Canada, and is likely to win confirmation again, even though the UN post has until now been reserved for more highly skilled and ex-

perienced individuals. The Crafts are also old friends of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, whose campaign has also benefited from their largess. In the hearing, Senator Robert Menendez stated, "I have deep reservations about your lack of qualifications for such a complex and challenging role."

When she began her stint in Canada in October, 2017, Knight Craft was asked her views on climate change and responded, "I believe there are scientists on both side that are accurate." However, at the hearing on June 19 she reversed herself, saying, "Climate change needs to be addressed, as it poses real risk. Human behavior has contributed to the changing in climate, let there be no doubt."

Despite this, she did not completely separate herself from the Trump Administration's denial of climate change, asserting that "We withdrew from the Paris (Climate) Agreement because we feel like we don't have to be part of an agreement to be leaders." She also referred to an Environmental Protection Agency report last April showing a 14 percent drop in U.S. human-generated greenhouse gas emissions from 2005 to 2017. However, she ignored the report's finding that these emissions increased by three percent in 2018.

The seriousness and immediacy of climate change has become impossible to ignore. Articles in the New York Times in June reported that melting sea ice forced a starving polar bear to search for food 300 miles south of the Arctic and that glaciers in the Himalayas are melting in summer more quickly than can be replenished in winter.

In an agreement with the Office of Government Ethics, Knight Craft has pledged to recuse herself from personally participating "in any particular matter that to my knowledge has a direct and predictable effect" on her financial interests in the fossil fuel business.

The Senate committee is expected to vote on her nomination in July and there is little evidence that she will have any difficulty getting confirmed despite the many questions that remain concerning her suitability for the UN post. §

Iran: Letter to Congress to stop march to war

Escalating tensions between Iran and the United States have raised the prospect of a military conflict. The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and 61 organizations sent the following letter to Congress on May 21, 2019.

We write to request that Congress take urgent action to halt a march to war with Iran. The Trump administration, spurred on by National Security Advisor John Bolton, has moved the U.S. into a war posture. Over the last few weeks, Bolton pushed through unprecedented sanctions and escalated the war of words intended to provoke retaliation from the Iranians. Now, Bolton has used a routine carrier deployment to the Middle East to threaten Iran with “unrelenting force” and has overseen the revision of war plans that would send 120,000 troops to the Middle East if Iran takes his bait.

Congress cannot be complicit as the playbook for the 2003 invasion of Iraq is repeated before our eyes. The administration has increasingly politicized intelligence on Iran’s nuclear program, and falsely asserts ties between Iran and al-Qaeda. Worryingly, the administration does not perceive that it is constrained by the lack of Congressional authorization for war with Iran and has even suggested that the 2001 authorization to use military force could be twisted to green light strikes against Iran.

As the drumbeat for war grows louder, Congress

must fulfill its Constitutional duty and enact further constraints to unequivocally prevent the administration from launching an unauthorized war. We urge you to pass legislation to bar funding for an unauthorized war with Iran – The Prevention of Unconstitutional War with Iran Act (S. 1039/H.R. 2354) - together with legislation that makes clear that no existing statutory authorization, including the 2001 authorization for use of military force, provides for war with Iran. Moreover, we urge all lawmakers to issue statements making clear that no authorization for an Iran war exists, and that if the Trump administration seeks war it must first come to Congress for debate.

The American people do not want another disastrous war of choice in the Middle East. Congress has the chance to stop a war before it starts. Please take action before it is too late. §

Faith in Action: To see the complete list of signatories, go to <http://bit.ly/CongressIranLetter>

Tell Congress to say no to war with Iran at <http://bit.ly/NoWarIran>

Honduras: Stop the violence, denounce the abuse

June 28 marked the tenth anniversary of the U.S.-backed coup that ousted democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya and unleashed a decade of violence in Honduras. The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and 13 organizations released the following statement to the governments of the United States and Honduras on June 27.

Over the last several weeks, Honduran security forces have killed and wounded teachers, students, health care workers and other Honduran citizens protesting cuts to the health and education system. At least four students were injured by bullets on June 24 as the Military Police stormed the National Autonomous University of Honduras, violating its autonomy. Seventeen-year-old Eblin Noel Corea Maradiaga was shot in the head and killed on June 19 as police and soldiers fired into a crowd protesting in Yarumela, La Paz. Jesus Ariel Sánchez Osorio, a young teacher, was killed on May 31 by a shot to the head as police fired on protesters in Villanueva, Cortes. In many other incidents across the country, security forces harmed protesters by shooting live bullets and indiscriminate use of tear gas. This repression must stop now.

We urge the Honduran government to: order all se-

curity forces to end immediately excessive use of force against protesters; withdraw military and Military Police from responding to any protests; disband the Military Police; ensure government agents end any threats and abuse against human rights defenders and journalists; and ensure cases against state agents for these abuses are promptly investigated and prosecuted.

We urge the U.S. State Department to: call on Honduras to end excessive use of force, respect the rights of Hondurans to protest, defend rights and report on the news, disband the Military Police, and ensure justice for human rights crimes. We call on the U.S. Embassy in Honduras to end its all-too-often deafening silence and publicly, regularly denounce the abuses taking place. §

Faith in action: To see the list of signatories, go to <http://bit.ly/Honduras10>. To ask your U.S. Representative to speak out, go to <http://bit.ly/2LC54KC>

Guatemala: Maryknoll Affiliate targeted

Maryknoll Affiliate Claudia Samayoa and fellow Guatemalan Jose Martinez face false accusations of criminal behavior by the president of Guatemala's Supreme Court for speaking out against corruption and impunity.

Claudia Samayoa and José Martínez, Guatemalan citizens, have been targeted by their country's Supreme Court for speaking out against corruption and impunity. Samayoa is President of the Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala (UDEFEUGUA) and member of the local chapter of the Maryknoll Affiliates in Guatemala. Jose Martínez is a member of the Justicia Ya collective.

Ms. Samayoa told the Maryknoll Affiliates that she believes the charges by the Supreme Court are a direct response to the two human rights defenders' legal actions in defense of the Constitutional Court after it ruled against President Jimmy Morales' decision to shut down the U.N.-sponsored International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which has been investigating crime and corruption since 2007. Morales accused CICIG of violating Guatemala's sovereignty, a claim U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres rejected. Since the Constitutional Court overruled Morales's decision, the CICIG has been able to resume its work. The CICIG has been instrumental in investigations leading to trials and convictions against human rights violators in the Civil War as high up as former president General Rios Montt.

On January 9, the Supreme Court attempted to impeach three of the Constitutional Court judges who overruled President Morales. In defense of the Constitutional Court, Samayoa and Martínez filed a complaint against the Supreme Court calling for all eleven members to be stripped of immunity.

Now, the President of the Guatemalan Supreme Court is accusing the two human rights defenders of illegally obtaining a court document and influence peddling. This is the latest move in a retreat from the rule of law and transparency in Guatemala. It is yet another attempt to silence individuals and institutions that seek to address corruption and impunity.

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns rejects the criminalization of Claudia Samayoa and Jose Martínez for defending the constitutional rights of the people of Guatemala. Forty-five organizations sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urging him to publicly raise concerns with the Republic of Guatemala over the criminalization of the two human rights defenders.

“The criminalization of both defenders is yet an-

other example of the targeted reprisals leveled against civil society organizations and human rights defenders that have mobilized against a series of attacks on Guatemala's democratic institutional framework,” the letter stated. “Among other worrying attempts to undermine democratic norms and the rule of law in Guatemala, the government has attacked institutions that have sought to root out impunity and corruption. The most recent efforts include delegitimizing the Constitutional Court judges and unilaterally canceling an agreement with the UN that had established the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). Since its inception in 2006, the CICIG has conducted many independent investigations leading to important judicial decisions to address impunity and corruption and strengthen the rule of law.”

The letter went to say, “As religious and civil society organizations committed to justice and human rights, we urge you to publicly speak out in defense of fundamental freedoms and human rights and to call on the Guatemalan government to:

- End all acts of harassment, misuse of criminal law and criminalization against individuals, organizations, and communities that defend human rights in Guatemala, including Mrs. Claudia Virginia Samayoa Pineda and Mr. José Manuel Martínez Cabrera. In particular, we ask you to publicly call on the Public Ministry of Guatemala to dismiss the criminal complaint against both human rights defenders.

- Adopt the most appropriate measures to guarantee the safety and physical and psychological integrity of Mrs. Samayoa Pineda and Mr. Martínez Cabrera and of all human rights defenders in Guatemala.

- Protect, respect and guarantee the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all regions of Guatemala, as well as the validity of a democratic State.

“This moment of grave threat to the human rights and lives of Ms. Claudia Virginia Samayoa Pineda and Mr. José Manuel Martínez Cabrera presents a critical opportunity to clarify that the U.S. government stands in defense of human rights, transparency, and democracy.”§

Faith in action: Find instructions on how to send your own letter to Secretary of State Pompeo on behalf of these human rights defenders at <http://bit.ly/GuatemalaAction>

Israel-Palestine: New economic peace plan

Palestinians deride new U.S.-led peace plan as an “economy first” approach doomed to fail.

Hundreds of Palestinians attended demonstrations in the West Bank and Gaza June 24-26, organized by the Palestinian Authority in opposition to the Trump Administration’s “Peace to Prosperity” economic conference being held concurrently in Bahrain.

President Trump’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, organized the conference to rollout a \$50 billion economic plan to bolster the Palestinian economy and rally support from the Arab states to fund it. Diplomats, businesspeople and government representatives from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates were in attendance. Notably absent were any official representatives from either the Palestinian Authority or Israel.

The “Peace to Prosperity” document is the first part of the U.S.-led Israel-Palestine peace plan, and quite the “carrot”, dangled in front of the Palestinians while they await the “stick”: the Administration’s proposal for a political solution to the conflict which they have yet to disclose. On its face, the economic plan indeed outlines proposals to fund many development projects which would be critical for the Palestinians to have an effective, stable, functioning and even thriving state once the Israeli occupation ends.

The plan includes a travel corridor between the West Bank and Gaza, major infrastructure projects such as water, sewage treatment, telecommunications, and health care facilities. It also includes significant investment in the tourist industry, allocating funds for repairing religious sites and making beachfront areas more desirable for visitors. It includes plans to strengthen private-sector development, regional trade, education with a focus on empowering women, and even funding for arts and athletics. Perhaps the most controversial are projects to strengthen rule of law, government accountability and transparency, and build up civil society.

The Palestinian Authority rejected the plan and the conference outright. Lebanon also boycotted the conference, citing the portion of the proposal which includes funding for the permanent settlement of Palestinian refugees in their country, which currently number somewhere around 175,000. Jordanian officials did attend the conference so they “wouldn’t be left out of the room”, but a former senior Jordanian politician noted that “This is an unbalanced approach” which “assumes the Palestinians are the more vulnerable side and they are the ones who can succumb to pressure more easily.”

Unfortunately, the Palestinians are by far the more vulnerable side in the conflict with Israel, and are in desperate need of the developments this economic proposal entails—critical elements for a Palestinian state to be self-sufficient once the occupation ends.

But the Palestinians are right to be skeptical. Senior Palestinian official Hanan Ashrawi said “If the U.S. is so concerned about Palestinian well-being, then why did they carry out these punitive measures against us? Why did they target Palestinian infrastructure? Why did they stop scholarships to Palestinian students?” – referring to cuts the Trump Administration has made in U.S. funding for UNRWA, the UN Palestinian refugee agency, and USAID projects for Palestinians.

The United States has long been perceived as a biased peace broker due to its close relationship with Israel. The Trump Administration shattered any remaining hope among Palestinians for a U.S.-led peace deal when President Trump officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017 and moved the U.S. embassy there, handing Israel a major bargaining chip which could have been used as leverage in a negotiation. And in March 2019, President Trump recognized the Golan Heights as Israeli territory, despite that it is land illegally confiscated from Syria according to international law. In gratitude for his support, Prime Minister Netanyahu thanked Trump in a ceremony dubbed a “PR stunt”, unveiling an enormous sign marking the site of a new planned settlement in the Golan Heights to be named “Trump Heights”.

The Trump Administration is unlikely to release its political proposal for a peace plan until after September elections for prime minister in Israel as a favor to Netanyahu, who is already in danger of losing the election due to domestic problems without also having to contend with the problem of resolving the conflict with Palestine.

“First lift the siege of Gaza, stop the Israeli theft of our land, resources and funds, give us our freedom of movement and control over our borders, airspace, territorial waters etc.,” Hanan Ashrawi, a senior Palestinian official, declared on Twitter. “Then watch us build a vibrant prosperous economy as a free and sovereign people.”§

Read Churches for Middle East Peace’s statement on Peace to Prosperity at <http://bit.ly/2019PeacePlan>

Sudan: Nonviolent protesters need support

June 3 is the Feast of the Ugandan Martyrs, commemorating the execution of 45 young men for their faith in 1886. A similar massacre has again occurred on this day, this time in Sudan.

On this past June 3 in Sudan, peaceful protestors who had managed to bring down one of Africa's most brutal dictators, Omar al-Bashir, and had returned to the streets to call for a civilian-led government, were violently attacked by paramilitary forces outside the military headquarters in the capital city of Khartoum. The Transitional Military Council (TMC) has refused to identify the perpetrators who used live ammunition, water cannons and tear gas to drive the demonstrators away, but it has acknowledged that 61 people were killed and hundreds injured. At least 40 bodies were found floating in the Nile river.

The TMC acknowledged ordering the dispersal but claims the violence was not caused by its security forces and was a 'mistake.' Eyewitnesses told the press that scores of women and men were sexually assaulted in the attack, with Southern Sudanese and people from Darfur specifically targeted by the perpetrators.

In May, the Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns, aware the nonviolent demonstrators were not receiving the needed international support, sent letters to U.S. Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission asking them to exert maximum pressure on the Sudanese military to allow a civilian-led democratic government.

Shortly after, a bipartisan, bicameral letter was written by Rep. McGovern, signed by three additional Members of the House and nine Senators, and addressed to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin. The letter outlined practical steps the United States should take to support the protesters in their push for a free and democratic civilian government in Sudan – namely, refuse to recognize the legitimacy of a military-led government.

Immediately after the massacre on June 3, international condemnation proceeded from the Secretary General of the UN, the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, the UK Foreign Minister, the British Ambassador to Sudan, the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum and the EU. Within days, the African Union suspended Sudan from its membership. The AU's requirement for a civilian interim government in Sudan by June 30 still stands. On June 9, Pope Francis called for peace and dialogue in Sudan in his weekly address to crowds in St Peter's Square in Rome.

The pro-democracy protestors responded to the massacre by calling on all citizens of Sudan to join in

mass civil disobedience. This was called off when Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed arrived on June 7 to lead mediation talks. Protesters continued to live in fear for their lives as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), formerly known as the Janjaweed in the Darfur atrocities, terrorized the center of Khartoum.

Protesters circumvented the government's shutdown of the internet by using the hashtag #BlueForSudan on social media. On Instagram, U.S. celebrities such as Rihanna, Naomi Campbell and Ne Yo turned their profiles blue to raise awareness and express solidarity with the protesters' chants of "silmiyah," which means "peaceful" in Arabic.

The United States has been accused of indifference toward suffering and injustice in Sudan now and in the past. In 2005, the Bush administration, concerned with fighting terrorism, partnered with the Sudanese intelligence chief, Salah Gosh, who allegedly oversaw massacres in Darfur of over 300,000 people. Gosh has disappeared from military leadership but former Janjaweed commander General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, has taken his place and is posturing to become the next Sudanese president. To date, there is no justice for the atrocities committed in Darfur.

On June 23 the protestors accepted an Ethiopian-led road map to a civilian government with a leadership council consisting of eight civilian and seven military members. The military will chair the council for the first 18 months and civilians for the next 18 months. When the military rejected the proposal, the protesters called for mass demonstrations on June 30, the 30th anniversary of the coup that brought deposed dictator Omar al-Bashir to power.

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Khartoum, Obdurman, Atbara and other cities across Sudan on June 30. Security forces used tear gas to disperse them. Local news agencies reported five people were killed and 181 injured.

The peaceful protestors need the international community to refuse to recognize legitimacy of the Transitional Military Council, demand accountability for the crimes committed, and direct all support to civil society and peaceful protestors. The bravery of the Sudanese protestors should be matched by honesty and boldness by the international community in confronting the TMC.

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Philippines: Rural Missionaries face 'red-tagging'

The impunity of human rights violators in the Philippines continues to worsen as killings of, and trumped-up charges filed against, dissenting social movement leaders and religious groups add to the already bloody campaign of the government against drugs.

At the end of 2018, the Philippine Congress approved a request by President Rodrigo Duterte to extend martial law in the southern region until the end of 2019 despite documented human rights violations stemming from its declaration in 2017. Lawyers questioned the extension, stating that the original basis for the declaration was no longer valid.

Martial law was declared by President Duterte on May 23, 2017 after Islamic State group-linked militants laid siege to the Mindanao city of Marawi. After the Philippine military operation to extract the extremists decimated much of the city and left more than 1,200 people dead, state forces shifted their focus to longstanding communist rebels. President Duterte sought the extension of martial law, claiming that the initial declaration had been effective in stifling rebel activities. The president was supported by politicians and businesses alike.

However, civil society groups reported a rise in human rights violations in the first half of the year. Even churches and church organizations were attacked by suspected members of the state forces.

In February, unknown individuals distributed leaflets naming members and staff of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP), an organization of women religious from various congregations, priests and lay workers that assists poor farming and tribal communities, and the Iglesia Filipinista Independiente, as members of the communist-led New People's Army.

In the months following the declaration of martial law, staff of the RMP had already been receiving anonymous threats on their phones. This caused them to close their training center and put several of their projects serving remote indigenous communities on hold.

In March this year, the RMP national office filed a complaint at the Commission of Human Rights after RMP was cited as a 'front' of the Communist Party of the Philippines in a report submitted by National Security Council Deputy Director General Vicente Agdamag to the United Nations in February.

But in May, a subpoena was served against RMP-Northern Mindanao sub-regional coordinator Sr. Emma

Teresita Cupin, MSM and two other lay workers, accusing them of participating in a military action of the New People's Army (NPA) in Agusan del Sur, a province in the neighboring region in December last year. They were allegedly seen by members of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographic Unit who were held by the NPA as Prisoners of War.

In a statement signed by national coordinator Sr. Elenita Belardo, RGS, the RMP defended its workers, saying "Sr. Emma is 63 years old, while one of the lay workers, Ritchel Hiogon, was (sic) five months pregnant at that time. Are we supposed to believe that they were involved in attacking a military camp?"

The statement goes on to say, "... more than the absurdity of the case, this step by the government and the military is very dangerous. It unmasks the real essence of Martial law: helping the poor means you put your life and liberty at risk. Follow the teachings of the Church in having preferential treatment of the poor, and the enemies of peace and justice will set their eyes and fangs against you..."

The Rural Missionaries of the Philippines was founded by the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines in 1969 to address issues of social justice in farming communities. Their work, which included organizing farmers, farmworkers, and fisherfolks to defend their rights, had similarly gained the ire of the government of-then Dictator Ferdinand Marcos. A number of Maryknoll Sisters in Mindanao at the time were active members, some even serving as coordinator.

Throughout the years, the organization has not shaken off its identification with activists and organizations critical of the government's policies detrimental to the poor as it continued to work on land rights in rural communities, often going against big businesses and landowners in the country.

In Mindanao, the RMP has a network of schools for indigenous children in areas referred to by the government as 'rebel hotspots.' Some of its schools had already been shut down after the declaration of martial law and military attacks on teachers and students, and host communities. §



Resources

- 1) Read and share our series of two-page bulletins called *One Amazon, Many Voices* which will examine topics to be discussed at the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian Region and their connections to the lived experiences of Maryknoll Missioners. The series is produced by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns to serve as a tool for learning, reflection, and action by readers on issues raised by the Synod. Find *One Amazon, Many Voices* online at <http://bit.ly/OAMV2019>
- 2) Use a discussion guide for the book “**Choosing Peace: The Catholic Church Returns to Gospel Nonviolence**” edited by Marie Dennis and published by Orbis Books. The guide is produced by Pax Christi UK. <http://bit.ly/ChoosingPeaceQuickGuide>
- 3) Read the latest UN report on “**Climate change and Poverty,**” by the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, that describes the risk of a ‘climate apartheid’ scenario where “the wealthy pay to escape overheating, hunger, and conflict while the rest of the world is left to suffer.” <http://bit.ly/2XrBNVf>
- 4) Read the 44-page report “**The Religious Landscape in South Sudan: Challenges and Opportunities for Engagement**” published by the U.S. Institute for Peace. <http://bit.ly/ReligionSouthSudan>
- 5) Read the statement by the **Catholic Bishops Conference of Honduras** (Conferencia Episcopal de Honduras, CEH) denouncing their government's handling of recent conflicts in the country and a heartfelt cry of “Enough!” <http://bit.ly/2Nyqlln>
- 6) Read the 40-page executive summary of the “**Agroecology and Other Innovative Approaches**” by the UN High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition. <http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe/en/>
- 7) Read and share the one-page flyer “**Why we should end drone warfare**” produced by the Interfaith Working Group on Drone Warfare. <http://bit.ly/EndDroneWarfare>
- 8) Read our letter to Congress for **World Refugee Day** on June 20. <http://bit.ly/WRDMOGC2019>
- 9) Watch a 5-minute video “**UNHCR’s global trends in forced displacement, 2018 figures,**” produced by the UN Refugee Agency. <http://bit.ly/ForcedDisplacementVideo>
- 10) Find new data about refugees in the **Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2020** report, produced by the UN Refugee Agency. Refugees most at risk and in need of resettlement include Syrian refugees (40 per cent), followed by South Sudanese refugees (14 per cent) and refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (11 per cent). <http://bit.ly/2Xoxrhl>
- 11) Find the latest data on internally displaced people (IDPs) in the report “**Global Report on Internal Displacement**” from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). A record 41.3 million people are displaced inside their own countries because of conflict and violence, an increase of more than a million since the end of 2017 and two-thirds more than the global number of refugees. <http://bit.ly/Displacement2019>



One Amazon, Many Voices

Examining topics to be addressed at the Synod for the Amazon Issue 1

Indigenous wisdom

Modern society is dominated by consumerism and an egocentric lifestyle, generating a desire for unnecessary things. It promotes competition among people and the extraction of natural resources in order to accumulate money and power. These actions have fragmented relationships between people and nature and generated a social-environmental crisis that puts the present and the future of our planet at risk.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis says these problems are closely linked to what he calls the “throwaway culture,” a culture in which people and God’s creation are exploited as if they are disposable merchandise. The Council of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) addressed this in the January 2018 pastoral letter, *Missionary Disciples: Guardians of our Common Home* by pointing to the ancestral wisdom of indigenous peoples as an alternative to the throwaway culture and an important knowledge to include in dialogue.

“The upcoming Synod for the Amazon in 2019 opens a horizon for renewed theology and pastoral creativity,” CELAM says, “that invites an ecological conversion, a spirituality of communion and a vision towards ‘Buen Vivir,’ in harmony with the cycles of nature, water as a fundamental right and intrinsic value for every creature. Such a vision, based on God’s love for all creation, illuminates every place on every continent to enter into intercultural dialog and make commitments that lead us to an abundance of life in our common home.”

Amazonian and Andean indigenous peoples have managed to maintain an ecological balance with Mother Earth in their territories even as the customs and number of inhabitants have changed over the course of time. In some places, the presence of the Amazonian people has even strengthened the biodiversity of forests.

We can learn, and in some cases, relearn, from indigenous peoples how to minimize our impacts on Mother Earth.

Here are a few lessons to consider:

Everything is interrelated as one living being. Everything and everyone is made of the same substance: earth. People and communities are not separate from their environment. When we subject a forest to mining, the water becomes contaminated, the animals become homeless, the health of human beings is damaged, and ultimately, communities are fractured. Nothing is done in isolation; every action has repercussions on everything and on everyone. This is because we are interdependent, although we may not always perceive this reality.

Living in a community means living in a reciprocal relationship. An attitude of gratitude for life grows when we freely return the good deeds another person has done for us. This is how we become co-responsible for the continuous interwovenness of community, which is renewed each day. This reciprocity is lived out in relationship with Mother Earth, with the Divine, with one’s self and with community. A creative movement of life is generated by continuous gratitude.

As God communicates with all people, daily life expresses our close relationship with the divine, like a tapestry woven together with a thousand colors. The shared wisdom of all people can show us a pathway to peaceful, sustainable life together in our common home. It is up to each of us to incorporate this wisdom into our own life.

Written by Tania Avila Meneses and Father Paul Masson, M.M. and translated by Kitty Schmidt, Maryknoll Mission Center, Cochabamba, Bolivia. Contributions made by Chloé Noel, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

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