



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

# NewsNotes

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

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## Rural women propose solutions, demand action

*Since the food crises in 2008-2009, a number of programs have evolved to increase investments in African agriculture and rural development. One critical piece that is often overlooked is the important participation of women farmers (who make up the majority of farmers on the African continent) in defining what is needed to end rural poverty and promote people-driven development. At the recent Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) People's Summit, women took central stage and offered their perspective articulated in Peoples' Dialogue Press statement.*

For ages, mostly women farmers of southern African have used peasant family agriculture to produce most of the food for SADC countries through sustainable and ecologically friendly methods. Over the past 10 years agricultural dumping has increased; many of these family farmers have been driven out of local markets, and out of their own livelihoods. Those that managed to survive had to contend with mega projects, like hydro-electric and bio-fuel plantation projects that displaced and dispersed whole communities; and these projects are only projected to increase as the U.S.'s plans for electrifying Africa unfold.

Perhaps the most threatening invasion to their survival has occurred over the past 3-5 years – since farming has become the “new frontier” for foreign investments with a determined focus on “modernizing” African agriculture. Many of these farmers whose lives and livelihoods lie in the balance gathered at the SADC People's Summit in August 2013. There they were able to talk freely about the fact that in spite of all this attention, the SADC region suffers from a food production deficit. In fact, farmers are seeing greater levels of poverty and unemployment as result of inappropriate export-led development models, guided by the “dig it up and ship it out” mentality. Basically, peasant-family agriculture is being destroyed as this new model of agribusiness takes hold and as land grabs massively increase throughout SADC countries.

In her opening speech, SADC's incoming chair, Joyce Banda, president of Malawi, promised to prioritize agriculture and free movement in the region. Since she focused her remarks on agribusiness, southern African women farmers expect a continuation of the same

development models that have diminished peoples' sovereignty and control over their seeds and systems of food production. Of great concern is the notion that the SADC president will provide more opportunities for GMO seeds to further penetrate the region. Women farmers feel that this deeper access will only worsen the current situation because they view GMO seeds as a false solution to the food crisis.

The People's Summit offered small-scale farmers and rural women from the region an opportunity to engage and share information and farming materials with their Malawian counterparts during a farmers' exchange field visit in Lilongwe South, organized by the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM). In Lilongwe, local women farmers organize the production and market systems for rice and groundnuts – products that have become integral to their community livelihoods. These enterprising women have created local employment through processes that add value to raw products. This exchange of ingenuity and ideas is invaluable to local development.

Farmers at the SADC peoples' summit expressed grave concerns about the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the G8-New Alliance for Food Security & Nutrition. They claim that these programs contribute the destruction of peasant livelihoods.

They demanded that SADC nations implement the 2008 Maputo Declaration commitment to spend 10 percent of their annual budgets to support small-scale farmers in developing their agriculture. They also advocated for gender equity, particularly for rural women and youth to have the right to control and access to arable land and natural resources; they demanded that these rights be enshrined in SADC nations' constitutions. Furthermore, they advocated for community ownership of natural resources and an integrated SADC mining charter to guide investment and stifle intra-competition by regional governments that would put an end to over-exploitation of mineral resources and labor within the region.

For more information, see: <http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/22437>. (Learn more about farmlandgrab.org on page 19.) §



Photo of Zimbabwean woman by David Snyder/BigStock.com

## Right to communication vs. freedom of speech

*While freedom of speech is a basic right recognized (though not always respected) internationally, progressive governments in South America are working to go beyond that. They believe that their citizens have a right to communication, not only free speech but access to the means of communication as well. Instead of allowing a small number of corporations to control the vast majority of their TV and radio stations, newspapers, and other media outlets, these governments are allowing more people to broadcast their ideas through the creation of more public and community-run stations. Large media corporations that stand to lose profits due to the increased competition brought by these changes have falsely portrayed the initiatives as attacks on free speech.*

Latin America has a long history of concentrated media ownership. For decades, the proprietors were politically influential families, though in the last 20 years, many have morphed into massive international conglomerates with interests not only in media and communications, but banking, industry and other areas. Argentine media researcher Martin Becerra reported in 2010 that on average, “more than 82 percent of all information and communications activities [in Latin American countries] are controlled by the top four operators.”

This media concentration limits the diversity of viewpoints that people are exposed to and the amount and quality of political debate in those countries. As Becerra states, “I believe that if control of the media was not so highly concentrated, the situation of inequality in Latin America would be more actively challenged.” Carlos Ciappina, secretary of the Journalism and Social Communication School of the National University of La Plata, said, “Democracy and media monopolies are two things that simply cannot go together. There is no true democracy if the media is not democratized. Because if the media are not democratized, very few speak. And those who speak have an enormous influence, but nobody voted for them.”

To allow for a richer public debate, the UN Com-

mission on Human Rights has called on all countries to “encourage a diversity of ownership of media and of sources of information, including through transparent licensing systems and effective regulations on undue concentration of ownership of the media in the private sector.”

Venezuela was the first to move in this direction in 2000 when it passed the Organic Telecommunications Law that aims to “guarantee access to communication as a human right.” It created three types of media: private, public and community and guaranteed that each form of media would have access to the public airwaves. One result has been a surge in the number of media outlets: from 331 commercial and 11 public access FM stations, in addition to 36 private and eight public television

broadcasters in 1998 to 499 private, 83 public access, and 247 community radio stations, as well as 67 commercial, 13 public service, and 38 community television concessions by April 2012. In addition, the government has provided tens of thousands of free laptop computers to schoolchildren and has opened thousands of “Infocenters” (free computer and Internet access stations) nationwide.

In Uruguay, the Congress passed the Law for Community Broadcasting in 2007 that formally recognized community TV and radio as part of the nation’s airwaves; before this law, these alternatives sources of information were considered illegal. Since passage of the law, more than 100 communities have started their own radio and/or TV stations.

Ecuador’s Organic Communications Law, passed in June of this year (though not yet sanctioned by President Correa), redistributes the country’s radio frequencies, providing 33 percent to private media, 33 percent for public media and 34 percent for community media (in 2012, 71 percent of radio and 85 percent of TV was privately owned). It limits any single person to owning no more than one AM radio station, one FM station and one television station. To encourage national cultural production, the law requires that at least 60 percent of



Photo: Argentina Indy Media

daily broadcasting be nationally produced and 50 percent of music played should be produced, composed or performed in Ecuador.

Argentina passed a similar law in 2009, the Audio-visual Communications Services Law, which distributes broadcasting licenses in the same percentages as Ecuador, though it establishes a higher limit for individual ownership, allowing a maximum of 10 concessions.

The massive media conglomerates that have dominated the airwaves for decades are threatened by these changes because the laws will increase their competition.

In response, these media have used their considerable influence to paint these laws as anti-free speech. Other large media conglomerates in the U.S., Europe and elsewhere simply repeat these false charges without context or explanation.

While the mainstream media portray the governments passing these new laws as dictatorial and against free speech, those who study South American media like Ciappina disagree: "I would say the opposite. Today, in countries like Venezuela or Argentina, there has never been so much freedom of speech." §

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## Guatemala: Threats to human rights continue

*On August 24, the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) issued a press release expressing deep concern for two children who were shot August 23 in the Guatemalan community of Monte Olivo, along the Dolores River in the department of Alta Verapaz. The alleged shooting suspects were identified as employees of the Santa Rita hydroelectric plant – a project opposed by this mostly indigenous Maya-Q'eqchi' community. The children were the latest victims in a rash of human rights abuses directed at indigenous people who oppose the exploitation of natural resources on community lands.*

The shooting took place on the day that Dinah Shelton, IACHR Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, was conducting an on-site visit in Cobán, Guatemala – just 50 kilometers (about 31 miles) south of Monte Olivo. The purpose of her visit was to gather information about the human rights situation of indigenous peoples, with special focus on their lands, territories, and natural resources, and the right to prior, free and informed consultation.

IACHR delegation members who went to Monte Olivo after the attack report that the two indigenous children, aged 9 and 13, were shot while playing marbles. Members of the Rapporteur's delegation visited the Regional Hospital of Cobán to find that the 9-year-old sustained a high caliber shot in the skull and was in serious condition. The 13-year-old sustained two gunshot wounds, one of which damaged his trachea. (Tragically, both children have died since the visit.)

While interviewing members of the community, the IACHR team found that the alleged perpetrators had visited the home of a community member known for his opposition to the hydroelectric plant, but were told that he

was in Cobán for a meeting with the IACHR Rapporteur.

It took over an hour for an ambulance to arrive from Cobán to take the children to the nearest hospital – which was not equipped to deal with the 9-year-old's critical condition. Health care resources are lacking in Monte Olivo. Doctors working on the children reported to ICHR delegation members that the 9-year-old needed urgent transportation to Guatemala City, but the hospital's only ambulance was broken down.

In the press release, the IACHR urges Guatemala to guarantee human and material resources necessary to ensure integral and culturally-appropriate medical attention for the two children at the Regional Hospital of Cobán. It also pressed the state to take urgent action to ensure that regional hospitals like this one be equipped with ambulances to address emergencies in the future.

The Inter-American Commission also stated that it "understands that the lack of confidence of this indigenous community in the State's security forces is related to a longstanding high level of impunity." And the IACHR called on the Guatemalan authorities to work with the community of Monte Olivo to establish effective mechanisms to guarantee that the material and intellectual authors face justice, safeguarding at all times the rights and integrity of the community and its members.

Above all, IACHR special rapporteur Shelton expressed that the circumstances and timing of this attack raise concern that members of indigenous communities who have spoken with her during her August 21-30 visit may later experience intimidation or retaliatory actions by elements within society. Shelton states in the press release: "It is deeply worrying that a tragedy like this took place during the visit, with our presence in the area. We will be closely monitoring the actions to be adopted with great attention." §

## Mexico: Leahy freezes funds for drug war

*The following analysis was written by Laura Carlsen and published by the Center for International Policy's Americas Report.*

[In early August], Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), chair of the Appropriations Committee, blocked release of \$95 million dollars in funding for the Merida Initiative, citing the lack of a clear strategy on the part of the U.S. State Department and the Mexican government.

“The whole thing looks like just coughing up money with no accountability,” Leahy was quoted as saying in the legislative monitor, CQ Roll Call.

The decision is a long-overdue recognition that the drug war in Mexico has been a bloody fiasco. The Merida Initiative, a Bush-era plan to attack cartels in Mexico and reduce trafficking of prohibited drugs to the U.S. market, began in 2008. Congress has appropriated \$1.9 billion from the federal budget for the program over the past five years, most aimed at bolstering Mexican security forces. Since the drug war was launched and armed forces deployed to fight the cartels, the homicide rate in Mexico soared 150 percent, between 2006 and 2012.

[In August 2012], the State Department asked the committee to obligate some \$229 million assigned to the Merida Initiative in the 2012 budget. At first, Leahy decided to hold up the entire amount, after receiving a two-and-a-half page explanation from the State Department that he felt failed to adequately describe spending and objectives.

In April, the committee released \$134 million, but held up the rest pending more information from State and the Mexican government on how the money would be spent, what the goals were and how the programs and resources would help achieve those goals.

Since then, neither government has clarified publicly or to their respective Congresses the state of drug war cooperation or where they want to take it. [The August 1] announcement confirms the hold on the funds and obliges both governments to define a joint strategy that shows some signs of viability.

Contacted shortly after the hold, a top Leahy aide summed up the reason behind suspension of the aid, “We received less than three pages of explanation. Senator Leahy does not sign away a quarter of a billion dollars just like that.”

From its Bush origins as a “Counterterrorism, Counterterrorism and Border Security” plan (a leaked 2007 document that to date provides the most detailed public description), what was formerly known as “Plan

Mexico” has provoked criticism in Congress and the public for the lack of transparency and strategy.

The fact is that the Merida Initiative and the Mexican drug war were poorly conceived from the start. The government General Accounting Office wrote in a 2010 evaluation that the program was adopted without benchmarks for measuring success or even a clear definition of what success means.

Leahy’s concerns center on the lack of strategy from either government, growing human rights violations and a continuing problem regarding the level of consultation on what is supposed to be a joint effort. As an example of the latter, the State Department presented the request for releasing the funds in August of last year—when Mexico was governed by a lame duck president and no one yet knew what the new security strategy would look like or who they’d be working with in the new cabinet.

The aide added that the problem goes beyond the lack of accountability.

“There’s a concern that the Merida initiative has not achieved what people hoped for,” he said. “The Mexican people seem to share this view and they voted for a change. But it’s not clear yet what President Peña Nieto intends, and what he is doing differently.”

In its eight months in office, the government of Enrique Peña Nieto has announced a slate of new security programs, some apparently aimed more at prevention and attention to root causes of violence as promised in his campaign. But on the ground the drug war has intensified, with the occupation of the state of Michoacán by armed forces and continued military deployment and joint counternarcotics operations. Violence continues unabated.

A lack of information from the Mexican Embassy in Washington, and the apparent contradictions between actions and rhetoric has created uncertainty, according to Washington insiders.

Likewise, although the State Department has changed the listed objectives every few years and attempted to apply new monikers such as “Beyond Merida” and “Merida II,” it has not presented a significant shift toward a new, more effective and less violent binational strategy. Even as disastrous results poured in, the Merida Initiative has not shifted away from the drug war model of supply-side interdiction and enforcement—a model that has backfired in every part of the world it has been applied.

The Merida initiative is based on a military/police

approach to counternarcotics operations, something that Senator Leahy has criticized from the inception. Although direct funding to the Mexican armed forces has decreased since 2008 and 2009 appropriations, the emphasis on special ops to take down drug lords and seize shipments has led to head-on confrontations and sparked gangland rivalries.

In Mexico, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) has greatly expanded operations, alongside the spread of CIA, FBI and other agency activities. Since foreign military presence is prohibited under Mexican law, under the aegis of the Department of Defense Mexican military personnel are being trained in Iraq-style operations in a new Northern Command unit in Colorado Springs, at Fort Bragg, and in the infamous School of the Americas.

This strategy to conceive of Mexico's crime problem as a perpetual war has, predictably, made the nation on our southern border look more and more like a war zone. Five years into what was originally just a three-year funding plan, some 100,000 Mexicans have been murdered, and tens of thousands more have been wounded, raped or forced to leave their homes. Every day brings more decapitations, torture, assassinations and disappearance, and in far too many cases the evidence points to government security forces themselves as the culprits.

Even with an increase in arrests, Mexico's corruption, its notoriously dysfunctional justice system and the resiliency of drug cartels battling for a multi-billion dollar business have made the drug war as fought on Mexican soil a futile endeavor. After years of promises, the U.S. government has not put a dent in arms smuggling from the U.S. to Mexican cartels, or demand reduction,

or the flow of illicit funds through its financial institutions. Punitive drug laws have put millions of black and Latino youth behind bars even as the drug trade thrives.

Congress is right in putting a stop to public expenditures in futility -- especially ones that take human lives. Leahy has advised that unless his committee receives information detailing a joint plan to achieve defined goals, future appropriations will also be frozen.

Since the Merida Initiative requests are usually buried in multi-billion dollar foreign operations and defense funding bills, it has not gotten the scrutiny it deserves. Leahy's action turns the spotlight onto a situation that should never have gone on as long as it did.

Representatives in Washington must go further now and call for a full review of the Merida Initiative before appropriating or releasing any funds. It is arguably among the most wasteful and counter-productive programs in the federal budget and raises grave concerns regarding human rights. A series of human rights stipulations have only served to whitewash an aid package that has encouraged a sharp rise in violations by Mexican armed forces and police by rewarding the perpetrators, who rarely face any consequences for their actions.

Mexican and U.S. human rights groups have been calling to suspend the Merida Initiative for years. As that demand was ignored, the death toll mounted and organized crime groups grew more vicious and ambitious. The governments seemed to think it was enough to assure people it was just the darkness before the dawn and ask citizens to have patience.

For the mothers and fathers of the war's victims, patience is not a virtue. A caravan of family members of Mexican victims visited Leahy's office and other Congressional members last September urging an immediate end to the drug war. The nationwide caravan aimed to show how the Merida Initiative and other U.S. aid support for the war on drugs has devastated their families. Their stories brought many staffers to tears.

It's about time someone in government called for a halt to throwing good money after bad at Mexico's drug war. It not only doesn't work; it kills. §

It's about time someone in government called for a halt to throwing good money after bad at Mexico's drug war. It not only doesn't work; it kills. §

Photo from 2012 rally at U.S. Capitol by Paul Helfinstein/Picasa



## Immigration, detention centers, lost children

*The following article was written by Revista Maryknoll writer-editor Gabriela Romeri, Chelsey Clammer and Rae Bryant and was published on the Doctor T. J. Eckleburg Review website.*

Each year thousands of children try to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Most travel from Central America. On this journey — one that can be over 2,000 miles, the equivalent of walking from New York to Florida twice — the children must sneak past Border Patrol and guns. They must survive dehydration and starvation. They encounter gang violence and “coyotes,” who often abuse and extort them.

There is an option to the long walk. *La Bestia* is what the immigrants call the train that runs through Mexico. Riding *La Bestia* is risky, however, as the poor must sit on top, vulnerable to the train’s violent shaking, sometimes resulting in broken limbs and other injuries. Gangs patrol *La Bestia*, demanding US\$100 per station. To refuse means being shot or stabbed and thrown off the train. *La Bestia*. The beast.

The children lucky enough to survive the walk or *La Bestia* will often end up in detention centers. Norma Lujan, an El Paso resident, works as a detention center volunteer. She reports, “They found a boy of 12 crossing the desert carrying his sister on his back, his nine-year-old sister was paraplegic, that’s how they found them... last night they found three little brothers trying to cross.” She is jubilant when the children survive.

Lujan is the mother of three girls. In 2008, when Obama took office, she started visiting the detention centers for children caught crossing the border. “There were 70 kids and two children detention centers here in El Paso.” Five years later, the child detention centers are at collective capacity of 250 children. They are building a fifth child detention center in El Paso, and Lujan says, “I’m going to have to recruit more parents.”

Through her church, St. Pius X Parish in El Paso, Lujan recognized that children were disappearing along the border. To date, she has recruited 60 parent volunteers, and she continues to recruit more. Their jobs are to comfort the children with visits and stories, songs, shared meals, the occasional hug, against policy, but impossible to deny. Many of the older girls arrive pregnant. This past summer, Lujan and her church held 11 baby showers. They have seen newborns taken from their mothers, nursing mothers deported, children entered into the U.S. foster care system. A lucky few, the “legals,” are reunited with their families.

In 2012, the number of Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) being detained by the U.S. government more than doubled — from 6,000 to more than 14,000 child detainees. This year, according to the Refugee Council: “It is expected that roughly 23,500 UAC will arrive by the end of this fiscal year 2013.” This is low compared to the 100,000 children that Border Patrol claims to prevent from crossing every year. The majority have traveled not from Mexico but from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras. The Women’s Refugee Commission reports that “desperate conditions” are part of “trends in Central America, including rising crime, systemic state corruption and entrenched economic inequality.” In Honduras alone, 920 children were murdered between January and March 2012.

The detention centers offer housing. Some have outdoor, fenced-in playgrounds. Some do not. During the day, some children are taken by white vans to schools. Others are taught on site for two to three months while immigration judges decide their fates. This system, based in part on a family reunification policy, is more often concerned with borders than family.

There is one systemic grace. Inside the detention centers the children do not yet fear Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) like so many immigrants attending U.S. public schools, where ICE is an unrelenting threat. At any time, these children and their families can be taken and separated. In just one year, according to the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (DHS) there were 204,810 parents of U.S.-citizen children deported. Last year the number of kids detained more than doubled. To handle the rise in numbers, the centers converted gym floors into barracks with cots in order to house them. This year, the expected number is 23,500.

Immigration is a search for a better life, work, family. Safety. Families will gather and save what is a fortune for many, \$5,000 and more, to pay traffickers and coyotes to bring children and adults safely across the border. Too often these coyotes molest, abuse, impregnate, and sell these children and adults into slavery. The families know this risk, and still, they take the risk due to poor quality of life, a need for a better one. Monsignor Arturo Bañuelas of St. Pius X Parish in El Paso has heard these children’s migration stories. He says, “Children often feel the need to confess for the things they’ve seen or been forced to do.”

Border Patrol saves lives, yes. The detention centers are a grace to a point. What lobbyists and political engines choose to ignore, however, are the inconvenient



details: the patrollers who have shot and killed youth, the real likelihood of these detained children being deported to the same life they felt so compelled to escape, and this system by which corporations continue to profit.

ICE pays the Corrections Corporation of America and the Geo Group, the two largest private detention facilities, to separate and hold nonviolent adult and child detainees. This system is not cheap. Taxpayers paid \$3.3 billion in 2011. \$164 per detainee per night. Additionally, children who are separated from their families and placed into foster care cost taxpayers \$26,000 per child per year. The U.S. now spends more on immigration enforcement agencies than all other law enforcement agencies combined, despite all the overtime NSA PRISM perks.

Last year our immigration enforcement budget cost us \$18 billion. This year, additional criminalization features in the comprehensive reform bill -- S.744, the "Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act" -- would raise that budget again, to \$22.5 billion.

There are U.S. citizens committed to raising the voices of those lost on the trails. Robin Reineke is a doctoral candidate at University of Arizona's School of Anthropology. Her job is to try to piece together the identities of the corpses found in the desert from their

remains. She studies artifacts found in the baked sands of the desert, near desiccated skeletons and bodies decomposing from the heat.

"The letters are from the children or wives of those we've found dead, wishing them luck and telling them that they're loved, that they should be very careful on the journey, that the family's prayers are with them, that the family's hopes are with them. And the photos have been touched and pulled out over and over again, then folded up and put back carefully."

Deborah McCullough, born in Ohio and raised in Western Maryland, is an artist now living and working in Arizona. Her mixed media forms include artifacts left behind on the trails. One of her pieces, Angel of Mercy, wears a skirt made of ribbons. She explains that "each [ribbon bears] the name of a person who has died in the Sonoran Desert from 2011 through February 2012." McCullough's work has been exhibited at the University of Arizona, Social Action Summer Institute, and Duke University, but she does not sell her Trails artwork. ...

Academics, activists, and volunteers such as Robin Reineke, Deborah McCullough, and Norma Lujan work every day to make immigration safer and uncover the voices of the lost. To join their efforts, you can contact humanitarian projects such as Humane Borders, and contact your elected representative. §

### Fast and pray for immigration reform

People of faith across the country will engage in constant prayer, fasting and expansive action for 40 days starting when Congress returns from recess on **September 9 and lasting until October 18.**

How do we raise the level of concern, engage our communities, and grow in the virtues of solidarity and hospitality? We are at a point where we have to escalate our efforts, expose the injustice, and engage the heart of our country. We are convinced that what we really need now is a "compassion surge."

As people of faith, we believe that we must engage our communities in prayerful action in solidarity with those whose lives are directly impacted by our unjust immigration policies, and who will be impacted by both just and unjust reforms being considered by policy makers.

Our prayer and fasting will come from our hearts, stemming from personal stories and relationships with those who have been directly impacted by our broken immigration system. Together, we will pray and fast for:

- *A change of hearts and attitudes, that communities will grow to be more welcoming*
- *Moral courage of our elected leaders, that they might enact immigration reform that attends to the urgent and human needs of all people by creating a path to citizenship and prioritizing family unity*
- *Faith communities, that we might rise to the challenge of prophetic witness and action in advocating for, preparing our communities for, and implementing immigration reform*

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition invites you to join in these efforts for immigration reform as an individual, family, congregation, or study group. See more details and sign up at the IIC website: [www.interfaithimmigration.org](http://www.interfaithimmigration.org). §

## Honduras: Escalating violence in Nueva Esperanza

*The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joined colleagues in signing the following letter to Liliana Ayalde, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, and Jane Zimmerman, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.*

We write to express our concern over a serious human rights situation in the Florida district of Tela municipality, in Atlántida, Honduras.

Communities in the Florida district, especially the community of Nueva Esperanza, have lived over the past year with threats of violence and intimidation from representatives of a mining company. The situation escalated in late May 2013 when the mining company, Minerales Victoria, attempted to bring mining machinery onto land owned by community members, escorted by members of the Honduran police. Since then, armed men have intimidated community members. Two community leaders in Nueva Esperanza were granted precautionary measures in October 2012 by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights due to death threats.

On July 25, 2013, two international human rights accompaniers with the Honduras Accompaniment Project (PROAH), deployed to the area in light of the threats against community members, were abducted and held captive for 2.5 hours in the community of Nueva Esperanza by seven armed men. The men are believed to guard the mining operations of Lenir Perez, the owner of Minerales Victoria.

The abduction of these international accompaniers follows incidents in which community members were intimidated and priests accompanying the community as well as journalists covering the story on radio shows

were threatened. On June 26, the Catholic Diocese of La Ceiba issued a public statement denouncing the conduct of police and state security forces and threats against the religious workers of the Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Arizona Parrish, in particular Fr. Cesar Espinoza, who have accompanied these communities. The Diocese also expressed concern about the human and environmental impact of “the avalanche of mining projects” in the region and the frequent lack of consultation and consent, required under the General Law of the Environment, with affected communities.

We request that the State Department make a public statement of support for the work and mandate of national and international human rights defenders, and urge the Honduran government to take the following steps:

- Conduct an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the kidnapping of two international human rights defenders in Nueva Esperanza on July 25, 2013, by armed men, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- Take all necessary measures to ensure that the harassment and threats against members of the community of Nueva Esperanza and local and international human rights defenders and church leaders in the area cease;
- Provide protection measures, in accordance with their wishes, to community leaders, international accompaniers, journalists and church leaders in the Florida district who are at risk; and
- Guarantee prior and informed consultation with affected communities prior to permitting mining operations in the area.

This situation is just one example of a disturbing trend in Honduras in which companies and land owners appear to be using private security forces to pressure communities to sell land or permit resource exploitation, often apparently with the complicity or tacit consent of state actors. We would greatly appreciate the State Department’s assistance in urging these measures to address this specific situation as well as in encouraging respect for human rights, protection for human rights defenders and strengthening of the rule of law in Honduras. §

*The Diocese of La Ceiba’s June 26 press conference, when it issued a statement expressing its concern at the mining concessions in the department of Atlántida, was led by Monsignor Michael Lenihan, the Irish-born bishop. Photo from the Honduras Accompaniment Project website.*



## New and old in Africa

*This summer's U.S. media coverage of events in Africa was dominated by President Obama's second official trip to the continent of his father. During his short visit he unveiled a proposed energy program called the Power Africa initiative and spoke eloquently about the new orientation of his administration's foreign policy towards Africa. The following reflection was written by Fr. Dave Schwinghamer, a Maryknoll missionary who spent many years in East Africa; he recently joined the staff of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.*

Obama's outreach to Africa parallels -- and some would say attempts to counter -- China's entry into a continent that is seeking a new place in the world. There are now over one billion people in Africa. Forty percent are under 14 years old. Africa has 80 percent of the 250-800 million hectares of arable land considered to be "available" for agribusiness ventures. Several Asian countries are already investigating such opportunities. This new interest in Africa by outside "partners" has led some to speak of "Africa's moment" and others to claim we are entering the golden age of hydrocarbons in Africa.

At the same time, several old conflicts in which the U.S. has a deep interest continued to rage on without much attention from the present administration. In Darfur, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zimbabwe, deep and persistent communal divisions continued to be the order of the day.

In Darfur the UN believes 300,000 people have been displaced in the first five months of 2013. Human Rights Watch reports on much destruction of villages in Central Darfur. The government of Sudan's president Omar al-Bashir continues to use Russian-made planes to drop crude bombs on the Jebel Mara area. Recently Eric Reeves reported that in the last two years, 500,000 people have been displaced in Darfur. While the new policy statement, "U.S. Strategy towards Sub-Saharan Africa," claims that the U.S. has been the world's leader in responding to humanitarian crises, some analysts claim that the policies of the present administration have hardly matched the statement's rhetoric. The shift in policy -- in which the issue of state sponsored terrorism was separated from the conflict in Darfur -- sent a message, according to Reeves, that the northern government could resume its deadly attacks on Darfur citizens.

In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, an old conflict smoldered on as the government's army tried to defeat various militias such as the M23 group. The U.S. State Department has appointed former Wis-

consin senator Russ Feingold to be a Special Envoy for the African Great Lakes area and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Congress, Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA) introduced a House Resolution with a provision aimed at curbing "all forms of support to the M23 rebel by governments of the Great Lakes region" (read Rwanda), and urges the Obama administration to "... address support provided to militias operating in the DRC by foreign governments and entities."

In Zimbabwe a really old president once again outmaneuvered his opposition and won yet another presidential election. According to a report by the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) the credibility of the 2013 Harmonized Elections is seriously compromised by a systematic effort to disenfranchise an estimated one million voters. The ZESN estimates that over 700,000 urban voters were missing from the voter registration rolls. Yet, both the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and Africa Union have given their blessing to the re-election of Robert Mugabe. At their 33rd Summit on August 17-18, SADC leaders noted with satisfaction the holding of free and peaceful harmonized elections on July 31, 2013. The Summit even commended the government and people of Zimbabwe for the peaceful manner in which elections were conducted. SADC leaders reiterated their call for the lifting of all forms of sanctions hitherto imposed on Zimbabwe.

The U.S. government's assessment of the elections was not so positive. At a recent State Department press conference press secretary Jen Psaki declared that "the United States stands by our assessment that these elections, while relatively peaceful, did not represent a credible expression of the will of the Zimbabwean people due to serious flaws throughout the electoral process..." and announced that "a change in U.S. sanctions policy will occur only in a context of credible, transparent, peaceful reforms that reflect the will of the Zimbabwean people."

Africa is not heading towards redemption or collapse. The new and the old exist side by side. Much of the current thinking about Africa is based on simplistic and out of date frameworks from the mid-twentieth century. New perspectives on Africa and new ways of organizing society, economics and politics are arising in Africa and are being developed by African people. It is to these ideas, practices and people that we should direct our attention if we want to understand Africa's future development. §

## Syria: Is violence the only answer?

*As NewsNotes goes to press in early September, the news cycle is dominated by discussion about a possible military strike against Syria; President Obama is trying to gain support for the strike as the appropriate response to the Syrian government's use of chemical warfare against its citizens on August 21. Congress is debating use of force, and other nations are weighing in with their positions.*

On September 1, Pope Francis spoke directly to the tragedy in Syria. He announced a day of fasting and prayer, to be held on Saturday, September 7: "We will gather in prayer and in a spirit of penance, invoking God's great gift of peace upon the beloved nation of Syria and upon each situation of conflict and violence around the world ... Humanity needs to see these gestures of peace and to hear words of hope and peace." (Fasting for a day requires adult Catholics in good health to limit themselves to one meal.)

Pope Francis said everyone was invited, "including our non-Catholic Christian brothers [and sisters], followers of other religions and all [people] of good will, to participate, in whatever way they can, in this initiative."

On August 31, Pax Christi USA released a statement (written in collaboration with Scott Wright) that said, in part: "No one questions the obscenity of murdering a thousand people – many of them children – with poison gas, nor the moral indignation that people around the world feel at this atrocity and crime against humanity. The more than 100,000 deaths from two years of a cruel fratricidal war in Syria, and the cruelty of the Bashar al-Assad regime against its own people, speak to the obscenity of war.

"What many do question, however, including military veterans in Congress, is the wisdom of a military strike by the U.S. in Syria. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq also began with military strikes, caused the destruction of hundreds of thousands of Afghan, Iraqi, and American lives, and lasted more than a decade after 9/11. ...

"This is a crucial moment in history – and the U.S. can pursue the path of war, or the path of dialogue and negotiations, of true peacemaking. But the churches and people of all faith traditions should be leading the way, with our voices and by our witness.

"Before we add more fuel to the fire, and to 'the endless and horrifying sequence of wars, conflicts, genocides and "ethic cleansings" which have caused

unspeakable suffering; millions and millions of victims, families and countries destroyed, an ocean of refugees, misery, hunger, disease, underdevelopment and the loss of immense resources,' – words of John Paul II – we ought to question the wisdom of a military strike in Syria and heed John Paul's warning:

*"The twentieth century bequeaths to us above all else a warning: wars are often the cause of further wars because they fuel deep hatreds, create situations of injustice and trample upon people's dignity and rights... War is a defeat for humanity. Only in peace and through peace can respect for human dignity and its inalienable rights be guaranteed."*

### **Faith in action:**

The following alert was prepared by the Justice and Peace office of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM).

Please encourage your representative and senators to oppose U.S. military action in Syria and support sustained diplomacy. Call your representative and senators today. Here are some points to make in your call:

- I oppose U.S. military action in Syria.
- The U.S. does need to act. I encourage the [senator/representative] to support increased diplomacy, the convening of an international summit of heads of state to negotiate a just peace, explore restorative justice responses, and pressure on Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey to reduce the arms to the resistance as a signal to Russia and Iran to reduce their arms to Assad.
- Can you tell me about the [senator/representative]'s stance on stopping the violence in Syria?

The world community needs to act urgently to bring those responsible for using chemical weapons - and anyone who commits war crime - to a process of restorative justice. But U.S. military action will hurt more than help, increasing hostility, violence, and the risk of more chemical weapons attacks.

Instead, President Obama should engage diplomatically with all parties in the region and convene an emergency summit of heads of state, press the UN Security Council to ask the International Criminal Court to investigate all war crimes in Syria.

If you use Twitter, please look up the Twitter handles (<http://www.tweetcongress.org>) for your representative and senators and send them this message: @[Your representative's handle]: Don't bomb #Syria. Instead nonviolence, emergency summit, restorative justice, and reduce arms flow [bit.ly/16Rj6eV](http://bit.ly/16Rj6eV) §

## UN: Voice of youth

*Taking advantage of the summer vacation, 17 young women recently travelled from Hong Kong to Maryknoll NY as part of a program whose goal is to familiarize Maryknoll Convent School students with the life and work of the missionaries who were instrumental in starting their prestigious school. As part of their trip, the women visited places where the Maryknoll missionary dream began. They attended a presentation about the work of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns that included an explanation about the work of the United Nations and the role of civil society. The students also got a glimpse of past events at the UN.*

Thanks to the UN system that makes available videos on demand, the students were able to see the event on Malala Day, July 12, designated such in honor of Malala Yousafzai, a young Pakistani woman who was attacked in October 2012 for her efforts to gain an education. On July 12, 2013, her 16th birthday, Malala spoke at the UN; her speech captured the reason for civil society presence at the UN, brought the voice of the voiceless to the dialogue that has shaped international relationships, and has influenced policies that otherwise would have overlooked the life experiences of the people they are meant to protect.

“Today is the day of every woman, every boy and every girl who have raised their voice for their rights. There are hundreds of human rights activists who are not only speaking for human rights but who are struggling to achieve their goals of education, peace and equality. Thousands of people have been killed by terrorists and millions have been injured. I am just one of them. So here I stand... one girl among many. I speak – not for myself, but for all girls and boys. I raise up my voice – not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard.”

The United Nations has included youth in its development agenda because nations have come to realize the potential of young people to move the development agenda forward. The principle of inclusion cannot be stressed enough as it is pivotal for the success of the development agenda. The post-2015 development agenda will need to include everyone and in a special way, young people who are innovators not only for the future but have proved to be so in the present. Including youth in the dialogue empowers them through recognizing

their basic rights which Malala defines as “their right to live in peace, their right to be treated with dignity, their right to equal opportunity, the right to be educated.” When these rights are not granted, young people’s dreams are thwarted and their voices muted. “We realize the importance of light when we see darkness,” she said in her July 12 speech. “We realize the importance of our voice when we are silenced.”

As with other issues that require the cooperation of governments, the development agenda, and in a special way, the education agenda cannot move forward without the partnership of policy makers. Speaking for the young people, Malala called on world leaders to change

their strategic policies in favor of peace and prosperity.

“We call upon the world leaders that all peace deals must protect women and children’s rights, for a deal that goes against the dignity of women and their rights is unacceptable. We call upon all governments to ensure free compulsory education for every

child all over the world. We call upon all governments to fight against terrorism and violence, to protect children from brutality and harm. We call upon the developed nations to support the expansion of educational opportunities for girls in the developing world. We call upon all communities to be tolerant – to reject prejudice based on cast, creed, sect, religion or gender.”

All the issues that Malala mentioned in her speech are ones that the UN is grappling with and working to address by including open dialogue with civil society. The UN has created a platform that allows the voices of civil society to be heard which includes the rights of young people, people with disabilities as well as the rights of women, just to mention a few.

Malala’s words touched the hearts of the Hong Kong students; they sent her a note stating, “Thank you for giving us an inspirational talk ... which has given us the courage to voice our concerns as teens. You taught us that as long as there is a voice it needs to be heard.”

As believers we must listen carefully to the words of Christ through the voice of youth and children and not use violence to silence them. All young people are longing for peace, for equality of opportunity and an end to violence, war, illiteracy as well as poverty eradication so that they can enjoy peace and prosperity. §



Photo of Malala Yousafzai at UN by Ahyar Rona/Picasa

## New efforts on nuclear disarmament

*For years after the end of the Cold War, the extreme danger of nuclear weapons and the moral obligation to achieve “nuclear zero” seemed to command little serious attention from governments or from the public at large. While experts struggled to reduce the danger of inadequately secured nuclear weapons following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, fears about nuclear proliferation focused narrowly on a few countries and were largely divorced from any commitment to nuclear disarmament.*

Although nuclear disarmament was not the foremost issue on the foreign affairs agendas of most nations, efforts to achieve a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, to sustain the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and, eventually, to negotiate a new START Treaty continued. Meanwhile, many people of faith and other peace workers, including Ploughshares activists, kept pointing to the very real nuclear danger that remained. For an overview of nuclear disarmament efforts see the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs website at [www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear](http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear).

More recently, however, nuclear disarmament has again come to the fore as a critical concern. In June, President Obama reiterated his commitment to move toward a world without nuclear weapons, although his agenda was criticized as too limited and incremental. For example, he “missed an opportunity to remove quickly from ‘hair trigger’ alert at least some of the 1,000 weapons that are ready to fire at a moment’s notice.” (*New York Times*, June 22, 2013)

Meanwhile, many other nations are calling for action on nuclear disarmament. Reaching Critical Will, a project of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom ([www.reachingcriticalwill.org](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org)) reports on the 2012 United Nations General Assembly decision to convene an open-ended working group (OEWG) to “develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons.” Chaired by Ambassador Manuel B. Dengo Benavides of Costa Rica, the OEWG met in Geneva in May, July and August this year. On September 26 the UN will hold a High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament in New York.

Other recent efforts to address the nuclear threat include a March 2013 conference in Oslo on the Humanitarian Impacts of Nuclear Weapons. A second conference on the topic is scheduled for early 2014 in Mexico. A planned conference on a Weapons of Mass Destruction

Free Zone in the Middle East Zone was postponed indefinitely. (For background see Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, [www.wagingpeace.org](http://www.wagingpeace.org).)

Because the United States boycotted the Oslo conference, voted against establishment of the OEWG, and has been silent on the High-Level Disarmament Meeting, two dozen peace and disarmament groups, including Pax Christi USA, sent a letter to the White House on June 6 and launched a campaign calling for good faith U.S. participation in these multilateral forums:

*The world is urging the United States to join in multilateral efforts to achieve the global elimination of nuclear weapons. The time is right. As you said in Berlin, “so long as nuclear weapons exist, we are not truly safe.”*

*We call on the United States to participate, with you speaking, in the September 26, 2013 United Nations High level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament; participate in the UN working group on achieving a world free of nuclear weapons; pursue vigorously convening of the postponed conference on a Middle East Zone free of Weapons of Mass Destruction; and attend the 2014 conference in Mexico on the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons.*

*The world and our country must prioritize meeting human needs over weapons of mass destruction.*

### **Faith in action:**

As a nuclear power, the United States must play a leadership role in moving the world toward nuclear disarmament. A limited, step-by-step agenda is entirely inadequate. Massive public support for nuclear zero is essential if any real progress is to be made. Write or email President Obama and use the points listed in the June 6 letter (above) to urge him to take action.

Excellent resources are available to help you educate about the nuclear threat and organize for nuclear disarmament. For example:

- Breaking the Nuclear Chain ([www.breakingthenuclearchain.org](http://www.breakingthenuclearchain.org)) is a campaign to motivate people to prevent the looming humanitarian catastrophe represented by the nuclear chain from uranium mining, to power, to weapons to nuclear waste.
- Abolition 2000 ([www.abolition2000.org](http://www.abolition2000.org)), a network of over 2,000 organizations in more than 90 countries worldwide working for a global treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons, has produced a “Manual for Campaigners to support the UN Open Ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament (OEWG).” §

## Time for fossil fuel divestment campaign

*Universities, religious institutions, governments and other investors are withdrawing their investments from the fossil fuel sector – corporations that extract oil, coal, gas and other fossil fuels. They are inspired by the “terrifying math” of climate change that shows how these corporations’ very business model is detrimental to the future of humanity. It is essential that this growing campaign succeed if humanity is going to be able to avoid the worst effects of climate change.*

Bill McKibben, who founded 350.org, wrote a watershed article in the July 19, 2012 issue of *Rolling Stone* titled, “Global warming’s terrifying new math.” In it, he focuses on three numbers that everyone should know about and take to heart: Two, 565 and 2,795.

- There is a growing international consensus to maintain the increase in global temperature to a maximum of two degrees Celsius (about 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit). Many have argued for lower limits due to the fact that a temperature increase of only 0.8 degrees Celsius already has led to more storms, floods, Arctic melting and other negative effects. DARA, an independent organization that conducts research and evaluates humanitarian policy and practice, estimates that, currently, 400,000 people die each year from the effects of climate change. Yet world leaders were only able to agree on the two-degree limit.
- 565 gigatons is the maximum amount of additional carbon dioxide that can be released into the air by the year 2050 and have a reasonable hope (an 80 percent chance) of remaining below the two-degree limit. “At current rates—we’re burning more than 30 gigatons annually and increasing three percent a year—it will take us 14 years to seal our fate,” writes McKibben.
- Finally, 2,795 gigatons is the amount of carbon dioxide that fossil fuel companies report already having in reserves, ready to be extracted and burned. Note that this number is almost five times larger than the 565-gigaton limit. This means that if we as a global community are to avoid the worst effects of climate change, fossil fuel companies must keep 80 percent of their reserves in the ground.

Think about these numbers for a while. Even if corporations stopped searching for new sources of fossil fuels today, they already have discovered far more than we can use if we want our children and grandchildren to have a chance at a decent life. If they simply burnt what they already have in reserves, the global tempera-

ture would far surpass the two-degree limit with truly catastrophic results for all life on the planet. As McKibben says, “You can have a healthy fossil fuel industry or a healthy planet, but you can’t have both.”

It is true that we all benefit from fossil fuels: running our cars, heating our homes, bringing food to the table, etc., but most people would be happy using sun and wind power, and it is principally the fossil fuel industries that work to delay the use of more alternative energy. The industry as a whole spends \$440,000 a day lobbying Congress to maintain their power and inhibit cleaner alternatives. While some companies have nominal investments in alternative energies (investments that they repeatedly tout in commercials and billboards), they spend much more to find new sources of fossil fuels. ExxonMobil spends \$100 million each day in its desperate search for more reserves even though it, alone, already has reserves equal to seven percent of the total carbon necessary to pass two degrees.

Clearly we need to shift money from the fossil fuel sector to better alternatives. Chuck Collins with the Institute for Policy Studies has written, “Divestment is not primarily simply an economic strategy, but also a moral and political one. If slavery is wrong, is it wrong to make a profit from it? If apartheid is wrong, is it wrong to make a profit from it? If it is wrong to wreck the planet, then it is wrong to profit from it.”

As is often true of social struggles, universities and faith-based organizations are at the forefront of the fossil fuel divestment campaign. Students at hundreds of universities have begun campaigns to pressure their trustees to divest from fossil fuel corporations with some early successes at Hampshire and Unity colleges.

The United Church of Christ (UCC) was the first national church to officially decide to withdraw all of their investments in fossil fuel companies. Arguing in favor of divestment, Jim Antal, president of the Massachusetts conference of the UCC, said, “We can’t continue to profit from wrecking God’s creation—not through our pensions, not through our endowments, not by our personal investments. As Jesus said: ‘Where your treasure is, there is your heart also.’”

### **Faith in action:**

To learn more about the efforts to divest from the 200 publicly-traded companies that hold the vast majority of the world’s proven coal, oil and gas reserves, go to <http://www.gofossilfree.com> for more information. §

## Food sovereignty best addresses public interests

*October 16 is World Food Day, a day dedicated to education about world hunger and possible solutions. For the past two decades, small producers and family farmers have been shaping the concept of food sovereignty, based in the belief that all people deserve a say in how their food is produced, as well as the right to grow and produce it themselves through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. This notion, developed by the international peasant group Via Campesina, will gain traction this World Food Day as October 16 is the date chosen to present the Food Sovereignty Prize (awarded by the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance) and to launch the Right to Food and Nutrition Watch Report 2013 in various cities around the world.*

This year's Food Sovereignty Prize will go to the Haitian Group of 4, Dessalines Brigade/Via Campesina. In 2007, Haiti's largest peasant organizations – Heads Together Small Farmers of Haiti (Tet Kole), the Peasant Movement of Papaye, the National Congress of Papaye Peasant Movements, and the Regional Coordination of Organizations of the South East Region – joined forces as the Group of 4 (G4), an alliance to promote good farming practices and advocate for peasant farmers.

The G4, representing over a quarter of a million Haitians, invited South American peasant leaders and agroecology experts to Haiti to work cooperatively to save Creole seeds and support peasant agriculture. Together, the G4 and the Dessalines Brigade, as it became known – named for 19th-century Haitian independence leader Jean Jacques Dessalines and supported by Via Campesina – have collaborated to rebuild Haiti's environment, promote wealth and end poverty. The partnership also provided immediate and ongoing support to the victims of the 2010 earthquake, and the G4 made global headlines when they rejected a donation of hybrid seeds from Monsanto.

The Food Sovereignty Prize is a project of the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance, whose members include the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, Food First, Grassroots International, Why Hunger, and many more. Now in its fifth year, the prize was created as a way to provide a counter-balance to the well-publicized World Food Prize, which in recent years has been awarded to large industrial agricultural projects which exclude peasant farmers both in their engineering and implementation. The Food Sovereignty Prize is meant to draw attention to the kind of alternatives that people in peasant communities around the world are creating to address

the very specific challenges they face. (See page 3.)

The 2013 Food Sovereignty Prize awardees demonstrate the kind of alternative thinking that is highlighted in the 2013 Food and Nutrition Watch Report, *Alternatives and resistance to policies that generate hunger*. The report also critically analyzes many of the new programs developed through public private partnerships between governments and some of the largest, most concentrated agri-business corporations in the world. It reveals the ways in which people and communities most impacted by both the programs themselves and the policy changes necessary to clear the way for them are completely left out of their project design and implementation.

Recognizing that nearing a billion people around the world are struggling with chronic hunger, and that a hungry world can never be a secure and just world, Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) introduced the Global Food Security Act of 2013 (HR 2822) in early August. The bill directs the president to develop a comprehensive, multi-agency strategy focused on improving nutrition; strengthens agricultural development; ensures smallholder farmers access to inputs and training; and updates the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to include a renewed focus on women, nutrition and smallholder farmers. This is a valiant effort to get Congress more intimately involved in U.S. efforts to promote food security through its Feed the Future programs.

While the bill's focus on women farmers and small holder farmers is indeed welcome, language around promoting agro-ecological methods was dropped just before the bill's introduction. Smallholder farmers in less industrialized countries prefer these methods because they recognize that a "one-size-fits-all" approach is not possible. Unfortunately, even though there is broad recognition of smallholder methods, current Feed the Future policies and programs favor more industrialized and less labor intensive methods that are dependent on new inputs from non-local sources. Local farmers far prefer agro-ecological and biologically diverse systems to address problems related to climate change, resource scarcity and to avoid fossil fuel dependency. Although their work is seen as labor intensive, smallholder farmers around the less industrialized world see themselves as champions of their own food sovereignty – their work offers them a vehicle for escaping hunger and poverty.

Read about the prize at [foodsovereigntyprize.org/](http://foodsovereigntyprize.org/). Read the Watch Report at [www.rtfn-watch.org/](http://www.rtfn-watch.org/). Learn more about the Global Food Security Act at [thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c113:H.R.2822](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c113:H.R.2822). §



## Debt trial of the century

*On August 23, a U.S. appellate court upheld an earlier decision requiring Argentina to pay a number of hedge funds more than \$1.3 billion. The government of President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner has appealed to the Supreme Court which is set to decide later this year whether it will hear the case. The results of the lawsuit could have dire ramifications for people living in countries overwhelmed with debt in the global South and highlights the desperate need for global reforms in how nations deal with unpayable debts.*

Due to a severe financial crisis in 2001, Argentina was unable to pay its enormous debt burden and defaulted on more than \$81 billion. The country then renegotiated its debts, with 92 percent of its creditors accepting an agreement in which they would receive about 30 cents for every dollar owed to them. Some of these investors have already recovered three-quarters of their pre-default investment. Yet a handful of hedge funds, referred to as “vulture funds,” have refused Argentina’s offer and are now suing for full payment of the loan.

This is the modus operandi of vulture funds. They identify countries in financial distress, buy parts of that country’s debt at huge discounts – sometimes literally paying a few pennies on the dollar – and then sue those countries for the full value plus interest, using courts to bring in huge profits for themselves while draining money from public services like education and health care. In 1999, Liberia was forced to pay \$20 million to two vulture funds, an amount equal to 155 percent of that country’s health budget or 105 percent of its education budget. Zambia was ordered to pay \$55 million to a vulture fund that same year. “These funds are among the very worst actors in our international financial system,” notes Dr. Collins Magalasi, executive director of the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development.

In the Argentine case, the vulture funds are led by NML Capital, a hedge fund owned by Paul Singer, an investor with a net worth estimated at more than \$1.3 billion. In October 2012, NML Capital went to court in Ghana to seize an Argentine ship, the ADA Libertad, that was parked off Ghana’s coast, until Argentina paid its debt to the hedge fund. The court agreed and seized the ship for nearly three months until a United Nations court overruled the decision.

The case has been called the “trial of the century” because of its far-reaching consequences. If the hedge funds win the case, it will make it much more difficult, if not impossible, for countries to renegotiate their debts,

thereby prolonging economic crises. Creditors will no longer be willing to renegotiate their loans, lower interest rates or give more leniency in payments if they know that they can go to court to get 100 percent of the loan. Those most affected will be marginalized and vulnerable communities that will see health clinics and schools close, water and electricity prices rise and jobs lost as governments funnel more and more money toward debt payments.

In addition, a decision in favor of the vulture funds could undermine the already weakened international financial system. As Aldo Caliarì of the Center of Concern said in testimony before the U.S. Congress, “The situation of chaos, uncertainty and contagion that typically accompanies a sovereign debt crisis will risk being far more prolonged, and potentially bring the global economy to a sudden stop.” As he pointed out, “With debt levels in advanced countries at their highest peak in peacetime, and several emerging markets also showing worrying signs of growing debt levels, we cannot rule out more countries finding themselves in a situation of debt distress.”

International Monetary Fund Managing Director Christine Lagarde said, “Our concern is that the lower court’s decision would undermine the ability of the debtors and creditors to reach an agreement. In that respect it could be a threat to financial stability.” The U.S. and French governments have also written amicus briefs to the Supreme Court in favor of Argentina, expressing concern of the case’s possible effects on the world economy.

More than anything, this case shows the urgent need for global rules around sovereign debt (debt held by national governments). While individuals and businesses in most countries are able to declare bankruptcy, which allows them to restructure their debts so as to maintain their homes and continue their businesses (something beneficial to both creditors and debtors, as well as the larger society), there is no equivalent for nations facing overwhelming debts. Without such mechanisms, economic crises are prolonged and financial stability is jeopardized.

We pray that the Supreme Court decides to hear this case and helps to find a just solution to the problem. As the *Financial Times* has observed, “Trapping countries in unpayable debt obligations is dangerous,” and as Maryknoll missionaries around the world have seen, it is people who live in poverty who suffer most from these debts. §

## More transparency in corporate political spending?

*The U.S. Supreme Court's decision on Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission swept away restrictions on the amount of money corporations could spend to influence campaigns, leaving decades of precedent in disarray. For many years, socially responsible investors have called for greater corporate transparency and accountability in regards to corporate political spending and lobbying expenditures. Some companies are beginning to respond to this call.*

The International Corporate Governance Network, a membership organization of large institutional investors based in 50 countries, states: "It is a matter of good corporate governance for companies to ensure that any political involvement is both legitimate and transparent, and that companies and their boards are held properly to account for their political activities."

From 2004-2011, around 270 shareholder proposals regarding disclosure of political activity and policies related to lobbying and political contributions were filed, with an average of 30 percent of shareholders voting in support.

Since *Citizens United*, the issue of corporate money and politics has become a greater priority for shareholders. In 2013 alone, 50 shareholder proposals were filed, with 40 scheduled to come to a vote. The proposals asked companies to report annually their federal and state lobbying expenditures, including any payments to trade associations used for lobbying, as well as support for tax-exempt organizations that write and endorse "model legislation" for legislators to use.

The editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal* has attacked the investor campaign. The heads of the three largest trade associations -- the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Business Roundtable and the National Association of Manufacturers -- sent a letter to their members opposing lobbying disclosure, claiming the goal of proponents "is to get companies to disclose substantial information about government relations activities in order to limit those activities." According to the Center for Responsive Politics, since 1998, the Chamber has spent over \$1 billion for lobbying. In 2012, the Chamber spent \$136.3 million to influence government policy. Lobbying by trade associations is indirectly supported by substantial, and largely unreported, corporate contributions.

Shareholders are particularly concerned about corporations' support of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which, according to its website "works to advance the fundamental principles of free-market enterprise, limited government, and federalism

at the state level through a nonpartisan public-private partnership of America's state legislators, members of the private sector and the general public." It endorsed as "model legislation" Florida's "Stand Your Ground" law and drafted model Voter ID bills.

ALEC also developed legislation and resolutions for legislators to use that oppose the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's ability to legislate carbon dioxide emissions; oppose state agencies' abilities to regulate carbon emissions; and support state authorization to open federal public land for oil, gas and coal exploration. At its annual conference in August 2013, ALEC joined its partner, the Heartland Institute, whose president has asserted that there is "no global warming trend" in hosting a climate change workshop. One participant, Rep. Mark Pocan, a progressive Wisconsin Democrat who has attended ALEC meetings in order to report on its dealings, said that ALEC lawmakers were told that because the amount of carbon dioxide and the average human lifespan had increased during the past century, "therefore" increased CO2 is a good thing. Top corporate sponsors of the conference include ExxonMobil, Peabody Energy, TransCanada, Eli Lilly and Wells Fargo.

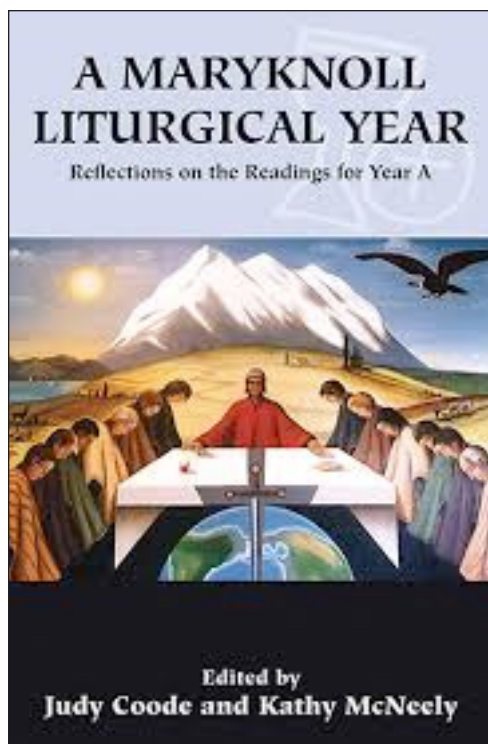
Shareholders who question corporate financial support of ALEC are beginning to see results. Since 2011, over 50 companies have left ALEC or have said they are no longer involved. These include GlaxoSmithKline, ConocoPhillips, Johnson & Johnson, Amazon, Unilever, WellPoint, Darden Restaurants, Pepsico, Coca-Cola, General Electric, Walgreens, CVS/Caremark, Kraft Foods, McDonalds and Bristol-Myers Squibb. Some of these companies have set corporate goals to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions, and have seen the contradictions in supporting organizations that challenge measures to address climate change.

Shareholder pressure also has led to companies like Ameren, Deere & Co and Dow to publish the portion of their payments to trade associations that go toward lobbying.

In July 2013, 65 percent of Alliant Tech's shareholders voted in favor of a proposal for greater transparency in lobbying activities. The lead proponent, Rev. Michael Crosby of the Midwest Capuchin Franciscans, said that his order "has been very concerned for over a decade with some of the businesses of Alliant Tech, particularly land mines, as this is a weapon that continues to kill and maim innocent people around the world. This concern is only exacerbated when the company moves into guns and then lobbies heavily to thwart legislation that would regulate their use." §

## Resources

- 1) **Farmlandgrab.org:** This website contains news reports about the rush to buy up or lease farmlands abroad as a strategy to secure basic food supplies or simply for profit. Its purpose is to serve as a resource for those monitoring or researching the issue, particularly social activists, non-government organizations and journalists. The site is updated daily, with all posts entered according to their original publication date. It was originally set up by GRAIN as a collection of online materials used in the research behind *Seized: The 2008 land grab for food and financial security*, a report issued in October 2008. GRAIN is small international non-profit organization that works to support small farmers and social movements in their struggles for food sovereignty. Farmlandgrab.org is an open project. Although currently maintained by GRAIN, anyone can join in posting materials or developing the site further.
- 2) **Peace journey with Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP):** CMEP will lead a “dual narrative” tour of Israel-Palestine from Oct. 14-25, with both Palestinian and Israeli guides. Cost is \$2,652 per person. Visiting with Israelis and Palestinians is essential to understanding how the ongoing conflict undermines the lives and livelihoods of both peoples, and to being an advocate for an end to the violence and better futures for both people. For more details and registration go to CMEP’s website: <http://cmep.org/content/cmep-peace-journeys-come-and-see>, or contact CMEP at 202-543-1222.
- 3) **Repackaged, renewed JustFaith Catholic:** The JustFaith adult faith education program will now be flexible and adaptable for busy adults and parish communities. The program consists of four phases, each with six sessions (two hours each, with group dialogue and prayer) and an immersion experience (participants are asked to commit to all four phases). It includes opening and commissioning retreats; intriguing books and videos that expose the deeper implications of poverty in the world; and a small faith-sharing group that is connected by sacred listening, dialogue, and trust. After the program graduation, there is a recommended three-week discernment period for continued individual and group mission exploration. Learn more at [www.justfaith.org](http://www.justfaith.org) or call 502-429-0865.



### **A Maryknoll Liturgical Year: Reflections on the Readings for Year A**

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 second 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. Maryknollers describe how people cope with climate changes; they celebrate the solutions people have employed; and rejoice in the places where they find hope for the future of the planet. At the same time, Maryknollers celebrate diversity, the fact that they are warmly welcomed into the communities in spite of differences in appearance, language, and culture. These are the kinds of stories elevated in this book: 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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