



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

# NewsNotes

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

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## After Charlottesville

*After violent clashes between white supremacists and counter-protesters at a “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, on August 12 left dozens injured and one woman, Heather Heyer, dead, there has been a much needed national discussion on racism, fascism and nonviolence.*

One of the many notable observations after the violent white supremacist rally in Charlottesville was by Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia:

“Racism is a poison of the soul. It’s the ugly, original sin of our country, an illness that has never fully healed. Blending it with the Nazi salute, the relic of a regime that murdered millions, compounds the obscenity. Thus the wave of public anger about white nationalist events in Charlottesville this weekend is well warranted. We especially need to pray for those injured in the violence. But we need more than pious public statements. If our anger today is just another mental virus displaced tomorrow by the next distraction or outrage we find in the media, nothing will change. Charlottesville matters.”

Marie Dennis, co-president of Pax Christi International, and former director of this office, participated in an interfaith prayer service in Charlottesville, and echoed Archbishop Chaput’s urgency: “I believe those of us who live white privilege have to be attentive to our own racism, but we also have to be more visibly in the streets and engaged in dismantling racist structures in our society. Our statements of shock and solidarity are important but insufficient.”

The events in Charlottesville drew widespread international attention. The UN committee charged with monitoring racism (CERD) issued a rare ‘early warning’ to the United States over the failure of Trump administration to unequivocally denounce white supremacy after Charlottesville. Indeed, the rest of the world should be concerned. As disturbing as the violent events in Charlottesville last month were, they reflect a global trend seen by Maryknoll missionaries of violent populism, ethnic and racial hatred, and Xenophobic nationalism.

A populist president in the Philippines encourages extrajudicial killings of mostly poor Filipinos accused of using or selling drugs, with over seven thousand deaths since his inauguration. Muslim Burmese, the Rohingya, are being forced out of their country in a genocidal campaign by some fundamentalist Buddhists. Thousands of children in Yemen are dying of malaria and starvation in a U.S.-supported military campaign led by Saudi Arabia, causing Yemen to compete with South Sudan for the title of worst humanitarian crisis since World War II.

“As we look around our beloved country we can see dark clouds gathering,” Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark told a global gathering of leaders of popular

movements in Modesto, CA earlier this year. “Your work of building community and calling all of us to truly ‘see’ one another is needed now more than ever...[Those in power] demonize excluded groups—people who look, sound, or believe differently from the dominant group. This act of misdirection—channeling the anger of anxious people toward ‘the other’ rather than toward the architects of the economy of exclusion—is a classic tactic of a populist leader.”

Each of us is called to action, to get into the streets and to witness to the power of Gospel nonviolence—to stand in solidarity with our African-American, Jewish, and Muslim sisters and brothers, and to welcome our neighbors who are undocumented immigrants.

As Pope Francis told a gathering of popular movements in Bolivia in 2015: “The future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of people and in their ability to organize.”

### So what can we do?

First, show up. Find a local organization or church that is speaking out against racism and white supremacy, accompanying undocumented immigrants or promoting interreligious dialogue. All of us have something to contribute to the struggle for peace and justice.

Speak up. Write President Trump and Congress. Write a letter to the editor. Engage in dialogue with your neighbors, family and your church community.

Learn more. One of the many good things that have happened after the tragedy of Charlottesville are the positive actions and examples of creative nonviolence against neo-Nazis and violent white supremacists. Wagingnonviolence.org offers Kazu Haga’s excellent piece, “Don’t feed the trolls - how to combat the alt-right.” Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (CNI) has good resources; CNI’s own Maria Stephan is quoted in a *New York Times* article on the power of nonviolence entitled “How to Make Fun of Nazis.”

Finally, pray. The power of prayer is inestimable; but it’s often underrated in activist circles. Prayer unites us as a community of faith. The Conference of Major Superiors of Men recently passed an unanimous resolution entitled “Gospel Nonviolence: The Way of the Church” that, in calling for an embrace of active nonviolence by the Catholic Church, begins with a call to prayer. §

## NAFTA renegotiations: Better deal for whom?

*The United States has laid out an ambitious schedule and hinted at plans for a new North American Free Trade Agreement with Mexico and Canada.*

Mexico, Canada and the United States were scheduled to meet for a second round of renegotiations of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in early September, despite President Trump's continued threats to pull out. The rounds are scheduled every two to three weeks until the new deal is complete, which is considerably faster-paced than is typical for trade talks. With the upcoming midterm elections in the United States and presidential election in Mexico, the administrations of Donald Trump and Enrique Peña Nieto are eager to finalize negotiations by the end of 2017 or early 2018.

Despite President Trump's desire to "get a better deal for America," the talks appear to be business-as-usual. The negotiators are currently discussing ways to incorporate provisions of the Trump-rejected Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal under the guise of "modernizing" NAFTA. By modernizing they mean including intellectual property protections for the internet age, opening up more investment markets to competition, adding more patent protections for Big Pharma which would further limit people's access to medicines, and adding new patents on seeds which would make it more difficult for smallholder farmers to grow food for their family and livelihoods. Federal officials have said that the U.S. plans to introduce its list of proposed changes in the third negotiating round in Canada in late September.

A few of the changes that the Trump administration has been considering could benefit vulnerable communities that have been hurt by NAFTA thus far. For example, the United States originally planned to end the business friendly, un-transparent investment courts systems (also known as investor-state dispute settlement or ISDS). This system empowers individual companies to sue countries for expected future loss of profits. For example, in TransCanada's ISDS claim against the U.S., it argues that President Obama's decision to cancel the Keystone XL Pipeline violated NAFTA by expropriating the company's expected future profits.

As the Keystone example suggests, Canadian companies frequently use the investment courts system and the government of Canada vehemently defends maintaining ISDS in NAFTA. A group of U.S.-based companies also sent a letter to the Trump Administration asking him to support keeping ISDS. Mexico supports keeping ISDS in NAFTA. Some analysts speculate the ISDS makes Mexico more attractive to investors. With

this pushback, the U.S. is now floating making joining the ISDS optional. Canada and Mexico will likely oppose this proposal, too. Civil society advocates in all three countries, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, are campaigning to end ISDS.

There are plans to add modern environmental and labor standards directly into the agreement that would reflect the deal worked out in 2007 between President Bush and the Democratic-controlled Congress. While on paper many of these provisions are good, in practice, there is little political will to hold governments accountable when they fail to follow the international labor and environmental laws included in the agreement.

In July, the first labor dispute case under the 2007 trade provisions was decided. U.S. and Guatemalan labor unions brought forward the dispute against the government of Guatemala under the Central America Free Trade Agreement. The unions claimed Guatemala was not upholding international labor standards. The court ruled in favor of Guatemala, stating that there was no evidence that labor violations were affecting trade.

If decisions by investor courts are determined by effects on international trade rather than effects on workers, the provisions do not represent the vision of trade that serves the common good. To see our full trade vision, read the latest issue of our Faith Economy Ecology newsletter, *Encounters*, at <http://bit.ly/2eMzB74>.

The renegotiation process for NAFTA is even less transparent than that used to craft the TPP. There are no stakeholder sessions planned and all parties have agreed not to divulge the text. The public is virtually in the dark. Read our statement calling for transparent NAFTA renegotiations that serve the common good at <http://bit.ly/2wZ3SKr>.

Even with renegotiations underway, President Trump continues to threaten to withdraw from NAFTA altogether. On August 28, he told reporters he may need to put the U.S. on the brink of withdrawing from NAFTA to get his renegotiation objectives met. Any NAFTA party can pull out of the agreement with six-months' written notice. Legal experts are researching whether or not this is even possible without Congressional approval. §

**Faith in Action:** Tell Congress and the Trump Administration to negotiate the NAFTA we need, not the same broken trade model that puts corporations before God's people and all creation. <http://bit.ly/2wueDlb>

## Cooperativism, Catholicism and the future of work

*The New Economy Coalition, of which the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is a member, recently launched a new campaign called “Now We Own” to promote the importance of collective ownership in creating a more equitable and sustainable economy by highlighting examples of collective enterprises among its members.*

For Catholics, collective ownership is not a new concept. The Church has been intimately involved in most of the major examples of collective enterprises throughout its history. While the issue of ownership has always been important for economic equality and sustainability, it is becoming increasingly important as more workers are replaced by robotic technologies.

The Christian communities formed after Jesus’ crucifixion were collective endeavors. Twice in the book of Acts we read of how these early Christians pooled their resources in the service of others. For example, “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need.” (Acts 2:43-45)

In a soon-to-be published book on the role of cooperative enterprises in Catholic economic thought, Nathan Schneider, a contributing editor for Religion Dispatches and Yes! Magazine, who was one the first journalists to cover the Occupy Wall Street movement, describes the Catholic influence on larger cooperative efforts throughout history. For example, in 1900, Alphonse Desjardins, a committed Catholic in Quebec, Canada, began the “Mouvement des Caisses,” a federation of credit unions that is currently the largest financial intermediary in Quebec. He also helped to create the first credit union in the United States - St. Mary’s Bank in New Hampshire.

In the 1940s, Catholic priest Jose Maria Arizmendi founded the Mondragon cooperative movement in the Basque region of Spain, which has grown into a global network of hundreds of cooperatives, banks, schools and more, all owned and governed by its more than 73,000 members. In Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Fathers Jimmy Tompkins and Moses Coady used their Jesuit university’s extension program to help organize close to 200 community organizations during the Great Depression, which, in turn, created numerous cooperatives, credit unions and study groups.

In the 1970s, Italian priest Giuseppe Tonello helped to create the Ecuadoran town of Salinas de Guaranda’s famous network of credit unions and cooperative factories known for making cheese, chocolate, and textiles.

Catholic support of collective efforts continue today. In the United States, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development is a significant supporter of numerous cooperatives around the country and many Catholic hos-

pitals act as anchor institutions by purchasing from cooperatives as well as providing them with much-needed loans. Around the world, Caritas Internationalis, a confederation of Roman Catholic relief, development and social service organizations, and numerous other missionary organizations are helping many thousands of cooperative efforts worldwide. For example Maryknoll Sister Mary Gabriella initiated the credit union and cooperative movements in Korea in 1960.

We are now at a time in history in which collective ownership is becoming more important. Many economists predict a wave of layoffs as new technologies replace human labor. While the threat of robots replacing millions of workers is unlikely to be as drastic in the short term as some have written (global productivity growth rates are at historic lows; economic growth is slow; and corporations are investing little in new technologies), it is likely to have significant effects in the middle and long terms. Yet, improved technologies need not result in massive numbers of destitute, unemployed people. Collective ownership can help ensure that the benefits of increased productivity are fairly distributed.

“If machines produce everything we need, the outcome will depend on how things are distributed,” the famous scientist Stephen Hawking explained. “Everyone can enjoy a life of luxurious leisure if the machine-produced wealth is shared, or most people can end up miserably poor if the machine-owners successfully lobby against wealth redistribution.”

It is the resilience of cooperatives that is especially appealing in times of economic insecurities. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said, “With the world facing multiple crises, and with natural disasters testing even the most robust economies and communities, cooperatives have meanwhile maintained high credit ratings, increased assets and turnover, and expanded their membership and customer base.” An International Labor Organization study showed that “financial cooperatives out-performed traditional investor-owned banks before, during and after the global financial crisis in 2007 and 2008 and pointed to their long-term stability.”§

**Faith in action:** See inspiring examples of collective ownership at the “Now We Own” campaign at the New Economy Coalition website <https://neweconomy.net/> and their social media sites. Consider ways you could support their efforts.



## Bishop Seitz's pastoral letter on immigration

*On July 18, just steps from the U.S.-Mexico border, Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, issued a new pastoral letter on the issue of immigration, calling for a moratorium on deportations by the United States until it adopts comprehensive immigration reform.*

In the first pastoral letter on immigration by a U.S. bishop in a decade, Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, denounces “narratives that paint our border as a place of chaos, and violence” and calls for a moratorium on deportations until the U.S. adopts comprehensive immigration reform. During a press conference at the 125-year old Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Segundo Barrio, Bishop Seitz blessed the crowd – which included fellow clergy, civic leaders, and a mariachi band – in both English and Spanish, before signing copies of his letter entitled “Sorrow and Mourning Flee Away.”

In his letter, Bishop Seitz denounces the suffering caused by a “broken immigration system” and sets migrants and his community as the heroes in an increasingly complicated story. “Migrants are prophetic in their lived testimony to values increasingly sidelined in today’s culture: faith, life, and family. And they wake us from our indifference, opening our eyes to the injustices of globalization and ‘an economy of exclusion and inequality,’” he writes, citing Pope Benedict XVI.

But “migrant communities are living in a great deal of fear right now,” Bishop Seitz said in a slow, deliberate voice from the pulpit at Sacred Heart. They are “brothers and sisters who need to need to know they are not alone.”

Following Pope Francis’ lead, Bishop Seitz challenges the increasingly harsh rhetoric against migrants and condemns the escalating enforcement of U.S. immigration laws. Measures such as mass deportations and border walls are not going to make the situation better, he said. “It’s going to have a disastrous impact on our migrant community and, finally, on all of us.”

Bishop Seitz called the letter and its proposals a “process” and “not a shot across the bow.” Among his promised actions are the creation of a diocesan commission on migration and a scholarship fund for so-called ‘DREAMers’ – “the most innocent of the innocent” – who will lose their protected status if President Trump follows through on his campaign promise to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. It also sets up a formation program for clergy to train in ‘know-your-rights’ rules and rapid response teams for “when they are at the door,” and calls for “permanent, comprehensive immigration reform” and an immediate moratorium on deportations of all nonviolent migrants.

With this pastoral letter, Bishop Seitz supports a

level of local Church resistance perhaps not seen since the Sanctuary movement in the 1980s, and instructs local Church leaders to refuse immigration officials entry into parishes, schools, or other Church property without a federal warrant or life-threatening emergency. “We will recognize the rights we have and exercise them,” he said during a video-streamed media conference after the letter’s release.

Bishop Seitz also calls on “[t]hose who administer our nation’s immigration laws and face difficult and sometimes dangerous situations. I appeal to you, do not ignore the obligations of conscience! Treat all you encounter with dignity and respect and with the American values of fairness and justice.” “No human being is illegal!” he declares, imploring immigration officers to respect the sanctity of sensitive places such as places of worship, hospitals, and schools, trusting their “goodwill” to do so.

Above all else, Bishop Seitz shines a compassionate light on migrants while offering a powerful appraisal of the “broken” system that hounds them. “I invite you to consider the challenges of a system which is breaking apart our community and reflect upon how God is asking us to respond,” he writes. “No one can deny the terrible human impacts of a system that divides families, permits some to detain human beings for profit, and compromises our nation’s historic commitment to the refugee and the asylum seeker. The burning sands of our desert are an unmarked grave for too many migrants who have died attempting to cross. Increased militarization of the border will make this journey even more dangerous.”

Bishop Seitz points to elected leaders who “have not yet mustered the moral courage to enact permanent, comprehensive immigration reform.” Seitz continues with a raw assessment of Congress and others who block reform: “We must also beware of the Pharisees of our day, who self-righteously hold others to a standard they would never apply to themselves. They attempt to enforce minutiae of the law meanwhile ignoring the unbearable burdens they are laying on children and families.”

“We fix our broken system,” Bishop Seitz writes, “the day we stop seeing [migrants] with fear and stony hearts.”§

**Faith in action:** Read and share the pastoral letter at <http://www.bordermigrant.org/>

## U.S. immigration: 'We're all human'

*Darrin Mortenson, who serves as the migration fellow for the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, reports on his visit to El Paso, Texas, in July, where he met with some of the Maryknoll missionaries who welcome and accompany newly-arrived migrants despite the rising risks and complicated political reality of the U.S.-Mexico "borderlands."*

Even as the U.S. government increases immigration enforcement and accelerates the militarization of the southwest border with Mexico, Maryknoll sisters and other Catholic missionaries continue to work to build bridges for migrants while others raise walls. Some missionaries are helping migrants through their first few hours and days after being detained by border enforcement authorities. Others are doing pastoral work in communities dominated by undocumented residents. The city of El Paso gives a good example of both.

One hot July afternoon, on a quiet downtown street where businesses hang signs in Spanish and colorful graffiti depicts familiar icons of Tex-Mex culture on chipped plaster walls, a bus driven by ICE agents pulled up to brick building known as Annunciation House to drop off about 20 refugees from Central America. The exhausted migrants had just been caught by border patrol agents, held overnight in detention centers, and then released with instructions to appear in court at a later date. They were mostly families with children, which the local immigration system increasingly can't handle. Instead, ICE turns them over to Annunciation House through an arrangement that has played out for more than two decades.

Since Ruben Garcia founded Annunciation House in 1978, he and volunteers have offered hospitality to more than 250,000 migrants over the last 40 years, tending to people traumatized and exhausted from their long hard journeys and often recovering from harsh treatment by U.S. border guards. Garcia says he and a small band of Catholics opened the shelter "because we wanted to find more depth and purpose in our lives. And one way of doing that was to place ourselves among the poor." Working with the "poorest of the poor," the "unwanted, the enslaved, [and] the marginalized" soon meant welcoming and accompanying undocumented migrants – a purpose that still drives him through the current crucible of immigration enforcement.

In quieter times Annunciation House has hosted individuals and families for months or years, depending on their situation. But now, as waves of refugees from Central America flee violence and hunger and arrive in numbers greater even than during the region's civil wars some three decades ago, volunteers struggle just to provide a clean bed, a few hot meals, and outfit

them with a fresh set of clothes before passing them on to other local shelters like Casa Teresa, just a few blocks away. Late one searing summer afternoon, Franciscan Sister Terri Rodela arrived at Casa Teresa to work the overnight shift. The shelter is an aging two-story house retrofitted with a few extra bathrooms, a small kitchen, and mattresses that crowd the bedroom floors. On that day Sr. Rodela had only one inexperienced volunteer on hand when Annunciation House staff called to say ICE has just dropped off more refugees who were bound for Casa Teresa within the hour. She scrambled to shuffle other guests to make room for 22 new migrants. It's a daily routine.

As soon as they arrived, Sr. Rodela explained house rules and assigned rooms: men in one room and women in another; beds for the adults; space on the floor for the children. The volunteer began interviewing adults from the six migrant families to find out where they were from and where they were going. Four of the families and most of the children were from Guatemala; the others were from Honduras and El Salvador. They wore desperation on their faces like theatre masks, slowly removed by the humble hospitality of Casa Teresa.

Their stories started to emerge during basic interviews to locate sponsors and arrange transportation. Each had fled some life-threatening situation and was headed for a different part of the U.S. with orders to appear in immigration court at a later date. Rogelio, an indigenous Quiche man from Guatemala, said he and his fifteen-year-old son were grateful for the chance. He said they had fled violence – yes – but starvation is what really drove them north. "We're all human," he said. "We have to eat. We're just fighting for our lives."

Their stories all had a familiar ring: drought and hunger, extortion, forced gang recruitment, family members murdered. One woman named Karla, who travelled from Honduras with four children, had subsequent husbands and a brother slain by gangs. Under threat of death she fled to Mexico where she worked and begged her way north to Ciudad Juarez, pregnant by another migrant who was later captured, until she and her children were caught by Border Patrol trying to cross into El Paso. Now she had no sponsor and no place to go – and was branded a criminal by the government. "Illegal entry is becoming a felony crime," said Ruben Garcia.

“They are charging parents with human smuggling” for bringing their children into the U.S.

Back at Casa Teresa the next night, Sr. Rodela was again preparing to receive another group of 25 refugees when Maryknoll Sister Leila Mattingly swung her car into the driveway. She had just taken a Guatemalan family to the Greyhound station to board a bus bound for Georgia where they had family. Once back at Casa Teresa, Sr. Mattingly beckoned the next family to come with her so they, too, could continue their own journey of hope and fear to its next destination. These are the lucky ones, the sisters said: the migrants going somewhere with government permission.

This so-called ‘catch and release’ system, common during the previous administration, is now officially barred by President Trump. Nevertheless, it remains a daily ritual across the borderlands, not by government grace or compassion, but because the U.S. government lacks the infrastructure to detain more families. Unaccompanied men and anyone with even any legal infraction on his or her record now faces “expedited removal.” The policy fails to account for consequences such as family separation or worse, says El Paso’s Catholic Bishop, Mark Seitz, who gave a scathing public critique of the “broken system” on July 18 during a press conference on the release of his pastoral letter on immigration, the first of its kind in a decade. Sending people back to where they fled is a “de facto death sentence,” Bishop Seitz said.

While migrants with tainted histories used to be the primary targets for deportation, under the Trump administration, all undocumented people are now fair game. “There are no longer priorities. Everyone is a priority,” said government prosecutor Stephanie Miranda one day in El Paso’s federal immigration court, where seven judges already face a staggering backlog of nearly 6,000 cases, now surging under Trump. “This is the new and improved government, you know,” quipped federal immigration judge Robert Hough. “It’s sad, really, really sad,” said the court translator. “It’s people’s lives.”

Migrants’ lives are, indeed, destroyed by this “broken system.” On July 19, standing steps away from the Rio Grande and within sight of Mexico and New Mexico, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agent Oscar Cervantes explained, unlike in Arizona and California, where the CBP enlists the harsh desert and mountain terrain as allies in border control, few migrants die in the desert around El Paso. Instead, they drown in the Rio Grande. Cervantes said that only three people had so far died trying to cross the river. Within a week of his comments four more Central American migrants would

die. Bishop Seitz said more militarization of the border would “drive them into the desert ... and we are going to see many more people pay the ultimate price simply for their desire to survive.” Still, he said, “At some point people will become so desperate that not even Trump will scare them.”

Almost any long-time resident of El Paso will tell you that the ever-growing border fence does not just divide Mexico and United States, it separates families. They say El Paso and Juarez are really one big city, and always have been. Most residents nearby neighborhoods, such as Segundo Barrio, a few meters from the border barrier, have relatives on the other side or are newcomers themselves. It’s a city of migrants, says Bishop Seitz, “a place of encounter, a place of enrichment, a place where people could build bridges.”

Now, however, “everyone who looks Hispanic can be stopped” by authorities, said Jesuit Fr. Rafael Garcia at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, which stands just a couple blocks from the border. “People are afraid now. They don’t come out like before, he said, remarking on the so-called ‘Trump effect’. Father Garcia and others blamed Texas’ new SB-4 law for making things much worse, threatening both undocumented migrants and community cohesion. The law, temporarily blocked by a federal judge, enlists local law enforcement to question the immigration status of residents. In response, people are beginning to distrust and avoid their local police, with whom the community had a traditionally harmonious relationship. “This reminds them of where they’re from, the places they fled, where the police can’t be trusted and are corrupt or worse,” Fr. Garcia said.

Father Garcia says the community has started to rally against the “Trump effect” of intrusions, surveillance, and fear. “What it has done is increase civic participation,” he said. “I think if there is something positive, it’s that it has brought the community together.” Another ray of light, he said, are lessons the El Paso community can learn from the migrants’ stories of hard work and hope. “It’s amazing to see their faith,” Fr. Garcia said. Sr. Mattingly agreed. “Their faith is so huge. Mine is nothing compared to theirs,” she said. “So what do I have to give? I can accompany them.”§

**Faith in action:** Ask your members of Congress to vote “Yes” on the DREAM Act and grant permanent legal status to more than 800,000 young people who received temporary relief from deportation and employment eligibility through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which the Trump administration has threatened to end. <http://bit.ly/2vIpkzi>



## Trafficking of refugee children

*Child refugees in Greece desperate to reach other parts of Europe are forced to sell their bodies in order to pay smugglers to help them with their journeys, according to a recent report from Harvard University.*

The full scope of the problem of human trafficking is hard to ascertain because of the illicit nature of the exploitation. Every year, thousands of men, women and children fall into the hands of traffickers. Almost every country in the world is affected by trafficking, whether as a country of origin, transit or destination for victims.

In 2016 the Alliance of Women for the Abolition of Prostitution drafted a UN Convention Against Sexual Exploitation, in response to two controversial UN reports which suggest that prostitution should either be legalized or decriminalized. Prominent sociologist and women's liberation activist Kathleen Barry led the mobilization of the "Abolish Prostitution Now!" campaign and assisted in drafting the convention. While the UN acknowledges that there is sexual exploitation in all countries around the world, it does not go far enough to protect women and children.

The proposed convention recognizes the production, distribution, and consumption of pornography as sexual exploitation; and adopts legislation and other measures to prohibit sex tourism and advertised sex and penalizes those who organize tourism for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

One woman survivor of sex exploitation stated: "We survivors of prostitution and trafficking declare that prostitution is violence against women. Women and girls in prostitution do not wake up one day and "choose" to be prostitutes. It is chosen for us by poverty, past sexual abuse, the pimps who take advantage of our vulnerabilities, and the men who buy us for the sex of exploitation." (from Manifesto, Joint CATW/ EWL Press Conference 2005)

As the global refugee crisis worsens, more people, including children, have fled their homelands because of war, poverty or famine. They are vulnerable to sexual exploitation along their already arduous journeys to find safety. Regardless of various international commitments to stop human trafficking and efforts to diminish it, studies show that the problem has increased as economic in-

equality has increased.

Dr. Vasileia Digidiki and Professor Jacqueline Bhabha describe this problem in their recent report entitled "Emergency within an emergency." They stated that there is a "growing epidemic of sexual exploitation and abuse of migrant children in Greece." Unaccompanied child refugees in the crowded, disorganized holding camps engage in prostitution in hopes of saving enough to pay traffickers to smuggle them to their destination country, often Germany, Britain, or Sweden. The sex they provide brings in so little cash, 15 Euros per encounter, that smugglers' fees often remain out of reach.

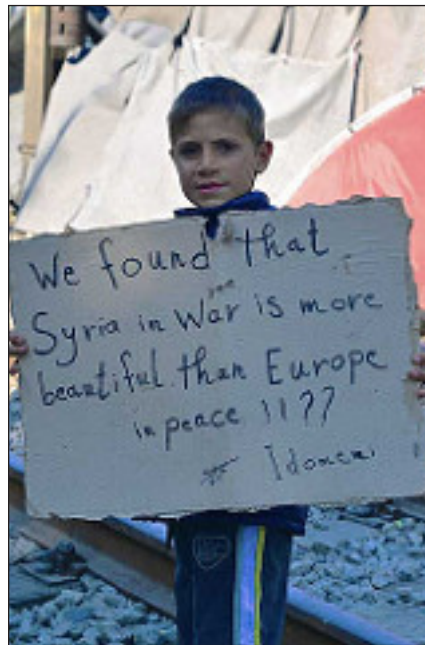
The report describes other forms of sexual exploitation and abuse of migrant children in Greece — sexual assault, rape, and blackmail by abusers who threaten to share explicit photographs of the children with their relatives back in their countries of origin. The report concludes that the detention of children in migrant camps in Greece needs to end immediately.

The problem of children trafficked into sexual slavery is rife in North America as well. Much of the sexual exploitation of minors has moved online. The organization U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking (<http://www.sistersagainstrafficking.org/>) is part of a campaign to end the advertisement of the sale of minors and others for sexual exploitation in Backpage.com, the world's largest classified advertisement site. More than a million sex ads are placed on Backpage.com per day, according to a 2016 report from the National Center

on Sexual Exploitation.

In addition to sexual exploitation, human trafficking, which is a 9.2 billion dollar industry in the U.S., can also involve forced labor and involuntary domestic servitude, with an estimated 300,000 child victims averaging age 13.8

**Faithinaction:** Ask your Senators to support the reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Read a summary and a sample letter to send to your Senators at <https://www.ecpatusa.org/tvpa>



*A child migrant at Idomeni, a makeshift refugee camp in Greece, 2016, by Mario Fornasari/Flickr.*

## Israel/Palestine: Nonviolent resistance by children

*Palestinian children of Bedouin villages in the Negev desert use cameras to document repeated land confiscation and destruction of their villages by the government of Israel.*

Although President Trump sent his son-in-law and senior advisor Jared Kushner to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas on August 23, hope for a revival of peace talks remains slim. Netanyahu's stance on ceding control of Palestinian land are clear: At a recent event to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of occupation of the Palestinian territories, Netanyahu told the crowd gathered at the illegal Israeli settlement in the West Bank, "This is our country."

"We are here to stay, forever," Netanyahu went on to say. "There will be no more uprooting of settlements in the land of Israel. It has been proven that it does not help peace....We've uprooted settlements. What did we get? We received missiles. It will not happen anymore." Without ambiguity Netanyahu has publicly declared that Israel will not compromise, and indeed, will continue its plan to remove Palestinians from their land, bit by bit.

In the Negev desert of southern Israel, which comprises over half of Israel's territory, the village of Al Araqib was destroyed by Israeli forces on August 1 for the 116th time since 2010. Al Araqib is one of approximately 35 Palestinian Bedouin villages in the Negev which are "unrecognized" by Israel, though they are within its borders. As a result, they are not entitled to municipal services such as water, electricity, or trash collection.

Some of these villages have been in existence since before the creation of the state of Israel. Others formed as a result of it – when the young Israeli government displaced entire communities onto new lands in the late 1940s. Many of them are under constant threat of destruction to make way for the construction of Jewish settlements, as is the case with the Bedouin village of Umm Al-Hiran. Early this year the Bedouin village was razed, and, in its place, the Israeli government plans to build a new town called Hiran. Although the courts assured the Palestinian residents of Umm Al-Hiran that the new town would be open to all Israelis, the bylaws of the Hiran cooperative association clearly state that members must be "Jewish Israeli citizens or permanent residents who uphold the values of Judaism."

Palestinians inside Israeli borders and in the occupied Palestinian territories have been dealing with this systematic and ongoing displacement plan since the State of Israel was formed. It is difficult to hope for a better future with such a challenging past and present,

yet hope remains.

The fact that Al Araqib has been demolished more than 100 times in the last seven years also highlights the incredible tenacity and resilience of its residents: They have rebuilt their village over 100 times in seven years. While many have left the village, about 100 residents from 22 families remain. And every time the village is destroyed, those families immediately begin to rebuild using the demolished scraps.

Each time the village is under siege they hold non-violent protests which receive international attention. Many organizations, both Jewish and Palestinian, work to support the unrecognized Bedouin tribes of the Negev, some with legal aid, such as Adalah, the first non-profit, non-sectarian Palestinian-run legal center in Israel, and others with education and economic programs, such as the Ajik-Negev Institute.

One creative nonviolent resistance effort is organized by the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF), a group that has coordinated ten-day photography workshops for children of the unrecognized villages since 2010. Children are given cameras and taught how to use them by volunteer professional photographers, both Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli. Photography has been recognized to be an important tool in documenting human rights abuses and NCF, along with other organizations, have been documenting the destruction of Bedouin villages for years.

The inspiration for the photography workshops was born out of the many requests professional photographers received from children of the villages to hold the camera while they were documenting demolitions. "We decided to provide not only tools but also equipment for the children to tell their story," workshop organizers said. "In this manner, the child turns from being the object that is photographed to a subject that identifies significance in the world around him or her, and gives us a glimpse into their reality and point of view."

Through this project NCF raises international awareness of the plight of Palestinian Bedouins while empowering children through learning a skill, introducing them to political engagement, building confidence and self-awareness, and teaching the incredible tool of nonviolent resistance. §

**Faith in action:** To see some of the children's pictures and learn more about the workshops, go to <http://www.dukium.org/hrd-kids-workshops/>.

## Venezuela: Causes and effects of the crisis

*Democracy in crisis-torn Venezuela is quickly eroding, as the oil-based economy crashes and people grow more desperate for food and medicine. The following article examines how Venezuela came to be in this crisis and how it is affecting the people from the perspective of el pueblo (“the poor”).*

As Venezuela suffers a massive humanitarian crisis, with critical shortages of food and medicines and the world’s highest inflation rate (600 percent), President Trump recently announced new economic sanctions against the country that will cause even more hardship on the literally starving masses in the barrios of Caracas and other Venezuelan cities.

In one of the world’s richest nations in oil and gas reserves, Venezuela’s overdependence on oil income (96 percent of the economy) has made its economy critically impacted by low oil prices. Average income per person has shrunk by more than one third in the past three years, and imports – which account for the major source of food as well as medicines in the country – shrank by 75 percent in the past five years.

Venezuela is one of the most violent of countries not at war and its capital, Caracas, has the second highest murder rate in the world. Violent political protests have been met with equally violent repression by the government. Dozens of opposition and government supporters have been killed in almost daily protests since April.

A majority of Venezuelans don’t have enough food. The country only produces 30 percent of the food it needs to feed its population. Prices on imported food are so high that it would cost the average family 12 basic salaries to afford a month’s grocery bill. CARITAS reports child malnutrition in many parts of Venezuela has reached crisis proportions, while the health system is close to collapse. Once vanquished chronic diseases such as cholera and malaria are on the rise for lack of available vaccines and medicines.

Hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans are migrating to Colombia, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, Chile, and Peru out of desperation.

How did Venezuela get in such a state? While mainstream U.S. media have for years painted the socialist government of Hugo Chavez as authoritarian, in reality, his party repeatedly won free and fair elections from 1998 through 2015. It won by large majorities for all those years because it delivered positive change to the poor of Venezuela’s barrios.

Since early 2016, however, the government of Nicolas Maduro has become increasingly authoritarian, by cancelling a national referendum, suspending elections, and imprisoning opposition leaders. Meanwhile the devastated economy and subsequent humanitarian crisis

have sparked protests and government responses have become increasingly violent.

For balanced assessments of the Venezuelan crisis, read the Washington Office on Latin America’s Venezuela Blog (<https://venezuelablog.org/>) and the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA): <http://nacla.org/news/2017/05/03/why-venezuela-spiraling-out-control>

Ultimately, dialogue between the opposition and the government is the only solution to the crisis in Venezuela. The Trump administration’s sanctions will only worsen the situation. Even Pope Francis has called for a national dialogue between all sectors of Venezuelan society, something that to date neither the government nor the opposition have been willing to accept.

To learn more about the experience of the crisis from the ground level, we offer a recent blog entry written by former Maryknoll Lay Missioner Lisa Sullivan, who has lived in Venezuela for 30 years. From her home in the countryside of Sanare, Venezuela, Lisa writes from the perspective of *el pueblo* (“the poor”), whose hunger is driving them to extremes of looting grocery stores and violently protesting against the government. You can read more of Lisa’s blog at <https://lisavenezuela.blogspot.com/2017/>.

“MONDAY, JULY 3, 2017—Yesterday, half of the participants of our youth exchange weekend didn’t show up, because they were looting.

“They were the half who live in the city of Barquisimeto. The other half were kids from my little town of Palo Verde. It was meant to be Part Two of a rural-urban youth exchange that began last month.

“I have known the looters since they were 8 years old, when I lived and worked in their barrio as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner. They are now in their last year of high school, just weeks from graduation.

“I taught them as kids to play the *cuatro* ( a Venezuelan guitar ) and my partner taught them to play the drums. We formed a musical group called Los Zagalines de San Juan.

“One summer when my artist-daughter Maia was home visiting from college, she helped the kids paint a colorful mural. It sprawled across the outside wall of the cultural center – the kids’ second home. The title of the mural was: *Este es el barrio que sonamos*. (“This is the neighborhood we dream of.”) Kites, trees, mangoes,



kids, and pink and turquoise houses lit up the wall.

“As I look back, I wonder how we didn’t realize then that the barrio we dreamed of was already a reality. Every single kid I knew was in school, universities were free and abundant and nearby, and any profession seemed within reach of anyone. Food was so subsidized, it was practically free. A former Maryknoll colleague joked in her visit that it seemed that for every year of Chavez’s presidency, people had gained a kilo. Medical care was free and around the corner. Community councils distributed everything from light bulbs to internet satellite dishes, for nothing. Even houses were free for those who needed one.

“Venezuela was about seven years into the revolution at that point in time. We never ever dreamed of the backwards slide that awaited.

“My young future looting friends remained on the straight-and-narrow throughout the decade that followed. They steered away from drugs and gangs, became wicked good drummers. They rose through the ranks of the cultural center’s vacation program, first as participants, then as facilitators, then full-fledged counselors. Younger kids dreamed of being just like them. Parents thanked them for their dedication.

“Thursday evening the bedlam began. Ledys and I had come to the barrio to visit his dad. We got out just as the National Guard post was going up in smoke. We skirted past road blocks of burning tires, trash and glass, and dodged a shooting spree between the Guard and protesters.

“No one can explain just how the situation dissolved into looting. We started receiving calls from friends in the barrio around 8 p.m., then at 10, at midnight, and into the wee hours. Dozens of food stores in the commercial strip of the barrio had their windows and walls smashed. Word spread and what seemed like the whole barrio descended upon the goods, clearing the shelves with amazing proficiency.

“When the smoke cleared – literally – some 24

hours later, we received a call from the coordinator of the cultural center. Four people from the community were dead and one of the kids from the center was caught red-handed and jailed. After hearing our shock, he informed us that at about a dozen of the youth leaders were involved in looting.

“For every year that has passed since Chavez’ death, those extra-gained kilos have been shed, and maybe two or three or four times more. These kids – my Zagalines, my muralists, my drummers, my camp counselors, my dreamers – have become walking skeletons. Their crime this past weekend was that of hunger.

“When it was clear that road blocks made it impossible for the looting contingent to join the gathering, we decided to go continue, with half the participants. We played games in the grass, we went on a walk to the nearby farm to collect dried bean pods, we held a scavenger hunt as the shadows of the mountains closed in on us. We ate *arepas* (“cornbread”) made of green bananas [due to a massive countrywide shortage of corn flour] and sang around an improvised campfire. Everyone stayed up well past the midnight curfew.

“But the core of the gathering – the exchange part – the part where the rural kids were to share with their urban cohorts about their food gardens, well, that part was put on standby, just as the soul of this nation remains on standby.

“As we went to bed with half of our participants missing, so Venezuela goes to bed with half of its participants missing, missing the food their bodies need.

“When and how will this end? That is the question on my lips as I arise with the sun each day, to plant yet another banana plant. It is the question on my heart as I fold my arms around these young and skinny bodies who come to help, startled by their strength and resilience. It is the question in my soul as I lay my own weary body down each night, after calling out to the stars and to the heavens for guidance.”§



*Lisa Sullivan harvests bananas at her home in Venezuela. Photo used with permission.*



## Panama: Web of Life retreat and migrants

*Maryknoll Sister Ann Braudis reports on her experience at the eco-spiritual retreat and study program called the Web of Life at the Maryknoll Sisters' Pastoral Center in Darien, Panama.*

I traveled to Panama from New York in June to join a Web of Life retreat for international visitors organized by the Maryknoll Sisters of the Panama Region. We spent the first day of the retreat in Panama City, where we visited the new and brilliantly designed *BioMuseo* (Museum of Biodiversity), which tells the story of the land formation of Panama and features exhibits on its flora and fauna. The next day, we drove five hours into the remote tropical wilderness of Darien province, home to the Santa Fe Maryknoll Sisters Mission. We spent six days there.

Immediately, we plunged into the study of the biodiversity of that corner of the tropical forest, including its significance for the well-being of the planet. We examined the patterns of cultural emergence, the destructive effects of large-scale for-profit development projects and the illegal drug trade, and also the work of the Darien Mission and local individuals and NGOs.

Before dawn on our fourth day, we traveled deeper into the Darien forest to the settlement of Yaviza. Here the Pan-American Highway is interrupted for about 65 miles by impassable jungle and wetlands known as the *Matusagarati*. Leaving our vehicles behind, we set out in the dark into two dugout canoes with motors to handle the strong tidal waters of the river which flow to the Pacific Ocean.

While on the river, we witnessed a breathtaking sunrise and handled some challenges. First, we spotted an alligator swimming near our canoes; then we got lost and the tide turned against us; next we ran out of motor fuel and could not find a place to dock. After nine hours on the water, we were relieved to be rescued and to set our feet upon solid ground. In the days to come, this experience would become invaluable as we attempted to expand and integrate our perspective of the web of life to include the issue of human migration.

Our attention turned to the human presence in the *Matusagarati* with the arrival of two women from Columbia and a man from Ghana at the Mission. They had come to document the fate of five migrants from Ghana who had hoped to reach the United States. The five migrants made it to Brazil, then on to Columbia. In Columbia, they entered the jungle and began the frightening journey into Panama through the *Matusagarati*. Tragically, in a place on the river not far from the Mission,

they lost their lives. They are buried in a cemetery in the town of Santa Fe.

The three visitors were human rights workers: Abdullah Audi Salisu from Ghana, who represented the families of the five lost men, and Ana Milena Garzoa and Yolanda Chois Rivera from Columbia, who came to Darien to document what had happened.

Yolanda had traveled to Darien before to document what had happened. Then, taking some stones from Darien, she went to Ghana, in search of the families of the five, wishing to comfort them by giving them something from the far-off burial site of their loved ones. She spoke eloquently of her conviction of the deep human need we share to stretch out our hands to those who mourn and long for warmth and a touch of humanity. While in Ghana, she met Abdullah, who came to Darien to place five stones on the graves, in remembrance of the five tenets of Islam, the faith of the men now buried in a Christian cemetery.

Ana, a fellow human rights worker from Columbia, addressed us with passion concerning the plight of migrants around the world who are either forced to flee their homelands or compelled by the simple desire to improve their lives, only to face closed borders in Asia and Europe. Their last hope is the long, perilous journey to the United States. There are no statistics available regarding how many migrants survive the journey and arrive finally in the U.S. and how many perish on the way.

Following this moving presentation, we were left with one more hike through the forest and a final view of a tributary of the river that claimed the migrants. As we met this last challenge, the impact of the story of the Ghanaians was with us; along with questions about the human civilization we are creating and our immense need to respect the web of life. The application of the retreat experience is ongoing in interlocking ways: In theological thoughts and questions raised, in the need to know the Earth where we live, and in the social and political actions we take within our lifestyles. §

**Faith in action:** Follow the Web of Life retreat held in June in a series of online blogs, videos, and photo galleries at <http://globalsistersreport.org/series/web-life>.

Watch a two-minute video about the retreat at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdgwYR\\_2VDY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdgwYR_2VDY).



## Brazil and Bolivia: Indigenous and land rights

*New policies in both Brazil and Bolivia have the potential to negatively impact indigenous communities, especially communities in isolation, and contribute to climate change and biodiversity loss.*

In July and August, both Brazil and Bolivia's presidents, Michel Temer and Evo Morales respectively, changed laws affecting environmental protections and indigenous land rights. While coming from different political orientations, both leaders pushed for these policies for their own personal political and electoral gains.

On July 19 in Brazil, President Temer accepted the Attorney General's recommendation that only communities physically present on their land since 1988, when the new constitution went into effect, would have their territories recognized (referred to as *marco temporal*). This deadline is controversial. The new constitution was established just three years after 21 years of dictatorship. Indigenous peoples were violently forced from their land during the dictatorship and many were not physically present in their territory when the new constitution went into force. Because the constitution does not say that indigenous land recognition starts in 1988, many critics say this new policy is unconstitutional. The Brazilian Supreme Court is scheduled to hear a case soon which may address this.

This new policy could lead to a reassessment of more than 700 cases and the dismissal of 90 percent of ongoing indigenous territory land claims. It could also prevent indigenous communities from expanding their currently recognized indigenous territories to include land grabbed by the dictatorship years ago.

When indigenous and pastoral leaders from the Amazon region came to Washington D.C. with the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM) in March, Jaminawa leader Rosildo da Silva spoke about other indigenous groups near the Jaminawa territory who were still in the process of having their land rights recognized and not yet afforded the right to free prior and informed consultation on new development projects.

The Mongabay Times, a non-profit online news source reporting on conservation and environmental science, has reported on a "storm" of public protests since the July 19 announcement and other actions President Temer has taken in indigenous territories without indigenous consent: the approval of construction of "strategic" public works, such as dams and roads; a new bill authorizing the opening up 1,347 square miles of the Jamanxim National Forest in the Amazon to logging, ranching, farming and mining; and, on August 23, the opening of the National Reserve of Copper and its As-

sociates (RENCA) – a territory the size of Denmark – to mining operations for copper, gold, diamonds, and other minerals.

RENCA contains nine protected areas, including three with full protection. It encompasses the Waãpi and Rio Paru D'Este indigenous territories. Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, along with the Catholic Bishops conference of Brazil and the Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM), strongly denounced the opening of the reserve and criticize the government for only consulting mining officials and not considering the irreparable loss of biodiversity and harm to traditional peoples in the area. On August 30, a federal judge agreed and blocked the government's plan.

In May, a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission into fraudulent titling of indigenous lands recommended that church leaders, anthropologists, and others supporting the rights of indigenous people be investigated.

The Temer administration promotes anti-indigenous and anti-environmental actions to earn the support of *ruralistas*, rural politicians and landowners who hope to expand agrarian activities in the Amazon. President Temer needed their support to narrowly defeat corruption charges in a vote in Congress on August 2. He will continue to need their support to strengthen his embattled re-election bid.

One hopeful development is the Brazilian Supreme Court's recent ruling in favor of indigenous communities and rejection of some parts of the *marco temporal* in a legal action by the state of Matto Grosso against the federal government. The state was seeking payment for land which the federal government took from the state and returned to indigenous communities. In two separate rulings, the Supreme Court ruled that overwhelming evidence demonstrates that the lands were traditional indigenous territories and that any other claim to rights or compensation by government officials is null. This case is a victory for the Nambiquara and Parecis people.

A third case, involving the state of Rio Grande do Sul, will likely be decided in September. If the court rules in favor of indigenous communities again, it will validate the courts as important checks on this controversial *marco temporal* policy.

In Bolivia, six years after massive protests stopped plans for a proposed highway through the TIPNIS, Bolivian President Evo Morales has enacted a new law – which the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party

shepherded through Congress – to strike down protections for the Isiboro Secure Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS) and open it up to “economic activities.” Bolivia established the Jamaica-sized park in 1965 and designated areas of it as indigenous territory for the Moxeños, Yurakarés and Chimanés indigenous people in 1990.

The main vehicle for the economic activities is a highway through the TIPNIS to connect the Amazon and Andean regions from Cochabamba in the highlands to the lowland Beni department. Earth Rights International, an NGO providing legal counsel to the TIPNIS indigenous communities, says it is part of the Brazilian-led Initiative for the Regional Integration of South America, a vast network of 531 mega-projects including hydroelectric dams, highways, bridges, and electrical power systems.

When President Morales first approved construction of the highway in 2011, after already securing a contract with a Bolivian company to build it, he was met with a massive march and protest from the lowland Beni department to highland Cochabamba. After police violently oppressed the protest and injured nearly 70, President Morales reneged on the permit and put an “untouchable” status in place for the indigenous communities and rich biodiversity. Now, this status has been overturned and once again the TIPNIS is President Morales’ political football.

The Catholic Church has been a consistent advocate for TIPNIS and its communities. Both the Bolivian Catholic Bishops Conference and REPAM expressed their profound concern regarding the August legislation. Also, Caritas Bolivia and the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights conducted an independent study on the government’s 2011 consultation process which concluded that the process was not conducted freely, with prior notice and sufficient and transparent information, nor in good faith.

Bishop Eugenio Coter, REPAM Bolivia’s coordinator, told Catholic News Service, “Knowing that the TIPNIS indigenous communities have rejected the highway, the government is imposing itself over the will of the people who live in the territory.”

Once built, the highway will allow private companies and individuals to conduct ranching, logging, mining, and gas and oil exploitation. Already, French, Brazilian, and Spanish oil companies have project permits.

More importantly, it will open up the TIPNIS to additional coca cultivation. Not only will coca crops cause deforestation, they will also poison the land with pesticides. Already, the Administration has given nearby land to coca growers and the deforestation is noticeable.

On August 30, the Maryknoll Latin America Mission Center in Cochabamba hosted a public dialogue on the TIPNIS. A few weeks earlier, the Archdiocese of Cochabamba hosted a forum on Chinese investments in Latin America. Yale University says that the road would likely be a major transport route for moving Brazilian soybeans to Pacific ports for shipment to China.

Emily Achtenberg, a journalist for the North American Congress on Latin America, has reported that, while President Morales claims that opening up the TIPNIS will benefit indigenous people, critics say that only communities nearest the highway will benefit. Such promises made by the government to these communities in the past never materialized.

REPAM says that activities in the TIPNIS will lead to cultural losses for all the communities in the park. The road will pass right through the Chinam indigenous territory, home to a community that lives in voluntary isolation. The TIPNIS activities would result in an ethnocide and trample their right to self-determination.

The TIPNIS development is important as Bolivia approaches the 2019 elections. Achtenberg claims that the TIPNIS decision is a final break of the unity coalition that brought Morales to power. Coca growers and a growing highland indigenous small business class are key constituencies for Morales if he runs again in 2019. In 2016, he lost a constitutional referendum vote for a fourth term.

As reported in The Guardian, “Bolivia’s constitution only allows two consecutive terms in office. He had sought to raise it to three straight terms. While this next election would be for his fourth, the constitutional tribunal has ruled his first term in office does not count since Morales did not complete the full five-year term. This is because in 2009 the government changed the constitution to make Bolivia a plurinational state instead of a republic.”

MAS already declared Morales their 2019 candidate. It is still an open question whether or not he will win, which is why shoring up his base is so important. §



*Protester for protecting the TIPNIS in 2012, by Daniel Vera/ Flickr.*



## UN: Intergenerational dialogue

*Maryknoll Sister Elizabeth (Claris) Zwareva, who represents Maryknoll at the United Nations, reports on the latest efforts at the UN to incorporate intergenerational dialogue in efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.*

On August 1, the United Nations Department of Public Information Non-Governmental Organizations (DPI-NGO), in collaboration with the NGO-DPI executive committee co-organized “Intergenerational Dialogues on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).” Two years earlier, UN member states adopted seventeen SDGs to end poverty, protect the planet, and to ensure human rights and prosperity for all by 2030. The purpose of the six intergenerational dialogues was to raise awareness that although society has considered young people and older persons as beneficiaries of social development, they are also contributors to the agenda.

António Guterres, UN Secretary General, addressed the audience via video message in which he expressed appreciation of the contributions of civil society, and in a special way, the contributions of youth and elderly persons towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). He thanked the non-governmental organizations for their active collaboration with the United Nations bodies and their contribution towards the achievement of the SDGs.

Echoing the Secretary General’s message, other speakers urged young people and older persons to unite to build bridges that will facilitate dialogue, knowledge exchange, and effective solutions to current problems. The dialogues were the beginning of such an effort.

The talks were organized under the following titles: breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty; gender equality: opening the door to full inclusion; access to employment throughout life; sharing responsibility for the planet; intergenerational innovation; and healthy living: physical and mental wellness.

Real life stories highlighted the importance of intergenerational collaboration in efforts to achieve the

SDGs. A young immigrant woman shared how her life was changed when she was given a violin that was donated by Joseph Feingold, an immigrant and a Holocaust survivor. Joseph and Briana, donor and recipient, stood side-by-side at the podium showing how their stories converged in Joe’s violin (<http://www.joesviolin.com/>). The violin was the bond that united the elderly man, who

had kept the violin for its memories but no longer played, to this young woman whose life was just beginning and for whom the violin was the door out of a life that was falling to pieces.

The intergenerational dialogues showed how bonds established through a common cause have the potential to transcend race, ethnic background, gender, and age among many other aspects of life. Hope is born when the dreams of young persons are guided by the wisdom of older persons; a convergence of wisdom and innovation. As stated in the 2030 Agenda, “we can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty, just as we can also be the last generation to have a chance of saving the planet.” One of the speakers summed up the message of the Intergenerational Dialogues by saying, “When people have a common purpose, age doesn’t matter.” Our purpose

is to end poverty, to foster peace and intergenerational harmony as a means to fully harness the potential embodied in the young and the elderly as a means towards achieving sustainable development.

As Christians, we read in Scripture about Mary’s visitation to her cousin Elizabeth, two women from different generations who affirmed life and dignity as they each brought new life into the world. In the same way, the relationship of young and old offers society a path to converge wisdom with innovation and thus “peace and justice embracing” (Psalm 85).§





## Myanmar: Calling out abuse and impunity

*International news agencies have reported in recent weeks that thousands of people in Myanmar who identify as religious and ethnic minorities and face severe restrictions inside the mainly Buddhist country have fled to the border with Bangladesh to escape fighting between the military and armed members of minority groups, only to be turned back by the Bangladeshi border guards. Faith groups in the U.S. were scheduled to deliver the following letter to Congress in early September in an attempt to halt a provision in a current defense authorization bill that would increase U.S. military cooperation with the government of Myanmar.*

As leaders of diverse religious denominations, congregations, and faith-based organizations, we write to express our unified strong opposition to a provision in the Senate's current draft of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would increase U.S. military engagement with Burma [also known as Myanmar]. We urge you to co-sponsor a bipartisan amendment (SA 607) to strike this language.

Over the past year, the Burmese military has been implicated in egregious abuses in several regions of the country. According to the State Department's latest International Religious Freedom Report, following an attack on security forces that killed dozens in the northern Rakhine State, "the Burmese military and police forces conducted 'security operations' that suspended access to humanitarian aid, independent media, and human rights monitors over a broad area." Their violent operations displaced approximately 93,000 civilians, with about 70,000 fleeing to neighboring Bangladesh.

Based on interviews with those who fled, Human Rights Watch says that "Burmese security forces burned at least 1500 buildings in predominantly Rohingya areas, raped or sexually assaulted dozens of women, and committed extrajudicial executions." The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights found that crimes against the ethnic Rohingya community in northern Rakhine State "seem to have been widespread as well as systematic, indicating the very likely commission of crimes against humanity."

In March the UN High Commission of Human Rights launched a fact-finding mission to substantiate or disprove this allegation, but neither the government nor the Burmese military has cooperated. Their refusal puts Burma in league with Syria and North Korea—other

countries that deny the UN access.

Amnesty International found a similar pattern in the Army's targeting of other ethnic minorities in Burma's Northern Shan State, where the military stands accused of forcibly disappearing Kachin Baptist ministers who were witness to the military's bombing of a Catholic church. The ministers had led journalists to the scene of the damaged church in December 2016. The two Kachin Baptist ministers were last seen traveling towards the Byuha Gon military base. Despite repeated inquiries from representatives of the Kachin Baptist Convention to local government authorities, nothing has been heard of the Baptist ministers and the Government of Burma denies its military had anything to do with their disappearance.

According to the Trafficking in Persons report issued in 2017, "The military continued to subject civilians to forced labor.... Ethnic minority groups in Burma—particularly internally displaced Rohingya, Rakhine, Shan, and Kachin communities—continued to be at elevated risk of forced labor as a result of ongoing military incursions, and the government remained largely inactive on this longstanding issue."

Our shared commitment to faith and moral teachings commit us to support policies and practices that sustain our collective humanity and to speak out when our brothers and sisters are being oppressed. We do not believe that the record of abuse and impunity by the military in Burma over the past year merits closer U.S. support at this time.

We thank Senators Gardner, Markey and Cardin for their leadership on SA 607 and urge all Senators to support this amendment to strike an embrace of this military at this time. [For a complete list of signatories, email [ogc@maryknoll.org](mailto:ogc@maryknoll.org)]



*Rohingya Muslims, Myanmar, 2014, by European Commission DG ECHO/Flickr.*

## South Sudan: Urgent cries for peace

*Violent conflict in South Sudan has resulted in famine in several parts of the country and fueled the world's fastest growing refugee crisis. St. Mary's Cathedral in Wau, South Sudan's second largest city, has become a sanctuary for thousands of people in need of shelter from the ongoing civil war, but with fighting close by, help is scarce and food in short supply.*

As the civil war in South Sudan approaches the end of its fourth year, many thousands of desperate people in the northwestern region of the country have been forced to flee their homes and are now living in a UN protected area, while others – several thousand – have taken refuge in four church compounds, including St. Mary's Cathedral. Maryknoll Father Tom Tiscornia is in Wau, serving as chaplain for the Catholic Health Training Institute.

“Just this week the UN has again distributed some food items to those who are in the church grounds,” Father Tiscornia said in an email on August 29. “They had stopped for a while, hoping that people would return to their homes or go to the UN protected camp. Many of these people go out during the day but return at night for protection.”

According to Father Tiscornia, a large percentage of the people taking refuge in the church compounds are either children or elderly. Their future is extremely uncertain.

On August 15, Stephanie Glinski, a journalist based in South Sudan, reported for IRIN that more than 10,000 people are encamped at St. Mary's Cathedral. “The official UN camp on the other side of the city is the most congested protection of civilians site in the country – almost 40,000 people shelter on 200,000 square meters of land (roughly the area of 25 football/soccer pitches),” Glinski reported.

Civil war broke out in South Sudan in December 2013 after a political dispute between President Salva Kiir, a Dinka South Sudanese politician who has been president of South Sudan since its independence in 2011, and his then vice president Riek Machar led to fighting that has pitted mostly Dinka ethnic soldiers loyal to Kiir against Machar's Nuer ethnic group. The 2015 peace agreement to end the violence was again violated in July 2016 when the rival factions resumed fighting in the capital city of Juba, forcing Machar to flee into exile in South Africa, without that government's knowledge. From there, Machar continues to direct the rebel forces of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO), which is the largest armed group outside of the government.

At the same time, drought, driven in part by the El Niño weather pattern, has been exacerbated by the

fighting and has caused food shortages and subsequent spikes in food prices. Earlier this year the United Nations and the government of South Sudan declared a state of famine in several parts of the fledgling country. A formal famine declaration means people have already started dying of hunger.

This past May, President Kiir declared a unilateral ceasefire and launched a national dialogue committee. The move was seen as controversial, as it excluded Machar. It wasn't until the final days of August that Machar and other key opposition leaders were said to have “responded positively” when contacted by the committee leadership. The deputy chairperson of the committee told reporters on August 31 that they will continue to persuade the rebel leaders to join the dialogue or send representatives.

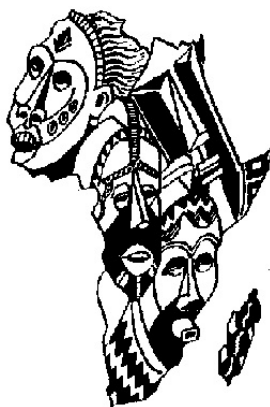
Meanwhile, the ongoing fighting has forced an estimated 4 million people to flee their homes. Uganda currently hosts more than a million South Sudanese refugees, while over 330,000 have fled to neighboring Ethiopia.

“I have quit searching for adjectives to describe the violence in South Sudan,”

Mel Duncan of Nonviolent Peaceforce wrote in an email on August 31, after visiting Wau. “Malnutrition and starvation surges amid the violence. I was with our team north of the city of Wau in an impromptu camp for internally displaced people when we encountered a newly arrived group of 680 people, mainly women and children, who were literally starving. A man showed me leaves in a pot that they had been eating.”

“Yet, amid the horror, inspiration pops up frequently,” Duncan said. “Where ever I went I heard people, especially women, starting to speak out against the war. We will stand with them. I am convinced that peace will come from the bottom up, not from the men meeting in hotels in Addis and Kampala.”§

**Faith in action:** Urge your members of Congress and the Trump administration to work with the international community to put increased pressure on the armed actors to halt the conflict, provide humanitarian access, and bring stability back to South Sudan. <http://bit.ly/Act4SouthSudan>



## Resources

- 1) **Celebrate the Seasons of Creation** from **September 1 – October 4**. Find prayer resources for the month of September at <http://seasonofcreation.org/>.
- 2) **Join “Days of Action against U.S. Blockade of Cuba,”** from **September 11 – 16** organized by the International Committee for Peace, Justice, and Dignity for the Peoples. <http://bit.ly/2wZ5KTK>
- 3) **Celebrate World Food Day on October 16 and Food Week of Action** from **October 15-22**. This is an opportunity to act for food justice and food sovereignty. Find educational and worship materials, suggestions for daily actions and solidarity events near you. <http://pcusa.org/foodweek>.
- 4) **Read the August issue of *Encounters*** which examines what we need in the NAFTA renegotiations: open, transparent, serving the common good. <http://bit.ly/2eMzB74>
- 5) **Read *A Land Full of God***, the latest edited volume from Churches of Middle East Peace Executive Director Rev. Dr. Mae Cannon. Available for purchase at <http://wipfandstock.com/a-land-full-of-god.html>
- 6) **Read “Does My Story Matter? Seeking Asylum at Mexico’s Southern Border,”** a 36-page report which highlights the hardships migrants from the Northern Triangle countries of Central America face as they seek safety in Mexico. Produced by the Latin America Working Group. <http://bit.ly/2vRNOp4>
- 7) **Watch short videos about NAFTA** produced by the Council of Canadians, with subtitles in English and French:  
NAFTA and ISDS: <https://canadians.org/nafta-isds>  
NAFTA and Water: <https://canadians.org/nafta-water>  
NAFTA and Energy: <https://canadians.org/nafta-energy>
- 8) **Watch “The Life for the Amazon,”** the first 30-minute episode of a documentary series produced by REPAM. <http://bit.ly/2xEOKiO>
- 9) **Watch “Peru: The judicial process of the Aymara-zo socio environmental conflict”** an 8-minute video about the struggle of the indigenous people of Puno, Peru, to secure their rights to water and a clean environment, with the help of Maryknoll Sister Patricia Ryan. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLKPDt99OqY>
- 10) **Download the powerpoint presentation** by climate scientist Alan Robock on the intersectionality of climate change and nuclear disarmament. <http://bit.ly/2vzar6j>
- 11) **Read “Defenders of the Earth: Global killing of land and environmental defenders in 2016,”** the 60-page report by Global Witness that documents the murder of more than 200 land and environmental defenders in 2016 – the deadliest year on record. <http://bit.ly/2vyPLv8>
- 12) **Apply for a free online course on civil resistance.** Rutgers and the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC) are now accepting applications for the moderated online course, "People Power: The Study of Strategic Nonviolent Resistance." The course comes with optional graduate credits offered by the Graduate School of Rutgers University. The online course will take place from **September 27 – November 10. Application deadline: September 17, 2017.** Learn more and apply at <http://bit.ly/2wZeSHP>
- 13) **Find links to seven games for raising cultural, political, and economic awareness and action** organized by the TESA Collective – The Toolbox for Education and Social Action. Some of the games are free and available online <http://bit.ly/2imCCPN>
- 14) **Find a screening of “The Nuns, the Priests, and the Bomb,”** a new documentary by Helen Young about five peace activists, including two Catholic women religious and the late Father Bill “Bix” Bichsel, as they practice creative, active nonviolence against nuclear weapons. Watch the trailer: <https://vimeo.com/229424880> and follow the Facebook page: <http://bit.ly/2wZtuqI>
- 15) **Call to Prayer and Action: U.S. and North Korea.** Find links to prayer, action, and articles about the escalating tensions between the United States and North Korea. <http://bit.ly/2eN3BQn>