



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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Brazil: Study released on 30 years of land conflicts

The Brazilian Catholic Church's Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) recently released a study of 30 years of conflicts in Brazil over access to land, water and worker rights. It found an overall decrease in clashes over the past 10 years due to decreasing poverty rates thanks to an increased minimum wage and other programs like the Bolsa Familia that provide support to low income families. Despite this good news, the study also notes that Brazil, which holds 12 percent of the world's fresh water, has seen a growth in the number of conflicts over water, especially in urban areas. Unfortunately, a number of factors indicate that this trend is likely to continue in coming years.

Conflicts over land are nothing new to Brazil. Some emblematic cases in history are Canudos (1896-1897) in the northeast and Contestado (1912-1916) in the south. Little information is available about conflicts during the military dictatorship (1964-1985) due to the repression against journalists, though anecdotal evidence suggests an intensification of conflicts in the Amazon region due to the dictatorship's push for more resource exploitation there, as well as an increase in the center-west region with farmers from other areas establishing large plantations to take part in the dramatic increase in swine and soy production there.

Luckily, since 1985, the CPT has recorded increasingly detailed information about land conflicts around the country. The majority of the 28,805 conflicts documented over the last 30 years have taken place in the north and northeast regions where almost two-thirds of violent struggles occurred, though only 35 percent of the population lives there.

The study classifies three sources of conflict: access to land, access to water and slave or near-slave labor. Large "development" projects like mining and hydroelectric dams are significant sources of conflict; speculation by financial entities, which buy land not to use, but rather to hold and wait to sell for a higher price, is also portrayed as fueling the conflicts.

Role of mining

Mining has become increasingly important for the economy. Between 2001 and 2011, the study notes, Brazilian mining increased 550 percent and mineral exports

as a portion of total exports increased from seven to 14.5 percent. Unfortunately, mines often create conflicts in all three areas highlighted by the study: over land (when families are displaced), over water (when mines pollute or exhaust rivers and other community water sources), and over worker rights (when workers are exploited, leaving them heavily in debt and restricting their ability to travel freely.)

The study does not mention that many of the large hydroelectric dam projects that create land conflicts are being built to supply the massive amounts of energy required by mines to extract and process steel, copper, zinc, aluminum, gold and other minerals. The CPT identifies steel and gold as the minerals whose extraction cause the most conflicts, being responsible for 16.2 percent and 19 percent of the conflicts analyzed, respectively.

Though prices for most minerals have fallen recently, the study discusses two paradoxes that indicate a likely increase in mining in coming years: The first is "the contradiction within many nation states: they stimulate activities that concentrate income and create social inequalities [like mining], collect more [in taxes] and, with that income, compensate the people who are harmed by those same activities." The second paradox is seen in the actions of major mining companies around the world: "[D]uring times of crisis in mineral prices, they increase the rhythm and rates of extraction in order to crush competition from small and medium-sized mining companies and secure their position as an oligopoly in order to maximize profits before the price falls even further... This means that the crisis in mineral prices will not diminish conflicts and violations, on the contrary, they will increase."

Conflicts over water

The study defines three types of conflicts over water: private appropriation (usually when a landowner affects the flow of, or access to, rivers that others depend on); use and preservation (which often involves mining projects, agroindustry or others contaminating water sources); and dams built for energy (that create massive lakes displacing families, often indigenous).

Most families are being affected in states with large "development" projects like the Belo Monte series of dams that will affect almost 70,000 families or the



Grande Sertão Veredas landscape; used courtesy of Creative Commons licensing

massive industrial complex being built by the Atlantic Steel Company in Rio de Janeiro affecting more than 8,000 families.

A relatively new but rapidly growing source of conflicts identified by the study is water shortages in urban areas. In the state of São Paulo, at least 14 percent of cities are experiencing difficulties and are implementing rationing and/or fining households that increase their water usage. In February 2015, 142 cities in 11 states were rationing water; the situation is likely to worsen according to a study by the National Water Agency that predicts more than half of Brazilian municipalities could experience water shortages in 2015.

Though Brazil contains more than 12 percent of the world's fresh water, roughly 50 percent of that water is in the Amazon river basin, where only four percent of the population lives. As the World Resources Institute points out, "About 80 percent of Brazilians are concentrated in megacities along the east coast, like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, which rely on their own local river basins. Many of these cities are water stressed, due to their rapid growth and development." In addition to the rapid population growth, two other factors have exacerbated the problem: privatization of water providers and deforestation.

Seen by many as a solution to water shortages, privatizing water companies has brought some negative effects. With cities selling off their water companies to different corporations, "planning has ended up happening only at the municipal level, seeking isolated solutions as if the cities were islands," according to Vicente Andreu, director-president of the National Water Agency. "We need to find a way to integrate, to have more ample planning, preferably by water basins." Another problem experienced by many cities after privatizing their water providers was that the corporations reduced investments in infrastructure in order to pay large dividends to their investors.

Another important source of urban water problems is deforestation occurring in the Amazon and Cerrado region in the central-west of the country. Mounting evidence shows that forests in these regions "function as a giant water pump [that] lifts vast amounts of moisture up into the air, which then circulate west and south, falling as rain to irrigate Brazil's central and southern regions. Without these 'flying rivers,' the area accounting for 70 percent of South America's GNP could effectively become desert, according to Antonio Nobre, a scientist at Brazil's Center for Earth Systems Science. While Brazil was successful in dramatically reducing deforestation

(decreasing 70 percent from 2005 to 2014), recent data shows a surge in deforestation likely brought on by recent changes to the Forest Code that allow for new areas to be cut down.

Worker rights in Brazil

Slave labor has historically been more prominent in rural activities like agriculture and ranching, but for the first time, in 2013, more slaves were found in non-agricultural, urban activities, especially construction and clothes manufacturing. An added novelty is the increasing number of foreigners working in slave-like conditions, especially in the garment sector.

While the number of people discovered to be working in slave-like conditions has decreased in recent years (1,752 people were freed from these conditions in 2014, markedly less than the average of 2,495 people per year between 2011 and 2013), the study says this is not so much a result of fewer people working in these conditions, but a lack of interest on part of the government to investigate the problem.

In 2015, only 2,703 work auditors were dedicated to finding and freeing slaves, fewer than any other year. Some states have completely stopped investigating for slave labor due to a lack of funds and personnel. This is especially concerning, because while conflicts over land and water are very visible due to the protests and other activities by those affected, slave labor is an invisible problem that only comes to light through active investigations by the government.

Another factor making the identification of slaves more difficult is the increasing sophistication of corporate outsourcing of labor through the use of subcontractors. Of the 3,553 people freed from slavery in the 10 largest cases between 2010 and 2013, 3,000 (90 percent) were outsourced workers. The study posits, "[T]here are strong indications that outsourcing of workers and slave-like conditions don't only move side by side, but are intimately related." "The adoption of outsourcing by companies enhances the exploitation of labor capacity and reduces the likelihood of action of agents that could impose limits on this process."

Unfortunately the study points to a number of bills being considered by the increasingly conservative Brazilian Congress that will worsen the situation of workers. From weakening the definition of slave-like conditions to changing labor laws to facilitate outsourcing to no longer publishing the names of companies found guilty of using slave labor, a variety of bills have a chance of passing. §

Brazil: Digging deeper into corruption scandals

Over the past year, news from Brazil has been dominated by different corruption scandals, especially one involving the energy corporation Petrobras. Within Brazil, national news programs and newspapers dedicate extensive coverage to the scandals, which has contributed to growing anger toward President Dilma Rousseff and her affiliated Workers Party (PT). Millions of Brazilians are even calling for the military to intervene in what appears to be a corrupt government running out of control. But reality may be different than what is being reported.

The biggest scandals are the Mensalão (“Big monthly payment”) where high level members of the PT were found guilty of funneling money from public companies to members of Congress in exchange for voting with the Lula administration and the long-running Petrobras scandal, commonly called the Car Wash scandal, where executives of the semi-public corporation are accused of inflating contracts to divert the extra money into campaign funds of various political parties. The Mensalão scandal resulted in the imprisonment of a number of leaders of the PT, including key advisors of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. The Petrobras scandal currently is being investigated, with the treasurer of the PT already indicted and others likely to be brought to trial.

Ironically, these wrongdoings are coming to light in large part due to a series of important measures taken by Rousseff and former president Lula (also of the PT) to investigate and prosecute corruption. Major media outlets in Brazil, meanwhile, emphasize the involvement of members of the PT while ignoring the involvement of opposition parties and other larger scandals.

Anti-corruption initiatives

The Institute Alvorada, a collective of government workers from various departments, explains why no administrations have taken on the issue of corruption, even though it has long been widely recognized as a serious problem.

“In Brazil, for centuries, the government did not have the necessary political will to tackle the problem because to investigate and bring to light cases of cor-

ruption often causes political crises, increasing society’s perception that [it] is growing, even when what happens is just the opposite.”

This is clearly happening today as, while the PT is described as a hopelessly dishonest party in most media outlets, especially social media, it has actually taken a number of very significant measures to rein in corruption that are having positive, concrete effects.

Soon after taking office, former President Lula created the General Controller of the Union (CGU in



Lula passes presidential sash to Dilma, January 2011; photo by Fabio Rodrigues Pozzebom/ABr (Agência Brasil), via Wikimedia Commons

Portuguese), a cabinet-level entity responsible for combating and preventing corruption. The CGU has carried out surprise audits of close to 40 percent of municipal governments as well as auditing all major federal programs like the Bolsa Familia, a subsidy for low-income families, and spending for the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics. In the first 10 years of operation, 4,577 federal workers were fired, including high-level administrators. All the names of those expelled are listed on the

CGU’s website as well as the full content of the different audits. The site also contains a list of all companies that have been suspended from receiving government contracts due to illegal activities. Finally, the CGU created an extensive website that shows federal government spending to an impressive level of detail compared to most countries with similar sites. The website is considered by the United Nations to be one of the five best anti-corruption measures in the world.

The Lula government granted more autonomy to the federal police to root out corruption. During the last three years of Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s presidency (January 1995-January 2003), the federal police carried out a total of only 20 special operations against corruption, while during the Lula and Rousseff administrations they have averaged close to 200 each year. In 2013 alone they enacted 296 special operations. More than 2,393 government workers have been imprisoned as a result.

The Attorney General is the only person who can accuse the president, ministers or members of Congress of a crime. As the president can appoint anyone s/he chooses, regardless of his or her qualifications, most

have traditionally appointed a friend they could trust not to investigate them or their party. Cardoso, for example, appointed Geraldo Brindeiro, a personal friend and cousin of then-Vice President Marco Maciel. Brindeiro came to be called the “Drawer-in-chief” for his tendency to put criminal investigations of politicians in the drawer and never look at them again. Brindeiro followed up on only 60 of the 626 criminal investigations that were referred to his office. The Lula administration pushed for changes long demanded by police and judicial organizations, so that now, the Attorney General must come from the ranks of state and/or federal police systems and have appropriate qualifications and experience.

In 2011, President Rousseff signed the Law of Access to Information, a project proposed to Congress by Lula in 2009. Similar to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) in the U.S., the law opens all government information to the public. The law has been fruitful in that since May 2012, almost 165,000 requests for information were sent to the federal government with 98 percent receiving responses within an average of 13 days. This is much different than the FOIA experience in the U.S., where responses can take months or even years.

Oppositional media

Despite these significant advances in rooting out corruption, to read any newspaper, to watch television news or to browse Brazilian social media sites, it would appear that the PT is the most corrupt political party in Brazilian history. There is minimal reporting about the advances against corruption, and a strong emphasis on incriminating stories against the government.

In a meeting of Fecomercio, the federation of commercial businesses, Maria Judith Brito, president of the National Newspaper Association and executive of the *Folha de São Paulo*, the country’s second largest newspaper, said, “[T]he media are, in fact, doing the opposition position of this country, as the opposition is deeply weakened.” And there are ample signs of this bias in their reporting.

Articles about the Petrobras scandal always emphasize the role of the PT and allied parties, ignoring the participation of opposition parties. For example, a front-page article in the *Folha de São Paulo* is titled “Donations of those investigated in the Car Wash [scandal] prioritize PP, PMDB, PT and opposition.” Yet examining the data in that same article shows that opposition parties actually received more money than those allied with the government. And it is only in the last of 17 paragraphs that parties of the opposition are even briefly mentioned.

A leaked memo sent to directors for all Globo television stations, by far the largest and most influential network in the country, shows the planned bias in their reporting on the Petrobras scandal. The memo urged the directors to “review your video tapes with attention! Let’s not broadcast any mention of Fernando Henrique,” referring to testimony that day from a witness saying that bribes were received during the Cardoso administration as well.

Even Reuters, thought by many to be less ideological and more neutral in its reporting, published a piece on the scandal without removing a somewhat incriminating note from the reporter to the editor. At the end of a paragraph referring to this same testimony that bribes were made before the Lula administration, the reporter wrote in parentheses “(we can remove this if you think that’s better).” Reuters later apologized for publishing the article without removing the internal note, but made no mention of, or apology for, the bias that the note implied.

As the Petrobras scandal came to light, its stock price began to fall and Brazilian media focused heavily on this fact, though they failed to report that the stock prices of all publicly traded oil companies were plummeting due to the commodity’s falling price. The same media has failed to focus on the rapid rebound in the price of Petrobras’ stock since March, recovering more rapidly than its competitors.

A study from the University of Rio de Janeiro showed that during the 2014 presidential election season, the National Journal (TV Globo’s national news program) aired 82 minutes of negative reporting on President Rousseff, with only three minutes of positive reporting. Meanwhile, other candidates received fairly balanced reporting.

Finally, while Brazilian media have focused on the Petrobras scandal, they have practically ignored much larger scandals in terms of their effect on government coffers. Two recent tax evasion scandals are Zealots, in which corporations (including Ford, Santander and BankBoston) allegedly paid government officials to evade taxes and the recent release of information about 8,667 secret bank accounts held by Brazilians in Switzerland.

The losses to government coffers from tax evasion schemes like this are estimated to be from seven to 25 times larger than those lost due to corruption. While Brazil is ranked as the 69th most corrupt country in the world by Transparency International, the International Tax Justice Network reports that only Russia loses more money from tax evasion than Brazil. §

Mexico: Ending drug violence from bottom up

The following article was written by Marek Cabrera, an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

This April 15 was the fourth anniversary of a very peculiar, and largely unnoticed, “citizen uprising” in Cherán, a small indigenous town of 20,000 residents in the state of Michoacán, México, that has dramatically reduced its previously widespread drug trafficking-related violence. For many years, the local drug cartel, the Knights Templar, had extorted, tortured, disappeared and/or killed residents of Cherán, all with the cooperation of corrupt local and regional authorities who also benefited both from the drug business and from illegal logging in the nearby forests. The transformative experience in this small town is not only relevant because of the lessons it can teach communities that still suffer similar levels of violence in other parts of Mexico and Central America. It also demonstrates an important and powerful principle that is seldom discussed about reducing violence in the region: direct local participation of residents in their own community’s safety. “Guarda Bosques” (“Forest Keepers”), a 2013 documentary by a Mexican American journalist based in Cherán, outlines this story in the words of the people who participated in those events. (The filmmaker requests anonymity due to ongoing death threats.)

In April 2011, women started it all with a bold act of protest against the cartel’s illegal logging in areas the community reveres. That morning they used their own bodies and their children to attempt to stop the large trucks of the illegal loggers as they drove through town on their way to the forest. When the loggers tried to run over them, the entire community rose up and burned the cartel’s trucks. The police tried to protect the loggers, which further enraged and mobilized the community. The corrupt political authorities fled, as did the police and the Knights Templar, the drug cartel.

In order to prevent the return of the purveyors of violence, the community residents closed all the access points into the town by setting up bonfires. A group of volunteers quickly formed *rondas comunales*, a traditional form of self-defense, to protect the town’s residents, the forest and their source of water. After working to guarantee a level of local citizen security, the community was able to effectively organize further by relying on their own indigenous concepts of communal life and governance.

The first step they took was to call a general assembly to select a council of elders to oversee the town’s affairs, especially that of security. According to “Guarda Bosques,” that was only the beginning of a much more successful period of community activism that has turned Cherán into an example of participatory resistance, organization and, most importantly, provided a level of peace the residents had not enjoyed in a long time.

In the film a young indigenous woman tells of her experience walking home every night after work and feeling safe for the first time knowing that in every corner there will be a small bonfire with members of the *rondas comunales*, who are her own neighbors. The bonfires have become a powerful symbol of participatory security where residents organize themselves to identify collectively the needs of their specific neighborhoods. The results have been nothing short of stunning. One of the elders in the film makes an important distinction: “The police [is] what the state imposes on us from outside, but the *rondas comunales* is what emerges from the community itself.”

The documentary also makes clear that after the drug trafficking-related violence ended and the community began organizing itself politically by relying on their own indigenous traditions and customs – no po-



April 2014: A girl participates in a march commemorating the anniversary of the Cherán uprising; photo by Kinoluiggi, used courtesy of Creative Commons licensing.

litical parties, most importantly – a renewed form of participatory development emerged. The first communal, non-commercial radio station, Radio Fogata (Radio Bonfire), was inaugurated, operated by local youth, men and women. In 2015 they have been able to start their own television station. A young indigenous man in the film notes that these means of communication are their “new weapons” and that they are the opposite of guns in that they do not seek to destroy, but rather to build through the power of ideas.

Some forms of indigenous culture, including language and dances, which in the past had been suppressed by political and religious authorities, are flourishing again. The former Palacio Municipal de Cherán (Municipal Palace) is now a Casa Comunal, a name much more representative of their form of self-governance. Long-held macho attitudes are being questioned, and the institutions on which they rested, being eroded. The young openly form groups around common interests without being harassed, recruited or killed by the cartels. As the director of the film said during a recent presentation at American University: Once you remove the violence of the corrupt Mexican state from the communities, a whole new dynamic of peaceful social relations

can emerge when the residents themselves participate in their self-governance and self-defense.

Four years after the uprising, Cherán continues to be an example to other communities in Mexico that seek to rid themselves of the drug cartels who operate there, in many instances, from within the government. Many communities have managed to achieve some level of control of the violence, but much more is needed. The disappearance of the 43 indigenous students in Ayotzinapa at the hands of drug cartels and the local authorities is a powerful reminder of the corrupt nature of the Mexican government, and the risks that communities like Cherán still face at their hands. For now, this community is enjoying significant citizen security and participatory development, and the national government has recognized their general council of community elders as the legitimate authorities. It is important, however to remain vigilant as there are powerful voices in the government calling for the violent takeover of this town.

Watch the 45-minute documentary (in Spanish with English subtitles) on YouTube; search for “Guarda Bosques.” Learn more through <http://www.elenemigo-comun.net/>, an English-language news site based in Cherán. §

Guatemala: The violence and the vision

Ann Braudis, MM, recently visited Guatemala in Central America, for the main purpose of helping out for a few weeks at the Maryknoll Sisters Contemplative Community in the village of Lemoa, Department of El Quiché, among the Quiché Mayans. This simple intention soon became a threshold leading to a deeply felt connection to the people of Guatemala in their long struggle for social justice and human rights. This article relates something of this struggle during recent decades: it reflects on where the majority of indigenous and poor people find themselves today.

The violence

On February 21, Julia Esquivel, poet and eloquent witness to the suffering of the oppressed people of Guatemala, was the guest speaker for the local Maryknoll Affiliate Chapter, gathered at the Maryknoll Society Residence in Guatemala City. All Maryknollers and friends of Maryknoll were welcome at this meeting.

Esquivel shared the large strokes of her faith journey as a Presbyterian lay woman, starting as a young observer of injustice and finally recognizing her personal call in the image of Jesus pouring out his life for the

sake of others. The path of her own self-emptying has been through the public testimony of her poetry which has become the voice of sister and brother Guatemalans denied justice and human dignity. As a consequence, she endured long years of harassment and forced exile from her beloved homeland.

Beyond the account of her personal journey, she summarized the political events of the 1950s. At that time, Guatemala had a democratically elected government committed to civil and human rights, and to economic reform rooted in fairness. Unfortunately, in Washington D.C., within the Eisenhower administration, these measures were interpreted as communist inspired. It was feared that if the reforms being enacted were successful, they would likely impact other Central American states, weakening U.S. hegemony in the area. Clearly, the interests and influence of U.S. companies located in Central America would be affected. The United Fruit Company, which had major advocates in Washington, was chief among these companies. The upshot of this was a U.S.-supported military coup overthrowing the elected government and backing a military regime favorable to U.S. interests. Thus began almost 40 years of brutal civil war

with extensive military assistance, training and advice furnished by the U.S. until 1977, when human rights abuses could be ignored no longer.

Lastly, Esquivel linked what happened in the past to present day violence, corruption and the ongoing concentration of wealth in the hands of a fraction of the population. She pointed to the continued failure to recognize the rights of the indigenous people and the lack of economic opportunity for poor people in general. She drew attention to the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and the [March 2015] visit of U.S. Vice President Joe Biden who unveiled a new aid package related to curtailing the migration of undocumented people to the U.S. She asked these difficult questions: Whose interests are being served and who will profit from this agreement and this package? (See “Biden’s solution to Central American migration overlooks CAFTA damage” by Jeff Abbot, Truthout, March 18, 2015)

Lemoa is a village three hours northwest of Guatemala City. It is home to Quiche Mayans and situated on a high ridge in the Sierra Madre Mountains. It lies just above a small lake called Mirror Waters. It is because of the clear lake waters that the Mayans settled in this place.

The rooms occupied by the sisters for their living quarters are part of a catechetical center attached to the parish church. The exterior walls of these rooms are white-washed. This is good but does not cover up entirely a certain darkness caused by the fact that this same space was used as a torture center against the local people during the violence. What happened there is unspeakable. Many of the adult population of Lemoa and the entire mountain region carry terrible memories of the atrocities committed against them and their loved ones. To hear their stories is to feel broken hearted. (See: “The Echo of the Pain of the Many,” Armadillo Productions.)

At the edge of the village a cemetery holds the remains of 27 women and men massacred in 1981. Their tortured bodies were tossed into a gully where they remained for 10 years before being discovered. In this place of sorrow it is hard to integrate feelings of sadness and outrage with a sense of hope that the lives of these martyred men and women may issue forth in a better humanity.

One afternoon, Diego Gonzalez Osorio, a man from a nearby community visited the Sisters. His story is shattering. Age 53 now, he was 17 when his village was destroyed. Men, women, and children were savagely murdered. Unborn babies were ripped from their mothers’ wombs. All possessions – a typewriter here, a sewing machine there – were destroyed. All the houses

and the school were burned to the ground. Some people survived by fleeing into the mountains where they nearly starved.

Referring to the communist threat in Central America, politicians like to speak of the domino effect, but it is in the indigenous villages that the domino effect was truly felt: The violence left no opportunity for the youth to go to school, nor were there any jobs to be found. There was no health care. People were left in tatters, in shock and depression. In spite of the 1996 Peace Accords, to this day there is no restitution for losses sustained due to the official scorched earth policy. The survivors live in hovels and their teenage children dream of escaping to the United States and know the coyotes who will ferry them through Mexico to the U.S. border for a price.

In Diego’s case, he recently sent his daughter to Guatemala City to study at the university; he sent her equipped with a computer. Then, two men on a motorcycle passing her on the street shot her in the leg and grabbed her computer.

According to Diego, there are three kinds of violence in Guatemala today:

- Criminal violence, which fills the capital
- Economic violence, suffered by the indigenous people because food and other necessities are priced beyond their buying capacity
- Drug violence, which has invaded the whole country

For him, the violence of the war years never ended. It merely changed form.

The vision

Finally, a word about the Maryknoll Sisters Contemplative Community in Lemoa. Unquestionably, the sisters are intellectuals as well as contemplatives. Daily, through study, they strive to deepen their understanding of what it means to midwife a new interior platform as a basis for shaping human aspirations and for rewiring the human brain to act in alignment with its understandings. This is work that demands immense discipline and a continuous, unflinching resolve to attend to prayer while dwelling in and responding to a very real world of poverty and want. Their driver is Christ-consciousness. From their remote corner of the planet, through the internet, they connect with others around the world who are assuming personal responsibility for evolving a new way of seeing and acting; a way that is commensurate with a vision of humanity that corresponds to the potential to become one earth community in justice and in peace. Their small community is actually a global community. Lastly and above all, in them love is evident; simple human warmth characterizes them. §

Africa: Democratic elections

In 2015, 14 African nations will hold presidential and legislative elections; by the end of 2016, 25 countries will have held elections. From Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Guinea and the Central African Republic (CAR) in the west to Tanzania, South Sudan, Sudan, Somaliland (an autonomous region of Somalia) and Ethiopia in the east, to Zambia and Lesotho in southern Africa, millions of voters will trek to the polls.

The context of each election varies. For nations like Tanzania and Zambia, peaceful democratic transitions have become the norm. Other countries like Sudan and CAR will attempt to hold elections in situations of conflict and regional or ethnic tensions. One – South Sudan – has passed a constitutional amendment bill that extends President Salva Kiir's mandate in office and the mandate of the current members of parliament for three more years. To the north in the Republic of the Sudan, the time for elections was extended for a full day due to low voter turnout, probably caused by a boycott of the election by opposition parties.

On March 28-29 Nigeria held its fifth quadrennial election since the end of military rule in 1999. Former military dictator Muhammadu Buhari defeated incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan by 2.5 million votes and a mostly peaceful transition of power came about when Jonathan called Buhari to concede the election. This positive development runs counter to the trend in a few central African countries where current presidents are attempting to extend presidential term limits. While some countries – Namibia, Ghana and Mozambique – are strong adherents of term limits, others like Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are proposing ways to extend term limits by finding supposed loopholes in the constitution (Burundi) or by proposing actual changes in the election laws (DRC).

The Catholic bishops of the DRC and many civil society groups opposed such election law amendments and were supported in their efforts by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. In late 2014 Bishop Richard Pates, chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, wrote to the U.S. State Department urging them to oppose any changes to the constitution by the DRC's current administration.

In Burundi, the Catholic bishops spoke out and opposed President Pierre Nkurunziza's interpretation of the constitution as allowing him to run for a third term. In their second pastoral letter ahead of the elections, the bishops stated: "The president elected by the people of

Burundi must not exceed the two terms of five years stated in the Constitution."

According to the International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES), Burundi's elections will be held amid a political climate marked by a sense of polarization that has endured since the local election in 2010, when the ruling National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) won by a wide margin. The situation has since deteriorated, as political space has shrunk, opposition parties have become marginalized, and the nation's previously active press and civil society organizations have suffered from increasing government interference in, or prohibitions of, their activities. Tensions are being further exacerbated, however, by President Nkurunziza's bid to run for a third term, and reports that party youth have received combat training are raising fears that incidents of electoral violence will feature prominently in the 2015 electoral cycle.

According to recent testimony before the U.S. Congress by IFES's Bill Sweeney, "Nearly 87 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's eligible population is registered to vote; over 45 million ballots were cast in the region in 2014 alone, and a recent Afrobarometer publication based on more than 51,000 face-to-face interviews in 34 countries reveals that the demand for democracy in Africa exceeds supply." Sweeney also testified that "in 2015 alone some 311 million people in Africa are registered to vote in upcoming presidential, parliamentary and local government elections and referenda."

Recent Afrobarometer surveys of 16 African countries reveal some important findings about how African peoples view the elusive concept of democracy. First, the commitment to democratic rule is growing. When asked what kind of government they prefer, most Africans surveyed (71 percent) opt for democracy over other kinds of political regimes. However, only 43 percent of those surveyed think that their country is a democracy. Third, most surveyed believe that democracy is more consolidated in East Africa and least advanced in North Africa. As the election in Nigeria seems to demonstrate, the demand for democracy is greatest in West Africa.

Like other places in the world, elections in Africa can serve many ends. Some can legitimize autocrats like Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe. Others can give respectability to rulers who came to power illegally or violently. Still others can and are increasingly becoming peaceful transitions of governance as well as pathways to help countries emerge from situations of internal conflict. §

Angola: Detained activists must be freed

In mid-March, Amnesty International released the following statement on the situation of human rights activists in Angola. Maryknollers in Namibia have interacted with Angolan civil society activists, one of whom, just prior to speaking with Maryknollers in 2014, was attacked and beaten by agents of the Angolan government.

From Amnesty International: The Angolan authorities must immediately and unconditionally release two human rights defenders who were detained solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in the country's Cabinda region, five organizations including Amnesty International said [on March 18].

Jose Marcos Mavungo was arrested on 14 March 2015 – the day of the planned protest – and charged with sedition on 16 March 2015. Another human rights defender, Arao Bula Tempo, was also arrested and detained on unknown charges.

“These arbitrary detentions are the latest disturbing example of growing repression of dissenting voices, peaceful protest and freedom of expression in Angola, particularly in the province of Cabinda,” said Muleya Mwananyanda, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Southern Africa.

“We believe there is no basis for the arrest of the human rights defenders or the sedition charges brought against one of the activists. This makes a mockery of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression.”

Amnesty International was joined by the Southern Africa Litigation Centre, Lawyers for Human Rights, SADC Lawyers Association and the International Commission of Jurists in calling for the release of all those unlawfully detained.

Jose Marcos Mavungo was arrested at a Church compound as he was going to his regular morning mass. The governor of Cabinda had banned his planned protest for “representing lack of honour and consideration owed to people and government institutions.”

Arao Bula Tempo, a human rights lawyer and the president of the provincial Council of the Angolan Bar

Association in Cabinda, was arrested by security forces in Cabinda near the border with Congo Brazzaville.

A week earlier, on 6 March 2015, he had delivered a speech stressing the need for the independence of lawyers in Cabinda and other parts of Angola.

“The Angolan authorities must stop responding to peaceful dissent with repression. People should be allowed to express themselves freely and without fear of reprisals. Charging human rights defenders with sedition because of criticising the government is in clear violation of freedom of expression,” said Muluka Miti-Drummond, Regional Advocacy Director for the Southern Africa Litigation Centre.

Jacob van Garderen, Lawyers for Human Rights National Director for South Africa, added: “The rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are protected under international human rights law. Angola has voluntarily ratified international treaties agreeing to respect and protect fundamental human rights and it should honour its commitment.”

Arnold Tsunga, International Commission of Jurists Director for the Africa Regional Program, said: “Angola's constitution requires that people are allowed to exercise their right to freedom of expression. It is scandalous that people are being put behind bars merely for voicing their opinions.”



José Marcos Mavungo and Arão Bula Tempo

Background

Dissent is frequently dealt with repressively, and often violently, by the Angolan authorities. Amnesty International has documented how the freedom of expression and peaceful assembly have been unlawfully restricted in Angola in its report *Punishing Dissent: Suppression of Freedom of Association and Assembly in Angola* (Index AFR 12/004/2014)

Those who have challenged the government of President José Eduardo dos Santos have been subjected to extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture. [Although] freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are rights clearly enshrined in the country's constitution and in several international treaties that Angola has signed and ratified, violations to these rights continue to be occurring. §

Africa: Concerns about U.S. military policy

At its April 2015 meeting, in light of President Obama's June trip to East Africa, the Washington, D.C.-based Advocacy Network for Africa (ADNA), of which the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is a member, adopted a final draft of a statement on several important U.S./Africa policy issues. ADNA raises awareness about Africa among members of Congress and attempts to increase the flow of dependable and timely action-oriented information among advocacy groups in the U.S. Below is ADNA's stance on the militarization of U.S. policy towards Africa.

... While we support the quest for transnational shared security with and for all African peoples, we are opposed to the Western focus on building larger, more politically powerful, technologically-equipped, and expensive militaries in African countries. This reflects a policy based on a belief – and on a habit – that military solutions are the first step toward peace. Military responses to conflict and contestation are often counter-productive in the long term and result in gross violations of human rights and deaths of civilians.

The introduction of the philosophy and strategy of the Global War on Terror (or “overseas contingency operations”) into Africa with aggressive militarization has not and will not facilitate peace and will continue to contribute to human rights violations.

The policy of the “whole of government” approach to combine State Department, USAID, and Department of Defense (DOD) policy and planning is a mistake to the extent that it erases the important differences between traditional policy-making by the civilian arm of the executive branch (such as the Department of State and USAID) and the implementation of a security-focused military policy, driven by DOD. We are especially disturbed at the explosive growth of the DOD in policy assessment and policy-making, through the relative numbers of U.S. military personnel representing the U.S. in Africa, in the militarization of the programs of the Department of State and USAID, and in the apparent decline of the role, influence, and resources of the State Department and USAID.

In order to conduct U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) counterter-

rorism operations during the War on Terror, the U.S. has recruited African allies – Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti and Ethiopia in the war against Somalia's Al-Shabaab, and Niger and Burkina Faso in the war against Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) – leading the U.S. to not demand accountability and instead overlook the human rights violations of their partner countries, such as torture, arbitrary arrest, and restriction of freedom of expression. In addition, the U.S. has even been implicated in participating in unlawful activities, such as colluding with the governments of Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Somalia to maintain a secret detention program, all in the name of countering terrorism.

We are deeply troubled by these broad and hidden security engagements which are happening in dozens of African countries without any opportunity for public policy debate about the targets of the attacks, or the nature of their actions. Before continuing on this path there should be space for broader reflection on both the collateral civilian damage, the license to take action without public accountability, and the wisdom and effectiveness of a military suppression of dissidence.

We are especially concerned that the strategies of aerial attacks since 2007 in Somalia and potentially now in the rest of the Sahel Region – by C-130 Hercules gunships, attack helicopters, cruise missiles, and now by drones from the four bases in Africa and from Europe – can be a source of mounting collateral deaths of civilians and blowback in facilitating the recruitment of new militants. The impending permanent base near Seville, Spain, under the control of the U.S. Africa Command, is an additional worrying expansion of U.S. offensive security policy.

We advocate more U.S. support and resources for human rights, conflict resolution, and negotiation in Africa in order to develop long-term peace based on the often difficult agreements among different legitimate stakeholders, including the many varieties of Islamic and Islamist organizations across Africa. With this emphasis on conflict resolution, additional funds are needed for economic development activities in health, education, housing, and infrastructure as incentives for conflicting groups to come to the table and to begin to build cooperation across lines of conflict for the reconstruction of disrupted civil society. ... §

Slide from a 2007 official AFRICOM overview presentation.



Myanmar: Cardinal Bo's message

The following article was written by Maryknoll Affiliate Chris Smith, a Washington, D.C.-based writer.

Myanmar has seen rays of hope as it moves away from the military junta to a more inclusive, democratic system of government. In March 2015 the ruling government reached tentative cease fire agreements with numerous armed rebel groups. The reform process in the country has been gaining momentum since most international sanctions imposed by western countries were lifted in 2013.

A majority Buddhist country, its people have been plagued by ethnic violence that has focused on the Muslim minority, in particular the Rohingya people of the Rakhine state. The Rohingya population largely live in temporary camps lacking basic sanitation and related services and face insufficient employment opportunities while being hampered by travel restrictions.

Another significant issue in Myanmar is human trafficking. The U.S. State Department's annual country rankings of human trafficking were marked by an upgrade in 2012 when Myanmar's status at the bottom tier (of four categories) – which it held from 2007 through 2011 – improved to “Tier 2-Watch List.” The 2014 report noted that the government's written plan to address the problem would “constitute making significant efforts to meet the minimum standard for the elimination of trafficking.” The key, however, is ensuring that vigorous enforcement of the plan occurs, something that has been lacking to this point.

As the people of Myanmar grapple with the legacy of the military junta and international sanctions, they have found a strong ally in newly-appointed Cardinal Charles Bo (right). Previously archbishop of Yangon, Cardinal Bo was appointed by Pope Francis as Myanmar's first cardinal in December 2014. He serves 800,000 Catholics in a country of 51 million people. Pope Francis has made it a point to expand the Church leadership to countries that had previously lacked representation in the College of Cardinals.

In his Christmas homily, Cardinal Bo noted that 2014 marked the Church's jubilee year in Myanmar and proclaimed his central message as “Do not be afraid,” citing the Gospel of Matthew (1:20). He notes that elections will be coming to the country and that “Now like the Israelites we await with hope – will this land become a land of promise and prosperity to all?” He reminded

the people that Christ was born during a period of cruelty and oppression in the Roman Empire and stated:

“Amidst all political oppressions, Christ, our Savior never forgot human needs. For he proclaimed ‘Good news to the poor, liberty to captives and freedom to [the] oppressed.’” (Luke 4:16-18).

Cardinal Bo recounted Myanmar's history as a resource-rich country (gold, jade, ivory, teak, etc.), and compared that Myanmar to Korea, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. “We were [then] reduced to one of the poorest countries on earth. Genius at work! Poverty and oppression sent millions to exile. Our sons and daughters became the modern day slaves in the nearby countries. We became the least developed country.”

He also criticized the imbalance between large companies “investing” in Myanmar while average citizens suffer economic and political deprivation:

“Yes – you deserve a better life; do not be afraid of challenging those who steal your future from you. Keep an eye on those who loot the resources. Do not be afraid of resisting the injustice where the foreigners and the companies that come to grab our land living in five star hotel luxury and the poor Myanmarese (Burmese) who resist are thrown into inhuman prisons.”

In his recent Easter message, the cardinal notes that the ceasefire agreement is a sign of hope, but “must give way to peace based on justice.” He adds: “Do not bury our people once again into poverty. Do not open their resources to international looters and cronies. Myanmar people seek justice and fair play.” Cardinal Bo also highlighted the need for “reconciliation among communities.” There are 300,000 internally displaced people in Myanmar, with 120,000 in Kachin state and 120,000 in Rakhine state. “These people are the Lazarus of Myanmar. They are the people of Exodus.”

Myanmar has been afflicted by ethnic conflict, poverty, the exploitation of its natural resources and restrictions on political expression. Yet Cardinal Bo sees the Easter season as a sign of hope for his country:

“The Easter Christ is faithful in our work of salvation. We fear no one. We love all. So we will continue to work for peace and justice in this land bringing mercy and promoting reconciliation among communities. We are Easter people and our Lord is a trustworthy partner in our long march of mercy and reconciliation.” §



Cambodia: Worker rights abuses in garment industry

The following article was written by Maryknoll Affiliate Chris Smith, a Washington, D.C.-based writer.

Cambodia's global exports reached \$6.5 billion in 2013, with \$4.96 billion (76 percent) coming from the garment and textile industry. The garment sector figure rose to \$5.7 billion in 2014. The garment industry in Cambodia represents a major source of the country's non-agrarian jobs. Over 90 percent of the 700,000 workers in the garment sector are women.

But the opportunities for workers to share in the prosperity of the industry come at the price of exploitation and abuse. A March 2015 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report ("*Work Faster or Get Out*": Labor Rights Abuses in Cambodia's Garment Industry) documents a story of wage and working conditions abuses, child labor law violations, discrimination against pregnant workers and sexual harassment, and union busting. Despite a strong labor law passed in 1997 designed to protect Cambodian workers, enforcement is weak and the use of short term contracts serves to control employees, avoids payment of earned benefits and obstructs union organizing.

The HRW report was based on interviews with 342 people that included workers, union representatives, factory representatives and Cambodian Labor Ministry officials. The report documents a wide range of issues:

- **Overtime and wages:** Although Cambodian law limits the work week to 48 hours, with a maximum two hours overtime per day (for a six-day work week), most workers interviewed said that they often far exceeded the 12-hour overtime weekly limit. The demand to meet production targets meant that workers were pressured not to take bathroom or rest breaks, and special bonus incentives to meet targets were often unpaid.
- **Child labor:** Although Cambodian law restricts employment to those age 15 and above (with jobs limited to light work and an eight-hour daily maximum) and requires registration and proof of age records

by employers, the reality found by HRW researchers tells a different story. Many under-age children started between 12 and 14 years old, driven by the lack of educational access and/or the need to supplement their family's income. They often were paid less than the minimum wage and were instructed to hide from view when "visitors" came to the factory.

- **Union busting:** The report found evidence of concerted efforts to break unions at 35 factories since 2012. Multiple union representatives testified that "as soon as workers initiated union-formation procedures, factory management would dismiss union officer-bearers or coerce or bribe them to resign, thwarting union formation." Since December 2013 Cambodia's Ministry of Labor introduced new obstacles to licensing unions, delaying the certification of unions and allowing management time to use retaliatory measures against union leaders. Additional measures to raise the threshold for the number of workers required to gain recognition and allow the Ministry of Labor to suspend union registration without judicial review also served to restrict the rights of workers to organize and form a union.



- **Women facing sexual harassment and discrimination against pregnant workers:** Although the law in Cambodia provides for three months of maternity leave and maternity pay if employed for one full year (without interruption), the pervasive use of short-term contracts often thwarts any meaningful enforcement of these protections for pregnant employees. These workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Their condition meant that denial of bathroom and rest breaks could easily lead to dismissal for failure to meet production targets. One Phnom Penh factory worker told HRW: "It doesn't matter whether you are pregnant or not – whether you are sick or not – you have to sit and work. If you take a break, the work piles up on the machine and the supervisor will come and shout. And if [a pregnant] worker is seen as working 'slowly' then her contract will not be renewed." Sexual harassment is

common, with an ILO survey showing that 20 percent of women report sexual harassment leading to a “threatening work environment.”

One of the critical issues that magnifies the risk for workers in developing countries is the extensive use of subcontractors to factories. In many cases not directly authorized by international brands, these subcontractors often escape the monitoring regime of Better Factories Cambodia (BFC), the third party auditing firm that inspects garment factories for the international companies. The need to meet quotas and/or rush orders leads to supplemental work being handed off to subcontractors who use more casual hiring practices and shorter-term contracts that contribute to weaker protections for worker rights. While BFC provides critical information to international brands who are serious about monitoring their supply chain, individual audit reports are not available to unions and workers, thereby hampering their ability to confirm that worker complaints are accurately reflected in the reports. Nevertheless, BFC launched a “Transparency Database” in March 2014 to provide enhanced disclosure of company audits, and the existence of a third party auditing system provides an important tool for holding international brands accountable for protecting the rights of workers who make their products.

Ultimately, accountability begins with international brands like Gap, Marks and Spencer, Joe Fresh, Adi-

das and H & M. These brands have a mixed record, with Adidas disclosing its supplier list in 2007 and H & M by 2013. Gap, Marks and Spencer and Joe Fresh do not yet disclose this information publicly. In addition, companies need to publicly disclose what corrective action was taken in cases of abuses and whether any improvements are being sustained over time.

The Cambodian government has also fallen short in its accountability to enforce laws protecting workers. Labor inspectors told HRW that bribes in exchange for favorable reports were common, and the Labor Ministry’s own data showed fines were imposed on just 10 factories between 2009 and 2013.

The Human Rights Watch report on the Cambodian garment industry mirrors similar reports documenting worker rights abuses in many other industries and developing countries. Yet it also underscores the fact that existing mechanisms provide a framework for enhancing protections for workers to maintain employment in a safe, stable and sustainable environment that respects their dignity and internationally-protected rights. The joint efforts of international brands, the Cambodian government, Better Factories Cambodia, unions and workers and international NGOs can all contribute to ensuring that Cambodian garment workers receive the rights they are entitled to under both international law and a just and equitable economic system. §

World Bank projects displaced 3.4 million

“Evicted and Abandoned: The World Bank’s Broken Promise to the Poor” is a global investigation that reveals how the World Bank has regularly failed to follow its own rules for protecting vulnerable populations. Contributors to the research include the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), the Huffington Post, the GroundTruth Project, the Investigative Fund, the *Guardian* and more than 20 other news organizations.

In recently released reports, the ICIJ-led reporting project has identified the following key findings:

- Over the last decade, projects funded by the World Bank have physically or economically displaced an estimated 3.4 million people, forcing them from their homes, taking their land or damaging their livelihoods.
- The World Bank has regularly failed to live up to its own policies for protecting people harmed by projects it finances.

- The World Bank and its private-sector lending arm, the International Finance Corporation, have financed governments and companies accused of human rights violations such as rape, murder and torture. In some cases the lenders have continued to bankroll these borrowers after evidence of abuses emerged.

- Ethiopian authorities diverted millions of dollars from a World Bank-supported project to fund a violent campaign of mass evictions, according to former officials who carried out the forced resettlement program.

- From 2009 to 2013, World Bank Group lenders pumped \$50 billion into projects graded the highest risk for “irreversible or unprecedented” social or environmental impacts — more than twice as much as the previous five-year span.

Read more stories in the “Evicted and Abandoned” series here: <http://www.icij.org/project/world-bank.> §

Eliminate detention bed quota for immigrants

In April, nearly 1,000 activists joined in the annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD); this year's theme was "Breaking the chains: Mass incarceration and systems of exploitation." As in previous years, participants spent a day visiting their members of Congress to urge support of specific legislation. The 2015 EAD "ask" was: Reform federal criminal justice and immigrant detention policies toward the goal of ending unfair, unnecessary, costly and racially biased mass incarceration: 1) Adopt criminal justice and sentencing reform policies that incorporate an end to mandatory minimum sentencing; and 2) Eliminate the detention bed quota for immigrants and implement alternatives to immigrant detention.

On the issue of the detention bed quota, EAD participants shared the following information with their members of Congress. We invite you to use similar language when you contact your senators and representative.

The U.S. has the largest immigration detention infrastructure in the world. The expansion of this system in recent years is partly due to the immigration detention bed quota, policy passed by Congress under which 34,000 immigrants are held in ICE detention at any given time: ". . . funding made available under this heading shall maintain a level of not less than 34,000 detention beds." This policy is unprecedented; no other law enforcement agency operates on a quota system. Many detained people are seeking protection from persecution, sexual assault, trafficking, and violence. The bed quota is a particularly egregious element of the immigrant detention system.

Immigrants are held in facilities in which innumerable human rights abuses and dozens of deaths have occurred. Immigrants are often held with no access to outdoor space, served rotten food, and subjected

to wholly inadequate medical and mental health care. Most immigrants are held in facilities hundreds of miles from their families and without access to counsel.

The quota feeds into a larger system characterized by mass deportation and lack of due process. It incentivizes targeting immigrants for deportation in order to fill jail cells to the profit of corporations and localities.

Immigrant detention can be replaced by other proven and effective methods—including parole, release under supervision, and bond. All of these alternatives, when needed, can help ensure people participate in their court proceedings, are more humane and cost taxpayers far less than detention.

Detention is expensive – there is a human cost to our communities and a monetary cost to taxpayers. The administration's rampant detention and deportation policies mean each year nearly half a million people are torn apart from their families and communities. The most recent budget request for ICE's Custody Operations is just over \$2 billion. During a time of fiscal challenge, it is unacceptable to be spending billions of taxpayer dollars to needlessly detain immigrants.

Private prison corporations lobby for policies like the bed quota which keep immigrants in detention. Nearly 60 percent of detention beds are in facilities run by private prison corporations, which rake in profits from the incarceration of immigrants.

For members of the House, Reps. Ted Deutch (D-FL) and Bill Foster (D-IL) will introduce an amendment to strike the quota language in the appropriations bill. Members of the U.S. House of Representatives are asked to: 1) Vote in favor of the Deutch-Foster amendment; 2) Contact other offices to gain support for the elimination of the quota; and 3) Express opposition to the bed quota in public statements. §

U.S. bishops: "Improve in-country refugee program for minors"

In a recent press release, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) stated, "The Central American Minors (CAM) program ... which allows children in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador to apply for asylum and humanitarian parole in the U.S. from their home countries, is a tool that helps save children's lives."

Anastasia K. Brown, with the USCCB's Migration and Refugee Services (MRS), praised the program during an April 23 Senate subcommittee hearing. She stated

that the CAM program should be considered one part of a multi-dimensional approach to child migration from the region. Other elements would include strengthening asylum and child welfare systems in neighboring countries and addressing the push factors, such as violence and the lack of opportunity, in Central America.

Her testimony can be found at: <http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/congressional-testimony/upload/Anastasia-Brown-Testimony-CAM.pdf>. §

Trade: No consensus for Fast Track, TPP

On April 16, Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) legislation was introduced by Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI), Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR). This legislation, if passed, would create a “Fast Track” process for any trade agreements, including the proposed TransPacific Partnership (TPP), allowing them to bypass traditional committee processes and limit the decision to an up or down vote.

The legislation, touted as bipartisan, is opposed not only by most Democrats and some Republicans, but also by civil society groups representing consumers, faith communities, immigrant rights organizations, labor, public health advocates, and environmentalists.

Congressional Democrats oppose Fast Track due to concerns about labor, the environment and access to medicines. Republicans who oppose the agreement have seen their districts lose jobs due to past trade deals or are concerned about increased migration or ceding their authority over trade content to the administration.

Fast Track legislation is expedited, with limited time for debate, no ability to offer amendments, and an abbreviated review period. This version of Fast Track includes some improved negotiating objectives and a few attempts to fix procedural issues, but ultimately many of the basic problems which made it an undemocratic model in the past remain. For instance, the president can sign the agreement before sending it to Congress, so there is no way for Congress to certify that it includes any of the content that Congress wanted. This is particularly problematic when most legislators have been excluded from negotiations.

This new version also codifies that only staffers with security clearance can view the text before the negotiating parties agree on it; this was not an explicit legal requirement in the past.

On April 23, ranking minority leader Rep. Sander Levin (D-MI) introduced “The Right Track for TPP Act,” an alternative TPA bill. He argues that the TPP has been under negotiations for six years already and yet outstanding issues with the agreement are not addressed

in the TPA legislation.

Rep. Levin’s bill, which was blocked by Rep. Ryan, would have allowed for more transparency and a greater role for Congress in directing the process and certifying that the negotiating objectives were included. It also included specific negotiating instructions for expedited consideration only and until a bipartisan group of House and Senate trade advisors had determined that

the instructions were followed.

Congress would have written the consultation procedures, including what negotiating texts must be shared with Congress and stakeholders. It included two useable mechanisms to enable Congress to remove expedited consideration where necessary.

Ryan, Hatch and Wyden are trying to move the Fast Track legislation as quickly as possible in order to seal the TPP deal before the end of the year so that it doesn’t interfere with the 2016 election cycle. The bill would move

first in the Senate and then in the House. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), however, tried to delay the process; he wants Trade Adjustment Assistance, the Africa Growth and Opportunities Act reauthorization, Generalized Systems of Preferences reauthorization, and other trade-related bills to be approved at the same time as TPA. At this point, the Senate will likely vote on the TPA bill the week of May 11.

Faith in action:

Call your senators to oppose Fast Track; use this specially provided number: 888-410-0619. Suggested language: “Past trade agreements have destroyed rural economies in Mexico and Central America, have not improved dangerous labor conditions in Latin America, and have reduced access to life-saving medicines. The negotiating objectives in Fast Track and the little we know of the secretive TransPacific Partnership is that the TPP will cause further harm to the living conditions of impoverished communities among TPP trading partners. Trade must put human dignity and the health of God’s creation at the center. Please oppose Fast Track trade promotion authority.” §



MOGC staff member Chloe Schwabe (left) attends a “no Fast Track” rally in mid-April on Capitol Hill.

UN: Reports from CSW59, “Change is coming”

The 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) took place at UN headquarters in New York from March 9-20, 2015. Representatives of Member States, UN entities, and NGOs from all regions of the world attended. Maryknoll Sisters Veronica Schweyen, Elizabeth (Claris) Zwareva, Mary Ann Smith, Jean Fallon, Meg Gallagher and Maryknoll Affiliate Jo Albright were participants.

Held two decades after the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, which took place in Beijing, a repeated theme at this year’s event was that, in too many places, not enough progress has been made in raising the status of women.

Hundreds of side events and parallel events were offered; one entitled “The SDG on Inequality: How Useful Can This Be for Women?” asked panelists to respond as to whether the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are expected to be adopted in September 2015, will be able to avoid the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), on which the UN development agenda was based so far. Kenyan activist Gathoni Blessol spoke about the inequality and degradation experienced by women in the slums of Nairobi; her perspective is that the MDGs promulgated by the UN have not helped most women in Kenya, and in fact have sidelined them. She stated that policies that promote privatization actually increase poverty, endangering women who are already at the bottom of the economic ladder.

The Women’s Rights Movement of the Philippines released its statement: “We deplore that 20 years after the 1995 Beijing Conference, in most countries including the Philippines, gender inequality remains pervasive – economically, politically and socially. Women continue to suffer from authoritarian and military regimes, increased militarization, violence and armed conflicts, unlawful foreign interference, lack of fundamental freedoms and human rights violations, corruption and poor governance and much discrimination. ... ‘National development’ or the touted ‘public-private partnership’

continue to be used as a pretext for plundering and appropriating lands, territories, and resources owned by marginalized women and peoples, for private and corporate gain. ...”

In many of the presentations, the conclusion was the same: the soon-to-be-approved SDGs must include mechanisms by which governments will be held accountable for recognizing the rights of women as equal citizens.

In her closing speech for CSW59, UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka noted that the post-2015 development agenda has to put gender equality at the core of sustainable development. “We are all aware that there are no shortcuts to realizing gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls. Based on the road we have travelled, we know that there are more challenges ahead of us. We know we must continue to work, systematically and relentlessly, to bring about transformation in our families, societies, economies, and political and public spaces.”

She thanked the ministers and government representatives who approved the Political Declaration, which reaffirmed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the role of civil society, and set a target date to end gender inequality.

“We will need to see solid, measurable progress by 2020, and make sure that 2030 is the expiry date for gender inequality,” she stated. “I will rely on all of you to make sure all our governments and broader society ‘step it up.’ ...”

“Change is coming. Change has to come. We have to focus on dismantling patriarchy, not just reforming it or trying to find a way for women to thrive within it. The discussions of these last two weeks have made it crystal clear that the gaps and the issues are both structural and psychological. There can be no real progress in changing the world for women unless we change both. ... When we change the laws and the customary practices, as well as the attitudes and beliefs that shape behaviors, we will have a world in which to thrive. ...”

Learn more about CSW59 at <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw59-2015>. §



Resources

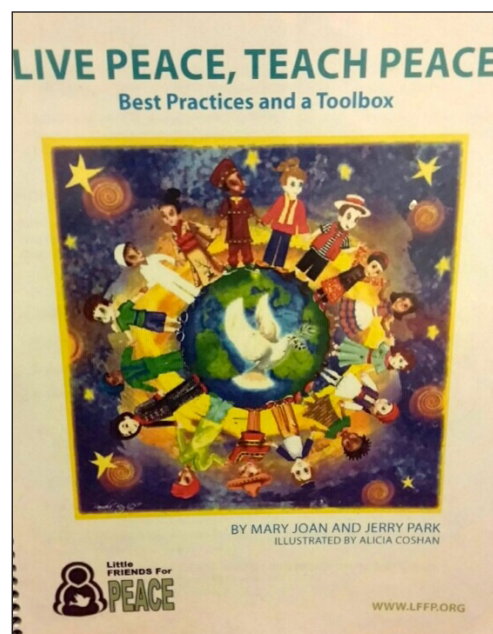
1) **Torture Awareness Week:** Join Witness Against Torture (WAT) in Washington, D.C. during Torture Awareness Week (**June 21-28**) and for the trials of WAT members who were arrested in January for protesting in Congress. (The trials will be June 22 and June 25.) Torture Awareness Week is the time when WAT traditionally gathers in support of Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC), whose members — torture survivors from all over the world — come together for solidarity and advocacy. The week culminates with the TASSC vigil on Saturday in Lafayette Square in front of the White House. Join all or part of the week. Learn more at <http://www.witness torture.org/>.

2) **Campaign Nonviolence conference:** Campaign Nonviolence will hold a national conference **August 6-9** in Santa Fe, NM; the event is meant to deepen the movement for a culture of peace, free from war, poverty, the climate crisis and the epidemic of violence. Presentations, nonviolence workshop, and vigils at Los Alamos on the 70th anniversary of the nuclear age will be held. Featured speakers include James Lawson, Erica Chenoweth, John Dear, Kathy Kelly, Lennox Yearwood, Jr., Kit Evans-Ford, Medea Benjamin, Sr. Joan Brown and Ken Butigan. Pax Christi USA will host a special gathering – with prayer, dialogue and socializing – for members, friends, and partners on August 6, 7:30-9:30 pm. To register for the conference or learn more information, go to the Pace e Bene website: <http://paceebene.org/programs/campaign-nonviolence/campaign-nonviolence-national-conference/>; write Pace e Bene at P.O. Box 1891, Long Beach, CA 90801, or call 510-268-8765.

3) **A Theory of the Drone:** Written by Gregoire Chamayou, a research scholar in philosophy at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris; published by the New Press, 2015. Drone warfare has raised profound ethical and constitutional questions

both in the halls of Congress and among the U.S. public. Not since debates over nuclear warfare has U.S. military strategy been the subject of discussion in living rooms, classrooms, and houses of worship. Yet as this groundbreaking new work shows, the full implications of drones have barely been addressed in the recent media storm. Far more than a simple technology, drones are profoundly influencing what it means for a democracy to wage war. *A Theory of the Drone* will be essential reading for all who care about this important question. Hardcover, 304 pages; ISBN: 978-1-59558-975-0. \$26.95 (Used copies also available).

4) **A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks:** This is an independent report commissioned by members of the G7; it identifies seven compound climate-fragility risks that pose serious threats to the stability of states and societies in the decades ahead. Based on a thorough assessment of existing policies on climate change adaptation, development cooperation and humanitarian aid, and peacebuilding, the report recommends that the G7 take concrete action, both as individual members and jointly, to tackle climate-fragility risks and increase the resilience of states and societies to them. Read the 24-page executive summary here: <http://www.newclimateforpeace.org/#report-top> or contact the MOGC for a hard copy.



5) **Live Peace, Teach Peace: Best Practices and Tools:** MJ and Jerry Park drew on 35 years of peace building experience to produce this comprehensive teaching toolbox. It includes instructions for making and using their signature Peace Train, themes and activities for a full week of Peace Camp, a treasury of 27 time tested win-win games, peace hero biographies, peace songs, inspirational posters, and a list of books and other resources for all ages. Like the other LFFP books, it's available in both English and Spanish. \$30. Available from Little Friends for Peace, 4405 29th Street, Mt. Rainier, MD 20712; 240-838-4549, <http://www.lffp.org/>.