

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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The Sabbath Year.....3

Asia-Pacific/The Middle East

Australia: Government drops tough asylum bill.....4

Hong Kong: Maryknoll addresses migrants' plight.....4

China: Mekong dams impact millions downstream.....5

Korea: "Comfort women" seek justice from Japan.....6

Philippines: Missioners protest 700 killings.....6

Nepal: Peace accord ends 10-year insurgency.....7

Iraq: Is the Study Group Report too late?.....8

Africa

Zimbabwe: Living standards drop by 150 percent.....9

South Africa: Staple food is now genetically modified.....10

African Indigenous Peoples on UN Declaration.....11

Latin America

Mexico: Urge pressure for human rights in Oaxaca.....12

Chile: Pinochet's influence fades.....13

Petition to repeal the Military Commissions Act.....14

Brazil: Public debt continues to grow.....15

SPP: "NAFTA Plus" takes shape.....17

Rock star urged to stop violent video game.....18

Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples.....19

"Oil aid" subsidizes international industry.....20

IDB cancels debt; financing details delayed.....21

Jubilee South's position on conditionality.....22

UN Council to study "right to water" obligations.....23

Integrity of creation: Maryknoll Sisters' land ethic.....24

Cluster bombs should be banned.....25

Shareholders work to end child sex tourism.....26

Resources.....27

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The Sabbath Year

Each issue of NewsNotes in 2007 will begin with a reflection on the Sabbath. This is the sabbatical year, the seventh year after the great Jubilee at the turn of the millennium and a fitting time to renew our commitment to righting the relationships, especially the societal relationships, in our lives. Sabbath, the sabbatical year, the Jubilee assume that there will be some "righting" needed, and establish a regular, repeated pattern of personal and social transformation that rearranges everything toward harmony and balance, including with the rest of creation. Returning this year to that tradition, we explore its significance and its challenge to the reality of the world in which we now live.

The direction is immediate – at the end of the creation story in our sacred book. The work of creation is balanced with Shabbat – a lesson in *abundance* and *limits* that was frequently repeated in the Hebrew Scriptures and became the cornerstone of Jesus' way of life. Human attempts to control and maximize the forces of production were to be regularly interrupted by a required Sabbath rest (Exodus 31:12-17; Deuteronomy 15:1-7), prescribed for the both land and human labor.

For six years you may sow your field, and for six years prune your vineyard, gathering in their produce.

But during the seventh year the land shall have a complete rest, a sabbath for the Lord, when you may neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. (Leviticus 25:3-4)

"Letting the land of our lives lie fallow," according to Maria Harris, is to allow "the tiny country each of us comprises, whose geography we know so well, to rest." We are, she claims, to let that land be still – "the land of our bodies, our blood, our breath, and our bones" – giving it not only physical nourishment but regular, ritual rest. "Sabbath practice — regular, ritual rest — when factored into frenetic, workaholic, shop-'til-you-drop, electronically connected lives, is both intensely personal and profoundly political."

In fact, the social, political, economic, cultural and ecological implications of even small efforts to implement Sabbath in our daily lives are enormous!

"We need," says Maria Harris, "to be ... listeners: not only to the creation surrounding us, but also to the creation and the land that we are ... Sabbath means that we live in time, in the present. Sabbath means that we practice *shavat* or cessation. It means that we stop."

Stop producing and consuming to allow ourselves to rest; stop exploiting and polluting to allow the earth

to rest; stop running in order that we might nurture relationships. Stop — even for a few hours a week, or a day a month.

Sabbath — even tiny Sabbath practice — is both countercultural and counter to the prevailing wisdom of free market capitalism. It takes some real discipline and faith to believe: "I am valuable, not because I am producing or consuming today, but because I am." To opt out of buying and selling long enough to tend a tomato plant or talk to a neighbor goes against the grain of a system that creates needs in a world where the real needs of a vast majority are never met. To stop accumulating things even for a little while boldly contradicts a system that tells us to buy more in a world of terrible waste. To stop the assembly line of life even for a few minutes unsettles a system that tells us to produce more, to exploit the rest of creation in any way necessary, to grow our economies without limit on a planet with very real and increasingly visible limits.

Although the Sabbath might feel like a necessary nurturing time for our own survival, it is much, much more about righting relationships with others than about anything turned too intensely inward. Sabbath invites us to live in a manner carefully attuned to the world in which we live, with all its hopes and fears, joys and sorrows. Unless we are still enough to see (really see) what is going on in our broken world, we will never have the will or capacity to participate in its healing.

Because we cannot separate ourselves from the earth, our "stopping," our "regular, ritual rest" must also in some manner be about righting our relationship with the rest of creation. Growing something in the front yard, or cleaning up the neighborhood, or refusing to drive a car for a day may be a blessed point of entrée, back into a deeper connection to the place we call home. More and more, thanks to extremes of wealth and extremes of poverty, we are wandering people — able to participate more easily in the pillaging of creation because our roots have been ripped from the particular piece of home called earth. Sabbath practice takes steps to correct this.

Sabbath rest, if it is genuine, will lead to jubilee justice — to righting the relationships that shape our lives, our communities, our world — to canceling debt, freeing slaves, restoring the land. The links may at first glance seem tenuous, but they are not. While the land of our lives lies fallow, the lessons about a society where everyone has enough and relationships are right must be made our own.

Australia: Government drops tough asylum bill

The Australian government has withdrawn a bill to process all future asylum seekers who arrive by boat in offshore camps. Prime Minister John Howard canceled a Senate vote after three members of his party, which holds a one-vote edge in the Senate, said they opposed the measure.

Under current law, persons seeking asylum in Australia are processed offshore if they reached only outlying islands or were intercepted at sea. The cases of those who succeed in reaching the mainland are handled inside the country.

Refugee groups had spoken out against the bill's tougher restrictions. It provided that all arrivals by boat would be sent offshore, mainly to the island state of Nauru. Even if claims for refugee status were accepted, it would have been unlikely that any of the boat people would have been allowed to settle in Australia.

Nauru, the world's smallest island nation at eight square miles, lies 2,500 miles northeast of Sydney.

Bishop Joseph Grech, the Australian bishops' delegate on migrant and refugee matters, said that he

welcomed the bill's withdrawal. "The idea of sending asylum seekers, including women and children, back into indefinite detention was very strongly opposed not only by the Church but by the community at large," he said.

"It is in all our interests to get the security questions right," said Phil Glendenning, director of Australia's Edmund Rice Centre. "However, the absurdity of the government's position was to demonize people fleeing terror as if they were terrorists."

Critics had accused Howard of using the bill to heal a rift with Indonesia, which Howard denied. A decision last March to accept more than 40 Papuan asylum seekers had angered Jakarta. (See "Australia: Asylum seekers reflect Papua turmoil," *NewsNotes* March/April 2006.) The Indonesian government said that by giving the group refugee visas, Australia was showing tacit support for Papuan independence.

The Netherlands granted Papua self-rule in 1961, but the territory was subsequently annexed by Indonesia. The country has been fighting a low-level insurgency in the province ever since.

Hong Kong: Maryknoll addresses migrants' plight

Members of the Maryknoll Ministry in Asia with Migrants met Nov. 10-17 in Hong Kong to study the plight of migrants in Asia and consider possible responses. The following is taken from a resolution adopted at the close of the meeting.

Laila, an 18-year old Indonesian Muslim migrant worker, ... was in Hong Kong for only a few months. She was sent by her employer to the market to buy pork, but due to a language misunderstanding, she bought the wrong meat. ... The employer pushed her down to the floor, tied her hands and poured boiling water down her throat, resulting in a permanent loss of taste.

Laila escaped and the police referred her to Bethune House, a mission for migrant workers where some Maryknoll Sisters volunteer. The mission helped her with medical care, legal redress, and personal support. Today Laila, still living in Bethune House, is a vivacious young woman, surviving her horrendous experience.

Another migrant we met was Rowena, a Filipina woman who had worked in Hong Kong for 15 years.

Her goal was to send her three daughters through high school and college, and now she is going home. But, after all these years, her daughters are almost strangers to her. They did not have the experience of a mother's presence during the most formative years of their young adult lives. ...

In response to this situation of increased violence, marked injustices, and the escalation of people caught up in migration, we see the need to:

- Deepen our understanding and exposure to this reality throughout Asia.
- Study the trends, issues, and interconnections among the sending and receiving countries.
- Network with migrants, NGOs, the churches and concerned people to address the plight of the migrants, and their families.
- Publicize the worsening conditions of the migrants, especially in the countries whose labor laws do not recognize or protect them.
- Address and respond to the situations and needs of foreign spouses and their families.

China: Mekong dams impact millions downstream

China has built 26,000 large dams on its rivers – more than any other country – and meets 25 percent of its energy needs through hydroelectric power. It plans to build as many as 15 new dams on the Lancang River (called the Mekong River in Southeast Asia) to help meet the power needs of its growing industrial economy. However, the proposed dams also raise economic and environmental concerns both in China and in Mekong Basin countries downstream.

China's planners hope to quadruple the national economy by 2020, counting on industrial growth as a major driving force. The country's hydropower capacity reached 100,000 megawatts (MW) in 2004. To meet rising industrial demand, planners propose expanding hydropower production to more than 250,000 MW by the year 2020 and to 300,000 MW by 2025.

The Lancang/Mekong is one of the longest rivers in the world, flowing 3,000 miles across China and Southeast Asia to the South China Sea. Sixty million people depend on it for food, water and transportation. The river supports one of the world's most diverse fisheries, but the 15 dams China proposes to build pose a potential threat to the fragile river basin. The dams could drastically change the river's natural flood-drought cycle and block the transport of sediment, threatening the livelihoods of millions living downstream in Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Environmentalists in China acknowledge the need for more power. However, they warn against overexploitation of the country's rivers, and they promote the development of renewable energy sources. As Chinese journalist Ma Jun explains, "They know that tripling China's hydropower capacity would mean virtually the end of healthy rivers in China, the fragmentation of ecosystems across China and in downstream neighbor states, and the impoverishment of biodiversity."

The Lower Mekong Basin comprises most of Laos and Cambodia and a significant part of Thailand and Vietnam. Nevertheless, critics say, China builds dams without consulting nations downstream. They also say China fails to assess dams' potential social and environmental impacts.

Dams in China have forced more than 10 million people from their homes and land, and many of them are still displaced. Some communities forced out by the

Manwan and Dachaoshan dams on the Upper Lancang/Mekong have not received fair compensation, and they experience food insecurity and higher incidence of disease in their new locations.

Conservationists say the number of fish species in the Mekong River in northern Thailand is dwindling, and they say the decline might be the result of fluctuations in water levels and temperatures linked to dams in China. The fish catch in the Tonle Sap, Cambodia's great lake, has reportedly dropped 50 percent, and some likewise see a connection to fluctuations in water levels traceable to discharges from dams in China.

Ma, who formerly wrote for the South China Morning Post, says most of the local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that criticize government policy are not anti-dam. But he says they want to correct the mentality dominating the hydropower sector that "views every single gorge as a good dam site."

A growing movement in China is challenging the government's approach to hydropower development, demanding more transparent and participatory planning. The National Development and Reform Commission estimates China could reduce its energy use by 100,000 MW by 2020, in part through better management policies and more efficient practices. In addition, the Chinese Academy of Sciences estimates China could generate up to 1,000 gigawatts of clean, renewable wind power.

"Growing public awareness and increased attention from civil society on the impact of dams have prompted the government to look at more sustainable development models," according to Ma. He says some of the top leadership is trying to build a "harmonious society" including greater harmony between humans and nature, as opposed to the old practice of developing hydroelectric power at any cost.

"Over the next 20 years, these two views will clash vehemently on the fate of hundreds of rivers," Ma says. "The lives of millions of people will very much be determined by this grand hydropower endgame."

Faith in action:

International Rivers Network (IRN) works with the river protection movement in China, advocating a cautious approach to development that balances economic growth with environmental protection. See www.irn.org for further background and related links.



Korea: “Comfort women” seek justice from Japan

On Dec. 7 about 500 former U.S. service personnel, now in their 80s and 90s, gathered at Pearl Harbor to honor the victims of the Japanese surprise attack 65 years earlier. A few aged Japanese officers and enlisted personnel were also present, a witness to the reconciliation some on both sides have experienced.

A day earlier in Seoul, a small group of South Korean “comfort women” gathered in front of the Japanese Embassy in protest—as they have every Wednesday since 1992. The women are demanding a formal apology from the Japanese government and official compensation for their sexual enslavement during World War II. Across Asia an estimated 200,000 women and girls as young as 13 were raped and made sex slaves by Japanese forces during the war. Though their numbers have dwindled it is clear that, for these Korean protesters, there has been no reconciliation, no closure.

The U.S. House of Representatives adopted a resolution in September in support of Asian comfort women. Resolution 759 urged the Japanese government to acknowledge and accept responsibility for “one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20th century.” It also said Japan should educate future generations about the crime, and refute any claim that the enslavement of comfort women never occurred.

The Japanese government denies it was directly

involved in operating wartime brothels for its soldiers. However, the House resolution said the government “permitted” the army to do so.

In 1995 Japan set up the Asian Women’s Fund for surviving comfort women, based on \$4.8 million in donations from the Japanese public. Initial payments of \$20,000 each were made to 285 women in South Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan. However, many former comfort women refused to apply to the fund, arguing that the Japanese government should pay them directly.

Amnesty International has called on the Japanese government to accept full responsibility for the harm the women suffered and to offer them an acceptable apology. It also says Japan should ensure full reparations to the survivors, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.

Last month at Pearl Harbor, Zenji Abe – a former Japanese navy pilot involved in the bombing – said the attack was a violation of bushido, the samurai code of honor. A samurai would never attack an enemy while sleeping or from behind, Abe explained. He said Japanese soldiers were told that war had been declared on the U.S., and did not realize the bombing was a sneak attack.

However, Abe’s veiled apology is no consolation to the Asian women who still wait for Japan to acknowledge violating their honor 65 years ago.

Philippines: Missioners protest 700 killings

Members of the Maryknoll Ministry in Asia with Migrants have written to Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to protest the extra-judicial killing of more than 700 political activists, journalists, lawyers, human rights defenders and members of the clergy since she took office in 2001. (See NewsNotes September/October 2006.) The missioners, meeting in Hong Kong, also wrote to Philippine Consul General Alejandrino A. Vicente in Hong Kong. The following is taken from their Nov. 16 letter to President Arroyo.

These incidents shock the international community. The Catholic Church, which is the predominant religious community in your country, also feels deeply dismayed over such killings of suspected sympathizers of insurgents allegedly by some ultra-rightist elements in the military.

The Papal Nuncio to the Philippines, Archbishop Fernando Filoni, and the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) have denounced such killings as not respecting and not implementing the rights of the human race.

The repeated occurrence of such incidents leads to doubts regarding the commitment and intention of the government to abolish the death penalty and to maintain the rule of law. [Last April President Arroyo commuted the sentences of the country’s 1,200 prisoners on death row to life imprisonment.]

As a humanitarian concern and in solidarity with church people and peace activists in your country, we convey to you our fervent hope that you seriously look into the matter, and we strongly request that the government take appropriate measures to immediately stop such killings.

Nepal: Peace accord ends 10-year insurgency

In a year marked by rapid political change in Nepal, the government and Maoist rebels signed a peace agreement in late 2006 to end a 10-year insurgency. The fighting had claimed more than 13,000 lives. Besides providing for elections and guaranteeing civil and human rights, the agreement further limited royal authority, nationalizing "all properties acquired by King Gyanendra by virtue of him being the king." The future of the monarchy itself will be decided by an elected assembly.

The government declared a national holiday after Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and Maoist rebel leader Prachanda, who uses a single name, signed the accord Nov. 21. Thousands took to the streets in Kathmandu to celebrate, chanting "Victory is ours!" and "Long live people's democracy and peaceful Nepal!"

The 52-year-old guerrilla chief, who emerged in June after years of hiding, said, "We are not dogmatic communists, and we are prepared to change and debate our beliefs with anybody." Koirala, 85, urged Nepal's political parties and rebels to set aside their differences and work together for the country's development. "From today the politics of killing, violence and terror is over, and we all have now started the politics of reconciliation," he added.

Murari R. Sharma, former ambassador of Nepal to the United Nations, observed, "It would be rather unique in history that a Maoist party has been instrumental in saving democracy from the clutches of a despot and in advancing democratic values."

Human Rights Watch had accused the Royal Nepalese Army of illegally detaining 1,200 persons, torturing prisoners and killing noncombatants during the hostilities. It also said the Maoists had publicly executed those they considered enemies, tortured people and recruited thousands of child soldiers.

While the agreement sets forth benchmarks for a democratic society, it also proposes several bodies to help heal the nation's wounds after a decade of war. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission will investigate alleged violations of human rights during the conflict and promote reconciliation in Nepalese society. A national peace and rehabilitation commission is envisioned to provide relief to persons victimized by the war.

The agreement provides for Maoist leaders to take

seats alongside elected politicians and join an interim government to oversee elections for an assembly that will draft a new constitution and determine the fate of the monarchy.

The rebels built schools and aided poor farmers among a population of 28 million whose capita income is less than \$1 per day. Fighting to abolish Nepal's more than 200-year-old monarchy, the rebels said the right to vote in the assembly satisfies their key demand. They have promised to honor the outcome even if the assembly decides to maintain a ceremonial monarch.

Both sides agreed to separate their forces, with the army returning to their barracks and Maoist fighters reporting to 28 camps, where they will lock their weapons and have them sealed by the UN. A similar quantity of arms of the Nepal Army would also be sealed.

The agreement capped a quick succession of events in 2006. Gyanendra had suspended parliament in 2002, but his one-man rule failed to bring the insurgency any closer to resolution. In February 2006 the government called for local elections, which were largely boycotted by the country's seven opposition parties. Under increasing public pressure to speed the return to democracy, the king called parliament back into session in April. The lawmakers voted to reduce the king's power and called for Nepal, officially a Hindu nation, to become a secular state. The Maoists declared a unilateral ceasefire, and further negotiations led to the Nov. 21 agreement to end the fighting.

Briefing the UN Security Council on the peace agreement, the top UN envoy to Nepal told the Council it should act promptly and authorize an advance UN team to assist with the peace process and with preparations for elections. Ian Martin referred the Council to then-Secretary General Kofi Annan's recommendation to send up to 60 observers to Nepal to monitor the management of arms and armed personnel, and to advise on the 2007 polls.

Meanwhile, the Kathmandu Post captured the people's deepest hope: "What until recently was an improbable peace has become a reality."

Punam Shrestha, a 54-year-old street vegetable vendor in Kathmandu, put it more poignantly: "I hope no mother will lose her children to conflict and no children will become orphans any more due to violence."



Iraq: Is the Study Group Report too late?

The statistics are dismaying, the immediate prospects for Iraq daunting. A close reading of the Iraq Study Group Report, released on December 6, 2006, shows a mixture of bravado and willful blindness (the panel says “there is significant underreporting of the violence in Iraq”). The 10-member bipartisan panel that authored the report was co-chaired by former Republican Secretary of State James Baker and former Democratic Rep. Lee Hamilton (IN). Many of the report’s 79 recommendations seem sensible but, sadly, several years too late.

The tenor of the report is that, by tweaking its policy in Iraq, the U.S. can help stem the violence and unite the country. But the U.S. is not in control. As the Study Group reports, “The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating” and “The situation in Baghdad and several provinces is dire.” Two of the more important recommendations seem unlikely to be embraced by the Bush administration: “The President should state that the United States does not seek permanent military bases in Iraq...” (Recommendation 22) and “The President should restate that the United States does not seek to control Iraq’s oil.” (Recommendation 23) Yet, unless the U.S. clearly acknowledges Iraqis’ rights to self-determination and to their own natural resources, the motives for the U.S. military presence will remain suspect, and U.S. forces—anticipating suffering their 3,000th casualty—will remain prime targets.

Who could argue with the wisdom of giving “the highest possible priority to professional language proficiency and cultural training, in general and specifically for U.S. officers and personnel about to be assigned to Iraq” (Recommendation 73)? Yet the panel acknowledges that, among the 1,000 persons assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, only six can speak fluent Arabic. And after nearly four years of fighting in Iraq, the Study Group was told “there are fewer than 10 analysts on the job at the Defense Intelligence Agency who have more than two years’ experience in analyzing the insurgency” due to frequent rotations.

U.S. news coverage of Iraq comes under withering criticism. “A roadside bomb or a rocket or mortar attack that doesn’t hurt U.S. personnel doesn’t count,” the text reports. “For example, on one day in July 2006 there were 93 attacks or significant acts of violence reported.

Yet a careful review of the reports for that single day brought to light 1,100 acts of violence.” In reality, the report notes, 3,000 Iraqi civilians die violently every month.

The Study Group calls on the U.S. to “engage directly with Iran and Syria in order to try to obtain their commitment to constructive policies toward Iraq and other regional issues.” (Recommendation 9) However, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice rejects that idea. She says the U.S. is not about to “trade away” Lebanon to

Syria, or to allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons, in exchange for peace in Iraq.

Nevertheless, the Study Group sees a linkage between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and broader Middle East issues, and it urges meetings among Syria, Lebanon and Israel (Recommendation 14) to help resolve their differences. It says “[i]n exchange for these actions and in the context of a full and secure peace agreement, the

Israelis should return the Golan Heights, with a U.S. security guarantee...” (Recommendation 16).

Unfortunately, the Study Group offers Iran no such carrot. Instead it postulates that it is in Iran’s interest to cooperate with the U.S. on Iraq because instability in Iraq “could inflame sectarian tensions within Iran” – which is predominantly Persian – among its minority Azeris (24 percent), Kurds and Arabs.

President Bush said he would present a revised Iraq strategy after the new year. Shortly before Christmas, much of the discussion in Washington focused on whether to send more troops to Iraq, at least for a short period. The Study Group was clear: “Sustained increases in U.S. troop levels would not solve the fundamental cause of violence in Iraq, which is the absence of national reconciliation. ... America’s military capacity is stretched thin: we do not have the troops or equipment to make a substantial, sustained increase in our troop presence.”

One of the most dangerous linkages in current administration policy seems to be reflected in the report: that of equating critical U.S. interests (first mentioned on p. 1) with Iraq’s known oil reserves, the world’s second largest (p. 2). Until that linkage is broken and U.S. decision-makers call for an infusion of more credibility, not more troops, a nightmare scenario will likely continue in which, the report says, “...U.S. forces seem to be caught in a mission that has no foreseeable end.”



*Photo of Iraqi children by Jerry Zawada/
Christian Peacemaker Teams*

Zimbabwe: Living standards drop by 150 percent

Zimbabwe's living standards have declined by 150 percent within the last decade, says a poverty assessment survey compiled and published by Zimbabwe's public service and social welfare ministry. "The period 1996 to 2005 was marked by accelerated deterioration in the socio-economic situation," the survey said. "In contrast to the development achievements of the first 10 years of independence (granted from Britain in 1980), the decade of the 1990s witnessed a turnaround of economic fortunes as economic decline set in and structural problems of high poverty and inequality persisted." (AfricaFiles from IRIN; see www.irinnews.org)

The social welfare ministry survey revealed that between 1995 and 2003, more than 63 percent of rural people could not obtain enough money to meet both basic food and non-food requirements, while the figure in urban areas was 53 percent. The survey covered 58 rural districts and 27 urban areas across the country's 10 provinces. Minimum monthly incomes of urban dwellers declined sharply during the same period because of the "deteriorating macro-economic environment, characterized by hyperinflation, negative GDP [gross domestic product] and shrinking formal job opportunities."

Gender was also recognized as having an impact on poverty levels. "Female-headed households, who are already mostly very poor, are moving towards the bottom limit," the ministry said. Since the last survey in 1995, malnutrition in children under five increased by 35 percent, people without access to clean water increased by 25 percent, and the number of people without access to healthcare went up by 48 percent.

The ZANU-PF government has experimented with six different economic policies since 1996, with dire consequences: hyperinflation has been hovering around 1,000 percent - the highest in the world; unemployment levels are above 70 percent; the industrial base has contracted by a third since 2000; foreign currency is scarce; and shortages of basic commodities, such as food and energy, have become commonplace.

The poverty assessment cited the country's economic problems after the withdrawal of international donor support "following the implementation of a controversial land reform program" as a contributing factor to the economic meltdown.

According to independent analysts, the farming sector, once one of the main foreign exchange earners,

has shrunk by about 65 percent as a result of the land reform program. The survey said poverty, already growing, had been worsened by recurrent droughts and floods, as well as an 18.1 percent HIV-AIDS prevalence - one of the world's highest - which compounded non-productivity in the farming sector, as a recent ministry of agriculture study had concluded. Farming communities were among the majority of areas that did not have access to health centers, with people having to travel more than 10 kilometers to the nearest clinic or hospital.

Rising medical costs forced about 30 percent of pregnant women to deliver at home, and skilled personnel attended to only 72 percent of those who went to health centers to have their babies, mostly due to an exodus of health workers in search of better salaries and working conditions.

Falling standards of living have made basics seem like luxuries. "I bought a wardrobe, bed and radio with my first salary but these things are now a pipedream for most people - even those with the so-called executive jobs," Sibangani Nkomo, 45, a teacher now employed as a human resources officer at a leading wholesaler in the capital, Harare, told IRIN. Nkomo takes home Z\$200,000 (US\$800) a month, most of which is absorbed by rent, leaving him with no option but to borrow from friends and loan sharks. His wife went to Britain three years ago, where she works as a child minder and sends home the occasional US\$200.

He has not been able to visit his elderly mother in rural Masvingo, about 250 kilometers south of Harare, for the past three years because he cannot afford the cost of transport. "When I can, I send [my mother] a packet of sugar and a bottle of cooking oil through the driver of the bus that gets to my rural home, and I know she thinks I no longer care about her." Before the country's economic meltdown, Nkomo said, weekends were spent with friends, when they would drink beer or attend local soccer matches. Nowadays, economic restraints keep him housebound.

According to the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe (CCZ), in October the basic monthly cost of living for a family of six was Z\$141,706 (US\$566); in November it cost at least Z\$208,000 (US\$832) - a 47.3 percent increase. "CCZ is greatly concerned about the general price increases, especially in the month of November, which recorded significant increases compared to other months in the year," the consumer watchdog said in a statement.



South Africa: Staple food is now genetically modified

At a recent conference on "Food Security and the Challenge of GMOs" organized by Silveira House in Harare, Zimbabwe, Kevin Roussel from the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference Parliamentary Liaison Office gave a talk on GMOs in South Africa. Excerpts follow.

In South Africa there are 622 biotech and biotech-related projects, accounting for an annual revenue of Rand [South African currency] 368 million and the employment of 3,500 people. Most South Africans are not aware of the size of the biotech industry or that all maize, milk, cotton and soy products made in South Africa are genetically modified with the exception of those products labeled as organic. ... South Africa is the only country in the world that has allowed its staple food to become GM. Prior to 2000 only yellow maize, considered as livestock feed, was GM. Since then all major brands of maize meal are GM foods. In addition to this, permits have been granted for field trials and experiments with cotton, maize, soybeans, apple, canola, wheat, potatoes, sugar cane, eucalyptus trees, grapes, and a host of micro-organisms. ... [L]egislation around the labeling of GMOs is currently nonexistent... .

The South African experience has also highlighted the danger of dependency and monopoly control over GMOs... All farmers using GM crops have to sign contracts with Monsanto where they agree to not share their seed, only to use Monsanto chemicals, to buy new seed the following year and to set aside 25 percent of their land as a "refuge" area... .

The GM seed also is more expensive than the ordinary seed. In the example of cotton, the non-GM seed sells at R210 for a bag of 25 kilograms, which is enough to plant on one hectare. The GM equivalent costs R267 and also has a technology fee paid to Monsanto of R600, which costs the farmer R867 a bag. The yield on dry land on a small farm is not profitable at this cost so only large-scale commercial farmers can actually benefit from using GM seed.

The contractual obligations that are placed on farmers and the specific genetic use restrictions, which make the crop only resistant to the chemicals that the company sells, shows that GM crops are not really pest-resistant. It would have cost all the chemical giants a lot more to develop new pesticides and herbicides when their patents ended. Instead of doing this, they have entered the seed market to guarantee that farmers only use their product and not the cheaper generics which

could be made available.

A case in point of the problems of dependency is the Makhatini Flats project into which both government and Monsanto have put significant time and money. While this project is considered a success, we need to consider some fundamental facts. For starters, the project receives support and prices are guaranteed as state granaries purchase all the crop. ...

It is true that Bt cotton grown in the area has shown marked resistance to bollworm. [The bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* ("Bt") creates a natural insecticide that has been used for decades by organic farmers to control crop-eating insects and by the World Health Organization to kill mosquitoes without using dangerous chemical pesticides.] Commercial farmers planting Bt cotton are already returning to normal spraying patterns because of outbreaks of secondary insects such as aphids, leafhoppers and stinkbugs. ... Currently Monsanto is paying for this as they want this project to succeed. In the United States and Argentina ... Monsanto applied legal action, forcing the farmers to destroy their crops when pests began to gain resistance to the GM crop. In all these cases, the farmers lost out and no compensation or free spraying was offered... .

Although in theory GMO increases the yield per seed ratio, GM food is poorly suited to African farming. Traditional practices, which include rural and commercial farming areas, have relied extensively on saved seeds to use for the following year. GMO does not allow for this, which forces the farmer to buy seed every year. ...

South Africa has gone ahead with using GMOs against the worldwide trend towards caution. The New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development strategy may bring about obligations on states to take on GMOs. This would be of obvious benefit to South Africa, which is a port of access for the seeds, which are still produced overseas, and also a leader in Africa. GM seed is sold in U.S. dollars, which would encompass some serious loans in order to pay for the initial costs. If there are any fluctuations in crop prices, we will see a repeat of the green revolution occurring in southern Africa where small farmers are absorbed into debt. Dependency on chemicals produced by the Gene Giants is likely to result in job losses as local producers of pesticides and herbicides close down. In South Africa, Monsanto has acquired all the local manufacturers and holds a complete monopoly. Although there have been no job losses, this is due to government subsidization that has kept this industry going... .

African Indigenous Peoples on UN Declaration

In early December, the 150 member organizations of the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee (IPACC) expressed their profound disappointment that the African states were unable to support the Declaration on the Rights Indigenous Peoples (see related article, page 19). They said that the “African group has placed the new Human Rights Council at grave risk of politicization and domination by a few powerful states. The Africa group has not fully considered its own human rights standards, norms and mechanisms. Africa has delayed the recognition of the rights and dignity of the world’s 370 million Indigenous Peoples including Africa’s most vulnerable communities.”

On November 28, 2006, Namibia proposed to the UN Third Committee of the General Assembly that it should not adopt the Human Rights Council’s decision, but rather delay bringing to the Declaration to a vote.

To justify its position, Namibia produced a position paper for the Africa group which mirrored the objections of the U.S. and attempted to apply them to an African context. The paper’s writers did not explain that the principle of self-determination and territorial integrity is already dealt with in the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights: “...All peoples shall have right to existence. They shall have the unquestionable and inalienable right to self-determination. They shall freely determine their political status and shall pursue their economic and social development according to the policy they have freely chosen.” (Article 20)

Objections by Namibia to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples include the absence of a clear definition of indigenous peoples and cited threats to national territorial integrity. According to IPACC, the UN Working Group on the Draft Declaration has debated this for 22 years with little African participation.

In 2003, the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights, the treaty body of the African Charter and the African Union, adopted a working definition of indigenous peoples and affirmed both their collective rights as peoples and their right to self determination. The African Charter is the only regional multilateral human rights instrument which endorses collective “peoples” rights and the right to internal self-determina-

tion. It was designed specifically to protect Africa’s borders while acknowledging the multi-ethnic and diverse character of African societies and nations, as clearly underlined by the African Commission’s jurisprudence.

The African group’s position paper also refers to the threat of secession. Repeatedly in IPACC statements, African indigenous peoples have asked for greater inclusion in the State system, to have identity documents, citizenship, the right to vote, the right of access to schools and clinics, to be recognized by government and to be part of the nation’s political economy. These are internal aspects of the right to self-determination, which,

according to IPACC, should be differentiated from its external aspects leading to secessionism and statehood. It is therefore unfounded to argue that the claim for self-determination only involves colonized states.

IPACC called upon the African region to read the 2003 report of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights and to use this to assess the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration as it stands, they said, represents an African approach to human rights which made it more disturbing that the Africa group has threatened its adoption.

“Africa is the oldest occupied continent on the planet. We have the great-

est genetic, linguistic and cultural diversity of any continent. During the formation of the State under colonialism, hunter-gatherer and nomadic pastoralists were excluded from citizenship or state apparatus. In the post colonial state, this class of people found themselves without full citizenship. Through the efforts of the United Nations and the communities themselves, the African Commission has studied and responded positively to this issue.”

IPACC claims that the position paper of the Africa group goes against some fundamental African values of tolerance and respect for diversity. African states are already signatories to all of the major mechanisms which add up to the content of the Declaration.

For information, contact the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee, www.ipacc.org.za, ipacc@iafrica.com, ipacc.africa@gmail.com.



Maasai in Tanzania

Mexico: Urge pressure for human rights in Oaxaca

After six months of popular movement struggle involving the 70,000-member Oaxaca teachers' union and, at its height, hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples, Christian base community groups, students and union members, the state government and federal forces gained the upper hand and unleashed a wave of detentions and disappearances amid widespread reports of torture and prisoner abuse.

Detentions were uncontrolled and in most cases without arrest warrants, while house and office searches proceeded without due legal process. Detainees were denied their right to legal counsel and were held incomunicado.

The unrest in Oaxaca is symptomatic of tensions building in the rest of Mexico. This widespread instability is partly due to economic conditions caused by unfavorable free trade agreements and trade liberalization as well as perceptions of electoral fraud. With comparable conditions throughout Mexico, similar protests are probable in the future, both in Oaxaca and in other states. Therefore, it is essential that the Mexican government, which strives to maintain a positive international image, know that it is being watched and monitored. A strong international response is needed to say that the extra-legal procedures employed by federal and state governments are not an acceptable way to deal with unrest in Oaxaca or in other parts of Mexico. Mexico must respect its obligations under the UN Declaration on Human Rights, and hold police and government officials legally and morally accountable for any violations of this Declaration and the Mexican Constitution.

Since November 25, the date of the last major march and confrontation with police of the Oaxacan teachers movement and the Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, reports of abuses of Mexican citizens' rights increased dramatically. In sum:

- Local media reported over 500 persons formally arrested by federal and state police, over 200 more detained and over 100 disappeared. At least 17 people died during the six months of protests, including a reporter from the U.S.
- Groups of federal police entered schools by force and apprehended teachers in front of terrorized students.
- In some communities paramilitary groups that local media associate with the ruling PRI (Institutional

Revolutionary Party) threatened teachers. As a result some parents' groups themselves closed schools to protect their children and the teachers, taking 4,500 children out of classes.

- Some local NGOs reported that their phone lines were illegally tapped and their representatives in rural communities were detained.

- Student groups alleged that university students were being arbitrarily detained on the streets and apprehended whether or not they were involved in any actions of the social movements.

- Media also reported widespread physical abuse and torture of detainees by both federal and state police.

- Local and national media reported approximately 140 Oaxacans detained and moved to prisons in the state of Nayarit, hundreds of miles from their homes, while being denied access to legal council and contact with family members.

- There were also reports of grossly exaggerated charges being filed against prisoners in Nayarit and impossible bail of up to four million pesos being exacted.

- The Catholic Archdiocese of Oaxaca went on record accusing the government of suspending all legal guarantees without notice, calling for the release of all those unjustly incarcerated, and likening the situation of arbitrary arrests and disappearances to the situation of Guatemala in the early 1980s. Internationally acclaimed local artist Francisco Toledo asserted that Oaxaca seemed close to civil war.

Faith in action:

Send a letter expressing grave concern over the apparent violation of human and constitutional rights committed by state and federal governments against Oaxacan citizens. Urge officials to demand that the violations of the Mexican Constitution and the UN Declaration on Human Rights cease and the illegal activities of state and federal police and officials be redressed. (Sample letters available at www.maryknollogc.org.) Address phone calls, letters and emails to: Ambassador Carlos de Icaza, Embassy of Mexico, 1922 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006; mexembusa@sre.gob.mx; fax: 202-883-4320; tel: 202-728-1600; and Presidente Felipe Calderón Hinojosa. Residencia Oficial de los Pinos Casa Miguel Alemán, Col. San Miguel Chapultepec, C.P. 11850, México DF; felipe@felipe.org.mx; fax: 52-55-527-72-376; tel: 52-55-278-91-100.

Chile: Pinochet's influence fades

Augusto Pinochet's military coup in 1973 marked the beginning of a profound societal change in Chile. The government repression that followed resulted in over 3,000 social leaders killed or disappeared and close to 70,000 imprisoned and tortured. This reality created a deep-seated fear of being involved in any sort of protest against the government, even after 1990 when Pinochet stepped down and formal elections returned. His death on December 10 comes at a time where there are positive signs of Chilean society coming out from under the blanket of fear that Pinochet had spread over the country. The year 2006 will hopefully be seen as the beginning of a more true and participatory democracy in Chile, though there are serious societal problems that will require many years to overcome.

Michelle Bachelet's election to the presidency last January represented the strong desire of the Chilean people to put the violence of the earlier period behind them. Her life story represented a clear break with that past. Shortly after the 1973 coup, Bachelet's father was imprisoned and killed and both Michelle and her mother were arrested and tortured for 21 days. In her campaign, Bachelet focused on improving social disparities, especially with regard to gender inequalities.

Less than two months after her inauguration in March, Bachelet encountered her first political crisis when high school students around the country went on strike, demanding free student bus fares, free college entrance exams, and, in the long term, the abolition of the Organic Constitutional Law on Teaching (LOCE) and student participation in the reform of Chile's educational system.

The LOCE, which was pushed into law on Pinochet's last day in office in 1990, decentralized and deregulated the Chilean educational system, leaving it to the whims of financial markets. It created three types of schools: municipal, private and subsidized private. The government pays municipal and subsidized schools about \$50 a month per student. Subsidized schools can charge additional fees and private schools tend to charge from \$200-\$450. Average class size in private schools is 20, while in public schools, it is closer to 45. The result is a horribly unequal system producing students that score lower than students in countries like the Philippines, Botswana, Saudi Arabia, Ghana, and South Africa in comparative tests.

As more schools adhered to the strike during the month of May, and external support grew, negotiations

began with the government. At its peak, the students, together with labor and other supporters, put close to 800,000 people on the streets, the largest such protest in decades. Finally, after weeks of protest and missed classes, students voted to accept a proposal from Bachelet promising the following: free transport passes for the poorest 20 percent of municipal school students, half a million free school meals, free college entrance exams for 150,000 students each year (approximately 80 percent of applicants), investment in infrastructure for 520 schools, the reform of the LOCE and the Constitution to recognize the right to quality education for all and the formation of a Presidential Council on Education with six seats reserved for students. This council will advise the president on future educational reforms.

The student protestors are from the first generation not to grow up under the military junta. Their ability to maintain their strike for so long and to attract so much support from other sectors was a first in many years. Because people were afraid, most previous strikes were short-lived with little support from other sectors which feared a violent response from the government. This protest was a renaissance in the Chilean social struggle. While the students' unity and force may not be reproducible quickly by other sectors, the example of a committed group winning significant concessions from the government with minimal violence will serve as a beacon for others to organize without fear. One group that may have already benefited from this effect is the Escondida miners who maintained a strike in August with which they were able to gain a five percent salary increase and \$17,000 bonus.

But the students' victory represents not only a victory over the blanket of fear, but also over the economic policies that have created an incredibly unequal and unhealthy Chilean society. While Chile is often held up as the most developed country in Latin America – its per capita GDP of almost \$6,000 is the highest in Latin America – this overlooks the severe costs that this model has placed on the poorest Chilean people and the environment.

The economy continues to depend on the extraction of raw materials like minerals, fish, agriculture and lumber. Fish stocks are dwindling rapidly due to over-fishing, and gold mines like the Pascua Lima mine in the north leak cyanide and other poisons into streams important to farmers and indigenous people.

The economic "miracle" has been encouraged through a strong appeal to the "American dream" and

consumption. More and more Chileans have credit cards with running debts that accrue interest: the average Chilean family spends 43 percent of its monthly income to pay debts, despite the fact that Chile has the second longest work week in the world – 51 hours.

This endless cycle of overworking and still not being able to pay personal debts has created a very unhealthy society. In 2005, 43 percent of Chileans took time off for mental health reasons. Studies by the University of Chile show that Santiago has the highest rate of depression of any capital city in the world. Together with depression, rates of other health problems like

cancer, ulcers, hypertension and heart failure are growing in the country.

The success of the student protests should help to encourage other social groups to demand their rights, and the example of countries like Bolivia and Venezuela achieving real changes for the poor in their society could help to inspire and unite Chileans to struggle for a more humane and sustainable model of development. History will tell if 2006 really was a watershed year for Chilean democracy, but with a more understanding person in the presidency and an awakening civil society, Chile’s future looks promising.

Petition to repeal the Military Commissions Act

The Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC), whose mission is to abolish torture wherever it is practiced, is circulating the following petition directed to Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). It responds to the enactment of the Military Commissions Act (MCA), signed into law by President Bush on October 17.

The passage of the MCA is an alarming retreat from Constitutional protections that have been cher-

ished in the U.S. as a bulwark against official tyranny. Under its provisions, the president has arbitrary power to decide who will be afforded due process and who will be “disappeared” into internment centers, suffer “aggressive interrogations” and face martial law proceedings is staggering.

Please promote this petition, and continue to consult TASSC’s website for further developments: www.tassc.org.

Repeal the Torture Law (The Military Commissions Act of 2006)

To the Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives

Speaker Pelosi:

I call upon you to initiate action to repeal the Military Commissions Act of 2006. Whereas: Under the Military Commissions Act of 2006: “The president can now—with the approval of congress—indefinitely hold people without charge, take away protections against horrific abuse, put people on trial based on hearsay evidence, authorize trials that can sentence people to death based on testimony literally beaten out of witnesses, and slam shut the courthouse door for habeas petitions...” (ACLU, 10/17/06).

And whereas: The act also grants Bush and others immunity and is, *in Los Angeles Times* columnist Rosa Brooks’ words, “...a congressionally delivered ‘get-out-of-jail-free card.’”

THEREFORE, I, THE UNDERSIGNED, CALL UPON YOU TO INITIATE ACTION TO REPEAL THE MILITARY COMMISSIONS ACT OF 2006.

First/Last Name: _____ Signature: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

PLEASE return to:

Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC)
4121 Harewood Road, N.E. Suite B Washington, D.C. 20017
T. (202) 529-2991 F. (202) 529-8334 pmagno@tassc.org www.tassc.org

Brazil: Public debt continues to grow

In December 2005, the Brazilian government paid off its remaining debts to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with a final \$15.5 billion payment. The following month, it did the same with its debts to the Paris Club. The government used these payments to create the image that Brazil's debt is no longer a problem and that the government will no longer have to follow the dictates of international investors. The reality, unfortunately, is quite another, as these payments, ironically, actually will increase the total debt burden. The overwhelming problem of public debt in Brazil will continue to grow, thus increasing Brazil's susceptibility to international financial crises.

First, it is important to put the payments in perspective of the overall debt. Even after making these additional payments, the external debt only shrunk from \$202 billion in September 2005 to \$178 billion in July 2006, a reduction of 12 percent.

Second, the government continues to accrue new external debts and these new debts have much higher interest rates than those that were paid early. While the interest rates with the IMF were close to four percent per year, the interest rates on the \$14.3 billion in new debt that have been accrued since January 2006 have an average of 8.5 percent interest.

Third, these anticipated payments really represent a simple exchange of external for internal debt. One of the biggest problems with paying external debt is that it must be paid in U.S. dollars, or other internationally traded currencies. There are only a few ways for a country to obtain these dollars, the most obvious being by exporting more products than it imports. In 2005, Brazil exported \$13 billion more than it imported, but its debt was \$157.1 billion. Indebted countries' desperate strategy of orienting their economies toward exports instead of feeding or meeting other needs of their own people is rarely successful.

In the past 10 years or so, another way to obtain dollars for southern governments has been the sale of government bonds known in Brazil as internal debt titles. These titles are pieces of paper sold by the Brazilian government with the promise of a return on investment defined by the country's federal interest rate. Foreign investors leave their dollars with the Central Bank, which are used to pay the external debt, in exchange for Brazilian

reals that then are used to buy internal debt titles.

In order to attract these dollars, Brazil has maintained the highest interest rates in the world. In December 2006 they were 13.25 percent. To pay off the IMF and Paris Club debts, which had interest rates of four percent, the Brazilian government sold internal debt titles at a 13.25 percent interest rate. In the seven months since paying off the IMF debt (December 2005 – July 2006), the internal debt grew from R\$1.002 trillion to R\$1.109 trillion reals, an increase of 11 percent. The additional R\$107 billion equals six times what was spent on public health in the same period.

To compound the problem, the majority of the internal debt is indexed to the dollar, which means that any losses to international investors due to changes in the exchange rate will be paid by the government. So, as the dollar has fallen in relation to the *real* (caused by international investors flocking to buy *reals* in order to buy internal debt titles), the government pays investors not only incredibly high rates of return, but also reimburses the same investors for exchange rate losses. It is a no-lose situation for investors and a no-win situation for the Brazilian people.

Despite the anticipated payments to the IMF and Paris Club, debt servicing (payments of principal and interest rates on public internal and external debts) continued to weigh heavily on the government's spending in 2006. The figure below compares how much of public money is spent on different budget items. If debt refinancing – the paying of old debts with new debts, or “rolling the debt” — is also considered, the total spent on debt servicing would be 61 percent of total federal spending.

The Brazilian government's economic policies will continue to be heavily influenced by external forces as long as debt payments dominate public spending and foreign investors are able to withdraw all of their money at a moment's notice. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (Lula) was elected to address these structures that limit

Budget item	Percent of public spending (%) Jan-Jul 2006
Debt service	34.36
Health	4.75
Social assistance	2.74
National defense	1.75
Education	1.73
Agriculture	0.73
Science & technology	0.26

government's ability to address the serious social problems in Brazil, yet he has chosen not to change the limits, but to accept them and try to work within them.

One relatively easy step that Lula refuses to take to confront the problem is to heed Brazilian civil society's call for an audit of the debt, something that the 1988 Constitution requires but has never been done. In 1931 a similar audit was done of the debt and found that 40 percent of the contracts being paid had no documentation whatsoever and there was no control of remittances out of the country. By 1948, after canceling debts for which there was no documentation, the debt was reduced from \$1.124 billion to \$597 million. Debt servicing was reduced from 30 percent of export earnings to

seven percent in the same time period.

A group of economists and civil society organizations have begun a citizens' audit of Brazil's debt, which, much like past audits, is revealing missing contracts and a lack of controls. An official audit is likely to show debts that have been paid more than once, debts for projects that were never realized, debt that simply went into the pockets of corrupt dictators, etc. By stopping payment on these illegal and illegitimate debts, billions of dollars would be freed each year that could be spent to benefit the Brazilian people. Unfortunately, it appears that this president is not prepared to run the risk of upsetting investors, and the debt snowball will continue to grow without end.

Christian Peace Witness for Iraq March 16, 2007 ♦ Washington, D.C.



The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is one of many sponsors of the upcoming "Christian Peace Witness for Iraq." We ask you to join us for an ecumenical public witness in Washington, D.C. on March 16, 2007, the fourth anniversary of the war in Iraq. As followers of Jesus Christ, our faith compels us to make our voice heard—to repent of our complicity with the invasion and occupation of Iraq and to renew our commitment to peacemaking.

Our focus:

1. **End the U.S. occupation.** Like Isaiah, we are called to raise our prophetic voice, saying that security cannot be achieved through military domination of one people over another. We call on one another to find genuine security in God, who insists that we build just relationships with all people. We call on the president and Congress to bring our troops home from Iraq, to remove our military bases and to stop threatening Iran and other nations.
2. **Support our troops.** We call on one another to care for soldiers and their families who give so much of themselves in times of conflict. We call on the president and Congress to provide generous support for veterans and active-duty soldiers and their families as they seek to rebuild their lives.
3. **Rebuild Iraq.** There must be international reconstruction of Iraq and humanitarian aid provided for shattered Iraqi families.
4. **Say NO to torture.** We call on one another to learn and practice the discipline of active nonviolence: to resist violence and injustice and to construct the culture of peace and reconciliation that we all desire. We insist that our government treat all enemy combatants humanely and take decisive action to ensure that torture is banned by all agencies of the United States government.
5. **Say YES to justice.** Like Mary, who praised God for lifting up the lowly and filling the hungry with good things, we long for a world free from hunger, homelessness, environmental destruction, injustice, and oppression. We call on one another to do justice and show mercy to make our vision plain. We call on the president and Congress to create a federal budget that puts priority on meeting basic human needs instead of on making war. Let us together begin to fashion a just peace dividend that is both renewable and lasting.

An evening ecumenical worship service will be held at the Washington National Cathedral, followed by a candlelight procession to the White House, and a late night peace vigil. Check the website <http://www.christianpeacewitness.org> for more information, including information on how to connect with others in your area, or contact the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns at ogc@maryknoll.org, 202-832-1780. We would love to know if you can join us.

SPP: “NAFTA Plus” takes shape

The letters “SPP” need to become as common in the minds of North Americans as the terms NASCAR and NFL. SPP is the acronym for “Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America,” perhaps a more significant expansion of corporate power than the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed in 1994. Official announcements about the SPP are minimal and tend to downplay its significance, but from what has been discovered so far, the SPP plans to significantly change government policies on a wide range of issues.

The presidents of Canada, Mexico and the United States announced the launch of the SPP on March 31, 2005 in Waco, Texas. Their founding declaration called for the formation of 13 cross-border working groups, now called the North American Competitiveness Council (NACC), composed of corporate leaders and government officials that will report to Cabinet-level officials twice a year in addition to a meeting every March. The groups cover the following areas: manufactured goods and sectoral and regional competitiveness; movement of goods; energy; environment; e-commerce and information communications technologies; financial services; business facilitation; food and agriculture; transportation; and health. The lists of committee members have not been released, but from official declarations, apparently they are comprised solely of business and government representatives.

The NACC institutionalizes privileged access for corporations to government officials. Clearly corporations already possess much more access than other segments of society, but through the NACC, these same businesses will meet regularly with government officials. Entities excluded from this council, such as labor and environmental groups, will be at an even greater disadvantage than today.

While the SPP remains relatively unknown, its members are moving rapidly on a variety of initiatives. In June 2005, less than two months after the announcement of its existence, SPP working group members met with government leaders in Ottawa, Canada where they presented reports including spread sheets showing goals, objectives and time lines. No public disclosure was made of these plans – even to the legislative bodies of each country – but the transportation working group’s plan was leaked and shows that the aims are quite ambitious.



The most worrisome goal of this group is the creation of “multimodal corridors” which would run from Mexico through the U.S. to Canada, with six car lanes, four truck lanes, two freight rail lines, a high-speed commuter line, as well as “infrastructure for utilities including water lines, oil and gas pipelines, and transmission lines for electricity, broadband and other telecommunications services.” See <http://www.keeptexasmoving.org/projects/> for more details.

These multimodal corridors raise many serious concerns from people in the most affected states, especially Texas. They point out that 584,000 acres of land will be confiscated through eminent domain laws. In expectation of a rise in lawsuits on this issue, the Texas Department of Transportation has called for an increase in the numbers of courts that can hear eminent domain cases. Small roadside businesses note that they will lose customers due to infrequent entrance and exit ramps. Environmentalists say that wildlife habitats will be fragmented. Air pollution will rise not only due to an expected increase of vehicles passing through the region, but also due to the corridor’s distance from urban centers, creating longer local trips. Finally, SPP opponents question the estimated total cost for the Trans Texas Corridor of \$145.2 billion to \$183.5 billion: what is the source of this money, and will this drain funding for more urgent transportation needs in urban centers?

The Task Force on the Future of North America, a joint project of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives and the Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales, drafted the original proposal for the SPP. According to notes from a 2004 meeting of the Task Force, “No item – not Canadian water, not Mexican oil, not American anti-dumping laws – is ‘off the table;’ rather contentious or intractable issues will simply require more time to ripen politically... Mexican oil and Canadian water ... are invested with greater emotion than are those same natural resources in other countries. ... Consequently, policy recommendations on these issues are best considered long term goals.”

Proposals of this size and importance must be discussed with the highest amount of transparency and public participation. Go to the International Relations Center and read “Trinational Elites Map North American Future in ‘NAFTA Plus’” for more background on this issue: <http://americas.irc-online.org/am/386>.

Rock star urged to stop violent video game

A growing worldwide campaign calls for Bono, lead singer of the band U2 and Time magazine's 2005 person of the year for his work on issues such as debt cancellation and hunger, to use his considerable influence to halt the distribution of a new video game that is both violent and offensive to Venezuela. In "Mercenaries 2: World in Flames," the player leads an armed force into Venezuela with the objective of killing a "power hungry tyrant" who has taken over the oil industry. Bono is a principal investor in Pandemic Studios, the company that created the game.

The studio is known for producing extremely realistic video games and was subcontracted to produce realistic training games for the Pentagon in the 1990s. One outcome of this venture is "Full Spectrum Warrior," which is used not only to train soldiers but also to recruit youth. As an article on the MSNBC website says, "Training aside, video games are increasingly viewed by top brass as a way to get teenagers interested in enlisting." At recruitment stations around the country and on National Guard websites, free copies of video games like "America's Army" or "Guard Force" are available.

"Mercenaries 2" uses the same technology to make the video's scenes as realistic as possible. Anyone who has spent time in Caracas can immediately recognize the city's streets and landmarks in the game. The aim of the game is full devastation, so any "person" who moves should be "shot," and all the buildings, such as the headquarters of PDVSA, the Venezuelan public oil company, can be "destroyed."

Literally thousands of studies have shown links between media violence and aggressive behavior in children. These studies also show that violent video games are more harmful than violent television or movies because they are interactive and require the player to identify with an aggressor role. As video games become more life-like, as in the case of "Mercenaries," this effect will be even stronger.

"Mercenaries 2" is even more worrisome because of its choice of venue. With an already antagonistic

relationship between the U.S. and Venezuelan governments, a game like this can only add to the tensions. Millions of Venezuelans fear an invasion from the U.S.; knowing that a company that works for the U.S. military has created a game in which the country is completely destroyed will increase those concerns. "I think the U.S. government knows how to prepare campaigns of psychological terror so they can make things happen later," said Venezuelan Congressman Ismael Garcia, referring to the game. Other legislators have threatened to ban the game in Venezuela, but would prefer that the game not be released at all.



Caracas, Venezuela, the location of "Mercenaries 2: World in Flames."

Led by the Venezuela Solidarity Network, of which the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is a founding member, the campaign to stop the game has focused on Bono, not only because of his consistent public support for economic justice for southern countries, but because his involvement in the game is quite extensive. For him, Pandemic Studios is not simply one of many financial assets – Bono is one of only six partners in a firm called Elevation Partners, which was formed in 2005. Their first investment was in August 2005 of \$300 million in Pandemic Studios, making Elevation Partners the practical owner of the studios. Since that time, they have only invested in two other companies: \$300 million in Forbes magazine and \$100 million in an internet realty group called Move.

Clearly, Bono is aware of Pandemic Studios' links with the military and knows of the problems with "Mercenaries 2," if only due to the hundreds of letters from individuals, religious organizations and leaders, classrooms, and others that have been sent, asking him to stop the release of the game and divest from the company. Initially, Pandemic Studios faced unexpected difficulties in finding a distributor for the game due to concerns about public reaction, but it now appears that it will be released by Sony in 2007.

For more information about the campaign, contact the Venezuela Solidarity Network at 202-544-9355; email vsn@afgj.org; or visit <http://www.vensolidarity.org>.

Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The following was written by Maryknoll Affiliate Jo Albright who volunteers as a Maryknoll representative at the United Nations in New York. See a related article on page 11.

In June 2006, the indigenous world reacted with joy and optimism when the UN's Human Rights Council adopted the Draft Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples and included it in its overall report for review during the 61st session of the General Assembly (GA). The Declaration, a comprehensive statement addressing the rights of indigenous peoples, was drafted and formally debated for over 20 years. It addresses both individual and collective rights, cultural rights and identity, rights to education, health, employment, and language. It also ensures indigenous peoples' right to remain distinct and to pursue their own visions as recognized in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

During the week of October 16, indigenous peoples from all over the world congregated in New York when the UN's Third Committee (which oversees human rights issues) was scheduled to discuss indigenous issues. Since March 2006, prior to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, indigenous populations, peoples and individuals, as well as human rights organizations, endorsed global petitions, joint statements and lobbied governments to strongly support its adoption by the General Assembly.

On October 16, members of the NGO Committee on the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples were in the Third Committee conference room listening to Rodolfo Stavenhagen, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights for Indigenous Peoples, and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the Chairperson of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples, send strong messages to members of the General Assembly to adopt the Declaration without further delay. The next day it was to be discussed in a closed meeting of the General Assembly's leadership.

By November, it was still unclear if and when the report would be presented to the GA Plenary. It was learned that some issues relating to the Second Decade

of the World's Indigenous Peoples were never discussed as scheduled on October 16 and 17 in the Third Committee; rather, the committee continued to discuss the Declaration. Unfortunately, due a break in protocol, a chain of events then began which derailed the adoption.



Hmong women and girls in Vietnam; photo from Union of Catholic Asian News

As a result of this derailment, the draft declaration failed to pass its first hurdle in the GA's human rights committee. Briefly on November 28, Peru, supported by a number of European and Latin American countries, urged adoption. But Namibia said some provisions in the draft declaration contradicted the national constitutions of a number

of African counties. On behalf of African nations, Namibia proposed amendments to put off consideration of the declaration to allow further consultations and to conclude consideration of the declaration by the end of the current GA session in September 2007. The committee then adopted the amendments to delay by a vote of 82 to 67 with 25 abstentions. The amended draft declaration was then adopted by a vote of 83 to 0 with 91 abstentions, one of which was the U.S., while New Zealand, Australia and Canada voted in favor of the delay. (The right of indigenous peoples to self-determination, recognition of substitution rights and rights to lands, territories and resources have been sticking points for these four countries since the beginning. The latter three issues will be the theme of the 2007 Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.)

Needless to say disappointment, even outrage, reigned in the UN, which was accused of missing an historic opportunity to fill a critical gap in human rights protection. While not legally binding, the Declaration was expected to have a major impact on the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide. On December 19, the Third Committee will deliver its human rights report to the GA recommending adoption of the Declaration but deferring consideration until the end of the 61st session in the fall of 2007.

For further information on the Permanent Forum go to: www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii.

“Oil aid” subsidizes international industry

“Oil aid” is the government’s practice of diverting taxpayer money, intended for poverty alleviation, to subsidize the international oil industry. Oil accounts for about 40 percent of the modern energy used in the world and 95 percent of transportation fuel. The world’s addiction to oil runs deep and oil corporations are among the most influential companies in the world. They are actively using their influence to develop allies within government and block much needed reforms. The result is that we are pursuing an incoherent and often contradictory energy policy whereby governments are promoting the expansion of the oil industry and working to overcome oil addiction at the same time.

The best and most visible example of this counter-productive energy policy is the billions of dollars in subsidies that governments provide to international oil companies each year, including the use of limited development assistance to subsidize the expansion of the international oil industry. Through domestic policy, international financial institutions like the Export-Import Bank and the World Bank Group, rich governments are providing goods, services, grants, loans and a range of financial guarantees – along with billions of dollars in tax breaks - to the largest and most profitable companies in the world. Governments and aid agencies are also financing the infrastructure that oil companies use to produce and transport oil and pressuring countries in Asia, South and Central America and Africa to change laws and regulations in ways that favor Big Oil.

Oil dependence is increasingly tied to many of the biggest problems facing humanity today:

- Oil fuels global warming. More than one third of all global greenhouse gas emissions come from oil and gas, and overcoming our dependence on oil is a critical component in avoiding dangerous climate change.
- High oil prices drive impoverished countries into debt. The oil shocks of 1970s helped to trigger the modern debt crisis and today’s soaring oil prices are undermining the benefits of debt cancellation and putting serious stress on many of the world’s most impoverished countries.
- Oil triggers and intensifies armed conflict. Countries that have a lot of oil are more likely to suffer civil wars than those that don’t, and countries that depend on oil imports are all too often prepared to go to war to secure oil supplies.
- Oil is often linked to human rights abuses and repression. There is an alarming record of human rights

abuses by governments and corporations associated with oil projects, and oil money is propping up some of the most authoritarian regimes in the world.

- Oil harms human health and undermines sensitive ecosystems. Oil production and transportation can have a devastating impact on local communities and ecosystems, and the process of refining and burning oil generates massive amounts of pollution.

Yet, since 1992, the World Bank has provided more than \$5 billion in subsidies to the oil industry, while devoting only five percent of its energy budget to clean, renewable energy sources. The U.S. government has spent even more money subsidizing Big Oil internationally. These misguided policies have fueled global warming, encouraged oil dependence, led to increased conflict, and increased poverty and debt.

For example, the estimated cost of Tanzania’s oil imports rose from \$190 million in 2002 to \$480 million this year – for the same amount of oil. In comparison, debt cancellation is expected to free up only about \$140 million for Tanzania in 2006. Furthermore, this cancellation doesn’t even touch the debt held by large private banks in London, Paris and New York. At the same time, oil companies are raking in record profits, with ExxonMobil reporting profits of \$4.7 million an hour in July 2006.

In Chad, the World Bank provided critical assistance to a project led by ExxonMobil that has exacerbated conflict and poverty. As oil started flowing, Chad’s authoritarian president increased military spending and ripped up an agreement with the World Bank that was supposed to ensure that oil revenues were used to fight poverty. At first the Bank objected, but it backed down as soon as the president threatened to cut off the oil if his terms were not accepted.

Faith in action:

On November 7, the U.S. people voted for an agenda that called for an end to the support of Big Oil and a focus instead on promoting renewables and energy efficiency. Urge Congress to move swiftly in this direction in the coming months.

For additional information: The End Oil Aid Campaign is working internationally to raise public awareness and pressure decision-makers in donor countries, the World Bank and other institutions to stop using development assistance to subsidize the expansion of the international oil industry. Contact: 202-518-9029 endoilaid@priceofoil.org, www.endoilaid.org

IDB cancels debt; financing details delayed

On November 17, 2006, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) agreed to cancel US\$2.1 billion in debt out of US\$3.5 billion owed to the IDB by five Latin American highly indebted poor countries (HIPCs, Bolivia, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua). The IDB is the biggest lender in Latin America and these nations owe on average one third of their overall debt stocks to the institution. This decision by the IDB sets an important precedent: that the G8's Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) can and should be expanded to include other important creditors.

IDB staff had admitted, in a recent leaked document, that cancelling this debt would seriously improve these countries' debt sustainability outlooks and help them achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The document showed that Latin American countries had benefited far less from the MDRI agreed last year due to the exclusion of lenders in the Latin America and Caribbean region.

The announcement on November 17 by IDB President Luis Alberto Moreno followed intense campaign and lobby efforts by organizations across Latin America, North America and Europe. Over the last 12 months, the "Justice for Latin America" coalition – which included Eurodad, Latindadd, Fundación Jubileo Bolivia, Jubilee USA, Social Justice Committee Canada and Manos Unidas Spain among other groups – had targeted the IDB and relevant national capitals with letters, phone calls, faxes and face-to-face meetings.

The deal will see US\$380 million written-off for Bolivia; US\$249 million for Guyana; US\$333 million for Haiti; US\$717 billion for Honduras and US\$505 million for Nicaragua with a cut-off date of end-2003.

It follows months of protracted internal negotiations within the IDB as to how to finance the write-down. Key differences centered on replenishment of the Fund for Special Operations (FSO), the IDB's concessional loan window for the poorest Latin American borrowers. If the FSO used its resources to finance this cancellation, its capacity to provide highly concessional finance to the poorest countries – which include, in addition to the five HIPCs, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala and Paraguay – would be seriously compro-

mised because the FSO depends in large part on reimbursements. The United States had wanted to separate negotiations on debt cancellation from discussions on FSO replenishment, but some Latin American HIPCs such as Bolivia had feared that this would mean they would see reduced concessional finance in the future, which would not help their longer-term debt sustainability profiles.

In the end it appears as though key financing decisions such as these have been postponed until early 2007.

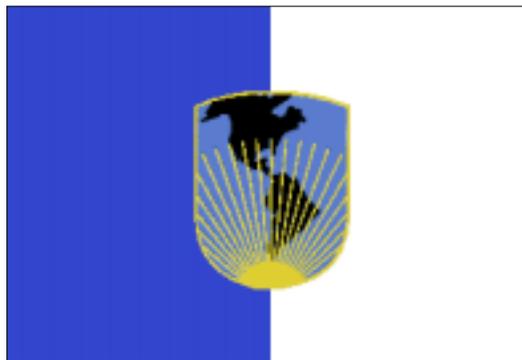
The IDB says that the agreed-upon framework will ensure preservation of the FSO, but, according to Eurodad, it appears that some countries – Bolivia and Honduras – will in the future receive a mix of concessional and non-concessional resources which means that the overall level of concessional borrowing they are entitled to from the IDB will be reduced.

The IMF also has to give its seal of approval to the macroeconomic policies being pursued by these countries in order for the IDB to approve the cancellation.

Under the terms of the deal, Haiti cannot benefit from any of this cancellation until it completes the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. Haiti is just at the start of this program which involves countries having to implement a whole series of economic and governance reforms in order to be awarded with the prize of debt relief at the end. But countries that have gone through this process already have experienced significant delays and serious disagreements over the reform measures the IMF and World Bank insist they implement. This is likely to mean that Haiti will not benefit from any of this debt cancellation until 2008 or 2009.

Faith in action:

Haiti needs debt cancellation now in order to support the country's fragile peace and provide much-needed funds for an impoverished nation's development. Write to Héctor E. Morales, the U.S.'s representative on the IDB's board of directors, 1300 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20577, and urge a cancellation of Haiti's debt without postponement or intrusive policy conditions.



Jubilee South's position on conditionality

The Norway Conference on Conditionality, held in Oslo on November 28-29, 2006, brought together government officials from donor countries, academics, non-governmental organizations and international agencies to review the changes in policy conditionalities proposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). At that gathering, Jubilee South presented the following statement on conditionality:

1. Jubilee South welcomes the Conference on Conditionality organized by the Government of Norway. We appreciate the intent of the meeting and its CSO [civil society organizations] supporters, as we also appreciate the context in which it takes place. It is a welcome opportunity for the different parties to discuss an inherently wrong, unjust and highly resented political tool used by the “donors” and particularly the Bank on governments and peoples of the South.

2. We regret, however, that the chosen focus on the undesirability of “economic conditionality” leaves the impression that non-economic conditionalities may be desirable or legitimate. Drawing a distinction between a purported good or political conditionality on the one side, and negative or economic conditionality on the other is analytically unsound, politically superficial and risks placing even more power in the hands of the World Bank and external lenders.

3. Jubilee South stands against all forms of Conditionality. The imposition of conditionalities is an externally-driven process that contradicts the principles of sovereignty, democratic self-determination, autonomous decision-making and popular empowerment. As such, any and all conditionalities are unacceptable to Jubilee South.

4. Conditionality, in any of its manifestations, undermines the autonomy of national processes and encourages the reduction of public spaces for citizen's participation in the discussion and definition of government policies. Practice has shown that political conditionality geared toward achieving “good governance” has failed. Enhanced democracy is the product of citizen engagement and not just the result of getting the right recipe of policy and institutional change. Changes imposed through external pressure tend to be unsustainable because they are not deeply rooted.

5. Political and economic conditionalities are two sides of the same coin – both are impositions wrapped in the latest discourse designed by the rich to “assist” the poor, and make a profit doing so. The World Bank and

the “donor” countries, instead of facing up to the failure of the neoliberal economic development and growth model, pretend once again to place the blame on the victim. Now it is claimed that the skewed development and mounting poverty are the result of “bad” “corrupt” governments – the same governments that have blindly followed the Washington Consensus recipe book.

6. Having succeeded in many countries in imposing, with elite complicity, privatization and liberalization measures, corporate capital is deepening its penetration. This is facilitated by the public sector governance norms pushed by the IFIs [international financial institutions], the bilateral lenders, Free Trade Agreements and the World Trade Organization. As the Bank admits, most of its conditions are now in that area, particularly financial “management” to reinforce its ongoing pressure for governments to sustain privatization, trade liberalization and macro-economic orthodoxy in general so as to facilitate and protect the operations of finance capital and corporations.

7. Conditions to impose privatization and liberalization are neither more nor less objectionable than those allegedly leading to good governance. As the Norwegian CSO Networkers stated, “Conditionalities are the “sticks” that the Bank and its donor partners use to enforce their will on the receiver, and constitute an important set of tools in current development policies. Loans and grants “buy” powerful influence, and conditionality is the ticket to that power. The tools of conditionality therefore greatly extend the arsenal of tools that the Bank can activate, and gives it a formidable leverage over receiving countries.”

8. We hold that “donor” conditionality needs to be analyzed in the context of the chronic poverty, impoverishment and social exclusion that plagues the South. Power is at the heart of the unfair social and international relations that must be changed and not reinforced. In Jubilee South we speak not of aid and conditions, but of the need for reparations and restoration of the historical, economic, ecological, political and social debt that the North owes to the South. The real – and immediate – issue is to secure the unconditional stop to the net flow of resources from South to North in the form of debt repayment and profit remittances that impoverish so many of our countries.

9. From the standpoint of principle, Jubilee South insists that the devolution of what has been taken from our countries over history and in a documented manner is a principle not subject to negotiation. This is a

question of human rights for both North and South, a matter of justice for the South and should not be viewed merely as a question of choice for the North.

10. We acknowledge that the impulses of charity and sympathy are infinitely different from those of imperial greed and domination through force and structural adjustment. Nonetheless as long as what is offered is social alleviation rather than core restructuring of the unjust global exploitation system, the same impulses are insufficient and, if not redirected, could lean closer to the positions of “creditors,” leaving the unjust debt order untouched.

11. Democratic social movements and organizations in the South believe that it is the poor themselves that can and must act as their own liberators. When bilateral funders and others in the North demand specific social policies and so-called poverty alleviation measures, they may be undermining the very democratic processes that are key to the empowerment of the poor.

12. “External co-operation” has done much harm to the South, particularly where accompanied, as usual, by high-sounding discourses of democracy. With conditionality as one of its tools, the relationship perpetuated is still one of domination. We call on everyone to closely scrutinize and reject the prescriptions being handed down by the World Bank, as it avidly seeks to become the standard bearer on issues of governance and anti-corruption process. Bilateral cooperation agencies should not continue to accept Bank leadership.

13. Jubilee South calls on governments in the South not to be deceived or to fall into the trap of accepting the policy parameters dictated by the so-called creditors, lest conditionality deepen the economic, political and

ideological occupation. Policy on conditionalities should be addressed not as a matter of “good” v. “bad” conditionality, but as a political question. We must not allow the World Bank to dictate the terms of the debate on governance, development and conditionality.

14. We call on CSOs in the North to: support the process of social movement building and the demands articulated by those movements for broader and deeper debate on the nature of poverty and debt; be in solidarity with –not preempt or substitute – peoples’ movements in their democratic and sovereign process of creating new instruments of governance, modes of interaction with or resistance to governments; and be respectful of the decision-making process at the level of CSOs in the South.

15. We also call on CSOs in the North and forward-looking development agencies to support the creation of spaces, in the North and in the South, so that people themselves can freely determine their future and create societies free from poverty, debt and war. All attempts to undermine countries such as Bolivia and Venezuela that are taking important steps to democratize and practice alternative development must also be rejected.

16. We enjoin you to broaden the debates within all our countries and tackle the links between economic power, multinational corporations, war and militarism, and address the issues of exploitation and colonialism (old and new).

17. The struggle against debt and conditionality should serve and be part of the struggles of the poor for the redistribution of economic and political power. Our struggle is not to “humanize” an inherently cruel international power structure, but to change it.

UN Council to study “right to water” obligations

On November 27, 2006, the UN Human Rights Council made a key decision on human rights and access to water, requesting “the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, taking into account the views of States and other stakeholders, to conduct, within existing resources, a detailed study on the scope and content of the relevant human rights obligations related to equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation under international human rights instruments, that includes relevant conclusions and recommendations thereon, to be submitted prior to the sixth session of the Council.”

This decision is significant for the promotion of the

right to water because the right is viewed by many countries as “controversial.” The study by the UN High Commissioner will provide countries with the opportunity to debate the right to water. Hopefully, the result will be commitments on the part of governments and international aid agencies to support the implementation of the right.

Recently, the UN Development Program referred to water policies “water apartheid” because of the lack of service to the poor, and called for the implementation of the right to water to address the inequitable distribution of resources in water services.

Integrity of creation: Maryknoll Sisters' land ethic

The following statement was affirmed by the Maryknoll Sisters at their Inter-Assembly Conference in October 2006. The document can also be found on the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns' website.

As Maryknoll Sisters our sense of mission impels us to live in a way that testifies to the integrity and sacredness of all of creation. We are called to relearn our place in the Universe and be enlightened by a worldview in which land once again is seen as sacred. By embracing the self-organizing principles of the cosmos, as we state in our 2002 General Assembly proceedings, we are called to see land as subject rather than object or commodity. Our endorsement of the Earth Charter similarly invites us to live out of a new sense of being members of one Earth Community.

We are privileged, as a Congregation, to participate within numerous cultures around the world. We have learned from these many cultures their own reverence of Earth, the Cosmos, as Holy. We witness to the increased suffering of millions of people – a suffering related to the rampant degradation of Earth and its gifts. We likewise witness to the destruction and diminishment of other life forms and elements in the web of life that sustains us. We share in the wisdom of these cultures and have been sensitized to the centrality of land in many people's lives. Likewise we recognize that we hold precious land that is host to ourselves and the larger web of life.

We concur that a land ethic enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soil, air, water, plants and animals and thereby reflects the existence of an ecological conscience. May the beliefs and commitments to action articulated here serve as an important guide for our choices as we seek to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community that a land ethic implies.

We believe that creation is a primary source of revelation of the Divine Presence. Earth is sacred, and the extinction of life forms and eco-systems through overuse and irresponsible exploitation is a destruction of manifestations of the Divine Presence.

We believe we are called to a greater consciousness of the interconnectedness and oneness of the universe of which Earth is a part. This consciousness continues to evolve. Emerging from the spiritualities of prophets, sages, mystics and indigenous peoples throughout the

ages, it is strengthened by present day theological and scientific insights and discoveries, and by our day to day experience with the people with whom we are living and working.



We believe as we journey from our focus upon the human to an earth-cosmos centered community, we are challenged to a radical transformation in our understanding of the place of the human within creation. Such an understanding impels us to witness to a deeper consciousness of justice as right relationship between the human and the rest of creation, thus respecting the integral human-cosmos relationship that exists.

We believe we are called to live in a sustainable manner, meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

We believe we are called to be a community that not only exercises faithful care of Earth's gifts, but also co-creates along with the Divine. We hold these blessings in trust in a spirit of solidarity with each other and especially the poor. We desire to live in harmonious partnership with all of creation and thus be faithful to the mission of Jesus to which we have been called.

As participants in One Sacred Earth Community we commit ourselves to:

- deepen our understanding of the beliefs articulated here through study, dialogue, prayer, action and reflection;
- apply these beliefs to our land use decisions;
- be guided by ethical principles and responsible research that reflect our deep reverence for Earth and our clear commitment to a right relationship with the Earth community in our decisions for land use;
- consider our commitment to the poor and their needs in any land decisions;
- be attuned to and guided by the land ethic of host cultures in which we live and minister;
- consider the good of the land as an important criterion in any land use decisions;
- work to protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life; and
- cooperate and collaborate with other persons and groups that are engaged in awareness raising and advocacy around these issues.

Cluster bombs should be banned

Israel's invasion and heavy bombardment of Lebanon for 34 days last summer has boosted an international campaign to ban cluster bombs. Norway says it will invite interested states to begin drafting a treaty ban early this year. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) says it also intends to hold a meeting this year to outline a possible cluster munitions treaty.

A cluster bomb is a canister packed with bomblets and weighing up to 2,000 pounds. Launched from aircraft – sometimes by parachute – or dispatched by artillery or rockets, the canister is meant to break open in mid-air, spreading its submunitions over an area as large as two or three football fields. They are meant to explode on impact, but the weapons do not always work as designed. Wind, weather and soil conditions all contribute to a dud rate as high as 40 or even 80 percent.

Cluster munitions virtually guarantee civilian casualties when fired into populated areas, and unexploded submunitions become de facto landmines, killing or maiming people long after a conflict. The ICRC estimates that more than 10,000 people have been killed or injured by cluster bombs over the past 30 years – 98 percent of them civilians. Children are especially vulnerable because the tiny bombs are often an eye-catching yellow with small parachutes attached.

The UN says Israel released an estimated 1.2 million bomblets over southern Lebanon last July and August, 90 percent during the last three days of fighting as a peace agreement was being finalized. The Israeli commander of a rocket unit in Lebanon told the Tel Aviv daily newspaper Haaretz the saturation bombing with cluster weapons was “insane and monstrous. We covered entire towns in cluster bombs” before the Aug. 14 ceasefire.

UN staff and Lebanese Army bomb specialists in southern Lebanon found and destroyed more than 10,000 cluster bomblets in the first two and a half weeks after the fighting ended. During the same period, duds killed 12 Lebanese civilians and injured over 50 more.

An investigation commissioned by the UN Human Rights Council concluded that Israel deliberately used cluster munitions to make large areas of agricultural land in southern Lebanon unusable. With their fields and orchards having become minefields, crops such as summer tobacco, wheat and fruit were left to rot. Winter crops such as lentils and chickpeas could not be planted because farmers could not plow their fields. Many casualties were poor farmers who were desperate to feed

their families and risked working in fields amidst unexploded ordinance.

The bombs were used in Laos in the 1970s and 1980s, Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998, Serbia and Montenegro in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003 and most recently by both sides during the Israel-Lebanon conflict.

Cluster bombs are not prohibited under international law, even though they cannot distinguish between civilians and combatants, and they remain deadly long after the end of hostilities – two crucial tests for munitions under the Geneva Conventions that govern conduct during conflict.

Nevertheless, the U.S. and 70 other countries from Algeria to Yemen maintain cluster munitions. The U.S. arsenal includes 5.5 million cluster bombs containing 728 million bomblets; the military insists the weapons are needed to attack artillery positions or runways, armor columns and missile installations.

In August an amendment to the Defense Appropriations bill was introduced in the U.S. Senate regarding the use of cluster bombs. The measure would have prevented funds from being spent on the purchase, use or transfer of cluster munitions unless the Defense Department ensured that the munitions would not be used in or near any civilian areas. However, the amendment was rejected on a 70-30 vote.

Like the international landmine treaty that was adopted in 1999, a treaty to ban cluster munitions is needed. The U.S. and the international community have spent millions of dollars to remove landmines in post-conflict areas, saving countless lives. A similar effort regarding cluster bombs would save still more lives.

Belgium instituted a ban on the weapon last February, and Germany announced their troops will no longer use cluster weapons. Australia and Norway have also declared a moratorium. Sweden, Mexico, the Vatican and the ICRC are also calling for a ban.

A total ban on cluster munitions is the only antidote for the “iron rain” that fell over southern Lebanon last summer. “You know how you sprinkle seeds on the ground?” asks Hussein Ali, a 47-year-old municipal worker. “That’s what the bombs are like down here.”

Until countries can agree, the sorrows of farmers like Rida Nouredine in southern Lebanon will continue. With his olive groves and wheat fields littered with cluster bombs, he says, “I feel as though someone has tied my arms, or is holding me by my neck, suffocating me because this land is my soul.”

Shareholders work to end child sex tourism

Each year more than two million children are exploited in the global commercial sex trade, some of them as young as five years old, with the average age of 14. Child sex tourism (CST) is the practice of foreigners sexually exploiting children in another country. It is an organized multi-million dollar industry (includes tour guides, websites and brothel maps). At least 32 countries have extraterritorial laws that allow the prosecution of their citizens for CST crimes committed abroad including the U.S.

In 1996, the International Hotel & Restaurant Association (IH&RA), recognizing that child sex abusers may attempt to use hotels as the location where they commit their crimes, passed a resolution condemning the sexual exploitation of children and recommended all members consider measures to prevent use of their premises for commercial sexual exploitation of children.

In 2003, the World Tourism Organization and End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT), funded by UNICEF, created a global Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism, applying to suppliers of tourism services worldwide.

Travel, tourism, and hospitality companies who sign on to the Code must establish a corporate policy against commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC); place clauses in contracts with suppliers stating a common repudiation of CSEC; report annually on their progress; train tourism personnel; provide information to travelers; and provide information to local “key persons” at travel destinations. IH&RA encourages members to sign the Code.

In 1999, two non-governmental organizations reported on sexual exploitation of minors conducted at several hotels in San José, Costa Rica, including the Marriott. Following criminal investigation, a Costa Rican was convicted for aggravated pimping of minors and sentenced to serve eight years in prison. A sworn witness’ statement from the trial elucidated the network comprised of hotel receptionists – including Marriott receptionists. Victims reported having been brought to clients in the Marriott and other San José hotels.

After several unsuccessful attempts to establish dialogue with the company, two Marriott shareholders, The First Swedish National Pension Fund (through GES

Investment Services), and Boston Common Asset Management filed a resolution with Marriott International in 2005 requesting that Marriott address the risks of child sex tourism, to prevent recurrence of previous problems at one of their hotels in Costa Rica.

The shareholders agreed to withdraw the resolution after Marriott agreed to a substantive dialogue on the issue of a policy to protect children from commercial sexual exploitation. Shareholders met three times during 2006 with members of Marriott’s Human Rights Task Force, that was formed specifically to address this issue and consists of senior officials in the organization across the areas of human resources, compliance, public affairs and international lodging operations.

Marriott began evaluating some potential changes that could be made to their hotlines and audit procedures. They gathered and analyzed the human rights policies of others in the hotel industry, as well as other relevant codes, including the ECPAT code.

In November 2006, Marriott International’s Board of Directors approved a change in its human rights policy to specifically include a section on the protection of children.

Marriott has already begun employee awareness and training on this new policy at all levels of the organization. The company is taking a leadership role in the International Business Leaders Forum that is working on an industry-wide initiative to prevent child sex tourism. Marriott started including in all pre-arrival email messages (20 million are sent by Marriott each year to registered guests), the Responsible Tourist and Traveler brochure developed by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, which includes a message about not engaging in child sex tourism since it is a crime. Additionally, they have encouraged all their sites to look for specific partnerships to address this issue within the communities they are located, such as youth employment training programs.

The shareholder group will continue to encourage Marriott to expand their efforts in this area and monitor the implementation of the company’s policy.

In addition, members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility filed shareholder resolutions this fall with Starwood Hotel & Resorts and Host Hotels & Resorts (an international hotel real estate company), and plan to extend their advocacy efforts to others in the industry.

Resources

- 1) “... And How are the Children?” The fifth annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days will be held in Washington, D.C. **March 9-12, 2007**, and will focus on the theme of children. Over 1,000 people are expected to attend. Experts will train participants on advocacy and inform them of U.S. domestic and international policies that impact all of God’s children and are shaping the future of our world. The gathering will conclude with a visit to Capitol Hill where participants will ask Congressional representatives to make the needs of children the center of the 2007 legislative agenda. Registration fee: \$150 (includes two lunches and Sunday dinner.) Early registration discount (before February 1) \$20; late registration fee (after March 1) \$50. The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is a co-sponsor of this event. Contact information: www.advocacydays.org; info@advocacydays.org; tel: 202-470-0127; EAD, c/o United Church of Christ, 100 Maryland Ave. NE, Suite 330, Washington, D.C. 20002.
- 2) **Middle East Peace Advocacy Conference:** Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) will organize a conference **May 6-8, 2007**, in Washington, D.C. Advocates from churches around the country are invited to participate. This ecumenical conference will focus on U.S. policy and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with speakers, workshops, advocacy preparation and a day of lobbying your elected officials. The program will begin on Sunday evening and conclude with Tuesday’s Hill appointments and will include a special session for denominational gatherings. Updates and information on how to register will be available on CMEP’s website in the coming months. Check www.cmep.org for details.
- 3) **Threats to Our Water: NAFTA, SPP, Super-Corridors, Atlantica:** The Sierra Club has created a PowerPoint presentation on the threat posed by the new “Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America,” also known as NAFTA Plus. See related story on page 17. Go to the Sierra Club’s website to view the PDF file: <http://www.sierraclub.org/cac/water/WaterThreatsNAFTASPPAtlantica.pdf>
- 4) **The World Bank’s Strategy on Governance and Anticorruption: A Civil Society Perspective:** This new background paper from CIDSE (International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity, a coalition of 15 Catholic development agencies in Europe and North America) is based in part on a survey of 56 southern civil society organizations based in 24 countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia. This paper directly addresses key elements of a new World Bank strategy, with the expectation that views of local civil society organizations, working at the grassroots level on governance issues, will be taken into account. To read a copy of the document, email CIDSE for information: contencin@cidse.org
- 5) **How the U.S. Can Use Strategic Diplomacy to Break the Deadlock and Protect Darfur Now:** This new paper from Africa Action analyzes how the U.S. can effectively mobilize its support for new action to protect Darfur. It urges the U.S. to put the lives of the people of Darfur above the counter-terrorism concerns that have tied Washington to Khartoum, constraining a more robust U.S. response to the genocide and emboldening the Sudanese government to thwart the will of the international community. To read the article online or to download a PDF version, go to www.africaaction.org and click on “resources and information.” To contact Africa Action for a copy, call 202-546-7961 or write to Africa Action, 1634 Eye Street, N.W., Suite 810, Washington, D.C., 20006, or email africaaction@igc.org
- 6) **People’s Peace Initiative:** The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is one of several Catholic organizations to endorse the People’s Peace Initiative, an effort to articulate the challenges for Catholic peacemaking in the 21st century. Central to the vision are Jesus’ Gospel values and the experiences and insights of marginalized people—especially communities of color, women and the impoverished in the U.S. and around the world. The two components of this initiative include: 1. the writing and publication of a document, based on input from small group reflection processes in parishes and diocese convenings; and 2. an invigoration of the “vocation of peacemaking” and strengthening of relationships among Catholic organizations at the local level to further the work of building a more just and peace-filled world. To learn more about this process and how you can participate, or to receive a copy of the booklet (\$5 each, 30 pages), contact Pax Christi USA, 814-453-4955; www.paxchristiusa.org