

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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MARYKNOLL OFFICE FOR GLOBAL CONCERNS:

Peace, Social Justice and the Integrity of Creation
<http://www.maryknollogc.org>

*Maryknoll Sisters
 Maryknoll Lay Missioners
 Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers*

- Marie Dennis — *Director*.....mdennis@maryknoll.org
- Sr. Ann Braudis, MM.....abraudis@mksisters.org
- Judy Coode.....jcoode@maryknoll.org
- Yamileth Coreas.....ycoreas@maryknoll.org
- Sr. Rose (Meg) Gallagher, MM.....rgallagher@mksisters.org
- David Kane, MLM.....dkane@maryknoll.org
- Rev. Jim Kofski, MM.....jkofski@maryknoll.org
- Susan Weissert, MLM.....sweissert@mksisters.org

MOGC Washington

P.O. Box 29132
 Washington, D.C. 20017
 (202)832-1780 phone
 (202)832-5195 fax
 ogc@maryknoll.org

MOGC Maryknoll NY

P.O. Box 311
 Maryknoll, N.Y. 10545-0311
 (914)941-7575 phone
 (914)923-0733 fax
 ogc@maryknoll.org

MOGC UN Office

777 First Ave., 10th Fl.
 New York, N.Y. 10115
 (212)973-9551 phone

TAKE ACTION - Email, call, fax or write U.S. decisionmakers

President George W. Bush
 The White House
 Washington, D.C. 20500
www.whitehouse.gov

Vice President Dick Cheney
 The White House
 Washington, D.C. 20500
vice_president@whitehouse.gov

White House Comment Desk
 (202) 456-1111 phone
 (202) 456-2461 fax

Condoleezza Rice
 Secretary of State
 2201 C Street, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20520
 (202) 647-6575 phone
 (202) 647-2283 fax
www.state.gov

Robert Gates
 Secretary of Defense
 The Pentagon
 Washington, D.C. 20301
 (703) 695-5261 phone
www.defenselink.mil

Alberto Gonzales
 Attorney General
 U.S. Department of Justice
 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20530-0001
 (202)353-1555 phone
AskDOJ@usdoj.gov
www.justice.gov

Dr. Zalmay Khalilzad
 U.S. Representative to UN
 799 United Nations Plaza
 New York, NY 10017
 (212) 415-4000 phone

Current status of bills:
 (202) 225-1772
<http://thomas.loc.gov>

Capitol switchboard:
 (202) 224-3121

www.senate.gov
www.house.gov

President
 World Bank Group
 1818 H Street, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20433
www.worldbank.org

Rodrigo de Rato y Figaredo
 Managing Director
 International Monetary Fund
 700 19th Street, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20431
www.imf.org

Sabbath: A reflection on right relationships

As we continue our reflections on this Sabbath year, we are bombarded by numbing images of war and the sinful loss of lives, expansion of regional conflicts, the deepening poverty in our own country, and increasingly commercialized messages from presidential hopefuls. Maryknoll missionaries continue to tell encouraging stories of struggle of the people they serve, as they also keep us informed of the ways that the worsening economic contexts in which people live and work become continuously more precarious. It is difficult to be hopeful, and to remain energetic and effective in the face of enormous economic, social and ecological injustice, and sometimes, spiritual fatigue.

The Sabbath year is actually a gift, a reminder that we have a chance to rest, can have Sabbath if we choose. “I even gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, so that they might learn that I, Yahweh, am the one who sanctifies them.” (Ez. 20:12) We learned in 2000



Photo by Jeff Scott, courtesy of Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers

that the Jubilee is a time for righting our relationships, with each other and with the earth. Jubilee and the subsequent Sabbath years are the time to put ourselves and our world back in balance with God and with each other.

The Jubilee year was to be a time to free slaves and to remove the “yoke.” In past years, we have fought for – and continue to call for – debt cancellation and attention to the global climate crisis. In this 21st century, globalized world, there are many forms of slavery that we might consider in the light of these readings.

Current trade regulations, brokered by the members of the World Trade Organization, result in new kinds of enslavement. “If you buy or sell with your neighbor, let no one wrong his brother.” (Lev. 25: 14) Current trade policies work against this mandate. Free trade agreements across the world give rise to new types of slavery, where laborers are refused their rights to just wages and labor organizing, and small farms and businesses are forced to close. People who suddenly find themselves without income are forced to sell their land, their bodies, and, in some countries, their children in order to survive and to minimally feed their families. Immigrants seeking work find themselves without documents or rights, lonely and fre-

quently paying back travel costs at exorbitant rates, in the hope of supporting their families from a distance.

We hear stories of Mexican farmers who could no longer afford to farm their lands or sell their goods, as U.S. agricultural products flooded the Mexican market after the signing of NAFTA. For persons working in the maquilas, wages are too low to live on; work conditions mean 12 or more hour days with no breaks; and in many cases, on-the-job injuries are not reported to the public healthcare system, effectively hiding the tremendous cost that our trade policies bring

Peruvian and Colombian laborers and farmers face potentially similar circumstances as proposed new free trade agreements could undermine conditions for farmers and farm workers by requiring those countries to lower tariffs on agricultural imports. The U.S. government subsidizes production of many U.S. agricultural commodities that can be sold overseas at prices that undercut local producers. Andean farmers worry that they will face the same fate as their Mexican brothers and sisters.

When we consider the role of the U.S. government in the World Trade Organization and in these trade agreements, we must ask how we can affect our elected representatives. How do we go from unwittingly supporting slavery in our globalized land to actively participating in freeing the oppressed and breaking every yoke? (Isaiah 58: 7)

There is yet another “freeing of the slave” that we might consider as activists and advocates: the leaving our own selves to “rest and lie fallow.” In a world that is each day smaller, where technology brings instant information to our eyes, and carries critical needs and calls for justice to our attention, pulling us to yet one more hopeful act or phone call, we are challenged by the mandate to take Sabbath. Even Jesus invited the disciples, “You must come away to some lonely place by yourselves and rest awhile.”

As we face each day with the challenges to bring about right relationships - among God’s people and God’s world – what is our “right relationship” with our Creator and with ourselves? How do we hear our own hearts or the voice of God therein, the directions our commitment should take? The invitation to take some Sabbath time, to allow our hearts to lie fallow, allows us to rest and revive, but also to “prepare the land for the next planting.” Our very souls need the Sabbath space to rest and prepare.

Thailand: Would elections restore democracy?

Thai voters might see a familiar face in the run-up to elections the ruling junta has promised for December – but he won't be running for office. The current premier says former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra may return to Thailand from London, where he has lived since the military deposed him last September. But Thaksin is barred from holding public office for the next five years.

Thaksin remains popular with his rural base – and controversial with urban voters. However, the military-appointed Constitutional Tribunal disbanded his Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) Party on May 30. The court also barred him and 110 other party leaders from public office for five years for alleged violations of election laws. The decision brought thousands of angry Thais – Thaksin supporters and other coup opponents – into the streets of Bangkok in daily protests.

In another development the Assets Examination Committee (AEC), Thailand's powerful anti-graft panel, said June 11 it would freeze more than \$1.5 billion in assets held by Thaksin and his family. The AEC, which the junta set up last year, said it would block 21 accounts holding profits from the controversial sale of Thaksin's Shin Corp., the telecom giant he founded before entering politics. The tax-free sale to Singapore's Temasek Holdings in January 2006 sparked public outrage that led to months of street protests and eventually to the coup that removed Thaksin.

"[The AEC's] decision to freeze their assets is not politically motivated," said committee member Kaesan Athipho. "The committee has evidence that Thaksin broke the law."

Thaksin, meanwhile, has denied any role in the protests, but junta spokesman Sansern Kaewkamnerd said the military wanted to put his claim to the test by freezing his money in Thailand. "If the protests stop after Thaksin's assets are blocked, it means that he's been supporting the demonstrations," he said.

"His reason for wanting to return is understandable. He needs to come to fight the [AEC] charges," Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont said. "It's his right to come back and answer the charges made by the AEC. We're all equal under the law." General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, the junta leader, also said he would not oppose Thaksin's return.

"If he comes back, he will come back as a player, not a spectator," said Thaksin's lawyer, Noppadon

Pattama. "If a man has been treated unfairly, he can do three things – he can fight based on the law, he can fight in democratic politics, or he can sit still. I don't think Thaksin will just sit still while his wife and family have been treated unfairly."

"We will put together a good team of lawyers to file legal suits against all key members of the AEC and reclaim the majority of the assets frozen by the committee," Noppadon added. "They lack evidence. We are confident that we will prevail in the court."

When the military seized power, coup leaders vowed to root out what they called systemic corruption during Thaksin's five-year administration. The AEC so far has ordered a freeze on personal accounts held by Thaksin and his wife, Pojaman, and has recommended criminal charges against Thaksin over a land deal. The couple's children reportedly face a \$789 million tax bill.

Chulanont has said a referendum on a new constitution – being written by an unelected body – would be held by September, followed by parliamentary elections in December. The new charter would limit prime ministers to two four-year terms in office, reduce the members of parliament from 500 to 400, and cut the number of senators from 200 to 160. The senate would be appointed, not elected. The most controversial proposal – to have a non-elected prime minister – has been dropped.

"Dissolving the party, banning the executives, freezing Thaksin's assets – it's a one, two, three body blow," said political analyst Thitinan Pongsudhirak. "(But) it may boomerang. It may actually intensify the anti-military fury that has been ignited."

By barring Thaksin and disbanding his party, the government could indeed be creating a new dilemma for itself. While promising a return to democracy, the Council for National Security, as the junta calls itself, is gambling that Thaksin's followers would not win a free and fair election.

"They believe that the [street] demonstration comes only from the financial support of former Prime Minister Thaksin, so they decided to freeze his assets," said Nattawut Saikuar, a key protest organizer. "That is a misunderstanding. This decision will bring even more people to the protests. They come here with their own money, not with Thaksin's financial support."

He added: "The junta can freeze his assets, but they cannot freeze the desire for democracy in Thais' hearts."

Egypt: Elections hardly reflect a democracy

The results of Egypt's June election are in: President Hosni Mubarak 84, democracy 0. Mubarak's National Democratic Party won 84 seats in the Shura Council, the parliament's largely ceremonial upper house, while four seats went to two small parties and two independent candidates. However, opposition candidates of the Muslim Brotherhood were largely kept off the ballot, and none were elected. Mubarak was to appoint 88 additional members to the 264-seat chamber.

The outcome was never in doubt. The Muslim Brotherhood, whose members run as independents, won 20 percent of the seats in Egypt's lower house in elections in 2005. However, Human Rights Watch (HRW) says more than 1,000 members of the group were detained between March 2006 and March 2007, and it says 232 are currently in prison for attempting to exercise their rights to freedom of association and expression.

While the Brotherhood has been banned since 1954, Egyptian politics were further stifled with the approval in March of constitutional amendments evoking the issue of terrorism. Amnesty International (AI) says amendments to Article 179 state that "measures taken to combat terrorism shall not be constrained by the constitutional protections against arbitrary arrest and detention." AI explains the amendments give "sweeping powers of arrest to the police, grant broad authority to monitor private communications and allow the Egyptian president to bypass ordinary courts and refer people suspected of terrorism to military and special courts, in which they would be unlikely to receive fair trials."

HRW says recent arrests coincided with the military trial of 33 members of the Brotherhood on charges of terrorism and money-laundering. The defendants include Khairat al-Shatir, the organization's deputy supreme guide, who was arrested last Dec. 14 along with 16 other prominent members. On Jan. 29 a Cairo criminal court dismissed all charges against al-Shatir and his co-defendants and ordered them released. However, police quickly re-arrested the men, and Mubarak, ignoring the court's finding, ordered the cases transferred to a military court.

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Arab Commission for Human Rights and the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights sent observers to monitor the trial, but they were not admitted.

However, lawyers, wives and daughters of the accused were allowed to attend. After a June 3 hearing the court adjourned until July 15.

"The Egyptian government has never convincingly justified its continued ban of the Muslim Brotherhood, which has renounced violence for more than 30 years," according to Joe Stork, deputy director of HRW's Middle East division. Human Rights Watch called on the government to lift the ban and stop arresting people based on their alleged membership in the organization.

"Egyptians can and do debate the sincerity and extent of the Muslim Brotherhood's commitment to democracy," Stork says, "but the government's repression of the group flouts fundamental human rights and freedoms."

Egypt, which won election to the UN Human Rights Council on May 17, should correct its "appalling human rights record," which includes "routine torture in police stations, arbitrary arrests of non-violent dissidents, and crippling restrictions on civil society organizations," HRW says. The organization says the government is holding political prisoners including Ghad Party leader Ayman Nur, who challenged Mubarak in the last presidential election, and television journalist Abd al-Monim Mahmud.

The U.S. seems little inclined to push its Middle East ally very hard on human rights. After allegations of vote-buying, ballot-stuffing and underage voting in the June election came to light, State Department spokesman Sean McCormick expressed "deep concern" – hardly a robust response.

That lukewarm reaction reflects a gradual easing of U.S. pressure on Egypt. After meeting with Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit in February 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called on Egypt to be "an important voice in leading this region again as it faces questions of democracy and reform."

Earlier this year the two met again, focusing largely on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the turmoil in Iraq. Rice acknowledged "the [U.S.] relationship with Egypt is an important strategic relationship," and the Foreign Minister gave a nod to the "bilateral Egyptian-American relationship" as one of "stable, positive, warm and mutual cooperation."

But for an administration whose friends are also among its closest allies – such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia or Pakistan – democracy no longer seems an important question.

Iraq: Persecuted Christians appeal for help

Sunni and Shiite Muslims are not the only victims of Iraq's civil war. Under threat from extremists, much of the Christian population has fled the country since the U.S. invasion in 2003. The number of Christians has declined from more than one million to an estimated 200,000-300,000 today. Church leaders, charging Iraq's political leaders with indifference, have appealed to the Vatican and the international community for protection. This report is based on stories from the AsiaNews website of the PIME Missionaries at <http://www.asianews.it/>

Discriminatory demands of Christians in Iraq take various forms: that crosses be removed from churches, that Christian women wear a veil, that Christians pay protection money or flee, leaving their possessions behind. In one of the worst incidents, a Chaldean priest and three subdeacons were shot to death June 3 in Mosul after Sunday liturgy.

“[Iraqi leaders] take advantage of us because we have no outside support or our own militia,” says Redemptorist Fr. Bashar Warda, rector of St. Peter Major Seminary. “They know that all we can do is make appeals and complain. Politicians act convinced that our community is bound to disappear in a few years.” Security concerns forced the seminary to move recently from Baghdad to Ankawa in northern Iraq.

Fr. Bashar takes Iraqi leaders to task for their seeming indifference to the persecution of Christians. “They do not consider us as belonging to this nation, our human and intellectual participation as Iraqis [as contributing] to the country’s progress along with all the other religious groups that live here,” he says.

A car bomb attack April 23 in Kurdistan, northern Iraq, demolished the headquarters of a Kurdish political party. It killed nine persons, including two children. Among at least 60 injured were two Dominican nuns from a nearby convent. Kurdistan had been considered relatively safe, but the attack led Chaldean Bishop Rabban al Qas to request intervention by the Vatican. His message: “Find a way, a means to save us. The Church in all of Iraq is in great danger. We beg the Vatican to help us bring our voice to the world.” Other Christians reportedly began to speak of Iraq as a country without hope for at least the next 10 years.

Another minority in Iraq that suffers persecution is adherents of the ancient Yazedi religion. The day before the car bomb attack, fundamentalists stopped a bus near Mosul and murdered 23 Yazedi passengers, allowing Muslims and Christians to go free.

Calling the past four years of violence and destruction in Iraq “a folly of human reason,” Chaldean bishops of northern Iraq appealed to international leaders as they met in May in Egypt’s Sharm el-Sheikh to discuss the future of Iraq. “We particularly ask that the threats, kidnappings and forced emigration of our Christian people [be] stopped,” the prelates wrote, noting that the unraveling of Iraq’s social fabric “would mean the disastrous destruction of an ancient cultural and religious civilization.”

The bishops noted “the essential relationship between Christianity and Islam as monotheistic religions” and cited the Qur’an as they pleaded for greater tolerance: “If your Lord had wanted, he would have created all men as one nation.”

Chaldean Archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk – president of Iraq’s Council of Catholic Churches’ Committee for Inter-religious Dialogue – recalls Christians’ ancient roots in Iraq. Recognizing Christians’ close relationship with Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Sabea and Yazedis alike, he urges all political, religious and cultural communities in Iraq to be united because “there is no salvation without our unity.” He adds, “[Christians] have been part of the Islamic culture for the last 14 centuries, by [and] large without problems. Today they want to continue this existence in the spirit of love and under the charter of human rights.”

Chaldean Patriarch Emmanuel III Delly decried the use of the Pontifical Babel College in Baghdad as a military base. “The Americans came to Iraq without our consent,” he said. “God does not appreciate what you have done and are doing in our country.”

Fr. Ragheed Aziz Ganni, the Chaldean priest who was killed in Mosul, returned to Iraq after finishing his studies in Rome in 2003 because “that is where I belong, that is my place.” However, he wrestled with a major question: “In a sectarian and confessional Iraq, will there be any space for Christians? We have no support, no group who fights for our cause; we are abandoned in the midst of this disaster. Iraq has already been divided; it will never be the same. What is the future of our Church? Today it can barely be traced.”

Nevertheless, he never lost hope. He wrote, “I am certain about one thing, one single fact that is always true: that the Holy Spirit will enlighten people so that they may work for the good of humanity, in this world so full of evil.” He added, “It is our duty not to give in to despair. God will listen to our prayers for peace in Iraq.”

Ignorance of other nations is far from bliss

Millions of people are caught up in armed conflict around the world and find their lives at risk daily. Economic, political and religious differences threaten new hostilities, but not enough is done to foster international understanding. Greater respect for other people and their values could help resolve some of the tensions and conflicts in Asia and the Middle East.

To observers in the U.S., the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be difficult to grasp. Yet, only so much can be done from outside. Roadmap or no, Israelis and Palestinians themselves will ultimately have to sit down and settle their differences. Many agree on the broad outlines for peace: a two-state solution, a return to the pre-1967 “green line” and a shared Jerusalem.

Nonetheless, the two sides are hardly talking. In fact, the number of Palestinians and Jewish Israelis learning each other’s language has been shrinking since the hopeful days of 1993 when the Oslo Accords were signed. Three years ago Tel Aviv University nearly closed its Arabic department for lack of students. Some Palestinian entrepreneurs study Hebrew to engage in trade with Israel, but a growing number of Israeli Jews favor French or English over Arabic, reflecting an inclination toward Europe or the U.S. rather than toward their Arab neighbors.

On the Korean peninsula, families with members in North Korea and South Korea have suffered the heartache of separation since an armistice halted the Korean War in 1953. The South maintains a policy of rapprochement toward North Korea begun under former President Kim Dae Jung, and cross-border visits have been allowed in recent years on rare occasions. However, some critics say South Korea is too generous in its efforts to bolster the economy of the North. (See “Two Koreas: Trade might improve political ties” in March/April 2005 *NewsNotes*).

Meanwhile, North Koreans continue to flee their country at great personal risk in pursuit of food, employment or freedom. The lucky ones find their way through China or Burma to South Korea (nearly 1,400 defectors arrived in 2005, according to South Korea’s Ministry of Unification). Despite their official welcome, however, newcomers say South Koreans show little interest in their earlier hardships in the North.

Japan has attracted the ire of China and South

Korea in recent years over the revision of history textbooks for Japan’s secondary schools. Critics say the changes whitewash Japan’s role during World War II. For example, one textbook avoids the word “invasion.” It says instead that Japan brought other Asian countries under its rule “in order to secure resources.” In addition, no statistics are offered for the 1937 Nanjing Massacre in China, in which historians estimate 150,000-300,000 died.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also came under fire from his Asian neighbors this year when he denied the Japanese military forced women into sexual slavery during World War II. Historians say 200,000 women, mostly from Korea and China, served as “comfort women” in Japanese military brothels in Asia in the 1930s and 1940s. Many women said they were forced into sexual slavery by Japanese troops. However, Abe said in March there was “no evidence to prove there was coercion.”

Taiwan sparked its own textbook controversy this year by revising high school history texts. The changes remove references to a common history with the People’s Republic of China. Instead, the new textbooks refer to the mainland as China but omit any mention that Taiwan and the mainland are part of the same country. In addition, Chinese history will no longer be considered as “national history” but simply as “the history of China.” The history of Taiwan will be taught separately.

Yang Yi, spokesman for China’s policymaking Taiwan Affairs Office, insists Taiwan is an inseparable part of China. “We’ve noticed the developments,” he said. “The political motive behind it is to transform the island’s education into an ideological one for Taiwan independence.” The changes also drew criticism at home. Kuomintang lawmaker Diane Lee Ching-an said, “It is obvious that (the education minister) wants to brainwash our children in order to introduce pro-independence education to Taiwan.”

At a time when the U.S. is needed to play a more constructive international role, the country seems instead to be caught in an isolationist mode. While the public needs to be better informed, major U.S. newspapers have been closing their foreign bureaus and drastically reducing the number of foreign correspondents. And while the U.S. needs to better communicate with other countries and cultures, only nine percent of U.S. college students are studying a foreign language.

China and the World Bank in Africa

Reuters reports that the World Bank and China have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to collaborate on projects in Africa. The Bank has indicated that these joint investments will focus primarily on infrastructure lending, namely in the transportation and energy sectors, and that their efforts will initially be concentrated on “sustained-growth” performers such as Ghana, Uganda and Mozambique.

In addition, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank’s private sector loan facility, and the Export-Import Bank of China (China Exim) also signed an agreement to provide joint financing “to support environmentally and socially sustainable investment in emerging markets,” mainly in Africa.

China Exim, China’s official export credit agency, provides financing predominantly for overseas investment and construction projects to facilitate Chinese private investment. International Rivers Network (IRN) revealed in a new report that China Exim has loaned at least \$6.5 billion to African governments, primarily for infrastructure projects. China Exim’s Vice President Li Jun told Reuters that he hoped to provide \$20 billion worth of project financing to the continent over the next three years.

The increasing role of China in Africa has raised the specter among Western donors that Chinese investment will adversely affect governance and the environment on the continent, and that African governments will again rack up unsustainable levels of new debt.

Many observers contend that neither the World Bank (and its IFC) nor China Exim is in a position to ensure the environmental and social sustainability of their projects. For example, although the IFC presents itself as the world’s lead institution on sustainable banking, many in civil society are skeptical of IFC’s commitment, arguing that the IFC has failed to practice what it preaches in its own operations. While the IFC may deserve some credit for its role in promoting safeguards at private banks through the Equator Principles, absent effective enforcement mechanisms, the “sustainable banking” push at the world’s leading financial institutions may amount to little more than rhetoric.

Both the IFC and China Exim have questionable track records when it comes to the impacts of their investments on people and the environment. China Exim has invested heavily in the highly controversial

Merowe Dam in Sudan, where opponents of the project have been attacked by Sudanese authorities, tens of thousands of residents have been or will be displaced from the fertile Nile Valley without adequate compensation, and environmental consequences are expected to be severe. (See the IRN website at www.irn.org) Meanwhile, the IFC has attracted criticism for its increasing role in extractive industries, including lucrative oil investments and destructive mining projects, which have significant adverse environmental and social impacts.

The World Bank’s decision to join forces with the Chinese bank represents the latest about-face of multilateral lenders in their stance on China’s role in Africa. In recent months reactions from multilateral lenders such as the World Bank, IMF and European Investment Bank (EIB) have fluctuated between concern, outrage, and now, conciliation. Earlier this year, the African Development Bank (AfDB) held its annual meetings in Shanghai, signaling the continent’s growing ties with China.

Civil society has become increasingly concerned about the growing role of Chinese banks in Africa and elsewhere, particularly because of China’s apparent tolerance of human rights violations and lack of transparency around social and environmental safeguards.

As the African Development Bank convened in Shanghai, African and international civil society groups called for greater public accountability in China’s relations with Africa. China’s expanding role in Africa may represent a great opportunity for development, they said, but only if China is careful not to repeat the errors that Western powers made in the past.

Nikki Reisch, the manager of the Bank Information Center’s Africa program, emphasized that civil society needs to be part of the rapidly growing cooperation between China and Africa. Reisch said in Shanghai:

“Plans by the African Development Bank and China to intensify investment in the extractive industries and infrastructure in Africa could pose significant risks to people and the environment. Civil society organizations in China, Africa and abroad should work together to hold their governments accountable.”

For additional information, see the Bank Information Center’s news on Africa: www.bicusa.org and International Rivers Network at www.irn.org.

African churches oppose EPAs

According to the Washington Office on Africa, Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries will soon face a complete shift in their trade relations with the European Union (EU). Under the Lomé Conventions these countries enjoyed unilateral trade preferences into the EU market for almost three decades. In 2000, the Fourth Lomé Convention was replaced by the Cotonou Agreement, which extends these unilateral trade preferences up to the end of 2007. Thereafter, negotiated World Trade Organization (WTO)-compatible reciprocal trade agreements, called Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) will replace the current non-reciprocal preferential trade regime. These EPAs have to be concluded by no later than the beginning of 2008. EPA negotiations started in September 2002.

A recent statement signed by representatives from the Catholic Church-Kenya Episcopal Conference and AMECEA, the Anglican Church of Kenya, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, the Reformed Church of East Africa, World Revival Mission and Pentecostal Assemblies of God expressed opposition to the EPAs under negotiation. Excerpts follow:

“Kenya and 15 other countries ... are currently negotiating a reciprocal free trade agreement with the European Union (EU). Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are basically reciprocal free trade agreements that upon signing will open our markets to the products and services from the EU.

“The objectives of these EPAs are poverty reduction and sustainable development through regional integration and liberalised trade between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries...

“While we appreciate the development objectives and the spirit of the Cotonou Partnership Agreements, we are wary that the current negotiations with the EU seem to have deviated from these noble objectives. Instead, EPAs have turned out to be free trade agreements, which can have a detrimental effect on the Kenyan economy.

“While we acknowledge that the EU continues to be an important destination of Kenya’s exports, the market share for Kenyan goods in East Africa and other African countries is growing particularly under the East Africa Community and Common Market for East and Southern Africa regional groupings... We are concerned therefore that the proposed EPAs will contribute to the loss of our regional market.

“In addition we are convinced that the free trade

agreements under EPAs will undermine our government’s national development plans. The government has formulated the Strategy for Revitalisation of Agriculture and the Economic Recovery Strategy both of which recognise the need to attain national food security. The strategy for the Revitalisation of Agriculture aims to restore profitability and viability of the agricultural sector as a source of gainful employment and to empower households to have resources for accessing adequate nutritious food. The irony is that Kenya is undertaking this strategy to revitalise agriculture in the face of liberalisation.

“Agriculture still remains the dominant sector in the economy of Kenya. The sector employs 77 percent both directly and indirectly of the labour force and contributes 75 percent to industrial raw materials. The poor performance of the agricultural sector in the past two decades led to an increase in food insecurity and unemployment in the country....

“Furthermore, we note that currently Kenya’s national budget has been funded 95 percent locally through revenue collection. If implemented in its current form, EPAs will definitely cut government revenue as a result of the elimination of import taxes on goods and services from the EU.

“The question that needs to be asked is: Will Kenya be able to implement and realise the benefits of these plans in the face of increased cheap imports when the economic partnership agreements come into force in December 2007?

“We are of the opinion that if EPAs are to contribute to Kenya’s economic development they must be designed specifically to complement the national development strategies and should not be allowed to pressurise the government to adopt new or different approaches that are not in consonance with the national development plans.”

The churches called for more time for discussion before the negotiations are complete; an inclusive negotiation process that would include citizens and members of parliament; policy space; and a comprehensive analysis of the social and environmental impact of the proposed EPAs.

Trade, they concluded, should be at the service of people and not for profit. “Hence trade policies should enhance people’s livelihoods through the protection of human rights. It is for this reason that we the church representatives affirm the principles of justice, equity and protection of human rights. These principles should guide any trade policy making and agreements.”

Kenya: Responding to ethnic clashes

The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights estimates that about 500,000 Kenyans have been internally displaced by inter-ethnic violence since 1992. The Catholic Religious Superiors' Conference (RSCK) recently examined the causes of ethnic clashes and proposed solutions. Excerpts from their statement follow:

“Ethnic clashes are a running sore too frequently breaking out on the face of Kenya. Their roots run deep in history and they themselves are the violent children of a multi-sourced parentage.

“The purpose of this memo therefore is not to repeat what has frequently been said and done. Rather it is that in the light of the past we map out the broad parameters of cooperation bringing all Kenyans together in a thrust forward for the sake of the hitherto neglected peoples in particular.

“Though ethnic clashes are sporadic, instantaneous and unpredictable in the short run, there is clear evidence of a recurring pattern to their outbreaks. Historically, ethnic clashes in Kenya have had five major sources which mutually nourish, reinforce and sustain each other.”

The religious list these as the tribal element that goes back to the beginnings of the Republic, the cult of personality that depends so heavily on tribal sentiments, the unfair distribution of land, the specter of poverty due largely to neglect by successive governments. In addition, they said, “[T]here is the unsettling awareness that outbreaks are too frequently linked to elections. Added to these is the proliferation of small arms and border insecurity.

“The church must offer prophetic, responsible leadership while ever mindful of the crucial need to monitor that its own house is in order.”

The steps forward they proposed include:

- Forgiveness with justice, particularly a Peoples' Truth Tribunal to give expression to the perpetrated injustices.
- Integration by the government of neglected areas of the nation into a more sensitively nuanced development program that really gives priority to grossly neglected areas.
- A comprehensive recovery plan that will lift the northern region out of its never-ending cycle of poverty. In this connection patrons of the well intentioned and generally well received Vision 2030 Document should revisit the focus of their intent lest they put in

place not so much a plan of economic revival and progress across the nation but instead another strait jacket keeping the rural masses impoverished and in perpetual bondage.

- A revision of the Constitution, saying that the “present Constitution cannot help us solve most of the problems we are facing.”

- Accountability for outbreaks of ethnic violence associated with politicians and their personal ambitions.

- The rejection of any process of appointment to positions through favoritism related to family, clan, tribal connections and so on.

- Encouraging the media to avoid selective reporting, irresponsible sensationalism and misrepresentation of facts. In particular the media should be encouraged to seek out news items that enhance the image and self respect of neglected areas.

- Decentralization of the organs of public service in order to give a fairer chance of participation to those areas which have been neglected but have great potential.

“Regarding the police force in particular,” they said, “there is a huge need for the management of competent and professional policing. Such professionalization will de-ethnicize the police and make it less dependent on amateur security forces who sometimes end up being extortionist.”

- Collaboration among nongovernmental organizations to avoid unnecessary duplication and discourage unhealthy competition.

Finally, they said, “there is a particular call to patriotism addressed to those who have committed themselves to consecrated life as religious. Organizations such as the Religious Superiors Conference of Kenya (RSCK) and the Association of Sisters of Kenya (AOSK) have a prophetic call to inspire their fellow citizens of the nation to greater unity by showing through the example of their own lives how multicultural living together is a blessing from God, that a simplicity of lifestyle is one of the great signs of a people trusting in that same God...

“Since the battles on the streets are ultimately rooted in conflicts of minds, let us ever be prepared, while issues remain unresolved to begin again, if necessary, with commitment to tolerance, openness and reconciliation. For it is only in this way that we can learn to work together, all of us, in jointly constructing and living in the kind of society that each of us would judge worth struggling for.... ”

Zimbabwe: “Injury in addition to insult”

The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum released recently a report entitled “Adding insult to injury: A preliminary report on human rights violations on commercial farms, 2000-2005.” According to the report, widespread human rights violations were inflicted upon white farmers and black farm workers by agents of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe’s government during the seizures of white-owned farms from 2000 to 2005.

According to a survey of 187 former commercial farmers conducted over six months in 2006-2007, only six percent reported that they are still on their farms. Seventy-five percent of the respondents said they are Zimbabwean citizens and 65 percent still reside in Zimbabwe. This is significant as it shows that most white farmers identified themselves as Zimbabweans, not British.

In addition, a total of 53,022 people – farmers, farm workers and their families – were identified by the survey respondents as having experienced at least one human rights violation. Many experienced multiple abuses. These abuses included assaults, torture, being held hostage, unlawful detention and death threats.

Furthermore, the report notes that war veterans and members of Zanu-PF were the largest number of perpetrators of the violations, followed by the police. Other significant perpetrators were found to be members of parliament, officials from the president’s office, provincial governors, and other government officials. These findings point to an organized seizure of land planned by officials, not a spontaneous seizure carried out by landless blacks, as the government claims.

In addition to the human rights abuses, immense financial losses were inflicted upon the farm owners. Farm workers suffered catastrophic losses of income, habitation, health services and access to clean water and sanitation that contributed to a high death rate. The total financial losses incurred by white farmers responding to the survey, according to their own estimates, are US\$368 million. The combination of the human rights abuses and loss of livelihood have contributed to a growing economic and humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe.

If the survey’s figures are extrapolated to the entire commercial farming sector the financial loss figure is an astronomical US\$8.4 billion and the number of people suffering abuses during the farm seizures

could be more than one million.

The amount of the damages for which the Zimbabwe government should be liable, for giving open support to the land invasions, would have catastrophic consequences for an economy already in precipitate decline.

The losses suffered by the farm workers were life threatening. The survey found that about one percent of displaced farm workers and their family members have died since losing their jobs. Extrapolated to the entire population of one million farmer workers and their families, 10,000 people could have died after displacement from the farms. This is clearly a gross underestimate and anecdotal evidence from commercial farmers suggests that the figure is considerably higher.

The report found that the gross human rights violations, and the violations of rights generally, were much greater than had been previously assumed. It is also evident that the patterns of violations and those involved in the perpetration of these violations are not commensurate with conflicts over land between land owners and landless people. Instead the data from the survey suggests organized appropriation by an elite, as has been widely claimed.

The report concludes that the evidence is strongly suggestive of a systematic campaign, as evidenced by the failure of the police and civilian authorities to enforce the law and offer the protection of the law. The report finds that a plausible case can be made for crimes against humanity having been committed during these displacements. There is a compelling need for these to be investigated and the perpetrators to be charged and tried.

All Zimbabweans have suffered as a consequence of the ill-advised land reform process, which has devastated the economy and created an enormous humanitarian crisis. The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum believes that there can never be impunity for gross human rights violations and hence there must be some process of accountability for the violations that occurred during the land reform exercise. Quite obviously this accountability must involve both criminal and civil actions, and both groups – commercial farmers and farm workers – must be supported in obtaining redress for the violations they have experienced and the losses they have suffered.

For additional information see Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, www.hrforumzim.com.

“Sustainable urbanization”

The following article was written by Maryknoll Sister Marion Hughes, who lives and works in Tanzania.

“Sustainable urbanization” was the theme for the 21st Session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT), the UN agency for human settlements, which met in Nairobi, Kenya April 16-20. Strong emphases were placed on local action for poverty reduction through finance and planning, and on the role of women in strategic planning and poverty reduction.

The governing council reconfirmed its commitment to reduce poverty in cities, especially in slum areas, through financing pro-poor housing and a medium-term strategic and institutional plan. Other resolutions passed included new guidelines on decentralization and strengthening of local authorities, guiding principles for providing basic services, a resolution on Arctic cities, urban youth development, and the approval of the biennial work program.

Central to the program was a two-day convention called MDG (Millennium Development Goals) Town. A tent was set up on the grounds of the UN HABITAT headquarters in Nairobi and provided the space for dialogue and exchange of ideas on issues concerning youth and their role in the attaining of the MDG goals. Participants came from young people’s groups, nongovernmental organizations, governments and UN agencies, all of which were able to present their vision for a better future for young people.

In their commitment to reduce poverty in cities, especially in slum areas, the council explored ways to assist groups to attain loans and finance pro-poor housing. Once the loans are repaid, the funds can be reinvested in other projects, thus increasing the effect of the original investment while at the same time providing suitable housing and work for people.

The process will take place in three phases:

- The loans will be made available to community-based organizations or municipalities to undertake low-income housing and infrastructure projects which fall within the scope of the Habitat agenda and other related UN mandates. (2007-2011)
- The UN Habitat Foundation may embark on drives to borrow money - within certain limits - from govern-

ments, governmental agencies and intergovernmental organizations. (2012 – 2016)

- Provision is made for UN-HABITAT to raise funds by issuing credit through bonds and other instruments. Both the second and third phases will only be activated once the preceding phase proves successful (2017-)

Possible donor countries have raised the question as to whether or not their contribution is necessary as there are other organizations such as the World Bank and IMF which are open to lending money. In response, Dr. Anna Tibaijuka, Under-Secretary-

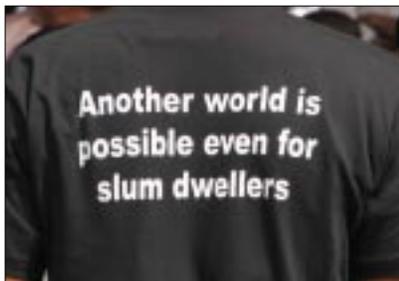
General and executive director of UN-HABITAT, said that “financial institutions do not have the facilities to lend money to the poorest segment of society. They also do not have the experience or skills to work with social issues. ... These institutions also do not lend money to community-based groups or local governments. All loans made by them go directly to central governments.”

Rose Molokoane of the South African Federation of the Urban Poor explained it in the following way: “We are fed up of being the subject of the agenda. We are fed up with you not listening to us.

“We are poor but we are not hopeless. We have money but no chance to come to the bank and open an account because we have no address. If you give me security of tenure, then I have an address and I will open an account,” she said according to the publication “State of the World 2007” which was launched at the UN HABITAT meeting.

The governing council also passed guidelines on strengthening local authorities worldwide. According to Tibaijuka, “The resolution on guidelines on decentralization and strengthening of local authorities ... gives us the means to engage member States in one of the key aspects of Habitat Agenda – to support efforts in strengthening the front line role of local authorities in its implementation.”

One of the terms used by Anna Tibaijuka in her talk was “Homo Urbanus.” She used this to acknowledge the rise in city and consequently slum dwellers. In 2007 the number of slum dwellers will reach one billion and this could double in the next 13 years. In Tanzania, the growth of urban population is approximately six percent per year – twice that of the average growth rate of population.



T-shirt worn at World Social Forum, Nairobi, January 2007

Venezuela, Bolivia: Constitutional reform processes

The following article is written by Justin Knight, who worked as an intern with the Maryknoll Global Concerns Office during the spring of 2007.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the constitutional reform processes in Bolivia and Venezuela. A new constitution has the power to change the very foundation upon which a country's political system is built, though it is rare that a country is in a position to be able to forge enough social unity to make significant constitutional changes. This was the case with the Venezuelan Constitution of 1999, though the ongoing process in Bolivia shows the difficulty of writing a constitution with deep internal divisions.

While it is easy to simplify these constitutional processes by associating them with a particular leader or political movement, one must keep in mind that the roots of these projects are much deeper than Hugo Chavez and the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) or Evo Morales and the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS). In Venezuela, the first calls to rewrite the country's old constitution were heard more than a decade before Hugo Chavez's election. Indigenous groups in Bolivia began demanding a new constitution in the early 1990s, and the cause was embraced by several presidents prior to Evo Morales.

In each case the goal has been to create a document that reflects the character of the people by means of an open and consultative process. The two countries employed different mechanisms to achieve this goal and did so with varying levels of success.

Election of members: In Venezuela, there was little opposition to the new constitution due to the fact that the traditional political parties had lost their legitimacy in the minds of the majority of Venezuelans. Decades of corruption and regressive policies had left the Venezuelan people thirsty for real change. That reality, together with an electoral process that individualized each election, resulted in a Constituent Assembly with 95 percent of its members allied to reform the constitution.

In Bolivia, the traditional political parties that lost power to Evo Morales were not as significantly weakened as their Venezuelan counterparts. Due to electoral rules that favored opposition parties over social movements, they were able to win enough seats to block the 2/3 vote required for passing the new constitution. This gives the opposition the power to stall any major changes to which they disagree.

Participation and consultation: The truly revo-

lutionary aspect of the constitutional process in Venezuela that is being emulated in Bolivia is its consultative process. Indeed, the participative process has been said to have initiated a paradigm shift from a representative democracy to a participatory democracy. Groups from all sectors of society were able to submit proposals and discuss their priorities with Assembly members. In the end, the Venezuelan constitution was a product of the input of the people; over half of the 624 proposals offered by civil society were included in the final document. In Bolivia, many of the methods used in Venezuela have become institutionalized parts of the process. Before deliberations began, delegates met with citizens in local and regional forums to document proposals that will later be considered.

Results: The Venezuelan constitution reshaped the country in many ways, creating two new governmental powers, changing to a unicameral Congress, guaranteeing indigenous representation, and defining new economic and social rights for all Venezuelans. It has become an inspirational document for the people who helped create it. Many feel as though they have a personal stake in the document, which encourages higher levels of citizen participation in political life. It is common for Venezuelans to carry a pocket-sized version of the constitution for easy reference.

The inspiration it provides to ordinary people is perhaps the most significant impact of the Venezuelan constitution. If Bolivia can harness the same participatory spirit as it rewrites its constitution, hopefully it will have the same effect as that seen in Venezuela. Unfortunately, with less than two months left before the original deadline for completion, the Bolivian process has been anything but inspirational, leaving many to question whether the process will succeed and if so, whether it will be worthwhile or not. Political divisions in the country may prove insurmountable.

It is easy to see the significance of the constitutional processes both for those two countries and for other countries considering similar initiatives. In neither country was the process perfect, but the leaps made in participation and inclusion are encouraging as possible building blocks for the future.

Unfortunately, the international response has been both skeptical and cynical, an all too common reaction to popular movements in Latin America. If given the chance to succeed, the new constitutions could not only improve life in these two countries, but to inspire people the world over. The potential is vast, but to reach it more solidarity will be required.

Guatemala: Protests continue against gold mine

An open pit gold mine in western Guatemala operated by Canadian company Goldcorp is attracting increasing resistance from local communities. The company began operations without any notification or consultation with the people who would be most affected by the mine, contradicting both Guatemalan law and Goldcorp's own environmental and sustainability policy. Since its beginning nearly two years ago, the mine in San Miguel has radically altered local communities, sparking a growing resistance. The following article is based on reports from Kim Lamberty, a peace activist who lived in the San Marcos region of Guatemala in the spring of 2007. See other NewsNotes articles: "Guatemala: Community votes on mining activities" (July-August 2005); "Guatemala: Without informed consent" (March-April 2005); and "Guatemala: Mines of San Miguel Ixtahuacan" (Nov-Dec 2004).



Photo by Jim Stipe,
www.jimstipe.com

The mine claims an area of about 100,000 hectares (250,000 acres) which have been completely deforested with a large, expanding hole in the middle. A huge nearby lake is filled with cyanide-contaminated

water which the corporation says does not leak down into groundwater or rivers, though locals doubt this. The mine uses mass amounts of water – up to 250,000 gallons per day. During the six-month dry season, trees dry up as their underground water sources are tapped out by the mine. Local residents report that six underground springs, on which they are dependent for families, crops and animals, have dried up since the mine began. As more springs dry up, people may be forced to migrate to other areas or to the U.S.

The mine has also radically changed the atmosphere of San Miguel from a small, sleepy town to one full of foreign workers, mostly single men, or men living without their families. Many bars have opened and public drunkenness is not uncommon, while gangs, alcoholism and drug abuse flourish. An atmosphere exists where people feel threatened by the mine but are afraid to speak out due to overt threats from members of the mine's security forces as well as the presence of military soldiers not only from Guatemala, but also from the United States. Twelve human rights groups in San Marcos, in addition to the Catholic diocese, sent

an open letter to President Bush complaining of U.S. troops' presence there, but has received no reply.

Despite being a hugely profitable endeavor for Goldcorp, the mine received \$45 million from the World Bank, not because it needed the loan, but to give it more prestige as a so-called development project. According to the corporation's own data, it spends about \$207 per ounce of gold in this mine, which currently sells for around \$650. The \$207 amount includes the corporation's payment of one percent in royalties, divided between national and local governments, and corporate taxes. (Goldcorp would pay 13 percent in royalties for a similar mine in Canada.)

The mine produces over a million ounces per year, but little of the money made from the gold benefits the local community. It employs close to 800 local people, but their salaries average about \$300 per month while the better paying jobs are given to the 500 outsiders who have been brought in to work the mine. Meanwhile the mine, which will cease to be productive in 10 years, creates a potential environmental disaster that could affect the community for decades to come.

The Catholic diocese of San Marcos is seen as the strongest ally in the struggle against the mines, and has shown support without undermining the indigenous organizing. In addition to sending letters to political leaders, local churches helped organize referendums on the mine in nearby municipalities. In the municipality of Sipicapa, 13 out of 14 towns roundly rejected the mine either unanimously or with few votes in favor; only one town said the mine could stay.

No consultation has been done in the city of San Miguel, arguably the most directly affected community, because of threats and harassment. Opponents to the mine fear that a referendum in the city would spur an outbreak of violence. A major protest was held in January 2005 in the Solala municipality. Police opened fire, injuring 20, killing one and arresting 14 others. Another blockade was held in January 2007 in front of the mine; peaceful protesters attempted to meet with mine directors in order to present grievances about the mine, including environmental damage to the area and fraudulent deals for their land. Despite the peaceful nature of the protest, police arrested seven people. (These cases are still pending; the arrestees have huge legal bills that they cannot pay.) Yet the people, with their Church, will continue in the struggle for a safe and healthy community.

Results (in Spanish) of the most recent referendum on the mine are posted on www.maryknollogc.org

SOA: Narrow margin maintains training program

In the closest vote on this issue yet, an amendment that would have cut funding to the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), formerly known as the School of the Americas (SOA), lost in a House vote 214 to 203. The amendment, initiated by Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) with over 110 cosponsors, was supported by a grassroots effort of tens of thousands of phone calls, letters and visits to each House member.

Staff members in many offices commented on how many calls they had received in support of the amendment. Indeed, if the votes were cast merely on the merits of the amendment, it would have passed, but key members asking for personal favors and the WHINSEC lobby machine (funded by our taxes) were able to turn a small handful of votes to change the result.

During the debate on the amendment, those in favor of WHINSEC talked about how different the new school is from its predecessor, the SOA. At WHINSEC, they said, there is a new focus on human rights and better vetting of students to rule out human rights abusers. Yet, no one was able to explain how they knew the school was better since the school



Crosses collected at gates of Ft. Benning during annual SOAW vigil/Photo by Linda Panetta, www.opticalrealities.org

refuses to release the names of its students anymore. For the last two years, FOIA requests have been released with the name of every student blacked out. Even during its worst times, the SOA was at least transparent in releasing names. Without these names, there is no way to know if WHINSEC is really an improvement over the SOA. In addition to its work to close the program, the SOA Watch

campaign will work to pressure Congress to release all students' names.

Faith in action:

It is important that every House member hear from his/her constituents again, either thanking him/her for voting for the amendment, or complaining about a no vote. Go to <http://clerk.house.gov/> to see how your representative voted. If s/he voted no, ask why and be clear that you are completely against the school and want it closed. Go to www.soaw.org for talking points on the school. As preparation begins for another vote later in the year, legislators need to know that their constituents are watching their vote closely.

Migration: UNHCR should expand mandate

The Standing Committee of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) held its mid-year meeting in Geneva at the end of June; a Global Forum on Migration and Development will be held in mid-July in Brussels. The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), along with other nongovernmental organizations, presented a statement to the UNHCR Standing Committee on the grave concern of many ICMC members, including bishops and church migration leaders in Djibouti, Haiti, Mexico and Australia, about the dangers, deaths and disappearances of thousands of refugees and migrants trying to cross seas and deserts for hope and new lives.

According to ICMC, it "has raised the call for the development of a more organized response of protec-

tion for all migrants in such situations, not just for asylum seekers and refugees. This may well require several years of steady advocacy work and policy collaboration. ... [S]ome States continue to express resistance to what they fear would be an inappropriate extension by UNHCR of its protection mandate to non-refugees in these border crossings."

Below are excerpts from the NGO statement on UNHCR's activities in relation to the asylum-migration nexus:

"Mixed migration flows are extremely complicated, but the need for protection is not. ...

"On boats and in [land] crossings, a small percentage of people apprehended actually assert their fear of persecution in strict Refugee Convention terms. While we agree with UNHCR and States that it is

essential to continue to distinguish those who have and raise claims to asylum, and to respond with all of the international law and architecture that has responded to refugees over the past 56 years, that should not end the conversation, or the need for a protection response regarding the others.

“With estimates like those of immigration authorities in the Canary Islands that as many as 6,000 people died or disappeared in 2006 alone just trying to cross the waters from the west coast of Africa to the Canaries, it is evident that large numbers of those making these crossings have reason to fear death right there in the crossing.

“... We acknowledge that the clearest mandate and the first responsibility of the UNHCR is to identify and offer protection to those with a credible claim to asylum.

“But, because the risk is so high for so many, because the rates of death are being propelled steadily *higher* by a mix of human smugglers, traffickers, and enforcement-induced channelling of migrants into ever more dangerous routes, the international conversation—and response—cannot end simply by calling the rest of the travellers ‘economic migrants,’ even if 90 or 95 percent of some groups are not technically refugees or asylum-seekers under the Refugee Convention. If not asylum-seekers, many are victims of human trafficking or other international crime. Literally countless others are victims of extortion, assault, rape, and murder on the high seas, and in other border areas.

“Protection is not just for asylum-seekers and refugees. We believe that at the core of international mandates for protection is a recognition that it is mortal *risk* that compels protection, not status.

“NGOs encourage and stand ready to partner with UNHCR and States on a more organised reflex of rescue and protection for all at risk of death in mixed migration flows. This includes specific protection for those traumatised by the danger, violence, or tragedy of their crossing, regardless of the initial motivation for their migration. Further we suggest:

1. With its unparalleled history and expertise in protection, UNHCR should help to develop guidelines and responses, such as those already developed with the International Maritime Organisation, but also with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Organisation for Migration, as well as with other partners among international organisations and NGOs. Given the number of deaths and disappearances reported by NGOs and the media, the need for improved standards and mechanisms seems clear.

Several hundred unidentified migrants who died along the U.S./Mexico border are buried in a Holtville, California cemetery, a ministry of local church communities/Photo by Rick Reinhard



2. Should the suggestion arise that people who wilfully get into dangerous boats, deserts or other crossing predicaments have somehow waived any right to protection from related risks, it will be important to recall, among other things, universal standards that call for protection of victims of human trafficking regardless of whether they consented to the migration involved.

3. Recognising the issue’s urgency but complexity, UNHCR should mark it for immediate high-level, *priority* attention. We agree with States that have recently suggested the topic for discussion in the “High Commissioner’s Forum” initiative. An Ex Com Conclusion would help—not on rescue at sea, but on standards and operational responses for the protection of refugees and migrants whose lives are threatened in sea or land crossings. Developing a practical Conclusion would require great care and determination in a process that should include experts, as well as “Informal Consultative Meetings” with States and others.

“[M]ixed migration is indeed ‘a global phenomenon.’ In a world of globalization, migration is being propelled, not so much by traditional push-pull factors, as by a new *mutuality of need*, where for the first time in history, it is no longer simply millions of refugees, and migrants who need hope and jobs, but also receiving States that need millions of additional workers. Not only migration, but mixed migration of all kinds is today’s reality. ...”

In a separate statement to the Standing Committee, Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN in Geneva, wrote that “in the long run a positive and preventive approach [to the desperate situation of refugees and migrants] would require the transformation of conditions in the places of origin through greater security, respect of human rights, effective political participation, the creation of jobs, and an environment of peace. But this local transformation cannot happen without the involvement of the international community for better organized and wider legal channels for the movement of people and without fair agricultural, financial and trade policies that would not impact in a negative way the poor countries thus triggering forced displacement.”

CSD: Highlights, dilemmas, and disappointments

The work of the United Nations is intended to support development that will allow all people to be liberated from the bonds of poverty, while taking into account economic, social and environmental factors that will ensure that future generations will live free of poverty and capable of satisfying their needs with dignity. In other words, the human family, within the framework of the UN, its highest forum for expressing its ideals, acknowledges that living sustainably is key to human well-being, now and in the future. This is in itself a great achievement. However, this ideal must find its way into agreements and policies that enable its actualization.

While this work is being carried forward continuously around the globe, the venue of its international public face is the annual UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The CSD meets in two-year cycles on different issues. Year one of the cycle focuses on a review of the issue at hand. Year two is for agreements by member States on policy. This year the commission met for two weeks in late April and early May for the policy segment on the topic of Energy for Sustainable Development: Industrial Development, Air Pollution/Atmosphere, and Climate Change.

Without doubt, the highlight of the two week meeting was the speech given by Gro Harlem Brundtland at the opening of the final session of the commission. Dr. Brundtland has been named by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon as special Envoy for the Environment, a move universally supported since her reputation in terms of sustainable development and environmental work is unmatched. As head of a previous UN special commission, she published the report entitled "Our Common Future," popularizing the concept of sustainable development and leading to the UN Earth Summit in 1992. As Prime Minister of Norway she can be described as a trail blazer for environmental reform. In her speech on the occasion

of the CSD, she was single minded in proclaiming the global climate crisis as an unprecedented threat to all life on Earth. She appeared tenacious in her determination to combat it vigorously.

In contrast, the chair of the next CSD is to be Francis Nhema, Minister of Environment and Tourism of Zimbabwe. While Nhema has the support of the African nations whose turn it is to chair the next CSD, this choice is questioned by many. The topic of the next two year cycle of CSD is Agriculture, Rural Development, Land, Drought, Desertification, and Africa. Zimbabwe seems singularly ill prepared to show leadership and credibility in these areas.

Disappointingly, the member states of the CSD were unable to reach consensus regarding the final document of the Commission. The difficulty arose particularly around climate change concerns related to energy. The European Union, consistent with its strong position regarding the urgency of combating global climate change, insisted on setting time-bound targets for renewable energy, the integration of energy policies into national planning by 2010, a formal review arrangement for energy issues in the UN and international agreement on energy efficiency. In lieu of a final agreed upon document, the chair put forth a summary in which he tried to be fair and balanced.

During the process of struggling toward a conclusive policy statement, it could be observed that aside from creating a forward looking document, it is necessary to be certain that all new documents are coherent with other environmental documents of the United Nations. Also, some said that the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is the proper place for dealing with climate change issues, not the CSD. However, it is generally acknowledged that climate change is integral to all human considerations and, above all, to that of development. This becomes more apparent as we become more cognizant of the interlinking dimension of all issues.

Climate change at the CSD, G8 meetings

By the close of the recent UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in New York, it was clear that global climate change has become a concern of overarching importance. It was also clear that movement forward based on agreements favoring a least common denominator mentality is insufficient to

meet the seriousness of the global situation under threat of possible catastrophic climate change.

This is captured by the fact that on May 11, in the final session of the CSD, Sigmar Gabriel, Germany's Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation

and Nuclear Safety, speaking for the European Union, insisted that there is urgent need for international agreement to set clear time-bound targets for renewable energy and the integration of energy policies into national planning by 2010.

That Germany spoke for the European Union does not come as a surprise since the newly elected Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, is a physicist whose signature issue is climate change. Furthermore, it is widely reported that the German people are very determined to work toward diminishing the threat of climate change. The European Union is unmistakably aligned with Germany on this issue.

It is notable that Merkel is a physicist since physics is a discipline that is grounded in an understanding of the interrelatedness of all things at the subatomic level. The challenge for physicists and everyone is to understand how interrelatedness at the minute level of planetary life bears upon the human and provides a model for behavior.

At the recent gathering in Germany of the G8, the world's leading industrialized nations, Merkel led the participating states in designing policy that energetically addresses the multifaceted issue of climate change, the effects of which indisputably reach into all aspects of life on Earth. Clearly, Merkel's background in physics brought depth, focus and precision to the discussions and negotiations.

However, while Germany was able to articulate the intentions and willingness of other nations to act in a forceful and concerted way expressing definite targets, deadlines and accountability procedures, the United States, under the leadership of President Bush, refused to do more than state general acceptance of the need to combat climate change and reduce carbon emissions by 50 percent by 2050, but on a voluntary



basis with no definite binding controls. In addition, Bush made future cooperation contingent upon the cooperation of China and India in reducing their carbon emissions in the apparent fear that China and India may gain global economic dominance if allowed to continue to compete on growth terms renounced by the United States in order to combat climate change.

This could be viewed as fragmenting and alienating on the part of the United States in a time when it is generally recognized that integration and the well-being of the whole planet take precedence over national interests and that leadership is now expressed in terms of understanding the nature of Planet Earth, its interconnected heart, and its growth limitations.

Finally, physics, which may seem an unlikely background for a national political leader could be precisely the background required for action born of depth and conviction before the complexity and gravity of global climate change.

For more information on the UN's Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), go to <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/index.html>.

Trade: U.S. policy needs re-fashioning

The 2006 midterm elections in the U.S. showed not only a strong desire for change in policy toward Iraq, but an even clearer desire for change in the U.S. trade model. According to a Public Citizen study (www.citizen.org/documents/Election2006.pdf), in all 37 Congressional races where an incumbent lost or retired, the candidate advocating for change in trade policy beat their "free trade" opponent; in addition, 100 percent of fair trade candidates up for re-election won their race, most by large margins. Despite this mandate for change, it appears that Congress could

pass four trade agreements with minimal improvements, but there is an opportunity to stop any future agreements until after the 2008 presidential elections.

In an attempt to respond to the call from U.S. citizens in the elections, Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY), the new chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, and Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT), Senate Finance Committee chair, began in March a negotiation process with the administration ostensibly to make changes in the four trade agreements awaiting ratification

(Peru, Colombia, Panama and South Korea) to benefit workers and the environment as voters had demanded. Unfortunately, the negotiations ended up being quite secretive, ignoring input from civil society and even much of the Congress.

Despite promising beginnings and strong statements from Rangel, the negotiations resulted in a deal that no labor, environmental or religious organization supports, but is widely praised by multinational corporations.

Positively, the deal calls for all signing countries to adopt and implement the five core International Labor Organization labor standards: freedom of association, collective bargaining, elimination of forced labor, abolition of the worst forms of child labor, and the elimination of discrimination in employment. It also calls for the recognition of seven Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), specific protections of forests in Peru, some minimal improvements in access to generic medicines and calls for foreign investors in the U.S. to not be given greater investment protection rights than U.S. investors themselves.

While most of these changes point toward the changes demanded by civil society, they are far too timid and leave out significant problems with free trade agreements (FTAs) today. Among many problematic aspects, the deal leaves untouched the outrageous investment provisions that create incentives for U.S. firms to move offshore and undermine democracy; does not address the agricultural policies in FTAs that result in increased hunger, social unrest and ecological destruction; does not address how FTAs ban anti-off-shoring laws and other governmental policies aimed at increasing employment; ignores labor's long time demands to stop FTAs from overruling federal and state prevailing wage laws as well as laws that forbid government contracts with companies that do business in the Sudan or Burma or companies with poor legal and/or environmental records; and does nothing to address FTA limits on food safety inspection.

Due to the insignificant changes recommended in the trade deal, many Democrats will vote against the agreements. The first vote will probably be on the Peru agreement, possibly combined with Panama, some time before the August break. The Colombia agreement will be difficult to pass due to that country's



Agricultural workers in South America/Photo by Fr. Steve DeMott, MM, courtesy of Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers

horrible record of corruption and the killings of union leaders, while the South Korea agreement faces strong resistance especially from U.S. car makers.

If the votes for Peru and Panama pass easily, it could be read as a sign that the trade deal made by Rangel is the new framework for future trade policy. It is important that these agreements not pass, or pass by small margins, to show the need to renegotiate trade policy with input from more stakeholders.

The overriding trade reality today is the ending of Fast Track, or Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) on June 30. The TPA gives the Congress' constitutional authority to negotiate trade agreements to the administration: After the administration signs agreements with other countries, the Congress is limited to a simple yes or no vote, with no amendments. The result has been a series of trade agreements with catastrophic results for our planet and an explosion in the U.S. trade deficit - since the passage of Fast Track in 1973, U.S. balance of trade has gone from a small surplus to a deficit of \$758 billion in 2006. The fact that the president has not even attempted to renew the TPA shows how unpopular these agreements have become.

Many had expected at least an extension of the TPA to finish the WTO Doha "Development Round" of negotiations, but those talks recently collapsed over what Brazil and India say was the U.S.'s unwillingness to lower its farm subsidies adequately. Renewal or extension of the TPA appears unlikely, though never an impossibility.

It is crucial that all people wanting to change U.S. trade policy pressure their legislators to vote against the remaining four trade agreements and refuse to renew the TPA for this administration.

Faith in action:

Call or write your legislators and urge them to vote against the remaining trade agreements with Peru, Colombia, Panama and South Korea. Also ask that they take advantage of the ending of the TPA to refashion U.S. trade policy so that it spreads the benefits of trade, protects people and the environment, and does not undermine democracy. Please go to the Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment (www.tradejusticeusa.org) for a reflection on the TPA and how to contact your legislator.

Children: UN calls nations to act against violence

“The study should mark a turning point – an end to adult justification of violence against children, whether accepted as ‘tradition’ or disguised as ‘discipline.’ There can be no compromise in challenging violence against children. Children’s uniqueness – their potential and vulnerability, their dependence on adults – makes it imperative that they have more, not less, protection from violence.” (From the report by the independent expert for the United Nations’ study on violence against children)

In February 2003, then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan appointed Prof. Paulo Pinheiro, an independent expert, to lead and conduct an in-depth study providing a global picture of violence against children, concluding with recommendations to prevent and respond to this issue. During 2005, nine national/regional consultations were held around the world providing a platform for effective and meaningful participation of girls and boys; more than 260 children and youth were invited to express their ideas and concerns, and were involved in decisions included in the final report. Youth from East Asia and the Pacific highlighted their discussions with a famous Chinese saying, “No sound can be made if only one hand claps. We children are one hand. Adults are the other hand. The community is one hand. The government is one hand. We strongly believe that a community with peace, love and unity can be built if we work together for the future.”

Completed in autumn 2006, the report exposed the shocking scope of violence against children and documents its devastating effects on children, their families, their communities, and the broader society. The study clearly establishes the urgent need for immediate action to prevent and respond to violence against children in all of its forms. A call is addressed now to UN member states to act at the 2007 UN General Assembly to establish a Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Violence against Children to work with the UN system, non-governmental organizations, children and youth as a high-level and high-profile advocate to ensure concrete action to end violence against children in all part of the world. All member states should develop a child protection system with an integrated strategy to end



Photo by Kevin Thomas, courtesy of Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers

violence against children; participation of children in the development and implementation of this system is fundamental to its quality and credibility.

The study recommends that, in order to end violence against children, members states should:

- prohibit all forms of violence against children, including sexual abuse and exploitation; corporal punishment and all other forms of degrading punishment, in all settings, including the home.

- develop a national child protection system and allocate sufficient funds to undertake a wide range of measures to prevent all forms of violence against children, including educational and media campaigns, provision of child-friendly legal, medical and psychosocial services, and data collection capable of monitoring the prevalence of violence against children.

- establish mechanisms for listening to girls and boys with the aim of involving children directly in the

design and implementation of policies and programs that address violence against them.

- do their utmost to minimize the number of children coming into conflict with the law. They should establish comprehensive and child-friendly juvenile justice systems, complying with international standards, which aim to rehabilitate children and divert them away from criminalization and detention.

- make particular efforts to promote the active participation of boys and men in ending gender discrimination and violence against children.

- support the appointment of a Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on the Elimination of Violence against Children, with the mandate and resources required to provide leadership and oversight on this issue.

Faith in action:

For more information on this subject, and to sign on to the statement, “An International Call for Action: Establish a Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General on Violence Against Children,” go to the Child Rights Information Network website, www.crin.org/violence/index.asp. Follow the link under the “campaigns” banner to sign the statement.

G8: Leaders vow one-third of AIDS resource need

The world's leading industrialized nations, known as the G8, met in Germany in early June. Among the many topics for discussion was funding for programs to end AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. The following article from Global AIDS Alliance provides more details.

[On June 8,] the G8 leaders promised an increase in investment in programs to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, but the \$60 billion total will still be only one-third of what the UN says is needed over the next five years. Together, these diseases kill about 16,000 people a day.

"We will have to watch the G8 carefully to see they keep their promises," said Dr. Paul Zeitz, Executive Director of the Global AIDS Alliance. "But even if they do keep them, the funding falls far short of what is needed. In addition, their promise to provide this money 'over the coming years' is outrageously vague."

"A plan to really defeat AIDS, TB and malaria is still missing, yet that's what we must keep demanding of these leaders," he said. "This is not an issue of 'more money is always needed when it comes to poverty.' Rather, the full amount is needed so that we can actually get ahead of these health crises, which pose a global threat."

Half of the total is a U.S. contribution of \$30 billion on AIDS and tuberculosis, but the U.S. was already on course to provide this even before President Bush's announcement last week. The Bush proposal was greeted with great fanfare in the press, but this obscured the fact that it would keep spending at about current levels for the next five years, despite the rapid spread of health crises like drug resistant TB.

The G8's promise of \$60 billion is for "over the coming years." But, UN estimates show that \$192 billion is needed to address AIDS, TB and malaria during from 2008 to 2012, mostly for HIV/AIDS, plus even more would be needed to improve health systems. Of this \$192 billion, \$134 billion is needed for AIDS, \$37 billion to fight TB (including extremely drug resistant TB), and \$21 billion to address malaria,

a major killer of children and expecting mothers.

"To give the world a chance to reach basic goals, the G8 should speed up the delivery of this \$60 billion by 2010, not spread it out over five years," said Zeitz.

The declaration reaffirms grant making by the Global Fund at a level of \$6 to 8 billion per year, however, the leaders made no specific financial commitments themselves regarding contributions to the Fund. The Global Fund is a cost-effective, demand-driven financing mechanism based in Geneva, which addresses AIDS, TB and malaria. Each year for the past five years President Bush has proposed a large cut in the U.S. contribution, and the U.S. Congress is on course to provide only two-thirds of what the Fund needs from the U.S. in 2008.

There was a risk that the leaders would fail to recommit themselves to the goal of universal access to HIV/AIDS services for 2010, including AIDS treatment, but in the end they reaffirmed this goal. Right now only about two million people are receiving this treatment, while six million need it to survive. By

2010, 11 million people will need it (seven million in Africa), and the world is not at present on course to provide full access. Universal access to AIDS treatment is defined by UN as 80 percent coverage.

"It is good news that global epidemics remain as high a political priority at the G8 as they have in years past," said Zeitz. "Peaceful protests, massive petitions and concerts again made a difference by putting a spotlight on the imperative of the G8 keeping its promises. Without the mobilization, we would not have made the gains that we did."

The G8's statement also included important and welcome statements on the need for pediatric HIV/AIDS treatment and greater action to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the HIV virus. They recognized the important role of access to basic education in bolstering HIV prevention. The G8 also acknowledged the need for reproductive and sexual health services, as well as effective programs to end violence against women, as essential parts of the response to AIDS.



Fr. Rick Bauer, MM, with an AIDS patient in Tanzania / Photo by Sean Sprague, courtesy of Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers

Debt: One Step Forward. How Many Back?

Eurodad's new report, One Step Forward. How Many Back?, notes that while the 2005 debt cancellation deal cancelled US\$39 billion for African and Latin American countries, debt claims this year from Sub-Saharan Africa alone amount to over US\$215.6 billion and from Latin America over US\$723.6 billion. According to Oxfam, the most impoverished countries in the world continue to pay \$100 million each day to service their debt.

One development that threatens the effectiveness of hard-won debt cancellation agreements is the appearance on the scene of so-called "vulture funds." "Vulture funds" are companies that seek to profit by buying heavily discounted debt belonging to companies or countries in serious financial trouble, then suing to recover the original amount and more. Lawsuits against developing-country governments by these funds have increased in the past few years. More than 40 funds are reported to be pursuing claims against about 12 heavily indebted poor countries for a total of about \$1 billion.

According to the *Financial Times* (5/25/07), "Vulture funds, so-called because they are perceived to prey on the weakest countries, usually operate through shell companies based in the Caribbean, buying cheap debt obligations at a fraction of their face value on secondary markets and then taking court action with the aim of getting full repayment plus interest." A number of African countries are mounting expensive defenses against these funds in French, UK and U.S. courts.

In late April, a UK court ruled that Zambia must pay Donegal International, a vulture fund officially located in the British Virgin Islands but mostly owned by Debt Advisory International (a private U.S. company), \$15 million for debt acquired for just over \$3 million from the Romanian government. This year, Zambia expects to save \$40 million as a direct result of the 2005 debt cancellation agreement. Paying Donegal \$15 million would mean that funds needed desperately for education and health care would again be going to rich creditors.

Jubilee debt campaigners and many other organizations called on for the following actions in response:

1. The World Bank should use its IDA Debt Reduction Facility to more aggressively buy back outstanding commercial debts in all eligible countries to get at-risk debts out of the public domain. The World Bank should expand the IDA Debt Reduction Facility so that it is available to Heavily Indebted Poor

Countries (HIPC) before they reach decision point and allow repeat operations for all eligible countries. Furthermore, the debt eligible for IDA Debt Reduction Facility operations should also include debts owed to "semi-commercial" enterprises of non-OECD countries.

2. The G8 should support the development of codes of conduct for commercial creditors and a Charter for responsible lending which includes binding requirements that creditors not sell or re-assign sovereign debts owed by nations eligible for debt cancellation without explicit approval of the debtor.

3. Increased technical and legal assistance should be provided to all HIPC countries with debts at risk. This support should be extended to prevent lawsuits from being brought against governments and to help once there is a suit.

4. National legal mechanisms should be created to make vulture fund profiteering illegal.

Introduction of the Jubilee Act for Responsible Lending and Expanded Debt Cancellation of 2007 by Maxine Waters (D-CA) and Spencer Bachus (R-AL) is a step in the right direction. The bill ensures that promises made by the G8 two years ago are kept; calls for expanded debt cancellation for additional poor nations; and proposes a new regime to ensure responsible lending in the future. The Act urges an end to the activities of vulture funds.

The "Jubilee Act" is the centerpiece of Jubilee's 2007 Sabbath year campaign. The Act:

- calls on the Bush Administration, the IMF, and the World Bank to keep their promises on debt cancellation and to challenge the activities of "vulture funds;"
- calls for expanded debt cancellation for all impoverished countries that will use the freed resources well and need debt cancellation to meet the Millennium Development Goals; and
- creates new standards for responsible lending and creditor transparency by calling for measures to address the problem of vulture funds as well as debt audits of odious and illegal debts from the past.

Faith in action:

Ask your representative to support the Jubilee Act of 2007. Organize your local community to participate in Jubilee USA's Cancel Debt Fast (Sept. 6-Oct. 15) and Global Week of Action for Debt Cancellation and Economic Justice (Oct. 14-21). See www.canceldebtfast.org.

Resources

1. **Cancel the Debt Fast:** Jubilee USA will hold a 40-day Cancel Debt Fast from September 6 to October 15, calling for debt cancellation and an end to global poverty: www.canceldebtfast.org. Individuals, congregations, and local organizations can participate in the Cancel Debt Fast by committing to fast for a day or more and on the same day to contact or meet with their Member of Congress, asking the congressperson to support the JUBILEE Act (HR 2634) as well as just trade and poverty-focused development assistance to fight global poverty. On any given day during the 40-day Cancel Debt Fast, debt cancellation advocates across the U.S. and around the world will be engaging in this powerful act of solidarity with those who are bound by the chains of unjust and oppressive debts. Contact Jubilee USA or visit the website to receive talking points, helpful advice, and assistance about talking to your member of Congress about the JUBILEE Act (H.R. 2634): www.jubileeusa.org or call 202-783-3566.
 
2. **“Building a living and sustainable community in today’s world:”** This video/DVD series was produced at a March 2007 conference sponsored by the Diocese of Sioux City. Four presentations are shown, designed to offer assistance in the work of building living and sustainable communities with local sustainable farms and other local business enterprises. The presentations’ topics include an analysis of the difficulty of rural development; adverse socioeconomic and environmental impacts of current farming practices; the connection of positive moral principles and values of Catholic social teaching with the work to achieve sustainable enterprises; and resources and tools to help transform individual lives and communities. DVD, \$10, VHS, \$13, including shipping and handling. Order from Reynolds Video Production, 300 W. Tower Drive, Dakota Dunes, SD, 57048; email: RVP@cablone.net; (605)232-01111.
3. **Examining the African Development Bank: A Primer for NGOs:** The Bank Information Center (BIC) recently released this new civil society reference document on the Africa Development Bank

(AfDB). The purpose of the primer is to provide civil society organizations in Africa and abroad with a better understanding of the structure, governance and operations of the AfDB, in order to increase their ability to monitor and influence the institution’s activities and impacts. The document is available in English and will soon be released in French. It can be downloaded from BIC’s website at: <http://www.bicusa.org/en/Article.3320.aspx>. As the AfDB evolves and its activities change, the document and other information on the BIC website will be updated. Comments, questions and suggestions regarding the Primer or BIC’s work to support civil society engagement with the AfDB, more generally, are welcome.

4. ***Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe:*** This is the updated version of a human rights report originally published 10 years ago by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF). *Gukurahundi* is a traditional Shona word, which means “the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains,” chosen by Robert Mugabe’s regime to describe a terrifying military operation against a civilian population during the 1980s. *Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe* is an essential book to read for anyone who wants to fully understand Zimbabwe’s history. It stands as perhaps the most critically important record of the violations against the people of Matabeleland during the 1980s. Go to the Exclusive Books website for ordering information: <http://www.exclusivebooks.com/>
5. ***Promised Land: Competing Visions of Agrarian Reform:*** Agrarian reform is back at the center of the national and rural development debate, a debate of vital importance to the future of the Global South and genuine economic democracy. The essays in this volume, edited by scholars from the Land Research Action Network (LRAN), critically analyze a wide range of competing visions of land reform. *Promised Land* is an essential resource for academics, students, policy makers, activists, and peasant organizations. \$21.95 Go to the Food First website for ordering information: <http://www.foodfirst.org/promisedland>, or contact Food First, 398 60th Street, Oakland, CA 94618; 510-654-4400.