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Through the lens of the women

In each issue of NewsNotes during 2008 we will develop our focus on one dimension of U.S. foreign policy and the U.S. elections around our theme of "Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world." In honor of International Women's Day (March 8) we will look at the different issues through a lens held by women.

In almost every corner of the world women carry the burdens of poverty, feel the impact of climate change, suffer when they are displaced or forced to migrate, embody the devastation of HIV/AIDS, and experience the multiple violences of war.

Women are also rooted in reality, committed to relationships, supportive of the common good, including the global common good, and visionary. The perspective they bring to the public arena is essential to creating a life of dignity for all people and respecting the integrity of creation. Women's wide and deep collective experience contributes to the description of a better world.

International Women's Day, held around the world each year on March 8, began in the early 20th century as an effort to lift up and honor the struggle of women for justice in the home, in the workplace and in the political sphere.

On March 8, 1857, women garment workers in New York City had marched and picketed, demanding improved working conditions, a 10-hour day, and equal rights for women. Their ranks were broken up by the police. Fifty-one years later, on March 8, 1908, women garment workers marched again, honoring the 1857 march, demanding the vote, and an end to sweatshops and child labor. (Chicago Women's Liberation Union Herstory Project)

According to the UN, "[i]n 1917, with two

million Russian soldiers dead in the war, Russian women chose the last Sunday in February to strike for 'bread and peace.' Four days later the czar was forced to abdicate and the provisional government granted women the right to vote. That historic Sunday fell on February 23 on the Julian calendar then in use in Russia, but on March 8 on the Gregorian calendar in use elsewhere.

"Since [that time], International Women's Day has assumed a huge importance for women in North and South alike. The growing international women's movement, which has been strengthened by four global UN women's conferences, has helped make the commemoration a rallying point for coordinated efforts to demand wom-

en's rights and participation in the political and economic process. Increasingly, International Women's Day is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of women's rights and the struggle for a better world."

In March 2007, at the 51st session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio to the UN, said, "The mistreatment of women is a longstanding reality in many places ... There is a profound need to strive to uphold the inherent dignity and worth of every human being, with special attention to the most vulnerable of society, our women, and children. The promotion of women will be achieved not only by the legitimate vindication of women's rights, but there must also be established a fresh appreciation of authentically feminine values in the heart of our societies."

*And then all that has divided us will merge
And then compassion will be wedded to power
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind
And then both men and women will be gentle
And then both women and men will be strong
And then no person will be subject to another's will
And then all will be rich and free and varied
And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many
And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old
And then all will nourish the young
And then all will cherish life's creatures
And then all will live in harmony with each other and the Earth
And then everywhere will be called Eden once again
(from *The Dinner Party*, Judy Chicago)*

Africa: Women make progress despite obstacles

In Africa, women have made significant strides in the political arena over the last few years. The continental political body, the African Union (AU), took a major step by promoting gender parity in its top decision-making positions. In 2003 five women and five men were elected as AU commissioners. The following year, Tanzanian Gertrude Mongella, who was educated by the Maryknoll Sisters, was chosen to head the AU's Pan-African Parliament, where women make up 25 percent of its membership. Another AU body, the African Peer Review Mechanism, which oversees standards for good governance, is led by Marie-Angélique Savané from Senegal. In South Africa and Mozambique women hold 30 percent of the seats in parliament. Mozambique was the first country in the region to appoint a woman as prime minister, Luisa Diogo. In Rwanda, 49 percent of parliamentarians are female.

African women also have successfully promoted agreements that advance their rights. All but two (Somalia and Sudan) African countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and often described as the international bill of rights for women. In 2003 the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa was adopted; it received its 15th ratification and came into force in October 2005. The Protocol, though not without controversy, specifically protects women's human rights and, according to Human Rights Watch, breaks new ground in international law.

At the same time, according to Africa Renewal (Vol. 19, No. 2), obstacles persist. For example, according to Dr. Farkhonda Hassan, Secretary General of the National Council for Women in Egypt, the primary development policies in many countries, most often articulated as poverty reduction strategies, still do not take into account differences in income and power between men and women, hampering efforts to finance programs that

reduce inequality. In addition, she says, the majority of African women are still denied education and employment, and have limited opportunities in trade, industry and government.

The Beijing Platform of Action identified as crucial for their future well-being the reduction of poverty among women, stopping violence against women, providing access to education and health care for women and reducing economic and political inequality.

"For many African women," continues Africa Renewal, "the Beijing platform and the various international instruments their governments have signed have yet to translate into positive changes in their daily lives. They remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy, with poor access to land, credit, health and education. While some of the agreements that African governments have ratified enshrine

property and inheritance rights, in most countries women are denied those very rights." Furthermore, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is destroying the health of more women than men in Africa.

In many African countries, women rarely own land and when they do, "their holdings tend to be smaller and less fertile than those of men. Studies also show that if women farmers had the same access to inputs and training as males, overall yields could be raised by between 10 and 20 percent."

Perhaps the greatest challenges women face are in education. "Disparities between girls and boys start in pri-

mary school and the differences widen up through the entire educational system. In total enrollment in primary education, Africa registered the highest relative increase among regions during the last decade. But given the low proportion of girls being enrolled, the continent is still far from the goal of attaining intake parity" Yet in several countries policies that specifically targeted girls have narrowed the gap: for example, sensitizing the media, reducing primary school fees, building latrines, assisting pregnant students, distributing free textbooks and recruiting female teachers.

In African countries subject to austerity or structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, or



conditions associated with HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Country) debt cancellation in the 1990s, government expenditures were severely curtailed to bring supposedly inflationary spending under tight control. Lack of government spending on schools and teachers, “user fees” on education, and other expenses associated with primary education frequently forced poor families to decide which of their children to send to school. Girls too often were kept home. In addition, though many African countries have significantly improved literacy rates, in many places women’s literacy rates continue to lag.

In terms of women’s economic activity in Africa, Africa Renewal notes that “(e)ven though women make up a significant proportion of the economically active population, their contribution is not fully recorded because they are mainly engaged in family farming or in the informal sector. In other cases, what they do, such as household work, is not considered an economic activity.

“In agriculture, sub-Saharan Africa’s most vital economic sector, women contribute 60–80 percent of labor in food production, both for household consumption and for sale. But while they do most of the work, they lack access to markets and credit....

“To redress the bias in macroeconomic poli-

cies that favor men and boys at the expense of women and girls, a number of African countries have adopted a tool known as gender budgeting (see Africa Recovery, April 2002). Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda are among the countries currently assessing their budgets along gender lines. This involves analyzing government spending choices and their impact on women and men, boys and girls, with the aim of better identifying disparities. That in turn can help mobilize more financing to narrow the gaps, for example by funding programs to reduce the heavy time burdens on women or by improving their access to energy, water, transport and labor-saving technologies.”

Faith in action:

The United States has signed the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), but our failure to ratify the convention hinders global momentum toward equality for women everywhere. The 2008 elections provide an opportunity to choose leaders who will follow the example of many African countries and put this important convention back on the table for consideration.

Bush visits Maryknoll project in Tanzania

In mid-February, President George Bush and his wife Laura visited five African countries. They stopped at the Emusoi Centre, an educational project of the Maryknoll sisters located in Arusha, Tanzania, on Monday, Feb. 18. Following is the statement that the Maryknoll sisters’ leadership team released in anticipation of the visit:

During their visit to Africa, President Bush and First Lady Laura Bush will visit Emusoi Centre, a project of the Maryknoll Sisters in Arusha, Tanzania. Emusoi (or place of discovery and awareness in Maa, the Maasai language) is an ongoing educational project that prepares school-age girls from nomadic tribes for entrance into secondary and tertiary schools. We are certain that President and Mrs. Bush will be deeply impressed by the young women of Emusoi and will see the beauty and strength that we as Maryknoll have seen so often in African cultures.

In Africa, Maryknoll missionaries also have seen the ravages of deep poverty, disease, violent conflict and environmental destruction. We have been supportive of the Bush administration’s focus on Africa, particularly through the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and support for debt cancellation for many countries.

PEPFAR, though far from perfect, enabled effective programs, including some sponsored by Maryknoll, to focus effectively on prevention, care and treatment of people living with HIV/AIDS. And in Tanzania alone, debt relief led to a 50 percent increase in primary school enrollment. We hope these programs will be expanded and fully funded during this final year of the Bush administration.

However, we could not welcome President Bush to the Maryknoll Center in Arusha without also raising our deep concerns about some crucial dimensions of his legacy in Africa, including:

- AFRICOM – We oppose the further militariza-

tion of U.S. Africa policy through the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM). We urge rather an emphasis on sustainable human security: education, housing, hospitals, decent jobs and clean water.

- Climate change – Africa is already feeling the impact of global warming. A compassionate U.S. policy in Africa would join immediately the global community's effort to address this universal threat.
- Poverty – Increased commerce, predominantly in extractive industries, between the U.S. and Sub-Saharan Africa, has benefited huge oil companies, but not the majority of African people, even in resource-rich countries. The control of 'big oil' over U.S. foreign policy is perpetuating poverty and environmental damage. Genuine

concern about African poverty will focus on creating a just and sustainable global economy that enables local communities to thrive.

- Children – The attention of the president to the young women and girls at Emusoi is most welcome, but he could accomplish much more for all the children of Africa by supporting U.S. ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, an important convention which only the U.S. and Somalia have failed to approve.

We are pleased with this opportunity to emulate our African friends in providing gracious hospitality for President and Mrs. Bush. We hope that this experience will open their hearts to cry for justice from Africa.

Philippines: Women's new roles aid bid for equality

News from the Philippines often seems to focus on political or economic events, especially when those events affect U.S. interests. However, a human struggle is being waged among the Philippine population of 91 million that is not often reported in the mass media: women's struggle for dignity, equality and human rights in their own society. Maryknoll sister candidate Genie Natividad offers her reflections on women's struggle in her native country.

The position of women in Philippine society is a complex reality. Women today occupy roles ranging from the very poor to the president of the Republic.

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo assumed office in 2001 as the country's second woman president. Other Filipinas as well have won international acclaim in politics, academia and other fields. Corazon Aquino, the Philippines' first woman president, won her country's Magsaysay Award in 1998. The award is often described as the Asian Nobel Prize. In contrast, many Filipino women find themselves economically disadvantaged, experience domestic violence, become caught up in prostitution, or suffer exploitation as migrant workers overseas. Clearly, the situation of women in the Philippines is characterized by sharp contradictions.

Sixty percent of Philippine women reside in rural areas, and they comprise half of the nation's poor. Women experience the ravages of poverty and hunger along with their male counterparts, but wom-

en suffer even more. Aside from their childbearing role, cultural and familial expectations cast women in a position that is subordinate and inferior to that of men. Women suffer disproportionately from food insecurity, often resulting in sickness, because men and children receive a larger allocation of food.

Women in the Philippines are also unemployed more frequently than men. Those employed outside of the home often work at low-paid, entry-level jobs. They are discriminated against both at work and within their own families. To escape poverty at home, many women seek employment overseas. Thousands and thousands work as domestic helpers in Hong Kong and the Middle East, although their human rights are often jeopardized or violated. Both at home and abroad, Filipinas suffer the indignity of being sold into sexual slavery and prostitution, and are also subjected to other violence. Indeed, most women in the Philippines are marginalized, discriminated against and exploited due to the harsh realities of consumerism and the global economy.

The rise of the women's movement in the Philippines has been instrumental in bringing about gradual change in many facets of women's lives, and it holds out hope for continued improvement. Women's voices have become stronger, contributing to a shift in society on gender issues. Philippine women will continue their struggle against the traditional mold of everyday life to ensure still greater progress toward equal rights.

Iran: Women-focused media curtailed

Iran has closed down a national women's magazine for publishing articles allegedly "undermining public confidence in law and order by leading people to believe that the Islamic republic was unsafe for women." The semi-official Fars News Agency said the publication license of *Zanan* ("Women" in Persian) was withdrawn Jan. 28 after the magazine highlighted crimes committed in Iran against women. More than 100 human rights activists and academics including Nobel Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi sent a letter to Iranian leaders protesting the ban.

Shahla Sherkat established *Zanan* in 1992, and she continues to serve as its managing director. To date the magazine has published 152 issues. When Iran's Press Supervisory Council revoked its license, it said the magazine threatened "the psychological security of the society" by deliberately showing women's situation in a "black light" and weakening the country's military and revolutionary institutions.

However, Human Rights First (HRF) says *Zanan* regularly runs articles on women's health, parenting and legal issues. The magazine, one of the most popular in the country, has also argued that the legal discrimination suffered by women in Iran is not mandated by Islamic law and should be changed.

HRF says shutting down *Zanan* marks an escalation in the censorship of media that provide space for a discussion of human rights in Iran. It says nearly 40 Iranian publications have lost their licenses or been banned by the Press Supervisory Council in the past two years.

The recent closure of *Zanan* might indicate more than just a struggle over free speech, however. As the *New York Times* suggested in a Feb. 7 editorial, "President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran and his hard-line allies rail against the United States and other external 'enemies,' but who they really fear are their own citizens."

In a related incident, the Iranian government has blocked websites on women's rights.

Beginning in mid-January, authorities blocked Internet users in Iran from accessing websites dedicated to women's human rights, according to HRF. Although the sites could be accessed outside of Iran, they were blocked within the country. HRF

says it is becoming more common in Iran to restrict access to the Internet and prosecute its users in order to silence dissent.

The action might have been an effort to disrupt a two-year-old web campaign aimed at changing laws that discriminate against women. Advocates have been pressing for reform of discriminatory laws against women in areas including marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. Beginning in 2006 women activists sought to collect the signatures of one million Iranians to show the government they had broad support in their fight for equality.

On June 12, 2006, hundreds of women and men gathered peacefully in a square in Tehran to protest the discriminatory laws. However, about 100 police officers attacked the demonstrators with pepper spray and batons, seriously injuring a woman. The Minister of Justice said 42 men and 28 women were arrested for having organized an "illegal" gathering.

Nevertheless Iranian women's groups, including an organization led by Nobel Prize winner Shirin Ebadi, went ahead with plans to launch their campaign to collect one million signatures on a petition demanding change in discriminatory laws. A second public rally was planned in August in Tehran, but authorities prevented the gathering from taking place. However, the organizers still launched a website (www.we-change.org) to help collect signatures.

HRF says the rights enshrined in the 1998 Declaration on Human Rights Defenders apply to all UN member states, including freedom of expression and the right to disseminate information about human rights. Iran is also bound by Article 19 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which protects "the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds" through any media of one's choice.

Faith in action:

Join Human Rights First in calling upon the government of Iran to reinstate *Zanan's* license, ensure the safety of the magazine's staff and respect the right to freedom of expression. Sign a letter to the head of the Judiciary and to the president of Iran by clicking on "Take Action" at <http://action.humanrightsfirst.org/campaign/Zanan/explanation>.

S. Asia: Nations address violence against women

At a recent conference, the eight nations of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) committed themselves to work toward ending gender inequality and violence against women. SAARC comprises Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The association, established in 1985, describes its aim as to provide “a platform for the peoples of South Asia to work together in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding. It aims to accelerate the process of economic and social development in Member States.” The following report from New Delhi, India, was published on www.india-news.com.

The sixth South Asia regional ministerial conference, which ended [on Jan. 19], identified six priority areas for the next two years to tackle gender inequality and violence against women.

The representatives of the eight South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries deliberated on a range of issues related to the condition of women for three days [in New Delhi] at the meeting hosted by India’s Ministry of Women and Child Development and UNIFEM, the UN Fund for Women.

The conference, inaugurated by India’s President Pratibha Patil, was a follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

The priority areas of work include preventing violence against women and pursuing gender sensitive laws, encouraging women’s participation and capacity building, promoting economic security, right to pass their nationality to their children and protecting human rights in conflict and disaster situations.

India’s Minister for Women and Child Development, Renuka Choudhury, said in her welcome address that the issue of female infanticide was a matter of emergency. She briefed the participants on India’s gender budgeting initiative and said 53 ministries already had [teams] for the purpose.

Afghanistan’s minister for women development said the country had been going through a difficult phase and violence against women was a major concern, according to a UNIFEM South Asia statement.

The minister said the representation of women in civil service was around 22 percent, and 28 percent in the national assembly. She said her country aimed to ensure women’s representation going up to 30 percent in all government institutions by 2020.

Bangladesh’s minister highlighted the marginalization of the ministry for women in her country and called for urgent steps to ensure security of women.

Nepal’s representative informed the meeting about a 12-point agreement signed by the government in 2006.

The Maldives’ minister said a national gender policy was passed in 2006, and a study showed that the employment of women had gone up from 37 percent in 2000 to 52 percent in 2006.

An NGO from Pakistan said the ministry of women’s development in the country was marginalized within the bureaucracy and needed additional resources. It said a national commission on the status of women did exist but had limited influence.

In Sri Lanka, as per the 2006 census, 89.9 percent women were literate but only five percent of them were represented in the government.

Afghanistan has proposed to host the seventh biennial ministerial conference in 2010.



Marie Dennis, director of the Maryknoll Global Concerns office, took this photo of girls in Afghanistan during her visit to that country in 2002.

Iraq: U.S. withdrawal key to stability

The following is an updated statement from Maryknoll's three leadership teams, calling for the U.S.'s withdrawal from Iraq paired with reconstruction aid, reparations and care for refugees.

Maryknoll missionaries live and work in communities around the world torn apart by conflict and war. We know too well the intense suffering and destruction that war brings. As followers of Jesus we are committed personally and institutionally to reverence and affirm the dignity of each person and the whole community of life of which we are a part. We seek to participate actively in the transformation of the world, pursuing social justice, the integrity of creation, and – with even greater intensity in these times – peace. (Statement of Maryknoll Joint Leadership, February 2003)

We acknowledge with sorrow that, five years after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the violence and destruction continue. Since March 2003 Iraq has descended into civil war, and millions of its citizens are either internally displaced or refugees abroad. Photos and accounts of torture and abuse of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. military personnel have shocked and scandalized the world. While most Iraqis wish only for peace, the country is in danger of partition. Ethnic cleansing of neighborhoods and deadly threats against Iraq's Christian minority make reconciliation appear ever more distant. With perhaps \$500 billion expended so far in Iraq, vulnerable U.S. citizens – especially the young and the elderly – are increasingly at risk as domestic budgets for social services, health care and education are frozen or reduced.

Expressing our

- Compassion for those on all sides who have suffered heart-rending losses,
- Concern for the self-determination and integrity of the Iraqi people and reconciliation of Iraq's war-weary citizens, and
- Confidence in Iraqis' capacity to shape a peaceful and prosperous society consistent with their ancient culture,

We call for



Photo by Fr. Jerry Zawada

- **Withdrawal:** The U.S. must move swiftly to implement a plan to promptly and completely remove its armed forces and military contractors and permanently dismantle its military bases in

Iraq. It must promote a transition to a multilateral peace-keeping force clearly separate from U.S.-led coalition forces and preferably under Arab command.

- **Oil sovereignty:** Iraq's oil industry, nationalized in 1972, generates 95 percent of government revenue. A draft oil law now before Parliament – with strong U.S. support – would open two-thirds of Iraq's known oil reserves, and all future oil discoveries, to foreign control. The bill would purportedly distribute oil revenues throughout the nation on a per capita basis. However, it would also permit much of the oil revenue to flow to international oil companies, with no minimum requirement to reinvest earnings in the Iraqi economy. No new oil law should be adopted under external pressure, especially if it would deny Iraqis the benefit of their own natural resources.
- **Self-determination:** The U.S. must give up the role of determining Iraq's future and leave it in Iraqi hands.
- **Reparations:** The U.S. must pay Iraq to repair the damage caused by the invasion, occupation and years of U.S.-led sanctions.
- **Reconstruction:** Reconstruction projects must not provide another windfall for U.S. firms. Contracts must provide jobs for Iraqi workers and companies.
- **Care of refugees:** The U.S. must increase support for Iraqi refugees accepted into the U.S. for resettlement, provide support for neighboring countries that have accepted refugees and financially strengthen the resources of these nations. When displaced Iraqis determine the viability of their return to Iraq, the U.S. should fund repatriation and resettlement.

The Leadership of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Maryknoll Sisters and Maryknoll Lay Missioners, March 2008

Femicide in Central America and Mexico

Since the late 1990s, human rights groups have documented the growing number of “femicides” in Central America and Mexico, using the term to refer to the brutal killings of women simply because they are women. The murders often include rape, torture, and mutilation. The victims tend to be younger women, mostly in their teens and twenties. The following article, which draws attention to the specific situations in the two regions of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico and Guatemala, was written by Ariel Ressler, an intern with the Maryknoll Global Concerns office.

In Ciudad Juárez, just across the border from El Paso, Texas, about 400 cases of femicide have been documented since 1993. The international attention on Ciudad Juárez has helped to highlight even more acute cases of femicide in other parts of Mexico and in Guatemala. While statistics specific to femicide are predictably hard to find, 3,000 homicides of women have been documented in Guatemala since the year 2000, and a significant number of those follow the trend of femicide cases. According to the Guatemala Human Rights Ombudsman, “[i]n the case of women, the brutality used in cases of mutilation is definitely unique in comparison to male victims.”

The horror of femicide is fueled by a number of underlying causes that are present in both Mexico and Guatemala. The most significant is the culture of machismo and its lack of respect for women’s rights. Economics also play an important role: When Guatemala’s level of extreme poverty went up in 2004, so did homicides of women, a fact which is attributed to desperate men striving to prove themselves in gangs or organized crime groups by killing their rivals’ female family members. Extreme poverty also makes women more vulnerable, as many rural women are forced to seek work in larger cities like Guatemala City or Juárez, away from protective networks of family and friends. The development of the maquila (assembly factory) industry in Ciudad Juárez in the 1980s prompted rapid population growth, and Juárez’s location on the U.S./Mexico border made it a hub of both narco-trafficking and human smuggling. In this conflict-filled, rapidly changing environment, conditions are ripe for investigative negligence and impunity.

Tragically, as of 2007, less than 20 cases of the more than 3,000 femicides in Guatemala have reached resolution through the justice system (including both convictions and acquittals). This impunity plays a major role in allowing femicide to continue. By bringing less than one percent of all femicide cases to trial, Guatemalan institutions are failing to protect women and practically guaranteeing killers than they will not be punished. The authorities in both countries also encourage the continuation of impunity by spreading their theory that the women targeted were prostitutes and gang members. These accusations are usually false, and more importantly, are irrelevant and do not excuse the authorities’ failure to prosecute the murderers.

In Guatemala, the historical legacy of impunity dramatically intensified during the 36-year civil war, in which the Guatemalan military commonly raped women and massacred indigenous communities it suspected of collaborating with the leftist guerrillas. Many of the same perpetrators of atrocities during the war remain in power today. One example is Otto Pérez Molina, a general during the civil war, who ran for president in the 2007 Guatemalan elections and very successfully capitalized on Guatemalans’ fear and desire for rule of law with his “mano dura” (“firm hand”) campaign until his eventual defeat in the November runoff election. The civil war finally ended in 1996, but many aspects of the peace agreement that would have led to a more just society and protected some of its most vulnerable members were never implemented or were very poorly enforced.

However, there are some signs of progress. In November 2007, three cases of young women murdered in Juárez were considered by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and were selected to go to trial in Costa Rica this year. The official inauguration of the new joint Guatemala-United Nations Commission against Impunity (CICIG) in January 2008 is a development that aims to address the reigning impunity that Guatemalan institutions are not strong enough to combat alone. Additionally, a non-binding bipartisan resolution condemning femicide in Guatemala passed in the U.S. House of Representatives in May 2007, and a similar Senate resolution is expected to go to the floor in March 2008. Such resolutions are important steps in pres-

sureing the Guatemalan government and police force to take femicide investigations seriously and actually bring cases to trial.

In January 2008, 35 women were murdered in Guatemala. The problem of femicide is complex,

but important strides have also been taken to combat it. U.S. citizens can get involved by addressing this issue in their own discussions or with the candidates prior to the November elections.

Latin America: Struggle against machismo

In Latin America, machismo, which endorses the superiority of men, persists as the dominant culture. The theory of male supremacy influences all aspects of Latin American society and requires a broad set of measures to counteract it. Women's organizations throughout the region have advanced gender equity in some ways, especially through micro financing, but overwhelming inequalities still exist. The new U.S. president and Congress can assist the efforts for women's equality through their own policies.

Women face disparity both inside and outside their homes. Even in Cuba, which boasts the clearest advances in terms of women's participation in politics and the economy (women hold 43 percent of seats in parliament and 66 percent of the technical and professional workforce), gender roles in the home remain unchanged. So while women hold more jobs outside the home, they continue to carry the majority of housework. While Chile and Argentina recently elected women to their presidencies, politics in the region continue to be dominated by men.

The legal systems in most Latin American countries also perpetuate gender inequalities. Despite progressive laws in many countries, macho attitudes still dominate the courts. Violence against women continues to be treated with impunity (see article on femicides), and many judges lack an understanding of women's rights issues. U.S. aid to the region should fund gender trainings for judicial professionals.

A sign of hope was seen in August 2007, when 33 participating Latin American governments signed the Quito Consensus on Women. This ambitious document prescribes a variety of actions to ensure women's political participation and recognizes their contribution to the economy and society at large. Signing countries agreed to adopt measures to achieve parity in government institutions and po-

litical parties, with equal participation of genders. They should also implement policies for "eradicating sexist, stereotypical, discriminatory and racist content in the media and to motivate them to promote egalitarian relationships and responsibilities between women and men." The media have a large responsibility in perpetuating the macho culture and must play an important role in creating a more equal society.

The governments also agreed to encourage co-responsibility in family and working life between men and women, encouraging men to take a more active role in household tasks. They also will explore ways to incorporate all the work done by women into national economic accounts, since it is only by recognizing women's real contributions to society that a more equitable system can be shaped.

As mentioned earlier, one area that has been especially promising for many women in Latin America is micro financing. Many women's organizations are forming their own financing structures for their members. With low interest financing, women have been able to supplement their spouses' incomes or even reach financial independence. Studies show that women tend to use their money to benefit their children more often than men do, therefore putting more money into women's hands has a larger positive societal affect. After seeing projects fail when men squandered extra earnings, development organizations are now focusing more on women who are more likely to pass their benefits on to their children.

The new U.S. president and Congress should ensure that aid from the U.S. is evaluated for its effects on women and modified for improvement. U.S. trade policy should be made less discriminatory as well (see article on trade and women). Women in Latin America are at the forefront of the struggle for women's equality. The question is whether the U.S. will be a help or hindrance in this important effort.

A question of gender

The following article was written by Heidi Cerneka, a Maryknoll lay missionary who has lived and worked in Brazil for over 10 years.

In November 2007, international news broke the story of Lidiane, a 15-year old girl who was held with 27 men in a single cell of a men's jail in Abaetetuba, Brazil. Accused of stealing a cell phone (even for an adult, this is a perfectly bail-able crime), Lidiane had her hair cut by police officers so that she would appear less "female" and then was repeatedly raped by some of the inmates over a 24-day period, before her family and human rights groups finally called public attention to the situation.

This case brings together all of the abuses that women in prison suffer. In this case, authorities tried to convince the press and the public that Lidiane had lied about her age to distract from the real root of the barbarity, which is about putting a woman in a men's cell for 24 days. Human rights defenders insisted that her youth just made the crime more heinous, but putting a 30-year old woman in a cell with men would also be a serious offense and against all UN, Brazilian and Inter-American treaties and declarations.

Lidiane is far from the only woman who has spent time in a cell with men. Because women are six percent of the prison population, most of the 26 Brazilian states have only one women's prison (and even this is normally precarious, usually a former men's jail, youth detention facility or an old school "renovated" to hold women.) Thus when a woman is arrested, authorities have made little or no provisions for her detention. This translates frequently into no feminine hygiene products, little or no toilet paper, no facilities for the constitutionally guaranteed right to nurse a newborn and limited or no prenatal care. Eighty-six percent of the women in prison are mothers. yet public telephones are unavailable to them, making contact with the family impossible. In addition, there are no public policies to consider and analyze the situation of women in prison.

If two different studies have shown that 95 percent of women in prison have suffered some type of physical or sexual abuse in their lives, then why does the State not recognize that access to effective counseling is absolutely essential for any chance of helping women to change their lives?

Across the world, the issue of women in pris-

on is gaining more and more attention. The Quakers United Nations Office has dedicated significant work and research to the issue of women in prison and published many reports (<http://quno.org/humanrights/women-in-prison/>)

In Brazil, organized civil society has provoked the formation of a government working group, composed of 12 government ministries and two representatives of civil society to look at the question of women in prison and propose systemic changes to the prison policy.

Why? From 2000 to 2006, the number of women in prison grew over 135 percent while that of men grew by 53 percent, but because women have historically not been violent, the State has consistently responded to the more "urgent" need and invested in services and prison units for men.

Women are more likely to be arrested for drug-related crimes, although they are usually the bottom rung of the ladder and arresting them does very little to diminish drug-trafficking. In an effort to reach the true drug traffickers, the justice system offers a reduction in sentence for anyone who gives information that will lead to the arrest of a bigger fish, but women are so far down on the hierarchy of power and information, they rarely have any useful information.

Civil society in Latin America has begun to fight back. In October 2006, the governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay had a collective public hearing at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, showing how governments ignore their female prison population (<http://www.cidh.org>). Brazil's government also was granted a public hearing in March 2007, proving discrimination against women in prison and at times, the complete denial of their existence.

Lidiane is in witness protection for speaking out against the police; what happened to her is a barbarity of immeasurable proportions, even more so because she is not an isolated case. It became an international scandal and the Brazilian population was outraged for a few weeks, but collective amnesia seems to have settled in already. Will anyone be held responsible for the repeated rape of a 15-year old girl under the supervision and "protection" of the State? Will government begin to recognize that women in prison cannot simply be treated as men?

Women and trafficking

The 21st century has seen a growing infestation of greed and exploitation in the form of human trafficking, which the United Nations describes as the recruitment, harboring, transporting, or obtaining of a person through force, fraud, or coercion “for the purpose of subjugation to involuntary servitude, debt bondage, or slavery.” The international community has responded in recent years with multilateral strategies to combat this contemporary slavery. The following article was written by Emily Thrush, an intern with the Maryknoll Global Concerns’ office through the Church of the Saviour’s Discipleship Year program.

The business of trafficking persons has increased greatly in the last decade. The U.S. estimates that 800,000 people are trafficked transnationally every year, and millions more are trafficked within their home countries. The global web of criminal organizations focuses on the most vulnerable populations, promising freedom and comfort, but the web proves inescapable as traffickers exploit victims through intimidation, abuse, threats, and violence. Studies show that women make up nearly 80 percent of trafficking cases worldwide, and close to half of trafficking victims are children under the age of 18. While some trafficking exploits migrant workers, ensnaring them into forced labor and indentured slavery, most cases of females trafficked – close to 90 percent – move the women into commercial sexual exploitation.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission in Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) cites the most vulnerable women as those aged 10-35 who are uneducated; come from impoverished areas; represent an indigenous, ethnic minority; or come from rural or refugee groups. As is often the case in forms of oppression, the multiple violences of poverty, greed, misogyny, and dominance coalesce into a rapidly growing industry of manipulation and commodification. Especially related to sex trafficking, a female victim not only undergoes the heinous violence of the trafficker, but also the disinterested self-absorption of the client who pays for her continued bondage and who perpetuates the demand for more traffickers to prey on the vulnerable.

The reasons a woman could find herself in a position of vulnerability for traffickers may not present themselves at first. She may feel caught in

a desperate economic bind, needing to support her family but unable to find work in her area. Many traffickers lure their victims with job offers in newspapers and on the internet. Job openings that seem innocuous—restaurant staffing, watching children, or cleaning houses—could turn into sexual enslavement and prostitution. UNESCAP finds that “the ongoing abuses of human rights and the growing social and economic inequality within and between countries have led to an environment in which many women have few choices and resources, and are thus vulnerable to being lured, misled or forced into being trafficked.”

In 2000, the U.S. passed landmark legislation in response to the growing problem of global trafficking. In the last seven years, Congress has passed reauthorizations for the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Acts (TVPA). The TVPA of 2000 established an office within the State Department that focuses entirely on monitoring and combating trafficking in persons. The law increased criminal penalties and provided new avenues for the detection and care for trafficking victims. It also created the T-Visa, given to victims of human trafficking who have been identified in the U.S., and allowing the persons to stay in the country for three years while working with them to potentially pursue an investigation against the traffickers.

In October 2007, Rep. Tom Lantos introduced the reauthorization bill for 2007. The House overwhelmingly supported this pending bill (HR 3887), and it has been read twice in the Senate Judiciary Committee. In addition to appropriating monies to maintain the provisions of TVPA 2000, HR 3887 helps expand the work of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G-TIP), and revises some provisions in order to expedite the time between when a person is identified as a victim of trafficking and when the person can receive care (especially in Section 213).

There are manifold challenges to face in approaching human trafficking. Reliable data on the complexities of this crime proves elusive given the stealthy nature of its participants and victims. Questions remain unanswered related to the extent of trafficking, its geographic attributes, the varying forms it takes, the myriad causes of trafficking, and the most effective practices both to prevent and penalize the perpetrators. Trafficking also intersects

with the politically loaded immigration debate, and the result rarely benefits the victims and survivors of trafficking. Thanks to legislation like the TVPA, law enforcement and government officials are learning to not criminalize and deport people identified as trafficked.

Amidst the challenges, groups have suggested meaningful ways to progress in addressing the greatest needs for trafficked persons: increase the number of residential facilities to house and rehabilitate victims; acknowledge the presence of human trafficking victims within our own borders, and increase the dialogue between service providers and law enforcement; strive for increased educational tools for impoverished areas that will empower women and girls and equip them with invaluable resources; work against the misogyny prevalent in societies worldwide, and hold the men who create the demand for sexual exploitation accountable.

Faith in action:

Call your senators, especially if they sit on the Judiciary Committee, to show your support for

TVPA 2007, HR 3887. The U.S. has received positive feedback for its work in passing the TVPA. The newest reauthorization continues in the same vein and should be passed quickly so that resources can be renewed and services expanded in the difficult work of giving care to trafficked persons.

Maryknoll is one of 20 organizations that participates in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking, which meets several times a year to network, to create strategies for best practices in direct care for trafficked persons, to speak with government officials related to eliminating human trafficking, and to think about ways to further educate the general public on this reality.

To learn more about human trafficking, visit the UN Global Initiative Against Trafficking, www.ungift.org; the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, <http://www.unescap.org/esid/GAD/Issues/Trafficking/index.asp>; and the USCCB's website, <http://www.usccb.org/mrs/traffickingweb.shtml>.



This one-hour investigative documentary, a joint production of Maryknoll and Lightfoot Films, exposes the painful, rarely seen human side of illegal immigration, including the growing black market trade in human beings.

"Documents the horrific, and lucrative, business of human trafficking ideal for church and Bible study groups." -- *Sojourners* magazine.

To order, go to www.livesforsale.org or go to www.maryknollmall.org, or call 914-941-7590. \$19.95.

Women and armed conflict

In armed conflicts raging around the globe, soldiers and paramilitaries terrorize women with rape, sexual and other physical violence, and harassment. These tactics are tools of war, instruments of terror designed to hurt and punish women, wrench communities apart, and force women and girls to flee their homes. According to Human Rights Watch, women in the Sudan, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Kosovo, and Bosnia/Herzegovina have reported brutal rapes, sexual assaults, sexual slavery, and mutilation committed by male combatants. In some cases, perpetrators first raped then killed their victims. Those who survived the attacks suffered from psychological trauma, permanent physical injury, and long-term health risks, especially HIV/AIDS.

Armed conflict also almost always has long term effects on the lives of women, completely changing their role in the family and in the larger community. In some countries, including the United States, more and more women are going into combat. In other countries, when men are conscripted, detained, displaced, have disappeared or are dead, women have to bear greater responsibility for family and community affairs. Women become heads of households and breadwinners, taking over sole responsibility for earning a livelihood, caring for farms and animals, trading, being active outside the home, and caring for the sick, wounded and the elderly in very harsh conditions. (Center for Women, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, ESCWA)

About 50 percent of the world's refugees are women and girls. A recent report from the UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) described by the ESCWA Center for Women, revealed that serious inadequacies in clothing, blankets, and sanitary materials existed among female camp-based refugees. This inadequacy in needed basic goods impeded the ability of women refugees to participate in education, employment and other activities. The UNHCR report also highlighted the security constraints facing women in refugee camps since simple daily activities such as gathering firewood or fetching water continue to place refugee women at risk of sexual and physical harm.

Human Rights Watch says also that the end of war does not signal the end of violations against

women. In the post-conflict period, many women confront discrimination in reconstruction programs, sexual and domestic violence in refugee camps, and violence when they attempt to return to their homes.

ESCWA Center for Women notes that although women disproportionately bear the consequences of wars and conflict, "they seldom have a say in political decision-making; as the decision to 'go to war' is usually reserved to male politicians or military leaders. Peace does not simply mean the end of the armed conflict, but a time to address the structural power imbalances that caused the conflict in the first place. Therefore post-conflict reconstruction efforts could present a valuable opportunity to address gender concerns and include women in political decision-making, and conflict resolution processes in war-stricken areas.

"This position was reaffirmed by the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA), and the Security Council resolution 1325 (2000); which requests member states, to increase the political representation of women, include them in decision making, peace negotiations and conflict resolution mechanisms, and protect them in armed conflict as they are one of the most vulnerable segments in society during wars and conflicts."

In early February the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) announced the start of two new projects in Africa that aim to support the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. They call for the full and equal participation of women in all peace and security initiatives, along with mainstreaming of gender issues in the context of armed conflict, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. UN-INSTRAW launched these projects during the High-Level Policy Dialogue on National Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Africa, organized by the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on February 6-8, 2008 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

As part of a year-long project in Burundi and Liberia, UN-INSTRAW will conduct assessments of the women, peace and security situation;

support the full implementation of Resolution 1325 by generating national consensus on these issues and promoting a national action-planning process; and stimulate awareness-raising and capacity-building activities through tools and workshops to relevant stakeholders. In Somalia, INSTRAW will evaluate and strengthen the role of Somali women in ongoing conflict-resolution and peace-building processes; as well as the role of Somali women living in the diaspora. The project also aims to create dialogue and strengthen collective action between diaspora women and women living in Somalia.

Rather than portraying all women as helpless victims of war and violence, the INSTRAW continues, it is essential to take into account the active roles that they play as combatants, peacebuilders, politicians and activists. INSTRAW is committed to building national commitment to more gender-sensitive and inclusive peace processes in countries facing war and the aftermath of prolonged conflict.

Until recently, according to Human Rights Watch, many viewed violence against women as an “inevitable, if regrettable, consequence of war. This attitude guaranteed impunity for perpetrators, effectively silencing women who suffered gruesome sexual and physical abuses. The creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and the International Criminal Court hold out some hope that women in war-torn countries might finally gain greater access to justice for crimes of sexual violence. Since 1998, these tribunals have convicted individuals of rape as an instrument of genocide, a form of torture, and a crime against humanity.”

Of equal hope is that the inclusion of more women in decision-making positions will facilitate a more honest assessment of the consequences of war and a deeper commitment to sustainable and inclusive security.

Climate change, terrorism linked to human security

At a gathering held in November 2007, powerful women from across the world proclaimed that a new approach to global problems is within reach, and that women leaders are uniquely positioned and qualified to solve them. The leaders from more than 30 nations gathered in New York for the International Women Leaders Global Security Summit, sponsored by the Annenberg Foundation Trust, the White House Project, the Council of Women World and Women Leaders Intercultural Forum.

The women observed that issues sometimes viewed as “soft,” such as climate change or economic inequality, can be the root causes of “hard” security problems, such as violence or terrorism, because they provoke mass population movements, reduce confidence in government competence and increase the potential for identity-based conflict. Participants also emphasized the importance of working together to negotiate non-violent solutions to both domestic and in-

ternational disputes.

In their Call to Action, the women wrote:

“We, the participants of the International Women Leaders Global Security Summit, share a common vision for a more secure, peaceful and just world. Our different cultures and backgrounds are unified by our common sense of urgency and shared resolve to ensure that all people may live free from fear and want. We commit to supporting effective policies that increase human and state security and challenge affronts to both.

“We recognize that the people of every nation deserve an accountable government, and a security system that provides for its own defense and sustains the safety and well being of its citizens. Nevertheless,

“As mothers and grandmothers, wives, daughters and sisters, we understand both the practical and the emotional cost of global insecurity. Those of us from this region know it better than we would like because we are living with it every single day.”-- *Jordan’s Queen Rania on the launching of a Women Leaders Intercultural Forum in the Arab region, February 28, 2008*

in a world where threats to peace are not contained by borders, military force must not be the only tool used to address insecurity. An over-reliance on military solutions diverts resources--both financial and human--away from solutions that favor prevention and persuasion over coercion and force. The arms industry and the proliferation of small arms carry a high human and economic toll that undermines human rights, diverts resources and encourages violence. Recognizing that expanding defense budgets do not buy greater security, we call on governments to create a balanced response to security that accurately reflects today's real security threats and creates the momentum for long-term solutions.

"... Security cannot be effectively discussed or achieved with the involvement of only half of humanity. The accumulated experiences of women

leaders now rising to power must be brought systematically to bear on local, national and international security policy. ...

"We call on both governments and individuals to effectively use the local, regional and international tools already in our hands, such as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, internationally agreed human rights standards including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and evolving norms such as the Responsibility to Protect, which are endorsed by heads of government and the international community."

For their specific recommendations relating to the economics of insecurity, responses to terrorism, climate change, and the responsibility to protect, see www.womenandglobalsecurity.org

Commission on the Status of Women

The UN Charter was signed in 1945; the following year, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established under the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), one of the six principal organs in the UN system. The Commission was established to promote the advancement of women throughout the world. Initially, the Commission focused on legal measures to protect the human rights of women and awareness-raising on the status and situation of women globally; within a short time, numerous other international women's movements were attracted to the vision and activities of the commission, and wished to join in partnership.

Over the past 60 years, the CSW has played a critical role in shaping the progress of women at both the global and national levels, and in a particular way by raising awareness of the challenges confronting women worldwide.

By the mid 1960s, the role of women in economic and social development issues was given high priority, drawing attention, in particular, to women in rural areas and the need to enhance their contributions and their expressed needs. In 1975, at the urging of the Commission, the International Women's Year, with the theme "Equality, Development and Peace" was created. The culmination of the year was the first global Women's Conference in Mexico City, which adopted a global plan of action

to improve the status of women. The UN Decade for Women from 1976-1985, and the following world conferences on women: (Copenhagen, 1980; Nairobi, 1985; Beijing, 1995) created an unprecedented momentum for change. Within this decade, the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Convention has now been ratified by 185 countries, and has become a crucial tool in the struggle to improve conditions for women everywhere.

In 2000, the groundwork for adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention was laid; now, women, in more than 80 countries, can use the Protocol to seek remedies for violations of their rights.

The Commission has played a critical catalytic role in promoting and monitoring gender mainstreaming at national level and within the UN system. The unanimous adoption of Security Council resolution 1325, "Women, Peace and Security," in October, 2000, was spearheaded by the Commission's untiring efforts in ongoing service to women.

However, despite many noble interventions aimed at ensuring gender equality and empowerment, women and girls continue to have much less access to resources than their male counterparts. The abysmal allocation of resources directed specifically to civil society programs targeting women and girls is disappointing. Also worrisome is that such funds,

when available, remain largely in the hands of northern non-profit organizations to the detriment of the southern ones. This lack of resources limits the implementation of locally initiated programs that would ensure a much more sustainable approach to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls from the global South.

Overwhelming evidence tells us that women and girls are still the poorest among the poor; the most uneducated; 50 percent of HIV infected persons, 80 percent of whom live in developing countries; severely under-represented in decision-making processes and leadership positions; economically dependent on men; disempowered by socio-cultural factors such as poverty, conflict, and illiteracy; lacking in food, medical treatment, employment, as well as personal autonomy, and the power to make decisions on their own; and often victims of systemic gender violence in the forms of early marriage, trafficking, genocidal rape, and other forms of sexual abuse in the home, in community, and in the workplace, violating women's innate human dignity and rights as a person.

The CSW, along with its many partners, has organized annual conferences at the UN in efforts to stem the gender inequities that exist throughout our world, and bring to reality the universal truth "that all persons have been created equal." This year, the Commission will consider the theme "Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women" at its 52nd session at UN headquarters, from February 25 to March 7, 2008.

The CSW's work will be guided by two reports of the Secretary-General on the theme, one of which will identify and discuss key issues in financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women and suggest policy recommendations; and a second which will provide an overview of mainstreaming efforts related to financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women at national levels.

Recommendations to be advanced through the conference discussions will be:

- The integration of women in decision making

processes from the local to the highest levels of policy making, particularly when it comes to budgeting to ensure that women's needs are properly assessed.

- The integration of women, living with HIV/AIDS, in all decision-making processes designed to address the pandemic, on all levels of government
- The promotion of economic empowerment of women
- The assurance that women and girls have access to the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, potable water and health services
 - The assurance of safety for all women and girls and firmly prosecute perpetrators of sexual violence
 - In event of armed conflict, the assurance of adequate human and financial resources for victims suffering from psycho-social and emotional disorders.



Whether in success or in failure, the Commission members continue to believe that women's rights are human rights, and toward this end they will continue to work.

To mark the 60th anniversary of progress brought about by the CSW, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said, "Largely thanks to your work, the international community as a whole is beginning to understand a fundamental principle: women are as affected as any man by the challenges facing humanity in the 21st century. It is, therefore, right and indeed necessary that women should be engaged in the decision-making processes in all areas, with equal strength and in equal numbers. ... The world is starting to grasp that there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women and girls; no policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, or reduce infant and maternal mortality. No other policy as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation. ... You have demonstrated, time and again, that the Commission not only moves with the times; it is ahead of its time." Then he put the world on notice by saying, "the future of this planet depends on women."

In support of Earth: Strengthening the right brain

According to the New York Times (Feb. 18, 2008), a California meat company recently issued the largest beef recall in history, 143 million pounds, some of which was used in school lunch programs. The recall was forced by an undercover video showing company use and abuse of crippled and sick animals.

At the time of the recall it was pointed out that there were no recorded instances of illness or death as a result of eating the beef. While this information is important, it is also important to note that this case shows a violation of ethical values and renders crass the ordinary grasp of what is supportive of life. How has it happened that the use of diseased animals for food is considered acceptable by those who provide food for the U.S. American table, and worse still, provide food for school children? How can the industrial conditions in which the animals are raised and become diseased be considered correct or safe enough?

The conditions pertaining to the beef recall highlight the problem of using the need for food as a means of maximizing profit. When food becomes a mere commodity, the age old concept of food as gift and blessing is left to become a faint memory. Narrow choices can forestall insight and prevent one from seeing that all things are interconnected.

In relation to interconnectedness, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization points out that industrial livestock handling is a major producer of greenhouse gases when all the production factors are measured, from feed production to the carbon dioxide emitted during processing and transportation of animal products. This in turn affects the entire planet in the form of global warming.

How could a feminist approach to situations such as the one cited above make a difference? While there are a variety of ways of addressing this question, one way is to look at how the left and right sides of the brain function and how an understanding of this may be helpful.

The strengths of the left side of the brain lie in logical thinking, analysis and accuracy. Left brain persons tend to think in parts. This way of thinking is associated with the masculine mode of being. The strengths of the right side are linked with aesthetics, feeling, and creativity. Right brain persons tend to

think in wholes. This way of thinking is associated with the feminine mode of being. Everyone's brain has both left and right sides but men and women ordinarily show preference for one or the other, depending on their gender.

The modern period is characterized by over exercising the reasoning, analytical left side of the brain, emphasizing sequential, part by part thinking. This has been highly successful in developing the modern industrial world. However, clearly, there are excesses and blind spots within the modern industrial world that stem from overuse of the left side of the brain and under use of the right side of the brain. Humanity today needs to develop the right side of the brain in order to strengthen holistic thinking that leans toward embracing decisions that support the totality of life. In the modern world women have been educated to develop the left side of the brain leaving underdeveloped the right side because, until recently, males have established the parameters for education. Also, women have acted as men have acted in order to be successful because few people grasped that the codes that govern behavior in the public sphere could be different. That situation is changing and it is more and more acknowledged that the great challenge for women today is to balance the skills acquired through left brain development with right brain development. This is required for the sake of all humanity and for the well being of the whole earth. Otherwise, humanity will continue to act in a way that is less and less in touch with its soul, failing to account for the total impact of actions, as evidenced in the case cited above.

Throughout time there have been outstanding examples of both men and women who have made well balanced and holistic contributions to enlighten the human journey. Following are three examples of modern women who have combined their right brain perceptions with highly trained reasoning skills thereby enhancing our understanding of the animals that we depend upon and our relationship to the earth that provides our nourishment.

Jane Goodall, a British primatologist, was the first to help people understand that primates are sensitive creatures; they suffer pain from illness and injury and depression from loss. This, in turn, has applications to other animals and to our sense of proper behavior toward them. It relates directly to

industrial animal raising. In addition, Goodall has helped people the world over appreciate the human evolutionary connection with primates. The story of her long years of chimpanzee observation in the mountains of Tanzania is captured in her beautiful book *Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey*. The Jane Goodall Institute is a global nonprofit organization that empowers people to make a difference for all living things.

Rachel Carson, a U.S. American marine biologist, drew the attention of the whole world to the truth of DDT, a pesticide that spread death far beyond the insects it was intended to kill. She achieved this through her book *Silent Spring*, which began with a myth about the loss of the song of the birds due to DDT. She joined her trained mind and bril-

liant creativity in support of all forms of life on earth. In the experience of mothering her adopted son she found inspiration and determination for writing the truth in a highly antagonistic academic, political and corporate atmosphere

In her book *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*, Vandana Shiva, an Indian physicist, delineated the contemporary assault on food through genetically modified organisms, pesticides, herbicides and intellectual property rights. Her field of expertise may be quantum physics but her concern is for the living earth and women's role in nurturing life. Her book *Staying Alive* helped re-define perceptions of third world women. She has courageously fought for changes in agriculture and food production.

U.S. elections 2008: Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world ***Amando a nuestro prójimo en un mundo cada vez más pequeño***

Foreign policy decisions made in the United States reverberate around the world, in positive and negative ways. To educate voters in the U.S. about how the decisions made by their legislators and leaders can affect our brothers and sisters in other countries, the Maryknoll Global Concerns Office has prepared an election guide based on the principles of Catholic social tradition and gospel teachings, and inspired by the deep and long experience of Maryknoll missionaries around the world. This guide can be viewed as a companion piece to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' "Faithful Citizenship."

Please contact us for copies of the 12-page guide, in English and/or Spanish. Donations are warmly accepted; the suggested donation for large orders (over 100) is 25 cents per copy. Call or email: 202-832-1780; ogc@maryknoll.org

Also, visit our website for a PDF version (English or Spanish) and for other resources on the U.S. 2008 elections.



It's not just about AIDS

"All AIDS strategies should pass the test: Does this work for women?" (Dr. Peter Piot, executive director, UNAIDS)

At the end of 2007, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNAIDS, 50 percent of all adults living with HIV worldwide, and 61 percent in sub-Saharan Africa, were women. Additionally, in Africa, young women age 15-24 account for 75 percent of youth living with HIV. Women are biologically more susceptible to HIV infection from heterosexual sex than men. (Younger women might be even more biologically vulnerable to HIV infection because they have less mature tissue and are often victims of coercive or forced sex.)

The girl child is often sought for trafficking, prostitution or other forms of coercive or forced sex if she is believed to be a virgin, thus not a danger for HIV for the man. Marriage is not a protection against this virus. Some research indicates that married women are more at risk for HIV than unmarried women; according to UNAIDS, one third of all new infections in Thailand occur in married women.

Gender norms, violence, stigma and discrimination, as well as lack of legal and human rights, are potential barriers to women's access to care and treatment. Girls tend to receive less education than boys, further increasing their social and economic vulnerability; and in families impacted by AIDS, it is the girls who are forced to drop out of school.

As AIDS ravages families and communities, the burden of caring for ill family members rests mainly with women and girls, many of whom may be seriously ill themselves. A woman affected by HIV/AIDS is plunged further into poverty when she loses the ability to provide for herself and her children. Combined with pervasive social stigma and the collapse of traditional family and support structures, HIV/AIDS erodes the status of women in many countries. Once a woman is infected with the virus, she is more vulnerable to extended social and economic stigma. A study in Zambia reports that "(m)arried women...stated that their husbands and other intimate partners beat, kicked, or emotionally abused them when discussing HIV testing and treatment, and when they disclosed their positive HIV status." According to Human Rights Watch, "In the Dominican Republic, women are illegally subjected to HIV testing without informed consent ...

and public health professionals routinely reveal HIV test results to women's families without the woman's consent ... exposing them to violence and abuse."

In April 2007, WHO reported that only 28 percent of those who need AIDS medicines are receiving them, and the impact on women is severe, if they in fact can access those drugs. Women in Tanzania report that they are forced by husbands or partners to give them their own medication, even if the man has not been tested for HIV or does not know his status. Such "sharing" of medicines means interrupted treatment for the woman, placing her in jeopardy of resistance to the drugs; and if those family members who do not access treatment fall ill, the burden of their care generally falls to the women.

In many societies, women and girls are expected to be ignorant and passive about sex, while men are expected to seek multiple sexual partners. While the ABC prevention messages ("abstain, be faithful and use condoms") seem to cover all situations, gender norms often leave women unable to negotiate abstinence, monogamy or condom use on the part of her partner or spouse, and can place her in danger if she attempts to do so.

In June 2008, the United Nations will once again meet to review how nation states have held to their commitments of 2001 and 2006. Some of the measures that can be taken and monitored include:

1. Include women in the planning and decision making in regards to their health services and AIDS programming; assure that national plans include women in the coordinating bodies and provide training for women, particularly those living with HIV, to be advocates and leaders;
2. Ensure that national and local laws protect women's human and legal rights and that prohibit violence against women and include these in national AIDS strategies. Include programs for educating police and all areas of judicial and social services, as well as community leaders;
3. Invest in programs that work for women and girls, including women in development of those programs; expand access to the services that women need, and fund research that benefits women's HIV prevention programs and women's health services;
5. Fund and establish programs that ensure girls' education, abolishing school fees and making secondary education available for all;

6. Provide access to affordable antiretroviral therapy and develop and fund programs to support care givers, particularly older women and their dependents;
7. Invest more in HIV prevention methods that favor women and women's health.

Finally, UN member states must adhere to those promises that have already been committed

to through UN and other international agreements. The 2006 Political Declaration commits all states to "eliminate gender inequalities, gender-based abuse and violence; increase the capacity of women and adolescent girls to protect themselves from the risk of HIV infection." Let us each monitor our government's record on these promise and elect candidates committed to fulfilling that promise.

Trade and women

In many ways, women are more affected by the changes brought about by trade agreements than are men. Women make up 70 to 90 percent of those employed in export processing zones around the world and most of the world's food production is carried out by women. It is important to look at gender issues within trade because men and women are affected differently by trade policies. While gender issues have finally become part of the debate, there is a long way to go toward making real changes. The next U.S. President and Congress will have an opportunity to reshape our trade policy for the better. Below are some suggestions of how they can make trade policy more women friendly.

In the area of services, women are more affected than men by the changes called for in trade agreements. Public services privatization leads to huge layoffs of workers, most of whom are women. The privatization of services also brings increased fees thus less accessibility for poor people. Women tend to be caretakers of family members who are sick more often and for longer periods due to lack of formal health care. This often leads to the "defeminization" of the economy as increased family care commitments limit women's ability to maintain paid work outside the home. Essential services like health, water and education should not be included in negotiations for new trade policies; these services are too important to leave to the whims of the market, and their liberalization unduly affects women.

Intellectual property (IP) policies have driven up the price of many life-saving medicines; patents and data exclusivity put these drugs out of the reach of many. In Jordan, medicine prices jumped 20 percent after signing a trade agreement with the U.S. that contained strong IP provisions. New medicines to treat diabetes and heart disease now cost from

two to six times more in Jordan than in nearby Egypt that has no such agreement. A new trade policy will allow countries to adjust their IP to favor public interest over private profits. Patents are a horribly inefficient method to reward innovation and cause huge monetary and health losses. The new president and Congress should explore the variety of alternative means to reward innovation in medicines.

Most trade agreements negotiated by the U.S. include the core labor standards of the right to associate, collective bargaining, and no use of forced or child labor, but leaves out a standard that is critical to the well being of women: the right to a workplace free from discrimination. Unfortunately, women in factories often face severe injustices. In processing plants in Mexico and Central America (maquilas), female workers must submit to regular pregnancy tests and are forced to resign if they become pregnant. Around the world, women face sexual harassment and even assault at their worksites, but it does not have to be this way: The next president and Congress can give women a legal tool to fight these practices by including the standard of discrimination-free worksites in all trade agreements.

Finally, to truly include all the world's women, the enormous amount of women's work that receives no recognition or compensation must be addressed. The UN Development Program has documented that the majority of the world's poor people are women despite the fact that women work more hours than men in nearly every country. The UN estimated the value of women's unpaid and underpaid work equaled \$11 trillion in 1990, almost half of the world's officially measured output. A new president and Congress should hold hearings on how to address this fundamental injustice and how to include the participation of all women in the economy.

Resources

1. **CMEP Middle East Peace Advocacy Conference: April 20-22**, Washington, D.C. Hosted by Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP). Held at the Kellogg Conference Hotel at Gallaudet University and Lutheran Church of the Reformation, this ecumenical conference will bring together advocates from churches around the country. It will focus on U.S. policy and Middle East peacemaking with speakers, workshops, advocacy preparation and a day of lobbying your elected officials. The program will begin on Sunday evening and conclude with Tuesday's Hill appointments and will include a special session for denominational gatherings. For more information, contact CMEP at 202-543-1222, www.cmep.org.
2. **A Convention for the Common Good: July 11-13**, Philadelphia, PA. The Maryknoll Global Concerns Office is working with our partners at NETWORK, Pax Christi USA, the Center of Concern, the Sisters of Mercy, and Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, along with others, to hold a Convention for the Common Good this summer in Philadelphia. Please save the date and join us. Leading up to the convention, the organizers will initiate a substantive discussion of government for the common good. We will engage people across the country in advance of the Convention to draft a Platform for the Common Good. Delegates at the Convention will ratify the Platform for the Common Good, and work together on ways to use the Platform. We envision people using the Platform to educate and organize voters in their areas and also asking candidates to endorse the Platform. And after the election, we will hold elected officials accountable to the common good. For more information, check our website: www.maryknollogc.org.
3. **Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, A Primer**: Written by Phyllis Bennis, this primer uses easy-to-understand and straight-forward language. Bennis, at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and a long time analyst of the Middle East and U.S. policy in the region, answers these and many other frequently-asked-questions on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This new updated edition includes an analysis of the "road map" to peace. To order, contact IPS at 202-234-9382, www.ips-dc.org.
4. **Women in Politics**: This map provides a "snapshot" of women's presence in the executive and legislative branches of government, as of January 2005. It was published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Division for the Advancement of Women on the occasion of the 49th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which reviewed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action progress. The map provides a visual representation on the percentage of women in politics, including women in parliament, ministerial posts, and heads of state or government throughout the world. Download PDF version from the UN's Womenwatch website at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/publications.htm>.
5. Free online reports from the Institute for Policy Studies: *Iran in the Crosshairs: How to Prevent Washington's Next War*; *U.S. Department of Energy Budget FY 2009; Military vs. Climate Security*; *State of the Dream 2008*; *Wal-Mart's Sustainability Initiative: A Civil Society Critique*; *Executive Excess 2007*; *Just Security*; *A Unified Security Budget for the United States, FY 2008*, among others. Go to www.ips-dc.org/reports/ for free downloadable reports.
6. **Voting for the Common Good resources**: The Center of Concern has several resources available on its website pertaining to the critical issues in the 2008 election decisions. The most recent, written in partnership with Pax Christi USA, is a collection of pieces focused on the war in Iraq including a policy paper, "Towards a Just and Peaceful Solution in Iraq," talking points outlining the main issues, questions for candidates, a fact sheet on the human and economic costs, recent church statements on Iraq, and a sheet of prayer, study and action resources. These materials can be found at www.coc.org/election2008.