



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

# NewsNotes

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

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## U.S. Catholic Bishop promotes call to nonviolence

Archbishop of Baltimore William E. Lori published a pastoral letter entitled “The Enduring Power of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Principles of Nonviolence,” on February 14.

The six principles of active nonviolence advocated by Dr. Martin Luther King are “more necessary than ever,” according to the Archbishop of Baltimore William E. Lori. In anticipation of the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. King on April 4, Archbishop Lori shared a pastoral letter entitled “The Enduring Power of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Principles of Nonviolence” with the Catholic community of Baltimore.

The 30-page pastoral letter on nonviolence was released on February 14, the same day that 17 people, mostly children, were killed in a mass shooting by a former student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The letter also comes nearly three years after the death of Freddie Gray, Jr., the Baltimore man who died in hospital from spinal injuries a week after police took him into custody. Gray’s death sparked major protests that rocked Baltimore for weeks.

Reflecting on the current U.S. political climate, the gun violence, and the numerous other challenges impoverished communities in Baltimore face, Archbishop Lori calls for changing the ‘negative narrative’ about the city by embracing King’s vision of active nonviolence. The archbishop recognizes that the struggle for civil rights to which Martin Luther King gave his life is far from won; now, fifty years later we are seeing a rise of white supremacy, demonizing of immigrants, hate crimes against minorities and increasing violence in our society:

“Weighing heavily on our minds and hearts is the sin of racism that continues, sometimes overtly but often subtly, to insinuate itself in our relationships, institutions and communities of faith, including our own. Indeed, the sin of racism has tarnished the soul of our society for so long that racist attitudes can be deeply embedded in our subconscious, such that we may hardly know they are there. We must bring to light such attitudes and overcome them.”

Lori further notes that violence in U.S. society is not only the terror of school shootings or inner-city gun violence but also a “vitriolic and coarse public rhetoric” that “spills over into private conversation.”

“They may not kill their neighbors with bullets but they do ‘kill’ them with words and gestures of disrespect. The commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ pertains to all forms of violence against others, including the violence of economic inequality.”

In the face of this harsh reality that leads many of

us to become cynical or indifferent, the pastoral letter invokes the persistent hope of Dr. King to create the Beloved Community, a society based on justice, equal opportunity, and love of one’s fellow human beings. “All of us need to walk the path of nonviolent hope,” Lori says.

The best way to observe the anniversary of Dr. King’s assassination, Archbishop Lori claims, is to pay careful attention to his prophetic vision of nonviolence. Lori calls for three steps: Retrieving the legacy of Martin Luther King; Changing the narrative of hopelessness or indifference by reflecting on Dr. King’s six principles of active nonviolence; and Engaging in the practice and spirituality of nonviolence that leads to lasting social change through one’s lived experience.

The letter reviews King’s six principles of nonviolence (listed below) and offers questions for reflection for parishes, communities, families and individuals:

1. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.
2. Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.
3. Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people.
4. Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform.
5. Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate.
6. Nonviolence believes that justice will ultimately triumph.

Finally, Archbishop Lori recognizes that for the Catholic community of Baltimore to successfully confront the challenges of racism, violence, and despair will require deep personal commitment on the part all Catholics in the Archdiocese; a fuller collaboration among parishes, diocesan offices and community organizations; and greater interfaith action and cooperation to confront systemic injustices and build peace.

As members of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of Pax Christi International working to integrate the teaching of Gospel nonviolence into all levels of the Church, we are grateful for this significant pastoral letter on nonviolence by a major leader of the U.S. Catholic Church. §

**Faith in action:** Archbishop Lori invites readers to submit comments on practical ways to put King’s teaching on nonviolence into action, based on six steps outlined on pages 24-26 of the pastoral letter. Read the pastoral letter and submit comments at <https://www.archbalt.org/kingpastoral/>

# Nuclear posture of the United States

*The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review by the United States signals a new arms race and increasing potential of the use of nuclear weapons.*

Last November, Pope Francis named the elimination nuclear weapons a “moral imperative.” Surrounded by some of the world’s leading thinkers on peace, including 11 Nobel Prize winners, at the Vatican for a conference entitled “Perspectives for a World Free from Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament,” the pope rejected the strategy of nuclear deterrence supported by his predecessors and condemned not only “the threat of their use” but also “their very possession.”

In his remarks opening the conference, Pope Francis spoke of “the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental effects of any employment of nuclear devices.” He went on to say, “If we also take into account the risk of an accidental detonation as a result of error of any kind, the threat of their use, as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned.”

It is with this new thinking in mind that we look at the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review from the U.S. Department of Defense, released in February. The review signaled a new nuclear arms race, directly counter to the papal message. The United States appears to be embracing the outdated and failed strategy of nuclear deterrence which, the review states, requires \$1.2 trillion over the next 30 years to modernize and maintain the U.S. nuclear arsenal, and lowers the threshold for employing nuclear weapons.

In some ways the review is a continuation of the status quo, advancing thinking and initiatives of previous Administrations, including the most recent. There is an appreciable shift, however: a more aggressive posture and more expansive potential use of the weapons of mass destruction.

The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review calls for “low-yield” or “tactical” nuclear weapons in order to enhance “flexibility.” These low-yield options have an explosive yield (amount of energy released upon detonation) of one to 20 kilotons of energy. For reference, the weapon used to devastate Hiroshima had a 15-kiloton yield, well within the range of “low-yield,” resulting in a final death toll of 135,000 - although many estimate it to be higher. The review argues that creating more weapons like this is “important for the preservation of credible deterrence.”

The review rejects a “sole purpose” policy for nuclear weapons, i.e., the only purpose of nuclear weapons being to deter, and if necessary, respond to the use of nuclear weapons by other countries. It also rejects

a “no first use policy,” or in other words, use only in retaliation to a nuclear strike. The review also affirms that the Trump administration is prepared to use nuclear weapons first in numerous situations, while maintaining “some ambiguity regarding the precise circumstances” precipitating a nuclear response, citing use in “extreme circumstances,” which include but are not limited to “significant non-nuclear attacks,” e.g., conventional strikes on “allied or partner civilian population or infrastructure on the U.S.” or some 30 “allies and partners.”

The review asserts that the United States will not ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1996, which prohibits all nuclear explosions, civilian and military, in all environments, which Russia ratified.

Concerning Russia, the United States’ leading adversary in the nuclear weapons realm, the review states “the United States will not forever endure Russia’s continuing non-compliance,” in terms of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. The review seems to promote the development of U.S. missiles as a means to intimidate Russia and force compliance.

The review ignores the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the first legally-binding international agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons, which member states at the United Nations passed in July 2017. Without naming the treaty, the review states that all talk of nuclear abolition is “fueled by wholly unrealistic expectations” of disarmament without an overhaul of the existent international security landscape.

Beatrice Fihn, who accepted the Nobel Prize for Peace on behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons in 2017, stated in response to the review, “There are only two possible endings to this story: either the end of nuclear weapons or the end of us all.”

Fihn attended the conference at the Vatican last November, where she said the pope was “giving moral leadership” on disarmament. The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review represents a significant move by the United States in the opposite direction. §

**Faith in action:** The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has reset the hands of the Doomsday Clock to 2 Minutes to Midnight. We offer three ways to take action to stop the threat of nuclear war at <http://bit.ly/2CGV6iF>

# Catholic institutions divest from fossil fuels

*Catholic institutions are divesting from fossil fuel companies and investing in renewable energy as part of their response to the urgent call Pope Francis sounded in *Laudato Si'* and in response to the statement by Catholic Bishops from all continents at the Paris climate talks in 2015.*

“Put an end to the fossil fuel era...and provide affordable, reliable and safe renewable access for all.” – Catholic Bishops from all continents in a statement to the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, 2016.

Last October, a group of 40 Catholic institutions committed to caring for our common home by announcing their divestment from fossil fuels. This is the largest joint Catholic announcement to date. Among the religious communities in the group are the School Sisters of Notre Dame, the Society of the Sacred Heart, and the Australian Jesuit Province. (See the complete list at <http://bit.ly/2sXaiZn>)

Since the release of *Laudato Si'* in 2015 various religious communities have committed to divestment: Missionary Society of St. Columban, Scarborough Missions, Franciscan Sisters of Mary, and Sisters of Loretto were some of the first. Institutions such as Georgetown University, University of Dayton, and Trocaire have also committed to divestment.

Amy Echeverria, the Director Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation for the Columbans explained why the international mission society made the commitment to divest from fossil fuels on the Feast of St. Francis, October 4, 2016:

“Columbans have a long history of commitment to care for creation which is reflected in our education, advocacy, networking and pastoral care...With the growing divestment from fossil fuels, particularly within the Catholic world, and in light of *Laudato Si'*, we see this as a concrete way to further align our mission with our [investment] policies and practices.”

Divestment is the removal of investment capital from stocks, bonds, or funds. The global divest-invest movement asks institutions to move their money out of oil, coal, and gas companies for both moral and financial reasons, and encourages reinvestment of those resources in clean energy companies that will help solve the climate crisis while tackling energy poverty.

In June of 2016, when four Catholic organizations announced that they were selling their investments in coal, oil and gas companies as the moral case against fossil fuels continued to build, Tomás Insua, Coordinator of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, commented: “These congregations mark the beginning of a new momentum for the Catholic Church. Pope Francis’ encyclical

highlights that politics and business have been slow to react in a way commensurate with the urgency of the challenges facing our world. Through divestment from fossil fuels and reinvestment in clean energy, Catholic institutions are starting to use their financial resources to live *Laudato Si'*.”

The four that committed to divestment in 2016 are the Marist Sisters Australia, Presentation Congregation Queensland, Presentation Sisters Wagga Wagga, and the Passionists – Holy Spirit Province Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Vietnam.

Not long after the announcement in 2016, Cardinal Peter Turkson described what he sees as the next steps the Church should take in responding to the global crisis of climate change:

“A genuine examination of conscience would recognize not only our individual failings but also our institutional failings. As Pope Francis says, ‘we are participants in a system that ‘has imposed the mentality of profit at any price, with no concern for social exclusion or the destruction of nature.’ This implicates all of us in one way or another.

“Ecological conversion entails not only individual conversion,” Cardinal Turkson continued, “but community conversion, too. We need a conversion of economics and politics – away from an obsession with short-term and self-centered financial or electoral gains, and toward a true appreciation of the common good.”

Recently, Trócaire, the overseas development agency of the Irish Catholic Church, published a guide for Catholic communities and institutions who are considering divestment from fossil fuels entitled *Ethical Investments in an era of Climate Change* (available online at <http://bit.ly/2EYjRZB>). Trócaire concludes:

“If a significant portion of Catholic institutions review their investment policies and publicize their decision to divest from the most harmful sectors, Catholic institutions can make a significant impact in caring for the planet. There is possibly no other global institution as well placed to show prophetic and practical leadership at this critical moment.”§

**Faith in action:** Learn more from the Global Catholic Climate Movement at <http://bit.ly/2ClvUCD>

## Protecting Dreamers through the courts

*The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns was invited to join the legal effort to keep the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program alive by writing about the lived experiences of Maryknoll missionaries in an amicus brief supporting a case on behalf of 42,000 DACA recipients in the state of New York.*

While some 700,000 Dreamers face uncertainty and the possibility of deportation, recent rulings in federal court emit a ray of hope that their cause is not lost.

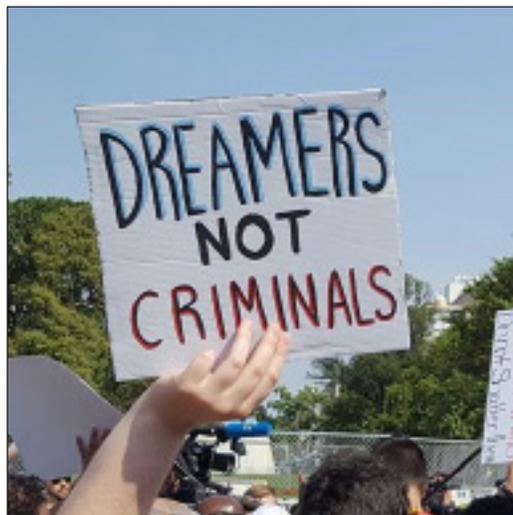
These undocumented immigrants, brought to the U.S. as children, have been shielded from deportation and other immigration enforcement under the Obama-era program known as DACA, for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. That changed on September 5 of last year, when the Trump administration ordered the program to shut down by March 5 unless Congress came up with the fix. Paralyzed by a wave of creative advocacy by Dreamers and their supporters on one side and by a wall of entrenched immigration views and open racism on the other, Congress has failed to act.

But now two federal courts have lent moral weight to the Dreamers' side. On February 13 a federal judge in Brooklyn followed a California court issuing a preliminary injunction against the DACA recension, giving Congress more to consider over the next two weeks. On February 28 the Supreme Court ruled that it would not entertain an appeal by the Trump administration to block the injunctions, requiring the Trump administration to keep major parts of the DACA program in place while legal challenges against the recension of DACA proceed.

In its injunction, the Eastern District of New York (EDNY), representing some 42,000 DACA recipients, Judge Nicholas G. Garaufis found that a 17-state and immigrant-advocacy coalition suing over the DACA decision likely to prove the "arbitrary and capricious" nature of the September 5 order to end DACA. The EDNY asked advocacy and religious groups, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, to write amicus briefs for the case to support the "capricious and arbitrary" basis for the decision and help illustrate what was at stake Dreamers and their families.

For its part in the amicus brief, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns wrote:

"Having lived and worked with families in extreme poverty for many years in countries around the world, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Sisters, and Lay Missioners have acquired a deep understanding of the dire social, economic and environmental conditions that Dreamers would face if they were deported, as well as intimate witness to the fragility and insecurity of living in the shadows without documents in the US. Deporting Dreamers to their countries of origin, where most have only weak or distant ties, would subject them to the same forces of poverty, violence, and instability their families originally fled and from which millions more still flee. In Haiti, for example, Maryknoll Sisters have witnessed the bare struggle for post-disaster survival in the massive slums of Cite Soleil, where they help residents subsist from gardens grown in discarded tires on turf fought over by rival gangs. In El Salvador, one Maryknoll Lay Missioner describes the anger and pain that pervades communities preyed upon by powerful gangs, where immediate survival forces youth to face grim choices between lives of drugs and



guns – or escape. And in Guatemala, a Maryknoll Father reports on the rising rates of femicide and sums up what motivates millions of rural migrants in a single word: 'desperation.' Maryknoll Missioners working in migrant shelters along the U.S.-Mexico border also hear daily stories of desperation from the countries many Dreamers might be returned. Poverty, starvation, extortion, sexual assault, gang violence, and political oppression are among the conditions cited as triggers to leave. In one such encounter in Nogales, Sonora, a man travelling north with his son from Honduras merely pointed south and said, 'There is no life there anymore.'"

While the government does not have to consider new applications under the EDNY ruling, the Department of Homeland Security can judge DACA renewal requests on merits and case-by-case but must otherwise continue the program "on the same terms and conditions that existed prior" to the September 5 DACA recension. §

## “Bridges, Not Walls”: U.S. Bishops visit Holy Land

*The following is a reprint of a news release by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on January 30, 2018.*

Ten [U.S. Catholic] bishops made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land on January 18 – 27, 2018. In reflections issued at the conclusion of the Pilgrimage, they noted the "many walls and some bridges" they encountered as they "sought out those on the peripheries." The visit had as its theme, "Bridges, Not Walls," to help connect the bishops' domestic experiences of walls on the U.S. southern border to the reality of walls in the Holy Land.

They offer a number of reflections regarding their visit, including:

In Sderot, the city that has suffered the most from rocket attacks by Hamas, the bishops noted "they encountered the real fears of Israelis who grieve for the loss of lives," and also expressed great concern for their children who are "regularly required to practice air raid drills."

In addition to visiting Jerusalem, Nazareth, and many holy sites, where they celebrated daily Eucharist, the bishops traveled to Gaza and Jiffna in the Palestinian Territories to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist with "small, vibrant Christian communities."

They traveled extensively in the West Bank, including to Hebron, Susya and Bethlehem, witnessing firsthand the "stark reminders of the Israeli occupation—check-points that inhibit movement, confiscations of Palestinian lands, expansion of Israeli settlements, and a security barrier whose route cuts deep into the West Bank, which together with Israeli-only bypass roads, strangles natural urban growth and divides the Palestinian Territories into non-contiguous cantons."

The bishops also urge the U.S. government not to cut badly needed humanitarian and development assis-

tance. They had met with families in Gaza and the West Bank who depend on aid for basic necessities, health care and education.

The bishops also express a particular concern for the dramatic decline of the Christian presence throughout the Holy Land, but also noted there are reasons for hope. In particular, they pointed to schools sponsored by the Church where persons of different religions study together, health ministries that serve the most vulnerable,

and relief and development agencies doing heroic work.

The Pilgrimage for Peace was originally proposed by Bishop Oscar Cantú of Las Cruces, when he was Chairman of the US-CCB Committee on International Justice and Peace, with the support of Bishop Nelson Jesus Perez of Cleveland, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Hispanic Affairs. Catholic Relief Services and the Holy Land Incoming Tour Operators Association partnered with the US-CCB Office of International Justice and Peace



*“Nativity Wall” believed to be painted by the controversial British graffiti artist Banksy in 2005.*

in planning the Pilgrimage.

Calling for an end to violence and the occupation, the bishops are asking "Catholics to pray for the peoples of the Holy Land, to come on Pilgrimage to both the Holy Sites and the local Christian community, and to urge our nation's leaders to support policies that promote justice and peace."

The other bishops who participated were Bishop José Arturo Cepeda of Detroit, Bishop Octavio Cisneros of Brooklyn, Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, MSPS, of Seattle, Bishop Felipe de Jesús Estévez of St. Augustine, Bishop Armando Xavier Ochoa of Fresno, Bishop Rutilio del Riego of San Bernardino, Bishop Alberto Rojas of Chicago, and Bishop Plácido Rodríguez of Lubbock. §

The full text of the statement can be found here: <http://bit.ly/2HLzZ2q>

## Palestinian peacemaker on U.S. embassy move

*Nora Arsenian Carmi, a Palestinian Christian born just months before Israel was founded, is both a leading peacemaker and refugee in her own divided city of Jerusalem. Educated in Catholic schools and Protestant universities, Carmi is actively involved in Palestinian society as a community organizer and has worked with the YWCA, Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, and Kairos Palestine. Carmi and the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns work together on the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of Pax Christi International. We invited Nora Carmi to share her opinion on the Trump administration's decision to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem.*

Since December 6, when President Donald Trump made the rash decision of deciding the fate of Jerusalem by declaring it the capital of Israel and announcing the plan to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the country of Israel/Palestine has been in turmoil. President Trump's decision violates international law and defies the United Nations which considers Jerusalem as occupied by Israel since 1967 and thus waiting for a shared and just solution. This is why foreign embassies exist only in Tel Aviv and not in Jerusalem.

The sole exception is the so-called Christian embassy, the "International Christian Embassy Jerusalem" to be exact, created by an evangelical Christian Zionist group in 1980 when they established their "embassy" in West Jerusalem. Embassies represent sovereign states. Christianity is not a sovereign state and thus does not need an embassy. President Trump has made it clear who he is siding with.

Most member states represented in the UN General Assembly denounced President Trump's decision. Both the United States and Israel simply ignore them. Even more dangerous than the decision itself is the United States' attempt to distort the recognized status of Jerusalem, an open city for peoples of all faiths and home to over 300,000 Palestinians.

As a follower of Jesus the Christ, our Savior, I have been anchored for 70 years in Jerusalem/Palestine, Jerusalem/Jordan and Jerusalem/under Israeli Occupation. I hear Jesus crying over the city that has yet to understand His message of peace. "If this day you only knew what makes for peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes... because you did not recognize the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:42-44).

The arrogant declaration of the U.S. president has narrowed and almost closed the gates to peace! It has launched a chain of controversial reactions: on the one hand, emboldening the Israeli government to impose even harsher, unjust measures, including taxation on the churches, and on the other, intensifying the resilient nonviolent actions of Palestinians decrying their portrayal as "terrorists."

One such example is the nonviolent action taking

place in response to the story of young Ahed Tamimi, the courageous Muslim girl from Nabi Saleh, who dared slap the Israeli soldier trying to defile the sanctity and privacy of their home after having shot her cousin in the face. Ahed and her mother, Nariman, have been held in administrative detention and the trial continuously postponed. Her punishment may be years of imprisonment. The case of the blue-eyed blond-haired Palestinian Ahed, who celebrated her 17th birthday while incarcerated, has gone viral. Many peace-loving people around the world are advocating for her release while nonviolent demonstrations and marches in response to Trump's decision to move the embassy continue weekly, after Friday prayers. All of this strengthens the unity of the Palestinian people in the face of systematic violence.

The reaction of the churches in Jerusalem to President Trump's decision was evident during the annual week of prayers at the end of January. Daily prayers held in the churches of different denominations all focused on a commitment to a nonviolent but firm effort to find a just solution that maintains the open city of Jerusalem. At the same time, church leaders have issued a joint statement about Israel's decision to impose taxes on church properties thus violating the status of religious organizations.

Promoting nonviolence in a strong and unjust military system is the only way to preserve the dignity of human life, a challenging responsibility that ensures mutual respect, equity, and reconciliation.

**Postscript:** The situation in Jerusalem is in graver danger of violent explosion. On February 25, church leaders were forced to make the difficult decision to close the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in response to Israeli legislation regarding the collection of taxes from churches and their properties. Following international pressure and condemnation by Palestinian Christians, Israel decided to suspend the legislation and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre reopened three days later. Prayerful nonviolent action and pressure continue to be needed. God have mercy. §

## U.S. cuts funding for Palestinian refugees

*On January 16 the Trump Administration sent a letter to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) announcing its decision to withhold \$65 million from its scheduled \$125 million contribution to the agency's humanitarian programs.*

Since the UN General Assembly passed a resolution in late December condemning the United States' recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the Trump administration has said it was considering retribution against those nations which voted in favor of the resolution as well as against Palestinian leaders who said the United States should no longer play a role in peace talks with Israel. The decision to severely reduce U.S. funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which funds schools and clinics for Palestinians, appears to fit the bill.

The UNRWA is a relief and human development agency funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions from UN Member States. The agency supports Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.

The State Department spokesperson said that along with the decrease in U.S. funding to the UNRWA, there is a need for a fundamental review of UNRWA. "As across the U.N., the United States should not be asked to bear a disproportionate share of these costs," the spokesperson said. "It is time other countries, some of them quite wealthy, step in and do their part to advance regional security and stability... It is time for a change."

The UNRWA carries out humanitarian projects for refugees, including educational support for over 5 million children, emergency food support to over 1 million refugees, and greatly needed health care services. In Gaza, where more than half of the 1.9 million people are refugees, 80 percent are dependent on international aid, including aid from UNRWA. The New York Times reported on February 11 that UN officials warn that current conditions are so dire that "Gaza is nearing total collapse, with medical supplies dwindling, clinics closing and 12-hour power failures threatening hospitals. The water is almost entirely undrinkable and raw sewage is befouling beaches and fishing grounds."

The Trump Administration has faced strong criticism from U.S.-based faith groups over its decision to cut UNRWA's funding. The Friends Committee on National Legislation called the decision "a perverse affront to the oft-stated guideline of U.S. humanitarian policy that 'a hungry child knows no politics,' these cuts to UNRWA use the hunger of Palestinian refugee children as a political tool." Churches for Middle East Peace stated it "strongly believes that removal of this funding

undermines U.S. and Israeli security interests and will do significant harm to the Palestinian population; particularly to children, many of whom already live below the poverty line."

The Faith Forum on Middle East Policy, of which the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is a member, sent a letter to President Trump on February 6 expressing concern that this decision could devastate an already vulnerable population: "Humanitarian aid must be provided to civilians on the basis of need alone, not used as a way to attempt to extract concessions from political leaders." Further, the letter goes on to say that this move "appears to be part of a series of actions to deny basic rights to Palestinians – in this case, their fundamental rights under international law."

More than one hundred members of Congress expressed their opposition on February 8 in a letter to President Trump which asked him to reconsider the decision to cut funding for the UNRWA, emphasizing the danger of weakening the Palestinian leadership and delivering a blow to security for the region. According to the letter, even Israel appealed to the U.S. to continue its support for UNRWA: "the Israeli government deems UNRWA's work providing basic services and education to Palestinian refugees so consequential for Israeli security that it has reportedly weighed in with your administration in support of maintaining US contributions to the agency."

Eleven countries – Switzerland, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Russia, Belgium, Kuwait, the Netherlands and Ireland – advanced their payments to UNRWA for 2018 early, but this will not make up for the gap in U.S. funding and leaves many concerned about the future of the U.S.'s commitment to support Palestinian refugees.

While world leaders debate political solutions and Palestinians face dire economic conditions and human rights violations, hope can be found among the people. One example is that of Majd Mashharawi, a civil engineer in Gaza who along with her partner, Rawan Abdulatif, have created a type of brick made out of recycled ashes of destroyed buildings—a new building material that is environmentally-friendly, cheap, locally sourced, heat-resistance and sound-proof. Called "Green cake," the brick is an ingenious work-around in a community where building supplies are severely limited by Israel. §

# Militarization of the Middle East

*The Faith Forum on the Middle East, of which the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is a member, was scheduled to send the following letter to all Members of Congress on March 6.*

As Christian denominations and faith-based organizations working in and concerned about the Middle East, we write to express our serious concern regarding increasing U.S. arms sales and military aid to the Middle East.

In FY2017 the amount of U.S. arms sales approved worldwide was a record-high \$75.9 billion, doubling that of the previous year. Of these approved sales, \$52 billion were to countries in the Middle East. A Congressional Research Service report notes that “the United States is the single largest arms supplier to the Middle East and has been for decades.”

These sales are lucrative for U.S. defense corporations, and purportedly promote U.S. security interests, but they come at a steep cost. As a result of our organizations’ long-term relationships and engagement throughout the Middle East, and our longstanding commitment to justice, peace, and security for all, we know all too well the price that the people, especially civilians, have paid and continue to pay for the ongoing conflicts that are fueled by these arms sales.

In Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Palestine and Israel, Libya and elsewhere, thousands of civilians have died with countless more wounded. More people are displaced worldwide than at any other time since World War II. Basic infrastructure such as roads, water and electrical systems have been destroyed and young people are growing up with trauma and fear. Sadly, these conditions, coupled with the high volume of weapons that will remain long after a conflict ends, will lead to instability and insecurity for generations to come. No amount of corporate profits or so-called “security interests” can possibly be worth this.

The United States provides more than \$8.5 billion in military and security assistance to the Middle East and North Africa, with most of it going to Israel, Iraq, Egypt and Jordan. Among these countries, peace treaties already exist between Israel and Egypt, and Israel and Jordan. U.S. assistance to this small geographical region represents more than half of all U.S. military assistance worldwide. Countries such as Israel and Saudi Arabia already rank among the highest spenders worldwide per capita on their militaries, and Israel is not only a recipient of U.S. military aid but is also an arms exporter.

We firmly believe that stability and long-term security in the Middle East will only come about when the United States and other countries move away from

a militarized approach and the profits that come from perpetual conflict. In the meantime and at a minimum, we strongly recommend the following steps:

- Immediately suspend U.S. arms sales to those countries not in compliance with international humanitarian law. The Foreign Assistance Act (Section 502B), Arms Export Control Act and Presidential Policy Directive (PPD-27) already provide some limitations on arms sales related to human rights concerns, but stop short of full conditionality.
- Fully enforce existing human rights conditions (“Leahy law”) for U.S. military assistance to all recipient governments. This will require increased funding and capacity to robustly carry out the vetting process.
- Strengthen and expand end-use monitoring. The Foreign Assistance Act (Section 505) requires nations receiving defense articles and defense services to “permit continuous observation and review by, and furnish necessary information to, representatives of the United States Government with regard to the use of such articles or related training or other defense service.”
- Oppose the transfer of oversight of the export of small arms and ammunition from the United States Munitions List to the less-restrictive Commerce Control List. This change would decrease transparency and make it much more difficult to enforce human rights conditionality.
- Ratify and fully abide by the terms of the Arms Trade Treaty. The treaty, which entered into force in 2014, establishes international standards for regulation of trade in conventional weapons. It is vital that the United States, as the world’s largest arms exporter, join the treaty.

The continued provision of aid and arms to the countries of the Middle East, it has been clear, does not result in greater peace, but rather greater conflict, casualties, and loss of life. The U.S. has not advanced its own security or interests through military aid or arms sales.

More than 50 years ago, Congress enacted the Arms Control and Disarmament Act, which says that, “An ultimate goal of the United States is a world which is free from the scourge of war and the dangers and burdens of armaments; in which the use of force has been subordinated to the rule of law; and in which international adjustments to a changing world are achieved peacefully.” We urge you to do all that you can to make this vision a reality. §

# UN Commission for Social Development 2018

*The following article was written by Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns staff member Sr. Marvie Misolas, MM. Sr. Marvie serves as Maryknoll's representative at the United Nations where the Maryknoll Sisters and the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers have consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.*

The fifty-sixth session of the Commission for Social Development took place at the United Nations in New York from January 29 to February 7. The Commission is the advisory body responsible for the social development pillar of global development. The priority theme for the 2018 policy cycle is “Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all.”

The countries and their official representatives reported on national plans, programs, and actions on the situation of four vulnerable social groups: people with disabilities, youth, older peoples, families. The goal of the commission was to draft action-oriented resolutions that set social policies and strategies to eradicate poverty and leave no one behind. Stakeholders agree that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations which include poverty, hunger, health, education, climate change, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, environment and social justice – must include all members of society.

Country representatives reported on both successes and obstacles to eradicating poverty. Gaps and inequalities continue, exasperating uneven progress on the global and local levels. By discussing the complexities of implementing policies to eradicate poverty, the commission plays a crucial role in identifying targeted strategies to attain the SDGs.

“Eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, remains the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, particularly in Africa and in the least developed countries, small island developing States, landlocked developing countries and in middle income countries,” said Ghada Waly, Minister for Social Solidarity of Egypt, speaking on behalf of the “Group of 77” developing countries and China, summing up a common view.

Vietnam’s delegate, representing the group of ASEAN nations, cited the region’s robust focus on innovation, inclusivity, and international cooperation as the reasons the ASEAN nations are on track to fulfill the SDGs, also known as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, or 2030 Agenda. She said that the number of people living in extreme poverty in the region decreased from 138 million in 2000 to 44 million in 2015.

The representative of Equatorial Guinea, speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that 390 million Africans continue to live in extreme poverty, despite multiple poverty eradication commitments and pledges. Progress has been slow due to climate change impacts, economic slowdowns, war, and civil unrest. International support and partnerships are needed to boost ongoing efforts, with stepped-up investments from the private sector, civil society, and the UN.

Simultaneously, hundreds of youth representatives from around the world gathered for the Youth Forum to give voice and participation to youth. Luis Alvarado Martinez, youth representative of Spain and President of the European Union Youth Forum, said strategies for eradicating poverty should focus on equal access to work, strong social protections, and political inclusion. Although youth lack power, Martinez said, they must be active participants in shaping policies that affect their future.

Liu Zhenmin, the Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, stressed the need to exert more effort to improve people’s lives. He cited that although the world is enjoying robust economic growth which has lifted more than a billion people out of poverty over the past two decades, many of these people live barely above the absolute poverty line and are at risk of falling back into extreme poverty if impacted by disaster, illness, loss of work, or a lack of social protection.

County representatives reported on social protection programs and policies that have been implemented in varying degrees of coverage. Gender bias and unequal wealth redistribution continue to be a challenge. Various countries commented on the uneven distribution of progress on the global level. This is a reality on the local level as well, with development gaps between urban and rural areas. The fact remains that there are still parts of the world cut off from basic services.

The challenge continues to be the creation of a development model that includes everyone, where everyone enjoys a healthy quality of life and sustainable economic status, and where the rights of nature are protected. To this end, the commission adopted resolutions encouraging African development and youth empowerment. This is a global response to address the needs of nations lagging in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. §

# UN: Ten acts for safe global migration

Civil society organizations at the UN concluded their consultations on the proposed “Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration” in December with a 15-page report entitled “Ten Acts for the Global Compact.” The report lists actions needed to ensure that human mobility, envisioned as a normal and inescapable fact of life, will be safe and provide migrants with opportunities for human development. The following are excerpts from the report which has been given to UN member nations participating in negotiations scheduled for February to July 2018. Read the full report at <http://bit.ly/2FktxkG>

... “All human beings have the same universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. This includes all people on the move...” ... “Issues of safe movement, labor rights, decent living conditions, family reunification, inclusion, discrimination, reintegration needs and returns are critical for migrants and refugees alike. To do justice to these realities, we urge states to take a comprehensive approach to the Global Compact” ...

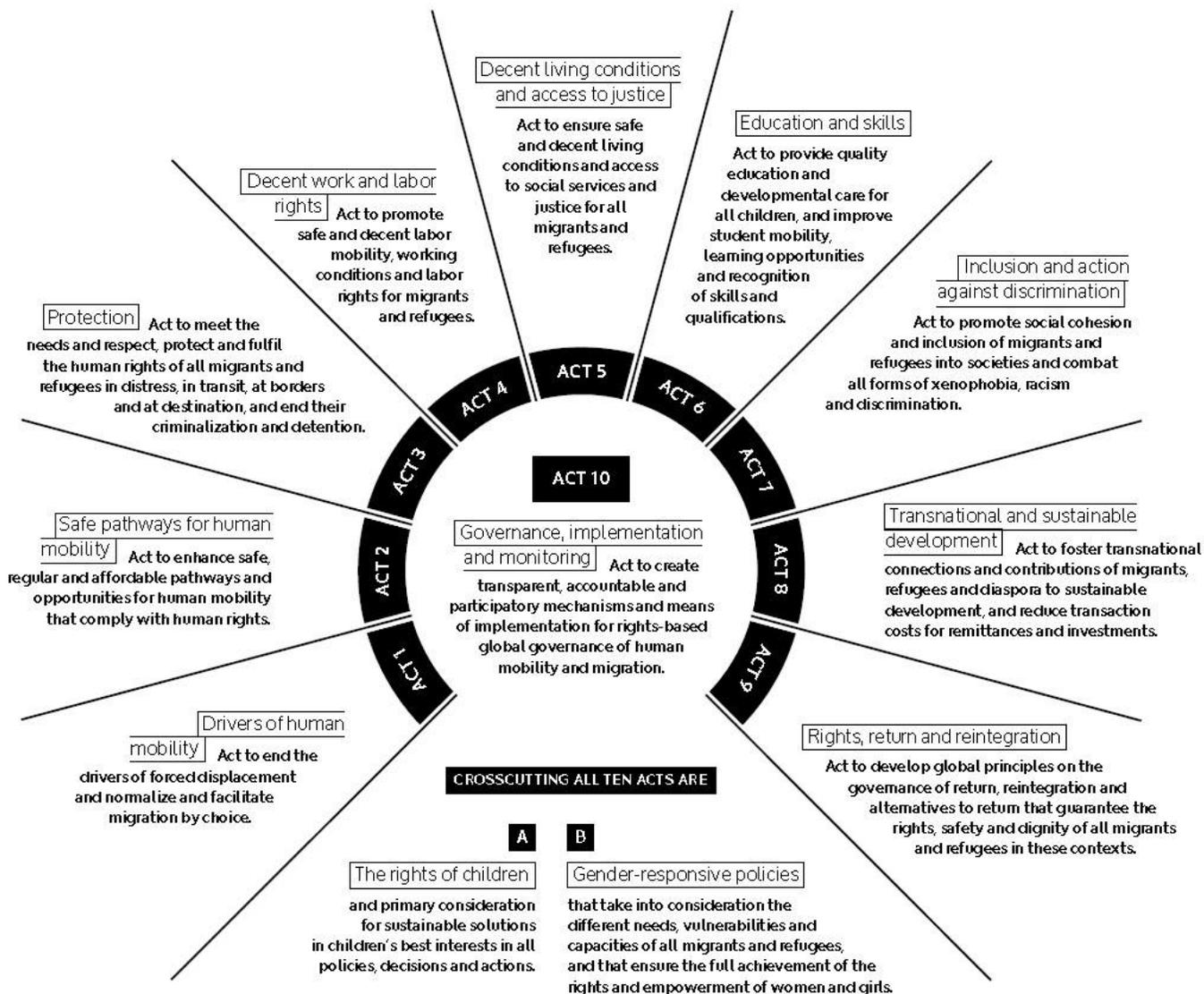
Principle of purpose - The Compact must directly benefit migrants, refugees and societies” ...

Principle of progress - The Global Compact must build upon [existing laws, agreements, regulations]” ...

Principle of participation - Civil society, including migrants, refugees and diaspora organizations, must be meaningfully part of the discussion and solutions” ...

The report contains the following graphic describing the ten acts:

“Three principles for a Compact worth agreeing to:



## Pope Francis visits Amazonia

*Pope Francis continues to raise the importance of the Amazon region, its indigenous communities and unique natural environment, to the Church and the world.*

Pope Francis kicked off preparatory meetings for a synod on the Pan-Amazon region in October 2019 with a visit to Puerto Maldonado, a small city in Peru that serves as the gateway to the Amazon. Beautifully dressed and tattooed indigenous families, many wearing the traditional beads and headdresses, shared their culture with the pope through dance, songs and stories.

Pope Francis, in turn, engaged them as authentic dialogue partners. In his opening words, he called by name many of the tribes present. He recognized the wounds that Amazonia and its people bear and affirmed the Church's commitment to a heartfelt option for the defense of life, earth, and cultures.

During his address to more than 4,000 attendees, Pope Francis touched on a number of relevant challenges that face the Amazon ecosystem and forest peoples that inhabit it. Most urgent is the threat Amazonian communities face to their territorial rights and access to land from large-scale land acquisitions, often referred to as "land grabbing." The pope named extractive industries and conservation efforts as drivers of these threats.

"On the one hand, there is neo-extractivism and the pressure being exerted by great business interests that want to lay hands on its petroleum, gas, wood, gold and forms of agro-industrial monocultivation," Francis said.

"On the other hand, its lands are being threatened by the distortion of certain policies aimed at the 'conservation' of nature without taking into account the men and women, specifically you, my Amazonian brothers and sisters, who inhabit it. We know of movements that, under the guise of preserving the forest, hoard great expanses of woodland and negotiate with them, leading to situations of oppression for the native peoples; as a result, they lose access to the land and its natural resources. These problems strangle her peoples and provoke the migration of the young due to the lack of local alternatives. We have to break with the historical paradigm that views Amazonia as an inexhaustible source of supplies for other countries without concern for its inhabitants."

Concerns about displacement and land conflicts associated with resource extraction are more well-known than the challenges related to conservation efforts. While there are numerous examples of land grabbing and of projects impinging on cultural, economic, and political rights of indigenous communities, Pope Francis did not offer more explanation of his concerns related to conservation efforts.

We can look to *Laudato Si'* for a clue. In his groundbreaking encyclical on integral ecology, Pope Francis criticized carbon markets. One example is REDD+ (Reductions in Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation), a climate mitigation program governments and the private sector can use to offset emissions by giving payments to indigenous communities in exchange for conserving the forest. But REDD+ projects can drive conflict and impinge on indigenous rights.

Pope Francis also could have been referring to the establishment of national parks or other protected sites that can displace or limit the rights of indigenous peoples in the land they inhabit. Conservation through national parks is a valuable though complicated process that requires careful examination. It is unfortunate that Francis was not more explicit and we are left to wonder.

While in Peru, Francis gave special recognition to communities living in voluntary isolation, who, he said, go into seclusion to find freedom. Such communities are vulnerable to diseases from the outside world and threats from illegal loggers and hunters. In Ecuador, the Catholic Church is defending the rights of isolated communities in Yasuní National Park.

Pope Francis also spoke about the need for bilingual education and culturally appropriate health care, and he denounced the practice of sterilization of indigenous women promoted by some governments. He spoke about human trafficking – both for sex and labor – around illicit mining sites. He did not, however, cite the trafficking and prostitution around permitted extractive sites.

His visit to Peru, the planned synod in Rome, and the references to the Amazon biome in *Laudato Si'* all lay clear the pope's view of the importance of this region to the world. In accord with the pope, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ruled on February 8 in support of both the individual and collective right to a healthy environment. The commission also recognized the impact of climate change on the effective enjoyment of human rights, particularly for the most vulnerable populations. This decision could lead to changes in international law and court jurisdictions that go beyond the borders of Latin America. §

# Colombia: Integral Human Development

*Dallana Contreras of Caritas Colombia wrote the following article about her work with communities defending their land rights against national and international economic interests in the Amazon and Orinoco regions.*

Colombia is recognized as a country with great agricultural potential. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization names Colombia as one of the five most important countries to feed the world. Nevertheless, the national economic strategy has focused on mining, oil, gas, and large scale biofuels production rather than food production. This strategy does not take into account the rural populations that live in poverty and were most affected by Colombia's decades of violent conflict.

The peace accord signed in 2016 presents an opportunity to improve living conditions for rural communities. Item One of the peace agreement is entitled "Toward a New Colombia Countryside: Comprehensive Rural Reform." The goal is to give rural communities greater access to and use of land.

Caritas Colombia values farmers' relationships with land and nature, knowledge of local agricultural practices, and way of life. If the heritage of rural communities is not preserved, then not only is their existence at risk, but so is the existence of all of us.

To counter the current static rural development model, smallholder farmers have developed an alternative approach that reflects their vision of a nutrition and agricultural system. It includes protecting native seeds, pesticide-free food production, local economic development, and an exchange of both wisdom and flavors.

## El Chaparrito Case Study

The Chaparrito community is located in the municipality of Puerto Concordia, in the central Colombian department of Meta. The National Development Plan names the municipality as a good prospect for agribusiness. The principle economic activity in Puerto Concordia is large-scale African palm oil plantations. Palm oil is used in all kinds of products, from biofuels to food additives to cosmetics.

The seemingly legal activities of a proposed plantation in Chaparrito is a threat to the rights of 25 smallholder subsistence farming families. The government could displace these families who have lived on and cultivated the land peacefully for the past 16 years. Many of them were internally displaced from other parts of Colombia during to the decades-long conflict. Now this struggle for land may rupture the social fabric they have worked so hard to build in Chaparrito.

If the land goes to the company, it would imply a preference for the neoliberal economic practice of measuring per capita productivity which benefits the

agroindustrial palm oil companies. This goes against the dignity of the farmers and directly affects natural and collective resources like water and land.

## Integral Human Development

The social pastoral team of Caritas Colombia works to prevent the dispossession of land and to maintain the identity of peasant farmers in the rich and biodiverse Amazon and Orinoco regions. One of our strategies is to seek alternatives that promote integral human development. We stand firmly on the side of peasant farmers and indigenous communities. We have opened our senses, especially our ears, to listen to the cries for help and recognition. We walk with these communities in search of wisdom, solutions, and to defend their territorial rights.

In Chaparrito, first, we implemented an agroecological farming practice to create opportunities for farmers to reflect and learn, recognize the resources that already exist in their territory, and strengthen their values and their potential.

Second, we recognized that for this strategy to have an impact beyond their own farms, they needed to organize and strengthen the social fabric within the community. Only then could the farmers be effective advocates to the government. They strengthened their individual and collective identities and developed agricultural methods grounded in sustainability, food sovereignty, and self-determination.

We have seen changes in the *finca*, or the land that is common territory. Here they create relationships with each other and with nature and improve the community's economic and emotional health. Don Fernando, a farmer in the Chaparrito, said, "The garden forms a place of family meditation" that not only serves for consumption but also as a shared economic project where we grow produce to sell in the farmers market. This project has drawn the attention of local authorities and boosted support for other economic alternatives.

The farmers markets have great economic potential for smallholder family farmers. It is where they sell healthy and quality produce, without intermediaries in the supply chain, and at fair prices. This model fosters friendships, community life, and traditions that strengthen the social and organizational fabric of the community. Women, in particular, are the protagonists in this model and in cultivating a local identity. Through this accompaniment, we have learned that strong communities are formed when they make decisions together. §

## Canada: Ombudsperson for extractives industry

*On January 17, Canada's Trudeau administration announced a new ombudsperson to oversee Canadian mining, oil, and gas companies after more than a decade of pressure from Canadian human rights advocates, affected communities, and other organizations in solidarity with communities harmed by Canadian extractive industries.*

Development and Peace – Caritas Canada, the official development agency of the Canadian Catholic Church, played a critical role in advocating for the creation of an ombudsperson for the mining and gas industries, who will oversee operations of Canadian companies and issue public findings on allegations of harm. The office will also make recommendations for redress, regarding corporate eligibility for government services and with respect to policy and law reform.

Serge Langlois, executive director of Development and Peace, the Canadian member of Caritas Internationalis said, “This announcement has been a long-time coming and we are happy to see that the government is respecting its electoral promise and restoring Canada’s role as a leader in defending human rights worldwide.”

According to Development and Peace – Caritas Canada, the government has been relying on the Office of the Extractive Sector Corporate Social Responsibility Counselor and the National Contact Point for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines to receive complaints from local communities experiencing human rights violations by Canadian extractive companies. These mechanisms, however, have not proven effective in resolving cases since they lack investigatory powers and independence, and are not mandated to recommend remedy.

Over the years, evidence of human rights abuses and violence surrounding Canadian mines has been documented by various non-governmental organizations and has led to four UN bodies calling on Canada to hold Canadian companies accountable for their operations overseas; three hearings of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on the accountability of Canadian mining companies that ended with a call on Canada to adopt measures to prevent “multiple human rights violations”; and a letter signed by 180 organizations from Latin America sent to Prime Minister Trudeau in June 2016 demanding action on promises for a mechanism for corporate and state accountability.

In addition to the new ombudsperson, the Minister of International Trade also announced the creation of a Multi-Stakeholder Advisory board for Responsible Enterprise which will advise the government on business and human rights. Development and Peace – Caritas Canada will be one of the civil society representatives on this board, and thus, will be able to monitor the cre-

ation of the ombudsperson and make recommendations to the government on the conduct of Canadian companies abroad and its impact on communities.

Development and Peace highlighted the reactions of some of their global partners following the decision.

Archbishop Rolando J. Tria Tirona, the president of Caritas Philippines, said, “Mining and other extractive industries gradually corrupt our generation with the culture of waste, reliably damaging the environment and its people. Eventually, such culture tolerates violation of basic human rights, forever impairing human dignity. The Philippine archipelago is both a vivid picture and a living witness to mining’s painfully catastrophic effects.

“Thus the action now of the Canadian government, in particular of the Minister of International Trade, to create an independent ombudsperson to investigate complaints and monitor overseas mining operations, is a welcome initiative. However, though optimistic, we remain to be vigilant to ensure that outcomes will have no government and business influence, and enforcement will be carried out in full.

“As a church, we reiterate one of the principles in *Laudato Si'*: if we consider and act on balanced utilization of resources and stewardship of creation, we do no harm to our earth.”

“We welcome the news of the creation by the Government of Canada of an ombudsperson for mining,” said Father Dario Bossi with the Latin American-based Churches and Mining Network. “We need policies which regulate corporate behavior and which guarantee the essential principle of the respect for human rights.”

“*Justiça nos Trilhos* is a network of communities affected by operations of the Brazilian mining company Vale, in northern Brazil,” Father Bossi explained. “For these communities, which suffer various violations from mining, the role of the state is essential to oversee mining operations and guarantee respect for human rights, which are above economic interests. For that reason, *Justiça nos Trilhos* and the “Network of those Affected by Vale” fight for Vale to respect human rights in all the countries of the world where it operates, and that our country also feels responsible for the violations that still exist.”§

## South Sudan, DRC: Prayer and Fasting for Peace

*Pope Francis designated the First Friday of Lent, February 23, to be a day of prayer and fasting for peace for South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.*

Overwhelming violence and political turmoil in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo have all the ingredients for a humanitarian catastrophe: violence, hunger, disease, and homelessness. In response, Pope Francis invited all people of faith to observe a day of prayer and fasting for peace dedicated to the two African countries on February 23. Print and share our handout at <http://bit.ly/2F40TnX>

In the DRC, continuous ethnic and political conflicts, fueled by illicit profits from the country's extremely rich natural resources (gold, diamonds, oil, and cobalt) have displaced nearly 4 million people. There are more internally displaced persons in DRC than any other country in Africa.

More than 600,000 people have fled South Sudan and have gone neighboring countries as refugees. Currently, Uganda hosts the largest number of DRC refugees, over 200,000. Pope Francis has expressed a desire to visit both the DRC and South Sudan but the violence has forced him to postpone his visit indefinitely.

In South Sudan, the civil war has entered its fifth year. Many thousands of people have been forced to flee and live in one of the UN protected areas or Internally Displaced Persons camps. Maryknoll Father Mike Bassano is a chaplain at one such camp in Malakal. Several thousand more have taken refuge in church compounds, including St. Mary's Cathedral in the city of Wau. Maryknoll Father Tom Tiscornia is in Wau, as a chaplain at a nursing and midwifery school. Maryknoll Lay Missioner Gabe Hurrish is in Yambio, as an instructor at a teacher training college.

Nearly 2 million South Sudanese are internally displaced and 700,000 have fled the country as refugees. Uganda hosts over one million South Sudanese refugees; more than 85 per cent women and children. Maryknoll Fathers John Barth and David Schwinghamer have recently moved to Palabek Refugee Camp in Uganda to minister to the 41,000 residents – 60 per cent of them children.

On November 23, 2017, Pope Francis offered this prayer for peace in South Sudan and in the DRC:

*May the risen Lord break down the walls of hostility that today divide brothers and sisters, especially in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.*

*May he comfort those women who are the victims of violence in war zones and throughout the world.*

*May he protect children who suffer from conflicts*

*in which they have no part, but which rob them of their childhood and at times of life itself. How hypocritical it is to deny the mass murder of women and children! Here war shows its most horrid face.*

*May the Lord help all the little ones and the poor of our world to continue to believe and trust that the kingdom of God is at hand, in our midst, and is "justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). May he sustain all those who day by day strive to combat evil with good, and with words and deeds of fraternity, respect, encounter and solidarity.*

*May the Lord strengthen in government officials and all leaders a spirit which is noble, upright, steadfast and courageous in seeking peace through dialogue and negotiation.*

*May the Lord enable all of us to be peacemakers wherever we find ourselves, in our families, in school, at work, in the community, in every setting. "Let us wash the feet" of one another, in imitation of our Master and Lord. To him be glory and praise, now and forever. Amen.*

Maryknoll Lay Missioner Gabe Hurrish works in South Sudan: "Solidarity Teacher Training College is run by a group of international religious from various congregations and institutes. Our college has 15 tutors from 9 different countries. There are 125 students from all over the nation and a few from Sudan in the north. The compound has classrooms, a library, a computer room, dorms for women and men, a cafeteria and several warehouses. The religious staff has its own house and everyone has their own room." Read more at <http://bit.ly/2BDZTB0>

Maryknoll Father John Barth works in Uganda: "The settlement population at Palabek Refugee Camp rises weekly. We are now up to 41,000 people – 60 percent of them school-age children. Our top priority is to build and staff primary and secondary schools for these children. Maryknoll is teaming up with Salesian missionaries to provide four nursery schools to enroll 200 each. Most of the teachers have been hired in the camp itself with others coming from the Ugandans living nearby. Today the school doors opened (actually there are no doors yet, just a roof and brick pillars.) Maryknoll is supplying uniforms, school supplies and porridge each day for the next year." Read more at <http://bit.ly/JohnBarth> §

## Philippines: Catholics protest threats to life

*The Council of the Laity in the Philippines organized its annual “Walk for Life” on February 24 to protest extrajudicial killings and the push to reinstate the death penalty in the country.*

In the Philippines in February, marches, protests, fasts and a “Walk for Life” marked the 32nd anniversary of the nonviolent overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship, called the EDSA People Power’s Revolution. On February 25, 1986, hundreds of thousands of Filipinos gathered along the 54 kilometers of Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) to call for the restoration of democracy, culminating months of nonviolent direct action training by the Catholic Church. It was the power of the people that ended the oppressive Marcos regime. Hence, it came to be known as the EDSA People Power’s Revolution – one of the prime examples in modern history of the power of active nonviolence.

This year’s commemoration of that proud moment in Philippine history took place under a cloud of threats to Philippine democracy: Under the guise of President Duterte’s ‘war on drugs’ over 7,600 Filipinos have been victims of extrajudicial killings – possibly exceeding the number of victims from the martial law years under Marcos. Duterte has stated his support for bringing back the death penalty and he arranged for a hero’s burial for the remains of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Duterte is also trying to change the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which reestablished democracy after the People Power Revolution, to establish a federalist government which critics claim will only consolidate power in the hands of Duterte and a privileged few.

For nine days before the February 25 anniversary, Catholic farmers, fishermen, nuns, and priests staged a fast and protest at the People Power Memorial in Manila to dramatize their opposition to the proposed rewriting of the 31-year-old Constitution. “A shift to federalism,” said one participant, Fr. Robert Reyes, “will only give greater powers to family dynasties and landlords in the provinces.”

Benedictine nun Mary John Mananzan, one of the organizers of the newly-formed Movement Against Tyranny, agrees but went further, saying the goal of the proposed revision of the Constitution is to “concentrate all power in one man’s hands” and “is a formula for complete tyranny and dictatorial rule...we cannot allow another era of darkness.”

Archbishop Socrates Villegas, president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference, and protégé of the late Jaime Cardinal Sin (who helped lead the People Power Revolution), denounced the ‘rape’ of EDSA People Power by the current administration in a letter to Car-

dinal Sin written days before the anniversary: Decrying the “relentless killings of the poor in the name of change...the glory now flickers in the darkness of fear and terror again.”

In his letter, the archbishop noted the recent hero’s burial of the late dictator: “History books are rewritten. Historical memory is revised. The hero is a villain. The plunderers are now heroes.” But reflecting on the continuing potential in the peoples’ engagement in active nonviolence, Villegas wrote:

“This land may be ruled by tyrants and killers, murderers may win elections, plunderers may grin at the ignorant voters they have cheated, trolls may keep hurling invectives at their peace loving countrymen...but we will still celebrate.”

Making a surprise appearance at the “Walk for Life” the Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, condemned the thousands of extrajudicial killings, lamenting the “culture of violence.” Catholic lay people organized the walk to demonstrate their opposition to the killings and to the death penalty. Cardinal Tagle cited Pope Francis’ 2017 World Day of Peace message on nonviolence, calling for a renewed “culture of nonviolence” among Filipinos to face the country’s challenges.

Loreta Castro, founder of the Center for Peace Education at Miriam College in Quezon City is a member of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, which has been gathering input from leading Catholic peacemakers to be used to encourage Pope Francis to write an encyclical on nonviolence. During a global online dialogue recently, Loreta heard the Palestinian peacemaker Nora Carmi speak from Jerusalem about the persistent non-violent struggle of the Palestinian people in the face of tremendous oppression.

Echoing the Palestinian Christian’s hope, Loreta spoke of the strong Catholic leadership and the thousands of students, religious and laity who participated in the many marches, rallies and protests around the Philippines that marked the anniversary of the People Power Revolution, denouncing the extrajudicial killings and calling for the preservation of democracy enshrined in the 1987 constitution. From Jerusalem to Manila, the power of Gospel nonviolence inspires great courage and hope. §

## Francophone Africa: Solving land grabbing

*The following article is adapted from a report by CIDSE, an international alliance of Catholic social justice organizations based in Brussels. The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is a member of CIDSE.*

More than 70 representatives of African church institutions and faith groups, social movements and grassroots initiatives as well as non-governmental organizations from Africa, Europe and the United States gathered in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire for a three-day workshop in November under the slogan "Land grabbing in Francophone Africa: identifying and strengthening endogenous solutions."

The workshop was organized by members of the platform "Our land is our life" established at the conference on "Land Grab and Just Governance in Africa" in Limuru, Kenya, in 2015 which brought together church and non-church actors to exchange knowledge and strategies on land grabbing, or large-scale acquisitions of land by corporations, governments, and individuals.

The gathering in Abidjan engaged stakeholders from Francophone Africa, with the aim of sharing practices of African communities and developing strategies to stop land grabbing in Africa. At the same time, participants worked on building a network and strengthening movements within Africa, and between Africa and other continents. The conference also provided a space for reflection and discussion on land grabbing grounded in teachings from *Laudato Si'* and Catholic social thought.

Nine bishops from Benin, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria and Togo travelled to Abidjan to participate in the conference, to listen to the testimonies of people affected by land grabbing and to dialogue with communities, peasant organizations, NGOs, faith groups, and social movements.

According to Côte d'Ivoire Bishop Joseph Spiteri, "Land grabbing spreads in all regions of Africa. We must assess: What are the different forms of land grabbing? How does the phenomenon differ between countries? But after analyzing the situation we also need to act. We need to discuss, which role the church can play in this."

The participants adopted a common definition of land grabbing: A phenomena where land is acquired without respect and dignity of the human person, in violation of economic, cultural, and social rights, without transparency, without consultation, and when there is not fair, proportionate or long lasting compensation.

As part of the solution, grassroots movement leaders highlighted the need for food sovereignty (the right for people to access healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods), and their right to define their

own food and agriculture systems.

Grassroots representatives also offered a critique of agricultural investment programs based on public-private partnerships. According to Kadidja Koné of the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles, "Land, water and the seeds of peasants are not commodities; they are commons which need to be preserved for future generations. The access to land must be guaranteed through legal provisions on the national, regional and continental level, to protect communities, women and the youth against discrimination. This implies to resist investment programs such as the G7-New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa or other public-private partnerships."

The New Alliance, the G-7's strategy for supporting agriculture launched in 2012, has been cited for land grabbing among its projects. France has thus pulled out – the first country to do so – leaving the U.S., U.K., Canada, Japan, Germany, Russia, and the EU as donors.

Mariam Sow from the Senegalese partner organization ENDA-Pronat highlighted the need for a comprehensive advocacy strategy, "Our experiences show that the advocacy work on agroecology and good land governance must go hand in hand. It is a social task. Without just access to land, people cannot farm according to their agroecological principles."

On the last day of the conference, nearly 60 church and non-church representatives signed a joint statement which facilitated linkages among all actors to the political process of bringing church and civil society together. Known as the "Declaration of the Abidjan Conference," the statement captures the topics identified as most important to the communities affected by land grabbing: their right to manage their lands as commons in respect to the principles of food sovereignty, the need to strengthen their capacities to know and defend their rights, and the protection of their engagement, which has been shrinking due to the criminalization of human rights defenders.

Participating bishops committed to extend their knowledge on land governance and to spread the ideas shared at the conference within church institutions, with some concluding that, "We have never before had such a strong statement by the African church on the matter of land grabbing."§

## Resources

- 1) Listen to “**Among the People**” the new free podcast series produced by the Maryknoll Father and Brothers. The sixth episode features Orbis Books author Jim Forest. “Jim takes us through his early years that inspired his writing, from childhood to his time in the United States Military and into his lifelong work as an activist for peace.” <https://maryknollsociety.org/podcast/>
- 2) Plan now to attend **Ecumenical Advocacy Days** (EAD) in Washington, D.C., **April 20 – 23**. The theme is “A World Uprooted: Responding to Migrants, Refugees and Displaced People.” More information is available at [www.advocacydays.org](http://www.advocacydays.org), or contact the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.
- 3) **Earth Day** is **April 22**. The Global Catholic Climate Movement offers a resource kit to help your community celebrate, advocate, and educate for creation. The kit includes materials for a Creation Mass, homily helps, youth lesson plans, educational materials about clean energy and tips for dioceses to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Register now to receive GCCM Earth Day updates, first-look materials, and more. <http://bit.ly/GCCM2018>
- 4) Pre-order the new book by **Marie Dennis: *Choosing Peace*** published by Orbis books. “Drawn from the [historic conference hosted at the Vatican in 2016] and presented here are contributions by many of the participants, including Lisa Sowle Cahill, Terrence J. Rynne, John Dear, Ken Butigan, Rose Marie Berger, and Maria J. Stephan, among others. Together they advance the conversation about the practice of nonviolence in a violent world, Jesus and nonviolence, traditional Catholic teaching on nonviolence, and reflections on the future of Catholic teaching. The book concludes with Pope Francis’s historic Message for World Peace Day in 2017.” <http://www.orbisbooks.com/choosing-peace.html>
- 5) Visit the **Human Thread Campaign Modules** for educational modules on the garment industry. Choose from lesson plans for Primary, Intermediate, and Advanced students. For adults, there are lesson plans designed for use with Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, human concerns committees, or general parish formation <http://bit.ly/2FcZwUO>
- 6) Order the new book by **John Dear: *They Will Inherit the Earth: Peace and Nonviolence in a Time of Climate Change***, published by Orbis Books. “Drawing on personal stories of his life in the desert of New Mexico, his time as a chaplain at Yosemite, his friendship with indigenous and environmental leaders, his experience at the Standing Rock protests, as well as his work with the Vatican on a new stance on nonviolence, John Dear invites us to return to nonviolence as a way of life and a living solidarity with Mother Earth and her creatures.” <http://bit.ly/OrbisBooksJohnDear>
- 7) Explore ***Convocate***, a free online tool for **human rights research** offered by The Center for Civil and Human Rights (CCHR) at the University of Notre Dame that allows researchers, scholars, practitioners, advocates, ministers, students, and other interested individuals to simultaneously search and compare documents of Catholic Social Teaching and international human rights law. <https://convocate.nd.edu/>

