



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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20th Anniversary of 'Trading in Justice'

Chloe Noel, Faith-Economy-Ecology project coordinator, reflects on the 20th anniversary of the Maryknoll joint leadership statement on global economic justice.

In March 2002, the leadership of the Maryknoll Sisters, Fathers and Brothers, and Lay Missioners released the joint statement, "Trading in justice: The local impacts of global economic decisions." The leadership released the statement in response to the powerful impacts of "free trade" policies and institutions, such as the North America Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization, on millions of people living on the margins since their start in the mid-1990s.

Based on the observations of Maryknoll missioners around the world, Maryknoll leadership recognized that there are benefits to trade but they remained skeptical that communities traditionally excluded from economic gains would experience the benefits generated by free trade policies, where goods and services can be bought and sold across international borders with little or no government protections of local people, jobs or the environment from their exchange.

"Time after time we have witnessed the disastrous impact on these [impoverished and marginalized] communities of decisions made in distant or disconnected places," the leaders wrote. "We see this happening once again as people in increasingly centralized positions of power negotiate trade agreements that place profit and growth before human and environmental well-being."

In the hyper-globalized world in which we live, their analysis was prescient. Twenty years and many free trade agreements later, we clearly see how free trade agreements have put U.S. and transnational corporate profit over the lives of farmers, factory workers, persons who are ill, women, and Indigenous communities. Not surprisingly, these trade deals are negotiated behind closed doors with significant corporate influence.

One of the goals of free trade is to create a friendly environment for investments. This typically translates into deregulation. But without adequate oversight of complex business interactions, the public is often harmed. Excessive deregulation since the implementation of NAFTA in 1994 and the establishment of the WTO 1995 contributed to, among other things, the moving of manufacturing jobs from the United States to places with weaker labor laws and lower wages. It also fueled greater economic inequality, human rights violations and unchecked pollution, and it opened new markets for environmentally destructive extractive industries and unhealthy U.S. junk food. It also enabled corporations to campaign against affordable generic medicines and even anti-smoking regulations.

Free trade policies have also made it harder for countries to respond to economic crises, as trade agreements usually limit a government's use of financial con-

trols to regulate the economy. Within trade agreements, corporations and countries are often given special legal privileges that allow them to sue other governments over efforts to regulate industries or give preference to domestic industries.

Civil society has mobilized for the past three decades to stop harmful free trade proposals. In 2004, humanitarian and environmental organizations successfully stopped the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas Agreement because it failed to include environmental and labor standards. And, in 2016, civil society resistance, combined with presidential politics, prevented the United States from joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), which would have linked economies in the Americas and Asia along the Pacific Rim. Advocates from Maryknoll and other organizations believed the TPP agreement, like its predecessors, would benefit large corporations and harm the environment and the poor.

Thanks to tenacious advocates and policymakers, labor, environmental, and public health protections have gradually improved in trade agreements. For example, the number of patents on new classes of medicines and medical treatments have been limited, allowing for more affordable generic drugs. But protective policies still need to go farther.

There are troubling, emerging frontiers in trade that the Maryknoll statement could not have foreseen. For example, some countries are discussing digital trade pacts to deregulate Big Tech rather than addressing real issues such as scams, surveillance of activists, human trafficking and a host of other IT issues. Civil rights organizations have raised concerns that the digital policies could increase racial profiling. Some people in the Biden administration and Congress see a digital trade pact with Asia to be an alternative to the problematic TPP that would give the United States a foot in the door to counter China's influence.

Trade impacts all of our lives. Trade should lift all boats and create an economy that is people- and earth-centered. But the current model of free trade has promoted an economy of exclusion and a throwaway culture. It doesn't have to be this way. Hope can be found in emerging North-South solidarity economies, cooperatives, locally-led conservation and development initiatives, and sharing economies. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Campaign for Human Development, various other Catholic development agencies, and Maryknoll missioners are supporting some of this important work demonstrating that another kind of economy is possible. §

Ongoing Struggle for Economic Justice for All

Experts discussed the legacy of “Economic Justice for All” and how to reignite conversation about economic justice in the U.S. Church.

This past November marked 35 years since the publication of “Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy” in 1986. A landmark pastoral letter of the U.S. Catholic Bishops on the United States economy, the document received significant attention at the time but has since faded from view.

In a virtual panel highlighting the anniversary organized by the Catholic Labor Network, experts weighed in on the document’s impact and continued relevance. Fr. David Hollenbach, SJ, who was part of the document’s drafting process, explained that “the U.S. bishops had been charged with drafting a document on [the Church’s response to] capitalism, because a little bit earlier the bishops had issued a document on Marxism.”

However, Hollenbach said that rather than explicitly focusing on an abstract system or ideological framework, the bishops decided to focus on concrete questions or issues facing the U.S. capitalist economy at the time, including high unemployment rates, diminished social programs, and increased inequality.

In the document, the bishops emphasized that economic justice is characterized by inclusion, participation, and the protection of fundamental human dignity. They further developed the Catholic concept of “economic rights” from Catholic social teaching, a corollary of human rights which articulates the human need for dignified work. They urged for a form of capitalism in the United States that promotes creativity and participation while setting limits on the market in service of the common good, and especially in service of the poor.

“Economic Justice for All” made a splash at the time of publication, even prompting a cover story in the New York Times. But the principles issued in the document have faded from the attention of Church leadership and the wider public in the decades since.

Despite this, panel experts noted that the economic challenges addressed in the document – including poverty, unemployment, and unjust global economic relationships – are still relevant today. They mentioned that missing from the document were discussion of the challenges facing working class Americans, both people of color and rural whites, and an analysis of the rising and

extreme levels of inequality in the last half-century.

Following in the steps of his recent predecessors, Pope Francis has sought to revitalize conversation about global economic justice in the Church. In 2019, he founded the Economy of Francesco, a movement of young people committed to “giving a new soul to the global economy.” The initiative flows from Francis’ long-standing concern about the structural problems of the global economy. Building on the tradition of Catholic social teaching, he has critiqued “models of [economic] growth incapable of guaranteeing respect for the environment, openness to life, concern for the family, social equality, the dignity of workers and the rights of future generations.”

In his most recent speech to the World Meeting of Popular Movements, Pope Francis repeated that “land, labor and lodging” are key rights that are cornerstones of social and economic justice. The goal of these movements, he says, is to “place the economy at the service of the people in order to build a lasting peace based on social justice and on care for our common home.”

The panelists for the anniversary gathering considered how the conversation about economic justice could be reignited in the U.S. Church. Dr. Meghan Clark, a theologian at St. John’s University, said that key to reinvigorating the conversation would be for Church leaders to heed Pope Francis’ call to spend more time listening directly to people on the margins. “The cry for [dignity of work] we’re hearing louder and louder now,” she said. The conversation “needs to start on the margins,” she concluded.

Faith in action:

Watch the panel, “Economic Justice for All at 35:” <https://bit.ly/3rE4pNF>

Read the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ “A Catholic Framework for Economic Life,” summarizing the ten main principles in Economic Justice for All: <https://bit.ly/31AEqeW>

Watch this video documentary from the World Meeting of Popular Movements and watch Pope Francis’ speech: <https://bit.ly/3Itz1rg>

Explore the website for the Economy of Francesco movement: <https://francescoeconomy.org/>



Trade: Problems with ESG Investing

New reports highlight problems with the way Environmental, Social, and Governance investing (ESG) is carried out today.

Since the 1700s, when Quakers refused to invest in companies involved in the slave trade, an investment strategy that seeks to create a better society, often called socially responsible investing (SRI), has slowly evolved. What began as a niche market, mostly for faith-based investors, has become a major industry, now commonly referred to as Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) investing.

As ESG investing grows in popularity, experts are warning that the industry still lacks clear standards for measuring a company's social and environmental impact, and it is losing its focus. Rather than evaluating how a corporation's actions affect social and environmental concerns, more ESG investment ratings are concerned with how social and environmental realities are impacting a corporation's bottom line.

Most socially responsible investment funds use ESG scores created by independent evaluating groups, like MSCI ESG, Sustainalytics, and RepRisk. But studies have shown that these ratings agencies have serious shortcomings due to a lack of quality data, clear standards, and an overemphasis on corporate profit.

Until recently, most information about a corporation's actions in the ESG fields came from the corporations themselves, with little standardization. This led some experts to conclude that ESG scores were based less on concrete practices and more on the quality of a company's public relations department. Since the launch of the Global Reporting Initiative in 2000, there has been an effort to standardize measurement of corporate social impact.

However, there is still no clear standard of what ESG data should be measured nor how corporations should be judged. With each evaluating agency using its own data points and criteria, ratings vary widely.

A study from the MIT Sloan School of Management showed that "ESG ratings from different providers disagree substantially." Another study showed that, in the same year, RepRisk gave a "below average" score to Bank of America, while Sustainalytics graded the bank as "well above average" even though both agencies factored in the same issues.

Experts say that the most fundamental problem with ESG ratings is their growing emphasis on corporate interests over social responsibility. As New York University Stern School of Business professor Hans Taparua explains, "Contrary to what many investors think, most ratings don't have anything to do with actual corporate responsibility as it relates to ESG factors. Instead, what they measure is the degree to which a company's economic

value is at risk due to ESG factors."

Bloomberg Businessweek recently published a critical investigation of MSCI, the largest and most influential ESG rating agency. It examined the agency's logic by looking at the details of 155 ratings upgrades in 2020.

According to the investigation, a chemical company receiving a better "water stress" score "doesn't involve measuring the company's impact on the water supplies of the communities where it makes chemicals. Rather, it measures whether the communities have enough water to sustain their factories."

McDonald's Corporation received a higher environmental score despite increasing its carbon emissions by 7% over four years. Why was that? Because "as long as regulations aimed at mitigating climate change pose no threat to the company's bottom line, MSCI deems emissions irrelevant."

MSCI judged that the issue of emissions "does not present significant risks or opportunities to the company and with the assigned weight of 0% does not contribute to the overall ESG rating." Yet, because McDonald's installed more recycling bins in their restaurants and announced a policy to reduce plastic use, in response to French and British laws requiring them to do so, MSCI gave the corporation a 7 out of 10 on its "E" score.

While E is the first letter in ESG, environmental is the factor least used by MSCI, with governance being the most frequently cited factor (42%), followed by social factors (32%). In more than half of the ratings upgrades, simply adopting a policy related to ethics and corporate behavior, including "bans on things that are already crimes, such as money laundering and bribery" was enough for an upgrade.

Regulatory agencies and investors are looking for ways to improve the reliability and impact of ESG ratings. The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission announced in March 2021 the creation of a Climate and ESG Task Force to "develop initiatives to proactively identify ESG-related misconduct."

A coalition of investors, including the Maryknoll Sisters, is pursuing a different tactic, using ESG data to internally pressure corporations to make changes to benefit the planet and long-term economic value. They recently had some success combining their votes at an ExxonMobil shareholders meeting to elect at least two environmentalists to the board of directors.

But with these ongoing concerns, investors should take ESG advice with a grain of salt and, as always, let the buyer beware. §

Maryknoll Sister Human Rights Hero

Maryknoll Sr. Patricia Ryan was recently recognized in Peru for her work over nearly 50 years defending Indigenous rights amid land exploitation in the Latin American country.

Working alongside Aymara and Quechua Indigenous peoples throughout Peru, Maryknoll Sr. Patricia Ryan has dedicated her life to implementing nonviolent alternatives to the situation of extreme poverty, violence and environmental destruction.

The National Coordinating Committee for Human Rights, an umbrella group of 80 nongovernmental organizations “dedicated to the education, defense and promotion of human rights in Peru” chose Sr. Ryan as the 2021 recipient of the Mamá Angélica Award, named for the late Peruvian human rights activist and Quechua woman who led a national campaign for an independent Truth and Reconciliation Commission to seek justice for families of the dead and disappeared during Peru’s 20-year “dirty war.”

“It is such a great honor to receive this award, especially given that it is in honor of Mamá Angélica,” Sr. Ryan said in an interview published by the Global Sisters Report on Dec. 14, 2021. “She has been a model to all of us in Peru for her courage and her unwavering persistence for years and years until her death in 2017 demanding an accounting for the thousands of people

disappeared during the 20 years of political violence.”

Asked by the Global Sisters Report to comment on efforts to build a “just transition” from an economy based on fossil fuels to clean energy, Sr. Ryan reflected on the lessons learned by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. “They concluded that one of the primary reasons [for the political violence] was the 500 years of exclusion, discrimination and racism lived in Peru,” Sr. Ryan said.

“This context made it possible for those who lived in urban areas such as the capital of Lima to ignore what was happening in rural areas where the Indigenous people were the innocent targets or fodder of both the Shining Path and the armed forces. Their lives simply did not matter; the rest of Peru did not care because ‘they are only Indigenous.’”

“Until discrimination, exclusion and racism are addressed, there will never be real progress or sustainable development,” Sr. Ryan said.

Read more of the interview with Sr. Patricia Ryan in the Global Sisters Report:
<https://globalsisters.org/3217a04> §

Israel-Palestine: Threat to Christian Presence

Churches for Middle East Peace, a coalition of 30 national church communions and organizations, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, joins local churches of Jerusalem in a statement of concern for Christian communities there.

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) remains committed to supporting the sustainability of Christianity in the Middle East in general, and in particular to promoting a shared Jerusalem by Palestinians and Israelis.

CMEP recognizes and opposes ongoing attempts to diminish the Christian presence in Israel/ Palestine. Christian communities are a vital source of the land’s culture as well as stewards of sites Christians around the world call holy. As Christians prepare to celebrate Christmas, we keep in mind our siblings in the Holy Land who continue to carry the traditions in the place where our faith began.

Therefore, CMEP stands with the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem calling for urgent dialogue with political authorities in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. We strongly oppose radical groups’ opposition to Christian communities, manifesting itself now in Jerusalem. CMEP promotes and advocates for the preservation of Christian heritage, especially in the Old City’s

Christian Quarter.

CMEP Executive Director Mae Elise Cannon commented, “We are deeply grieved by the ongoing struggles of communities who follow Christ in the Holy Land. Their very presence is under threat and we must do everything we can to preserve the Christian presence in Jerusalem, Israel, and the occupied Palestinian territories.”

CMEP invites U.S. Christians to support the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches’ recent statement by sharing it within their own communities. CMEP remains committed to raising the situation faced by Christian communities in the Holy Land with U.S. policymakers as we advocate for the religious freedom of all in the region. §

The Philippines Human Rights Act

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns has joined efforts to promote a bill that seeks to strengthen human rights protections in the Philippines.

Activists concerned about human rights violations in the Philippines have rallied behind a new bill in Congress, the Philippines Human Rights Act, introduced by Rep. Susan Wild of Pennsylvania with 26 co-sponsors. The Act calls for the United States to suspend security assistance to the Philippines until the government demonstrates respect for the human rights of its citizens.

Under the current administration of President Rodrigo Duterte, infamous for his statements encouraging law enforcement to kill drug suspects and promising police immunity, over 30,000 Filipinos are believed to have been killed by police and other Philippine security forces. The International Criminal Court has found evidence of crimes against humanity and Global Witness has named the Philippines as one of the deadliest countries in the world for land defenders, journalists, trade unionists, and activists.

Leaders in the Philippine Church have spoken out against the extrajudicial killing and human rights violations carried out by the Duterte administration since 2016. In the words of Filipino Bishop Gerardo Alminaza, “In sadness, we are all crying out: End the killings! These barbaric and calculated assassinations must end... May the growing death list disturb the conscience of the murderers. It is my ardent prayer that instead of perpetrating violence, they may open their eyes to the reality of truth – that life is precious, that it is a sin to kill.”

In speaking out, members of religious congregations and other Church organizations working to serve and protect victims of abuse have at times found themselves the victims of “red-tagging” – false accusations of terrorism and insurgency used to criminalize and even violently attack. The fight against actual armed insurgent groups is used as justification for martial law and sweeping government crackdowns on violent and non-violent groups alike. President Duterte has threatened to

“kill useless Bishops” who speak out against the drug war which has targeted unarmed civilians and government dissidents.

Despite the cries of Filipinos and the prayers of the Church, since Duterte took office in 2016, the United States has provided over \$550 million in military aid to the Philippines and implemented paltry human rights restrictions and oversight. Activists in support of the Philippines Human Rights act argue that federal money should not go towards supporting President Duterte’s human rights violations in the Philippines.



Photo: 3,000 tsinelas (sandals) on the National Mall in Washington, DC on Nov. 18, 2021, in commemoration of the estimated 300,000 who have died during the "war on drugs" in the Philippines.

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns has joined in advocacy in support of the Philippines Human Rights Act. In September, MOGC signed on to a letter by U.S. faith leaders in support of the bill. Read the letter here: <https://bit.ly/3IDdvA6>

“Gross human rights violations under the Duterte Administration are indeed well documented,” the faith leaders stated. “While some have argued that U.S. aid is needed to defend against China, U.S. military assistance to the army and police does not serve to defend the Philippines against the Chinese intrusions in the West Philippine Sea under Philippine jurisdiction. Instead, it is being turned against the most vulnerable and marginalized among the country’s population. We earnestly ask you to join us in advocating for the rights of

the most exploited and oppressed in the Philippines and to co-sponsor the Philippine Human Rights Act.”

In November, MOGC participated in a demonstration on the lawn outside the U.S. Capitol in support of the bill. For the Nov. 18 demonstration, 3,000 pairs of “tsinelas,” Tagalog for “flip-flops,” were laid out on the lawn to represent the more than 30,000 extrajudicial killings that have occurred during the Duterte administration. §

Faith in action:

Write to your representative to urge them to support the Philippines Human Rights Act: <https://bit.ly/3yitW0e>

Ethiopia: Promoting Peace and Human Rights

On Nov. 17, 2021, Advocacy Network for Africa (AdNA), Sojourners, and TASSC issued a joint statement about the violent conflict in Ethiopia that includes recommendations for short- and long-term actions for building peace.

Three international civil society organizations concerned with the growing violent conflict in Ethiopia called on the parties to the conflict to “cease hostilities, allow for unrestricted humanitarian access and ensure that human rights for all Ethiopians are respected and protected.” Advocacy Network for Africa (AdNA), Sojourners, and the anti-torture group TASSC declared in a joint statement released on Nov. 17 that “there can be no victory through force of arms and perpetuation of the war will burden the people of Ethiopia with bearing the terrible cost of this conflict for generations.”

The organizations acknowledge the suffering of citizens located in the conflict area in the northern region of the country, as well as those elsewhere in Ethiopia left destitute by a war effort that uses up desperately needed public resources. They go on to express grave concerns for the life and the livelihoods of people in conflict area, based on limited reports by human rights groups and international media of massacres of civilians.

In the short term, AdNA, Sojourners and TASSC call for all parties and peoples in Ethiopia to “respect human dignity and honor international and regional human rights standards and humanitarian law” by taking the following steps:

1. Immediately end hostilities and support a negotiated ceasefire. This must include independent verification that all Eritrean troops have withdrawn from all parts of Ethiopia.
2. Take immediate steps to ensure that individuals are safe, and that the rights of all Ethiopians are respected and protected.
3. Secure immediate and unrestricted access for humanitarian organizations including the creation of humanitarian corridors to allow humanitarian assistance to facilitate the distribution of food and health services to people in Northern Ethiopia and to other disenfranchised communities who have been exposed to famine conditions as a result of this war.
4. Call for an inclusive national dialogue process to be launched immediately, supported by the international community, with all political parties and stakeholders participating, convened by a neutral party to deliberate on a peaceful transfer of power to a coalition government that does not include leadership by either belligerent party.

In the long term, the three organizations call on the international community to...

5. Establish independent commissions to investigate ongoing human rights abuses committed by all parties to the Tigrayan conflict and by government forces in other parts of Ethiopia and attend to the plight of minorities in all regions.

6. Call for the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission to pursue accountability for human rights violators.

7. Press the government of Ethiopia, whether in the hands of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed or post war transitional council, to halt brutal crackdowns on opposition groups and open up civic space.

a. Promote freedom of expression, assembly and association including by creating an enabling environment for civil society organizations to advocate for the respect, protection and promotion of human rights.

b. Lift the command post structures that operate to enforce the state of emergency throughout the country and in areas linked to systematic and egregious human rights violations with impunity.

c. In consultation with local communities, develop alternative security structures.

d. Restore full internet and telecommunication services immediately to ensure transparency and access to credible information on the situation in Tigray, Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, Afar and other parts of the country to avoid misinformation and disinformation.

e. Provide access to public transportation.

f. Ensure full due process rights for all those arrested as well as the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners.

g. Take concrete steps to hold to account perpetrators affiliated with the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and allied forces, including Eritrean military forces, and persons linked to acts of gender-based violence and rape, assassinations and extrajudicial executions. The government must also make publicly available the steps it has taken and is actively taking.

8. Press the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) and allied forces to investigate and hold accountable persons linked to human rights abuses including those linked to acts of gender-based violence and rape, assassinations and extrajudicial executions.

9. Encourage the United States and other donor countries to ramp up the provision of humanitarian medical aid, particularly for survivors of gender-based violence, by supporting health centers, establishing safe houses and providing counseling services.

10. Urge the UN to call on the International Criminal Court to open an investigation for the purpose of identifying for criminal prosecution those responsible for atrocities and human rights abuses, in particular, the use of targeted sexual violence in Ethiopia. §

Faith in action: Share this video of Bishop Medhin of Tigray calling for the end to the violence:

<https://bit.ly/34dSDQe>

El Salvador: El Mozote Massacre 40 Years On

The Washington Office on Latin American released the following statement, excerpted here, on Dec. 9, 2021, entitled “On 40th Anniversary, Search for Justice in El Mozote Massacre Must Continue.” Read the whole statement at <https://bit.ly/ElMozWOLA>

Since Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele took office in June 2019, and particularly since May of this year when Bukele’s Nuevas Ideas political party began the new legislative session with a qualified majority, attacks on judicial independence and rule of law in El Salvador have been of increasing concern. These attacks have presented yet another barrier in the 40-year search for truth and justice in the 1981 El Mozote massacre in which over a thousand men, women, and children were brutally murdered by Salvadoran soldiers. While achieving justice for those who died and the survivors is important in and of itself, the case also represents a test of the strength and independence of El Salvador’s judiciary and the country’s peace accords, both of which have been severely undermined under Bukele.

The El Mozote massacre took place on December 11, 1981 when Salvadoran troops entered a rural area of the northern Morazán province where Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrillas had been active. Even though El Mozote residents and surrounding communities were largely apolitical, troops rounded up community members, and over a three-day period, carried out what became the largest single massacre of civilians in modern Latin American history. They executed over a thousand people, hundreds of whom were children.

In remembering the massacre, honoring its victims, and acknowledging that the battle for justice is still being fought 40 years later, it is also important to analyze not only the role of the Salvadoran government, but that of the U.S. government as well. In addition to the millions of U.S. dollars being spent on El Salvador through military aid at the time, and the U.S. training of Salvadoran battalions, including the Atlacatl battalion that carried out the El Mozote massacre, this past spring it was revealed that the U.S. had even more direct involvement in the massacre. A testimony by expert witness Terry Karl demonstrated that a U.S. military advisor was in Morazán with a commander of the Atlacatl Battalion during the massacre and that he was likely aware beforehand of what was being planned. This expanded public knowledge of the extent of U.S. involvement in the war and provided additional context to the U.S. government’s coverup of the massacre. As Karl explained, had the U.S. advisor’s presence been known at the time, U.S. aid would have been cut off to El Sal-

vador as it violates our laws. Although the United States has provided some documents and materials related to the case, as recently as last year U.S. officials were still contributing to the delay of justice by not responding to Judge Jorge Guzmán’s request to declassify U.S. military documents related to the massacre. Even with the inclusion of provisions requiring U.S. cooperation on the case in the reports accompanying recent appropriations bills for foreign assistance and the House version of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, little progress has been made.

Gaining access to important military records has also been impeded in El Salvador. In September 2020, a court-ordered inspection of military archives was violated when the Ministry of Defense ordered soldiers to block a judge and inspectors from entering the armed forces headquarters and searching the military archives. President Bukele, who had previously promised to open them, supported the military’s refusal and accused the judge of succumbing to political interests.

Bukele’s shift in policy is not surprising given his recent attacks on democracy and judicial independence. This year, on the 29th anniversary of the peace accords, Bukele dismissed the agreements, rejecting the institutional foundation of Salvadoran democracy and further solidifying his strategy to erode checks and balances and empower the armed forces. This was followed by consecutive attacks on the rule of law and efforts to co-opt the country’s judiciary. In addition to unlawfully replacing all five magistrates on the Constitutional Court and the attorney general, and issuing a ruling to allow presidents to run for consecutive reelection, Bukele-allied legislators also approved reforms that dismissed around 160 prosecutors and judges based on their age or how many years they had been in service. This judicial purge ultimately resulted in the dismissal of numerous judges handling highly sensitive cases, including Judge Jorge Guzmán who had presided over the El Mozote massacre case for many years. This purge delivered a severe blow to accountability in historic human rights cases and undermined the progress that had been made in the El Mozote case.

Despite severe setbacks in the El Mozote case and the larger fight for democracy and rule of law in El Salvador, the search for justice for victims of the massacre persists...

Climate Change: Fierce Urgency of Now

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns issued the following statement as a reaction to the UN climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2021.

On the heels of a dire UN report on the state of the climate, world leaders and their negotiators arrived in Scotland for what was the most consequential international climate talks since the meetings in Paris in 2015. Yet they failed to meet the moment. The following is a statement by Chloe Noel, faith economy ecology project coordinator of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

“Fossil fuel profits and addictions hampered the level of ambition necessary to meet the goal of 1.5 °C warming above pre-industrial level – for now. The longer we put off turning off the nozzle, the further away a healthy and habitable planet becomes for future generations of God’s creation. Dr. King spoke of “the fierce urgency of now,” the need for immediate, “vigorous and positive action” on civil rights. Climate change is our ‘fierce urgency of now’ and the Glasgow Climate Pact does not rise to the moment. Just as Dr. King said in 1963, there is such a thing as being too late.

“After another year of record heat, forest fires, hurricanes, floods and droughts, rich countries still are not willing to put forward the finance necessary to assist countries to adapt to climate impacts, nor to respond to irreparable loss and damage that communities are already experiencing today. Yet their very wealth stems from almost two centuries of fossil fuel usage. The United States came to COP26 with the intent to lead in the negotiations. But they continue to lead by blocking progress on loss and damage.”

Negotiators completed the Paris Rulebook and adopted the Glasgow Pact. One of the most challenging elements of the Rulebook is Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, which defines the rules on how countries can work together to reduce emissions. Noel commented: “While there were marked improvements, the system laid out in Article 6 still lacks the strength needed to move countries to more ambitious policies and contains loopholes for countries to evade fully accounting for their emissions. We welcome the inclusion of human rights language in the text, but the lack of ambition still stands as a threat to human rights and environmental integrity.

“The United States came to Glasgow with high-level officials and action plans. But more action is urgently needed. As a first step, Congress needs to pass the Build Back Better Act and approve the international climate finance budget lines to restore credibility and avert needless suffering in climate vulnerable communities at home and abroad. As the largest historical emitter and

wealthiest country, we have a unique moral obligation to the Global South.”

In regard to COP27 in Egypt, Noel said: “COP26 was delayed by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the climate and the COVID crises disproportionately impact communities marginalized by race, class, caste, gender and ability, especially in the Global South. As we look to the ‘African COP’ in November 2022, will the continent of Africa have widely accessible and equitably accessed COVID-19 vaccines, testing and treatment? With just three percent of the continent vaccinated, it is a far cry from anything close to herd immunity or the goal set by COVAX to have 20 percent vaccinated by the end of 2021. It would be a shame to have an African COP when most people on the African continent cannot yet access a vaccine. The global community must now rally to provide the tools necessary – patent waivers, production capacity, and technology transfer – to end the pandemic.”§

Faith in action: Contact your Senators to ask them to support the climate resolutions included in the Build Back Better legislation: <https://bit.ly/32c9OR6>

Take Part in the Laudato Si’ Action Platform

In May 2021, the Vatican officially launched the Laudato Si’ Action Platform inspired by the 2015 encyclical that accelerated the Church’s ecological conversion and work for environmental justice.

The Platform is a seven-year plan to galvanize action on climate within the global Church. According to Cardinal Peter Turkson, formerly of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the project is designed “to do something concrete” in response to the growing message from scientists and youth activists that “we are destroying our future.”

The platform invites all Catholics to prayerfully discern how they can best respond to the invitation of *Laudato Si’* and make a seven-year action plan accordingly. The Vatican hopes the campaign will culminate in a year of celebration to mark the Church’s progress toward ecological conversion.

Faith in action: Explore the new Laudato Si’ Action Platform website, available in nine languages. Prayerfully discern with your faith community how you might get involved:

<https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/>

UN: Invest in Food Systems Resilience

A UN report released after the first-ever Food Systems Summit in September 2021 focuses on enhancing the resilience and sustainability of global food systems.

The United Nations hosted the first-ever Food Systems Summit in September 2021, to focus on ensuring resilient, sustainable agrifood systems around the world. The Summit was particularly urgent given the rise in global hunger due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing threat of climate change to food systems.

In a statement in advance of the Summit, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that even before the onset of the pandemic, the world was not on track to meet the ambitious goal to decrease global hunger set in the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. Noting the effects of the pandemic, Guterres said that “up to 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020 — a 20 per cent increase in just one year. Over 41 million are on the doorstep of starvation.”

“The crisis brought on by the pandemic is unfolding against a planetary crisis that is threatening our climate and life as we know it,” Guterres added. “Food production and local producers are increasingly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change.

“At the same time, recent reports have found that food systems are contributing up to one-third of greenhouse gas emissions, up to 80 per cent of biodiversity loss and use up to 70 per cent of freshwater. However, sustainable food production systems should be recognized as an essential solution to these existing challenges. It is possible to feed a growing global population while protecting our planet.”

The international conference was held entirely online and called a “People’s Summit” due to the efforts to engage people from the local to the global level. At its end, the Summit issued a call to action around five key objectives, one of which was building the resilience of food systems to respond to shocks and vulnerabilities, including due to events such as pandemics and climate disruption.

After the Summit, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) issued a comprehensive report known as the “State of Food and Agriculture 2021.” Subtitled “Making agrifood systems more resilient to shocks and stresses,” the report responds to one of the five objectives of the Summit in providing an assessment of nations’ ability to respond to stresses and offering guidance to governments as to how they can improve resilience.

According to the report, the complex web of the world’s agrifood systems produces 11 billion tons of food per year and employs billions of people directly or

indirectly. However, there are approximately three billion people who cannot afford a healthy diet, and additional one billion would similarly lack access to healthy food if their incomes declined by one-third due to a shock. The FAO report defines shocks as “short-term deviations from long-term trends that have substantial negative effects on a system, people’s state of well-being, assets, livelihoods, safety and ability to withstand future shocks.” Some examples are extreme weather events, plant and animal diseases, and insects or pests.

The report authors argue that key to ensuring resilience of food systems is the diversification of food input sources, production, markets, and supply chains, because “diversity creates multiple pathways for absorbing shocks.” The FAO’s analysis shows that a country’s food production sector is more resilient when it produces a diverse mix of food and non-food products and sells them to a wide range of markets, both domestic and international. Supporting the development of small- and medium-agrifood enterprises and cooperatives helps maintain diversity in domestic food markets.

Another important factor for promoting food system resilience is ensuring access to food through transport networks. The FAO’s analysis of data from 90 countries shows that many low-income countries in particular have limited capacity to respond if main food transport routes are disrupted. It is essential for all countries to devise network systems that can more quickly overcome disruptions by shifting sources of supply, transport, marketing, and labor.

An additional means for reducing hunger is to enhance the resilience capacities of vulnerable households. The report identifies ways of enhancing resilience at the household level, including by helping families have diversified sources of income and access to social protection programs in the event of shocks.

Other policy prescriptions in the report include the need for better health and education services, gender equality and women’s participation in all facets of the agrifood system, and recognition of agrifood’s role in stewardship of the natural environment.

The FAO concludes the report by committing to take concrete action “in order to transform agrifood systems to make them more efficient, more inclusive, more resilient and more sustainable for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life for all, leaving no one behind.”§

Nuclear Powers Issue New Statement

Although a UN gathering to review a cornerstone nuclear treaty has again been postponed, five nuclear weapons states issued a statement expressing commitment toward preventing nuclear war.

On January 3, the P-5 nuclear weapons states – Russia, China, France, United Kingdom, and the United States – issued a joint statement on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races.

The statement was timed to coincide with the beginning of the tenth United Nations Review Conference on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), but the conference, originally to take place in 2020 and rescheduled for January 2022, has once again been postponed until later in the year, likely August, due to COVID-19 concerns.

The P-5 statement does not include any new, concrete commitments by the nuclear powers. However, it does outline a vision that focuses on risk reduction and reiterates commitments to disarmament under the NPT. The statement also affirms a principle first expressed by U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought,” building on bilateral talks between President Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin last year in which the two also agreed to the Reagan-Gorbachev principle.

More than 50 years since the NPT entered into force in 1970, there are still more than 10,000 nuclear warheads on Earth – 90% of them held by the United States and Russia. Most arms control experts say the NPT, on balance, has been successful at helping reduce the size of arsenals held by superpowers.

Under the NPT, nations that possess nuclear weapons are obligated to show progress toward gradual nuclear disarmament, while non-nuclear weapons states must forego developing or acquiring nuclear weapons. With 190 participating countries, the NPT has been one of the most effective international agreements on nuclear weapons. But progress on disarmament under the NPT has stalled in recent decades.

Amid other global crises such as the coronavirus pandemic and climate change, the issue of nuclear weapons receives little media attention. However, together with climate change, the nuclear threat is widely regarded by scientists and security experts as one of the “twin existential threats” to life as we know it. Experts at the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists say the nuclear threat is only increasing in urgency as global instability has increased due to climate change, weakened global partnerships and declining momentum for disarmament.

In the hopes of galvanizing progress toward nuclear disarmament, 86 nations including the Holy See have signed a new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear

Weapons (TPNW). First signed in 2017 and effective as of January 2021, the TPNW is the first legally-binding international agreement to comprehensively ban nuclear weapons. Although none of the nine nuclear powers have signed it so far, the nuclear ban treaty helps build international legal norms against the possession of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear disarmament is an essential element of the Catholic Church’s call to protect all life and defend human dignity. Recent papal documents and speeches by Vatican authorities have reaffirmed Catholic teaching that nuclear weapons are a threat to life and to our common home. Money spent on our nuclear arsenal should instead be spent to promote economic and climate justice and a security regime based on trust and solidarity.

Pope Francis has emphasized the Church’s opposition to nuclear weapons, stating for the first time that not only the use but the very possession of nuclear weapons by nations is immoral. The Holy See was among the first states to ratify the nuclear ban treaty, and Pope Francis has actively promoted the treaty, hosting a 2017 gathering at the Vatican.

In May 2021, a group of leading scientists and Catholic leaders, including Susan Gunn of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, sent a letter to Pres. Biden with recommendations for the United States’ recommitment to a world free of nuclear weapons.

“We will urge bipartisan support of an ambitious nuclear disarmament agenda,” they wrote. “We call on President Biden to reaffirm the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and to take concrete steps to realize it.” The letter calls on President Biden to affirm the nuclear ban treaty and to use the NPT review conference in 2022 as an opportunity to make nuclear disarmament a reality.

While the postponement of the NPT review conference is a disappointment, the P-5 statement outlines principles on which to build more concrete commitments. Between now and August, civil society groups can pressure nuclear weapons states to live up to the principles affirmed in their statement and outline steps for fulfilling their disarmament commitments.

Faith in action:

Read the letter signed by scientists and Catholic leaders calling for the United States to recommit to a world free of nuclear weapons.
<https://bit.ly/CathSciNukes>.

Iran Nuclear Talks Resume

In late November 2021, members of the Iran nuclear deal met in Vienna in an attempt to salvage the agreement.

Although the United States was not formally participating in the negotiations to salvage the Iran nuclear deal in Vienna this winter, on December 10, President Joe Biden sent Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley there to negotiate indirectly with the other parties.

In 2019, one year after President Trump withdrew the United States from the seven-country deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran began incrementally violating the agreement. Signed in 2015, the deal meant to set limits on Iran's nuclear program such that the country wouldn't be able to create a nuclear weapon for the duration of the deal. Since then, all parties to the deal – Iran, the United States, and the rest of the P5+1 countries (China, Russia, United Kingdom, France, and Germany) – have expressed a wish that the United States rejoin and Iran come back into compliance.

Before returning to compliance, Iran wants the United States to lift its “Maximum Pressure” sanctions as a sign of good will and to demonstrate that it will not abandon the agreement again. The United States insists

that sanctions relief happen simultaneously with Iran's return to compliance.

Meanwhile, even as the talks achieve some concessions, such as replacing monitoring cameras at Iranian nuclear facilities, the ultimate goal of reducing the threat of war becomes increasingly difficult to achieve. U.S. sanctions have severely impacted the lives of ordinary Iranians, including crippling the country's healthcare system – a situation made dire by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Faith groups have urged the Biden administration to lift sanctions and salvage this historic deal. Iran, the rest of the agreement members, and nearly all the world's countries have backed an even more promising proposal to establish a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East. The United States, together with Israel and three other countries, has blocked it. The Vienna talks may be the last chance to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region and avoid war. §

Faith in action: Urge President Biden to lift sanctions and salvage the JCPOA: <https://bit.ly/3eQGGIS>

Growing Campaign to Restore Asylum

Nearly one year since taking office, Pres. Biden continues to violate U.S. asylum law and treaty obligations by turning away asylum seekers.

On Dec. 3, 2021, more than 80 Catholic Sisters held a prayer vigil outside White House calling on President Joe Biden to rescind Title 42 regulations and the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), also known as “Remain in Mexico,” both of which make it easy for U.S. border agents to turn away asylum seekers. Organized by NETWORK Lobby, Maryknoll Sisters Mary Ann Smith and Ann Braudis traveled from New York to Washington, to join sisters who came from across the country, to bring their concern for the safety of migrants at the border to President Biden, a fellow Catholic.

This event followed months of opposition to Title 42 including a September letter to President Biden by more than 150 Catholic organizations. Mary Novak, Executive Director of NETWORK Lobby, said “People of faith recognize the internationally recognized right to seek asylum, and call on President Biden to rescind Title 42 and end the use of MPP.”

On Dec. 17, more than 240 organizations sent another letter detailing these concerns to President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris:

“Despite repeated statements decrying Remain in Mexico as dangerous and inhumane – and issuing memoranda to terminate it – this administration has inexplicably and unconscionably chosen to expand Remain in

Mexico beyond the scope of it under the prior administration. Now, non-Mexican migrants and asylum seekers from any country in the Western Hemisphere are subject to forced returns to danger in Mexico, including Haitians, who often face targeted anti-Black violence and discrimination there.

“The first implementation of Remain in Mexico led to massive human rights violations with more than 1,500 reported killings, kidnappings, rapes, torture, and other violent attacks against people returned to Mexico. There is no reason to believe this time will be different.

The decision earlier this month to renew the Title 42 order issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for another 60 days and use this unjustifiable policy in conjunction with Remain in Mexico to block, return, and expel people seeking asylum in the United States to danger is gravely concerning. There is no public health justification for continuing to bar people seeking protection at the border, as senior CDC scientists and other public health experts, including Dr. Fauci, have repeatedly explained to Congress and the public.”§

Faith in action: Tell Pres. Biden to restore asylum by ending “Remain in Mexico” and Title 42 policies. <https://bit.ly/3eTAA45>

Haitian Migrants in Mexico

The following article by Daniella Burgi-Palomino was published by the Latin America Working Group (LAWG) in November 2021. It is excerpted here with permission. Read the whole article here: <https://bit.ly/33tDNER>

“Cher migrant pour le moment, nous n’avons pas assez d’espace à Tochan” the sign reads in French on the door of the Casa Tochan, one of the few migrant shelters in Mexico City, informing migrants that for the moment, they don’t have space. The overwhelmed shelter staff would like not to put up that sign, but for the moment they have had no other choice because of the large groups of Haitians that they have been receiving in the last two months at the small shelter in...Mexico City.

Casa Tochan like the other two migrant shelters that exist in Mexico City, has been well over capacity in recent weeks. Tochan is a shelter just for male migrants with only 30 beds. When I was there in mid-October the shelter had 40 migrants staying, over half Haitian, and the rest a mix of Central American and other migrants. At one point at the end of September they fit 76 migrants—on their floors, kitchen, closets, anywhere they could fit a mattress. Hermana Magda, the director of CAFEMIN (Casa de Acogida Formación y Empoderamiento de la Mujer Migrante y Refugiada), another shelter in Mexico City, told me that they were housing around 200 people, even though they have capacity to fit 50 people comfortably. CAFEMIN had such a large Haitian population that they had set up two kitchens so that each group of migrants could cook food to their liking and feel more at home in Mexico. These are two of the (at most) three shelters in Mexico City that are doing extraordinary work with very limited resources to welcome Haitian, Central American, and other migrants amidst multiple challenges.

Gabriela Hernandez (Gaby), the director of Casa Tochan and a volunteer, told me how most Haitians at the shelter have made the long and dangerous journey to Mexico City from Brazil and Chile. The migrants have all told shelter staff of the lack of opportunities they had to integrate and live with dignity in South America. The vast majority do not speak of the United States as their destination. All have pending applications with Mexico’s refugee agency (COMAR) in Mexico City and are willing to wait it out to hear if they will be granted asylum or not. The same is true of the Haitian families in CAFEMIN. Some Haitians in Tochan and CAFEMIN try to find work in Mexico City any way they can, even before receiving their identification document in their asylum proceedings, making them vulnerable to exploitation in the informal sector. As is the situation across most of Mexico, Haitians face racism and targeting by

Mexican police...

...It is too early to tell if any of the Haitians, or other migrants who had already been waiting a few weeks at Tochan and CAFEMIN in Mexico City will ultimately be granted asylum. The Mexico City COMAR office has not received many of the country’s asylum applications... Haitians still have one of the lowest recognition rates compared to other nationalities. Many Haitians seek asylum in Mexico because it is one of the only options available to them to regularize their status in Mexico.

The reality is that not all the migrants crossing into Mexico—whether Haitian or Central American—have the United States in mind as their final destination. Many do, especially people with family networks in the United States, but not all. But waiting in Mexico means prolonged wait times for asylum applications to be resolved without much support and access to basic services. This difficult situation is further exacerbated by systemic racism for black migrants, extortion from organized crime, and the possibility of detention and deportation from Mexican migration, security forces, and law enforcement. The Mexican government’s apprehensions of migrants are at an all time high since 2019 and deportations to Haiti from Mexico have also continued since early October. It is no surprise that many give up given these enormous obstacles. And this is after an already traumatic and violent journey that migrants take, often crossing through multiple countries.

As we look beyond the horrific images at Del Rio, Texas of our Haitian brothers and sisters being abused by U.S. border officials and search for solutions, we must call on the U.S. government to rescind the Title 42 border policy that closes the border to asylum seekers and continues to fuel expulsions to Haiti, Guatemala, and southern Mexico. There never was a public health justification for a policy...The Biden administration must stop this unnecessary suffering, live up to its promises and take immediate steps to restore asylum at the border and build a system that welcomes people with dignity.

And we must call on the governments in the region, including the Mexican government, to provide migrants and refugees with humanitarian solutions, including access to asylum protection and other alternatives so that people can integrate and live with dignity if they choose to do so in Mexico. §

Resources

1. Read **Pope Francis' message for the 55th World Day of Peace, Jan. 1**, entitled, "Dialogue Between Generations, Education and work: Tools for Building Lasting Peace." <https://bit.ly/3FljFMV>
2. Read the annual report "**Landmine Monitor 2021**" by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) which records an increase in 2020 in casualties from landmines and explosive remnants of war during 2020. The ICBL concludes that the United States should support a global ban on landmines. <https://bit.ly/3yzX96R>
3. Endorse the "**Protect People and the Planet Appeal for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World,**" led by Unfold Zero, which calls for cutting budgets and investments in the nuclear weapons industry and reallocating and reinvesting these to climate protection and carbon emission reduction. <https://bit.ly/326f4pV>
4. Sign a petition to Congress to pass a no-first-use-policy and other **nuclear risk reduction measures** during NPT Review Conference in 2022: <https://bit.ly/30EoHeS>
5. Endorse "**Fulfil the NPT: From nuclear threats to human security,**" an open letter to the states parties of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, calling on them to commit to ending the nuclear arms race and shifting budgets and public investments away from the nuclear weapons industry: <https://bit.ly/3q2Aah2>
6. Watch a recording from Laudato Si' Research Institute of the public lecture, "**The Politics of Land: Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial Perspectives on the Situation of First Nations in Canada,**" by Professor John Berkman of Regis College: <https://youtu.be/mJ8dfkICQ6I>
7. Watch the documentary, "**The Future Lies with Youth,**" produced by CIDSE, a network of Catholic social justice organizations of which MOGC is a member. Inspired by *Laudato Si'*, the documentary tells the stories of young climate activists, filling the audience with hope for the future of the planet <https://bit.ly/3q8LqZd>
8. Watch this short video, "**Why Are Indigenous People Dying At The Border?**" <https://bit.ly/3E7IuRv>
9. Explore this new report from the Wilson Center, "**Food Insecurity in the Northern Triangle:**" <https://bit.ly/3dZY0Ee>
10. Watch recordings of **webinars with Maryknoll Missioners**, available online at <https://bit.ly/3pdhuvT>
11. Join a webinar "**Shifts in Mission: Awareness of Systemic Racism Webinar,**" on Jan. 13 at 3pm ET. Maryknoll Sister **Marvelous (Marvie) Misolas, M.M.** will share how an awareness of "white privilege" can help us shift our way of doing mission: <https://bit.ly/3GONyfi>
12. The **Catholic Social Ministry Gathering** will be held online Jan. 29 – Feb. 1. For more information and to register, go to <https://bit.ly/3q43pQu>
13. Read this statement from Pax Christi International for International Human Rights Day (Dec. 10) on **shrinking spaces for civil society** around the world: <https://bit.ly/3mfVgaC>
14. Read this new brief from the Urban Institute, "**Centering Race and Racism in Immigration Policy Research: Considerations and Lessons from the Field:**" <https://urbn.is/3dYXPcr>
15. Watch a 13-minute video interview with **Bertha Carceres in Honduras**. The daughter of slain indigenous environmental rights defender Berta Carceres answers questions about the recent presidential election in Honduras: <https://bit.ly/3p3O038>
16. Watch a multimedia report "**Why is Haiti's food system so hard to fix?**" produced by Devex: <https://bit.ly/3e44d2d>
17. Yale University Forum on Religion and Climate is launching a new series of **free online religion and ecology courses**. Learn more at <https://bit.ly/33rpP6r>
18. Check out CLINIC's new policy brief on **immigrant religious workers** and how USCIS can take immediate action to minimize the harm that backlogs and other policies are causing them and the U.S. communities they serve <https://bit.ly/324KxZg>.
19. PAX Christi Netherlands released a report, '**Perilous Profiteering,**' on the nuclear weapons industry and successful efforts to curb it: <https://bit.ly/3JLrMLG>