



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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

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Ecumenical Advocacy Days: Swords Into Plowshares

The virtual conference held in April featured Christian voices for peace from around the world.

Christians from across the United States representing a multitude of churches came together April 25-27 for the 21st annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD), a virtual conference for building global peace with justice. The theme for this year's conference was "Swords into Plowshares: Achieving Enough for All and Pursuing Peace."

Faith leaders and policy experts from around the world led workshops on issues related to the theme and skills for effective advocacy. On the final day, participants met with their members of Congress, presenting them with two shared policy "asks": lawmakers were urged to support the People Over Pentagon Act, currently in the House of Representatives, which would cut \$100 billion from the Pentagon budget, and to strengthen and protect the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called food stamps) in the 2023 Farm Bill.

In choosing this year's theme, conference organizers wrote, "Through the prophet Micah, God declares, 'They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.' But God also tells us why: 'They shall all sit under their own vines and their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid.'"

"Having spent so long running in every direction but peace, it's easy to forget there's another way. No one can serve two masters; we cannot excel in both war and justice, both wealth and mercy. We cannot take by force what is intended to be shared. Let us heed Christ's call and gather as one body to discern how we can re-forge weapons of destruction into tools of growth, cultivate healing throughout God's creation, and pursue systems that empower each person to thrive."

The message of hundreds of Christians representing faith communities across the United States asking to defund the Pentagon and fund human needs stood in sharp contrast to the debate over the debt ceiling happening at the same time on Capitol Hill, as House Republicans passed a deal cutting spending on SNAP and other social programs, while lawmakers from both major parties agreed not to touch the bloated Pentagon budget. During an EAD panel presentation on militarism, Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe remarked that we now have a "military-industrial-congressional complex."

The EAD conference featured plenary sessions on the theological significance of turning swords into plowshares, the connection between militarism and global hunger, and how nutritional equity and sustainability build peace. Over 35 workshops included diverse voices covering a wide range of issues related to the Swords into Plowshares theme, from nuclear disarmament to racial justice, rights of asylum-seekers and refugees to environmental justice in the Farm Bill.

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns' Lisa Sullivan was joined by Sister Patricia Ryan, MM and others in a workshop on "Taking Action for Human Rights in the Face of State-Sponsored Violence in Peru." Sullivan also organized a conference on "A New Trade Model for Climate, Labor, and Community Empowerment." MOGC director Susan Gunn, who was also co-master of ceremonies for the conference, organized a workshop on the findings of an interfaith human rights delegation to the Philippines in which she participated in March.

Participants enjoyed opportunities for both shared ecumenical prayer, and separate denominational worship, as well as virtual spaces for socializing and a virtual exhibit hall with booths highlighting the works of sponsor organizations, including MOGC. Organized into state delegations, conference-goers met for training and strategic planning, culminating in virtual meetings with their respective congressional offices.

Over 370 people from 29 different states and the District of Columbia participated in this year's conference, representing 18 Christian denominations. About 500 people registered, meaning they can access recordings of conference presentations.

MOGC was just one of several Catholic groups to co-sponsor the event together with United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Friends (Quaker), Mennonite, Church of the Brethren, Christian Reformed, and Episcopalian organizations, as well as several major ecumenical organizations including Church World Service and the National Council of Churches. §

Faith in Action: Write to your representatives in the Congress asking them to support the People Over Pentagon Act and protect and strengthen SNAP benefits in the 2023 Farm Bill. <https://mogc.info/EAD-act>

Vatican Rejects Doctrine of Discovery

The 500-year-old legal and political theory that justified the taking of land from native populations by colonizers was formally renounced by the Church.

On March 30, the Vatican formally rejected the 500-year-old “Doctrine of Discovery.” This series of theory from the fifteenth century provided legal and religious justification to European rulers in their seizure of lands in the Americas and Africa from the people who had been living there for generations. It formed the foundation to property laws that are still enforced today that denied Indigenous people their land, language, culture, spirituality, and resources.

The announcement, a joint statement from the Dicastery for Culture and the Dicastery for Integral Human Development, said that the 15th century papal bulls were never official Catholic doctrine. “The Church acknowledges that these papal bulls did not adequately reflect the equal dignity and rights of Indigenous peoples, these documents were manipulated for political purposes by competing colonial powers in order to justify immoral acts against indigenous peoples.”

The rejection of the concept comes after years of pressure from Indigenous groups calling for a formal rescission of the doctrine. This came to a crescendo last July as Pope Francis visited Canada and issued an apology for the Catholic Church’s involvement in the country’s 19th and 20th century residential schools, a legacy that stripped Indigenous peoples of their Native heritage and cultures.

During that visit, representatives of Canada’s First Nations delivered a plea to reject the doctrine to Pope Francis. At that time, the Holy Father said, “I humbly beg forgiveness for the evil committed by so many Christians against the Indigenous peoples.”

For many, his apology was not enough. Eight months later, Cardinal Czerny at the Vatican said that the church’s priority is to listen and to take seriously concerns raised by Indigenous peoples. While some appreciated his remarks, others insisted it was still not enough to repair the damage done. In its denouncement of the Doctrine of Discovery, the Vatican decried the theory as “not part of the teaching of the Catholic Church,” stating that the bulls were “written in a specific historical period and linked to political questions, [and] have never been considered expressions of the Catholic faith,” calling them “an ad hoc response to an ad hoc problem.”

The first of the series of papal “bulls,” or decrees from which the Doctrine of Discovery was derived, came in 1452, authorizing colonial powers such as Spain and Portugal to seize lands and subjugate people in Africa

and the “New World,” as long as people on the lands were not Christians.

The Doctrine of Discovery even found its way into the U.S. judicial system, and was referenced in an 1823 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that Indigenous people had only rights of “occupancy,” not ownership, over their native lands that they had long inhabited. This led to the concept that the natives’ lands were free to take.

Invoking the Christian mandate to respect the dignity of every human being, the Vatican said, “The Catholic Church therefore repudiates those concepts that fail to recognize the inherent human rights of indigenous peoples, including what has become known as the legal and political ‘doctrine of discovery.’”

In making the announcement, the Vatican invoked the pope’s words from his Canadian visit: “Never again can the Christian community allow itself to be infected by the idea that one culture is superior to others, or that it is legitimate to employ ways of coercing others.”

The U.S. and Canadian Catholic bishops conferences issued statements welcoming the Church’s announcement. The U.S. bishops said, “as the Joint Statement [from the Vatican agencies] points out, there were times when Christians, including ecclesiastical authorities, failed to fully oppose destructive and immoral actions of the competing colonial powers. In this regard, we too express deep sorrow and regret.”

Maryknoll Fr. Steve Judd, who spent 40 years working among Indigenous peoples in Peru and Bolivia said the Church’s rejection of the doctrine is “a huge and welcome development.”

“Many of us Maryknollers who were blessed to live among these peoples throughout Latin America share in the joy of this announcement,” Fr. Judd said. “If nothing else, the prophetic and pivotal actions of solidarity by Pope Francis dramatize the struggle of Indigenous peoples for dignity, justice, and respect for human and religious rights unparalleled in history. He has set in motion for all Christians a road map to true reconciliation that missionaries like me, and my brothers and sisters in Maryknoll, can and should follow for the rest of our lives in the accompaniment of these crucified and resurrected peoples.”

Fr. Judd said, “We know that the struggle for their rights and dignity is far from over, but this is an important first step.” §

Indigenous People's Water Manifesto

The following is an excerpt from a manifesto endorsed and signed by 74 Indigenous peoples and organizations represented at the March 2023 UN Water Conference.

We categorically affirm that Indigenous Peoples around the world continue to be primary actors in the care, protection and regeneration of water based on our deep and long-standing spiritual, cultural and economic relationships with water in all its forms and sources.

For Indigenous Peoples, water is an inherent and inalienable right and responsibility. We are water and without it we would not exist.

We therefore reject absolutely the commodification, privatization and dispossession of water being implemented by states and private sector entities around the world. Our original sources of water are being diverted to urban areas, mega-dams, extractive industries, and large-scale agriculture production, systematically violating our inherent, internationally recognized rights, inter alia, to self-determination, self-government and autonomy, means of subsistence, health, lands, territories and natural resources, and Free, Prior and Informed Consent. These policies and practices result in repressive and often violent outcomes for Indigenous Peoples, depriving us of our traditional lands and territories, diminishing and contaminating our water sources, and further contributing to the water crisis we are facing in our homelands caused by climate change.

We are deeply concerned that current national and international policies continue to allow widespread deforestation, mining, drilling and use of highly toxic agro-chemicals, contaminating water systems that nurture millions of species around the world. We are particularly concerned by the continuing contamination and poisoning of water sources by toxic waste produced by mining and drilling activities. These include contaminants such as mercury, which have well-documented, devastating impacts on maternal, child and intergenerational health and development. Many of these extractive activities also contribute directly to the global climate crisis and further diminish Indigenous Peoples' capacity to adapt.

We affirm that Indigenous Peoples continue to carry out a vital role in the protection of the Natural World and its original biodiversity. We continue to maintain and practice our sacred responsibilities as caretakers and protectors of water in all its forms including rivers, streams, lakes, springs, rain, snow, ice and oceans. We will continue to do this as an unwavering commitment. However, for us to realize and implement this commitment, it is essential that global institutions, international

organizations, national, regional and local governments, as well as national and transnational corporations fully recognize and respect our rights. These include rights affirmed in Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the rights affirmed in Nation- to-Nation Treaties and Agreements with settler governments.

We insist that all initiatives related to water, and specifically those that are carried out within our traditional lands and territories, be undertaken only with our Free, Prior and Informed Consent and full participation in decision-making by our authorities and representatives designated by our own Peoples. We reject the manipulations being carried out by some States to circumvent the true representation of Indigenous Peoples through falsified or watered-down consultation processes.

We also call upon States, international agencies, financial institutions, and the United Nations System to support all initiatives and actions developed by Indigenous Peoples regarding water, respecting the self-determination, autonomy, and self-government of our Peoples according to our own forms of organization, land tenure, and resource management systems.

We endorse the contributions to advance the respect and defense of our rights developed in the thematic reports presented to the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly by the Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Water and Sanitation, the Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights, and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We also welcome the recommendations of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in this regard.

Finally, we condemn and reject with one voice the systematic repression, persecution, kidnapping, assassination and criminalization of Indigenous Peoples and their authorities, leaders, and representatives who are defending their rights to lands and territories including their right to water. We also reaffirm the essential role of Indigenous women as water protectors, water defenders and water knowledge holders and call for their practices, and contributions and leadership to be recognized and safeguarded. §

El Salvador: Cries for Freedom for the Innocent

The cardinal of San Salvador and families of the detained speak out for the thousands jailed during the suspension of civil rights in El Salvador.

March 27 marked the one-year anniversary of the suspension of civil rights in El Salvador, as part of President Bukele's campaign to end gang violence in the country. Known legally as a "state of exception," it can be described as a state of despair for tens of thousands of poor and powerless people caught up in the growing police state.

Under the state of exception, originally approved by the Salvadorian Congress after the murder of nearly 90 people, blamed by gangs, over a single weekend in March 2022, the right to association is suspended, police don't have to inform those arrested of the reason for the arrest or their rights. Those arrested do not have a right to a lawyer and can be held for 15 days without seeing a judge rather than the previous 72 hours.

The human rights organization Cristosal documented more than 3,300 cases of human rights abuses under the state of exception.

The government has said that more than 65,000 have been detained over the past 12 months and at least 4,000 have been sent to a massive state-of-the-art prison that opened in February. Human rights groups like the Share Foundation and CISPES say that there have been many instances of prisoner abuses and that innocent people have been swept up in police raids.

Two remarkable things happened at the time of the anniversary:

Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez of San Salvador publicly criticized his brother bishops for not speaking out boldly against the human rights abuses under the Bukele administration. "Our brothers and sisters affected by this political situation must feel as if we've failed them, we haven't lived up to Romero's mandate" the cardinal said, during a homily at the Cathedral of San Salvador, for the feast of St. Oscar Romero on March 24. Cardinal Chavez knows well Romero's mandate to be a voice for the voiceless, having worked for him in the communications department of the archdiocese before Romero's assassination in 1980.

The 80-year-old cardinal agreed to the publication of an interview he gave to a Bolivian priest based in Rome, in a book entitled "Conversations with Cardinal Chavez" "I want to set the record straight about things that happened in Romero's life and in the church and in the country at the time of Romero's death and after – things that have never been told before," the cardinal said in a

meeting with Susan Gunn, Director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, last December.

"I cannot compete against the government's lies on social media that are directed at me when I speak out for the poor, for the innocent arrested in the state of exception," the cardinal said. "This book tells the truth. People will read it and know I am a man of truth."

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns assisted the cardinal in sending signed copies of the book to sixteen bishops around the world.

Movimiento de Víctimas del Regime (Movement of Victims of the Regime), a support and advocacy group known by the acronym MOVIR, organized marches in El Salvador by families of the detained during the state of exception. Addressing the families of the detained, MOVIR posted photos and videos of the marches on social media on March 27 and 28, stating "Thank you for this demonstration of love for your loved ones unjustly imprisoned. We defend innocents, not criminals. Freedom for the innocent."

About 500 people marched to the Congressional building in San Salvador on March 28, chanting "freedom for the innocent."

Many families say their detained family members have no gang ties and are taken by police motivated more by spreading fear than capturing actual criminals. They struggle to track the location of their loved ones after arrest, leading David Morales, senior attorney at the human rights organization Cristosal, to refer to those who cannot be located as "disappeared."

Polls show that a large majority of the people, particularly the poor who have been victims of extortion and terror at the hands of gangs, approve of the suspension of basic rights and sweeping arrests that have driven gangs into hiding – until it affects them.

The new mega-prison currently holds about 4,000 prisoners, with the capacity to hold 40,000. "They are never going to return to the communities, the neighborhoods, the barrios, the cities of our beloved El Salvador," said Gustavo Villatoro, El Salvador's minister for justice and peace, even though about 57,000 of the 65,000 arrested are still awaiting formal charges or a trial. §

Faith in action: Tell the U.S. Congress to suspend military aid to El Salvador until human rights abuses are addressed. <https://mogc.info/ElSalvador-act>

Peru: Christians Express Solidarity with Indigenous Protesters

Over 400 Christians in Peru signed an open letter in March 2023, to express their respect and support for the Aymara, Uro and Quechua peoples marching in defense of democracy and human rights.

More than 400 Christians signed an open letter in support of the Indigenous protesters in Peru who have been met with violence from state and national police forces since late 2022, after the removal and arrest of the president of Peru, Pedro Castillo, left them feeling politically disenfranchised. The original letter is written in Spanish and translated into English by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

“We are writing to express our solidarity with you and your struggle,” the letter begins, “and to tell you that as Christians we recognize the great example you are setting for the whole country with your marches in defense of true democracy and human rights; you are exemplary citizens and we demand that you be respected as such.”

The letter goes on to describe the Christian principles of participation, in which every person, made in the image of God, has the right and responsibility to participate fully in community and government, and of the preferential option for the poor, as the reasons for solidarity with the struggling Indigenous communities.

“As Christians we know that we must defend the cause of the people excluded from the system, the aspirations and struggles of the poorest and most marginalized of Peru, of those who have no drinking water, no health, no education, no healthy environment, due to irresponsible mining. We reject the mining concessions that want to be granted without respecting the right to prior consultation, eliminating their villages and agricultural lands and further contaminating the Pachamama.”

At least 55 Indigenous peoples have died, and more than 1,500 have been injured, in the protests since Dec. 7, 2022, an experience that the letter describes as “brutal repression that disqualifies those who now govern.”

“It is the obligation of the State to guarantee the fundamental rights of citizens, civilians and military,” the letter says, “it is not justified that police and military shoot bullets against people who do not represent an imminent danger to the life of someone; neither should they shoot buckshot to the chest or head, nor tear gas bombs, at close range; these are violations of human rights for which those who order or allow them will have to answer.”

The letter does not shy away from the more difficult and tragic moments of the violence, saying “we are

pained by the mistreatment and death of the Aymara volunteer soldiers by an army that has no care for their lives. We also regret the death of the burned policeman and the acts of uncontrolled violence of minority groups that served as a pretext for the authorities and the media to undermine the peaceful protests of the majority.”

To bring about peace, the letter calls for an end to the militarization of the country, including the withdrawal of the Armed Forces and the lifting of the state of emergency in the region.

Thousands of the Indigenous peoples have traveled from the southern region of the country to join the protests in Lima, despite the expense and difficulties of traveling during a state of emergency. Speaking directly to the Indigenous community, the letter thanks them for “courage and citizen conscience for the right to political participation of our people. You have fought for your right to be heard and to be part of the decision making that happened to all of us, but especially to you.”

The letter goes on to defend the Indigenous protesters against “the suspicions, offensive insults of terrorists and vandals” calling the criticisms “biased, lying and slanderous.”

“We congratulate you, rather, for your courage in peaceful mobilizations, bravely facing an extreme and unjustified repression, which violates fundamental rights. We denounce all this with energy and indignation.

“We recognize your sacrifices to protest. We know that you are putting up your own money to protest, to travel, to come to Lima, etc. We recognize that it is a great effort by your communities, that you are not receiving funding from anyone and that you have self-convened.

“That is why we recommend to all people of will, democratic and supportive, to form a wide network of support for their demands.” §

Faith in action: Read and share the letter in English and Spanish at <https://mogc.info/Peru-solidarity>

Christians Lobby for Peace in the Holy Land

Churches for Middle East Peace held a summit for Christians to hear about the state of human rights in Israel and Palestine and to meet with their congressional representatives.

At their first in-person advocacy summit in Washington, DC since the COVID-19 pandemic, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) hosted three Palestinian keynote speakers: Lutheran theologian Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb; Dean of Bethlehem Bible College, Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac; and President of Bethlehem Bible College, Rev. Dr. Jack Sara. Fr. Isaac named the beatitude “blessed are the peacemakers” as a call to take the side of the oppressed and the call for action for the conference.

“Time is running out for the Palestinians,” Fr. Isaac said. “The current Israeli ultranationalist government is not shy about its strategy” to expand settlements.

Mae Cannon, CMEP’s Executive Director, also spoke about hope, especially with renewed U.S. funding for UNRWA, the UN agency for relief for Palestine refugees. She said 93% of refugees in Lebanon live below the poverty line. They depend on UNRWA for food, medicine, education – all their basic needs. She said we can learn from them as they carry on because “despair is a luxury only for the privileged.”

Some 190 Palestinians were killed in 2022, making it the deadliest year for West Bank Palestinians since the end of the Second Intifada in 2005. So far, 2023 is on track to be worse. According to the 2022 U.S. Report on Human Rights Practices in Israel, West Bank and Gaza, 23 Israelis and 152 Palestinians were killed in 2022. Israel media report 17 Israelis and 89 Palestinians killed so far in 2023, by April 9th.

The report goes on to say that in 2022 Israel demolished or seized 952 Palestinian structures, displacing 1,031 residents. Israeli courts approved larger displacements in Masafer Yatta and Khan al-Ahmar. Despite agreements with the U.S and with Egypt/Jordan/Palestinian Authority, Israel approved well over 7,000 new West Bank settlement units on February 23 (surpassing 2022 and 2021 combined). Plans are being advanced for thousands of new settler units in Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem.

The vicious cycle of Israeli and Palestinian attacks on civilians – on both sides – adds tinder to the fire. New rules from Israel’s Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories from October 2022, and a new system to decide ownership of West Bank land are making matters worse, including restricting movement of American citizens and residents to Israel and within the West Bank and reducing Palestinians land ownership in Area C to

create more settlements.

After listening to the speakers, the participants in CMEP’s Advocacy Summit delivered the following messages in meetings with members of Congress and staff.

Actions by the Biden Administration and Congress can push Israel and Palestine toward peace or toward more violence, toward more respect for human rights or more violence. U.S. policymakers have the ability to make a difference for those suffering and dying under the Occupation.

Support for UNRWA and the Jerusalem hospitals is important and eases tensions some. It is critical that Congress does not cut off this funding in the upcoming budget process for Fiscal Year 2024. §

Faith in action: CMEP will host two upcoming webinars

- **Meet “Stand with Iraqi Christians”** - Churches for Middle East Peace (CEMP), The Episcopal Church, and Stand With Iraqi Christians (SWIC) will host two leaders of the Anglican Church in Iraq while they are in the United States. The Rev. Canon Faiz Basheer Jerjes, MBE, and Sinan Hanna Karakash will speak on contemporary challenges for Christians in Iraq and their ministries with Internally Displaced People and refugees (respectively) in response to ISIS’s 2014 invasion and destruction. **May 10 at 2:30pm ET** Register here: <https://mogc.info/Iraqi-Christians>
- **Fast and Pray for Tent of Nations:** Join Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) and Daoud Nassar to pray together for 30 minutes over the upcoming court hearing regarding the farm’s reregistration. Please consider fasting in a way suitable for you on a Friday, as we intercede and pray fervently for justice for the Nassar family. **May 12 at 12:30pm (ET)** Register here: <https://mogc.info/TentofNations>

Sub-Saharan Africa 'Crippled' by Funding Gap

The Africa Faith and Justice Network released the following statement during the Work Bank/IMF Spring Meetings.

[On April 14, 2023], the International Monetary Fund (IMF) released the “Regional Economic Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa Report: The Big Funding Squeeze” during the IMF Spring Meetings. The report follows [the] release of “The World Economic Outlook: A Rocky Recovery” that projected Sub-Saharan African growth to decelerate in 2023 to 3.6% from 3.9% in 2022 (with some countries like South Africa with a projected growth of 0.1%).

Going more in depth, the Sub-Saharan Africa report notes that “The confluence of higher global interest rates, elevated sovereign debt spreads, and exchange rate depreciations, among other factors, has created a funding squeeze for many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This challenge comes on top of policy struggles from the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.”

The projected ‘funding squeeze’ will cripple some African economies that have barely started to get their footing” notes Dr. Steven Nabieu Rogers, Executive Director of the Africa Faith and Justice Network and Africa political-economy expert. “Once again, African nations have no control over these external shocks that are disproportionately impacting Africa’s vulnerable populations and those living in poverty as compared to advanced economies.”

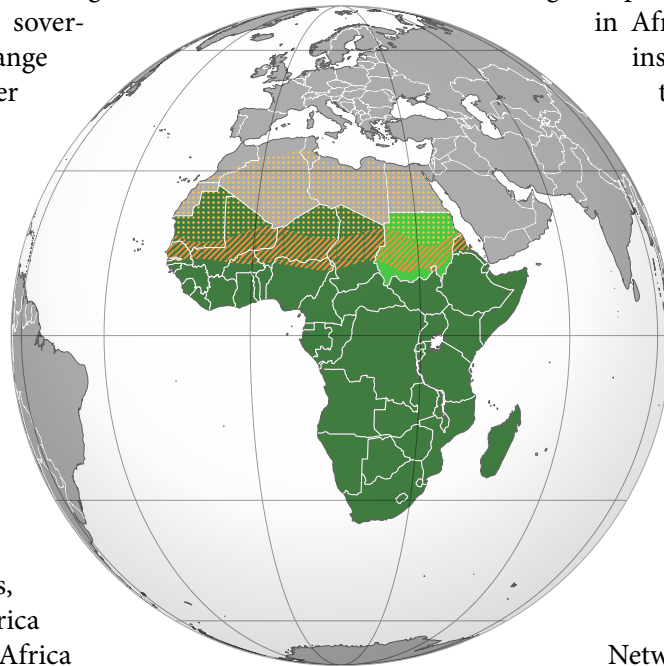
The Sub-Saharan Africa report notes that “double-digit inflation [is] present in half of countries—eroding household purchasing power, striking at the most vulnerable, and adding to social pressures” with an estimated “132 million people [...] food-insecure in 2022.”

“The continent had barely begun its recovery process from the Covid-19 Pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has led to significant rise in food and other commodity prices - with staple food items almost equaling rent in some countries” said Dr. Rogers. “Families and individuals, who were already heavily burdened, are finding it hard to make ends meet being driven deeper into

poverty.”

The report also predicts that the Sub-Saharan Africa “region’s growth potential” will be ultimately weakened as countries are “forced [...] to reduce resources for critical development sectors like health, education, and infrastructure” due to the shortage of funding.

“The World does not have a ‘funding squeeze’ problem” argues Dr. Rogers. “The Biggest Funding Squeeze is the lack of political will on the part of the global powers to invest in critical projects in Africa in a meaningful way. For instance, there is an urgent need to reallocate the billions of dollars in IMF Special Drawing Rights held by developed countries to African countries (among others) to overcome debt, promote growth and alleviate the suffering of their people. In the short term, this singular action could bridge the funding gap and mitigate the negative impact of the looming economic crisis on Africa.”



Graphic by M.Bitton via Wikimedia commons

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The Africa Faith and Justice Network is a faith-based, non-partisan coalition of 28 US-based religious communities of men and women. Inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, AFJN seeks to educate and advocate for just relations with Africa and to work in partnership with African people as they engage in the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. §

Follow the Africa Faith and Justice Network from their website: <https://afjn.org>.

Kenya is now in Eurobondage

Kenya is caught in a huge debt crisis squeezing government finances. The following is an excerpt from an article published by Nation Kenya on April 27, written by editor Jaindi Kisero.

Kenya is clearly stuck on the external debt treadmill and is firmly in the grip of what is now popularly described as 'Eurobondage'. This is when, as an African country, you find yourself in a vicious circle in which you are permanently financing debt with debt, perennially negotiating extensions of redemption periods, and constantly dropping in credit ratings.

Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz could not have described the Eurobond borrowing craze and the phenomenon we are witnessing more aptly. He attributed the Eurobondage phenomenon to "short-sighted financial markets, working with short-sighted governments, laying the groundwork for the world's next debt crisis".

Last week, Kenya put out an advert inviting bids for transaction advisers to help it in two assignments.

First, how to manage a massive US\$2 billion Eurobond bullet payment that is maturing in June 2024. Secondly, advisory services on a new Eurobond issuance between July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. It is a gutsy move because the conditions in both the local and international debt marketplace are not so rosy.

In recent auctions, domestic investors and bondholders have been voting with their wallets, sending a clear message that they are no longer willing to lend to the government beyond the 90-day T-bill treasury bonds.

Last week, a reopened 15-year-bond had to be cancelled. Neither was the performance of a re-opened three-year bond encouraging: Out of Sh30 billion bonds on offer, bids were received for Sh7.3 billion, of which only Sh1.7 billion were accepted at a weighted average interest rate of 13.47 per cent.

In a previous bond auction, domestic and international investors were only willing to lend to the government for 30 to 90 days, and essentially refused to buy 10-year Treasury bonds as only Sh3.3 billion (\$25 million) was taken from Sh20 billion (\$148 million) on offer. Investors' reluctance to buy Kenya bonds is due to either their demand for high interest rates that the government is unwilling to accept or to the specter of sovereign debt default.

What is clear, however, is that Kenya's debt situation is now piling pressure on government finances in an unprecedented way. Indeed, the debt metrics are dire with public debt to GDP now at 70 per cent. But the gravity of the crisis is more accurately reflected in the statistics on what the government is currently spending on debt

service: total debt service to revenues have galloped to a level of 65 per cent of revenues collected by the Kenya Revenue Authority.

When you are in the grip of Eurobondage and at high debt levels as Kenya is, three things happen. First, what you spend on debt service is predominantly 'interest on interest. Secondly, most of the debt is incurred to pay debt, borrowing from Peter to pay Paul. Thirdly, debt markets start demanding higher interest rates as investors start factoring a sovereign default.

The proceeds of the Eurobond Kenya is planning will not be used to build roads, bridges or ports. The government made it clear in the advert that they want money to repay the Eurobond payment maturing within fifteen months.

Kenya's journey to the Eurobondage began in earnest in 2012 when the country went to the debt markets for a syndicated loan that was maturing in 2014. In 2012, Kenya was touted as the one of the fastest growing economies in Africa and a poster child of the Africa rising narrative. Fund managers in advanced debt markets in the West found lending to Kenya attractive because dollar interest rates were at a historic low, and Kenya was able to raise \$850 million in December of that year.

However, the Eurobond Kenya is planning currently will be floated in totally different circumstances, with the world economy still recovering from a once in a century pandemic and Europe in a war affecting markets and supply chains of food, fuel and fertilizer. In addition, rising interest rates are exerting pressures on exchange rates of African countries and increasing external debt repayments.

Kenya is now caught in the 'Eurobondage' game needing to arrange or underwrite a syndicated multimillion-dollar loan from European commercial banks, typically with a two to three-year tenure. When the bonds or loans are near maturity it will have to refinance the existing debt with an even bigger bond.

Kenyans wonder if they are going to be saddled with unpayable debt in perpetuity. §

Sudan: Civil Society Needs Support to Stop War

Two rival generals of Sudan's military have agreed to a three-day ceasefire but fears remain of an all-out civil war.

Fr. Tom Tiscornia, MM, lives in one of the most remote and inaccessible areas in all of Sudan, the foothills of the Nuba Mountains, in the southern part of the East African country. Now more than ever, the remoteness of Fr. Tiscornia's home is a blessing, as fighting between followers of two rival military leaders has taken over the capital city of Khartoum, more than 400 miles to the north.



Photo of West Nuba Mountains by Rita Willaert via Flickr, CC

“The price of everything has doubled since much of the goods come from the north,” Fr. Tiscornia wrote in a recent email. “I’ve heard that even in Juba [the capital city of South Sudan] prices are rising.” Fr. Tiscornia has lived through violent conflict in Sudan before, writing about jumping into foxholes in 2014.

When asked what he thought the U.S. Catholic bishops could do to help, Fr. Tiscornia said he hopes the U.S. bishops keep in touch with their four brother bishops in Sudan and encourage them to speak out for peace. “I only wish that the Muslim leaders would step in and say something,” he said.

The majority of the Sudanese population identify as Muslim, generally belonging to the Sunni branch of Islam. The religion has a strong influence on governance and daily life, playing a dominant role in the nation's politics.

Fighting broke out in the capital city of Khartoum on April 14 after talks broke down between two rival military leaders – Sudan's head of the army Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo

(widely known as Hemedti), the country's deputy and head of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group, a group known for extreme violence in the Darfur region in the past. A three-day ceasefire went into effect on April 25. At the time this article was published, the ceasefire had been renewed for three more days.

When a nonviolent pre-democracy movement succeeded in removing longtime dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019, the international community responded by offering the transitional authority – a military-led body tasked with transitioning to civilian leadership – lots of financial incentives to invest in building democratic norms and structures of governance. But the rival military leaders remained focused on asserting their own power and dominance. In the end, the transitional authority missed deadlines to transition to civilian-led, mainly due to disagreements on the integration of the paramilitary RSF into the army.

Dr. Susan Nagele, a returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner living near Chicago after 31 years in Sudan, Tanzania and Kenya, sees the need to include civil society, women, and professional organizations in the process to stop the fighting and support their desire for a democratic civilian government.

Dr. Nagele says, while South Sudan and Sudan each have rival military leaders trying to “solve their differences on the battlefield and totally neglecting the civilian population,” “Sudan has a large, well organized civil society that successfully brought about a shared government with the military and were supposed to be given full authority of rule until last year when the military took over.” Sudan has civilians who are prepared to govern, but they are being denied by the military. “I think there is more hope for good future governance in Sudan than in South Sudan because of the strong civil society.”

“It seems to me that the international community needs to stand as one united front for democratic civilian rule and accept nothing less from the military,” Dr. Nagele said. “From my point of view, the U.S. Catholic bishops should advocate for civilian democratic rule and ask the pope to lead the way internationally, from his nonaligned position of creative nonviolence and Catholic social teaching.” §

Philippines: Speak Up for Human Rights

President Joe Biden offers a warm welcome to the president of the Philippines, despite vast human rights violations throughout the country, and gets more military access in return.

President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. was scheduled to visit the White House on May 1. The International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP-US) planned an all-day vigil across the street from the White House, “to be vigilant in our solidarity with human rights defenders in the Philippines and to speak out against the United States enabling human rights violations and war crimes in the Philippines.”

Susan Gunn, Director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, shared stories of human rights violations she heard while touring the Philippines with a faith delegation in March – stories of red-tagging and other forms of intimidation, in addition to extrajudicial killings and unlawful detentions and arrests by the military and police, targeting church leaders, indigenous peoples, peasant farmers, Christian and Muslim community members, lawyers and journalists.

Watch a recording of the report at

<https://mogc.info/Ph-webinar>

“The Philippines has a long and intense history of human rights abuses spanning years of colonization, martial law, and ongoing and protracted armed conflicts,” Gunn said. “After the People Power Revolution toppled the rule of Marcos Senior in 1986, martial law ended and a new Constitution was adopted, including a Bill of Rights.”

Yet, according to a 2020 UN report, “effective implementation [of basic human rights protections] remains elusive.” The report places the blame for this on two entrenched groups in the Philippines: landowning elites and political dynasties. Together and independently, they wield political and economic influence at national and local levels.

The southernmost island of Mindanao is an especially hot spot for ongoing armed conflicts between the Philippines military, with the active support of U.S. troops, and Muslim and Communist armed groups. “U.S. troops in Mindanao gave guidance to the Philippines military in 2017 when Islamic insurgents took hostages in the city of Marawi, the largest Muslim-majority city on the island. It comes as no surprise that the Philippine government took a scorched earth

mentality in the conflict in Marawi, bombing out the city and displacing tens of thousands. It is a mentality rewarded by the U.S. military and its war on terror.”

Now President Biden and the current Philippines president, Marcos Junior, have agreed the U.S. military will send more troops and equipment to Mindanao, as well as to four new locations in the northern part of the country, to face Taiwan. In exchange, the president of the Philippines received a handshake from Pres. Biden at the UN a few months ago, and now a visit to the White House.

At the onset of his presidency, Joe Biden stated that he was “putting human rights at the center of U.S. foreign policy.” This is yet to be seen in the Philippines. In its place, intimidation and persecution harms all members of society working to uphold basic rights and the rule of law, while the military and police spread a culture of fear, exclusion and violence.



President Biden hosts a meeting with President Marcos Jr, September 21, 2022
Photo by Adam Shultz, from the White House

Now, more than ever, it is urgent that the United States refuse to fund institutions responsible for human rights abuses in the Philippines. §

Faith in action: Send a message to your representative in Congress to support the Philippines Human Rights Act. <https://mogc.info/PhilippinesHumanRights>

South Korea: U.S. Nuclear Subs Enter Conflict

For the first time in 40 years, the United States will send nuclear submarines to the Korean Peninsula as part of a nuclear weapons deal with South Korea.

President Biden announced plans to send U.S. nuclear-armed submarines to the Korean peninsula in return for South Korea not to develop its own nuclear weapons — a decision that the president attributes to detaining North Korea, but most experts say the real target is China.

During a state dinner at the White House on April 26, President Biden vowed to “end” the North Korean regime if it attacks South Korea – words eerily similar to President Trump’s threat to “totally destroy” North Korea in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly in 2017. The person who was able to lower the temperature between North Korea and the United States at that time – former president of South Korea Moon Jae-in – is gone now, replaced by Yoon Suk-yeol, a far-right politician known in the Korean media as a “K-Trump.”

The nuclear disarmament organization Global Zero reacted to the news of U.S. nuclear submarines going to South Korea by issuing a statement detailing two reasons why the presence of U.S. nuclear subs in South Korea is a “big step in the wrong direction.”

First, “nuclear weapons are at the heart of the danger on the Korean peninsula,” Global Zero says. “Putting U.S. nuclear-armed subs near North Korea, with enough firepower to completely annihilate a nation of 26 million people and spark a global climate catastrophe, is far more likely to aggravate tensions than alleviate them.”

“Ensuring South Korea doesn’t go nuclear is important,” Global Zero acknowledges, “but the right approach is to deepen non-nuclear military, economic, and diplomatic cooperation.” The United States should “double down” on diplomacy with North Korea, while building stronger ties with South Korea in other areas, Global Zero says.

Second, Global Zero states that “nuclear weapons can’t solve our problems. Nuclear weapons are the problem.” The presence of nuclear weapons and threats of their use overshadow and derail dialogue and diplomatic gestures. The possibility of human error resulting in contamination or worse is also a real concern.

On the same day that President Biden threatened to end North Korea, a renowned South Korean peace activist delivered a speech to hundreds of American Christians preparing to lobby Congress for peace.

“For 23 years I have been working for an organization called the Frontiers to help war victims and to prevent

war,” said Dr. Song Kang Ho, who goes by “Brother Song.” “We are working to close down the naval base on Jeju Island at the southern tip of Korea and turn it into a base for peace.”

Brother Song told the story of the damage caused by the military base on the people and the environment of Jeju.

“In the construction site of the base, there was a beautiful and sacred rock called Gureombi where residents prayed and meditated and believe that the spring water gushing out of the rock was sacred. Gureombi, the holy living stone, was broken with an excavator and blown up with dynamite, and the military installation was built upon it. Every morning in front of the military base, we shout ‘Gureombi, wake up! Shut down the military base! Stop the war! And stop the war training!’ Every morning, more citizens are blocking the front gates of the naval base and are trying to force the naval Base to stop operating.

“After the military base was built, the sea became increasingly polluted, and catches declined. Sea workers have to dive deeper into the sea to collect the seafood, which makes their work more dangerous. Recently, fishermen in the village say they’re catching deformed fish off the coast of Jeju. However, they don’t know if it is because of the naval base or the contaminated water from the Fukushima power plant in Japan.

“Military exercises on land often attract attention and encounter resistance from citizens. But military exercises at sea do not. I hope the international community will pay more attention to the severe impact of war and military training at sea has on sea creatures. It is both an environmental problem and a food problem, especially for Asians, since seafood is a far more critical food source than for westerners.”

Brother Song went on to describe annual meetings of peace activists from the islands of Jeju, Okinawa, and Taiwan, “to cheer and support the lonely struggle for peace” for the residents of these East Asian islands. Together, Brother Song says, they imagine their islands and the surrounding ocean waters free of the military, bases, nuclear weapons, and the threat of war. §

Faith in action: Join Korea Peace Advocacy Days, held virtually **June 5-9** and hosted by Women Cross DMZ. Register by **May 12** at <https://mogc.info/KoreaPeace>

U.S.-Mexico Border: What's Next for Asylum

With the end of Title 42 on May 11, the political fight over the right to seek asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border is expected to heat up, with poor and vulnerable people caught in the fire.

On May 11, the Biden administration is expected to end the Title 42 pandemic policy, which has allowed immigration authorities to rapidly turn back hundreds of thousands of people without giving them a chance for asylum.

What is Title 42

First enacted under the Trump administration and continued under President Biden, the pandemic-era Title 42 health policy has allowed border authorities to expel asylum seekers immediately, denying them their legal right to seek asylum. Public health experts have spoken out against this health policy as outdated and ineffective, and human rights groups have attested to the harm the policy has caused for migrants, including through documenting nearly 10,000 cases of violence against migrants expelled under Title 42.

After more than two years of advocacy against Title 42 expulsions, we rejoiced at the news of its impending end more than one year ago. “We pray this decision is part of a larger effort to restore the asylum system to allow fair processing of migrants and asylum seekers,” said Susan Gunn, director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, in April 2022.

What's Next

With the end of Title 42, some expect the crowds of migrants on the Mexican side of the border to move forward, possibly leading to overcrowded border patrol facilities once again. The Biden Administration is considering stringent new immigration proposals that have upset immigration advocates who say the president is back pedaling on promises made on the campaign trail, promises to build a more welcoming nation.

One policy would block migrants from asylum if they do not use new parole programs, schedule an appointment at the border through the glitchy CBP One app, or first seek protections in a country they traveled through. Another of Biden's proposed policies would resume the detention of migrant families.

The Department of Homeland Security has also increased resources on the border and cracked down on smuggling networks.

Asylum Door Narrowing

In addition to the president's proposed restrictive

policies, there are members of Congress with their own proposals for narrowing access to asylum as a means of stemming the flow of migrants entering the United States. The latest is the Border Security and Enforcement Act of 2023 in the House of Representatives.

Eleven Catholic organizations working with asylum seekers, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, spoke out against the new border security bill, in a letter to the House Judiciary Committee on April 18, 2023. They named four ways the bill will harm immigrant communities and violate Catholic principles of welcome.

First, the bill would make it nearly impossible for migrants to seek asylum in the U.S. and significantly easier to deport asylum seekers, including families and children into harm's way.

Second, the bill will restart the failed and dangerous Remain in Mexico program for all migrants, including unaccompanied children;

Third, the bill will require family detention for any families attempting to enter the U.S. to seek asylum, as well as any families who previously entered the U.S. without visas;

Fourth, the bill will subject all unaccompanied children to an expedited removal process, harming children, particularly those in danger of trafficking.

These are short-term, draconian fixes with many traumatic, unintended consequences.

“The solutions is not found at the border but rather in Washington, DC,” Gunn said, “where Congress has failed to enact meaningful immigration reform for more than 30 years.”

“The United States desperately needs comprehensive immigration reform which includes opening up different legal pathways for migrants, rather than restricting asylum access at the border. Our missionaries on the border see it, and the president and members of Congress know it. They don't want to hear it but as long as the cries of the migrants go on, we will continue calling for justice for migrants.” §

Faith in action: See the conversation between leaders on immigration, “Human Dignity and the Migration Crisis at the U.S. Southern Border” hosted by the Georgetown Initiative on Catholic Social Thought <https://mogc.info/Migration-Discussion>

Resources

1. **Joint Statement on the “Doctrine of Discovery”** by the Dicasteries for Culture and Education and for Promoting Integral Human Development made Mar. 30
<https://mogc.info/DoctrineofDiscovery>
2. **Report: Indigenous Peoples’ Declaration for the 2023 United Nations Water Conference** signed by 74 Indigenous groups and organizations and five supporting organizations
<https://mogc.info/IndigenousWaterManifesto>
3. **Report on Root Causes Initiative: “Resetting U.S. Priorities Toward Central America: Year two assessment of the Biden-Harris root causes strategy”** by the Hope Border Institute
<https://mogc.info/RootCauses>
4. **Two-pager on immigration changes: “The Biden Administration’s Proposed Third-Country Transit Ban For Asylum Seekers”** by U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Migration and Refugee Services
<https://mogc.info/JfI-TransitBan>
5. **Article: “Churches in the Philippines call for protection of human rights and its defenders”** from Oikoumene
<https://mogc.info/Ph-HR-oikoumene>
6. **Webinar recording: “Human Rights in the Philippines”** hosted by Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
<https://mogc.info/Ph-webinar>
7. **Webinar recording: “Overcoming Violence in Wounded Societies: Perspectives from the Colombian and Kenyan Truth Commissions”** webinar by Notre Dame Keough School of Global Affairs
<https://mogc.info/Overcoming-violence-webinar>
8. **Recording: “Human Dignity and the Migration Crisis at the U.S. Southern Border”** conversation hosted by the Georgetown Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life
<https://mogc.info/Migration-Discussion>
9. **Documentary: *Torture in Our Name*** by National Religious Campaign Against Torture on the effects of solitary confinement
<https://mogc.info/TortureInOurName>
10. **Documentary: *The Letter*** about Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’* at bit.ly/MOGCLetter
11. **Meditate with the 100 Bows from Jeju Island.** Find video and text of the meditations used by activists who walk and bow for peace outside of the military base on Jeju island
<https://mogc.info/100bows>
12. **Webinar: Stand with Iraqi Christians** hosted virtually by Christians for Middle East Peace on **May 10** at 2:30PM ET. <https://mogc.info/Iraqi-Christians>
13. **Webinar: Fast and Pray for Tent of Nations** in advance of the upcoming court hearing regarding the farm’s reregistration, hosted virtually by Christians for Middle East Peace on **May 12** at 12:30PM ET. <https://mogc.info/TentofNations>
14. **Event: Laudato Si’ and the Catholic Church** virtual conference in the evenings from **Jun. 14 - Jul. 25**. <https://mogc.info/CCC-Conference>
15. **Event: Korea Peace Advocacy Days**, to be held virtually **June 5-9** and hosted by Women Cross DMZ. Register by **May 12** at <https://mogc.info/KoreaPeace>
16. **Event: Jubilee International Debt Crises Day of Action** to be held by Jubilee USA in Albany, NY on **May 2** from 9AM to 5PM
<https://mogc.info/NY-DebtAction>
17. **Celebrate Africa Day on May 25.** The annual commemoration of the creation of the Organization of African Unity, formerly known as African Freedom Day
18. **Prayer - Africa Renewal: A Prayer of Gratitude, Repentance, and Commitment**
<https://mogc.info/AfrPr>
19. **Maryknoll Lay Missioners Webinar:** Join us on Jun. 6, 6PM ET to learn about Maryknoll Lay Missioners and discern if mission is right for you.
<https://mogc.info/MKLM-Webinars>
20. **New Maryknoll Sisters Podcast:** Empowering Youth in East Timor with Sr. Susan Wangazi, MM.
<https://mogc.info/Sr-Podcasts>
21. **New Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers Podcast:** The Roots of Ecological Mission with Fr. Larry Radice, M.M <https://mogc.info/Fr-Br-Podcasts>
22. **Maryknoll Missioners Webinars:** Enabling Others to Engage in Mission in the Andes with Fr. Stephen Judd, M.M, May 25 at 4pm ET. Register and find recordings of other webinars at <https://mogc.info/MM-webinars>