



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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

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Take action - Email, call, fax or write U.S. decision makers

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Israel-Hamas War: Faith Leaders Call for Peace

The most violent year in the Holy Land in decades now culminates in outright war.

A deadly attack on Israeli civilians by Hamas shocked the world on October 7. In the days and weeks that followed, many people of faith and good will condemned the violence and called for Hamas to release all hostages. And, as the suffering grows for the people of Gaza under Israeli bombardment, so do calls by faith leaders for the violence to stop and safe corridors to open for delivering lifesaving aid to Gaza.

“Our hearts have been broken again and again as we have heard stories [of the Hamas attack] from the survivors and from the families of those murdered or kidnapped,” said more than 600 Jewish religious leaders in the United States and Canada in an open letter published on October 26. Signers of the letter, organized by the T’ruah rabbinic human rights organization, include prominent U.S. rabbis representing some of the largest congregations around the country. “In the depths of our pain, we also mourn the deaths and suffering of Palestinian civilians and call for immediate action to protect their lives,” the letter goes on to say. “Hamas’s war crimes do not justify further war crimes or collective punishment.”

Pope Francis noted that the Hamas attack on Oct. 7 took place on the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, which marks the completion of the annual cycle of reading the Torah scroll. “I pray for all those families that saw a day of celebration be transformed into a day of mourning,” the pope said. “And I ask that the hostages be released immediately,” he continued. Israeli government officials have estimated that Hamas is holding more than 200 Israeli hostages.

“One who is attacked has the right of self-defense,” the pope also said, “but I am very concerned about the total siege under which Palestinians are living in Gaza, where there also have been many innocent victims.” After more than a week of Israeli bombardment, the pope deplored the “desperate” situation in Gaza and urged Catholics to take “only one side” in the conflict, the side “of peace.”

On Oct. 29, Pope Francis called for a ceasefire during the Angelus in Rome.

In Jerusalem, the Roman Catholic Church’s top representative in the Holy Land, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, also known as the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, made headlines on Oct. 16 for offering himself in exchange for Hamas’s Israeli hostages if it would help bring children home. The invitation remains open. This creative nonviolent action is an alternative to meeting violence with violence and demonstrates that opportunities to de-escalate

and mediate the conflict exist, if only we allow ourselves to imagine them.

The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem also wrote a pastoral letter to the diocese on Oct. 24 explaining the situation. He called for an end to the “decades of occupation” and “a clear and secure national perspective to the Palestinian people” which he said is the only way that a serious peace process can begin. “Unless this problem is solved at its root, there will never be the stability we all hope for,” he said.

“The tragedy of these days must lead us all, religious, political, civil society, international community, to a more serious commitment in this regard than what has been done so far. This is the only way to avoid other tragedies like the one we are experiencing now. We owe it to the many victims of these days and to those of years past. We do not have the right to leave this task to others.”

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns has been working closely with Churches for Middle East Peace, a coalition of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches, to raise our voices calling for protection of Christians in the Holy Land and peace for all people in Israel Palestine. Together, we have met with White House staff, and representatives from the United Nations, and Egyptian and Jordanian governments, to discuss ways to de-escalate the conflict and to protect all Israeli and Palestinian people.

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns also organized a letter from Catholic organizations to President Biden and joined prominent Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Arab-American groups, in a letter to the president and Congress. Both letters ask for support for a ceasefire and protection of all civilians, including by increasing humanitarian aid into Gaza and working for the release of hostages.

Faith in action:

Churches for Middle East Peace invites the public to attend weekly 30-minute online prayer time for peace on Wednesdays at 12:30pm ET and briefings on Thursdays at 10:00am ET. Register at www.cmep.org

Ask President Biden to call for a ceasefire
<https://mogc.info/CeasefireNow>

Look through the list of Jewish rabbis who signed the letter for peace to find one near you and offer your solidarity. <https://mogc.info/T-ruah>

Share A Prayer for Peace in Israel and Palestine written by Rose Berger of Sojourners Magazine.
<https://mogc.info/SOJO-MEP>

Israel-Hamas War: 'End the War Now'

Churches for Middle East Peace (www.cmep.org) released the following statement on Oct. 26, in response to rising fears of catastrophic civilian casualties in Gaza.

The war in Israel and Palestine must be brought to an end. Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) calls for an immediate ceasefire, an end to all violence, and a rapid and substantial increase in the delivery of lifesaving aid to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of people in Gaza. CMEP calls on Hamas to release all hostages and do no harm to those still remaining. CMEP also calls on the international community and the United States to stop supporting further militarization and pursue every alternative means to protect all Israeli and Palestinian civilians.

In the disastrous wake of intensified bombardment and violence over the last 48 hours, CMEP repeats its urgent call for a ceasefire. The death toll is spiking to unprecedented levels this week as Israel [drops more bombs] on Gaza. Simultaneously, Palestinians in the West Bank are being victimized by an alarming increase in settler attacks.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the death-toll in Gaza reached 6,547 on Oct. 26, approximately 68 percent women and children. More than 300 children died in bombings on Oct. 24 alone. An additional 17,439 have been injured. There are also concerning reports about burn injuries from weapons that have not been identified. Human Rights Watch has expressed concern about the use of white phosphorus by Israel in Gaza and Lebanon. CMEP calls on the international community to investigate these injuries immediately.

The situation in Gaza is catastrophic and soon will result in the deaths of thousands more civilians because of the blockade alone. The humanitarian aid that has arrived in Gaza so far addresses a miniscule fraction of the need, and the blockade is strangling the humanitarian efforts that are in place. For example, the few trucks that were allowed into Gaza this week delivered only enough drinking water for a fraction of the population for a single day. Even before this elevated siege, Gaza was fully dependent on foreign aid, receiving 500 or more trucks daily.

Exacerbating the lack of basic resources for the population, humanitarian agencies that could help mitigate the devastation are breaking down. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), for example, has stated that their operations will grind to a halt imminently without fuel. Hospitals are already unable to provide medical services for lack of fuel for their generators and of supplies. An Israeli ground invasion will only exacerbate the scale of the catastrophe exponentially.

Meanwhile, 95 Palestinians in the West Bank have been killed by Israeli forces and settlers since October 7th including 28 children. This has already been the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank in more than 15 years. Israeli NGO Yesh Din documented over 100 settler attacks on West Bank Palestinians in the last two weeks including the killing of six Palestinians with live fire, razing farmers' olive trees, and setting Palestinian cars and homes on fire. Israeli settlers and soldiers reportedly detained and tortured three Palestinians in the village of Wadi al-Sik on October 12.

The United States must use its influence to prevent Israel from further retributive and revengeful acts toward the innocent people of Gaza. The people of Gaza should not be punished for the atrocities of Hamas. A ground invasion into Gaza by the Israeli army would only further inflame tensions with the broader Middle East and could expand the conflict into broader regional warfare. The collective punishment would also sow the seeds for generation upon generation of anger and response.

Instead of questioning the number of Palestinian casualties reported, President Biden must use his power and authority to do everything possible to negotiate peace. The White House National Security Council spokesperson, John Kirby consistently and rightly humanizes Israeli deaths by identifying Israelis killed as "human beings," "family members," "friends," and "loved ones." Palestinian civilians are human too, and their humanity must equally be acknowledged. Rather, Kirby states that Palestinian civilian deaths are unfortunate but justified because "It's going to be messy and innocent civilians are going to be hurt." We affirm that every Israeli and Palestinian human life deserves respect and is valued.

Peace with justice is the only lasting solution that will protect the long term security and sustainability of the State of Israel. CMEP supports any just and durable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis in which Israelis and Palestinians realize the vision of a just peace, which illuminates human dignity, supports human rights and equality, and cultivates thriving relationships. §

Faith in action: Attend CMEP events: Peace Prayers on Wednesdays at 12:30pm ET; Briefings on Thursdays at 10:00am ET; Webinar on Nov. 15. Register at www.cmep.org

Statement of Solidarity with the Guatemalan Peoples

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is working with the Latin American Working Group and the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission to gather signatures for a statement of solidarity with Guatemalan democracy protesters.

We the undersigned write to express our solidarity with the Guatemalan people, including many Indigenous peoples, engaged today in a difficult struggle for democracy, human rights, and accountability. We join them in condemning the violent and dishonest tactics of the Guatemalan government and the “Pact of the Corrupt” it represents, who seek to overturn the August 20, 2023 elections and prevent President-Elect Bernardo Arévalo from taking office on January 14, 2024. We call on the government to respect the election results and the rights of Guatemalans to peaceful protest. We urge international leaders to hold Guatemalan officials to account.

As recognized by the international community, Arévalo’s Movimiento Semilla party won by a landslide, with 58% of the vote. Sick and tired of the lack of social services and jobs, and a corrupt, absentee government, Guatemalans voted for a change.

Tactics used by the Guatemalan government include intimidation, threats, and legal actions against election workers and members of the Semilla party. The Attorney General’s office has ordered the special anti-corruption unit and the National Civilian Police to raid the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) offices four times, illegally searching and removing electoral material, jeopardizing the integrity of the electoral process. Secretary General Almagro of the Organization of American States asserted that the permanent and baseless harassment by the Attorney General constitutes a political persecution reminiscent of that carried out by authoritarian regimes.

Attorney General Porras’ seizure of electoral ballots during the most recent raid on September 29 sparked peaceful protests and blockades throughout the country. The demonstrations began on October 2, 2023 by Indigenous authorities of the 48 Cantons of Totonicapán, K’iche’, Ixil, and ancestral communities outraged at the theft of the ballots and the threat to democracy. Human rights activists, women’s groups, students, businesses, workers, and religious leaders are peacefully participating in the demonstrations. The protestors are demanding the resignation of Attorney General Porras, Special Prosecutor against Corruption Currichiche, and Judge Fredy Orellana as the most public faces of the corruption in Guatemala and the threat to democracy.

President Giammattei, Attorney General Porras and others have falsely accused the demonstrations of being violent and criminal, instigated by President-Elect Arévalo, and supported by international NGOs. They seek to end the protests, divide the opposition, and blame the Semilla Party for the unrest with the ultimate goal of overturning the election results. We stand with the protesters.

The Guatemalan people have been an inspiration to the world in the years since the end of armed conflict in their country. Working with the United Nations, they have offered a model of how to transition to democracy and hold human rights violators and corrupt officials accountable. Recent governments and their corrupt partners in the military, corporate sector, and organized crime have used lawfare, threats, and attacks to undermine this process, dismantle democratic institutions, and chase judges, prosecutors, journalists, and human rights defenders into exile. As demoralizing as these setbacks have been, the Guatemalan people have not given up. The recent elections put the Pact of the Corrupt on notice. As the government attempts to overturn those elections, the response of thousands of protesters taking peacefully to the streets has reminded the world of the extraordinary spirit of the Guatemalan people.

We stand in solidarity with the brave people of Guatemala. We urge the government of the United States to apply Global Magnitsky sanctions against Attorney General Porras, Special Prosecutor Currichiche, and others. We echo the Guatemalan people’s call for their government to respect the constitutional right to peaceful protest, respect the results of the election, and proceed with the peaceful transition of power to President-Elect Arévalo. The world is watching how you choose to proceed.

We wish strength and courage to the Indigenous peoples, land defenders, human rights advocates, activists and all Guatemalans seeking to save democracy and the rule of law. Thank you for your sacrifice, your vision, and the example you set for the world with your brave struggle. We will not abandon you. §

Faith in Action: Sign the statement of solidarity, and invite friends to do the same at <https://mogc.info/Guate-Solidarity>

Haiti: International Response to the Violent Crisis

Despite opposition by many Haitians, members of the Haitian diaspora, and faith groups, the UN Security Council approved sending a multinational armed force, led by Kenya, into Haiti.

On September 21, International Day of Peace, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joined faith leaders and members of the Haitian diaspora in a National Day of Action to Support the Haitian People. Participants from across the United States traveled to Washington, DC to meet with members of Congress and advocate for non-violent solutions to the violent crisis in the Caribbean country.

Haiti has been overrun by criminal gangs since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on July 7, 2021. In October, 2022, de facto Prime Minister Ariel Henry requested to the UN for armed foreign intervention.

Participants in the National Day of Action asked Congress not to support sending foreign troops to Haiti and instead to pursue four main objectives:

- Restore security in Haiti by stopping the flow of weapons and sanctioning collusion between gangs and Haitian elites.
- Restore democracy in Haiti by ending U.S. support for the corrupt and anti-democratic regime ruling Haiti, and by supporting a Haitian-led transition
- Fight rising hunger in Haiti by supporting local Haitian farmers.
- End deportation, abuse, and discrimination against Haitian and other Black migrants.

During visits with lawmakers and in a panel discussion on Haiti at the annual conference of the Congressional Black Caucus, participants heard repeatedly about plans for foreign military intervention. A proposal by the United States and Ecuador for a Kenyan-led international force was before the United Nations Security Council. When critics mentioned that foreign military intervention in the past had been disastrous, and that Haitians were concerned that the invitation was to protect buildings and not vulnerable people, panelists were quick to dismiss the concerns, but offered no explanation of why.

The day after the National Day of Action, prominent Haitian-American organizations NHAEON and FANM sent an open letter to President Biden stating their opposition to PM Henry and to the plan for armed intervention. “(We) strongly oppose your Administration’s proposed international military intervention in Haiti,” the letter reads.

“Any military intervention supporting Haiti’s corrupt,

repressive, unelected regime... will further entrench the regime, deepening Haiti’s political crisis while generating significant civilian casualties and migration pressure,” the Haitian-American advocacy groups wrote. “If the U.S. is genuinely interested in stabilizing the political situation to avoid a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Haiti, it will start by ceasing to prop up the corrupt government and allow the emergence of a consensus transitional government with the legitimacy to decide how the international community can contribute...”

The letter continues “We are confident that, given a chance, our brothers and sisters in Haiti will come together to develop a solution to the political crisis. Over the past three years, groups across the spectrum have gathered, often putting long-running political disagreements aside, to agree on practical, promising plans for a transitional government. But each time, the de facto authorities defeat the promising effort by refusing any compromise.”

The letter then echoes the call for the United States to stop the flow of guns to Haiti. The authors also cite a letter to the African Union from at least 60 civic groups within Haiti expressing similar concerns and opposition to the armed intervention.

Despite widespread opposition from faith groups and civilian leaders in Haiti and the Haitian diaspora, on October 2, the UN Security Council approved the plan for armed intervention. The Kenyan-led Multinational Support Mission would not be a UN mission, but rather it would be funded by individual Member States, with the United States committing to contribute \$200 million.

The deployment of the mission has been delayed by legal complications in Kenya. On October 9, Ekuru Aukot, a former presidential candidate, filed a petition claiming that the Kenyan constitution bars President William Ruto from deploying the force without the approval of the country’s legislature. Opposition lawmakers agree, and the National Assembly has not yet scheduled a debate on the matter. A Kenyan court has suspended the deployment until at least November 9. §

Faith in Action: Ask Congress to restore security and democracy and support food security in Haiti, and welcome Haitian immigrants to the United States.

<https://mogc.info/Haiti-Day-of-Peace>

Latin Americans Build Solidarity to Resist Extractivism

Church and community leaders in Latin America met in Panama to strengthen their efforts to protect communities from exploitative extractive industries.

Thirty community leaders from ten Latin American countries met in Panama in August to share experiences and strategies of active nonviolent resistance to the brutal extractivism impacting their communities in an event organized by Pax Christi International.

The leaders represented frontline communities, human rights organizations, and ecclesial ecology networks. Also present were the memories of martyrs who gave their lives in defense of the integrity of their lands and people. Among those martyrs—Saint Oscar Romero.

The gathering began each day with a rich interchange of eco-spirituality, with each community sharing rituals and sacred symbols of their land. Then it pivoted to the pressing dangers that the lands face.

The transition to renewal energy motivates the latest phase of a pattern of plunder in the Americas by powerful outside interests dating back to 1492. The extractive model leaves a wake of destroyed lives, communities, traditions, lands, rivers, and entire ecosystems. With the global transition to clean energy, this pillaging of lands – many of them homes to indigenous communities – will likely grow exponentially in the coming years.

Many land defenders are facing threats of jail and assassination. Tutela Legal identified land defenders in El Salvador as among those who are threatened.

At the same time, there have been victories, both large and small. Several communities have been able to block or undo the efforts of powerful international companies to haphazardly mine. These smaller victories have crescendoed with larger ones, including the vote on August 20th in which the Ecuadorian people decided to end fossil fuel drilling in nature reserves.

The encounter concluded with a shared commitment to strengthen the path of peace and care for our common home through the following strategies:

- Elevate the voices of the communities that have been affected by extractive industry.
- Address the collective rights of communities, especially indigenous, Afro-American, mestizo, rural, and urban communities, in national, regional, and international policy meetings.
- Promote public policies that would curb violations committed by governments and corporations and promote national structures in the transnational extractive companies' countries of origins to investigate human rights abuses committed in Latin America, ensuring that the recommendations of such structures are followed.
- Support human rights defenders at risk in Latin America who are confronted by the extractive industry, especially through empowerment, protection, and legal assistance to counteract impunity of high level corporate and corrupt government actors.
- Demand transparency and accountability from governments and transnational extractive companies.
- Demand effective processes of environmental democracy from governments,
- providing legal guarantees for the active and effective participation of rural and urban communities to obtain their free, prior and informed consent to the extractive industry. Respect the figure of popular consultations that allow communities in many countries in the region decide whether they want mining exploration in their territories.
- Promote in governments the need for serious, objective, and independent research, (including at universities) in order to achieve rigorous diagnoses of the real impacts and the planning of society's well-being in the framework of a just energy transition.
- Reject existing concessions located in indigenous territories or protected areas.
- Promote a decrease in the consumption levels; call for a moratorium on concessions, as El Salvador has done in order to plan for a more sustainable environment and respect for the rights of communities.
- Ensure that Free Trade Agreements contribute to the sustainable development of Latin American countries and that the human rights clauses relating to human rights and the environment are respected by having legal guarantees for the demand of rights by the communities.
- Monitor litigation by states against corporations when public health or environmental laws are at risk.
- Support the process for a UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights, for concrete policies for concrete policies with legal accountability for corporations and guarantees for communities.
- Ensure that the member states of the Organization of American States (OAS) comply with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. §

Pope Francis Calls on COP28 to Deliver

Pope Francis wrote in his recent apostolic exhortation Laudate Deum about his concerns for the climate and hopes for action at the UN Climate Change Conference COP28 in Dubai in December.

Pope Francis said he will attend the COP28 UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai, becoming the first pontiff to address such a high-level summit. One month earlier, on Oct. 4, the pope released Laudate Deum, a 13-page follow-up to Laudato Si, teaching about the urgency of the climate crisis and the ways the annual UN conferences need to be more effective.

The following quotes from Laudate Deum insight highlights the pope's concerns and hopes for the climate and COP28.

- **Gravity of the Climate Crisis and Its Effect on People**

Despite all attempts to deny, conceal, gloss over or relativize the issue, the signs of climate change are here No one can ignore the fact that in recent years we have witnessed extreme weather phenomena, frequent periods of unusual heat, drought and other cries of protest on the part of the earth that are only a few palpable expressions of a silent disease that affects everyone. LD5

It is indubitable that the impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and families of many persons..... in the areas of healthcare, sources of employment, access to resources, housing, forced migrations, etc. LD2

- **The World Must Respond with Urgency**

Eight years have passed since I published the Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'.... Yet, with the passage of time, I have realized that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point. LD2

- **The Climate Solution Must Be Global and Multilateral**

The most effective solutions will not come from individual efforts alone, but above all from major political decisions on the national and international level. LD69

.... a multilateralism that is not dependent on changing political conditions or the interests of a certain few. LD35

...a multilateralism "from below" and not simply one determined by the elites of power. LD38

- **Hope for COP28**

If we are confident in the capacity of human beings to transcend their petty interests and to think in bigger terms, we can keep hoping that COP28 will allow for a decisive acceleration of energy transition, with effective commitments subject to ongoing monitoring. This Conference can represent a change of direction, showing that everything done since 1992 was in fact serious and worth the effort. LD54

- **Listen to Grassroot Voices**

The demands that rise up from below throughout the world, where activists from very different countries help and support one another, can end up pressuring the sources of power. It is to be hoped that this will happen with respect to the climate crisis LD38

- **Oversight, Reviews and Penalties are Needed**

The Paris Agreement presents a broad and ambitious objective LD48.

But the accords have been poorly implemented, due to lack of suitable mechanisms for oversight, periodic review and penalties in cases of noncompliance. The principles which they proclaimed still await an efficient and flexible means of practical implementation. LD 52

- **Speed Up the Transition to Clean Energy, Abandon Fossil Fuels**

The transition towards clean energy sources such as wind and solar energy, and the abandonment of fossil fuels, is not progressing at the necessary speed. LD55

If there is sincere interest in making COP28 a historic event that honors and ennobles us as human beings, then one can only hope for binding forms of energy transition that meet three conditions: that they be efficient, obligatory and readily monitored. that it be drastic, intense and count on the commitment of all. ... only in this concrete manner will it be possible to reduce significantly carbon dioxide levels and to prevent even greater evils over time. LD 59

- **The Loss and Damage Fund Must Work**

The effects of climate change are borne by the most vulnerable people, at home or around the world. LD3

[The previous UN climate change conference] marked a step forward in consolidating a system for financing "loss and damage" in countries most affected by climate disasters. Yetmany points remained imprecise, above all the concrete responsibility of the countries that have to contribute. LD50

- **The Powerful Beware**

To the powerful, I can only repeat this question: "What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power, only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so? LD60

We must move beyond the mentality of appearing to be concerned but not having the courage needed to produce substantial changes. LD56 §

Faith in action: sign the faith letter for a comprehensive Loss and Damage Fund at <https://mogc.info/L-D>

Five Takeaways from Laudate Deum

On October 4, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis released Laudate Deum, a follow-up to his landmark encyclical Laudato Si'. Here are some points in Laudate Deum that stood out to us.

- **Climate change is real and caused by human activity.**

Pope Francis first dispels common climate skepticism myths, though as he writes, it is increasingly hard to be a climate change skeptic in good faith. “No one can ignore the fact that in recent years we have witnessed extreme weather phenomena, frequent periods of unusual heat, drought and other cries of protest on the part of the earth.” [5] Pope Francis still makes these clarifications, “which may appear obvious, because of certain dismissive and scarcely reasonable opinions that I encounter, even within the Catholic Church.” [14]

- **Climate change damage is unequally distributed.**

Pope Francis calls climate change “a silent disease that effects everyone.” [5] Lessons from Covid-19 show that disasters affecting humankind reverberate past borders and boundaries. “Everything is connected, and no one is saved alone.” [19] But some will suffer more than others. Experience has shown that it is the poorest people who are least able to equip themselves to weather unusual natural disasters, and the ones most devastated in the wake of calamity. This hardly seems fair given the share in the blame for the climate crisis that the poorest have.

Pope Francis mentions the Loss and Damage Fund as one of the few promising developments of the most recent UN climate conferences: “it was proposed to create a mechanism regarding the loss and damage caused by climate change, which recognizes as those chiefly responsible the richer countries and seeks to compensate for the loss and damage that climate change produces in the more vulnerable countries.” [46]

- **Technocracy is not the answer.**

We in Western nations are guilty of an over-reliance on technology and innovation to solve problems. Pope Francis writes that, while it is worth pursuing carbon capture and sequestration, “we risk remaining trapped in the mindset of pasting and papering over cracks, while beneath the surface there is a continuing deterioration.” [57] Furthermore, we are trapped by our narrow economic thinking to not see and judge the severity of the crisis for what it truly is. He explains, “the mentality of maximum gain at minimal cost, disguised in terms of reasonableness... makes impossible any sincere concern for our common home and any real preoccupation about assisting the poor and the needy discarded by our society.” [31]

Given the evidence of our high emissions relative to

other poorer nations “a broad change in the irresponsible lifestyle connected with the Western model would have a significant long-term impact.” [72] Instead of our current paradigm, “we need to rethink among other things the question of human power, its meaning and its limits.” [28]

- **World cooperation is necessary, but our responses so far have been inadequate.**

Pope Francis writes on the upcoming UN Climate Conference in Dubai, as well as all the previous conferences, which have collectively failed to make the changes needed. He repeats in 2023 what he wrote in 2015: “the accords have been poorly implemented, due to lack of suitable mechanisms for oversight, periodic review and penalties in cases of noncompliance. The principles which they proclaimed still await an efficient and flexible means of practical implementation.” [52]

But while the results have been disappointing, “to say that there is nothing to hope for would be suicidal.” [53] Pope Francis is encouraged by progress from movements that have bypassed the usual UN protocol, specifically naming the Ottawa Process, a treaty negotiation process, as an example of how civil society “is capable of creating effective dynamics that the United Nations cannot.” [37]

- **Humanity is intimately connected with the rest of God’s creation.**

With Laudato Si’ and with Laudate Deum, the common message is our need as a species to right our relationship with nature. Our human activity has already affected plant and animal life: The increase in ocean temperatures and their salinity is damage not likely to be undone for hundreds of years. “This is one of the many signs that the other creatures of this world have stopped being our companions along the way and have become instead our victims.” [15]

Pope Francis lauds the personal responsibility that individuals take on to protect their world, even if they are small fixes in the face of society-wide problems. In one of the final exhortations, Pope Francis writes, “I ask everyone to accompany this pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world... and to help make it more beautiful, because that commitment has to do with our personal dignity and highest values.” [69]

Faith in action:

Read the full exhortation at <https://mogc.info/LaudateDeum> \$

Africa Struggles with Climate and Debt Crises

Unsustainably high debt obligations complicate the African continent's efforts to confront climate change and promote economic and social development.

In recent months, church and political leaders have expressed deep concern over the high foreign debt loads of most African nations and their impact on responding to climate change. In October, just prior to the annual meetings of the World Bank, IMF and G20 in Marrakech, Morocco, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said that successive shocks since 2020 have cost the global economy \$3.7 trillion and that poor countries have been hit the hardest. She added that more than half of low-income countries and one-fifth of emerging economies remain at high risk of debt crisis.

Eric LeCompte, Executive Director of Jubilee USA Network, commented that “at least 60 countries are in debt crisis. World leaders can help solve the debt crisis or continue to do too little, too late.” LeCompte further stated that: “Special Drawing Rights – an emergency currency that the IMF issued in 2021 during the pandemic – played a critical role in addressing the pandemic and rising global poverty. Our world needs more aid like this as soon as possible.”

The IMF called for preemptive debt restructurings in countries with high debt risks. An entire chapter of its financial stability report focused on the role the financial sector should play in meeting climate investment needs. LeCompte stated that developing countries will need \$2 trillion per year by 2030 in climate investments but that most of this will come from private finance with high interest rates. “This means that countries will have higher debt payments that will lead to even more debt crises.”

Church leaders in Africa have also expressed serious concerns about the continent's debt crisis. In August, bishops, priests and Catholic laity with expertise from 11 countries met to discuss the debt crisis and Kenyan Bishop John Oballa of Ngong issued a statement. “Today African countries owe collectively more than \$1.1 trillion in external debt and 25 of them are in a deep debt crisis. (Out of 53 countries in Africa) Debt financing and inordinate interest rates incurred in servicing debt affects social sector spending to achieve development and climate goals.”

The statement also said that Africa owes three times as much to firms in the West than to Chinese firms and that Western firms charge higher interest than those of China.

These leaders recommended solutions, such as reducing or refinancing debt, spreading payments over longer periods, and reducing interest rates on loans. They also called on major lenders to “enact laws that require them

to participate in debt relief.”

In October, corresponding to the IMF-G20 meeting, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) met and noted that, as a result of not only debt but pandemic and Russia's war against Ukraine, there are now over 600 million people in Africa living in poverty and 250 million who go to bed hungry.

The SECAM statement noted that one of the major complexities is the multiplicity of creditors to African nations and that over 45% of debt is owed to private creditors, who charge high interest rates. In addition to what the church leaders called for in August, SECAM added that responsible lending should include debt contract authorization and disclosure safeguards, and debt reduction clauses that trigger automatically when debtor nations suffer national disasters or other shocks. They noted that Africa stands out as the most climate-vulnerable region.

Complementing church statements, the international NGO Action Aid issued a powerful critique of IMF lending practices with its report, “Fifty Years of Failure: The International Monetary Fund, Debt and Austerity in Africa.” The report strongly criticizes IMF persistence in demanding austerity by governments, prioritizing loan repayments over spending on health, education and climate action. It further criticized IMF's myopic focus on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to measure progress, rather than the more illustrative Human Development Index.

Regarding climate action, Action Aid stated: “The suggestion that climate finance from the Global North should be channeled to the Global South in loans, to countries already facing a debt crisis, is absurd and would accelerate the climate crisis. Climate-vulnerable countries in Africa must earn foreign currency quickly, which means in the present global economy investing in fossil fuels and industrial agriculture, even where countries know that a more sustainable path might be found through investing in renewables and agroecology.”

“Rescheduling debt is no longer enough,” Action Aid says. “If the IMF wants to play a constructive role on climate finance, it should be brokering deals for collective debt renegotiation or debt cancellation.”

Action Aid joined with the bishops and the IMF in calling for greater financial assistance from financial institutions which give aid and loans at low rates. §

Committee for Food Security Takes on Inequality

The drastic decline in world food security and nutrition in recent years drives home the urgency of confronting the root cause – inequality. Maryknoll Fr. Ken Thesing reports from the UN in Rome.

The latest State of Food Security and Nutrition (SOFI) report found that in 2022 an estimated 691 to 783 million people worldwide faced hunger, and nearly 3 in 10 people suffered moderate or severe food insecurity. This represents an increase of 122 million people compared to 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the increase in global food insecurity has been fueled by severe shocks—including COVID-19, climate disasters, economic crises and war—the root cause of ongoing lack of access to affordable and nutritious food is inequality. The SOFI report found that more than 3.1 billion people in the world – or 42 percent – were unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021.

If we are to meet the UN targets to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition by 2030, governments must radically commit to tackling inequality. This is the message delivered by the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) before the 51st Session in Rome in October.

The CFS began at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1974 and underwent major reform in 2009. It became an inclusive, participatory body to discuss food and nutrition issues and concerns related to agriculture. A Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) was established through which civil society organizations and movements could participate in formulating and developing food policies and programs.

In growing recognition of the importance and participation of indigenous people around the world the name Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) was changed to Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSIPM). Many Catholic NGOs take part through this mechanism.

To understand the CFS we must recognize their multi-year program of work. New programs and policy documents are developed over a period of years.

For example, work continues on the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition. At the meeting this year, we began a 20th anniversary remembrance of the Voluntary Guidelines for the Right to Food that was endorsed in 2004.

As new issues in world agriculture emerge or develop, they are taken up by member governments, or the civil society mechanism or private sector mechanism or other intergovernmental or international organizations like the

World Food Program to process these issues.

It is a massive amount of material; it is though what FAO is, what CFS does. FAO is a research and knowledge-based organization. The CFS develops policy and program documents related to food security and nutrition brought to it by its members and participants.

I remember when I first went to the FAO Partnership Division to explain our request as a religious organization to be part of the FAO and its work, the question back to me was: What will be your value added to the FAO?

I have come to understand that this question has two parts, or the answer can be understood as implying two parts. The FAO came to understand that its work as a knowledge and technical based organization was not enough to achieve its goal of reducing and eliminating hunger and food insecurity. And so, the reform of the CFS in 2009 was planned and implemented.

The CFS at the FAO became the most inclusive international ongoing forum for universal participation in analyzing food hunger and nutrition security issues and a forum for receiving inclusive and universal input to develop policies to resolve these issues. But the FAO also recognizes that the policies and programs it develops must be implemented at national and local levels. And any policy statement endorsed by the FAO/CFS is voluntary to the national governments. There are no legally binding agreements for governments produced within the FAO/CFS.

But there is the moral force of the voice of individual and collective countries. That is perhaps where Maryknoll missionaries enter, as advocates on the ground so to speak. Our 'value added' is often what we do at the local level, and at intermediate and national levels to influence government officials and humanitarian assistance programs, to implement programs 'as if people mattered' for they do.

The legal Right to Food is a right of every person. Let us use our influence to see that governments listen to their people and agree to implement effective programs domestically that reflect what they have endorsed at the FAO/CFS. One speaker at the 51st Session of the CFS quoted Nelson Mandela as he spoke of the data and knowledge required in food and nutrition systems: 'Inequality is the defining human rights issue of our time.' §

Courts and Congress Imperil Dreamers

Undocumented youth in the United States remain in legal limbo as courts argue the DACA program's legality.

On Sept 13, U.S. Judge Andrew Hanen of the Southern District of Texas decided that the Biden administration's attempt to reinstate and "fortify" the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program was unlawful, bringing the 580,000 people in the program, known as "dreamers," a step closer to deportation. While the court maintained a partial stay, not yet revoking the benefits assured those who received their Deferred Action prior to July 16, 2021, new applications for DACA still cannot be processed and DACA recipients remain vulnerable to political and legal threats.

President Obama established DACA by executive order in 2012 to protect from deportation nearly a million undocumented youth who arrived in the United States before their 16th birthday. It also allows DACA recipients to legally obtain social security numbers, driver's licenses, and work authorizations.

The executive order was modeled after the DREAM Act, a bipartisan bill first introduced in 2001 that never passed due to decades of congressional disfunction. DACA had many of the same features of the DREAM act except a pathway to citizenship that only Congress has the power to provide. Undocumented youth who arrived as children and meet the stringent criteria outlined in both the DACA order and DREAM Act are often referred to as "dreamers" because of the DREAM act.

DACA has been challenged since its inception. President Trump repeatedly tried to dismantle it. In 2017, his administration halted new applications until Judge Nicholas Garaufis of the US District Court in Brooklyn, New York, ruled in December 2020 that the administration had to allow first-time applications.

Six months later, however, Judge Hanen of Texas ruled that DACA was unlawful and had been since 2012. The court stayed the worst effects of ending the program by allowing people with DACA already to continue renewing their protections. Now, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is permitted to accept new DACA applications but not to grant applications, leaving applicants in limbo.

On August 24, 2022, the Biden administration appealed for a "final rule" on DACA in an attempt to "fortify and reinstate" DACA by moving the policy through a more rigorous policy process, including rounds of review and public comment. The aim was to address the legal deficiencies from the 2012 version of DACA that was ruled unlawful. It was this "final rule" by the Biden administration that

Judge Hanen rejected this past September.

Since its inception in 2012, DACA has allowed over 500,000 young people to remain in the only country many of them have ever known. Most dreamers arrived on U.S. soil before the age of ten. To qualify, applicants must have arrived in the U.S. before the age of 16; have lived continuously in the U.S. for at least five years; be in school, have a high school degree, GED, or honorable discharge from coast guard or armed forces; and no felony convictions or more than three misdemeanors of any kind. DACA recipients work in various public and private sectors and contribute to the US's development and economic growth.

The Biden administration will likely appeal Judge Hanen's ruling, but until the decision is overturned, DACA recipients remain in a precarious legal situation. One dreamer from Fort Worth Texas, Itzayana Aguirre, told Kera news in north Texas, "I grew up here. I want to live here. My family's here. I bought a house here. I'm investing in staying in this country, but it's almost like they don't want me here, and it's difficult to deal with that."

A true solution to the legal mire undocumented youth find themselves in would be the passage of a law. Senators Dick Durbin of Illinois and Lindsay Graham of South Carolina introduced the Dream Act of 2023, which would give dreamers the chance to receive lawful permanent resident status. However, its passage in the House of Representatives seems far from certain.

According to a February 2022 poll, almost 80% of registered U.S. voters would support bipartisan immigration reform that strengthens border security, creates a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who arrived in the US as children, and ensures a legal, reliable workforce for America.

Senator Durbin says, "Dreamers are teachers, nurses, and small business owners in our communities, but because DACA hangs by a thread in the courts, they live in constant fear of deportation. It is clear that only Congress can give them the stability they deserve. Therefore, we call on Congress to do right with DACA." §

Faith in Action: Tell Congress to protect dreamers by passing the DREAM Act of 2023 <https://mogc.info/DREAMERS2023>

Venezuelans in 'Paradox of Broken Immigration System'

New U.S. immigration policies protect some Venezuelans in the United States, and deportation for others.

Bishop Mark Seitz Of El Paso, chair of the USCCB Committee on Migration, posted two statements on the social media platform X (formerly called Twitter), on Oct. 6 on the news that the Biden Administration will resume deportations to Venezuela.

"In solidarity with our Venezuelan brothers and sisters," Bishop Seitz said, "we pray for bold action that promotes the right to life and integral human development throughout our hemisphere, relying not on failed policies of the past but forward-looking solutions that advance the common good."

The bishop went on in a second post: "US plans to deport Venezuelans? When our government acknowledges the exceedingly dangerous conditions in a country such as Venezuela and less than three weeks later begins forcibly returning people to that country, we bear witness to the paradox of our broken immigration system."

The news of more deportations of Venezuelans came just weeks after the Biden administration extended and redesignated Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for some people in the United States from Venezuela, Afghanistan, and Cameroon. While this will provide over 500,000 people with protection from deportation as well as the ability to work and support their families, it is not a permanent protection and does not address the backlog and red tape that has nearly paralyzed the U.S. asylum system.

About 472,000 Venezuelans in the United States on or before July 31 now will be eligible for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for a period of 18 months. Some 243,000 Venezuelans already have the status stemming from a 2021 designation that was renewed last year.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said the expansion of protected status for Venezuelans was warranted due to "Venezuela's increased instability and lack of safety."

The people of Venezuela have experienced unprecedented turmoil in recent years – economic and political crises, hunger and persecution. Expanding temporary protection from deportation for Venezuelans is a positive shift for Venezuelans who have sought peace, security, and stability in the United States while the country they know as home undergoes the largest displacement crisis in the world.

Approximately 50,000 Venezuelans crossed the U.S.-Mexico border without documents in the month of September, a record and once-unthinkable number, according to Department of Homeland Security statistics.

Deportation flights for Venezuelans who arrived since July 31 resumed on Oct. 18 with a first plane of more than 100 migrants landing back in their economically troubled country. This is the first time in years that U.S. immigration authorities are deporting people to Venezuela, marking a significant concession by the government of Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro to the United States, a longtime adversary.

The Biden administration said it plans to have multiple deportation flights a week to Venezuela, which would place Venezuela among the top international destinations for U.S. immigration authorities. An official from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), said those who were prioritized for the deportation include undocumented Venezuelans who recently arrived as well as those who have committed crimes.

The first flight occurred the day after the Venezuelan government and opposition parties agreed to work on electoral conditions, which triggered the United States to announce some sanctions relief on Venezuela's oil, gas and gold mining sectors. According to the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the agreement is partial but represents an important first step towards a democratic solution to the Venezuelan crisis.

"A route with greater electoral guarantees for the 2024 presidential elections is one of the most notable achievements of the agreements," said Carolina Jiménez, the president of WOLA.

The agreement includes the holding of presidential elections in the second half of 2024, and the participation of candidates in official media and international observation. Even if support for these agreements weakens in the few months, Jiménez sees them as "very important issues" that offer hope for the "re-democratization of a country that, at this moment and for many years, lives under a government characterized by its authoritarianism." §



I Surrender: A Memoir of Chile's Dictatorship

Orbis Books publishes firsthand account of two years in the repressive dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet for the fiftieth anniversary of Chile's coup.

Kathleen M. Osberger's book, *I Surrender: A Memoir of Chile's Dictatorship, 1975* tells of her time as a lay volunteer in Chile immediately following the military coup of General Augusto Pinochet. As a recent college graduate, she volunteered to work as a teacher in a Maryknoll Sister's elementary school. By her account, it was immediately apparent to her that Chile's political situation would not allow for the as not normal, and her time there would not be un. On her first day she learned that the Catholic sisters in her community were hiding political targets of the Chilean secret police.

Many thousands of people were killed under Pinochet's regime. According to the Rettig Commission, 2,279 were executed, most of them disappearing without explanation. The number of tortured is much higher, standing at 40,000. Many of these operations would be carried out by the Directorate of National Intelligence (DINA), General Pinochet's secret police.

Osberger's time among Catholic priests and sisters who would protect the lives of those targeted by the Pinochet regime would bring her face to face and interrogated by one Michael Townley, an American citizen and Chilean agent who ran the DINA's operations. Townley would later be convicted by U.S. Courts for the murders of Orlando

Letelier, former Chilean ambassador to the United States, and Ronni Karpen Moffitt, a Washington intern, who were bombed in a car on the streets of Washington, DC. Townley evaded sentences for the assassination attempt in Rome and in Argentina, and for all the deaths perpetrated under his direction on Chile.

Osberger was able to receive personal protection from the U.S. Embassy, but then-president Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger's policy toward General Pinochet was friendly. One measure of the hand that United States policy had in the dictatorship was the education of secret police on U.S. soil. One out of every seven higher-level DINA officials was a graduate of the School of the Americas, the U.S. combat training school for Latin American soldiers and police. Victims of Pinochet's regime would be tortured in methods outlined in manuals and teaching material originating from the United States.

The title of Osberger's book comes from the moment of her encounter with Townley when she did not believe she would make it out alive. In that moment, she describes a peace that overcame her, knowing that her surrender to the will of God made any outcome bearable. §

Faith in action: Order a copy from Orbis Books at <https://mogc.info/i-surrender>

Advent Reflection Guide: Preparing the Way

Download the 10-page guide produced by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. The guide offers reflections, small group questions, prayers, and actions based on each week's Gospel reading and concerns raised by Maryknoll missionaries and affiliates who attend to the needs of migrants and refugees around the world.

Find the guide on our website at
<https://mogc.info/Advent2023>

"Like never before, the gospel speaks to us of our role in preparing the way for the coming of Emmanuel, God with us. We need to speak out in truth and justice to those who would receive the Lord; those who will receive the migrants. We need to renew our baptismal promises to work always for a better world where everyone is welcomed, and all are recognized as God's people. Mary and Joseph started on the path and prepared the way for the birth of their Son, the chosen one. Their legacy lives on in all the migrants who leave their homeland and struggle to make the path straight for their children and grandchildren. Let us all join the migrants in spirit; let us comfort them as they look for their new heaven on this earth."

-Sister Dee Smith, MM

Resources

1. **Webinar on the Middle East Conflict**, featuring Lauren Draper of Churches for Middle East Peace. Hosted by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. **Nov. 6 at 11AM ET.** <https://mogc.info/CMEP11-6-23>
2. **Webinar: Israel-Palestine - Recent Developments, Difficulties Ahead**, hosted by Churches for Middle East Peace, **Nov. 15 at 4PM ET.** Register at <https://mogc.info/GU-MEP>
3. **Webinar: HOPE Away from Home in South Sudan** featuring Maryknoll Frs Mike Bassano, Tom Tiscornia and Dave Schwinghamer. Hosted by Friends in Solidarity with South Sudan. **Nov. 16 at 7PM ET** Register at <https://mogc.info/HOPE-Sudan>
4. **Webinar: Migration** from Pax Christi New York via zoom on the state of migration **Nov. 8, 7PM ET.** Contact nypaxchristi@gmail.com
5. **Webinar: Haiti** from the Justice Coalition of Religious featuring Nixon Boumba, on Haiti's current crisis and historical context on **Nov. 8, 1:30PM ET.** Register at <https://mogc.info/JCoR-Haiti>
6. **Statement on Violence in the Holy Land** by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) made on Oct. 8. <https://mogc.info/USCCB-MEP>
7. **Follow Sabeel** the ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians at <https://sabeel.org/>
8. **Advent Reflection Guide: Preparing the Way** by Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. Download the migration-focused guide for Advent beginning on **Dec. 3 through Dec. 24** <https://mogc.info/Advent2023>
9. **Two pager: COP28 UAE** by Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. Download the explainer for the UN Climate Conference going from, **Nov. 30 through Dec.12.** <https://mogc.info/COP28-2page>
10. **Recording: Encuentro de Comunidades en Resistencia Frente al Extractivismo** by Pax Christi International Latin America and Caribbean held Aug. 25 in Panama. <https://mogc.info/PC-LAC-Encuentro>
11. **Prayers on the Care for Creation** by the USCCB. <https://mogc.info/USCCB-CC>
12. **World AIDS Day Prayer Vigil:** Sign up for one hour of prayer on **Dec. 1** for all people impacted by HIV and AIDS. <https://mogc.info/WorldAIDSDay>
13. **Action: Ask Pres. Biden not to build a wall** and instead invest in immigration services at the border that protect the right to asylum and keep families together. Action by the Latin American Working Group. <https://mogc.info/LAWG-border-wall>
14. **Action: Sign a letter to Pres. Biden** asking for bold and just climate action at COP28, sponsored by Interfaith Power and Light. <https://mogc.info/IPL-COP28>
15. **COP 28 Position statements** by SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) on biodiversity, energy, and Laudate Deum. <https://mogc.info/SECAM-COP28>
16. **Statement: "Hands off Africa! Stop choking Africa: it is not a mine to be stripped or a terrain to be plundered!"** by Catholic groups AEFJN, AFSA, ESAFF, and SECAM <https://mogc.info/HandsOffAfrica>
17. **Wholemakers:** curriculum by Catholic Climate Covenant and Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers for young adults. <https://mogc.info/Wholemakers>
18. **Guidebook: on U.S. trade justice** "Turning The Tide: How To Harness the Americas Partnership For Economic Prosperity To Deliver An ISDS-Free Americas" produced by Rethink Trade, Columbia and Georgetown Law Schools <https://mogc.info/ISDS>
19. **Maryknoll Immersion Trips:** for 2024, journey to see the sites where Maryknoll missionaries are stationed, including Taiwan (**May 22-30**), Guatemala (**July 9-17**), and Bolivia (**Nov. 5-18**). Learn more and apply at <https://mogc.info/MM-immersion>
20. **Maryknoll Lay Missioners Webinar** Join Maryknoll Lay Missioners on **Nov. 15 at 7PM ET** or **Dec. 15 at 10AM ET** and discern if mission is right for you. <https://mogc.info/MKLM-Webinars>
21. **Maryknoll Missioners Webinars:** See recently recorded webinars from Maryknoll missioners, including most recently "Mission and Ministry in South America" and "The Season of Creation" and keep an eye out for future webinars <https://www.maryknoll.us/Resources/webinars>