



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

# NewsNotes

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

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## No longer slaves, but brothers and sisters

*Pope Francis' address for the World Day of Peace, January 1, was a strong condemnation of the various systems of slavery that deny our shared humanity. Following are excerpts; read the entire piece on the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns' website:*

“Today, as the result of a growth in our awareness, slavery, seen as a crime against humanity, has been formally abolished throughout the world. The right of each person not to be kept in a state of slavery or servitude has been recognized in international law as inviolable.

“Yet, even though the international community has adopted numerous agreements aimed at ending slavery in all its forms, and has launched various strategies to combat this phenomenon, millions of people today ... are deprived of freedom and are forced to live in conditions akin to slavery.” He mentions laborers who lack protection – men, women, children, in domestic, agricultural, manufacturing or mining industries, in all nations – and migrants who face grueling journeys at the very least, sex slaves, forced soldiers, and those kidnapped by terrorists, to name just a few.

The pope lists causes for modern slavery, the first being poverty, underdevelopment and exclusion, especially when combined with a lack of access to education or scarce employment opportunities. Second is corruption. “Slave labor and human trafficking often require the complicity of intermediaries, be they law enforcement personnel, state officials, or civil and military institutions.” The final ones he cites are armed conflicts, violence, criminal activity and terrorism.

Pope Francis then raises up the “enormous and often silent efforts which have been made for many years by religious congregations, especially women’s congregations, to provide support to victims. These institutes work in very difficult situations, dominated at times by violence, as they work to break the invisible chains binding victims to traffickers and exploiters.”

This work cannot be limited to religious congregations, he writes. “There is also need for a ... commitment on the institutional level: to prevention, to victim protection and to the legal prosecution of perpetrators. Moreover, since criminal organizations employ global networks to achieve their goals, efforts to eliminate this phenomenon also demand a common and, indeed, a global effort on the part of various sectors of society.

“States must ensure that their own legislation truly respects the dignity of the human person in the areas of migration, employment, adoption, the movement of

businesses offshore and the sale of items produced by slave labor. There is a need for just laws which are centered on the human person, uphold fundamental rights and restore those rights when they have been violated. Such laws should also provide for the rehabilitation of victims, ensure their personal safety, and include effective means of enforcement which leave no room for corruption or impunity. The role of women in society must also be recognized, not least through initiatives in the sectors of culture and social communications.”

He also notes that intergovernmental organizations must “coordinate initiatives for combating the transnational networks of organized crime which oversee the trafficking of persons and the illegal trafficking of migrants. Cooperation is clearly needed at a number of levels, involving national and international institutions, agencies of civil society and the world of finance.

“Businesses have a duty to ensure dignified working conditions and adequate salaries for their employees, but they must also be vigilant that forms of subjugation or human trafficking do not find their way into the distribution chain. Together with the social responsibility of businesses, there is also the social responsibility of consumers. Every person ought to have the awareness that ‘purchasing is always a moral – and not simply an economic – act.’”

Toward the end of his statement, the pope reminds us of Sudan’s Josephine Bakhita, who was kidnapped and sold into slavery sometime between the age of seven to nine, probably in February 1877. She is “an exemplary witness of hope for the many victims of slavery; she can support the efforts of all those committed to fighting against this ‘open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ.’”

“We know that God will ask each of us: What did you do for your brother?” he writes at the conclusion of the statement. “The globalization of indifference, which today burdens the lives of so many of our brothers and sisters, requires all of us to forge a new worldwide solidarity and fraternity capable of giving them new hope and helping them to advance with courage amid the problems of our time and the new horizons which they disclose and which God places in our hands.”

### **Faith in action:**

Find resources on modern slavery at the Stop Trafficking! website, [www.stopenslavement.org](http://www.stopenslavement.org). Stop Trafficking! is supported by national and international congregations of women religious, including Maryknoll.

## Africa: Military spending increases while wars decline

*Two seemingly contradictory trends have emerged in the security situation of several African nations: an increase in military spending and a decline in civil warfare.*

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) the total amount spent by African nations on military budgets increased 8.3 percent on average from 2012 to 2013, and by 81 percent between 2004-2013. Currently the total military spending for the continent is around \$44.9 billion. Over two-thirds of the African countries for which data is available increased military spending in 2013. Arms merchants and a surprisingly large number of foreign nations have found a lucrative market for both old military hardware like Ukrainian tanks and new high-tech weapons like drones. Between 2006-2010 at least 28 different nations exported weapons to Africa including the usual arms suppliers like China, the U.S., Russia and Ukraine as well as newcomers like Singapore, Slovakia and the Philippines.

Yet, the incidences of large-scale political violence in Africa are thought to be declining in both frequency and intensity during 2000s. (Two theories about the decline include the cutback in funding for proxy wars after the end of the Cold War and the new opportunities for obtaining power and wealth that came with democratization.)

Compared to the 1990s, sub-Saharan Africa has seen about one third fewer wars. Up to the end of the 1990s many armed conflicts involved armies holding territory and fighting for control of the state, such as the liberation wars in southern Africa and the North-South war in Sudan. Today's conflicts are small-scale (except for South Sudan) and often involve rebel or insurgent groups such as Seleka in the Central African Republic, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, Al Shabaab in Somalia, and Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. These groups often move across borders and get funding from illegal and criminal trading activities or from banditry and through international terrorists networks.

Some of the reasons for increase military expenditure programs by some African countries, according to Dr. Sam Perlo-Freeman, director of SIPRI's military expenditure program, are the response to genuine security needs arising from insurgent and rebel groups and the rise of piracy. But he also notes that economic growth, the dominance of autocratic regimes, and emerging regional arms races may also lead to increased expenditures on

arms. Indeed, high prices for Africa's commodities have led to increased revenues for several African nations, particularly those exporting oil. In its 2014 report, the African Development Bank group states that "after decades of relative stagnation, Africa has shown a steady upward improvement in performance in the past decade and a half. Average growth has been about five percent, while the value of intra-African trade has increased fourfold over the last decade to reach US\$130 billion." Increasing military expenditures may also be due to the joint projects with outside armament manufactures like Antonov in Sudan and Eurocopter in Kenya.

As the security agenda has become a major challenge to statehood in Africa, the U.S. Department of Defense has taken a greater role in directing U.S. foreign policy. In a recent speech at West Point, President Obama promised to add another \$5 billion to worldwide counterterrorism partnerships. No doubt some of this money will go to military support programs in Africa; in some places the U.S. outsources its security needs to local African armies.

While military spending is increasing and the number of wars is decreasing, most of the countries in Africa are actually at peace. However, African nations and continental organizations like the Africa Union are alarmed by the spread of insurgencies and violent non-state actors such as Al Shabaab, Seleka, M23, the White Army, anti-Balaka, Boko Haram, and the LRA. These groups cause conflicts that are typically smaller in scale and most often involve insurgencies of factionalized rebels on the peripheries of states rather than large armed forces. These conflicts also play out differently. They exhibit cross-border dimensions and depend on illicit trade, banditry, and international terrorist networks for funding and support.

These factionalized rebels, pirates and other violent groups are thought to be increasingly better armed and are developing the ability to disrupt and destroy order more quickly than states, even large ones like Nigeria, are able to defend their territory. However in most countries – not only in Africa but around the world – the insecurity of ordinary citizens stems not only from the activities of criminal groups but from the lack of sustainable development and inclusive and participative political systems. In 2015 the UN will attempt to address some of these underlying causes of the lack of human security and the role military expenditures play in fostering or deterring development through its work on the Sustainable Development Goals.

## Tanzania: Attempts to end FGM

*December means different rituals for different folks all around the world. It is holiday time for those celebrating Christmas, Kwanzaa and Hanukkah. Lay missionary Liz Mach writes about her work in Tanzania, where the holiday time also means the closing of schools and the return home of girls in order to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM).*

The roads of northern Tanzania are filled with dancing and celebrations in December as young men and women are escorted to the “cutter” to undergo circumcisions/mutilations that will mark their passage into adulthood. Fifteen percent of Tanzania practices this harmful tradition which impairs the reproductive, sexual and psychosocial lives of girls. Worldwide, three million girls are at risk yearly to undergo this practice.

FGM falls under the umbrella of gender-based violence (GBV), a human rights abuse against girls which impedes a society’s efforts to end poverty and promote gender equality. FGM is the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury of the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It can be done for social, religious, cultural and aesthetic reasons and has a direct effect on the reproductive health of a woman for her lifetime.

The initial mutilation could lead to numerous health consequences including bleeding, shock, urinary retention, infection and damaged organs. Research done by the World Health Organization (WHO) and published in the Lancet in 2006 show that women who have undergone FGM are significantly more likely to experience difficulty during labor and delivery, including increased

need for Caesarean sections, postpartum hemorrhage, episiotomy, need for resuscitation of the infant and perinatal death than women who have not had FGM. At the same time, most of the women who have undergone FGM live in areas without adequate infrastructure for safe deliveries, and those deliveries are much more serious with long term health consequences.

In our area, Tanzania’s Mara region, FGM is seen as a cultural rite of passage which the girl child moves through to become an adult and therefore eligible for marriage. According to Tanzania’s Law of Marriage Act, revised in 2002, a girl is considered to be legally of age for marriage at 15 years. Many forms of domestic violence, including FGM, are not defined in this act. The Sexual Offence and Special Provisions Act of 2008 protects girls who are under 18 from FGM, though this law is not often enforced due to fear, lack of legal education and cultural priorities.

Early marriages and early pregnancies often are direct correlations to lack of education and lifelong poverty. This cycle is difficult to break when it is woven into the societal life of a female. Failure to undergo the ritual cutting hampers both the family and the girl as it is possible that she will not be able to be married within the cultural boundaries. At the same time, the cutting opens her to physical damage and violence which will affect her throughout her lifetime. The bottom line is the violation of the human rights of the girl as defined by the World Health Assembly which passed a resolution (WHA61:16) on the elimination of FGM, emphasizing the need for concerted action in all sections – health, education, finance, justice and women’s affairs.

Currently here in the Diocese of Musoma we have two “rescue areas.” One is a camp up in the area where much of the cutting is being done; more than 600 girls are there under armed protection for the month of December. The other area is a year-round shelter built for the safety of any girl escaping from FGM and all forms of gender-based violence, as the first basic need when a girl escapes from probable FGM is to find protected shelter. Through a USAID program, a team within the local police have been specially trained to respond to issues of GBV; often those team

National political leaders, church leaders and UN representatives attended the graduation ceremony and closing of the 2014 Rescue Camp to end Female Genital Mutilation. Photo by Liz Mach.



members are the ones to bring girls to our site, where we provide a networking plan and provisions for safety to protect the girl from further abuse.

We have begun training the catechists in the diocese to recognize GBV and the role it plays within cul-

tural activities. This multitasked approach might be our way to make a cultural change which will bring greater gender equity in an area where the 21st century clashes with traditional norms from long ago.

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## South Sudan: A step towards peace

*A year has passed since South Sudan's government collapsed and Africa's newest nation descended into civil war. As 2015 dawns, many international observers wonder whether it is even possible to resolve the current political and humanitarian crises. Some South Sudanese, however, believe the long journey to peace and reconciliation has already begun. Over the next two years the Committee for National Healing, Peace and Reconciliation (CNHPR) will facilitate a nationwide consultation process at the grassroots level to insure that South Sudan's future is driven and shaped by the rich experiences, knowledge and needs of its own citizens. CNHPR will be joined in these efforts by the South Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission (SSPRC) and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Peace and Reconciliation.*

Since the political crisis that erupted in the capitol of Juba on December 15, 2013, these and other organizations have been working in close collaboration to create an environment for dialogue, peacebuilding and reconciliation throughout this nation of 11.3 million people; in early 2014, with that aim in mind, they created the National Platform for Peace and Reconciliation (NPPR).

In October 2014, CNHPR hosted an intensive four-week training program entitled "A Step Together: Shared Journeys of Listening and Dialogue," which gathered more than 80 community and faith-based practitioners from the 10 states of South Sudan to share their knowledge and experiences. The participants learned concrete skills as well as theories and approaches to reconciliation. The workshops were facilitated by South Africa's Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), with support from several international agencies including Catholic Relief Services. At the program's graduation ceremony, Rev. Bernard Oliya Suwa, Secretary General of CNHPR, outlined both the accomplishments of the project and its plan of action for the next few years. He noted that the participants came with a common experience: the dehumanizing effects of the wars, whether recent or earlier ones. The ultimate goal of reconciliation,

he stressed, is the daunting task of restoring the "humaneness" of all people throughout the country.

Rev. Suwa told the participants that the step they had taken was the beginning of a process that demonstrated how South Sudanese people of various ethnic backgrounds can live together peacefully. Such an accomplishment was an attempt to find common ground, or as he put it, to dig a common grave where all hatred, anger, bitterness, suspicions, prejudices and mistrust could be buried. The next step is to move the program to the various states of South Sudan and to train at least 50 peace mobilizers in each state, who will then engage with the grassroots communities in the 86 counties that make up South Sudan. By 2016 South Sudan hopes to hold a National Conference for Peace and Reconciliation that will build consensus for an agenda for peace and reconciliation.

In challenging the newly trained peace mobilizers to look ahead, Rev. Suwa called on them to take off their "dark glasses" and to put on "new glasses" that would result in a new worldview that would view people from other ethnic groups not as poisonous thorns in their flesh but as human beings created in the image of God.

These exhortations by a South Sudanese religious leader are in stark contrast to the assessment of South Sudan's situation given during a recent panel discussion at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. In the view of U.S. government officials, humanitarian experts and specialists in conflict analysis, South Sudan continues to face massive displacement, war, the thread of a major food crisis that is not weather related, endemic corruption and a leadership struggle over the spoils of the state.

All these factors underscore the need for a rapid political solution to the current crisis but as the rainy season ends, conflicts are resuming on the regional, national and local levels. It is not clear whether the international community now has the resources to stop the humanitarian food crisis in South Sudan because the global demand for such assistance is growing rapidly due to the Iraq crises and the Ebola outbreak.

## Middle East: Inclusive political strategy to counter ISIS

*The following analysis is excerpted from Syria and Iraq Alert II, a recent analysis by PAX, the Pax Christi International member organization in the Netherlands. The full document is available at <http://www.paxforpeace.nl/our-work/regions/middle-east/publications>.*

A response to ISIS must be inclusive in character, with a long-term objective of legitimate and responsive governments in Iraq and Syria. Years of repression and marginalization fed into the population's frustration and resentment, particularly among younger generations. In Syria as well as Iraq, the government that is supposed to protect its citizens against massive human rights violations and war crimes has proven to be one of the worst threats to their human security. This contributed to the radicalization that gave rise to ISIS in Iraq. The expansion of ISIS has further deepened sectarian polarization in the region with Shia actors connected to Iran at one extreme and different Sunni groups with various levels of radical character at the other. This divide dominates the political situation in Iraq and Syria, and also strongly affects the political situation in neighboring countries, particularly Lebanon.

The new Iraqi government has the duty to rebuild the trust of the Iraqi population and address many of the root causes of the current crisis by developing truly inclusive policies. PAX proposes that countries involved in the coalition against ISIS which are supporting the new Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) develop benchmarks in dialogue with the GoI and the KRG towards a more inclusive political system as conditions for further support for and cooperation with the GoI and KRG.

In Syria, ISIS could fill the power vacuum left by the erosion of the Assad regime in many parts of the country, but, unlike in Iraq, was not able to achieve a strong support base in the country. Establishing inclusive and participatory governance at the local and national levels will be the best strategy for preventing radical groups such as ISIS from taking further ground there. That also means that a political transition process needs to be established to move from the politically-exclusive Assad regime that is responsible for numerous war crimes to an alternative that is politically inclusive of all groups marginalized because of religion, ethnicity, gender etc. and geographically representative (including of the marginalized rural areas).

The proposal of UN Special Envoy Staffan De Mistura to establish a "freeze" of fighting in Aleppo to start

with provides an opportunity to develop democratic and participatory local governance, which makes communities more resilient against radical groups. De Mistura stated that a freeze in fighting should be supplemented by a revival of local governance and administration and that they could be test areas for decentralization. If a freeze in fighting in Aleppo would be accompanied by international support to develop democratic and participatory local governance in Aleppo, it could become an example for other parts of the country.

**Political inclusivity and participation** – In Iraq, initial political inclusivity efforts have been made by Prime Minister Abadi, who established a coalition government with participation of political factions representing the three main majority groups: the Sunnis, the Shia and the Kurds. However, true inclusivity also extends to minority participation and the participation of women and other marginalized groups. These groups, the most fragile in Iraqi society, bear the brunt of violations in the crisis and are currently underrepresented.

Regarding Syria, the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC), which is until today the only political body on a national level with a wide representation, has made efforts to be an inclusive political representative body for the Syrian people, but has not yet succeeded in that. Representation of minority groups such as Christians is dependent on their political allegiance to certain political currents or foreign supporters rather than on an inclusive national agenda. The SOC has not been able to address seriously Kurdish rights. Women's representation in the SOC is minimal. The establishment of the Temporary Government provides an opportunity to develop a democratic political body that applies inclusive policies and facilitates participation, but this will require international support and a system of benchmarks for inclusive governance.

**Legal reform and inclusivity** – Inclusivity should be a hallmark of legal frameworks that foster citizen rights and equal participation in the Iraqi and Syrian political and administrative systems. Legal systems should grant equal rights to all citizens regardless of religion, ethnicity or gender.

**Security sector reform (SSR) and inclusivity** – An inclusive national army and police force that protect all citizens is a condition for peace and should be one of the top priorities for the international community for its work in Iraq. One of the major causes of the current crisis in Iraq is the lack of equal representation of all groups in the security sector, in particular at decision-

making levels. For Syria, SSR on a national level would be an important issue for a later stage, as the international community has no control and little leverage over the various armed groups, including foreign fighters on the different sides of the conflict. If countries deliver arms and provide military support to the Free Syrian Army, this should be done only under strict conditions. On a local level, local governance development should include

an SSR process of transforming armed groups into police and civil defense under civil control.

**Social policies and inclusivity** – The deep roots of the current conflicts reside in cultural and social structures that enable sectarian discrimination and exclusion of groups and individuals on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender and age.

## Middle East: Palestine pushes ahead

*In what some describe as a desperate move, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority pushed a UN Security Council (UNSC) vote on December 30 on a resolution that would have put in place deadlines for a negotiated peace agreement with Israel within one year and the removal of all Israeli occupying forces from Palestinian territory by 2017.*

The draft resolution introduced by Jordan on behalf of Palestine and supported by all 22 Arab states was defeated in the UNSC with eight votes in favor, two against, and five abstentions. Unsurprisingly, the U.S. was one of two votes against the resolution and Secretary of State John Kerry was instrumental in the defeat, reportedly making 13 phone calls to member countries prior to the vote asking for negative votes or abstentions. It is assumed that if the resolution had passed, the U.S. would have exercised its veto power as a permanent member of the UNSC to defeat the resolution anyway, though at a time when the U.S. is relying heavily on its Middle East coalition to combat the self-proclaimed “Islamic State” in Iraq and Syria, the veto could have caused a rift. Fortunately for Secretary Kerry and the U.S., this was unnecessary as Nigeria decided in the final hour to abstain after President Goodluck Jonathan received personal calls from Secretary Kerry and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Although the U.S. has also repeatedly called for a negotiated settlement that would include a sovereign state of Palestine, their position on the resolution is that a “return to the [negotiating] table” is the solution, not “unilateral action.”

President Abbas has been promising to introduce this Palestinian statehood resolution to the Security Council for months, after U.S.-mediated negotiations

with Israel broke down last spring followed by Israel’s military action “Operation Protective Edge” in Gaza which left over 2,100 Palestinians and 73 Israelis dead over the summer. In November Abbas told a Churches for Middle East Peace delegation that he was waiting for Secretary Kerry to return his calls – he was ready to return to the negotiating table with Israel as soon as the opportunity arose – but he also made clear that in the absence of peace talks the Palestinian government had every intention of moving forward on their own towards independence from Israeli occupation.

The day after the defeat of the UNSC resolution Abbas followed through with another promise and ratified 20 international agreements including the Rome Statute of 2002, the governing document of the International Criminal Court, with the intention of joining the ICC. The U.S. claims that Palestine

cannot become part of the ICC because it is not a state, but UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has already announced that Palestine would officially become an ICC member as of April 1. As a member, Palestine will be able to refer cases of crimes against humanity and international war crimes to the court for investigation and has already submitted evidence against Israel as of January 2. Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat reports that the documents pertain to events in Gaza in 2014, illegal settlement expansion in the West Bank, as well as Palestinian land seized during the 1967 war that remains under Israeli control.

Israel’s ambassador to the UN was not present in New York for the UNSC vote. Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman called the resolution a “Palestinian gimmick” and an “act of aggression,” in which the “sole aim is to attack Israel, with no benefit for the Palestinians.” Netanyahu called a meeting following the vote where it was decided that the Israeli government would with-



**Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas** (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 generic license)

hold a deposit to the Palestinian government of 500 million shekels (over \$125 million) of tax revenue collected on behalf of Palestine. While the loss of much-needed funds could be extremely detrimental to the Palestinian Authority, Abbas will not be deterred: “Now there are sanctions – that’s fine. There’s an escalation – that’s fine ... but we’re pushing forward.” Palestine’s chief negotiator Saeb Erekat elaborated: “If Israel thinks that through economic pressure it will succeed in diverting our approach to freedom and independence, then it is wrong,” Erekat said. “This money is not Israeli charity to the Palestinian people... This is the money of the Palestinian people and Israel is not a donor country.” Israeli Minister of Energy and Water Silvan Shalom suggested that Palestinian tax funds should be used to repay debt owed by Palestinians for past due electricity bills, since currently 95 percent of electricity in the West Bank and 75 percent in Gaza comes from Israel. Israel’s ability to withhold Palestinian tax revenue and control over Palestine’s utilities such as electricity are part of ongoing aggravations of the occupation that spurred the Palestinian Authority to make their case to the international community rather than continue to wait for Secretary Kerry’s phone call.

While U.S. Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power called the Palestinians’ statehood resolution “deeply unbalanced” and “set[ting] the stage for more division, not for compromise,” it is clear to the majority of the international community where the imbalance lies in the situation with Israel and Palestine. Dozens of UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions have passed using strong language condemning Israel’s continued violations of human rights against the Palestinian people. Five resolutions were passed on November 25 by the

UNGA, including Resolution 69/23 (with a vote of 147-7-9), which “stresses the need for the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem.” An additional eight resolutions related to the Palestine situation were passed on December 5, which included unequivocal language that the international body is “convinced that occupation itself represents a gross and grave violation of human rights” (Resolution 69/90, vote of 88-9-79) and “demands that Israel, the occupying power, cease all practices and actions that violate the human rights of the Palestinian people, including the killing and injury of civilians, the arbitrary detention and imprisonment of civilians, the forced displacement of civilians, and the destruction and confiscation of civilian property.” (Resolution 69/93, 158-8-11) A majority of states voted in favor of each of these resolutions, but the United States did not vote in favor of a single one.

In defense of the U.S.’s vote against the Palestinian resolution at the UNSC, Ambassador Power noted that the U.S. has invested more in recent years to the peace process between Israel and Palestine than any other country – though some might say that the U.S.’s voting record at the UN sends a different message.

Riyad Mansour, Palestine’s representative to the UN, said in response to the defeat: “The repeated requests for us to ‘wait,’ and ‘wait,’ and ‘wait’ while our people are suffering, while our people are besieged, while our land is being colonized, and while the two-state solution is being destroyed and the prospects for peace are evaporating, must understand that such requests are not viable under these circumstances and are unsustainable... [It is] most regrettable that the Security Council remains paralyzed.”

## Pax Christi International World Assembly and HCEF Holy Land Pilgrimage

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of Pax Christi, the international Catholic movement for peace. Consider attending the Pax Christi International (PCI) World Assembly in Bethlehem from May 13-17. Before and after the PCI conference, be part of a Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF) Living Stones pilgrimage which will take you to many of the places where Jesus and his disciples walked as well as providing the opportunity to meet Christian (as well as Muslim and Jewish) peacemakers in the Holy Land and find out more about how we can help them in their march to peace and justice in our time. ***If you have any questions about the pilgrimage, please visit [www.paxchristiusa.org](http://www.paxchristiusa.org), or contact Bob Cooke ([cookerh1251@gmail.com](mailto:cookerh1251@gmail.com)) or the HCEF Pilgrimage Coordinator, Abigail Galvan at 301-951-9400.***



## South Korea: Continued opposition to naval base

*Maryknoll Affiliate Chris Smith contributed the following article.*

In 2007 the South Korean government announced plans to build a 400,000 square meter naval base on Jeju Island to house a new destroyer fleet to patrol the East China Sea between China and Japan. Under the terms of the Mutual Defense Treaty and Status of Forces Agreement between the United States and South Korea, the U.S. military retains the right to use the base for operations in a regional conflict. The island is the site of a 450-year-old village that supports the livelihoods of 1,500 farmers and fishermen and has been designated a UN World Heritage site. The coral reef habitat is threatened by the construction impact. The population expressed its overwhelming opposition to the naval base in 2007 with a 94 percent no vote.

Despite popular objections to the government's plans, construction has moved forward, even as villagers have documented environment damage. Over 50 farmers have cited damage to their crops, and water for drinking and farming has been contaminated by dust and oil generated by construction. The South Korean government has argued that the base will help promote tourism and bring jobs to the island, but ignores the fact that the most likely source of jobs will be bars, souvenir shops and brothels, hardly compatible with the farming and fishing backgrounds of the local population. The government maintains that the base will enhance security for the island. This argument fails to recognize the long history of conflict and tension that have plagued this part of East Asia; the island sits between South Korea and Japan and the Chinese coast is 300 miles away.

Recent activity on Jeju Island has underscored how strongly residents and activists from around the globe are determined to block the completion of the naval base. In October 2014, a Jeju Peace Festival was held that featured people from China, Japan and Korea to discuss various peace initiatives and how they can shape a "common future" for East Asia. Participants shared experience and reflected on similarities "in the movement against the bases in Okinawa and Jeju and in the growing concerns on environmental issues in China and Japan." ([www.SaveJejuNow.org](http://www.SaveJejuNow.org)) An 86-year old Tacoma, WA priest, Rev. Bill Bischel, was part of a U.S. delegation that joined Korean Catholic nuns and villagers in temporarily blocking cement trucks from entering the construction site. He reflected on the experience: "We get from them just a tremendous sense of faithfulness,

living out what you believe, trying to stop the militarization." Bischel is no stranger to these types of demonstrations, having spent over 40 years working against U.S. military programs and weapons. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Korea has also weighed in on the naval base, supporting the demonstrators' position against construction.

Local villagers and allies have focused on a demand to cut out the entire 2015 budget for the base, pointing out that construction of the base started without the agreement of villagers and is in violation of the conditions spelled out by the Korean National Assembly. The Korean Navy has modified its original plans for 690 units for military family housing within the village to 72 units amid protests by residents. The modification, however, was designed to secure the necessary building permits, evade required environmental impact assessments and avoid having to obtain the agreement of residents.

As the movement to stop the Jeju Island naval base enters its ninth year, the Ecumenical Working Group on Korea (along with other allied organizations) is planning to send a multi-faith peace delegation to North and South Korea in 2015. The new year will see a continuation of the movement to reclaim Jeju Island's future for its inhabitants. Since 2010, over 450 activists and residents have been detained or arrested protesting the naval base.

The story of Jeju Island is hardly new – a small population's interests and needs for a sustainable future are sacrificed for the interests of "national security" and the military. This flawed model reflects:

- Outmoded notions of security (more weapons and military bases = enhanced national security and peace)
- Culturally-insensitive models for economic growth (locally-based jobs must always give way to economic development that supports corporate or military interests)
- Negative environmental impacts are minimized or ignored
- Popular opposition to a given project is ignored or downplayed

With continued mobilization of a broad-based opposition to the naval base plans in 2015, we can hope that the rights and interests of the local Jeju Island population will finally be recognized and respected.

For more background on the issues around Jeju Island, see *NewsNotes* from January-February 2013, May-June 2014 and the website [SaveJejuNow.org](http://SaveJejuNow.org).

## Brazil: Torture report released

*In December, the day after the Senate Intelligence Committee released its report on torture by the CIA, Brazil's National Truth Commission published a similar study of government-sponsored torture carried out during that country's military dictatorship from 1964-1985. With the testimony of 1,121 witnesses taken in 80 public audiences in 20 of 26 states, the commission was able to piece together a more detailed understanding of the workings of the dictatorship and its consequences. Two major lingering questions for many, especially survivors and families of victims of the regime, are where the bodies of victims can be found today and if the known offenders will be tried or imprisoned.*

With this report, Brazil finally joins its neighbors, most of whom carried out similar investigations during the 1980s and 1990s. Unlike commissions from other countries which had broader mandates such as reparations for victims and trials of offenders, Brazil's Truth Commission was limited to investigating human rights violations. In her poignant remarks, President Dilma Rousseff, who was imprisoned and tortured for three years by the military regime, emphasized the historical character of the report, arguing that it has nothing to do with "revenge" or inciting "hatred."



Much of the information in the report was already known thanks to the Catholic Church's "Brazil: Never Again" report released in 1985 and investigations by human rights organizations and others. The Truth Commission's study provides evidence of 377 government agents involved in human rights violations from illegal detentions and forced disappearances to torture, sexual violence and executions. At least 434 people were killed or disappeared. Due to a lack of documentation, the report said, it left out other cases and the names of many others believed to be involved.

The report resulted in changing the death certificates of a number of people who the military had said died of natural causes while held in police custody, but actually had died as a result of their torture. It also showed that many more torture centers existed than previously believed, with at least 16 in Rio de Janeiro alone. During the commission's investigation, three former members of the military regime admitted to their involvement in torture, summary executions and hiding of bodies.

Interestingly, most victims of repression were

members of the military themselves. Almost 7,500 of them were discharged, imprisoned and/or tortured for supporting João Goulart, the president overthrown by the military junta in 1964, for opposing international commercial interests or for supposed communist beliefs.

The report brought new findings around a failed bomb attempt at a Rio de Janeiro convention center during a Workers Day celebration in 1981. Two bombs went off, one that failed to turn out the lights in the area as planned and another that exploded prematurely in the lap of a sergeant, killing him and exposing the operation as one of the military. The intent was to blame the bombings on radicals to then justify the government repression. The new documents detail the efforts taken by the military to cover up the story including quick removal of the bodies by soldiers in disguise and doctored photos sent to the media to incriminate leftist groups.

The military has critiqued the report, saying it was motivated by revenge and that it failed to investigate the estimated 121 people killed by armed leftist groups during the time period. Human rights organizations have complained that the report does little to help find the bodies of victims, hundreds of whom are still unaccounted for, and avoids using the term "torture" favoring the broader "human rights violations." "To talk about 'human rights violations' is too vague. What happened was institutionalized torture," said Cecília Coimbra, founder of the group Torture Never Again. Use of "human rights violations" is "a way of fudging the accusations."

The commission included 29 recommendations in its report; two controversial ones are calls for the demilitarization of the police and for trials of government agents involved in the repression. Brazil is one of few countries in the world that has not demilitarized its police force, yet the proposal is contentious for some who fear the police would be politicized and weakened.

In 1979, during the waning days of the dictatorship, the Brazilian congress passed an amnesty law exempting anyone involved in crimes related to the dictatorship. Yet the Interamerican Court of Human Rights found in 2010 that at least parts of the amnesty law are illegitimate and that state actors should be tried. Other international agreements of which Brazil is a part have also questioned the legitimacy of amnesty laws. Chile, which has a similar amnesty law, managed to prosecute several officials including General Augusto Pinochet, who acted as president during its dictatorship. But with the current conservative composition of its supreme court, few expect that anything similar will happen in Brazil.

# Honduras: Government set to privatize cities

*The following article was written by Marek Cabrera, an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.*

In Honduras, one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere, the government is in the midst of launching a radical neoliberal economic experiment that, aside from being highly unlikely to reduce poverty or inequality, or spur a kind of development that benefits people who are poor, constitutes a major violation of the rights of the Honduran people. Called Zones for Economic Development and Employment (ZEDEs), the project “represent[s] a significant expansion of free trade zones in that they facilitate the creation of autonomous privatized city-states designed to exist independently from the legal, administrative and social systems of the Honduran state. They are investor-friendly enclaves governed by their own laws, courts and tax systems,” according to the recent Report of the National Lawyers Guild (NLG) Delegation Investigation of ZEDEs in Honduras.



The government’s previous attempt to pass a similar law in 2012 was found to be unconstitutional by the country’s Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court, a ruling that prompted the dismissal of the presiding judges by the Honduran Congress. That paved the way for the current government, in power since the 2009 coup against the democratically-elected President Manuel Zelaya, to pass the radical ZEDEs law in 2013 that includes several deeply troubling features. As the report states, the ZEDEs law “enable[s] the corporate entities, organizations and individuals who will fund and participate in the zones to structure the social organization itself. This process includes the content of laws, the tax structure, educational, labor and health care system, security forces and other basic elements typically managed by the state.” This is not only an extreme liberalization of economic activity but also an example of a government giving up its responsibilities to its population.

Many basic rights of the Honduran population will not be protected within the borders of the ZEDEs, or “model cities” as those areas of the country are being referred to, including: the right to habeas corpus; the inviolability of a right to life; guarantees of human dignity and bodily integrity; guarantee against the extraction of forced labor; freedom of expression; protections for a

free press; freedom of religion; guarantees of assembly and association; freedom of movement; the right to a defense, to court access, and to counsel for indigents; and freedom from non-legal detention.

Furthermore, the ZEDEs will be imposed on unwilling communities throughout the country. Even though the law provides for consultation in more densely populated areas, in others where, according to the Honduran National Statistics Institute, the population density for a rural area is lower than average, Congress may establish a ZEDE without a referendum. Two economically important regions around the Gulf of Fonseca and the Caribbean Sea have already been approved without any consultation with the affected communities. Fourteen other areas identified by the government could potentially be converted into ZEDEs throughout Honduras. Such a process will allow the government to decide when to strip Honduran citizens of their right to self-determination through democratic governance. In terms of governance, moreover, the ZEDEs represent an extreme form of undemocratic, private rule. The ZEDE regions will be permanently governed by an unelected committee, which residents have no power to elect or influence. The existing elected authorities in those regions, their official responsibilities and duties, are not even contemplated in the ZEDE law.

As the NLG report mentioned above concludes: “Honduras is in desperate need of economic development, but development policies cannot replicate decades of neoliberal initiatives that have done nothing to alleviate the suffering of the majority of Hondurans, and served only to enrich the country’s economic and political elites. Against this backdrop, the prospect of ZEDEs raises considerable alarm about the future for the hundreds of thousands of Hondurans for whom the government already fails to provide security, stability and basic human needs. The rough contours outlined by the law itself ... will deprive citizens of rights guaranteed by Honduran and international law, and the implementation of these zones threatens to encroach on an even broader range of internationally protected rights. Instead of fulfilling its obligations to care for its citizens, Honduras is relinquishing those duties to international investors who are focused on increasing profits, not providing for economic and personal security. The international community must monitor for a potential human rights disaster created when the Honduran government privatizes the state functions that serve as its core organizing principles and obligations.”

## Guatemala: Ríos Montt retrial suspended

*Former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt's retrial on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity was postponed, again, on January 5. Presiding Judge Jeanette Valdez had initially rejected a motion that she recuse herself because she wrote a master's thesis on genocide, calling the move "a strategy to obstruct" the proceedings. But the two other judges who make up the panel accepted the motion, causing the trial's start to be postponed. A new tribunal will be named in the upcoming months for the trial to proceed.*

The following is an excerpt from an article written by Jo-Marie Burt, director of Latin American Studies at George Mason University and Senior Fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA). The original piece was published in December by the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) and is reprinted with her permission.

On May 10, 2013, a Guatemalan court found former dictator and army general José Efraín Ríos Montt guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity. It was an historic decision: the first time a former head of state had been prosecuted successfully in his native country for genocide, and the first time a high-level leader was convicted in Guatemala for the horrendous crimes that took place during that country's 36-year civil war.

... The victims, members of the Maya Ixil community, rejoiced at the ruling. It was a vindication of their three-decade struggle to have their pain and suffering acknowledged, and those responsible punished.

However, under pressure by economic elites and sectors of the armed forces, the Constitutional Court undid the ruling just 10 days later, arguing a legal technicality. It set the trial back a month and thereby invalidated the verdict.

Domestic and international groups appealed to the Constitutional Court to overturn the ruling, arguing that the proper route to challenge the decision was through a normal appeal process, and that the majority opinion was flawed. Two judges wrote dissenting opinions substantiating these and other points. The Constitutional Court held fast to its decision.

In the meantime, the crusading attorney general who was the architect of the genocide case, Claudia Paz y Paz, was forced out of office early, and the presiding trial judge, Yassmín Barrios, has faced

legal sanctions and media opprobrium.

...[O]n December 18, the Constitutional Court unanimously ruled that the decision of a pretrial judge, which argued that the proceedings should return to November 2011, prior to the date of Ríos Montt's indictment, was illegal and should be nullified. That was the same ruling that, on April 18, 2013, dramatically halted the genocide trial in mid-process for the first time. The ruling vindicates the decision of trial court judge Yassmín Barrios, who at the time refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of that decision, deeming it clearly illegal.

But the amnesty question still remains a potential obstacle. During the 2013 proceedings, an appeals court rejected one of the many legal motions presented by Ríos Montt's defense team calling for an earlier amnesty law to be applied. That amnesty law, passed in 1986 by then-dictator General Mejía Víctores with the intention of guaranteeing immunity from prosecution for all crimes committed during his government as well as that of his predecessor, Ríos Montt, in which he served as defense minister, was annulled. Another law, the National Reconciliation Law, allowed for amnesty for political crimes, but explicitly excluded international crimes of genocide, torture, and crimes against humanity. However, in one of several perplexing decisions, the Constitutional Court sent the ruling back to the appeals court, requesting that the decision be substantiated. While this may appear non-controversial, many observers feared that it leaves the door open for the appeals court to reverse its ruling and apply the 1986 amnesty law. ...

International organizations ... have published a statement calling on the appeals court to limit itself to following the Constitutional Court's request to substantiate its decision that the amnesty law is not applicable. [The organizations] reminded the appeals court that both Guatemalan law and international law do not allow amnesty for international crimes, and that the Guatemalan state has the international obligation to investigate, prosecute, and punish grave violations of human rights. The same argument was put forth in an op-ed by Spanish Judge Baltazar Garzón, who also noted that if amnesty is applied in the Ríos Montt case, the trial could continue in a foreign court under the principle of universal jurisdiction. ...

## WB social, environmental safeguards inadequate

*The World Bank is currently undergoing a review and overhaul of its safeguards policies with the intent to update and strengthen them. According to the Bank Information Center (BIC), “The Bank’s safeguards are designed to ensure that its investments ‘do no harm’ to people and the environment. Safeguards also help the Bank do good by building institutional capacity and enhancing a number of economic development benefits. Safeguards also assure that those project benefits are shared equally.”*

These policies are extremely important as the Bank is often viewed as the standard bearer for financial lending institutions. Many fear, however, that the Bank might actually weaken its safeguard standards to compete with the proliferation of new development banks rather than set the standards for other lending institutions to reach.

It appears that those worries may bear truth. The first draft of the review indicates that the new safeguards are actually weaker than current policies, even though they expand the groups of vulnerable people and environmental priorities covered. The application of the new safeguards now is limited to World Bank projects only, not all the arms of the World Bank Group, which includes the fast-growing International Finance Corporation projects. This means that projects akin to Guatemala’s Santa Rita hydro-electric dam or Cambodia’s sugar plantation projects, featured in previous *NewsNotes*, would not be covered under the new safeguards. (See related article, “IFC standards have subpar outcomes,” in November-December 2014 *NewsNotes*.)

On the plus side, the safeguards will include free prior and informed consent (FPIC) for indigenous peoples. It will also expand protections for children, LGBT individuals, people with disabilities, laborers, and others.

In some cases these groups are lumped together without recognizing their unique needs and vulnerabilities. In other cases, much discretion is given to the World Bank project directors to determine if the measures taken are adequate to meet the safeguard standards without ensuring clear deadlines or thresholds to meet.

FPIC is undermined by a new opt-out option for the Indigenous Peoples policy, offered after significant pressure from African nations. This is a setback in recent rights gains for African indigenous communities, which maintain hunter-gatherer cultural practices and livelihoods in the face of discrimination and marginalization.

Another concern is the policy on involuntary resettlement which often results from plans related to extractive industries, infrastructure development and land

grabbing for agricultural investment projects. Indigenous communities and other ethnic minorities or economically poor communities often are forced from their homes and land to make way for these development projects.

In a letter on land rights to Bank President Jim Kim after the 2014 release of the draft safeguards, civil society organizations wrote: “It dilutes requirements for information disclosure, consultation and participation of displaced persons in resettlement planning, implementation and monitoring. It massively dilutes Bank appraisal and supervision responsibilities for resettlement planning and execution, relying on self-assessment and self-reporting by the borrower and approving displacement-inducing projects without conducting due diligence on comprehensive resettlement plans. The effect is that the draft [Environmental and Social Framework] seriously weakens protections for people who will be evicted from their homes, land and livelihoods, increasing the risk that Bank-financed projects will impoverish people, exacerbate inequality and cause human rights violations.”

In addition to many other concerns with the document itself, it is also worth highlighting the flawed consultation process. According to BIC, when World Bank representatives came to Tanzania in November to hold a consultation, they responded defensively to comments from child rights advocates, especially regarding rights beyond child labor. The World Bank only brought environmental experts who were not equipped to answer the many concerns related to child protection.

Additionally, the registration process for the consultation in Tanzania lacked transparency. Many were told that the registration was closed when it was not. No project-affected people were invited to participate. Lastly, participants were notified the day before the conference of their official participation and given the draft safeguards at the meeting, therefore denying them adequate time to make plans, read, and respond to the safeguards.

Environmental safeguards have been fortified in some areas and weakened in others. According to a “Civil Society Statement on the World Bank Standards” released in time for the World Bank annual meetings in the fall, a focus on species biodiversity is strengthened. But the defense of forests and forest peoples are weakened by allowing projects to go forward in once-protected areas, and loopholes are created for logging projects. And even though the World Bank has committed to addressing climate change, the draft does not ensure that the project is in-line with national climate change plans. No mechanism is in place to assess or manage climate change impacts or

the resiliency of local communities and ecosystems from projects. There are also no requirements to assess greenhouse gas production for high emission projects or to take steps to reduce emissions.

Advocates have asked for the consultation process,

which now goes until February 2015, to be extended and more transparent. The 2015 Omnibus Appropriations Act requires the U.S. to vote against any new loans or grants if the Bank or any member of the World Bank Group weakens its safeguard policies.

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## Haiti: Communities oppose mining law

*In December 2012, Haiti's Office of Energy and Mines awarded exploitation permits for full-fledged gold mining operations. However, the Haitian Parliament passed a resolution calling for a moratorium on these activities in February 2013. The resolution states that these exploitation permits violate the Haitian Constitution because they were granted pursuant to mining conventions that were never ratified by Parliament.*

*According to a formal protest to the World Bank filed on January 7 by the Haiti Mining Justice Collective, the Bank agreed to help the Haitian government rewrite its mining laws in March 2013, and several months later, a task force comprised of representatives of several government ministries and Bank experts began drafting a new mining law. Some members of the Haiti Mining Justice Collective, which is comprised of communities and community-based groups and social organizations from mining-affected departments, as well as six human rights and social movement organizations, "obtained a copy of the Draft Mining Law dated July 31, 2014, and have learned from government officials that this version was submitted to the Prime Minister's Office, but has not yet been presented to Parliament. To our knowledge, this version of the law has not been made public; it has neither been translated into Creole ... nor shared or discussed with mining-affected communities." Following are excerpts from a press release detailing the January 7 filing:*

Haitian communities and organizations filed a complaint with the World Bank regarding Bank-supported activities to develop Haiti's mining sector. The complaint alleges that the Haitian populace has been left out of World Bank-funded efforts by the Haitian government to draft new mining legislation intended to attract foreign investors to exploit Haiti's gold and other minerals. Complainants contend that the Bank has failed to follow its own social and environmental safeguard policies or ensure that the new legal framework adheres to international best practices. They fear that allowing the mineral sector to develop without much-needed human rights and environmental protections and without public consultation could harm rather than help Haiti.

"The mining law will attract investment from foreign mining companies and yet the government does not have the ability to monitor environmental impacts or to promote the interests of the affected communities," said Nixon Boumba, a representative of the *Kolektif Jistis Min* (Mining Justice Collective). Haitian people who have had the chance to learn about the government's efforts to develop the sector share serious reservations about the new mining law and the broader effort to encourage mining: over 400 people in Haiti have signed a petition stating their concerns with mining sector development and demanding access to accurate information about mining and its potential impacts on [the] people and well-being of the country. The petition also requests a national debate and a full, public review of this strategy before the proposed mining legislation is finalized.

Some communities in Haiti have already had negative experiences with companies exploring for minerals on or near their land. 'We have seen impacts that make us worry,' explained a complainant and community leader from northern Haiti. 'People who have begun to understand what mining could mean, what an open-pit mine is, they are worried about how it will affect the environment and the way we live now.' Communities also claim that companies have already drilled and excavated on their land without seeking proper consent.

Complainants also fear the consequences of encouraging mining without ensuring the Haitian government's ability to enforce social and environmental protections. The government has suffered from inadequate resources and failed regulatory processes for years, and the country's recent protests and governmental instability underscore ongoing capacity issues. ...

"The World Bank's assistance aims to change the entire legal regime for mineral mining in Haiti," said Sarah Singh of Accountability Counsel, an organization representing affected Haitian communities. "Given the serious social and environmental risks associated with this industry, the Bank must ensure that the new law is developed with participation from civil society and includes provisions to protect human rights and adhere to international best practices."

## Peak oil, low prices

*Falling oil prices have led many to believe that there is little danger of reaching peak oil any time soon. How could there be a shortage of oil if prices are dropping, after all? But the fact is that conventional oil production has plateaued and fallen since 2005. This has been replaced by unconventional fuels such as shale gas and tar sands oil that are much more difficult (and expensive) to extract. And, despite statements like President Obama's in his 2012 State of the Union address, that "we have a supply of natural gas that can last America nearly 100 years," analysts now predict that the U.S. will peak in gas production by 2020 at the latest. It appears the peak of global liquid energy production could be only a few years away, bringing greater economic difficulties. Ironically, the currently low prices are part of the global reaction to dwindling oil supplies.*

Many news sources explain that excess oil is due to increases in fracked shale gas and tight oil production in the U.S. combined with less demand from a slower Chinese economy. In similar situations in the past, Saudi Arabia would reduce its production in order to maintain higher prices, but this time has chosen not to do so. Motives for this change range from wanting to punish Russia and Iran (both heavily dependent on oil exports to maintain their budgets) for their involvement in Syria and Iraq, to wanting to damage tar sands producers in Canada and shale gas companies in the U.S. (Producers of Canadian tar sands oil and U.S. shale gas need high oil prices in order to pay their extraction costs, which are much larger than those for conventional oil.)

While these are likely short-term influences on oil prices, these explanations leave out the bigger picture that explains the dynamic of nearing, or passing, the breach of peak oil production. Energy analyst Richard Heinberg summarizes part of this larger context and its importance: "During this past decade the oil industry has entered a new regime of steeper production costs, slower supply growth, declining resource quality, and higher prices. That all-important context is largely absent from most news stories about the price plunge, but without it recent events are unintelligible." The other untold story is the strong interdependence between energy and financial markets. Looking at this larger landscape, we can get a better idea of what may happen in coming years.

The reason prices do not simply continue rising when an important commodity reaches peak production is that there is a limit to how much people are willing and able to pay. When prices are too high, overall de-

mand begins to fall, leading to a slower economy. University of California economics professor James Hamilton produced a report showing that since World War II, "[e]very recession (with one exception) was preceded by an increase in oil prices, and every oil market disruption (with one exception) was followed by an economic recession." These recessions decrease demand for oil thus reducing its price.

These lower prices then have a damaging effect on energy and financial markets which are profoundly dependent on each other. Roger Boyd, author of the book *Energy and the Financial System*, explains that "the energy system requires massive [long-term] investments to develop new sources of energy [while] the financial system requires the economy to keep growing, which requires new sources of energy to keep that growth going." He shows how the two systems are mutually enforcing feedback loops where a reduction in energy production leads to economic stagnation, which then reduces the amount of money available to develop sources of energy, which leads to another drop in energy production. This cycle describes well what is happening in energy and financial markets today.

The shale gas revolution in the U.S. has been largely financed by high-risk junk bonds. Standard & Poors rates 75 out of 97 energy exploration and production companies below investment grade. "Junk-bond debt in energy has reached \$210 billion, which is about 16 percent of the \$1.3 trillion junk-bond market. That is a dramatic rise from just four percent that energy debt represented 10 years ago," according to energy writer Nick Cunningham. Bloomberg estimates that "21 borrowers [are] operating in the costliest U.S. shale-producing regions that will be unprofitable if crude oil falls below \$60 a barrel." On January 8, the price of WTI crude was \$48.65.

These companies defaulting on their loans could blow into a larger financial crisis, according to a recent Deutsche Bank study. It estimated that 30 percent of these junk bonds could default if the price of oil dropped below \$65. "A shock of that magnitude could be sufficient to trigger a broader high-yield market default cycle, if materialised," the authors warned. Local and regional banks like Oklahoma-based BOK Financial, with 19 percent of its loans made in energy, according to the Wall Street Journal, will also be at risk of default, which risks setting off a cascade-type series of defaults as occurred in 2008.

It is likely that prices will stay low for a long time

as a financial crisis and/or economic downturn caused by low prices will destroy more demand. But eventually the lack of credit for new oil and gas extraction will lower supplies enough to drive prices higher again, which will set off another financial or economic crisis. This is the

future that many who write on the dangers of peak oil foresee – not constantly rising prices, but wildly fluctuating prices that create increased economic destruction and reduction in energy production.

## 2014 vigil at SOA, Stewart Detention Center

*On November 21-23, over 2,000 people gathered at the gates of Ft. Benning in Columbus, GA to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the murders of six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter at the Universidad Centroamericana (University of Central America, UCA) in El Salvador. Those responsible for the massacre were military leaders who had trained at the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA), located at Ft. Benning; the program has been re-named the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC).*

As in recent years, participants in the 2014 SOA vigil also joined in the “Shut Down Stewart Detention Center” action, held on November 22 in nearby Lumpkin, GA.

Corrections Corporations of America (CCA), the largest for-profit prison company in the U.S., is the owner of the Stewart Detention Center, which houses 1,800 undocumented migrants held, by all accounts other than those of ICE and CCA, in inhumane conditions.

According to SOA Watch, “This is not a coincidence in the private prison industry. CCA makes more money by cutting on detainee medical services, food, amenities, recreation, as well as employee training and benefits. Not only does CCA profit from incarcerating migrants, but it also profits by forcing them to endure horrendous conditions such as those inside Stewart.”

CCA “pays” the detained migrants \$1-3 a day to clean and maintain the facility. SOA Watch notes, “Stewart detainees and other migrants around the country are criminalized for working without authorization in the U.S., arrested, deprived of their freedom, and then paid slave wages in prison for the profit of CCA.”

So many migrants are deported from Stewart Detention Center that it has its own immigration court. Three judges

*Photo of procession to Stewart Detention Center by Steve Pavey.*

decide whether to release Stewart detainees on bond before they ultimately decide whether they are allowed to stay in the country; records indicate that three percent of the detainees are released on bond while 83 percent are deported. According to SOA Watch, one of the Stewart judge, Dan Trimble, is now on the Board of Visitors of the SOA/WHINSEC. “A judge who regularly denies bond ... and orders the deportation of migrants inside one of the worst immigrant detention centers in the U.S. is also a public supporter and board member of another heinous institution 40 miles away. The [graduates of] SOA/WHINSEC have inflicted so much death and destruction on the people of Latin America, maintaining and exacerbating the social and economic conditions that force many Latin Americans to become migrants in search of a peaceful life. Some of them end up in Stewart, perhaps after being racially profiled and arrested for driving without a license. And some of them are then ordered deported by Judge Trimble.”

Like members of the movement to close the SOA/WHINSEC, immigrants and allies will continue to protest and bear witness at Stewart until it is closed. In Columbus, in Lumpkin, and across the continent, the solidarity movement will continue to make clear that the lives of migrants, the lives of Latin Americans, and the lives of their families and loved ones matter.



## COP20: Struggle for climate justice

*The much anticipated 20th UN Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP20) in Lima, Peru, closed on December 14 with less-than-hoped-for outcomes. Over 190 countries met and came to what has been called a watered-down agreement to combat climate change on a global scale. While the firm commitments that Maryknoll and many environmental justice activists hoped for were elusive, some agreement on global guidelines for compliance with goals to reduce climate disruption was reached. It is clear that 2015 will be a key year in determining whether there is truly global momentum to act against the disastrous consequences of climate change. At best, the gathering in Lima will be seen as successful if it paved the "Road to Paris" when the next and decisive climate change meeting, the COP21, will be held in December.*

By going overtime 33 hours in desperate negotiations, the 195 countries meeting in Lima finally agreed to adopt a four page document that explains the types of national climate targets they will need to deliver in the next six months. By June they will have to show how they'll reduce carbon emissions on a voluntary basis without having to submit to a rigorous assessment process. The UN will then deliver its own analysis of the "aggregate effect" of all the pledges by November 1, a month before the COP21 in Paris.

These "Intended Nationally Determined Contributions" were a key accomplishment of the Lima conference, as weak as it was. Another major issue that was addressed inconclusively was the "Common but Differentiated Determined Contributions" or how emissions reductions would be distributed differently between developed and developing countries. The issue of whether poorer countries of the global South which have contributed least to climate change and therefore should bear less of the burden of carbon reductions was left for the COP21 in Paris to resolve.

A third significant outcome of COP20 was that, unlike previous UN climate conferences such as the Kyoto Protocol or the COP17 in Durban, this agreement was globally inclusive and applies to all countries. Also, the first "Multilateral Assessment" of emission reduction goals by developing countries was held in Lima, and a new framework for "Measurement, Reporting and Verification" was established. Finally, funding for the Green Climate Fund that will assist developing countries in combatting climate change, reached \$10.2 billion in pledges, slightly exceeding the target.

As inconclusive as the conference was in achieving real progress, it was the first time a global agreement on tackling climate change was accomplished. Maryknoll was there along with hundreds of faith-based and environmental NGOs pushing the national delegations to do more. Outside in the streets of Lima, the "People's Summit" held an alternative grassroots mobilization that called for world governments to "change the system not the climate." Giving a forum for "voices from below," the Peoples' Summit highlighted the role of transnational corporations and the extractive model of production and consumption in contributing to climate disruption and abusing the earth as well as the rights of indigenous communities.

The grassroots movement in Lima highlighted two aspects of the destructive role of transnational corporations in climate change: 1) The environmental degradation and threat to peoples' sovereignty that free trade agreements such as the TransPacific Partnership (TPP) represent to indigenous communities in Latin America and 2) the negative impact of industrial agriculture promoted by these corporations on the food sovereignty of the small farmers and indigenous peoples who produce 70 percent of the world's food.

Catholic bishops from around the world came together in Lima as well, and in a statement to the delegates of COP20 echoed some of voices in the streets. They placed the responsibility for damaging climate change on "the global economic system...based on the primacy of the market and profit, which has failed to put the human being and the common good at the heart of the economy." They denounced this system's "'one-size-fits-all' modern technological-industrial approaches" and called for "an end to the fossil fuel era." Echoing Pope Francis, the bishops identified climate change as primarily a moral issue that Catholics must confront on behalf of vulnerable and marginalized communities.

This challenge to Catholics to act on climate change was also raised by Argentinian Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and Social Sciences, and a close friend of Pope Francis. In a lecture to the to the British Catholic development group CAFOD in November, Bishop Sorondo predicted that the pope's much-anticipated first encyclical would offer moral guidance to Catholics on this issue, in his "unique role as a religious leader."

"The problem of climate change has become a major social and moral problem, and mentalities can only be changed on moral and religious grounds," he said.

## Resources

- 1) **Still in the Storm: Reflections for engaging spirituality in times like these:** This new book, written by Joe Grant and published by JustFaith Ministries is an excellent companion for your Lenten journey and beyond. Available February 2015. Contact JustFaith to order: <http://justfaith.org/contact/> or call (502) 429-0865.
- 2) **2015 Cardinal Bernardin award nominations:** Do you know a Catholic between the ages 18-40 who is actively engaged in work on the local or national level to break the cycle of poverty in the U.S.? Help the Catholic Campaign for Human Development honor young adults who are addressing problems in their local communities, working with social justice organizations, or leading social concerns efforts on college campuses. The 2015 Cardinal Bernardin award recipient will be given \$1,000 at a reception held in conjunction with the June meeting of the U.S. Catholic bishops in St. Louis, MO. Nominations are due by March 15; contact Genevieve Mougey at [gmougey@uscgb.org](mailto:gmougey@uscgb.org) with questions.
- 3) **Friends Across Borders immersion experiences:** Consider joining Friends Across Borders, a project of the Maryknoll Lay Missioners, on a trip to either 1) Brazil, June 13-23, 2015 OR 2) Kenya, June 11-23, 2016 (tentative). Both trips will include site visits to Maryknoll ministries, daily reflections on the work of the Maryknoll community and contemporary issues, and opportunities to visit cultural and historic sites. For information, visit [www.friend-sacrossborders.org](http://www.friend-sacrossborders.org) or call 914-762-6364, ext. 207.
- 4) **A Maryknoll Liturgical Year: Reflections on the Readings for Year B:** Maryknoll missionaries' experiences of crossing into new cultures and sharing life with new communities bring fresh meanings of the sacred scripture to light. In this third volume of reflections that explore the readings of the liturgical calendar, readers find life described in its fullest – the deep pain and struggle that people endure, as well as the hope for a new heaven and a new earth. This collection elevates stories of reconciliation, of inter-religious collaboration; stories of ways in which groups have overcome their differences to take on projects that serve the common good. Paperback, 224 pages, \$20. Find it at Orbis Books, [www.orbisbooks.com](http://www.orbisbooks.com) or call 800-258-5838.

### **Breaking the Chains: Mass Incarceration & Systems of Exploitation Ecumenical Advocacy Days, April 17-20, 2015**

At the 13th annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD), held **April 17-20, 2015**, near Washington, D.C., join 1,000 Christian advocates in building a movement to shake the foundations of systems of human exploitation, including a prison-industrial system that incarcerates millions of people in the U.S. and abroad.

As people of faith, we denounce the elements in our world that justify such systems of exploitation and mass incarceration. At EAD, we will confess our personal and corporate failure to break the chains of poverty, racism, and greed institutionalized in our laws, economy, and social behaviors that collude to perpetuate such human exploitation and strip civil and human rights.

As people of hope, we are reminded that Jesus' radical message was one of liberation for all and restoration of right relationships. Through prayer, worship, advocacy training, networking and mobilization with others, we will face the reality of mass incarceration and corporate exploitation, and call for national policies that bring liberation both to the prisoner and to a world in need of restoration – all culminating with EAD's Congressional Lobby Day on Capitol Hill.

Learn more at [www.advocacydays.org](http://www.advocacydays.org) or call 202-543-1126. If you plan to attend, please let us know; we would love to coordinate with Maryknoll supporters who will be there.