



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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The case for Catholic fossil fuel divestment

This is the first in a series of articles designed to educate Catholic organizations about ways to participate in the fastest growing divestment campaign in human history - the fossil fuel divestment movement.

The first fossil fuel divestment campaign began in 2010 when a group of students at Swarthmore College in Philadelphia, incensed after seeing the destruction wrought by coal companies during a class trip to Appalachia, launched a divestment petition to their school. Students on other campuses, with the help of the Wallace Global Fund, organized similar campaigns in 2011.

It was not until a part-time environmental studies professor at Vermont's Middlebury College, Bill McKibben, wrote an article for *Rolling Stone* magazine and carried out a speaking tour in 2012, asking people to "Do the Math" on climate change, that the campaigns turned into a movement.

McKibben's main point was in order to avoid the worst of climate change and maintain global temperatures within two degrees Celsius of pre-industrial times, which would later become the rate in the 2015 Paris climate accord, the world can release no more than 565 gigatons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The live update of what remains of this number is published online by *The Guardian* as the "Carbon countdown clock."

At the time of McKibben's tour, fossil fuel companies already had 2,795 gigatons of proven fossil fuel reserves that they planned to sell. This means that to stay within two degrees, close to 80 percent of these companies' reserves cannot be used.

The numbers reveal as McKibben says, "that the fossil fuel industry's business model is in fundamental conflict with life on earth." The reasons for divesting have since settled into two camps: moral and economic.

Moral reasons to divest

Many Catholic institutions cite Pope Francis' teachings in *Laudato Si'* as a key motivator for divesting. Without specifically naming fossil fuel divestment in the letter, the pope lays out the arguments for it.

First, the need is urgent: "We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay." (165)

Second, we cannot depend on governments and businesses to act: "Politics and business have been slow to react in a way commensurate with the urgency of the challenges facing our world." (165) "The failure of global summits on the environment makes it plain that our politics are subject to technology and finance. There are too many special interests, and economic interests

easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected." (54)

Third, consumer boycotts "prove successful in changing the way businesses operate, forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production. When social pressure affects their earnings, businesses clearly have to find ways to produce differently." (206)

Other Church leaders have named the fact that while the poorest communities around the world are least responsible for creating climate change, they are bearing the brunt of its force. "The poor are suffering greatly from the climate crisis and fossil fuels are among the main drivers of this injustice," said Cardinal Luis Tagle, Archbishop of Manila and President of Caritas Internationalis. "That is why Caritas Internationalis has decided not to invest in fossil fuels anymore."

Finally, Catholic institutions can make a significant impact in caring for the planet. Trocaire, the Irish Church's relief and development agency, wrote in its manual on divesting, "There is possibly no other global institution as well placed to show prophetic and practical leadership at this critical moment."

Economic reasons to divest

If 80 percent of reserves cannot be used without catastrophic effects on the climate, then the current valuations of fossil fuel companies are, as the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries described them in 2013 "fundamentally flawed and the assets are 'stranded'."

This creates a carbon bubble estimated at more than \$2 trillion that will undoubtedly pop someday. "There are already many significant examples of how assets have been stranded by environment-related risks and then hit investor returns," Dr. Ben Caldecott, director of the University of Oxford's Sustainable Finance Program, said in 2014. He offered three examples: renewable energy depressing power prices and impacting utilities in Europe; shale gas stranding coal assets in Australia and the U.S.; water constraints and air pollution concerns stranding coal assets in China."

Over the last five years, credit rating agencies like Moody's and Standard & Poor's have placed the ratings of fossil fuel companies on review for a possible downgrade. Whether for economic or moral reasons, it clearly appears that the time to divest is now. §

UN: 62nd Commission on the Status of Women

The 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place at the UN in New York from March 12-23. Representatives of member states, UN entities, and NGOs from all regions of the world attended. A total of nine Maryknoll Sisters, including Srs. Marvie Misolas, Veronica Schweyen, and Mary Ann Smith, were participants.

The 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) was held at the United Nations in New York in March. The theme was “challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.”

“Worldwide, almost one-third of employed women work in agriculture,” Under-Secretary-General of the UN and Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka said in her opening remarks. She described the 400 million women who are farm workers as mainly smallholder farmers and agricultural and informal workers with little or no social protection, and almost no visibility.

“The world eats every day because they toil,” Mlambo-Ngcuka said.

Over two weeks, hundreds of side events and parallel events were offered; one, entitled, “Tackling Climate change through the empowerment of rural women,” asked panelists to provide innovative approaches, tested good practices and policy guidance around “unlocking rural women’s great potential in agriculture, food security, and nutrition policies in the context of climate change.”

Speaking from their experiences as policymakers, development agencies, NGOs and representatives of international climate change mechanisms, panelists agreed that there exists “clear evidence that climate change is having gender-differentiated impacts, and in many cases

is intensifying the constraints that already place women, especially those that are reliant on agriculture for their livelihoods, at a great disadvantage.”

For example, in developing countries, climate change affects the availability of surface water and as a result rural women, who are usually given the task of fetching water, have to cover greater distances to collect the water, increasing their already substantial workload.

Women and girls face unique challenges and discriminatory practices such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages, and discriminatory land politics. For example, only 13 percent of women own land they work despite making up 60 percent of the world’s agricultural workforce. By ending discriminatory laws and norms that sustain harmful practices, and by ensuring women’s access to innovative technology, credit, agricultural services, education, and decision-making authority, women farmers can respond to the changing climate, combat poverty and food security, educate their children, and contribute to peace in their communities.

“This is a tipping point moment,” Mlambo-Ngcuka said. “All over the world, we are witnessing an unprecedented hunger for change in women’s lives, and a growing recognition that when women band together they can bring about far reaching changes.”§

Find a list of events, videos, webcasts, speeches and statements from CSW62 online at <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw>

Factors affecting women’s political participation

Political and Electoral Systems

Women are elected in greater numbers (on average 6 percentage points higher) in systems of proportional representation (quotas) than they are in majority electoral systems.

Cultural Challenges

Prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the role of women and men in society affect not only how women are perceived by the electorate, political party leaders and the media, but also how women see themselves.

Socio-economic challenges

Campaigns are costly and women face more barriers to access and control over finances than men. When deciding to run, women often hesitate to invest family resources, ask for credit, or spend more on domestic help.

Source: “Gender Sensitive Parliaments” a study produced by The Inter-Parliamentary Union, October 2016.

UN: Reigniting call for nuclear disarmament

Despite strong opposition from the nuclear weapon states to last year's nuclear ban treaty, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and leaders of faith groups are pressing the countries to resume discussions on limiting and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons.

At the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on February 26, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres announced a new initiative to jump-start negotiations on the world's over-supply of nuclear weapons. He said that there are currently over 15,000 nuclear weapons and the \$1.5 trillion per year arms trade is flourishing. "Countries persist in the mistaken idea that nuclear weapons make the world safer," he stated.

"In response to these concerns, I am preparing, in support of member states, a new initiative aimed at giving greater impetus and direction to the global disarmament agenda," Guterres said. "This initiative is aimed at restoring the role of disarmament as an integral component of our work to maintain international peace and security. History shows that it has been possible to reach agreement on disarmament and arms control even at the most difficult moments."

The secretary general is expected to give a longer, more detailed explanation of this initiative in May.

The United Nations' action comes amid growing frustration at the slow pace at which member states have ratified the nuclear ban treaty passed last year. Of the 122 nations that voted in favor of the treaty, only 57 have signed it and only about ten have ratified it; one of the first states to ratify the treaty was the Holy See. The treaty will enter into force 90 days after at least 50 countries both sign and ratify it.

The challenge now is to bring the nine nuclear-armed nations into the dialogue. Those nations—China, France, India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States—boycotted the negotiations leading up to the treaty and indicated they do not plan to sign it.

Both the United States and Russia have announced plans to increase spending on modernization of its nuclear arsenal, compounding the slow rate of ratification. [Read our analysis of the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review in the March-April issue of NewsNotes.]

The United States appears to be embracing the outdated and failed strategy of nuclear deterrence which, the review states, requires \$1.2 trillion over the next 30 years to modernize and maintain the U.S. nuclear arsenal, and lowers the threshold for employing nuclear weapons. In some ways the U.S. is continuing the status quo, advancing thinking and initiatives of previous Ad-

ministrations. There is an appreciable shift, however, to a more aggressive posture and more expansive potential use of the weapons of mass destruction.

President Vladimir Putin shared Russia's version of a nuclear posture review during a 'state of the nation' speech to the State Duma in March. In his speech, Putin outlined ambitious goals in domestic spending and development, complemented by an assertion that Russia would also modernize its strategic and nuclear arsenal, and develop a "hyper-sonic missile" that travels faster than five times the speed of sound and cannot be shot down by any anti-ballistic missiles currently deployed. It's questionable if Russia can really afford ambitious increases in both domestic and military spending.

Even if neither country can achieve all its nuclear goals, the fact that the U.S. and Russia have embarked on plans to increase and modernize their nuclear capability does not bode well for disarmament. Given this impasse, 20 faith groups, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, and individuals of Christian, Quaker, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist affiliations issued a statement of support for the UN initiative.

"We believe that the time is long overdue for the elimination of nuclear weapons," the faith communities say, "and we believe that recent developments make it essential that the issue receives prompt and urgent attention." The statement was presented at the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) on April 25 in Geneva.

Just days after the UN postponed the first ever High Level Conference on Nuclear Disarmament that was scheduled to be held in May, the leaders of North and South Korea reaffirmed their joint goal of making the Korean Peninsula nuclear-free through complete denuclearization. The bold goals of a peace accord and an end to nuclear weapons on the Korea Peninsula may renew momentum for the nuclear ban treaty at the UN.

"The horrific destructiveness of nuclear weapons," the interfaith statement declared, "makes their abolition the only path to authentic human security."§

Faith in action: Read the full statement by the interfaith group <http://bit.ly/InterfaithDisarm>

Read our statement about new hopes for peace on the Korean Peninsula <http://bit.ly/MaryknollKorea>

Direct nonviolent action against nuclear weapons

The latest direct action against nuclear weapons by the Plowshares Movement occurred at a nuclear submarine base in Georgia on April 4, 2018.

On the night of April 4, seven activists from the Catholic Plowshares movement broke into the Kings Bay Naval Base in St. Mary's, Georgia. The date marked the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. They carried with them a written statement detailing the reasoning behind their direct nonviolent action.

Rooted in Dr. King's condemnation of what he called the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism, they came to the nuclear submarine base "to answer the call of the prophet Isaiah to 'beat swords into plowshares' by disarming the world's deadliest nuclear weapon, the Trident submarine," the statement says.

In photographs posted to the Kings Bay Plowshares Facebook page, the group's banner that says "The ultimate logic of Trident is omnicide" and crime scene tape are seen hanging inside the base. Also photographed are peace slogans spray-painted on the ground and a plaque with the name of the facility smeared with what looks to be human blood.

The seven arrested inside the nuclear submarine base in the early morning hours of April 5 are: Elizabeth McAlister, 78, Jonah House, Baltimore, Maryland; Mark Colville, 55, Amistad Catholic Worker, New Haven, Connecticut; Clare Grady, 59, Ithaca Catholic Worker; Martha Hennessy, 62, New York Catholic Worker; Stephen Kelly, SJ, 69, Bay Area, California; Patrick O'Neil, 61, Fr. Charlie Mulholland Catholic Worker, Garner, North Carolina; and Carmen Trotta, 55, New York Catholic Worker.

"We repent of the sin of white supremacy that oppresses and takes the lives of people of color here in the United States and throughout the world," their statement says. "We resist the militarism that has employed deadly violence to enforce global domination. We believe reparations are required for stolen land, labor, and lives."

The Kings Bay Naval Base opened in 1979 as the U.S. Navy's Atlantic Ocean Trident port. Just north of the Florida border, it is the largest nuclear submarine base in the world at about 16,000 acres. It houses six ballistic missile subs and two guided missile subs. Each submarine, the activists assert, carries the capacity to cause devastation equivalent to 600 of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima, Japan.

The activists point to the United States' embrace of a permanent war economy amid an endless war on ter-

ror as an echo of Dr. King's perennially poignant words, "The greatest purveyor of violence in the world today, my own government."

The statement continues: "Nuclear weapons kill every day through mining, production, testing, storage, and dumping, primarily on Indigenous Native land. This weapons system is a cocked gun being held to the head of the planet. As white Catholics, we take responsibility to atone for the horrific crimes stemming from our complicity with 'the triplets.' Only then can we begin to restore right relationships. We seek to bring about a world free of nuclear weapons, racism, and economic exploitation."

The Kings Bay Plowshares activists were denied bond at their hearing on April 6 and currently remain imprisoned at the Camden County Jail in Woodbine, Georgia.

This action is the latest in over 100 similar Plowshares actions around the world beginning in 1980 in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.

In reflecting on the importance of the Kings Bay Plowshares action, Maryknoll Sister Jean Fallon said: "It was to convey this imminent danger to all the nations, starting with ourselves, that these seven Catholic advocates for nuclear disarmament clarified Martin Luther King's exposition of the causes behind the use of nuclear crisis: Racism, Militarism, and Materialism. Ours is not to waste time arguing about whether or not their actions are this or that. We are called to support these seven brave persons who stepped up to their call."

In the words of the Kings Bay Plowshares: "Nuclear weapons eviscerate the rule of law, enforce white supremacy, perpetuate endless war and environmental destruction, and ensure impunity for all manner of crimes against humanity. Dr. King said, 'The ultimate logic of racism is genocide.' We say, 'The ultimate logic of Trident is omnicide.' A just and peaceful world is possible when we join prayers with action. Swords into Plowshares!"§

Faith in action:

Read the full statement by the Kings Bay Plowshares and find instructions for writing to each of the seven activists at <http://bit.ly/KingsBayStatement>

Follow the Kings Bay Plowshares on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Kingsbayplowshares/>

Solving global hunger: The role of agroecology

Maryknoll Father Ken Thesing, a delegate of religious congregations at the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome, writes about the 2nd International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition held at FAO headquarters on April 3-5, 2018.

Some 815 million persons around the world suffer chronic hunger because they cannot access sufficient food. After steadily declining for over a decade, this number appears to be on the rise once more. These two disturbing facts are presented and analyzed in a 132-page report “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017,” published last September by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), a specialized UN agency based in Rome of which I am an advisor.

In the just-over 70 years since World War II and FAO's launch in 1945, food has become more available per capita in the world by about 40 percent. There is enough food in the world to feed everyone.

Most experts say the ‘Green Revolution’ is responsible. Also known now as agribusiness or industrial agriculture, the research and initiatives that began in the 1940s and continued throughout the 1960s increased food production and productivity rapidly based on input-intensive agriculture, that is, the use of large inputs of energy from fossil fuels (especially oil and natural gas), water, fertilizer, and pesticides to produce large quantities of crops and livestock for sale.

I remember it well. I was a boy growing into adulthood on a farm in Minnesota, USA. I spent many Saturdays picking up brochures from the Agriculture Extension office in our hometown and reading the latest research from the land-grant University of Minnesota Agriculture Research Stations.

The Green Revolution productivity model worked in its time but its limits have become apparent over the years. Chronic hunger remains persistent in the world: Almost one in five deaths globally is due to poor diet; nearly one in three people worldwide suffer from malnutrition, some 2 billion from a lack of essential micronutrients in their food. The FAO report describes hunger as a product of poverty, not lack of food, and blames its recent rise on the increasing number of violent conflicts.

A second limit to the Green Revolution is the high cost to the environment. Agriculture and our food systems account for around 30 percent of greenhouse gases – only the energy sector contributes more.

“It is time to innovate,” said Jose Graziano da Silva, Director-General of FAO. “This time, innovation means increasing the resiliency and sustainability of our food systems, especially in the face of climate change.”

FAO is looking at agroecology as one possible way to innovate. In October 2016, the FAO's World Committee on Food Security, at civil society's urging, established a high level panel of experts on agroecology with the objective of releasing a report on the topic in 2019. According to FAO, agroecology “brings together scientific disciplines, social concepts and practices” and “provides multiple benefits to society and the environment, by restoring ecosystem services and biodiversity.”

FAO held the 1st International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition in 2014. It looked at the benefits of agroecology and was the impetus for a “Global Dialogue” in 2015 and 2016 that involved 162 member countries. Regional meetings were held in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.

In April, FAO held the 2nd International Symposium to share and discuss policies to “scale-up and scale-out” agroecology. “The results of our experience and of this Symposium must lead to introducing the principles of agroecology in our FAO work program,” Graziano da Silva said at the closing of the three-day conference.

The Director-General of FAO also named agroecology as a method to achieve two of the UN's seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Goal number 2 is ‘Zero hunger’ and Goal number 17 is ‘Partnership.’ To fulfill the theme of the 17 SDGs – leave no one behind – “means partnerships must be built everywhere we can,” Graziano da Silva said.

He also said that agroecology is not just a technical matter. “I stress the social aspect; it is to strengthen family farmers, women and youth.”

FAO has established a new “Scaling-up Agroecology Initiative” and Agroecology Knowledge Hub website to move the topic of agroecology from dialogue to activities at the regional and country level.

Before Graziano da Silva made his closing remarks, His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Maria Tomasi, Secretary of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development at the Vatican, spoke briefly about the interconnectedness of ecology, humans, and agriculture, and expressed support for FAO's agroecology efforts. “Truly much can be done,” the archbishop said. “Working together, it can be done.”§

Learn more about the principles of agroecology from CIDSE: <https://agroecologyprinciple.atavist.com/>

Brazil: International investment in the Cerrado

A fact-finding mission in 2017 has led to changes by the World Bank and the government of Brazil to address land grabbing and environmental destruction by plantations connected to international investment funds.

For decades, local and international campaigns have focused on the issues of deforestation and land conflicts in Brazil's Amazon region. Yet in the neighboring Cerrado region, the most biodiverse savannah region in the world and birthplace of many key rivers and aquifers, forests are being destroyed at a much higher rate and land conflicts are increasing and intensifying. Thanks to affected communities organizing and international groups standing in solidarity with them, significant progress has been made in protecting the environment and the people of the Cerrado over the last year.

In September, a group of about 30 human rights, development and rural experts visited communities in the state of Piauí to investigate reports of increasing land conflicts and deforestation involving international investment funds. Dave Kane, former Maryknoll Lay Missioner and current researcher for the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns based in Brazil, joined the ten-day fact-finding mission and wrote a 17-page report "Brazil: Human and Environmental Costs of Land Investments" documenting how, over the last decade in this part of the Cerrado, wealthy investment pools in the Global North (mostly pension funds and endowments) have purchased large plots of land which they have had deforested and developed into plantations of single crops, like soy or corn, produced for export, and often with devastating effects on local communities.

Representatives of more than 20 communities told observers about their experiences with recently-established large plantations, sharing stories of plantation officials making threats and using outright violence to force families off of their ancestral and communal lands. They also shared stories of the environmental damage caused by these plantations: desertification due to highland deforestation, pollution of streams and wells by agrochemical runoff, destruction of subsistence crops by pests which flourish on the single-crop plantations, and the loss of biodiversity in flora and fauna.

Community members cited the lack of clear title to their lands as an urgent problem. Even after living on their land for many generations, most families do not have free and clear title because the state has failed to regulate land titles, even though a new law (Piauí state law 6.709/2015) was meant to do just that. Instead of helping small family farms, however, community members said the law is helping to legitimize the plantations'

claims to lands they obtained illegally.

At the end of their research mission, the international observers held public hearings at the local, state and national levels to share their findings. At one of these hearings, the Federal Public Ministry (MPF, somewhat analogous to the Office of the Attorney General in the United States) expressed interest in learning more about how international investment funds, such as TIAA, use Brazilian subsidiaries to avoid legal limits on foreign ownership of land.

Two months later, the MPF held its own public hearings in the areas visited by the caravan. As a result, on December 18, the MPF sent a recommendation to the Piauí land regulating body, Interpi, and the World Bank, to immediately suspend implementation of the law in order to consult with affected traditional communities, carry out an anthropological study of how land in the region has been occupied, and to rewrite the law to include the possibility of collective land ownership to "prevent and remediate violation of the territorial rights of traditional peoples and communities." The MPF's recommendation was reinforced by a letter from U.S. civil society organizations delivered to the World Bank at its Land and Poverty Conference in Washington D.C. on March 21.

Shortly thereafter, a representative of the Bank, Adalberto Costa, traveled to Piauí to hear from affected communities. At two public meetings, Costa reiterated that close to 80 percent of the Bank's \$120 million project there is spent on health and education and only \$5 million goes toward land titling. But Costa said that the project will be revised with help from Interpi and the communities themselves to get land titles to communities of former slaves and indigenous and traditional communities. He also said that the Bank will support an anthropological study and visit again in June.

In January, European members of the caravan brought affected communities members to the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Sweden to meet with government officials and pension fund managers about their investments in large plantations in the Cerrado. And in the United States, members of the caravan are beginning to approach the endowment fund of Harvard University, a big investor in the Cerrado, after the release of an investigative report into allegations of the fund's involvement in title fraud, illegal deforesting, and violent expulsion of farmers from their lands. §

U.S.-Mexico border: 'This is not a war zone'

Catholic bishops from eight dioceses in Texas, Arizona, and California issued a statement criticizing President Donald Trump's announcement on April 4 that he would deploy National Guard troops to the U.S.-Mexico border.

A migrant caravan, supported by the group *Pueblo Sin Fronteras* (People without Borders), was walking through Mexico toward the border with the United States on Easter Sunday, April 1, when President Donald Trump seemingly referenced their movement in a tweet that characterized the U.S.-Mexico border as "Getting more dangerous. 'Caravans' coming."

Pueblo Sin Fronteras described the more than 1,000 people in the caravan as mostly from Honduras and mostly women and children "who were forced to flee their countries of origin due to persecution and violence." Upon reaching the border, the migrants had planned to turn themselves in and request asylum in the United States, the humanitarian organization said. After President Trump's tweet, however, most of the migrants left the caravan in Mexico City, telling volunteers from *Pueblo Sin Fronteras* they now hoped to seek asylum in Mexico.

The caravans are known in Spanish as *Via Crucis Migrantes*, or Migrants' Way of the Cross. This is at least the fifth year volunteers from *Pueblo Sin Fronteras* and some local organizations have provided meals, bedding, and other support along the journey to protect families from getting separated or preyed upon by criminals.

President Trump characterized the caravan not as a humanitarian crisis but rather a security crisis. Three days after his tweet, the president officially signed a memorandum to deploy 4,000 National Guard troops to the border, even though the number of apprehensions there recently reached a 40-year low. In his order, President Trump said that "the lawlessness that continues at our southern border" forced him to act.

The plan to bring the military to the border was swiftly rebuked by Catholic bishops there.

"The continued militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border distorts the reality of life on the border; this is not a war zone," wrote eight Catholic bishops from dioceses that line the border in an April 6 letter addressed to the presidents and people of Mexico and the U.S. "Seeking refuge from persecution and violence in search of a peaceful life for oneself and one's family is not a crime," said the bishops from Brownsville, San Antonio, San Angelo, Laredo, El Paso, Las Cruces, Tucson, and San Diego. [Read the letter at <http://bit.ly/DioceseofLaredo>]

The reality is National Guard troops will be able to do little but build and maintain roads and border infrastructure and assist surveillance. Unable to conduct

domestic law enforcement under 1878 Posse Comitatus Act, the troops will enable more Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents to deploy in the field and at checkpoints within the 100-mile-deep border zone. There are already more than 16,600 Border Patrol agents assigned there, along with some 6,500 customs and immigration officers working at ports of entry.

Secretary of Defense James Mattis assured Congress that the troops will have "no contact with the migrants." "The forces will not involve themselves with the migrants themselves or have any law enforcement duties," he said.

While previous deployments to the border have conformed to a supporting role, they have proven deadly. When U.S. Marines deployed to Texas on a drug interdiction mission in 1997, a Marine shot and killed 18-year-old Esequiel Hernández Jr. while he was herding his family's sheep in the tiny town of Redford. Some officials who investigated the case speculated that Hernández thought wild dogs that had been bothering his herd were back when he fired his grandfather's decades-old rifle in the direction of four Marines, who were 200 yards away and wearing camouflage. After silently tracking him for twenty minutes, one of the Marines shot Hernández dead. No one was charged with a crime. A film about the incident and ensuing scandal, "The Ballad of Esequiel Hernandez," won best-documentary awards at the Santa Fe and Mexico City film festivals in 2007 and at the El Paso film festival in 2008.

Some governors are saying President Trump's plan to deploy troops to the border is politically-motivated, meant to boost support for a border wall, and that it cost too much. The most recent deployment, in 2014 by then-Texas governor Rick Perry, cost \$12 million a month for 1,000 troops. That would mean nearly \$50 million a month for President Trump's plan, with no end in sight.

The eight Catholic bishops along the border expressed concern that the current "divisive rhetoric often promotes the dehumanization of immigrants as if all were threats and criminals." They implored all involved to ignore the rhetoric and remember that migrants are our sisters and brothers in Christ.

"We remain hopeful that our local, state, and federal officials will work collaboratively and prudently in the implementation of this deployment," the bishops said, "ensuring that the presence of the National Guard is measured and not disruptive to community life."§

Philippines to expel Australian missionary nun

The following article was published by The Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN) on April 25, 2018.

The Philippines' immigration bureau has revoked the missionary visa of Australian nun Patricia Fox over her alleged involvement in "partisan political activities."

A statement released by the bureau on April 25 said the 71-year-old nun, who was arrested on April 16 and detained overnight, had been ordered to leave the country.

"She was found to have engaged in activities not allowed under the terms and conditions of her visa," said Immigration Commissioner Jaime Morente.

The immigration official said the visa granted to Sister Fox gives her the "privilege to engage in missionary work and not in political activities."

A one-page immigration document dated April 23 ordered the forfeiture of the nun's missionary visa that was due to expire on Sept. 5. Sister Fox's alien certificate of registration is also "deactivated."

"We direct [Sister] Fox to leave the Philippines within 30 days from receipt of this order," read the immigration order.

Immigration spokeswoman Antonette Mangrobang, however, said the nun could still enter and leave the country as a tourist.

She also clarified that the decision to revoke the missionary visa was not part of any deportation proceedings.

"[The visa forfeiture] does not mean that she is blacklisted or deported.... The nun can still apply for another visa or re-enter the country using a tourist permit," Mangrobang told ucanews.com.

The nun, who is superior of the international Catholic congregation Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, said she was surprised by the bureau's decision.

"I thought the process was that I would have ten days to put in a counter-affidavit to answer the charges," she said in a statement.

She said she heard the news via the media because even her lawyer had still to receive a copy of the decision.

"I am very sad that the decision at present is that I leave the Philippines," said Sister Fox, who spent almost three decades of her life serving in poor communities.

She said her work with the poor seems to have brought her into conflict with the authorities.

"I am still hoping for a chance to explain how I see my mission as a religious sister and maybe the decision can be reconsidered," she said.

"I may lose my right to be in the Philippines but I can never lose the learnings and beautiful memories," she said.

The nun told ucanews.com that she and her lawyers are going to file a motion for reconsideration to challenge the immigration bureau's decision.

"I was not given a chance to answer the accusations against me," she said.

Among the evidence presented by authorities against the nun were pictures of her taken during a jail visit in the southern Philippines with a banner that reads "Stop Killing Farmers."

She also joined a recent fact-finding and solidarity mission that investigated alleged human rights abuses committed against farmers and tribal people in the southern Philippines.

In response to the visa revocation decision, church and human rights activists marched to the immigration bureau's main office in Manila on April 25 to protest what they described as "an act of religious persecution."

Good Shepherd Sister Elenita Belardo, national coordinator of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, said the Philippine government seems not to understand what it is to be a missionary.

"We are followers of Christ and the mission of Christ is our mission, that is to bring the Good News to the poor, free prisoners, defend the voiceless, and fight injustice," said Sister Belardo.

Father Benjamin Alford of the ecumenical group Promotion of Church Peoples' Response appealed to authorities to give Sister Fox a chance to defend herself and answer the charges against her.

"No revocation of her visa should take place before the bureau has heard the nun's explanation and presented her own side of the story," said the priest.

Bishop Deogracias Iniguez of the Ecumenical Bishops' Forum called on the faithful to press the government to reverse the immigration bureau's decision.

"It is high time for all Christians with a heart for the poor to come out and stand for what is just and right," said the prelate.

Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo said the decision to revoke Sister Fox's visa was "very sad."

"All the good [Sister Fox] has done to help the underprivileged is glossed over and not even appreciated while the insecurity of the present government is given weight," he said. §

Zimbabwe: New democratic spirit

As Zimbabwe prepares for the first elections since a military coup led to the resignation of 37-year ruler Robert Mugabe in November, U.S. leaders are offering incentives if the country can conduct a free and fair vote.

U.S. Senators Christopher Coons and Jeff Flake led a five-person delegation from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on a fact-finding mission in March to meet with new President and formerly ousted vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who is serving out former president Robert Mugabe's five year term until elections can be held later this year.

"The president has made a commitment to take action, but some of the important actions required for progress towards the conditions for free and fair and credible elections have not yet happened," Coons told the media after the trip, as reported in Zimbabwean media.

Coons and Flake proffered an amendment to the U.S.-Zimbabwe Democratic and Economic Recovery Act, which stipulates actions Zimbabwe's new government must take to ensure free and fair elections in order for sanctions to be lifted.

Robert Mugabe and his party had ruled Zimbabwe ever since the former colony known then as Rhodesia wrested independence from the United Kingdom in 1980. Massive mismanagement and corruption, political repression, rampant inflation, and international isolation had created a festering political crisis in the country, while the 93-year-old leader's health and welfare spurred a struggle over succession within the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front, or ZANU-PF.

The situation came to a head in November when Mugabe suddenly fired his vice president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, who was in direct competition with his wife Grace to succeed Mugabe in power. Two weeks later, on November 14, Mnangagwa loyalists in the military led a bloodless palace coup, placing Mugabe on house arrest until he resigned under threat of impeachment on November 21. The ZANU-PF named Mnangagwa president of the party and of the republic on Nov. 24.

Maryknoll Sister Janice McLaughlin, who has lived and worked in Zimbabwe for more than thirty years, witnessed the dramatic events and says she has hope for a new Zimbabwe.

"It was all very positive and upbeat," she said of the new president's recent meeting with U.S. officials.

Sister McLaughlin says preparations are already underway for the upcoming 'harmonious' election – meaning simultaneous presidential, parliamentary and local elections. She reports a new democratic spirit in

the wake of Mugabe's rule.

"There is certainly more openness to international involvement and a much freer atmosphere for campaigning," she wrote in a recent email to the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. "The opposition is still hopelessly split although many still have reservations about the 'new dispensation.' We will keep our eyes open," she said.

Concerns over the ruling party's capacity to hold free, fair and credible elections are well founded. While certainly not a repeat of the bloody 2008 elections, the last harmonized elections in 2013 were not considered credible by citizens of Zimbabwe or international observers. Irregularities included police and military presence at polling places, intimidation against candidates, restrictions to access to the polls, and ballot tampering.

Sister McLaughlin says mechanisms are now in place that could set a more democratic course for this year's vote.

"The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission that was mandated by the 2013 Constitution ... will monitor the harmonized elections in three phases," Sr. McLaughlin said. "The phases include the pre-election environment, such as political party rallies and primary elections; public education of human rights that will emphasize tolerance of divergent views during election season; curbing political violence through engagements with all political parties; monitoring the media against hate speech likely to stir rage, anger and violence; and promoting peace before, during and after the elections."

The campaigning has already begun.

"The ZHRC [ruling party] has been using radio and leaflets in local languages to promote observance of human rights," she said. "It also has a referral mechanism to assist victims of political violence." To facilitate the process, Sr. McLaughlin is helping to organize a forum for public dialogue on the elections to include "speakers with different points of view."

After the visit by the five U.S. Senators, President Mnangagwa assured observers that, quite unlike Mugabe, a range of views will be accepted in a new, post-Mugabe, Zimbabwe. "Where there is dialogue, there is always a way of resolving challenges and this one is an opportunity for us to look at issues and together resolve them and move forward," Mnangagwa said. "That is the spirit which our people must accept."§

Israel/Palestine: The March of Return

Gerry Lee, Director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, joined a delegation of representatives of Catholic advocacy organizations to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories in April. The following article focuses on the delegation's 24-hour visit to Gaza.

Every Friday since March 30 thousands of Palestinians have gathered in nonviolent demonstrations in Gaza near the fence with Israel to protest the humanitarian crisis caused by Israel's decade-long blockade and prior strikes on Gaza. Called "The March of Return," the protest highlights the plight of the 70 percent of Gaza's people who are refugees, and their right to return to their villages from which they were expelled decades ago.

According to a July 2017 report from the United Nations, Gaza's unemployment rate is 41 percent, 96 percent of the water is unpotable and each day Gazans only have around three hours of power. The 2017 report concluded that the prediction made by the UN in a similar report in 2012 that Gaza is on track to become 'unlivable' by 2020, not only holds but that the deterioration of living conditions for Gaza's two million residents has accelerated. "Life for the average Palestinian in Gaza is getting more and more wretched," the report said.

In camps erected near the border fence, many of the protestors have named their tents for the villages their families left behind. In these tents families can meet others from their village, some for the first time, to share a meal and sing traditional songs. Neighbors and local charities bring food to be shared; children play on a playground; women in traditional dress dance outside the tents and street theatre groups perform.

There's a festive, celebratory feeling in the camps, in contrast to the confrontation occurring a quarter of a mile away at the border fence with Israel. While initially the demonstrations at the fence were nonviolent, since the first Friday demonstration when 16 people were killed and hundreds wounded by Israeli Defense Forces snipers, the protestors have grown more desperate. Youth shout "We want to return" at Israeli soldiers as they throw rocks across the fence and the soldiers respond with tear gas and sometimes live fire. At points the youth have tried to pull down the fence and have sent kites with Molotov cocktails across the border.

In the first month of the demonstrations, 46 Palestinians have been killed, including several children, and hundreds have been severely wounded by live fire from the Israeli army. With other U.S. churches and advocacy offices, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns has denounced this use of lethal force against unarmed protestors who present no threat to heavily armed soldiers.

A delegation of 12 representatives from Catholic organizations in Belgium, Wales, the UK, Ireland, France, Germany, Slovakia, and the U.S. spent 24 hours in Gaza, where they visited Catholic Relief Services projects and met with personnel of the UN Refugee Agency (UNRWA) and local human rights groups, as well as city residents. Sponsored by CIDSE, an umbrella organization for Catholic social justice agencies from Europe and North America based in Brussels, the group heard directly from a Catholic parish priest, workers, and youth about the desperation that drives the protests.

Unemployment among youth is a staggering 64 percent, according to the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, which is based in the Jabalia Palestinian refugee camp in Gaza. Even college graduates often can't find work. With no job, unable to leave Gaza, and no viable future, one student told the delegation: "We don't have anything to live for. Who wants to stay here? No one. You must accept humiliation and be silent."

With very few hours of electricity each day and virtually no potable water, over 40 percent of Gaza's residents are food insecure and 85 percent depend on the UN or international donations for help. This is an economy in collapse. We spoke to fishermen who couldn't make a living because Israel has restricted their boats to under 3 nautical miles from shore and farmers who can't market their produce in Israel.

The blockade of Gaza affects all of life here – and death as well. The Al Mezan Center for Human Rights reports that dozens of residents needing treatment for cancer were not permitted to leave Gaza by Israeli authorities. Some have died while waiting for a permit.

"For me, it's a miracle in Gaza that we are still alive," one woman told the delegation. "This is the worst time in our history."

The March of Return is scheduled to conclude with a massive demonstration at the border fence on May 15, the day after Israeli Independence Day, known to Palestinians as Nakba ("catastrophe") Day. §

Faith in action: Read and share the statement on Gaza by U.S. Churches and Christian agencies <http://bit.ly/GazaReturn>

Tell Congress to support human rights and hold Israel accountable <http://bit.ly/TakeActionforGaza>

Resources

- 1) **Read and share our statement** about peace on the Korean Peninsula <http://bit.ly/MaryknollKorea>
- 2) **Explore online educational resources about agroecology** produced by CIDSE, the “international family of Catholic social justice organizations” based in Brussels. <https://agroecologyprinciple.atavist.com/>
- 3) **Watch a recording of a fossil fuel divestment webinar** by the Global Catholic Climate Movement: <https://bit.ly/2uKfcd6> Find all of their resources on Catholic divestment at <http://bit.ly/GCCMDivest>
- 4) **Learn more about fossil fuel divestment** in a guide by Trocaire entitled “Ethical Investments in an era of Climate Change” <http://bit.ly/TrocaireDivest>
- 5) **Learn to live Gospel Nonviolence** in a new manual by Mary Joan (M.J.) and Jerry Park, co-founders of the non-profit organization Little Friends for Peace. This resource includes practical strategies for groups and classrooms for resolving conflict, a prayer, and reflection questions. <http://bit.ly/LFFPmanual>
- 6) **Read and share a statement about the conflict in Syria** by a group of Catholic organizations <http://bit.ly/MaryknollSyria>
- 7) **Sign up for the Central America/Mexico Migration News Brief** from the Latin American Working Group. Every two weeks, you will receive an email compilation of recent top articles and reports related to issues of U.S. immigration and enforcement policy and migration from Central America and Mexico (articles in English and Spanish). <http://bit.ly/LAWGSignUp>
- 8) **Watch a video about the trial of the former president of Bolivia, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada**, in Florida, produced by the Center for Constitutional Rights. “A great story about poor, excluded people getting some level of justice against one of the most powerful men in their country. I’m glad that our Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns was able to play a small part in this important, precedent-setting case.” – Dave Kane, former Maryknoll Lay Missioner. <http://bit.ly/CCRBolivia>
- 9) **Read and share a letter from nearly 200 faith leaders** to the Commonwealth governments urging them to turn climate ‘words into action’ <http://bit.ly/CommonwealthClimate>
- 10) **Follow the Institute for Justice and Peace Studies** at The Catholic University of South Sudan on Facebook <http://bit.ly/IJPSSudan>. Every Wednesday in April, the Institute hosted a series of PAX Lectures on the theme, “Mediations of the Past: Discussions on Memory and Memorialization Practices in South Sudan.”
- 11) **Read and share the 2018 Easter message** from Cardinal Charles Maung Bo in Myanmar. In his Easter message to the people of Myanmar, “From Death To Life: Building a Nation of Hope and Peace,” Cardinal Bo urges an end to hatred and ethnic conflict. <http://bit.ly/2018EasterMyanmar>
- 12) **Watch a recording of Beatrice Fihn’s lecture on nuclear disarmament.** The 2017 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). Executive Director Beatrice Fihn delivered the annual Hesburgh Lecture at the University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies on April 17. The lecture was titled “Faith vs. Fury: The Moral, Legal and Rational Argument to End the Nuclear Threat for Good.” <http://bit.ly/HesburghLecture2018>
- 13) **Read and share remarks of Archbishop Bernardito Auza** on human rights violations by mining companies. In conjunction with the Panamazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) and the UN Mining Working Group, the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the UN hosted a side event on April 19 to examine the violation of the human rights of indigenous peoples in the Amazon by mining companies and ways to respond. <http://bit.ly/2FAXJEp>
- 14) **Read and share the five-page review of the U.S. 2018 Nuclear Posture Review** by the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy <http://lcnp.org/2018NPRLCNP.pdf>

