



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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Honduras: Gross election violations

On November 24, Honduras held national elections; it has been decided that Juan Orlando Hernandez of the National Party won the presidency. His term will begin on January 27. Eben Levey, an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, participated as an election monitor and wrote the following report about his experience.

José Luis stood up to make his point. “Of course there was fraud. Everyone knows that and recognizes it. But they will still make Juan Orlando, or rather I should say Juan Robando (stealing/thief), the next president. This is going to be a hard four years. It just means that we will have to work harder for the next four years if we are still alive.” Another woman echoed José Luis and said, “Yes, if we are still alive.”

Father Roberto Coyne, a Maryknoll priest who has worked in a parish on the outskirts of San Pedro Sula, Honduras since 1991, convened a post-election meeting between several parishioners and myself. He wanted them to have the chance to talk to me about the elections since I had just participated in an observation delegation with Fundación Share and US-El Salvador Sister Cities. We had been credentialed by the Honduran Supreme Elections Tribunal (TSE in Spanish), and had been given nearly unrestricted access to monitor and observe the elections process at the ground level. Our group of more than 50 delegates was one of six groups under the coordination of the Honduras Solidarity Network (which totaled more than 160 observers), and we were among the nearly 1,000 election observers drawn from the OAS, the European Union, the Carter Institute, and others.

From our experiences in a conflict ridden, militarized region called Bajo Aguan, we were incredulous when the OAS and the European Union released statements characterizing the elections as “generally fair and transparent.” Although Honduras revamped its electoral law to increase transparency in this presidential election, what we observed on the ground was far from a “free and fair” election.

Electoral fraud on the ground

On paper, the electoral reforms are impressive, putting in what should have been safeguards against electoral fraud. Among them were measures to provide representation at every voting table for members of each party participating in the election. At multiple points during the electoral process, voting table members had the opportunity to raise concerns about a particular vote.

In theory, this amount of oversight should have prevented the ground-level fraud of vote-buying, intimidation, and stuffing the ballot boxes. However, only the largest parties have the resources to put party members at each table. What followed then were widespread reports of smaller parties selling credentials to larger parties, consolidating oversight in the hands of the National Party and the Liberal Party. I witnessed this during the vote count in Tocoa, Aguan, where at multiple tables, despite “members” of the Patriotic Alliance staffing the table, no votes were recorded for their party. A generous thought might be that these individuals realized that victory was futile and cast their vote for another party, but it occurred far too frequently for this to be random.

Similarly, the new voting law prohibits the use of cameras and cell phones during voting, to prevent voters from snapping a photo of their ballot in order to claim payment from whichever party bought their vote. The voting tables that instructed voters to hand over cameras and cell phones were few and far between, and a number of voters gave themselves away when they forgot to turn off the flash on their device - an event that repeatedly received little to no attention from table members. In fact, vote buying was an open and condoned practice by all parties, on both the left and right. Another group of observers reported a mayoral candidate in Santa Barbara walking in and handing out 100 Lempira bills (about US\$5) to the voters. Our small observation group also overheard conversations as people were leaving the voting tables, asking questions such as “Where do we go to collect our money?”

One form of official and open vote buying was conducted exclusively by the National Party. Across the country, National Party activists were handing out discount cards to potential voters. The card, as reported by the National Lawyers Guild electoral observation group, “lowers the cost of groceries, pharmaceuticals, cell phone plans, and other goods and services, reportedly identifies the bearer as a National Party member and is good for four years. Whether or not this constitutes bribery, the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) calls it a hidden campaign financing source which may directly violate Honduran election laws, for businesses having contracts with the government.”

Among other serious irregularities, a number of voting tables had ballots missing from the electoral packets, at least one table had discrepancies between the number of voters and the number of ballots cast, and at another voting table, we observed table members telling

voters to vote for the National Party. When confronted by a dissenting voice at the table, we witnessed the National Party activists shout down the dissenting individual, telling her that they were running the table.

Systematic and open intimidation

However, vote buying and ballot irregularities were likely not the most concerning phenomena on the ground. Intimidation, by the State and by party activists, was rampant, and it speaks to the atmosphere of violence and impunity that currently pervades Honduran society. With the highest murder rate in the world and levels of impunity that are nearly 100 percent, Hondurans are currently living a reality of violence that is nearly unimaginable and certainly unsustainable. While much of the violence and deaths are attributable to gang and drug trafficking violence, the lawlessness has been used as a cover for targeted political assassinations and paramilitary activity. In the Bajo Aguan, campesino leaders of MUCA (Unified Movement of Campesinos in the Aguan) have to move often due to death threats from paramilitaries under the employ of large landowners such as Miguel Facussé. Involved in struggles over land and subsistence, the campesinos are not only fighting for land that was once theirs and is now in the hands of Facussé and others, but they also must battle mining and hydroelectric projects that have expanded in recent years and threaten water supplies and environmental sustainability. In the midst of these struggles are that constant threats from private paramilitaries and the State, which have repeatedly attempted to evict MUCA settlements and land occupations.

On election day, we saw that the Army had significantly more presence in MUCA strongholds than in the urban areas. In one voting center near a MUCA settlement, four armed military members “guarded” five voting tables, while in Saba, the city where I was observing, two armed military members watched 36 voting tables. If the military was intimidating campesinos during the voting in rural areas, the job of intimidation fell to party activists in the urban areas. In Saba and Tocoa, we witnessed groups of large young men milling about the entrances to voting tables, noting who was voting there. In one case, they completely blocked the doorway and only allowed people in to vote after having a few words with them. It appeared that a number of prospective voters turned around and left without having voted once they saw the men at the entrances to the voting tables.

Even our group of observers was not free from intimidation. We held a joint press conference in San Pedro Sula two days before the election, in which a

representative from the Honduran Solidarity Network condemned the Honduran government for its repeated violations of human rights. While our group left for Bajo Aguan immediately after the press conference, officials from Immigration arrived at the hotel from which the Honduran Solidarity Network was coordinating the observation groups and demanded all of the credentials and documentation from the various groups, specifically asking about the group of Salvadorans (my group) who was going to Bajo Aguan. As we were credentialed by the Supreme Elections Tribunal, and had official documentation, we could not imagine any motive other than intimidation behind the actions of the Immigration authorities. In Tegucigalpa, these actions were repeated against another group of international observers, but in that case, Immigration entered the hotel wearing face-masks, fatigues, and heavily armed. Finally, as we entered Bajo Aguan, after being stopped time and again at the numerous military checkpoints along the highway, our driver reported to us that the military had been advised that we were in the area and repeatedly told us that they “are watching us.” While not an overt threat, the message was clear that from the standpoint of the military, our group of international observers was unwelcome in the region.

The aftermath of the elections

As we witnessed on the ground level, the Honduran elections were far from “generally transparent.” In the hours after the closing of the polls, as television and radio stations were reporting the results coming in from around the country, the nearly five-point lead that LIBRE held was suddenly reversed and given to the National Party’s Juan Orlando. LIBRE, and their candidate Xiomara Castro, had claimed victory based on their polling results and the copies of vote counts that they were receiving from table members around the country. In spite of the optimism and conviction that LIBRE showed, sure of their victory, there was little chance that the elections would go their way. One of my fellow observers, Olivia Amadon of Fundación Cristosal, later wrote, “The question was never whether or not Xiomara Castro could get the number of votes needed to become president. The question has always been whether Xiomara Castro and the social movement that supports her would be able to overcome deep-seated political corruption and the concentration of power in the hands of the country’s economic elite, who have absolute control of the military and their own private security forces.”

The answer to that question appears, at least in the short term, to be no. The challenge that the social

movement has given the regime is evident in the violent actions that before, during, and after the elections. The authorities have responded with force to the largely peaceful protests against the election results. The military violated the autonomy of the national university to fire tear gas at protesting students in Tegucigalpa. Assassinations of LIBRE activists and left-wing journalists continue. An emboldened high-ranking military officer, Colonel Alfaro, publicly threatened a U.S. human rights activist who has been working in Honduras for a number of years. While this type of political violence is not new, in fact it has been a hallmark of the coup government, it indicates that the National Party is following through on Juan Orlando's promise to "do whatever we have to do" to rule the country.

While both LIBRE and the Anti-Corruption Party (a right wing party that fielded a popular sportscaster as its presidential candidate) refused to recognize the election results and called for a complete and transparent recount, the Supreme Elections Tribunal stated that Juan

Orlando's victory was "irreversible." Unable to agree upon the form and structure of a recount, the Supreme Elections Tribunal did not, in the end, have a recount, and it certified Juan Orlando's victory on December 11. In spite of clear concerns over electoral fraud and human rights violations, the OAS and the U.S. State Department immediately issued statements recognizing Juan Orlando's victory.

However, as José Luis said, this clearly fraudulent victory may very well invigorate the efforts of social movements and community activists to build from the grassroots the Honduras that they would like to see. The people with whom I met, parishioners with Padre Roberto, community activists in El Progreso, indigenous activists, campesino activists, and LIBRE activists, overwhelming demonstrated a courage and conviction in the face of terrible human rights violations and impunity. They are the ones who will change Honduras for the better and I am honored to accompany such individuals as they work to build peaceful and just communities. §

Human rights vs. impunity, amnesty

The following article was written by Eben Levey, an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

Recent years have seen huge strides against impunity in the Americas. Abusive military regimes of the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s are being prosecuted, with notable cases being tried across the hemisphere from Argentina to Guatemala – charges against high-ranking military leaders such as Alfredo Astiz in Argentina (convicted of crimes against humanity in October 2011 and sentenced to life in prison) and Efraín Ríos Montt in Guatemala (see below) have served as emblematic cases in the slow but gradual dismantling of amnesty laws.

However, in Central America, in spite of the progress of recent years, a hard-fought struggle between advocates for justice and those who seek to preserve the status of impunity continues.

Guatemala

In Guatemala, as has been reported in previous *NewsNotes*, the trial of former dictator Gen. Ríos Montt for genocide has been a slow and laborious process. In a recent event sponsored by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), lawyers Francisco Soto and Edgar Pérez spoke to a small group. They outlined a number of advances that Guatemala has undertaken in order to reach the point of beginning trials for crimes

committed during the years of military dictatorship. In particular, crucial to advancing the prosecutions were the creation of the High Risk Tribunal, which is tasked with prosecuting major crimes such as genocide and organized crime; a declassification of documents dating back to the years of military dictatorship; and a reorganization of personnel in the Public Ministry.

Following these changes, Ríos Montt was compelled by the courts to give his first testimony in January 2012. Yet the atmosphere surrounding the trial was one of contention, denial, and foot-dragging. High-level officials, including President Otto Pérez Molina, repeatedly made public statements denying that genocide ever occurred in the country. As Martín Rodríguez, director of the Guatemalan alternative media outlet Plaza Pública, detailed in a talk given at Georgetown University in October, the genocide trial brought together conservative elements in the country (politicians, military officers, businesspeople, right-wing academics, and journalists) who launched a campaign to discredit and slander those who sought justice and accountability for the crimes committed under the military regimes of the past. They derided the victims, advocates, and their lawyers as "communists," "terrorists" and "judicial assassins" who sought to undermine the carefully constructed peace that Guatemala had attained in the years since the peace accords. As such, they issued thinly veiled threats

of reactionary violence that would sweep the country should the prosecutions continue.

In the face of the media onslaught, the prosecutions continued, finding Ríos Montt guilty of genocide in May 2013. However, as Soto and Pérez explained, the strategy of the Ríos Montt defense was never to fight the charges of genocide on technical and legal grounds, but rather to wage a judicial war of attrition, delaying the proceedings while the media continued repeating its slanderous statements against the victims. By filing numerous injunctions, changing the legal defense team, and other such actions, the Ríos Montt team slowed down the prosecution to a crawl, making the verdict in May a true accomplishment for the victims. However, only 10 days later, the verdict was overturned by the Constitutional Court in a decision that mandated the trial start again from the beginning. Rodríguez of Plaza Publica lamented this court decision as one that proves that the ties that bind the past military regimes with the current officials and businesspeople in power remain strong and determined to defend impunity.

In November 2013, only days before Soto and Pérez spoke in Washington, D.C., the Guatemalan court set a date for the resumption of the trial: January 2015. The Guatemalan justice system has made huge improvements over the last decade, yet it is unclear if the victims of genocide will see the justice and accountability that was seized from their hands by the Constitutional Court. As Soto exclaimed, “This is not just a genocide trial, but a case against impunity.” For the moment, Guatemala hinges on a potential turning point.

El Salvador

El Salvador too has made strides in overturning the impunity that reigned following the civil war. In March 1993, one week after the Truth Commission released its report that detailed atrocities committed during the civil war, the Salvadoran legislature passed the Amnesty Law that shielded both the right (the military and powerful politicians) and the left (high-ranking members of the FMLN, now in power) from criminal prosecutions. The Amnesty Law was argued to have been crucial to establishing peace and stability in the wake of the civil war.

In recent months, the Salvadoran Supreme Court has announced that it will hear a challenge to the Amnesty Law that was filed by the Human Rights Institute of the Central American University. Public support for the Amnesty Law has been waning, and a number of domestic and international challenges to the Law have chipped away at it in recent years. In fact, a decision by the Supreme Court in 2000 ruled the Amnesty Law con-

stitutional, but gave individual judges discretion to rule that amnesty does not apply in cases that involve crimes against humanity. However, no judge has yet used that discretion to prosecute anyone, leaving the Amnesty in place. As such, the Court’s decision to hear the challenge has once again unleashed a public debate over the desirability and need for such a law.

The process, as seen elsewhere in the Americas, will be complicated and controversial, and is only the first step in dismantling a legal impunity that has protected still very powerful individuals from criminal prosecutions. In October 2013, WOLA published an article that warned against the likely ramifications of the challenge to the Amnesty Law: “If the court finds the Amnesty Law unconstitutional, a backlash from some sectors of society is almost certain ... [and it] appears that pushback from threatened sectors may already have begun. Some of the attacks on El Salvador’s Constitutional Court over the last year can be understood as preemptive measures against a court considered likely to overturn the Amnesty Law ... The human rights community in El Salvador will need support, both domestically and internationally, in order to stand firm in the face of pressure and resistance.”

In fact, on November 14, masked individuals attacked the offices of the Asociación Pro-Búsqueda de Niñas y Niños Desaparecidos [Association for the Search for Missing Children]. As reported in a press release by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, “Pro-Búsqueda has been vital to the work of finding children who disappeared during the war in El Salvador. Its investigative efforts over the years have made it possible to collect information and locate dozens of missing children and reunite them with their families, thereby reestablishing the enjoyment of their right to family, to identity, and to personal integrity, among other rights. Both the Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights have recognized the importance of their work, as well as the information they have collected.” In the attack, Pro-Búsqueda estimated that 70 percent of its files were destroyed or stolen, including “files on habeas corpus cases that are currently being processed by the Supreme Court of Justice, as well as documents related to Pro-Búsqueda cases that are before the inter-American human rights system.”

While neither the responsible individuals nor the intellectual authors have been identified, it is likely that this attack is related to the impending challenge to the Amnesty Law. While the investigation is ongoing, it is of utmost importance that the Salvadoran government do all in its power to protect the physical integrity of hu-

man rights defenders that may also come under attack in what WOLA stated was a predictable backlash.

The events in Guatemala and El Salvador are reminders that the struggle against impunity is extraordinarily difficult. The best examples from across the Americas, such as Argentina and Uruguay, have demonstrated that impunity can be dismantled piece by piece, and that military regimes (or at least emblematic individuals) can be held to account for crimes against humanity. Central America has seen remarkable advances in chipping away at Amnesty Laws, strengthening judi-

cial systems, and appointing and promoting individuals with the courage and determination to prosecute some of the worst crimes from the military regimes. However, strong resistance and even violent backlash committed by powerful actors who have much to lose in potential judicial proceedings continue. In Guatemala and El Salvador, it would not be an understatement to say that the Ríos Montt trial and the challenge to El Salvador's Amnesty Law, whatever the results, will greatly influence the continuation or demise of impunity and amnesty in the region. §

Brazil: Congress halts "Terminator" seeds

Thanks to the rapid response of tens of thousands of people around the world, Brazil's Congress has shelved deliberation on the legalization of genetically modified "Terminator" seeds, so named because they are sterile; unlike natural seeds, they do not reproduce themselves. Terminator seeds represent a real threat to global food security; in 2000, 193 countries signed a global moratorium on the production of, or even experimentation with, terminator seeds.

Terminator seeds are considered dangerous for a variety of reasons. Farmers who use them are no longer able to plant seeds from previous harvests, forcing them to buy new seeds each year. Seed companies have testified in court that there is no way to avoid cross-pollination where a terminator seed crosses with a regular plant to give it terminator traits. As plant diversity decreases, the risk of plagues that could wipe out huge swaths of global food production increases.

"More ominously," according to the ETC Group (formerly known as the Erosion, Technology and Concentration Group), "Terminator is fundamentally a ground-shifting market strategy. If major seed companies are allowed to use Terminator technologies they will immediately transfer all of their plant breeding research onto the suicide seed platform which affords them anywhere from two to four times the profitability of non-Terminator seeds. With the incentive of windfall profits, the multinationals will use every resource at their command to persuade government regulators to accept Terminator varieties and will quietly withdraw less-profitable, non-Terminator varieties from the market, leaving both farmers and countries stranded with only the Terminator option. Terminator profoundly transforms the economic and political dynamics of global plant breeding."

This is especially problematic as these markets are already incredibly concentrated. ETC Group's research shows that only six multinational corporations (Monsanto, DuPont, Syngenta, Bayer, Dow, and BASF) control 75 percent of all private sector plant breeding research, 60 percent of the commercial seed market and 76 percent of global agrochemical sales. Allowing terminator technology would surely result in even higher levels of concentration.

The Committee for Constitution, Justice and Citizenship in Brazil's Congress was considering the bill to legalize terminator seeds when a coalition of mostly farmer and environmental organizations organized a global petition calling for the bill's removal. After two days, the coalition had collected more than 35,000 signatures from dozens of countries. In the Committee's session the following day, the petition was used to show the strong international opposition to the idea. The committee's chair removed the bill from consideration and said he would not bring it up again as long as he is chair.

"This is a momentous day for the 1.4 billion poor people worldwide, who depend on farmer saved seeds," said Francisca Rodriguez of Via Campesina, a movement of peasant farmers. "Terminator seeds are a weapon of mass destruction and an assault on our food sovereignty." Even with this win, activists will continue to monitor the situation; although Brazil's Congress stopped debate on one proposed law, two others are being considered that could also lead to the approval of terminator seeds. In addition the topic surely will be discussed at the next meeting of the UN Convention on Biodiversity in Korea in October 2014. "Brazil is the frontline. If the agro-industry breaks the moratorium here, they'll break it everywhere," said Maria José Guazzelli of Centro Ecológico, part of the coalition that created the petition. §

Brazil: Report on São Francisco project

The following piece was written by Flávio Rocha, a Maryknoll lay missionary in Brazil.

In 2004, Brazil's then President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva announced the São Francisco River Diversion Project, followed by the beginning of the construction of the canal in 2005. Immediately, leaders from social movements expressed their concerns. Initially, the government stated that the almost 400 miles of canal would be built to take water to more than 12 million people in the northeast, but that was not what was written in the official project. In fact, critics say, only 30 percent of the water will be directed to humans and animals in the region and the other 70 percent will be used for irrigation of fruit trees such as mango, coconut and banana, mostly for exportation. The canal also crosses over indigenous land without their permission, which is against the Brazilian Constitution, and will relocate many families, some of them already relocated more than 20 years ago by the construction of the Itaparica Dam (one of the eight dams built on the Sao Francisco River course).

Specialists in the area note that the government has a better project for the region called Northeast Atlas Project. It consists of a rigorous study made by researchers from some Brazilian universities on different ways to provide clean water for more than 40 million people in the northeast. In many cases, the large landowners in the region have appropriated the water that was supposed to serve the population. It is important to note that the Northeast Atlas Project implementation will cost less than \$2 billion instead of the \$4 billion budgeted for the São Francisco River Diversion Project.

The São Francisco River is so important for the people who live in the northeast of Brazil that it is called the River of National Integration. It runs through five states located in the most populated semi-arid area in the world. (More than 22 million people live in this area, the so-called Sertão of Brazil). The Sertanejos, as the people who live in that area are called, are so connected to the São Francisco River that they have created hundreds of myths, songs and poems to honor the Velho Chico (the Old Chico), as the river is tenderly called by them.

The Sertão of Brazil suffers from periodical droughts that force many people to migrate to big cities like Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. However, this is only part of the problem. Some families have been running the region, politically and economically, for decades. As a result, the northeast region has the worst statistics in areas such as land distribution, literacy, infant mortality,

teenage pregnancy, unemployment, etc. The mainstream media tries to convince the Brazilian population that the only issue is the lack of access to water, although the northeast had more than 70,000 dams, ponds and reservoirs built in the last century to fix that problem.

In protest against the project and concerned about the river, Dom Luiz Flavio Cappio, bishop of the Diocese of Barra, located in the state of Bahia, held an 11-day hunger strike in 2005. At that time, not many people outside of the northeast of Brazil were aware of the consequences of this project. Dom Cappio stated that he does not like the expression hunger strike, but if he would say that he was fasting and praying it would not cause the same impact. In a speech for the Brazilian bishops at the 46th Bishops Conference, he said, "Jesus teaches us that when the enemy is very strong and powerful, just prayer and fasting are able to confront it." His nonviolent action made such an impact on Brazilian public opinion that President Lula da Silva asked him to stop it and meet with him at the presidential palace. During that meeting, the president promised him that the project would be better discussed with the Brazilian society.

Unfortunately, that did not happen. The canal construction continued and the media portrayed the government project as the solution for all the historical social problems of inequality in the northeast. Worse than that, the government promised thousands of jobs in an area known for sending people to work in cities like Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, undermining the resistance of non-governmental organizations and social movements.

Tired of waiting for the government to fulfill its promises, Dom Cappio started another hunger strike in November 2007. The bishop prayed and fasted for 24 days. During those days, he received the visit of many leaders from different Christian denominations, activists, artists who have interest in environmental and social issues and politicians who opposed the project from all over Brazil, but he was especially moved by the thousands of people who came to pray with him every day in support of his prophetic action.

On December 21, 2007, on his 23rd day of fasting, the Brazilian Supreme Court voted for the permission to continue the canal construction. Dom Cappio's family, friends and aides convinced him to stop his hunger strike and he consented. As it happens in many similar cases, his defeat was his victory. Many groups throughout the country started organizing people to discuss the project, inviting experts to explain it and its impact on the river. The people who have been moved away from

their land because of the canal are organizing themselves to demand their rights. As for Dom Cappio, he is still very committed to save the São Francisco River and to improve the lives of those who depend on it. He won the Pax Christi International Peace Award in 2008 “for his nonviolent action in favor of the fisher folk and river inhabitants endangered by the São Francisco river transposition project, as well as to the local community itself that was so active in the movement against the river transposition project.” He also won various other honors in Brazil and Europe for denouncing the project

and defending better ways to develop that region as agro ecology, for example. Even though he failed to stop the canal construction, his actions sparked the more general debate about the “development” of the northeast through megaprojects that often hurt the most marginalized people of society and the environment.

In spite of the promise to have the canals done by 2010, currently only about 50 percent of the project is ready. Current President Dilma Rousseff announced that she hopes to be able to finish it by 2015. §

Japan: Constitution’s Article 9 revisited

With the geo-political shifts in Asia and last year’s return to power of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, a real possibility exists of changing Article 9 of Japan’s Constitution which had been written during the Occupation Period after World War II. The following article was contributed by Maryknoll Fr. James Mylet, who has served in Japan for many years.

Article 9 is found in the second chapter of the constitution, “Renunciation of war”; its English translation states: Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

Recently with the escalating tension with China (Senkaku Islands), South Korea (Takeshima), and Russia (the northern territories; four islands) over territorial claims, the Japanese government seeks to be able to assert itself and defend its territories. A dispute continues between nationalists and pacifists in Japan over this issue. Nationalists see maintaining a military as a matter of pride and independence. Pacifists do not agree with the concept of the Self Defense Forces, saying that they are really military, and even hold joint exercises with the U.S. military.

At present, Japanese personnel can join UN peace-keeping missions in the role of non-combatant personnel. Recently, in the case of South Sudan, the Japanese forces supplied the Korean forces with ammunition. The pacifist element would like to remove Japan from all international wars.

The Security Treaty between Japan and the U.S., which went into effect in 1952, is questioned by some as a violation of Article 9; the presence of U.S. bases in Japan has been protested for many years.

Recently, after 17 years, approval was given to move the U.S. Marine Corps base from Futenma to Henoko (Okinawa); Okinawa has 76 percent of all the U.S. bases in Japan, but has only 0.6 percent of the land mass of Japan. In Okinawa, 18 percent of the land is given over to the U.S. military, so this draws opposition. (The disputed Senkaku Islands are in Okinawa Prefecture).

Two recent developments in the news should be noted and watched. First, on December 6, a new law (National Secrecy Act) was rushed through parliament in a late night session. It imposes stiff penalties on bureaucrats and journalists for disclosing and leaking information. It creates a fear of limits on freedom due to its vague language (widely open to interpretation), and it seems to stress civic duties over human rights. It is seen as an instrument to be used by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to help in revising Article 9 of the U.S. drafted Constitution.

Second, on December 26, Prime Minister Abe visited the Yasukuni Shrine where class A war criminals are enshrined along with the others who died in war. This visit, of which the majority of Japanese citizens disapproved, infuriated China and South Korea, and the United States expressed disappointment that Japan had exacerbated tensions with its neighbors.

In re-examining Article 9, balance has to be reached with Japan being able to defend itself, yet at the same time openly acknowledging the damage and havoc its military conquests have caused in the past, and it must be willing to make the appropriate reparations. §

Philippines: Climate crisis

The following article was written by Maryknoll Sister Marvie Misolas who was a member of the Maryknoll delegation to the United Nations Earth Summit Rio+20 which took place in Brazil in June 2012. She recently visited her home country of the Philippines as part of an internship related to her climate change studies at the University for Peace in Costa Rica.

Since June 2013, the Philippines has experienced three super typhoons, extreme climatic events that visited this country within the span of five months. In August, Baguio, the home of the Maryknoll Sisters' Ecological Sanctuary, was shut down for almost a week because of super typhoon Labuyo (Utor) coupled with monsoon rains. Labuyo paralyzed northern Luzon as well as central Luzon prompting the national government to declare a number of provinces under a state of calamity. Another super typhoon Santi (Nari) dumped heavy rains that flooded most of central Luzon. And then, the November 2013 tragedy of typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan), regarded as the typhoon of the century, razed through central Visayas, leaving more than 5,000 dead, still thousands unaccounted or missing and millions of homeless. These storms cost the Philippines billions of dollars in economic damages. [The first name for each storm listed is the one used by the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA, which means "hope" in Tagalog); the second name, in parentheses, is the name used by the World Meteorological Organization, WMO.]

While these super typhoons were surprising to many Filipinos living in their paths, they were not for scientists who have been studying the planet's ongoing climate and geophysical changes. The latest vulnerability index by Maplecroft ranked Philippines ninth in the list of countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) and PAGASA projections, mean temperatures in some parts of the Philippines will rise from 0.00C to 1.10C by 2020 and 1.20C to 2.20C by 2050.

In addition to the rise in temperature, the Philippines is expected to experience change in rainfall pat-

terns which will bring long droughts and heavy rains, high intensity typhoons and more torrential rains. Sea-level rise will affect low lying coastal areas.

Envisioned impacts from the above climatic changes are the following (from the Japan International Cooperation Agency, JICA):

- 1. Disaster in coastal and low lying areas:** Coastal flooding, storm surges; severe damage and destruction.
- 2. Water cycle:** Prolonged drought will cause water shortage.
- 3. Agriculture:** Changes in farming periods and prolonged drought as well as severe typhoons will affect food production, thus food security. Rise in CO2 concentration will be a concern.
- 4. Ecosystem:** Invasion of sea water into fresh water system and farming areas, damage to mangrove ecosystems.
- 5. Public health:** Temperature rise means rise in tropical diseases such as mosquito and floodwater-borne diseases.



Tacloban, Philippines, post-cyclone; photo from the International Organization for Migration

In 2009 the Climate Change Act of the Philippines (RA 9729) mandated the creation of RA 10121 or the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction Management Act of 2010 (DRRM), a national guide on how to achieve sustainable development with inclusive growth.

Among the provinces that are often hit by super typhoons and other extreme climatic conditions are those categorized to have the highest poverty incidence in the country. Most of them are located in the eastern seaboard of the Philippines. Climate justice must be discussed in addressing the effects of climate change in the lives of the most vulnerable to the effects of climate and environmental changes. In addressing the issue of adaptation and mitigation to climate and environmental changes, we must also address the economic empowerment of the people who are most affected.

The National Climate Change Action Plan (2011) clearly lays out seven priorities: food security, water sufficiency, environmental and ecological stability, human security, sustainable energy, climate-smart industries and services, and knowledge and capacity development. However, I think one of the most important objectives that should be the focus of government and civil societies is knowledge and capacity building of the local people. Information and understanding on the part of the vulnerable populations will enable them to make active decisions that will save their lives and economy. §

Syria: Challenging, complex, glimmers of hope

The following piece was contributed by Marie Dennis, co-president of Pax Christi International.

According to the UN, after almost three years of conflict, Syria is on the verge of reversing decades of economic and human development; three million people are unemployed; and one of the harshest winters on record has dumped snow, rain and freezing temperatures on vulnerable Syrians. Many have been imprisoned for no apparent reason, kidnappings are common and brutal violence – most recently involving explosive barrels – continues to devastate civilian communities.

On January 22 the Geneva II conference will launch what is expected to be a long process of dialogue, hopefully leading to a just peace in Syria. Syrian government and opposition representatives will be joined by the United Nations, Britain, the U.S., Russia, France and China (the P5), the Secretary General of the League of Arab States, the High Representative of the European Union, the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and 25 other countries. Whether Iran will participate was still to be determined at the time of this writing. The main objective of the negotiations is to implement the Geneva Communiqué of June 30, 2012.

In a recent statement, Pax Christi International urged the international community, primarily through the United Nations, to provide the necessary infrastructure, mediation and a timetable to facilitate the process of negotiations, but insisted that Syrians themselves should be the main actors. Syrian civil society committed to nonviolence and women in particular should be consulted prior to and during the negotiations and should monitor the implementation of any agreements.

The route to peace in Syria will require construction of a sustainable and inclusive political framework that upholds the rights and honors the diversity of all Syrians, regardless of ethnic or religious background or gender, and a just process to ascertain accountability for war crimes or crimes against humanity committed by any party to the conflict.

“Negotiations will be difficult, but without them, there is only bloodshed and despair on the horizon. I count on those with influence to encourage the Syrian parties to come to the Conference with the serious intention to end the war and agree on a peaceful transition.” (UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, Dec. 23, 2013)

Pax Christi International has proposed a follow-up conference on security cooperation and other critical issues, including the creation of a Middle East “weapons of

mass destruction-free” zone. Such a conference should involve all nations affected by the Syrian conflict.

Responding to the Syrian people’s suffering, Pax Christi International also called for full humanitarian access to those in need in Syria. Pax Christi urged international donors to honor and even increase their commitments of foreign aid for countries in the region hosting millions of Syrian refugees and to remove legal barriers to those seeking a safe haven in Europe or elsewhere.

In addition to 2.8 million refugees, most of whom are in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, more than 6.5 million Syrians are displaced internally. Many have been displaced multiple times and are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. On December 16, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) launched the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) 2014. As the coordinated response within Syria, the plan aims to meet the humanitarian needs of 9.3 million people, at a cost of US\$2.3 billion.

According to IKV Pax Christi Netherlands staff in the region, the starvation of civilians in besieged areas – explicitly prohibited in Article 54 of the Fourth Geneva Convention – is being used as a method of warfare. In this context, IKV Pax Christi Netherlands issued a policy brief on Syria entitled “Starvation as a weapon,” putting forward recommendations that urge the UN Security Council to support a resolution that explicitly condemns the use of starvation as a weapon; that confirms the rights of civilians to have access to humanitarian aid; and that opens all humanitarian corridors to allow access to the besieged civilian population. The International Criminal Court should start a preparatory study to examine intentional and planned starvation to determine whether war crimes (and by whom) have been committed.

IKV Pax Christi Netherlands also urged the international community to examine again with Russia and Iran the prospects of an UN arms embargo on all parties in Syria; to insist that Syria’s neighboring countries cut off the supply of weapons, fighters and money flowing to jihadist groups; and to continue strong condemnation of the use of internationally banned landmines and cluster munitions as well as the targeted use of explosive weapons on schools, hospitals and other populated areas.

Faith in action:

Write Secretary of State Kerry; urge the U.S. to support a UN arms embargo on all parties in Syria; to fully support negotiations toward a just peace; and to back a “weapons of mass destruction-free” zone in the Middle East. §

Central Africa Republic: Searching for peace

This report draws heavily on the November 19 testimony to the U.S. House Sub-Committee on Africa by Bishop Nestor-Desire Nongo Aziagbia of Bossangoa Diocese and vice chair of the Central African Catholic Bishops Conference.

In the past year, the Central African Republic (CAR) has fallen into chaos. Officials in the European Union and the United Nations have even raised the specter of a potential genocide in this land-locked nation of 4.5 million people. According to Jan Eliasson, UN Deputy Secretary General, the population is enduring suffering beyond imagination.

On November 19, Bishop Nestore-Desire Nongo Aziagbia of the Catholic Diocese of Bassanogoa delivered a very somber assessment of the current crisis to the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations. He stated that tens of thousands of people from his diocese were now sheltering in the diocesan compound in order to avoid the deadly violence occurring just beyond its walls. The reasons for their plight are rooted in the complicated political crisis that has engulfed the CAR.

Since winning independence from France in November 1960, the CAR has experienced a long series of coups and corrupt governments. In the past months the state has collapsed; the country is teetering on the edge of anarchy. In March 2013 Michael Djotodia and an alliance of four political parties called the Seleka drove democratically-elected President Francois Bozize from power. In his push to power, Djotodia recruited 20,000 mercenary forces from neighboring Chad and the Darfur region of Sudan to assist in the coup. According to Bishop Nongo, these troops make up about 90 percent of the Seleka forces. These foreign mercenaries are now carrying out a countrywide criminal operation that, according to the International Crisis Group, has no other purpose than personal gain.

In recent months the crisis has metastasized into a more dangerous conflict with religious overtones. The CAR is estimated to be about 80 percent Christian and 12 percent Muslim (as is Djotodia). Most of the Seleka fighters allied with the transition government are Muslims. Christians have armed themselves into self-defense groups called anti-Balaka and are retaliating against their Muslim neighbors. According to a December 5 press statement by the White House, both of these groups have committed shocking and horrific atrocities that demand a swift response by the international community. Djoto-

dia, who took the position of president, has disbanded the Seleka militias and has denied the claim by French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius that the country is on the verge of genocide.

On December 5 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2127 which provides a Chapter VII mandate to the international forces present in the CAR: protect civilians, restore security, and ensure humanitarian access. It calls for contingency planning in the event that a UN peacekeeping operation is deployed. Such an operation would require around 9,000 UN peacekeepers, but this seems unlikely at present given the one-year mandate to the present peacekeeping force, the African Union-led International Support Mission in the CAR (MISCA), which is composed of mostly Chadian troops, as are most of the Seleka fighters. Bishop Nongo and others are calling for more troops from neutral African countries so as to prevent Chad from pursuing its own interests in the CAR. Resolution 2127 also allows French troops that are already guarding the airport in the capitol of Bangui to take all necessary measures to support the African peacekeepers. Within days of the passage of the Resolution 2127 the United States began to airlift about 800 more French troops from Burundi to the CAR. These troops claim they will begin to disarm all armed groups, peacefully at first, but with the use of force if resisted.

The conflict in the CAR is rooted in the exclusion of its citizens from effective participation in the government. What began as a response to bad governance has now escalated into a regional conflict with mercenary forces setting up a de facto foreign occupation, and has also added a dangerous sectarian character. And, as with many conflict around the world, the plundering of precious minerals – gold and diamonds – plays an important role.

But despite the growing sectarian violence, commercial plundering of resources and continued political exclusion, the people of the CAR are actively seeking assistance from the international community that will help them establish peace and security. They are eliciting support for internal processes aimed at a thorough program to end violence, establish a humanitarian assistance program, develop a political transition process, and initiate reconciliation between Christians and Muslims. The visits to the U.S. Congress and the UN by Bishop Nongo and other religious and civil society leaders underscore the Church's commitment to active peacemaking in Africa, efforts that should be supported by churches worldwide. §

South Sudan: Praying for nonviolent response

On January 5, peace talks began in Ethiopia between the government of the world's newest nation, South Sudan, and opposition forces. The talks follow weeks of tragic conflict which continue to unfold; it is a deeply complicated situation with both ethnic and political differences fueling much of the violence. Maryknoll has a long history in Sudan/South Sudan; we join with our colleagues in the faith community in praying for the people of South Sudan. Intern Kelly Kundrat contributed the following piece.

After years of violence between what were then the northern and southern regions of Sudan, and two years after gaining its independence, South Sudan has descended into turmoil. Fighting broke out on December 15 in Juba, the capital; among other issues, President Salva Kiir has accused former Vice President Riek Machar of staging a coup. The violence has led to the evacuation of hundreds of U.S. officials and private citizens. Two UN bases in the region have been the target of attacks. In response, President Obama sent 45 troops to guard the U.S. embassy and personnel. At a December 30 briefing, State Department spokesperson Marie Harf said that Secretary of State Kerry has told both Kiir and Machar that “any effort to seize power through the use of military force will . . . result in the end of longstanding support from the United States and the international community. [Kerry] also has noted that all parties in this conflict have a responsibility to prevent atrocities. Those that violate international law, commit atrocities or other serious human rights abuses will be identified and held accountable.”

The UN has reported the discovery of three mass grave sites, illustrating the issue of widespread systematic violence. In a statement released on December 24, Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said, “Mass extrajudicial killings, the targeting

of individuals on the basis of their ethnicity and arbitrary detentions have been documented in recent days. We have discovered a mass grave in Bentiu, in Unity State, and there are reportedly at least two other mass graves in Juba.” According to the UN, the death toll is over 1,000.

Although both Kiir and Machar are members of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM), factions exist within the ruling party. When asked how the situation escalated to the point of violence when both leaders are members of the same party, Jimmy Mulla, co-founder of Voices for Sudan, told Voices of Russia, “It is more of a power struggle within the party and between the two leaders. At some point the former vice president challenged the authority of the president, saying that the country is not moving in the right direction, and the party has lost its vision. Subsequently the president dismissed him and [several] other top ranking officials from within the party. That is the start of the rift between the two.”

In a statement signed by Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Pentecostal and other Christian leaders, Catholic Archbishop Paulino Lukudu Loro of Juba urged leaders within the region to remain calm, protect the nation's citizens, and avoid inciting violence. They also wished to “correct the media statements and reports that refer to the violence as conflict between the Dinka and Nuer tribes. These are political differences among the Sudan People's Liberation Movement party, political leaders of the Republic of South Sudan.” [However, hostilities between the Dinka and Nuer are real and have existed for generations; Kiir is Dinka, and Machar and many rebels, including the “White Army” (named so due to the soldiers' use of ash as an insect repellent), are Nuer.]

Much has been invested in the birth of this young nation. We send prayers that the issues be resolved peacefully and without further loss of lives. §

Fr. John Barth, one of several Maryknoll missionaries assigned to South Sudan, recently wrote to the Global Concerns office: “While the violence has been horrific, the impression outside South Sudan can often make the situation seem bigger than it really is. Much of the country if not most is not experiencing the violence portrayed in those few areas where the two largest tribes overlap . . . [However,] people [are] on the move here in and around Juba, some leaving for the border for refuge in Uganda and elsewhere. Others are crowding into trucks, vans and whatever has wheels to head to the capital for safety. I was in the Bilpam UN compound [on January 1] and the people kept coming into this already overcrowded base (not a camp) seeking security (many if not most are from the Nuer tribe which is in conflict with . . . the Dinka tribe.) The UN is doing their best to cope with this rush of humanity, taking them into their bases around the country, the last hope for many trying to stay alive. Plans are afoot to prepare proper IDP [internally displaced persons] camps outside the UN compounds but when you're dealing with such number of panicked people it's a logistical challenge.”

Torture: Survivors suffer further ill treatment

The following article was written by Kelly Kundrat, a Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns intern.

“Beza, a Christian woman fleeing religious persecution in Eritrea, arrived at the U.S. port of entry at Hidalgo, TX, and asked for protection. ‘I was shocked,’ she explained. ‘I walked to the border to ask for asylum and was put into a small cell with eight people. There was a toilet in the middle. I was there for 24 hours with nothing—no blanket or mattress, just a cement bench. It was so cold.’” *From “Tortured and Detained: Survivor Stories of U.S. Immigration Detention” 2013*

On December 10, International Human Rights Day, four torture survivors and staff from the Torture Abolition and Survivor Support Coalition (TASSC) met with Congressional leaders to discuss immigration detainment of torture survivors in the U.S. The survivors recounted the experience of torture, their journeys, and subsequent detainment upon entry in the U.S.

When sharing her story, Marie*, a torture survivor, explained she had no idea what political asylum was upon entering the U.S. Marie crossed the Mexican border, five years after escaping prison in her repressive home country in Western Africa. Although she herself had never been involved in politics, she was abducted, raped, and tortured by government officials because of her father’s political activities. After arriving in the U.S., she was kept in a harsh jail-like facility, reminiscent of the horrific experiences she escaped. Terrified of being returned home, Marie was made to endure further hardships within the detention facility even with a legitimate claim to political asylum. Had Marie been assisted by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Legal Orientation Program (LOP) – an informative service only offered in 10 percent of immigrant detention facilities – she would have understood her legal options, thereby shortening her time in the harsh conditions of detainment.

Another torture survivor, Haile*, spoke of enduring humiliation through showering naked in front of others within the U.S. immigrant detention facility. “I come from a traditional Christian family,” he said. “It was the first time I was ever naked in public.” Haile was released after six months in U.S. detention.

The congressional staffers were given copies of “Tortured and Detained: Survivor Stories of U.S. Immigration Detention,” a report issued by TASSC, the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. Along with the meetings was a congressional briefing, featuring speakers

from TASSC, CVT, Human Rights First, the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and the National Immigrant Justice Center. The event was co-sponsored by the Bipartisan Congressional Women’s Working Group on Immigration Reform.

“Tortured and Detained” is a report on the experiences of 20 international torture survivors -- men and women from across the globe -- who went through mandatory immigration detainment upon entry into the U.S., held in prison facilities and detention centers. All 20 individuals were political asylum seekers, meaning they had political asylum status, were seeking political asylum status, or were still detained within the U.S. prison system awaiting the ability to seek political asylum.

The purpose of the report, as well as the Congressional visits and briefing in December, was to push for inclusion of the positive provisions within HR 15, the “Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act”; bolster the use of alternatives to detention; and expand access to LOPs.

In the 2003 pastoral letter *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope* the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) stated, “Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. This requires, at a minimum, that migrants have a right to claim refugee status without incarceration and to have their claims fully considered by a competent authority.”

Later, in the 2011 piece *The Catholic Church’s Teaching on Immigration Enforcement*, the USCCB stated, “Immigration policy should prioritize the use of alternatives to detention for those who do not threaten public safety or national security. U.S. immigration policy should provide meaningful protection to refugees and asylum seekers by eliminating the one year filing deadline, providing appropriate screening by a qualified adjudicator for all asylees, and eliminating mandatory detention of asylum seekers among other measures.”

**Names have been changed to protect survivors’ anonymity.*

Faith in action:

TASSC has created a petition to help torture survivors in detention facilities gain access to the Legal Orientation Program (LOP). Signatures will be presented to officials in the Justice Department’s Executive Office of Immigration Review. Go to www.tassc.org and click “Please sign our new petition” under News and Articles.

Torture: 12 years of Guantanamo

The following article was written by Kelly Kundrat, a Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns intern.

In January 2002, as the U.S. ramped up its “war on terror,” the U.S. military prison located within the Guantanamo Bay Naval base began accepting detainees, most of whom were from Afghanistan though others were from Iraq, the Horn of Africa and Southeast Asia. Since that time, Guantanamo has been harshly critiqued for human rights violations, including the use of waterboarding, forced-feeding, stress positioning, indefinite detention, and a lack of due process. Of the over 800 prisoners kept within the detention facility, only seven have been formally convicted, directly outlining the facility’s superfluous existence.

Some strides to close Guantanamo Bay Prison have been taken and progress has been made; on December 26, President Obama signed the final version of the FY 2014 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The legislation includes provisions that significantly ease the restrictions on transferring detainees out of Guantanamo to other countries. The bill has passed both the House and Senate, and, having been signed by the president, is now law. The president will now have the authority to transfer large numbers of detainees out of Guantanamo.

On December 31, three Uighurs, members of a Muslim ethnic group much-maligned in their native China, were finally released to Slovakia. (Their release had been ordered in 2008.)

While the passing of the NDAA is a step, the pressure from the faith community must remain. At present, 155 men continue to be detained. We applaud the progress made, but must remain vigilant in our determination to end this moral travesty.

In his 2013 open letter to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, Bishop Richard Pates (Des Moines, IA), chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), wrote he would like to see the Department of Defense “make good on the president’s commitment to close this facility that has become a symbol of indefinite detention without trial.” He went on to quote the USCCB’s statement after the 9/11 attacks; “We must not only act justly but be perceived as acting justly if we are to succeed in winning popular support against terrorism.”

For the 12th anniversary of Guantanamo, interfaith groups, student organizations, and social advocates alike



have planned public witnesses to call for the closure of this immoral detention facility. On Friday, January 10, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) plans to hold a Public Policy Call-In Day, where members of the faith community will reach out to political leaders and voice their concerns on the continued use of Guantanamo. Alongside this public policy event, members of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) plan an in-person lobby day where the faith community will be called to stand for those kept unjustly within the facility.

On January 11 all are invited to meet at noon in front of the White House and take part in a one hour procession. The event is sponsored by Center for Constitutional Rights, Witness Against Torture, Amnesty International, Code Pink, NRCAT, World Can’t Wait, Blue Lantern Project, and CloseGuantanamo.org, and the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. On this day, NRCAT also encourages people of faith to join a “prayer chain” at noon to close Guantanamo: Post your prayer to social media and encourage friends to do so too.

The activities focused on the closure of Guantanamo Bay wrap up on January 13, when members of Witness Against Torture end their weeklong fast.

Faith in action:

If you are in the D.C. area during the anniversary weekend and would like to participate in any of the public witness events, please visit www.nrcat.org/Jan2014 for more information.

For more information on NRCAT’s work on Guantanamo, check its website: <http://www.nrcat.org/post-911-detainees/close-guantanamo>. §

World Bank president stresses climate change

Since taking the helm at the World Bank in July 2012, Jim Yong Kim has made it clear that avoiding the worst of climate change and helping communities to prepare for its effects will be a high priority for the agency. While the Bank's goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030, announced in April 2013, has received more press coverage, Kim's commitment to addressing climate change will mark a larger shift for the organization. Civil society organizations are encouraged by these announcements though they know that the Bank, with its long history of support for fossil fuels and entrenched bureaucracy, is difficult to change.



Kim, a physician and anthropologist, is the first Bank president without a political or financial background. Best known for his work as chair of the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School and as co-founder of Partners in Health, a community-based health program, Kim surprisingly is the first international development professional to lead the world's largest development agency.

In a January 2013 Washington Post op-ed, Kim lamented the fact that, “[a]s economic leaders gathered in Davos for the World Economic Forum, much of the conversation was about finances. But climate change should also be at the top of our agendas, because global warming imperils all of the development gains we have made. If there is no action soon, the future will become bleak. ... Just as the Bretton Woods institutions were created to prevent a third world war, the world needs a bold global approach to help avoid the climate catastrophe it faces today.”

Kim laid out three absolute climate priorities: 1) increase the flows of financial assistance and find a way to define “a predictable price on carbon that accurately reflects real environmental costs”; 2) end all fossil fuel subsidies globally; and 3) focus on the largest 100 cities that contribute 67 percent of energy-related emissions and are the most vulnerable to climate change.

Kim has frequently pointed to the irony that while the bulk of greenhouse gases were created in developed countries, developing countries that have contributed little to the problem will bear the brunt of climate change and its costs, and people who are poor will suffer the earliest and the most from its effects.

The World Bank has long financed megaprojects to extract fossil fuels. While there has been a shift in the balance of energy lending during the last five years, the majority of its loans still go to fossil fuel projects, predominately coal. In 2012, the World Bank Group approved a total of \$3.6 billion in financing for renewable energy projects. This is a record 44 percent share of its annual energy lending of \$8.2 billion. Though activists point out that some renewable sources are cleaner than others. Since 2007, 43 percent of all the Bank's renewable energy loans went to hydroelectric power projects that displaced thousands of families, usually indigenous, and submerged hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland, creating methane, a powerful greenhouse gas in the process. Less invasive alternatives have received much less funding.

An argument that some in the Bank give in favor of coal and other fossil fuel projects is that, while not clean or renewable, they at least help the poor gain access to energy. Yet a 2010 Oil Change International study of the Bank's loans found that “*none of the World Bank Group's fossil fuel finance directly targets the poor or ensures that energy benefits are reaching the poor*” (emphasis in original). The investigators found “the only targeted end-users indicated for fossil fuel projects are industrial or commercial consumers... [m]oreover, there are no provisions to make either connections available to the poor or energy services affordable for the poor.”

In April 2013, 59 development, faith, human rights, community, and environmental groups from more than 20 countries sent a letter to Kim calling on all international financial institutions to stop using public resources to subsidize the fossil fuel industry. They offered a challenge to Kim: “It is time for the Bank to end support for all fossil fuel projects (other than assistance with transition, such as mine closure) unless it can be clearly demonstrated that 1) the project's sole purpose is directly increasing energy access for the poor, and 2) a full examination of all costs – including damages to public health, welfare, the environment, and the climate – of the proposed project and any new renewable and efficiency alternatives demonstrates that it is the best alternative for delivering energy services to the poor. We believe that you will find few, if any, fossil fuel-based projects that meet these criteria.”

Based on Kim's statements and background, it seems that his heart agrees with this call from society, but will he be able to steer the mammoth World Bank bureaucracy in a new direction? §

Increased interest in guaranteed basic income

Swiss citizens recently passed a referendum instructing their Congress to design and implement a guaranteed minimum monthly income of around US\$2,800 for every citizen of the country regardless of their income from other sources. The idea of a “universal basic income” (UBI) is gaining popularity across the world as it appeals to people of various political persuasions.

People with a liberal or progressive outlook are attracted to the UBI’s potential to end hunger and decrease economic inequalities while also diminishing environmental destruction. It can also guarantee survival for workers in an economy that no longer produces work for all. As computer scientist Jaron Lanier pointed out, Kodak, the iconic photography company, employed 140,000 people with middle class incomes at the height of its power. It filed for bankruptcy in 2012, the same year that Instagram, the company that now helps people share pictures, sold for \$1 billion while employing only 13 people. It is an extreme example of a larger trend of technological advances displacing workers. We are able to create much more with fewer people.

In order to maintain adequate levels of employment, most countries have chosen to deal with this excessive production by producing and consuming more and more. Yet as resources become scarcer and we run out of room for our wastes, it is clear that this is no longer a real solution. To guarantee a basic minimum income for all would assure that even while not employed in paying work, a person would be able to survive. According to the Global Basic Income (GBI) Foundation, “A basic income seems to be the only reform proposal that we currently have, which solves the contradictions in our present economic system and policy, and which will enable a gradual transition to a sustainable and social economy.” It would be especially effective if done in conjunction with resource taxes such as a carbon tax or land use fees that make resource usage more expensive.

The GBI Foundation argues further that “[f]orcing people to do hard, underpaid work by threatening them with poverty or even starvation in case of non-compliance, is a practice that has no place in a democratic, free society. Many people nowadays are unhappy with their work and lives, because of this practice. It constitutes a constant incursion on the democratic values of our societies and on human dignity. The dependence on work for survival gives richer people and companies too much power over people with little money. A basic income would reduce this imbalance in power. It would end at

least extreme forms of exploitation,” as workers would no longer be so desperate to accept whatever work was available.

“Apart from the fact that the conditions and quality of paid work would improve through the introduction of a basic income, it would also lead to a revaluation of unpaid work. A lot of important work that people do is not paid, such as raising children, household work or voluntary work for social organizations and people in need. A basic income is a recognition of the fact that most people who don’t have an official, paid job are nevertheless doing important work.”

Conservative economists and libertarians also see positive aspects to a guaranteed basic income. Friedrich Hayek argued on the simplicity and efficacy of the UBI: “There is no reason why, in a society which has reached the general level of wealth which ours has achieved the first kind of security [certainty of a ‘given minimum of sustenance’] should not be guaranteed to all without endangering general freedom.” It could take the place of a host of expensive, bureaucratic and questionably effective welfare programs with a simple system that could be run by a computer.

According to the Cato Institute’s Michael Tanner, “The federal government spent more than \$668 billion on over 126 anti-poverty programs in 2012. When you add in the \$284 billion spent by state and local governments that amounts to \$20,610 for every poor person in America.”

Many also appreciate how a UBI would do away with the paternalistic incentives in current welfare programs that discourage marriage, as two people currently receive lower benefits as a married couple than as single people. It would also remove the up to 100 percent marginal tax rates on earned income faced by people in current welfare systems. The government removes a significant portion, or even all, of any additional earned income removed from their benefits, making work less attractive. An interesting debate between conservative economist Milton Friedman and William F. Buckley about the UBI can be viewed on the Atlantic magazine’s website (“Icons of the right debate a Guaranteed Minimum Income,” Nov. 20, 2013) where Friedman lays out the conservative reasons for supporting the idea.

Brazil was the first country to pass a national basic income law in 2004. It aims to gradually implement the law, beginning with granting a monthly income of US\$33 to its poorest citizens in a program called Bolsa Familia (Family Basket). It is not a true UBI, which places no demands placed on recipients, as children are

required to have their vaccines up to date and have at least an 85 percent attendance record at school. Much of the money for the program comes from oil revenues making it similar to the Alaska Permanent Fund, in place since 1982, which pays a dividend for every Alaskan citizen not convicted of a felony with money from a tax on oil production.

Smaller pilot projects in Canada, Namibia, and India have shown that a UBI not only decreases poverty, but helps increase school completion rates and lower hospitalization rates. Despite many warnings that the

money would discourage work, only mothers of young children had reduced levels of paid work.

The effects of any UBI will depend on the details of each program, level of payment and other circumstances, but the Swiss example will be closely watched by other countries considering implementing similar programs. It may seem hard to imagine, but as the GBI Foundation argues, “A few centuries ago almost no one would have believed that universal suffrage or social security systems like the ones we have today would be possible. Yet, here we are.” §

UN: “The World We Want” platform

In 2000, the UN adopted the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV and AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015. UN member states now are consulting on the shape of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which will replace the MDGs beyond 2015.

“The World We Want” is a web platform created by the UN and civil society to hear and amplify the voices of people around the planet, to give them a chance to express their concerns and suggestions in this process of building a global agenda for the SDGs. One of its tools is the “Peoples’ Voices” series, which brings together panelists and speakers on various issues, both experts and those directly affected by the topic.

On November 19, the fifth session of the Peoples’ Voices series was held at the UN, on the theme of children and the post-2015 development agenda. People around the world were able to participate via livestream on the website.

UNICEF’s Richard Morgan moderated the panel, which included Andrew Johnson, Deputy Secretary-General of ChildFund Alliance; Louise Zimanyi, Director of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development; and Ivana Savic, the Organizing Partner for the Major Group on Children and Youth.

Youth participants Erida Bajrami, 16, and Flutura Braka, 17, joined the event via Skype from Albania. According to a press release from the Peoples’ Voices, “They introduced a video documenting child participation in Uruguayan Post-2015 consultations, conducted by SOS Children’s Villages. Bajrami and Braka then presented key messages that emerged from their own national consultation process which included a call for better education and job opportunities, ending discrimination, better child protection, ending violence against

children and more equality.

“As Bajrami and Braka noted, the children from the Uruguay consultation were able to ‘open up and feel comfortable with their peers’ in a way that they could not with adults. UNICEF’s Morgan pointed out the uniqueness of the Albanian youth presentation, where ‘children from one continent were introducing and summarizing the voices of another.’”

Maryknoll Sister Elizabeth Roach, a retired missionary who has spent her life working with children, was able to participate in the November 19 livestream from her home in Ossining, NY; Sr. Roach said, “I was able to view the webcast from right here at Maryknoll without making the trip into New York City. The reception was excellent. ... Some specific goals [the] teenagers mentioned were education, safety from violence, and safety from abuse, such as sexual and physical violence, as well as corporal punishment in schools. The panelists emphasized the importance of early childhood education and psychological needs of little children. They spoke, too, of the present incarceration of children in many countries. Perhaps the most touching comment of all was the report of a five year-old girl. When asked what she wanted, she said, ‘I would like a long table where everybody can sit and eat.’”

This is a living example of an agenda that leaves no one behind. Through technology, elder adults are able to contribute to the dialogue. As the UN defines new development goals for the 2015 agenda, it is imperative that women, children, people with disabilities, as well as many others including the elderly, be part of the discussion. The table needs to expand so that “everybody can sit and eat.”

Connect with the World We Want platform and learn more about the Peoples’ Voices series at <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/>. §

Trafficking: February 8 affirmed as day of prayer, fasting

On November 2-3, a workshop on the issue of human trafficking/slavery, the first on the topic, was held at the Vatican at the request of Pope Francis. According to a Vatican Insider article (November 2), “When, soon after his election as pope, the president of the ... Pontifical Academy of Sciences (PAS) ... Archbishop Sanchez Sorondo, asked him if he would like the PAS to focus on any particular issue, Francis immediately responded with a hand-written note saying ‘it would be good’ for the academy ‘to deal with the trafficking in persons and modern slavery’ ...”

The November workshop brought together approximately 75 delegates from the church, civil society and governments; another meeting is planned for 2014, with a larger conference to be held in 2015.

The weekend following the Vatican workshop, the U.S. Catholic Coalition Against Human Trafficking held its 10th anniversary meeting in Baltimore; members reflected on the past year’s progress and strategized on plans for the years to come.

According to Catholic News Service (November 4), “After Pope Francis entrusted [the Pontifical Acad-

emy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences] to study the problem of human trafficking, a group of women religious asked the pope to raise greater awareness in the church about the issue by establishing a worldwide day of prayer and fasting. ‘The pope was very interested in our suggestion and asked us what date we would like the day to be,’ Consolata Sister Eugenia Bonetti [said.] ‘We told him February 8, the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita,’ a Sudanese slave who found freedom in Italy and became a nun in the late 19th century. She said the idea for a worldwide day of prayer came from ‘the need to do something that joins us together’ to tackle the global problem; some dioceses and parishes are active on the issue while others are unaware or indifferent, she said. ...

“While he was archbishop of Buenos Aires, the future Pope Francis had been a strong supporter of local activists and initiatives fighting human trafficking and supporting rescued victims.”

Learn about the Catholic Coalition Against Human Trafficking at <http://www.usccb.org/about/anti-trafficking-program/index.cfm>. §

Jesus weeps – Resisting violence, building peace Ecumenical Advocacy Days, March 21-24, 2014

Join Maryknoll and other faith groups at the 12th annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD), held **March 21-24**, near Washington, D.C. This year’s EAD will focus on the ways we can transform policies that promote violence to policies that enable peace.

Guided by the image of Jesus weeping over a capital city that turned from the true way of peace (Luke 19:41-42), we will expose the violence that pervades our culture and world: Nearly 3,000 children in the U.S. killed by guns each year; a quarter of U.S. women experiencing domestic abuse at some point in their lives; a decade of war, nearly 1,000 civilians killed by drones, and Pentagon spending dominating our federal budget; more than 45 million people worldwide uprooted from their homes by persecution and armed conflict; and deadly conflicts over natural resources erupting around the world.

We are consoled by the promise that “justice and peace shall embrace” (Psalm 85:10), and are reminded that justice requires peace-making and that peace requires justice-making. We will confront and imagine how to transform the violence in our world, and together will seek a vision of peace in the community, peace among the peoples, peace in the marketplace, and peace with the earth. Through prayer, worship, speakers, and advocacy training we will discover a faith-based vision for national policies that “guide our feet into the path of peace” (Luke 1:79), all culminating with Monday’s Lobby Day on Capitol Hill.

Learn more at www.advocacydays.org or call 202-543-1126. If you plan to attend, please let the MOGC know; we would love to coordinate with Maryknollers and Maryknoll supporters who will be at EAD this year.