



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

# NewsNotes

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

**March-April 2020**  
**Vol. 45, No. 2**

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**Published by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: Peace, Social Justice & Integrity of Creation**

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# Nuclear Threat: Closer to “Doomsday”

*Scientists warn of the “twin existential threats” facing our planet – climate change and nuclear weapons.*

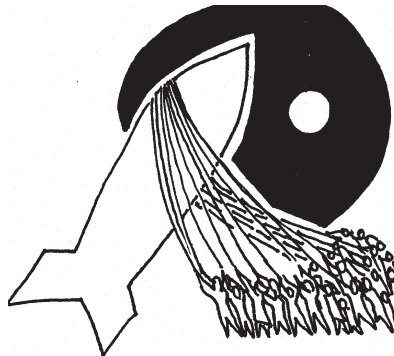
On January 23, 2020 the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, an organization of science and global security experts, announced that it was moving the hands of the “Doomsday Clock” to 100 seconds to midnight – closer to doomsday than ever before. Introduced in 1947 to visualize the risk of “destroying our world with dangerous technologies of our own making,” the clock’s hands are moved closer to or further from midnight – the apocalypse – by a group of experts at the Bulletin. Previously the gravest warning was when the clock was set to two minutes to midnight, which occurred upon the introduction of the hydrogen bomb in 1953, and again in 2018 .

The latest warning comes at an opportune time. Nuclear weapons and climate change are widely recognized by scientists and security experts as “twin existential threats” to life on earth. While much more action is needed, the gravity of climate change has largely entered the global consciousness, thanks to global youth activism. But since the end of the Cold War, the nuclear threat has failed to grab the public imagination in the same way. As experts warn that the danger of nuclear annihilation is greater than ever, the crucial New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) – the centerpiece of nuclear arms control and verification between the U.S. and Russia – is set to expire in February, 2021. The time is ripe for a new wave of citizen action to pressure leaders to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, nuclear weapons.

After announcing the Bulletin’s decision to move the clock closer to midnight, a panel of experts addressed a crowd at Georgetown University to explain the decision. The panel included Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; former UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon; former California Governor Jerry Brown, Executive Chair of the Bulletin; and Rachel Bronson, Bulletin President and CEO. Ban and Bronson cited the dismantling of the global arms control regime as a major factor in the decision, as world leaders are walking away from agreements and multilateral structures which reduce the nuclear threat with no plans for how to replace them. The panelists specifically mentioned U.S. withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty as examples, as well as reluctance on the part of the Trump

Administration to extend New START. In addition, the panel expressed alarm at changes in the U.S. military’s nuclear strategy, including the development and deployment of “low-yield” nuclear weapons which can be used to wage “winnable” wars and new Pentagon plans for a nuclear first strike.

Robinson called for global citizen activism aimed at disrupting such troubling trends, while Brown argued that a rallying cry for the next round of budget negotiations in the U.S. should be, “No START, no budget!”, suggesting that, if the White House could shut down the government over far less urgent issues, Congress could certainly withhold a new budget as a way of persuading the president to sign the treaty. Russia has already expressed willingness to sign a renewed treaty immediately, without negotiations.



The New START Treaty is between the U.S. and Russia, but President Trump says he wants to negotiate a deal that would also include China. The Georgetown panel suggested that it is far more important to extend the treaty between the U.S. and Russia – the countries with the most nuclear weapons – than to initiate negotiations to include China, whose nuclear arsenal is less than one fifth that of the two nuclear superpowers and whose leaders have indicated China will not join the New START. Without extending New START, the panel warned, the U.S. and Russia could spark a new arms race akin to that of the Cold War, putting the world at far greater risk, and using precious resources that could otherwise be spent on necessary social programs around the world.

Nonproliferation and arms reduction are critical and challenging first steps to reach the goal of total nuclear disarmament. Catholic leaders, led by Pope Francis, have stated clearly that the possession of any nuclear weapons is immoral. Vatican diplomats have been supporting dialogue between Russian and U.S. negotiators to increase cooperation on nuclear arms reduction. We must raise the alarm – the clock is ticking. §

**Faith in action:** Urge Congress to pass bills that would support the renewal of the New START treaty: <http://bit.ly/NewSTARTMOGC>

## South Sudan: Progress Toward Peace

*Steve Veryser, a Maryknoll Lay Missioner in Tanzania and the Lay Missioners' Area Director for Tanzania and Kenya/South Sudan, wrote the following article after visiting South Sudan.*

In February I traveled to Juba, the capitol of South Sudan, to visit Maryknoll Lay Missioner Gabe Hurrish, who works at an organization called Solidarity with South Sudan. I had worked in South Sudan in disease eradication before I joined Maryknoll, and Maryknoll missioners have worked there for years. While I was visiting, we spoke with a graduate of Solidarity's Teacher Training program who is now teaching at a school outside of Juba in a "Protection of Civilians" (POC) camp, a place where internally displaced people are offered protection by the UN. Remarking on the ongoing peace negotiations in South Sudan, the teacher shared, "We all want peace. But we are at the mercy of the leaders. The two [main] leaders and others just don't like each other. They don't listen to the heart of the people. We feel there is more hope now than before. We appreciate international people obliging the leaders to discuss peace. Life in the POC is terrible. We can do nothing. We can't improve our lives. There are no jobs."

There's a saying in East Africa that "when elephants fight the grass gets trampled." Violent conflict in Sudan and South Sudan has wreaked havoc on the population on and off for decades. If the elephants are the leaders and the grass is the people, in the complexity of the conflict it is often hard to tell where the grass ends and the elephants begin.

On February 20, President Salva Kiir and his vice president, Riek Machar, who leads the main opposition group, finally started implementation of a unity government in accordance with a deadline set under the peace accord, which ended the devastating civil war in 2018. This was an important step, finally achieved after numerous delays and setbacks in the peace negotiations. Various international actors, including the United States, are supporting the agreement. As the teacher we met mentioned, it has often seemed like the leaders have been "obliged into" the agreements by these external actors.

What is the use of forming a "unity" government? In a unity government, people who were marginalized or targeted during the civil war, as well as members of active opposition groups, are asked to come to the same table for negotiations and to share offices, military posts, and neighborhoods. Given the trauma that people from all levels of society have experienced, this is a tall order. While I worked for an organization in South Sudan associated with the Ministry of Health, I remember that the Minister of Health himself, who was from a targeted

ethnic group, fled Juba fearing for his life. Large numbers of refugees who fled the civil war are trying to reintegrate into society, although they may have grown up outside of South Sudan and may not even speak a language native to South Sudan. Many people lost land and valuable resources, such as herds of cattle, during the war. Ultimately, the tenability of long-term peace rests on how well people can reintegrate into society and the willingness of aggressors to accommodate those returning. After so many cycles of violence, will the aggrieved be able to forgive their oppressors? The churches in South Sudan are begging for these reconciliations and they know that peace is dependent on them.

While the greed of Kiir and Machar and tribalism are often blamed for the persistent violence in the country, there are also external interests at work behind the scenes. The Somali poet Ali Dhuh once said something to the effect, "the genius of whites is that they can both cause a conflict and then come in to broker peace." Again, in this case it is difficult to say exactly who the "whites" are in this situation. Suffice it to say that the same neighboring regional countries and global powers that vie for the upper hand in this strategic and resource-rich region of the world are the parties trying to broker peace in the country and offering aid to the people of South Sudan.

In the optimistic time in which South Sudan achieved independence from the North in 2011, one of the first major infrastructure plans proposed was a pipeline from the oil fields in northern South Sudan to Lamu, on the Kenyan coast. The proposed pipeline would benefit Kenya and allow South Sudan to sell oil to the United States. Currently South Sudan is only able to export oil by means of a pipeline ending in Sudan, and Sudan is barred from selling oil to the United States due to its inclusion on a list of "state sponsors of terrorism." Other countries, especially China, which invested heavily in the existing pipeline, continue to buy South Sudanese oil from Sudan. So it seems that there may be bigger "elephants" fighting over power and resources than Kiir and Machar, and also bigger than the leaders in the neighboring countries. In trying to convince the leadership in South Sudan to come to peaceful terms and usher in a stable peace for the population, those brokering the peace are treating the symptoms rather than the causes of the conflict. The international powers need to be held accountable for their efforts to control power and

resources without regard for the local people.

Gabe noted, “Despite the emotional trauma of losing loved ones to senseless acts of violence, the people of this country carry on. They are sad, frustrated, angry and even vengeful but they carry on. They do what they have to do to support their families. It is this spirit which I feel as I meet them and share their stories.”

As I was leaving, Gabe lent me a book about the life of South Sudanese Bishop Emeritus Paride Taban, the founder of Peace Village, a place where people of diverse ethnic groups live together. To close, I’d like to

share a quote from him that I feel expresses the spirit of mission: “If there is any message I have continuously tried to pass on to others, this has always been the one of peace and love. I see myself as a bee; my task is to sting around, not with the intention of causing harm but of awakening people and transforming lives.” §

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## Statement on Israel-Palestine “Peace Plan”

*Churches for Middle East Peace, a network of organizations working for peace in Israel-Palestine of which MOGC is a member, released the following statement on February 25 on the Trump administration’s “Peace to Prosperity” plan for Israel-Palestine.*

Dear Members of Congress:

As U.S.-based Christian communions and organizations, we are deeply committed to a peaceful and just end to the conflict in Israel-Palestine. We affirm the need for strong—but fair—U.S. leadership to help encourage a future in which Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side in peace and security with both peoples truly flourishing. It is in this spirit that we write to share our deep disappointment with the Trump Administration’s announced “Peace to Prosperity” proposal, which we believe will only further perpetuate violence, fear, and discord.

Our faith calls us to be peacemakers, but we know that for a peace plan to succeed, it must take into account the voices of all who will be affected. It must not, as this proposal did, pre-determine the issues and outcome without substantive consultation of the major parties, in this instance, Palestinian voices and leadership. And despite their exclusion, the success of the plan is placed squarely on the Palestinians, with the promise of a limited future autonomy, contingent on their meeting stipulations which they had no role in shaping. Over the next four years the plan envisions a maintenance of the current status quo without any recourse for change for Palestinians who will continue to live under Israeli occupation and who face ongoing and systematic violations of their rights. A first step outlined in the plan is for the funding of the “Prosperity to Peace Master Fund” and the “International Fund” for Palestine. As noted above, these funds were developed without input from Palestinians and we ask that you refrain from funding them until Palestinians are given sufficient opportunity to weigh in on the purpose of these funds and agree to their parameters.

Meanwhile, it is incumbent upon Congress to take immediate steps to work toward a just and lasting solution to the conflict in Israel-Palestine. To this end, we call on Congress to commit to robust funding for bilateral assistance to the West Bank and Gaza as you begin discussions regarding FY 2021 funding. This would send a positive signal of the U.S. government’s intention as a fair partner for peace. Such funding provides critical medical, educational, and food assistance to the most vulnerable Palestinians.

Additionally, the U.S. must reinstate funding to UNRWA, the only UN entity providing relief and assistance to the more than five million Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. If there is to be any chance for a viable Palestinian state, Congress must also take decisive action to oppose unilateral Israeli annexation of and continued Israeli military control over occupied Palestinian lands, including East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and ending the blockade and control of Gaza.

Despite our strong opposition to the proposal put forth by President Trump, we believe peace and reconciliation, when diligently and authentically pursued, can be achieved. With the conviction that another way is possible for both the Israeli and Palestinian people, we ask that you ensure U.S. policies will result in the recognition of full human rights and equality for all who live in the land called Holy. It is only through committing to uphold these rights and to ending the occupation that a future in which Israelis and Palestinians living together in shared peace and security can be realized. §

**Faith in action:** Write to your Members of Congress asking them to oppose the implementation of this new plan: <http://bit.ly/OpposeP2PPlan>

## Connection Between Climate Disasters

*An unusually extreme weather phenomenon originating in the Indian Ocean has contributed to several climate-related natural disasters around the world in the past year.*

Scientists in a recent BBC report explain that several climate-related disasters that have occurred in the past year are partially the consequence of a weather phenomenon called the Indian Ocean Dipole. These disasters include the intense bush fires in Australia, the floods in East Africa, and the locust swarms in East Africa. The extreme variation of the dipole that is happening this year is predicted to occur more frequently as a result of climate change.

The Indian Ocean Dipole refers to the disparity in temperature between the eastern and western sections of the Indian Ocean. The BBC report explained, “Temperatures in the eastern part of the ocean oscillate between warm and cold compared with the western part, cycling through phases referred to as ‘positive,’ ‘neutral’ and ‘negative.’”

Dr. Andrew Turner, a lecturer in monsoon systems at the University of Reading, United Kingdom explained in the BBC report that “When an Indian Ocean [positive] dipole event occurs, the rainfall tends to move with the warm waters, so you get more rainfall than normal over the East African countries.” A negative dipole phase would bring about the opposite conditions, causing warmer water and more rain in the east and cool and dry conditions in the west. A neutral phase would mean water temperatures were close to average throughout the Ocean.

The dipole’s positive phase this year was the strongest in six decades and resulted in higher-than-average rainfall and floods in East Africa and droughts in South East Asia and Australia. In Australia, this followed years of drought and steadily increasing high temperatures in the summer months. In December 2019 Australia experienced two days of the highest temperatures ever recorded on the continent.

The consequences for Australia included a record-breaking season of bush fires which burned 46 million acres, destroyed over 9,300 buildings, and killed 34 people and one billion animals as of early February.

Conversely, floods in East Africa were the result of an increase in rainfall of 300 percent above average in October and November 2019, according to the BBC. Close to three million people were affected by floods

and landslides and over 300 died. Hundreds of thousands of houses were demolished and roads and bridges were washed away. The nations of East Africa will need billions of dollars to rehabilitate the areas affected. Several of these countries, such as Somalia and Ethiopia, are among the poorest and most vulnerable countries in the world.

In addition, starting in January swarms of desert locusts began moving southwest from northern Somalia, where they initially bred, into Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda, and elsewhere. This was the worst locust outbreak in seventy years. In late January the United Nations

said that \$76 million was needed immediately to control the spread. With the long rains predicted to come in late March, increased vegetation could spur more breeding and it is possible that by June the number of locusts could increase by up to 500 times. The heavy rains of 2019 caused by the dipole created the perfect conditions for locusts to breed and produce unprecedented numbers of young locusts.

The severity of the weather outcomes last year and this year in various regions of the world has occasioned a

fierce debate over the role of climate change. The government of Australia, for example, has resisted attributing these effects to climate change. However, scientists in Australia have long been warning that a hotter, drier climate will contribute to fires becoming more frequent and intense and many parts of Australia have been in drought conditions for years. Australia’s Bureau of Meteorology has stated that the country has warmed by over one degree Celsius (about 1.9 degrees Fahrenheit) since 1910 and most of this has taken place since 1950.

The BBC highlighted a 2014 study predicting that extreme climate and weather events caused by the dipole will become more common in the future as greenhouse gas emissions increase. These scientists project that the frequency of extreme positive dipole events will increase this century from one every 17.3 years to one every 6.3 years.§

Photo of firefighters during 2019 Australian bush fire by Helitak430 - CC BY-SA 4.0.



# Papal Exhortation: “Querida Amazonia”

*In his Exhortation in response to the Amazon Synod, Pope Francis calls for a “missionary Church.”*

In February, Pope Francis released “Querida Amazonia,” or “Beloved Amazon,” his Exhortation in response to the Synod on the Amazon, in which he called for a renewed “missionary Church” to journey alongside the people of the Amazon region.

The Synod on the Amazon was a gathering of bishops, clergy, religious, and lay people in Rome in October 2019 to discuss the pastoral issues facing the Church in the Amazon, including as they relate to the social and environmental issues in the region. The synod was groundbreaking in its inclusion of indigenous and women pastoral workers and in its focus on the application of the principles of Pope Francis’s encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, to a specific ecological territory.

In the Exhortation, Pope Francis describes his “great dreams” for the Amazon region, which he divides into four categories - social, cultural, ecological, and ecclesial. He dreams of a Church in the Amazon region that advances the dignity of the poor and vulnerable, caring particularly for those whose land and lives are threatened by commercial interests which destroy the forest by extracting natural resources. He dreams of preserving the “cultural riches” of the region and celebrates the indigenous wisdom of *buen vivir*, “good living,” a spirituality of harmony between Creator and all creation. He urges the Amazonian Church and all people of good will to protect the precious Amazonian ecosystem.

Above all, and in the most extensive section, Pope Francis describes his dream of a “Church with an Amazonian face,” or a missionary Church transformed by encounter and dialogue with the Amazonian people. Building on Pope John Paul II’s teaching, Pope Francis reiterates the necessity of “inculturation,” or the process by which the Church is enriched and transformed through interaction with a local culture, and in turn the local culture is “brought to fulfillment in light of the Gospel.” He highlights the relationship between solidarity and inculturation, saying the Church must take up the social concerns of the local people as well.

Pope Francis’s exhortation has been met with mixed reactions. Those who were hoping that the document would demonstrate support for the ordination of married priests and women deacons to address the

shortage of priests in the region have expressed disappointment. Others, however, including key voices in the Amazonian Church, have welcomed and celebrated the Pope’s words.

Mauricio López Oropeza, director of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network, who was present at the Synod, called the Exhortation “a love letter for the people in the Amazon” and said that indigenous Catholics in the region feel that “for the first time their church will embrace their wisdom in protecting our common home, our mother Earth, instead of rejecting their identity as Catholic sons and daughters of this land.”

Tania Ávila Meneses, who was present at the Synod on behalf Amerindia, a network of Catholic indigenous theologians, affirmed the Exhortation, saying it shows that “Pope Francis’s heart is beginning to beat as one with the indigenous peoples and reflect our own way of thinking.” Ms. Ávila also works for the Maryknoll Mission Center in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Pope Francis’s call for a missionary Church which preaches the Good News to those on the margins is at the heart of the work of Maryknoll missionaries. Truly, Pope Francis makes it clear that this call applies not only to the Amazonian Church, but to the global Church, praying that “God [may] grant that the entire Church be enriched and challenged by the work of the synodal assembly.” §

**Faith in action:** Read the text of the Pope’s Exhortation, “Querida Amazonia:”

<http://bit.ly/FrancisQueridaAmazonia>.

Use and share this study and prayer guide on “Querida Amazonia” from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: <http://bit.ly/QAUSCCBGuide>.

Read a statement on the Exhortation by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns:

<http://bit.ly/MOGCQueridaAmazonia>



## Deportees Face Death and Abuse

*A new report highlights the consequences of restrictive U.S. asylum policies for deportees to El Salvador.*

A new report from Human Rights Watch reveals the torture, abuse, and death that some Salvadorans have faced upon deportation from the United States, largely due to targeted gang activity. Meanwhile, certain recent changes in border policy make it even harder for asylum seekers to gain legal protection in the U.S. and thus more likely that individuals facing serious harm will be deported.

The report, entitled “Deported to Danger,” is an effort to fill the gap in research on what happens to those deported from the U.S. to El Salvador. The investigators identified 138 cases of murder of Salvadorans who had been deported from the U.S. since 2013, and at least 70 cases of torture, abuse, disappearance or rape. In many of the murder cases, the individuals were killed by the same gang members or authorities whose death threats had prompted their flight to the United States. The authors believe that their data on deaths is only the “tip of the iceberg,” and that many more deported Salvadorans experience abuse upon return than they were able to investigate.

The authors write, “[This report shows that] as asylum and immigration polices tighten in the United States and dire security problems continue in El Salvador, the U.S. is repeatedly violating its obligations to protect Salvadorans from return to serious risk of harm.” This is especially true given the increasing threats to democracy in El Salvador (see the text box).

Although the right to seek asylum is codified in U.S. law, the Trump administration has increasingly restricted who qualifies for asylum. Maryknoll Lay Missioner Heidi Cerneka, an immigration attorney in El Paso, Texas, wrote an article in the September-October 2019 issue of NewsNotes detailing how these new restrictions make it nearly impossible to gain asylum in the United States.

In a recent interview with Texas Public Radio, Ms. Cerneka explained how, given the inaccessibility of asylum status, attorneys are turning to other legal avenues to keep those seeking protection in the United States even temporarily. However, these other forms of legal protection are also difficult to attain, and may not provide the stable protection or benefits that asylum status does, including work authorization or ability to travel outside the U.S.

In addition, news reports from the border indicate that it is increasingly unlikely that asylum seekers who reach the U.S.-Mexico border will receive a fair hear-

ing. According to the Washington Post, the Migrant Protection Protocols policy, which stipulated that asylum seekers must remain in Mexico while their asylum cases were processed, is being replaced by other, even more restrictive policies. One is the Asylum Cooperative Agreements policy, in which migrants who passed through other Central American countries on their way to the U.S. border are flown back to the first country they entered and allowed to apply for asylum there, even though the gangs which many migrants are fleeing operate throughout Central America and Mexico. Another such policy is the Prompt Asylum Claim Review, which condenses the asylum process from several months to under 10 days, further limiting the possibility of a fair hearing or legal aid.

The report from Human Rights Watch on the harm to deportees in El Salvador highlights the consequences of our restrictive and broken asylum system in the United States. §

### **El Salvador: Democracy Under Threat**

People across El Salvador were shocked to see soldiers in combat uniforms march into the legislative assembly, a sight not seen since the 1979-1992 civil war.

President Nayib Bukele ordered a show of force by the military in the legislative assembly on February 9 to pressure lawmakers to approve a \$109 million loan from a regional development bank to finance new weapons, drones and other security equipment to “modernize” the security forces in order to fight gang violence. The young, popular president sat in the assembly president’s chair, prayed, and then gave a one-week ultimatum for a decision on the stalled legislation, reportedly saying, “now I think it’s quite clear who has control of the situation.”

The next day, the Supreme Court ordered any actions taken under the emergency session to be suspended and instructed the president not to use the military in ways that are unconstitutional and “endanger the republican, democratic and representative system of government.”

Maryknoll Missioners reported to the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns that many Salvadorian citizens are concerned that President Bukele is attempting to use the military to take over the government. Thirty civil society organizations issued a public statement on February 11 strongly condemning the president’s actions.



# The Economy of Francesco

*Returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner Dave Kane interviewed two young people planning to attend Pope Francis's "Economy of Francesco," an international gathering in March in Assisi, Italy.*

"Dear Friends, I am writing to invite you to take part in an initiative very close to my heart," wrote Pope Francis in a letter to "young men and women studying economics and interested in a different kind of economy." The letter, sent on May 1, 2019, the feast day of Saint Joseph the Worker, was an invitation to "an event that will help bring us together and allow us to meet one another and eventually enter into a 'covenant' to change today's economy and to give a soul to the economy of tomorrow."

The three-day event this March, titled the Economy of Francesco, will bring close to 2000 young economists and entrepreneurs together to Assisi, Italy. While younger leaders will lead the conference, they will also tap into the wisdom of elders who have been working to make the global economy more humane and sustainable for decades. The morning sessions will allow participants to interact with leading thinkers such as Nobel Prize winners Amartya Sen and Muhammad Yunus, economist Jeffrey Sachs, and social entrepreneur Anna Meloto-Wilk.

In the afternoon sessions, the participants will meet in twelve "thematic villages" to discuss topics such as finance, agriculture, energy, lifestyle, and women in the economy. On the final day of the event the participants will relate their experiences to Pope Francis and consider what the future holds. Among the participants of the conference, there is a clear understanding that this conference is only the beginning of a much larger endeavor.

Felipe Witchger is a good example of the quality of participants going to Assisi. With a seemingly endless amount of energy, he has led the Community Purchasing Alliance since 2013, a coalition of religious and educational organizations that "leverages the buying power of community institutions to accelerate progress towards sustainability, equity, and justice." In 2018, Witchger joined the board of directors of Start.Coop, which "provides strategic tools, knowledge and investment that empowers entrepreneurs in building transformative, scalable, cooperatively owned businesses."

Witchger is organizing others in the U.S. to be part of the larger process surrounding the Assisi event. "I realized that other countries were having preparatory events and here we are in the U.S., most responsible for spreading the current economic model... with nothing," he said. While "some think their way into acting," he said, "I feel like I act my way into thinking." He began

to organize with others in the U.S. who are going to Assisi or interested in helping the process. In addition, he is creating a map of alternative economy networks in the U.S. that he plans to show to other participants in Assisi. The U.S. group has met twice through video conferences and plans to hold an in-person meeting in Washington D.C. in October.

Elizabeth Garlow is another U.S.-based young person who plans to attend the gathering in Assisi. Like Witchger, she is working to organize a network of people in the U.S. to continue the conversation after the conference. She brings a good deal of experience in alternative economics, from co-founding the Michigan Corps, a social entrepreneurship platform, to working as a community solutions policy advisor in the Obama administration. Her current position is with the Lumina Foundation, which invests in "companies focused on post-secondary credentialing and skill-building opportunities." Since 2012, Garlow has been a member of the Economy of Communion, a network of entrepreneurs in the U.S. and Canada focused on the intersection of spirituality and business, with ties to the Vatican.

As part of the Economy of Communion, Garlow participated in a meeting with Pope Francis in February 2017 in which the Pope issued a call to "change the rules of the socioeconomic system." He spoke of the need to stop merely helping the victims of the system and instead to change the system so it does not create victims. This meeting was a predecessor to the coming March meeting.

Garlow is especially excited about the movement-building potential of the Assisi conference. For those who are interested in becoming a part of the movement to imagine an "Economy of Francesco," resources can be found on the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns website.

As Pope Francis says in his invitation letter, "Please, do not leave it to others to be protagonists of change. You are the ones who hold the future!" Now is a time for all of us to reflect on what gifts we can bring to this movement and how we can best participate in this world-changing effort. At a minimum, we can pray for the success of these youth in changing the world. §

# Philippines: Overcoming the Cycle of Poverty

*The following commentary by Irish missionary priest Shay Cullen, SSC, was published by the Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN) on February 14, 2020. A member of the Missionary Society of St. Columban, Father Cullen has worked to promote human rights and the rights of children, especially victims of sex abuse, in the Philippines for nearly 50 years.*

There is extreme poverty in the world. One percent of rich people have more money and wealth than the combined wealth of 4.6 billion people who have almost nothing. Worldwide there are about 735 million people in extreme poverty.

In the Philippines, there are an estimated six million people in extreme poverty. Why is there so much inequality in the world?

Can the power of goodness bring social justice and overcome the devastating harm done by powerful, greedy, and selfish people? They must be challenged, opposed and resisted by those dedicated and committed to doing well.

Humanity develops when there is sharing, cooperation, justice, freedom and equality among people. When these values pervade daily life, they bring peace, harmony and well-being. People have to change peacefully the political and economic forces that allow them such a life.

Each of us can help our neighbors and find ways to open the cage of poverty and let them fly free. Everyone needs a job and a just wage to support their family. The following is a true story, one that is repeated many times over.

Luisito was a boy from a hungry, homeless family. They lived in poverty under sacks at the edge of a beach. His father was a simple fisherman but when international fishing companies were given commercial fishing permits in Philippine waters by corrupt officials, the fish disappeared.

Thousands of Filipinos were thrown into the pit of poverty. Luisito, then 15, collected junk, plastic bottles, anything he could sell for a few handfuls of rice. That's all they had but it wasn't enough. Sickness took his father.

One day Luisito, who was emaciated with hunger, was seen by the owner of a basket-weaving shop and invited to learn basket weaving. He was a person of conscience and he judged it the right thing to do and did it.

Luisito was amazed when he was paid, in advance, a generous trainee's allowance. Immediately he bought rice and fish for the family, the first that they had in weeks.

He was determined to succeed and joined several workers in the small factory. Quickly he became a skilled worker and was paid a higher just wage and giv-

en shelter in the workshop. The cage was open.

Luisito saw a way to overcome poverty. He went to evening classes and graduated high school and, with the help of the basket shop owner, he eventually graduated from college and found a managerial job. He saved his family and his own children. They became college graduates and they have good jobs today.

That was and is the exception rather than the common reality.

That was 30 years ago. The Philippine population is now 110 million and, while poverty has lessened, there are 23.1 million Filipinos going hungry every day, down from 28.8 million in 2016, according to a World Bank survey.

That is still 23 million too many. Yet many more millions of Filipinos, while not grievously hungry, are still living in poverty.

The world has moved on to new economic challenges, so new skills and education are needed to help make a just economy where the youth of today will find good pay in high-tech jobs with dignity and equality.

The nation needs to produce more high-value products in a sustainable way that protects the environment and heals the damaged planet.

To help bring this about, Pope Francis will launch a new initiative called the "Economy of Francesco" at a world meeting of economists and business people with a conscience. It is to be held in Assisi, Italy, in March.

Global action is urgently needed. Millions of people around the world demand change and refuse to be submissive and docile or live in fear of the rich. They now protest inequality, low wages, poverty, unemployment, environmental destruction. They raise their voices at rallies, marches and demonstrations or quietly advocate and create public awareness of social injustice.

Equality will have to come by the action of just governments that will tax the rich and compel them by law to pay higher wages. Governments must also provide social development, health, housing and employment with just wages, as government is supposed to be at the service of the people, for the people, by the people to overcome poverty.

In the Philippines it is the rich who control Congress; they rule by family dynasty and will very seldom legislate against their own interests and only under intense public pressure.

What is to be done to overcome poverty? One thing is to defeat and remove corrupt officials. Politicians promise to do this in order to get elected and have power, but most are corrupt themselves.

As the Philippine Daily Inquirer reported in January 2020: "The Philippines slipped 14 notches from its previous ranking in the latest Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), a rating of global anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International has shown."

In the group's CPI 2019, the Philippines scored 34 to land in 113th spot, down from 99th place in 2018.

Despite that vexing and painful truth, there has been change for the good. There are millions of children and youth getting a better education nowadays thanks to many Filipino people of compassion, with social conscience, who don't tolerate injustice and poverty and lobby and pressure government officials to act justly. It is a slow and frustrating incremental progress.

The restless youth and workers can't wait and are

demanding jobs and higher wages and benefits, a life free from hunger and want.

The rich oppose this. They grow rich from low wages, restrictive labor laws, short-term contract workers, exploitation, plundering natural resources, and paying low or no taxes. The labor movement is frozen.

Educated workers are frustrated and migrate with their brainpower, skills, and knowledge. The Philippines can lower the rate of poverty if the government will invest in advanced technology training and encourage business to create higher-value employment and make high-value products. This will give more spending power to people. That in turn spurs greater economic growth.

Breaking the cycle of poverty will only happen when many more millions develop a conscience, have compassion and give equal opportunities to the poor by sharing their wealth. Together we can help the poor to rise out of poverty and open the door of the cage so that they can fly free. §

## Threats to Shareholder Advocacy

*New rules proposed by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) threaten to stifle shareholder advocacy and decrease corporate accountability.*

On November 5, 2019, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) voted in favor of proposed changes to its shareholder proposal rule that would severely restrict investors' access to the corporate proxy, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) said in a statement released that same day.

The new rules would stifle the voice of shareholders, the statement said, "by substantially increasing the number of shares required to file proposals that appear on company proxies; doubling the thresholds necessary for the re-submission of those proposals in subsequent years; and restricting access to independent proxy advice."

ICCR CEO Josh Zinner explained the situation in a blogpost on the ICCR website:

"Presently, the SEC requires shareholders to hold \$2,000 worth of stock for at least one year before they can file a resolution, an amount which ensures that small investors have the ability to place issues significant to the company before fellow shareholders. The SEC is proposing to revise the rule so that shareholders must own this stake for a minimum of three years before they can submit a resolution. Under the proposal, shareowners who own stock for one or two years must own \$25,000 and \$15,000 worth of shares, respectively, in order to file a resolution. The current thresholds for shareholder support required for the re-submission of proposals are currently 3% for the first year, 6% in the second year

and 10% in the third year. The new re-filing thresholds being proposed by the SEC would more than double those thresholds to 5%, 15% and 25% respectively. The SEC is also proposing to dramatically curb the ability of proxy advisors to provide independent advice to investors, by, for example, requiring that companies have multiple opportunities to interfere with proxy advisors' recommendations on votes."

Zinner blames the push for the new rules on trade organizations like the Business Roundtable (BRT), the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the National Association of Manufacturers, which have repeatedly mischaracterized shareholders' motives as political.

"These industry critics have had a clear political agenda of their own," Zinner said, "to cripple the proxy process that has been in use by shareholders for over 75 years and thereby limit their ability to effectively engage with the companies they own on critical ESG risks."

Once the proposed rule changes are published in the Federal Register, a 60-day comment period will commence. Zinner said, "We will be reaching out in the coming days to help mobilize this response." §

**Faith in action:** Read letters the Maryknoll Sisters and the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers sent to the SEC to express opposition to the proposed rule changes and send your own letter to SEC Chair Jay Clayton: <http://bit.ly/ShareholderAsk>

## Africa: Increasing Illegal Drug Trade

*Fr. Frank Breen, MM, attended a panel at the United Nations on the increasing trade and use of illicit drugs on the continent of Africa. The following is his summary of the new research presented at the event.*

New research by international organizations demonstrates the increasing problem of illegal drug trafficking and use in the continent of Africa. Representatives from ENACT (Enhancing Africa's Response to Transnational Organized Crime), an organization funded by the European Union, explained that the "looming drug crisis" is fueled by existing socio-political problems such as corruption, poverty, and organized crime. These analysts predict that illegal drug trade and use will continue to increase and are working to design and implement better drug policy to combat this trend.

Based on research for a new report, the "Organized Crime Index: 2019," the representatives from ENACT stated that the drug trade in Africa is widespread and rapidly growing, with political and economic repercussions. The presence of illegal addictive substances is now an important focus of policy for many countries on the African continent.

As use has increased, however, countries which already struggle to improve governance and reduce corruption have limited capacity to address the problems the drug trade poses for public health and law enforcement. Many governments have pursued criminal justice as a response to this growing problem, including for low-level offenses such as possession, rather than providing care and rehabilitation for those with addictions. The lack of capacity of governments and their law enforcement branches has resulted in a significant growth in organized crime, and in the insertion of foreign organized crime syndicates on the continent.

INTERPOL, or the International Criminal Police Organization, has identified specific trade routes into and through the African continent for different drugs. In general, cocaine comes in to West Africa from Latin America and then on to Europe. Heroin is traded from Afghanistan to East and Southern Africa, from where it is transported to Europe and West Africa. Synthetic drugs are traded through central and north Africa. Drug use in Africa has grown in part due to over-production in Latin America and Asia, which led drug traffickers to look for a new market in Africa.

The presenters stated that poverty is one of the factors in growth in the drug trade; poor youth from urban slums see the sale of drugs as a way to make money

when they have few other opportunities. Political corruption is another prime element in the drug trade on the African continent: criminal gangs fund political campaigns and directly bribe politicians, who then ignore the growing abuse of drugs despite the harm it is doing.

The panel said that other factors that hamper discovery and control of the drug trade in various cities are successive changes in the ports of entry of drugs into the continent and the use of legitimate enterprises to import drugs. Pharmaceutical companies and used-car enterprises have been known to import drugs in packaging of legitimate products. In addition, known organized crime syndicates from Europe, West Africa, and Latin America have moved into Africa.



The presenters named African fragmentation as another obstacle to a continent-wide response to the trafficking of drugs by transnational gangs. There is no one African position on sale and use of drugs and some countries have even liberalized their policies. The presenters said that meanwhile, the number of drug users in West Africa has tripled since the beginning of the century, and that in Cape Town, South Africa, heroin supply has risen so dramatically that the price is half what it was. They noted that in West Africa, the increasing rate of urbanization is directly linked to the increase in drug use. By 2050, West Africa will be 70 percent urban, with 44 percent living in extreme poverty. Even in comparison to the negative predictions about illegal drug use in West Africa, over the next few decades East Africa is projected to have the sharpest increase in the share of its population using illegal substances.

To combat this epidemic, ENACT is operating training courses in Africa in Criminal Intelligence Analysis to equip junior analysts with concepts, techniques and a practical manual to collect intelligence, often without use of a computer. In three years they have offered 18 courses, training 335 officers from 49 countries and they have likewise trained and certified 50 officers from 18 countries in an Instructor Course. The presenters also highlighted the need for local community groups to be much more involved, in observing what is happening in their neighborhoods and taking action to exclude drug sellers. Coordinated effort at every level is necessary to combat this growing problem. §

## Joint Letter to Presidential Candidates

*On December 9, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joined 31 other faith-based organizations and 70 faith leaders in issuing the following open letter to all the 2020 presidential candidates urging them to call for significant cuts to the nation's military budget and for a renewed investment in domestic programs, diplomacy, and peacebuilding.*

Dear 2020 Presidential Candidates,

As faith-based groups and local faith leaders, we see the challenges that our communities face up close. We also witness first-hand the growth and joy that can be nurtured through wise investments of our bountiful national resources. Our faith and daily experiences tell us that our nation does best when our taxpayer dollars are spent on proven interventions that help make our communities healthier, safer, and stronger—like educating children, caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, and building peace in communities torn by violence.

We are therefore deeply troubled by our federal budget's increasingly distorted emphasis on spending to fight and equip for war, at the expense of investments in our communities at home and our pursuit of peace abroad. We call on you to reverse this harmful trend and reduce military spending, reinvesting our nation's resources in our communities and peacebuilding instead.

We represent a diversity of faith teachings on the question of when—and whether—the organized violence of war is morally acceptable. Where our faiths all agree is that war must never be a first resort or a mindless preference. The immediate effect of war and military violence, even when pursued with the aim of protecting others or ending wrongs, is to wreck, wound, and cut short lives. Faith calls on us to build, heal, and nurture.

With the July 2019 budget agreement, Congress voted to spend over half of the discretionary federal budget on war and today's military. With this decision, we see even more clearly how distorted our national priorities have become. Today the federal budget allocates over \$2 billion each day—more than \$1 million every minute—to spending on war, weapons, and the military. The budget agreement will increase spending on the military by at least \$20 billion over last year; just that increase is more than double the entire annual budget of the Environmental Protection Agency, and fully one-third of last year's total foreign aid and diplomacy budget.

While roughly 40 million people in the United States are not sure they can afford enough food for their family, Congress and the president have agreed to spend more than \$70 billion of our nation's resources on another year of fighting overseas wars. Salaries for the nation's teachers have fallen by 4.5% over the past decade,

yet our latest budget devotes another \$9 billion for F-35 war planes. Veterans of our nation's wars are dying of suicide and drug overdose at alarming rates, yet Congress is poised to spend well over a trillion dollars to refurbish a nuclear weapons arsenal for a type of war that Ronald Reagan once said "cannot be won and must never be fought."

This misallocation of our tax dollars is a gross misrepresentation of our values. Our faith insists that spending ever more resources on the tools and threats of violence will not bring us true security. In order to be truly secure, our communities need a just peace built on the dignity and strength of education, healthcare, housing, nutrition, sustainable employment, and lasting conflict resolution. Instead, Congress has repeatedly put our tax dollars towards weapons and war—tools and actions that harm communities, rather than build them.

Over half a century ago, President Dwight D. Eisenhower reminded us of what our nation loses when it wastes its resources on the tools and business of war: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children."

Our faiths call on us to choose a better path today. Though varied in practice and theology, all of our various faith traditions call us to honor the sacred dignity of each person and to attend to the needs of society's most vulnerable people both in the United States and abroad. It is immoral to spend excessively on the weapons and conduct of war, especially at the cost of food for the hungry, healthcare for the sick, education for our children, and prevention of and recovery from violent conflict.

We urge you to call for significant cuts to our nation's military budget, for major reinvestments in our communities at home, and for a more peaceful approach to the world beyond. §

# UN Addresses Global Homelessness

*In the following article, Sr. Marvie Misolas, MM, summarizes the 58th Session of the Commission on Social Development at the UN in New York.*

An international gathering at the United Nations in February focused on the issue of homelessness, which was the first time the issue of homelessness has been addressed in the history of the UN. This focus on homelessness at the 58th Session of the Commission on Social Development was fitting given that the slogan for this gathering was “Everyone Included” in honor of the 25th anniversary of the Copenhagen Declaration, a landmark document that placed social development and human well-being at the heart of the UN’s work for development. In work for social development, homeless people are often forgotten. The decision to focus on this issue was the result of years of preparation and advocacy by experts on homelessness.

Presenters at the gathering highlighted the relationship between increasing inequality around the world and the increasing exclusion of vulnerable people in many societies. The trends named in a progress report by the UN Secretary General include the increasing income gap between the rich and the poor in many countries, the increasingly uneven distribution of wealth, and the disparity in power between wealthy and impoverished countries. The conference presenters noted that one of the indicators of this extreme inequality is the increasing incidence of homelessness in many societies. According to the 2019 Pope Francis Global Poverty Index, a multi-dimensional poverty index published by Fordham University, in 2016 over 26 percent of the global population (or 1.9 billion people) lacked adequate housing. According to the National Center for Homeless Education, the number of homeless students in the U.S. in 2017-2018 reached 1.5 million, the highest number in history.

Although the right to adequate housing is included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, member states at the UN struggle to find a single definition of homelessness. It is a manifold issue with a variety of social and economic factors, and its causes and appearances are different in each society. Without defining homelessness, governments struggle to create and implement policies to address and end homelessness. The lack of a single definition also results in difficulties for collecting data on homelessness.

At the gathering it was acknowledged that a lack of housing also has a myriad of other social and economic consequences. The progress report by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres acknowledges that “homelessness is not merely a lack of physical housing, but is also a loss of family, community, and a sense of belonging. It is a failure of multiple systems that are supposed to enable people to benefit from economic growth and lead a safe and decent life.” The report also suggested a working definition of homelessness as “a condition where a person or household lacks habitable space with security of tenure, rights, and ability to enjoy social relations, including safety.” This was a definition that

had been proposed by an expert group on homelessness that met in Nairobi in May 2019.

While several countries at the conference showcased their policies and approaches to ending homelessness at the February gathering, only a few have consistently managed to reduce the number of people lacking housing. For example, Finland’s “housing first” policy is an example of a successful, holistic approach to helping those who have experienced homelessness by combining housing subsidies, social protection and health care

benefits, as well as other supportive services. Finland’s system is designed to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless again after an initial intervention. More than a dozen U.S. cities operate “housing first” programs as well.

The Commission approved the final document of the gathering, called the draft resolution, as its contribution to future UN gatherings which will touch upon the issue of homelessness. The United States expressed several reservations on the contents of the draft resolution, issuing a disclaimer that the U.S. only has obligations to the specific sections of the draft it signed. The Holy See welcomed the draft resolution and called for its urgent implementation. §



## Resources

- 1) Use and share our **Lenten Reflection Guide** for 2020, “A Journey Towards Ecological Conversion,” featuring prayers, actions, and reflections highlighting the experiences of Maryknoll missionaries:  
<http://bit.ly/2020LentGuideMOGC>
- 2) Fight against **labor trafficking** this Lent by joining the Labeling for Lent Campaign by the Coalition of Catholic Organizations against Human Trafficking. Send a postcard or sign a petition to prompt Sysco, a food corporation, to urge them to ensure their supply chains are free from forced labor: <http://bit.ly/Labeling4Lent>
- 3) **Register by May 1** for a **young adult gathering in Jerusalem** June 17-25 hosted by Sabeel, the Palestinian liberation theology movement:  
<http://bit.ly/YASabeelgathering>
- 4) Read a statement by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on **nuclear disarmament** in light of Pope Francis’s teaching that the “use and very possession of atomic weapons is immoral:”  
<http://usccb.org/news/2020/020-21.cfm>
- 6) Watch videos of presentations and read a series of blog posts from a conference at Georgetown in February on the **Church’s role in advancing global nuclear disarmament**: <http://bit.ly/PopeandtheBombGT>
- 7) Read a report by Human Rights Watch, “**Deported to Danger**,” which highlights the more than 138 cases of murder of individuals who were deported to El Salvador from the United States since 2013:  
<http://bit.ly/HRWEISalvador>
- 8) Read Network Lobby’s **2019 Voting Record** to see how your representatives voted on issues of economic justice: [www.networklobby.org/votingrecord2019pdf](http://www.networklobby.org/votingrecord2019pdf)
- 9) Register to attend **Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C. April 24-27**, which will focus on climate change and economic justice:  
<http://bit.ly/EAD2020DC>
- 10) Use and share a **Lent resource** from the **Interfaith Immigration Coalition**, “Facing the Future Together,” which focuses on walking with DACA recipients and their families: [bit.ly/faith4daca-lent](http://bit.ly/faith4daca-lent)
- 11) Visit “**Pathways to a People’s Economy**,” a new online toolkit developed by the New Economy Coalition to support activists and organizers in their efforts to amplify the new economy policy wins happening on the ground and to provide real examples of how to shift our economic conditions from the bottom up:  
<https://peopleseconomy.org/>
- 12) Register for a free, one-hour educational program by the Catholic Climate Covenant on preparing parishes, schools and communities to join in on climate action and advocacy in light of **Earth Day 2020**, the 50th anniversary of the original Earth Day:  
<http://bit.ly/CCCEarthDay2020>
- 13) Explore our resource page on the Synod on the Amazon and read our statement on Pope Francis’s final Exhortation, “**Querida Amazonia**:”  
<http://bit.ly/SynodResourcesMOGC>
- 14) Read a new 10-page issue brief produced by Food First/Institute for Food & Development Policy to address the question “How do we grow **agroecology** from “islands of success” to “seas of change?”  
<http://bit.ly/FoodFirstAG>
- 15) Explore a fact sheet by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and the National Family Farm Coalition explaining why a carbon market system will not work for the **agriculture industry**:  
<http://bit.ly/AgCarbonMarkets>
- 16) Read a report by the Othering and Belonging Institute on climate refugees, entitled “**Climate Refugees: The Climate Crisis and Rights Denied**:”  
<https://belonging.berkeley.edu/climaterefugees>
- 17) Read our **latest statements** on war with Iran, landmines, U.S. immigration and refugee policy, and more on our website:  
<https://maryknollogc.org/statements>
- 18) Prepare for **Laudato Si’ Week, May 16-24**, when Catholic communities around the world will be celebrating the fifth anniversary of Pope Francis’s encyclical, *Laudato Si’*: <https://laudatosiweek.org/>