



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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

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Maryknoll Statement on 2020 U.S. Elections

The leadership of the four branches of the Maryknoll family issued the following statement on October 22, 2020.

As the United States approaches the 2020 presidential and congressional elections, Maryknoll missionaries recognize their importance on a global level and the urgent need for what Pope Francis calls a “better kind of politics.” Guided by Gospel values and the social teachings of the Church, we encourage voters, election officials, and candidates to act truly in the service of the common good.

While Maryknoll is based in the United States, Maryknoll Sisters, Fathers, Brothers and Lay Missioners work in over 26 countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Given the powerful position of the United States on the global stage, the results of our elections are of global concern. We know the depth with which people in other nations count on the United States to honor its founding principles of democracy, constitutional order, and the rule of law.

As Election Day nears and with voting already underway, we are alarmed by the parallels we see between emerging conditions in the United States and those we have witnessed at times in other countries during more than one hundred years of mission when elections have not been transparent, inclusive, and accountable. We are troubled by efforts at voter suppression, especially as it

relates to historic systemic racism in the United States. We are also concerned by the spread of misinformation aimed at eroding trust in our democratic institutions. As the United States often instructs other countries, in order to be credible elections must reflect the free expression of the will of the people.

God calls each of us to participate in public life. In that spirit, we pray that all political candidates practice civility and put aside the use of divisive language that fosters hate and misunderstanding. It is our hope that voters scrutinize candidates’ policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, are affected by poverty, violent conflict, human rights violations, trade policies and ecological destruction.

Because of difficulties related to the pandemic, we encourage voters to make a plan and vote early. We encourage citizens to remain patient and confident if it takes longer than usual to count the ballots. We call on officials to ensure that everyone has a chance to vote in a free, fair, and safe manner, and that every vote is counted. We call on legislators and candidates to ensure that the results of the election are respected with a peaceful transfer of power. §

U.S. Elections: During and After November 3

Now that election day is here, U.S. voters have new concerns to consider. Links to all of the resources below are on our website at <http://bit.ly/MOGCElectSec>.

During the Election

Seek help if you need it. The national, nonpartisan Election Protection Coalition runs the hotline 1-866-OUR-VOTE (1-866-687 8683). Call it for questions about how to vote or if you encounter problems when seeking to cast your ballot. Legal help is provided by the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights.

Pray with us. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious offers a short prayer service that you can use to pray with your community called “On the Pulse of the Morning.” The Poor People’s Campaign will host a 12-hour Election Day vigil and bell ringing, culminating with a livestream prayer service at 9 p.m. EDT on Nov. 3. Pax Christi USA also offers prayer cards and resources for study and action.

After Election Day

Organize to protect democracy. The group Choose Democracy is organizing and advising people not to ac-

cept the results of the Nov. 3 election until all votes are counted. They also provide training for nonviolent civil disobedience in the event that the integrity of the elections is not respected.

The Transition Integrity Project, organized by former White House and Department of Justice officials, was formed in 2017 to prevent the U.S. democracy from declining into authoritarianism. In June 2020, it convened a bipartisan group of over 100 current and former senior government officials to name the post-election scenarios. The resulting 22-page report offers recommendations for concerned citizens in the event of an improper vote count or threat to a peaceful transition of power. §

Fratelli Tutti Through Latin American Eyes

Certain terms used in Fratelli Tutti are best understood in the original Spanish and through the lens of Pope Francis' South American roots.

The linguistic choices of Pope Francis in his new encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, reflect his South American perspective, with profound doctrinal and political implications. It is important for U.S. English-speaking readers of *Fratelli Tutti* to understand the way Pope Francis employs certain words in the original Spanish in order to better comprehend and live out his message.

Social Teaching and Social Friendship

One word with significant cultural connotations, “social,” appears in the encyclical’s subtitle, “on Fraternity and Social Friendship.” For American English speakers, “social friendship” may sound redundant. What is friendship if not “social,” which we tend to use simply to mean inter-relational? But in Spanish, social implies societal, suggesting relationships on a systemic, macro scale. “Social friendship” points to the tension at the heart of Catholic social teaching: For centuries, Christian demands on human relationships were largely interpersonal. But global commerce and the industrial revolution made it increasingly clear that modern humans are in relationship with people they will never meet. Catholic social doctrine helps us understand these relationships and their moral implications.

Jesus teaches us to think beyond traditional relationships when he invites us to ask, “Who is my neighbor?” In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis implies that our neighbor may be the Yemeni woman who lost a child to a U.S.-funded bomb, and another may be the worker making our smartphones in a Chinese factory. St. Francis of Assisi, who inspired the new encyclical, spoke of “brother sun and sister moon,” extending social friendship and familial relationships to care for our common home.

Populist, popular, and people

In the section “A Better Kind of Politics,” Pope Francis uses several terms with connotations in Spanish not clearly implied by their English counterparts.

The word “populism” is fashionable today, but it has two different meanings in the United States. Stemming from the People’s Party, or Populist Party, in the 1890s, it is used to describe progressive economic policies prioritizing common people over corporate elites. But “populist” may also refer to a brand of politics in which a leader appeals to common people’s frustrations with political elites, seeking not to reform and strengthen democratic institutions, but to convince people to place their trust in the leader instead. Populist leaders often appeal to nationalist and xenophobic sentiments.

Surely, being from Argentina, the pope understands

“populism” most with the latter meaning, as it is often used to describe Juan Perón, the most important Argentine political figure of the 20th century. This is also how it has been used globally in recent years to describe several leaders around the world. Francis warns, “Lack of concern for the vulnerable can hide behind a populism that exploits them demagogically for its own purposes.”

Pope Francis highlights two other related words: “people” and “popular.” Often in the United States, “people” is used simply as the plural of “person,” and “popular” as describing something or someone that is well-known and well-liked. But these words have deeper connotations in Spanish. “El pueblo,” or “the people,” is a singular noun that refers to *the* people, or *a* people, as a collective whole. The implication is that it refers to common, often impoverished people, again as distinct from an elite class. “Popular,” in turn, describes a connection to or resonance with “the people.” For missionaries, accompaniment of “the people” and support for “popular” movements are inextricably tied to Christian concern for the most vulnerable, pursuit of the common good, and the Church’s preferential option for the poor as first articulated by South American theologians.

Liberal and liberalism

U.S. readers may also question the meaning of the word “liberal” in *Fratelli Tutti*. Commonly used to describe leftist or progressive politics in the United States, “liberal” in South America and many other countries refers to classical liberalism, the political philosophy, and is not associated with the left. Liberalism includes the protection of individual rights – a value shared by both “conservatives” and “liberals” in the United States – but also merit-based individualism that undermines shared cultural identity and collective social movements. Liberal economies are market-based, marked by privatization, competition, and consumerism. In this sense, “liberal” as Pope Francis uses it has as much to do with right-wing libertarianism as it does with the kinds of policies U.S. Americans call “liberal.”

With *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis offers Catholic social teaching and the life of St. Francis of Assisi as gifts to the whole world, to guide us in navigating our current global challenges. The language he employs reminds us that he himself received these gifts in Latin American church, at the margins, among the poor. §

Faith in action: Read our 6-page summary and study guide of Pope Francis’ *Fratelli Tutti* in English or Spanish: <https://bit.ly/FTstudyguideMOGC>

Equitable Global Distribution of COVID-19 Vaccine

Leaders, including Pope Francis, are calling for just and equitable distribution of any future COVID-19 vaccine.

As pharmaceutical companies work feverishly to develop a safe and effective vaccine for COVID-19, efforts are being made to ensure that any successful vaccine will be distributed equitably among countries so as not to bypass the poorest and most vulnerable. Pope Francis and Catholic health organizations have called for the practice of solidarity through just and equitable distribution of the vaccine.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and associate groups have organized a platform called the COVAX Facility to support the research, development, and manufacturing of over 150 vaccine candidates and provide equitable pricing and distribution. The goal is to provide 2 billion doses by the end of 2021. Eighty-two developed countries have committed to the project and contributed funding, and 92 low- and middle-income countries are eligible to participate.

Notably, the United States and Russia have not joined in this effort, although China has recently committed. In September 2020, the U.S. announced it would withdraw from the World Health Organization.

All countries that commit to COVAX will receive enough vaccine doses for 20 percent of their population as soon as vaccines become available. In an attempt to end the acute phase of the pandemic quickly, these vaccines will be distributed first to health care workers, the elderly, people with preexisting conditions and people living in close quarters.

The logistics of vaccinating 7.8 billion people will require immense cooperation and planning. Of the four major vaccine types currently being tested, one will require extremely cold storage, which will be problematic even for highly developed countries. About 38 percent of the global population lives in places that lack temperature-controlled storage for vaccines. In addition, the vaccine may require two doses for efficacy, which will increase logistical challenges. At this point it is impossible to know how long vaccines will be effective, so booster vaccines may be required as well.

Vaccine development is a long and tricky process. It usually requires four, strictly monitored, phased trials over 10-15 years before a vaccine is approved. In the United States it is possible to bypass these requirements in an emergency situation, such as a pandemic, so long

as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) believes that there are reasonable benefits that outweigh the risks of vaccine distribution, given the evidence available.

However, if the FDA gives a vaccine Emergency Use Authorization, the standards for safety will be higher than those of other vaccine candidates, with routine re-evaluation of the vaccine as new data becomes available. In addition, vulnerable populations such as pregnant women and children will only be able to receive the vaccine when more data on its safety becomes available.



Photo: Vaccine production, by Sano-fi Pasteur via Flickr

The Catholic Health Association in the United States supports the guidelines for vaccine distribution set by the WHO and stresses that development and distribution of an effective vaccine should be based on the principle of solidarity so as to protect vulnerable people and the general public. In a public letter, the Association urged that global leaders “[give] all people access to the vaccine while minimizing global and domestic competition which drives up prices for limited supplies.” They added that, “All people, barring exceptional circumstances, have a responsibility to be vaccinated.”

In an interview on October 7, Pope Francis stated clearly his call for justice in the distribution of a vaccine: “The vaccine is the patrimony of humanity, of all humanity, it is universal; because the health of our peoples, as the pandemic has taught us, is a common heritage, it belongs to the common good.”

The WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has welcomed the comments from Pope Francis. “Supply nationalism exacerbated the pandemic and contributed to the total failure of the global supply chain,” said Ghebreyesus. “We have learned the hard way that the fastest way to end this pandemic and to reopen economies is to start by protecting the highest risk populations everywhere, rather than the entire populations of just some countries.”

On Twitter, Ghebreyesus added, “I couldn’t agree more with [the words of Pope Francis]. The #Covid19 pandemic shows that we must make health a human right for all and not allow it to be a privilege for the few. It also gives us an opportunity to rebuild a better, safer, fairer world – together!” §

Pope's Call to Action on *Laudato Si'*

*New Vatican publications urge communities to put *Laudato Si'* into action.*

Five years after the publication of Pope Francis' landmark encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, the Vatican is calling for renewed efforts to put its ideas into action – to move beyond words, as Pope Francis has said and toward “concrete and pressing action” to care for our common home. The urgency of the ecological crisis, coupled with the grave concerns facing humanity during the COVID-19 crisis, mean that, according to Pope Francis, “concrete decisions can no longer be postponed.”

In June, the Vatican published a document entitled “Journeying towards care for our common home: Five years after *Laudato Si'*,” for which the English translation was released in September. This document is an “action-oriented” text based off of *Laudato Si'*, directed at “local churches, local communities, politicians, and all people of good will” to help them implement concrete initiatives to address climate change and promote integral ecology, the central concept of *Laudato Si'*, or the idea that pressing human needs and environmental concerns are fundamentally interrelated.

The document explains that while the Church's expertise and primary capacity is “educational, pastoral, and cultural,” rather than “technical and scientific,” the Vatican wishes to “present various operational proposals” developed through consultation and social analysis, “with the aim of inspiring action on the part of Church institutions, believers, and all people of good will.”

The document is divided into two chapters, each with several sub-sections. The sections in each chapter include examples of “good practices” by church and faith-based organizations around the world, and “lines of action” of suggested next steps. The first chapter, “Education and Ecological Conversion,” focuses on how to encourage ecological conversion and the values of integral ecology in schools, parishes, and ecumenical and interreligious settings. The second chapter is entitled “Integral Ecology and Integral Human Development” and includes subsections on social concerns topics such as food and nutrition, energy, and finance.

Some of the proposals are strikingly specific and visionary, highlighting the Vatican's close consultation with subject experts and hope for significant transformation at the local and global levels. Perhaps most notably, in the section on finance in the second chapter, the Vatican urges organizations and businesses to “[take] care not to support companies that harm human or social ecology (for example, through abortion or the arms

trade), or environmental ecology (for example, through the use of fossil fuels).” This was noted by Catholic environmental groups in June as the first official endorsement of fossil fuel divestment campaigns by the Vatican. It closely followed the announcement by 42 faith-based organizations of divestment from fossil fuel companies.

Following up on this call to action, Pope Francis delivered his second Ted Talk in October, entitled “Our moral imperative to act on climate change -- and 3 steps we can take.” In the 12 minute video, the pope invites “all people of faith and good will” on a “journey of transformation and action...made not so much of words, but rather of concrete and pressing actions,” the goal of which is to “build, within the next decade, a world where we can meet the needs of the present generations...without compromising the possibilities of future generation.”

The first step suggested by the pope is “an education geared toward the care of our common home, developing the understanding that environmental problems are linked to human needs.” Such an education, he said, requires both a scientific and ethical approach.

The second step focuses on water and nutrition, naming the human rights to water and food and explaining that food production must shift towards “non-destructive farming methods,” so that addressing human needs does not come at the expense of future generations.

In the third step, Pope Francis calls for energy transition, or a “gradual replacement, but without delay, of fossil fuels with clean energy sources.” With great gravity, he names the predictions of scientists that we have “less than 30 years” to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere before we reach a turning point for catastrophic climate change. Reflecting the Vatican's proposals in the “Journeying toward care of our common home” document, he suggests that businesses should “[exclude] from investments those companies that do not meet the parameters of integral ecology...”

We cannot continue to “squeeze the earth like an orange,” said Pope Francis. “The current economic system is unsustainable.” In conclusion, echoing his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, he called for a “renewed politics,” reminding us that, “love is political.” §

Faith in action: Read and share the document, “Journeying toward care of our common home,” the Vatican's “how-to” guide for implementing *Laudato Si'*: <http://bit.ly/LSHowTo>.

40th Anniversary of Churchwomen Martyrdom

Maryknoll missionaries reflect on the legacy of the four churchwomen in El Salvador in advance of the 40th anniversary of their martyrdom.

December 2 will mark 40 years since the murders of the four U.S. churchwomen in El Salvador – Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, American lay missionary Jean Donovan of Cleveland, and Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel. For communities in El Salvador and in the United States, honoring this anniversary is an opportunity to reflect on the churchwomen’s legacy and to be re-inspired by their witness of Christian solidarity.

The four churchwomen were brutally killed by Salvadoran government forces in 1980 for their ministry work among the poor, for which the U.S.-backed Salvadoran government had labeled them “activists.” Today among local Salvadoran communities and many U.S. Catholics they are viewed as martyrs, women who gave their lives as a witness to Christian love and solidarity.

In a September 2 interview with Catholic News Service, Bishop José Luis Escobar Alas of San Salvador said, “The [churchwomen] could have lived in better [economic] conditions in their native country than here, but, not only did they show solidarity with the poor, but also suffered the same fate as the poor...at the hands of a bloody repression.” He said that the local Church celebrates the anniversary of their death each year “because they lived out the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the most extreme of consequences.”

The Maryknoll Sisters have continued to honor the memory of the churchwomen on this anniversary throughout the years. For the 35th anniversary in 2015, in conjunction with the SHARE Foundation, they participated in a pilgrimage to the village in El Salvador where the churchwomen worked. This year, instead of a week-long anniversary gathering, which was cancelled due to the pandemic, the Maryknoll Sisters are now hosting a virtual gathering on the evening of December 2. The SHARE Foundation and LCWR had planned a delegation to El Salvador for this December, but they have shifted to offering virtual resources, including a toolkit for those wishing to plan events in honor of the four churchwomen.

In El Salvador today, Maryknoll Lay Missioners are reflecting on the ways in which the four Churchwomen’s memory and legacy live on in the community.

Lay Missioner Ann Grieg says Jean Donovan’s life inspired her to become a lay missionary herself. Peg Vamosy explains that many times when she introduces herself to Salvadorans, she is identified with the churchwomen, who are celebrated as martyrs along with St.

Oscar Romero and Fr. Rutilio Grande.

Lay Missioner Melissa Altman says the churchwomen expanded the meaning of mission for the Salvadoran community in which she works: “[The terms mission and missionary] are common language here, as church-going people are encouraged to go on ‘mission’ to other parts of the country to evangelize for a weekend/week...[When I first arrived,] before I had time to explain [about my mission], Maria Julia, a long-time Church volunteer who...worked with Dorothy Kazel and Jean Donovan...said, ‘Oh no, Maryknoll is different. Maryknoll’s mission is to be in solidarity with us, to work with us and to learn together – that is how we build the Kingdom of God.’ My jaw dropped; I could not have explained it better.”

When he reflects on the impact of the four churchwomen, Lay Missioner Rick Dixon thinks of members of the community where he works in San Salvador. “Brandon, a five-year-old from La Esperanza, often asks me, ‘[When are the gringos coming?]’ He’s referring to the Lay Missioners’ Friends Across Borders (FAB) program. With the COVID-19 situation, it has been a year since our last FAB group visited La Esperanza and Brandon. They gave him lots of tender loving attention and read lots of children’s books to him.”

Remembering that loving attention, Brandon feels “moments of joy that haven’t faded,” Rick says.

“I think of what Jean Donovan said about the children here: ‘I want to get closer to God and going to El Salvador is the only way I think I can... I don’t know how the poor survive. People in our position really have to die unto ourselves and our wealth to gain the spirituality of the poor and the oppressed. I have a long way to go on that score. The poor can teach you so much with their patience and their wanting eyes. We are all so inadequate in our help. Several times I have decided to leave El Salvador. I almost could except for the children, the poor bruised victims of this insanity.’

“Jean Donovan said this forty years ago, and Brandon’s eyes say it all: Time hasn’t faded,” Rick says. §

Faith in action: For more information about plans to honor the 40th anniversary of the churchwomen’s deaths, visit <http://bit.ly/40AnnChurchw>

Maryknoll Says Set América Free!

Maryknoll Lay Missioner Heidi Cerneka in El Paso, Texas, led a campaign to free an indigenous woman from Guatemala from immigration detention.

On October 23, 2020, El Paso Matters, a digital newspaper serving the communities of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, reported on the dire situation of an indigenous woman from Guatemala detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in El Paso, Texas, despite having won her case for freedom three weeks earlier. The El Paso field office of ICE told local advocates that the decision was pending at ICE Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Maryknoll Lay Missioner Heidi Cerneka, an immigration attorney in El Paso, issued an urgent plea for concerned citizens to contact ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Headquarters and Congresswoman Veronica Escobar to call for América's immediate release.

Within 24 hours of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns emailing this action alert to missionaries and supporters, many emails and calls were made – and América was free!

While Heidi cannot provide details of the abuse that led the court to grant América 'withholding of removal', she can share some of her conversations with América and the situation that América finds herself in today.

From Heidi Cerneka, MKLM:

América is a young indigenous woman who fled Guatemala after suffering violence and persecution by members of her community, by the police, in school, in court simply for being indigenous and for being a woman.

América is a strong and thoughtful person. Speaking in the Mayan language of Mam, América describes the culture of the nearly half a million Mam people who live in parts of Guatemala and Mexico as different from that of the majority of Guatemalans. "We do everything differently. We farm. We use nature and natural healers. We sometimes wear shoes. I am a weaver, and I weave *huipiles*, our traditional clothing."

After six months in the ICE detention center in El Paso, Texas, held in jail-like conditions for the "crime" of seeking protection from the United States under UN and U.S. asylum laws, a judge recognized the persecution that América suffered in her native Guatemala and the danger to her if she were to return.

América won her freedom on October 5 but she is still not free. Proving one's case is no easy task for anyone seeking asylum. América had to demonstrate a more

than 50 percent likelihood that she will be persecuted if she returns to Guatemala.

The court's October 5th decision states that by statute, América cannot be deported to Guatemala. The government did not appeal and the decision is final.

The United States still tried to deport her. ICE has responded to the court's decision by contacting consulates in three other countries to ask for permission to deport her to a third country.

The U.S. courts recognize América as an indigenous woman from rural Guatemala who is not safe to return to Guatemala, but ICE is willing to deport her to a country she does not know, to a culture and community she does not know, in a language that is not her own – in the middle of a pandemic!

ICE had the authority to release her, either due to the grant of 'Withholding of Removal' on October 5th, or under ICE supervision while they sort out the responses from other countries.

América had suffered enough. For asking for protection under U.S. asylum law, América had been detained for over six months in the El Paso ICE detention center where she contracted COVID-19, and despite all of that, battled to win her case in immigration court.

In the isolation of the detention center, surrounded by sickness, América suffered under the stress and strain of winning her case yet was still detained and with no information.

Then, on the evening of October 26, after a public outcry, the El Paso Detention Center released América!

América will most likely be able to stay with her sister in the United States. She was granted Withholding of Removal, which means she cannot be removed to Guatemala. Generally, a grant of Withholding of Removal means the person can stay in the United States until the court decides conditions have improved in her home country. One judge with more than 30 years on the bench told another client of mine that he has never seen that happen. So, it is likely that América will not be deported to Guatemala, and will remain here in the United States.

Supposedly, in América's case, the judge ordered her deported to any country but Guatemala. ICE asked three countries to receive her. Only two responded and refused. After 30 days, on November 4, this matter is scheduled to close and América will not need to worry about being deported to Mexico or to anywhere else. §

South Sudan: New Ceasefire Agreement

South Sudan's government and the Opposition Movement Alliance announce their intention to sign a ceasefire agreement reached thanks to international mediation efforts.

The Rome-based Community of Saint Egidio mediated a breakthrough in talks between South Sudan's government and the Opposition Movement Alliance who have agreed to a ceasefire and to pursue dialogue toward a peace accord in the world's youngest nation. While the exact details of the ceasefire are not known, the Saint Egidio Community told Vatican News that it is organizing meetings between military and political representatives of both sides to establish mechanisms to monitor ceasefire violations.

The meetings are scheduled to take place in Rome, in two stages. The first encounter will be a workshop for military representatives from November 9 to 12. The second encounter will be a dialogue on November 30 aimed at producing a declaration of political principles. The negotiators from the government and the opposition alliance will need to reach an agreement on such contentious issues as federalism, the constitution, security, land allocation and reconciliation.

Maryknoll missionaries in South Sudan tell us that many people there are skeptical of the ceasefire's long-term success. Corruption, hunger and severe flooding have weakened the young nation at the very moment it needs to build a solid foundation.

In September, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan released a report that details the theft of "a staggering \$36 million" in public funds since 2016 by high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats, often in plain sight of

international corporations and banks which choose to remain silent. "It is worth noting this is just what we were able to trace and may not reflect the whole picture," said Commission Chair Yasmin Sooka in a statement to the Human Rights Council on Sept. 23.

"South Sudan is a country where lives are being destroyed by financial corruption on an epic scale," Chairwoman Sooka said. "Looting and pillage aren't just offshoots of war – they are arguably the main drivers of the conflict. At one end of the spectrum, South Sudan's political elites are fighting for control of the country's oil and mineral resources, in the process stealing their people's future. At the other, the soldiers in this conflict over resources are offered the chance to abduct and rape women in lieu of salaries. The eight-year-old girl gang raped in front of her parents is the collateral damage."

At the same time, more than half of the nearly 11 million people of South Sudan regularly go hungry and flooding has devastated parts of the country since July, according to UN estimates. The World Food Program blames the flooding on months of torrential rains that caused the Nile to burst its bank.

The Vatican's pursuit of dialogue and peace in this suffering place is a leading example of the Church's response to the pope's call for us all to be missionary disciples. §

Peace Agreement in Sudan

The Darfur Women's Action Group (DWAG) released a statement about the peace agreement signed by the Sudanese government and the rebel alliances on Oct. 3, 2020.

... "DWAG, and many others, remain skeptical of the peace agreement and the absence of the two powerful rebel groups reinforce the uncertainty that will ensue the signing ceremony....

"For the millions still living in displacement and refugee camps, peace is not simply an agreement between leaders and celebration but the recognition of and commitment to their safety and security. It is the restoration of their stolen land, a sense of justice against their struggles with lawlessness, and a guarantee of their safe return to their lands of origin.

"DWAG, therefore, calls on all parties to ensure that peace must be inclusive and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the affected communities. We further call on all parties to allow for a detailed step-by-step plan for capacity-building and an increase in the participation of women on all levels of decision-making pertaining to

peace agreements, their implementation, and the interim process.

"We call on the international community and the regional actors overseeing the peace process in Sudan to ensure that peace must be inclusive and accountability measures must be put in place to hold all parties accountable if they fail to implement the agreement.

"We further call on the Sudanese interim government as well as the regional and international stakeholders to make an effort to bring both the Sudanese Liberation Movement — the largest Darfuri opposition group, led by Abdel Wahid El Nur — and Abdelaziz Al-Hilu of Nuba Mountains to address their concerns, respond to their demands and retrieve their signatures to ensure that peace and security arrangements are complete, comprehensive, and sustainable." §

Read the full statement at <https://bit.ly/3jJNf9v>

Protecting Biodiversity and Preventing Pandemics

Protecting biodiversity will help prevent pandemics caused by diseases spread from animals to humans.

As the world reels from the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, scientists explain the connection between humanity's impact on declining biodiversity and increasing frequency of "spillovers," or human diseases which originate in animals. It is estimated that two-thirds of human diseases now originate in animals, facilitated by our practices of extensive clearing of wilderness areas and forests, catching wildlife, and selling meat in unsanitary places where it comes into contact with bats and wild birds.

Academic researchers, non-governmental organizations, and the United Nations are urging that biodiversity protection targets be implemented as one key method of preventing further outbreaks of pandemics similar to COVID-19. At the virtual UN Summit on Biodiversity held on September 30, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres stated, "Humanity is waging war on nature and one consequence is the emergence of deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola and COVID-19. The degradation of nature is not purely an environmental issue. It spans economics, social justice and human rights, and can result in geopolitical tensions and conflicts."

Speakers at the Summit explained that 13 million hectares of forest are lost every year, vertebrates have declined by 68 percent in the last fifty years, and in each year one million species of plant and animal life are at risk of extinction, caused by habitat loss, farming, poaching, pollution, invasive species, and climate change. Over the past few hundred years human population growth combined with increased, unsustainable production and consumption patterns have expanded demand for biological resources, which has in turn caused a dramatic loss of biological diversity.

The participants of the Summit concluded that if humanity continues down this path, food security, water supplies, and livelihoods will be threatened, as will our ability to fight diseases and handle extreme events.

The goal of protecting biodiversity is not new, but it is increasingly urgent. The UN Convention on Biological Diversity was adopted in 1992 and came into force in December 1993. It has been ratified by 196 countries, making it almost universal, with the notable exception of the United States. The Convention has three objectives: the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its components, and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.

At the Convention on Biological Diversity Conference in Nagoya, Japan, in 2010, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets were adopted, containing five strategic goals and

twenty ambitious targets. These targets were meant to guide action on biodiversity from 2011 to 2020, but at this year's summit, Heads of State and Government Ministers expressed concern that none of the 2020 targets will be met.

The Convention uses the ecosystem approach, a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainability in an equitable way. The clearest example of biodiversity loss is the homogenization of agriculture: the Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that 75 percent of the genetic diversity in agricultural crops has been lost over the last century, while 75 percent of the world's food is now generated from only twelve plants and five animal species. The erosion of agricultural biodiversity has made agricultural production vulnerable to pests, extreme climatic events, and market shocks.

In addition, the Global Assessment Report produced by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services stated that 14 out of the 18 categories of "critical contributions" that nature provides to humanity have been greatly diminished since 1970, including the ability to regulate pollination, climate, and air quality. Furthermore, the Biodiversity Summit members concluded that our skewed relationship with nature is directly connected with the origin of COVID-19, part of the 60 percent of infectious diseases considered zoonotic, or originating in animal populations often under severe environmental pressure.

To confront this dire situation, several speakers at the Summit said that in addition to implementing Convention objectives and the Aichi targets there is a need to transform economic systems. "We need an economic system that prioritizes biodiversity as much as gross national product," stated Munir Akram of Pakistan, the President of the Economic and Social Council. A shared responsibility for a "green reset" is needed, including provision of \$300 to \$400 billion annually to protect nature. Also, the real cost of nature's services must be calculated when determining the total of a country's annual production. "The time for polluting our way to wealth has passed," said Inger Andersen, Director of the UN Environmental Programme.

The Convention is now aiming for the next Conference on Biological Diversity to take place in Kunming, China, in the spring of 2021, at which a new Global Biodiversity Framework will be finalized. Considering the dire problems facing our world, the bottom line is that a healthy natural world is our best anti-virus. §

Thailand: Regime Smothers Democracy Movement

The following update on the Thai government's response to the growing pro-democracy protests was published by the Union of Catholic Asian News on October 22 at <https://bit.ly/3eaFFUd>.

Thailand's autocratic government is stepping up its campaign against independent local media outlets in response to daily youth-led mass protests in what observers say is a severe threat to press freedom.

In the latest move, a court on Oct. 20 approved an order by the Thai government to shut down "all platforms" of Voice TV, a Bangkok-based television channel with a wide viewership, over its coverage of the ongoing pro-democracy protests that have been drawing tens of thousands of people around Bangkok and elsewhere in Thailand for days.

According to the ruling, the television channel must discontinue all its operations both on-air and online. In its reasoning, the Thai government said the television channel had violated its "severe state of emergency" decree that prohibits any large political gatherings and reporting on them.

The decree, issued last week by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha, gives sweeping powers to the authorities, including censoring all news on the youth-led protests in the interest of "national security."

The protesters, most in their teens and twenties, have been calling for Prayut, a former army chief, to resign after more than six years in power.

They are also calling for democratic reforms in a country that has been ruled by a conservative military-dominated regime with Prayut at the helm since he spearheaded a coup that unseated an elected government in 2014.

Over the years, Prayut's government has resorted to various repressive tactics to limit the free flow of information. Yet, its latest move is seen as an escalation against independent media outlets in Thailand, a country once known for its raucous media landscape.

The management of Voice TV, which has been operating for more than a decade, said in a statement that it would remain committed to honest reporting.

"For 11 years, Voice TV has been a media committed to democracy, giving space to people's opinions from all sides with openness, transparency, and responsibility to facts," the channel's executive Makin Petplai wrote in response to the shutdown order.

Prayut's government is also considering forcing three prominent online news sites to shut down in a bid to limit coverage of the ongoing protests.

The Thai Journalist Association has condemned the government's heavy-handed attempt at censorship and warned that it could backfire.

"Censoring the media in this way is an attempt to block the public's rights to have access to the news," it said in a statement. "As a consequence, more members of the public affected by this censorship may end up joining the demonstrations."



Photo: Thai demonstrators; Credit: Khaosod English

At the same time, Thai authorities have made it illegal for all citizens to attend anti-government protests and post about them online.

Police have warned that anyone found taking pictures at a protest and posting them online could be sentenced to two years in prison for violating the emergency decree.

"We are under the severe state of emergency, which is a special law," police spokesperson Krissana Pattanacharoen said. "We must take this law seriously."

In recent days Thai authorities have also been censoring foreign news coverage of pro-democracy rallies by cutting the feed of broadcasts by the BBC and other news outlets.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand (FCCT) said in a statement on Oct. 20 that it was "deeply concerned" about the concerted government efforts at large-scale censorship.

"A free media is an essential element in any democratic society, and bona fide journalists should be allowed to report important developments without the threat of bans, suspensions, censorship or prosecution hanging over them," the FCCT said.

"This move is also likely to be ineffective and counterproductive in an age of social media, where there are far too many ways in which information and comment of uncertain quality can be disseminated to censor," it explained.

"It makes the government appear heavy-handed and unresponsive to criticism, and could stir up even more public anger," the FCCT added. §

Chile: A New Constitution and an Open Heart

Maryknoll Sister Linda Donovan in Santiago, Chile, reflects on the historic vote for a new constitution.

"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees someone in need, yet closes their heart against that person, how does God's love abide there?" (1 John 3:17)

What is happening in Chile is a sign of hope and confirmation that, in fact, God's love abides in Chile. From the protest in 2019, the broken promises, the continuous worsening of the economic situation, the military called to the streets and the victims of both institutional and group violence, came the possibility of reframing the Constitution, rewriting a story that makes sense for all of us and where we all fit.

The people have paid dearly for this opportunity. More than 50 percent of elders live below the poverty line. Many Chileans don't eat three meals a day and the monthly income of a majority of people isn't enough to cover all the bills.

The neoliberal economic model, championed by Chilean economists trained by Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago in the 1970s and 1980s, made Chile into the "Economic Miracle." But that came crashing down around us as the gains were accrued to the richest in the country. The meritocracy inherent in the system failed and middle and lower classes began to drown in debt. Even the education myth of more education bringing more opportunity and earnings has fallen apart as privatized education means exorbitant debt.

I could go on, but it is sufficient to say that the model only worked for the few.

The march by more than one million people to the Plaza of Dignity, as the people renamed it, on October 18, 2019 launched a series of protests and a movement. There was a consciousness that these protests were not individual events. And even though there would be violence following the big marches, people would say "I do not agree with the violence, but we need to protest. Things cannot go on this way."

And then COVID-19 struck. The most important thing to note here is that as much as the government tried to regain an image of being in charge and responding to the needs of an already hurting people, it did not work out as they had hoped.

The many months of confinement gave the government a break from the constant violent protests. But the pandemic pushed the people into a much larger and

darker hole. Many more people couldn't work, couldn't pay their bills, couldn't count on any kind of health coverage should they get sick, and they were hungry.

When October 18, 2020 came around, the government seemed surprised by the thousands that flooded the plaza.

It does sadden me, though, that the images that went around the world of that night were of two churches burning. It is not what I would have wanted to happen but what did happen earlier that afternoon -- the thousands of people and families protesting peacefully -- was clearly not what the press chose to communicate.

In 2019, one of the government's better ideas was a national referendum on the writing of a new constitution on October 25, 2020. Voters opted for a new constitution and an overwhelming majority of 79 percent also voted in favor of the new constitution being drawn up by a body which will be 100 percent elected by popular vote rather than one including 50 percent of members of Congress. The people want and need their voice to be heard.

The evening of October 25 was one of celebration in homes all over Chile and certainly in the Plaza.

Why a new constitution? The 1980 Constitution, written during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, established 18 areas of legislation which were protected by certain laws that would assure their continuance. While it did not specifically state support for a neoliberal economic model, it was written with that worldview as its underlying context, therefore protecting the very system that has hurt so many.

The people want change and are willing to work for it. As I write this from my home here in Chile, civic groups, political groups and others are diving deep into conversations about what needs to be integral to this constitution. It is an exciting time to be in Chile.

Change must happen. The system has failed, as I know it has for so many U.S. Americans. The system needs to change and Chileans recognized that. Of course, changing systems is never a quick procedure. Elections of the body that will carry out this process will happen in April of 2021 and then we will have one year before Chileans vote again. It is time to pray for and with an open heart. §



Photo: Mural in Santiago featuring worker priest Fr. Mariano Puga. Credit: Tienda Rosita Beas

Amazon Synod: One Year Later

Networks of solidarity have been built in the year following the Amazon Synod, despite many challenges.

In this first year since the monumental Synod on the Amazon in Rome, the eight-country Amazon region has faced many challenges. However, the Church has forged new pathways to build solidarity with communities there as they have sought to protect themselves and one of the most biodiverse ecosystems of the world. These threats include sickness from the coronavirus, violence at the hands of individuals in extractive industries, destruction by large-scale agriculture, fires, and climate change.

Facing Multiple Threats

The coronavirus has hit the Amazon region particularly hard. As of October 22, there have been more than 1.3 million confirmed cases and 33,000 deaths from COVID-19 in the region, according to data compiled by the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM) from health authorities in each of the eight countries. Officials believe that the numbers will continue to rise.

Specific to indigenous communities, there have been 66,848 confirmed cases and 2011 deaths as of October 13. The lack of resources and exposure to outsiders who carry the virus make indigenous communities more vulnerable.

“When the quarantine started, people were taking measures as much as possible; but extractive activities continued without any control,” said Susana Espinoza Soto, a member of the REPAM’s executive secretariat and coordinator of the coronavirus mapping initiative. “These activities maintained the flow of people who come and go and have greatly affected the communities.”

For example, the Yanomami, the largest relatively isolated tribe in South America, living in the rainforests and mountains of northern Brazil and southern Venezuela, blames illegal miners for a coronavirus outbreak and the murder of two indigenous leaders in their territory since April. According to one witness, the two men were murdered after requesting food from the illegal miners and having complained when they received less than was promised. There are roughly 20,000 illegal miners operating in the Yanomami territory. Brazil’s president, Jair Bolsonaro, has made statements that have emboldened illegal loggers and miners to enter the Amazon.

The Brazilian rainforest is also seeing its worst fire season in a decade, with a 61 percent rise in the number of fire hotspots between September 2019 and September 2020, due in part to drought and forest clearing for ranching and agriculture. The fires received enough in-

ternational attention that U.S. presidential candidate, Joe Biden, referenced them in a debate.

Hope from the Church

The Synod’s commitment of solidarity with communities in the Amazon came before anyone knew that the pandemic would grip the world in sickness. REPAM continues to support communities through legal representation, public statements and advocacy, monitoring of the pandemic’s toll, equipping community leaders and their Church counterparts on their rights and giving them platforms to share their grievances, needs, and solutions.

The Church’s capacity to respond will only deepen with the creation of CEAMA, the Amazon Ecclesial Conference. The goal of CEAMA is to promote synodality between the churches in the region, or, as Pope Francis has said, to give the Church an “Amazonian face,” one of the pope’s four “dreams” announced in his Apostolic Exhortation, “Querida Amazonia,” in response to the Synod.

With 250 participants, CEAMA held its first virtual assembly on Oct. 26-27, one year after the Synod concluded. CEAMA has established 20 different thematic working groups, with topics ranging from increasing the role of laity, women, indigenous peoples, Mestizos, and Afro-descendants in the Church, to establishing Church-based supports for victims of the pandemic, to exploring ways to create Eucharistic communities. The assembly emphasized that the working groups should center their work on dialogue and decolonization.

The Synod also spurred the founding of networks similar to REPAM in other bioregions of the world: REMAM (Mesoamerican Ecclesial Network), RAOEN (River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network), and REBAC (Ecclesial Network of the Congo Basin Forest). REBAC was established at the same time as REPAM with the recognition that the Congo and Amazon basins are the “lungs of the planet.” The networks hope to replicate the REPAM model within their own cultural and ecological contexts.

In his new encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis shares another dream – a dream for a world that faces global challenges as a “single human family,” brothers and sisters all. The example of dialogue and solidarity given by the Amazonian Church can help guide our efforts to pursue this global unity. §

A Faith-Based Vision for the UN at 75 and Beyond

This is an excerpt of a joint statement by organizations representing Catholic congregations of religious at the UN calling for key reforms to the UN System on the its 75th anniversary.

“Seventy-five years of unprecedented international collaboration have elapsed since founding the United Nations (UN) and the UN Charter’s signing. On this occasion, we, the undersigned faith-based organizations (FBOs), applaud the very many achievements of the UN System. Furthermore, as we reflect on the experience of these seventy-five years, we recognize that the UN has done much of its best and most important work on the ground when in dialogue and intentional collaboration with FBOs and members of our vast civil society networks. FBO input, guided by principles of subsidiarity and preferential option for the poor (among many others), has frequently been instrumental in ensuring that the world’s most marginalized communities are included in the design, delivery, and fruits of UN efforts on the ground. Our knowledge of grassroots realities and our roles as trusted community pillars paired with the UN’s technical support and multilateral strength have rendered FBO-UN partnerships uniquely impactful...

Nevertheless, as FBOs who began pursuing many

of the objectives of the UN decades to centuries before the establishment of the UN (and of many of its Member States), we note some weaknesses and shortcomings in the UN System that we believe this is an auspicious moment to address. As we lose the generation whose members witnessed the horrors of World War II, which became the impetus for the UN System’s establishment, it becomes increasingly important that the System remains relevant and valuable in the eyes of upcoming generations of leaders. The UN Secretary-General has called upon us, as an international community, to “build back better” in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as the UN’s initial establishment aimed to rebuild global society in the wake of World War II. Truly, much has changed in our world in the 75 years that transpired between these two occasions. We agree that it is time to build back better, even in the face of possible obstacles...” § Read the rest of the statement here:

<https://bit.ly/2HE2wvL>

Fordham Case Against Students for Justice in Palestine

Professors and clergy speak out in support of students advocating for justice for Palestine.

Maryknoll Father Jack Sullivan is one of four signatories on an Amicus Brief in support of the Fordham Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) in their effort to be accepted by Fordham University as a recognized student club. In 2017, Fr. Sullivan also signed a letter from Catholic scholars and clergy to Fordham asking them to reconsider their decision to deny official recognition of Students for Justice in Palestine. Ultimately, a New York state judge ruled in SJP’s favor, though Fordham appealed.

The organization Palestine Legal helped to secure signatures for an Amicus Brief to the court considering Fordham’s appeal. The brief was filed in August 2020 with four signatures: Fr. Drew Christiansen, SJ and Adjunct Professor Eli McCarthy, both from Georgetown University, Fr. Rafael Garcia, SJ, director of The Encuentro Project and Fr. Jack Sullivan, MM. The position of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is, regardless of whether or not one agrees with the policy positions of SJP, students have the right to express their beliefs (free speech) and the university should recognize the student club.

Earlier in the year, more than 100 Fordham faculty members signed a petition to the university president Rev. Joseph M. McShane, SJ urging the administration to re-

scind the university’s appeal of the August 2019 New York Supreme Court ruling that required the university to recognize Fordham Lincoln Center’s chapter of SJP. “The faculty who signed the petition did not sign it because they are for SJP; they signed it because they disagree with the silencing of students on campus,” said Aseel Sawalha, associate professor of anthropology, co-director of Women, Gender and Sexuality studies, and current faculty adviser to SJP.

Quoting Arturo Sosa, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, in his 2018 address to the International Association of Jesuit Universities, the petition portrays the appeal as contradictory to Fordham’s Jesuit mission. The university “is a privileged space for exercising human freedom ... to search and find the paths of social transformation,” Sosa said.

“The students of SJP fully believe they are on one such path of social transformation,” the petition read. “The university should support their search for their path, not block it.” §

Resources

- 1) **World AIDS Day is December 1.** Sign up for a slot during our World AIDS Day **24-hour prayer vigil:** <https://maryknollogc.org/aids-day-vigil>
- 2) Find resources on **election security** on our website: <http://bit.ly/MOGCElectSec>
- 3) Explore our **6-page study guide** for Pope Francis' new encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, in English and Spanish: <http://bit.ly/FTstudyguideMOGC>
- 4) Pray this **rosary prayer** from the Vatican's COVID-19 Commission on health and recovery from the pandemic: <http://bit.ly/COVRosV>
- 5) The Vatican Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development offers "**To Heal the World,**" a free PDF/e-book of Pope Francis' weekly catechesis on the pandemic in August and September with questions for parish group discussion and reflection: <https://bit.ly/2TjxrzR>
- 6) Explore this **new report from UN AIDS**, "Rights in a Pandemic: Lockdowns, Rights, and Lessons from HIV in the Early Response to COVID-19:" <http://bit.ly/UNAIDSCov>
- 7) Read this article (in Spanish) on Pope Francis's *Fratelli Tutti* from **REPAM**, the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network: <https://bit.ly/3jtsoqR>
- 8) Read about a statement by **SECAM**, the union of Bishops in Africa, on their reaction to *Fratelli Tutti*: <https://bit.ly/3okp0SR>
- 9) Join Columban missionaries from around the world for a **podcast mini-series** about the beauty of biodiversity and the threats it faces, called "Jubilee for the Earth." Each episode will explore biodiversity and a related issue like economic justice, peace, migration, and other themes of Catholic Social Teaching: <https://columbancenter.org/JubileePodcast>
- 10) "Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World," a **volume of essays** compiled by the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative and Pax Christi International, is now available: <https://bit.ly/35yWbd8>
- 11) Sign **this petition** from Churches for Middle East Peace, a coalition of which MOGC is a member, expressing your opposition to annexation of large portions of the West Bank by Israel: <https://bit.ly/37zHXLr>
- 12) Read this report by the World Bank, "Poverty and Shared Prosperity," on **global poverty trends:** <https://bit.ly/2TlomGM>
- 13) Listen to these **podcasts by the Vatican COVID-19 Commission** on various issues related to recovery from the global pandemic crisis: <https://bit.ly/31ySDX6>
- 14) Watch this webinar on Tuesday, November 10, at 12 p.m. EST on how the **U.S. elections will affect Palestine** by Churches for Middle East Peace and the Foundation for Middle East Peace. Register here: <https://bit.ly/3kq8kam>
- 15) Read "Journeying Toward Care of Our Common Home," the Vatican's "how-to" guide for Catholic institutions implementing the ideas of *Laudato Si'*: <http://bit.ly/LSHowTo>
- 16) Watch this short video, **Faith Speaks to UN**, featuring faith leaders celebrating the 75th anniversary of the UN and calling for structural reform: <https://bit.ly/2TAtJBZ>
- 17) Watch this video, "**A Hopeful Message from the Future,**" about what a future could look like if we succeed in addressing the great challenges of our time, especially climate change: <https://bit.ly/3otmLNt>
- 18) Explore this **interactive timeline** from UN Women, "20 Years of Peace and Security Milestones:" <https://bit.ly/3miclhz>
- 19) Pope Francis' planned gathering on building a sustainable economy, "**Economy of Francesco,**" has been moved to a virtual format and will be hosted November 19-21: <https://francescoeconomy.org/>
- 20) Watch a webinar, "Democracy Defense: Advice from Activists Around the World," organized by Nonviolence International and partner organizations: <https://bit.ly/2HSFD7K>