



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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

January-February 2020

Vol. 44, No. 7

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

200 New York Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001

Phone: (202)832-1780 Fax: (202)832-5195

ogc@maryknoll.org www.maryknollogc.org

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns:

Peace, Social Justice and the Integrity of Creation

<http://www.maryknollogc.org>

Maryknoll Sisters, Maryknoll Lay Missioners, Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers

Susan Gunn, director..... sgunn@maryknollogc.org
 Fr. Francis J. Breen, MM..... fjbreen@maryknoll.org
 Anna Engelmann..... aengelmann@maryknollogc.org
 Kathleen Kollman Birch..... kathleen@maryknollogc.org
 Dave Kane..... dglobalcitizenkane@gmail.com
 Sr. Marvie Misolas, MM..... mmisolas@mksisters.org
 Dan Moriarty..... dmoriarty@maryknollogc.org
 Chloe Noel..... chloe@maryknollogc.org

MOGC Washington
 200 New York Ave., N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20001
 (202)832-1780
 ogc@maryknoll.org

MOGC Maryknoll NY
 P.O. Box 311
 Maryknoll, NY 10545-0311
 (914)941-7575
 ogc@maryknoll.org

MOGC UN Office
 777 First Ave., 10th Fl.
 New York, NY 10115
 (212)973-9551

To contribute to *NewsNotes*, please contact Kathleen at kathleen@maryknollogc.org.

Take action - Email, call, fax or write U.S. decision makers

President Donald Trump
 The White House
 Washington, D.C. 20500
www.whitehouse.gov

Secretary of Defense
 The Pentagon
 Washington, D.C. 20301
 (703) 695-5261 phone
www.defenselink.mil

President
 World Bank Group
 1818 H Street, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20433
www.worldbank.org

Vice President Mike Pence
 The White House
 Washington, D.C. 20500
vice_president@whitehouse.gov

Attorney General
 U.S. Department of Justice
 Washington, D.C. 20530
 (202)353-1555 phone
AskDOJ@usdoj.gov
www.justice.gov

Managing Director
 International Monetary Fund
 700 19th Street, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20431
www.imf.org

White House Comment Desk
 (202) 456-1111 phone
 (202) 456-2461 fax

U.S. Representative to UN
 799 United Nations Plaza
 New York, NY 10017
 (212) 415-4000 phone
www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov

Current status of bills:
<http://thomas.loc.gov>

Secretary of State
 2201 C Street, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20520
 (202) 647-6575 phone
 (202) 647-2283 fax
www.state.gov

Capitol switchboard:
 (202) 224-3121
www.congress.gov

Lenten Guide: Ash Wednesday Reflection

The following is the Ash Wednesday (February 26) reflection from the 2020 Lenten Reflection Guide from the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. You can find the entire guide at <http://bit.ly/2020LentGuideMOGC>.

In this Season of Lent, we are invited to step back and closely examine our lives and our hearts. It is not an invitation to a mere moment of reflection, but to a deep, challenging and rewarding journey of repentance and renewal. At the end of this six-week journey is the joy of Easter – but before it lies re-conversion and re-commitment to loving God and our neighbor with our whole hearts.

This Lent, we invite you to reflect on a certain dimension of conversion: ecological conversion. Pope Francis defines ecological conversion as occurring when “the effects of [our] encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in [our] relationship with the world around [us]...We come to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults, and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change.”

In today’s first reading, the prophet Joel begins the journey of Lent by calling us to conversion: “return to [God] with your whole heart.” What does this truly mean? How is it related to ecological conversion?

Today’s gospel offers us some first steps. It lays out the three pillars of Lenten practice: prayer, fasting and almsgiving, or action for charity and justice. It emphasizes that we are meant to carry out these practices humbly, not seeking others’ attention or praise, but directing our full attention towards loving God, our neighbor, and all creation.

Returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner Dave Kane writes, “As a human family, we have become unaware of, and insensitive to, how our actions and lifestyles contribute to the destruction of both God’s creation and human dignity.” In moving through our days, how often are we aware of how our lifestyle choices – our purchases, travel, food, trash – are related to the earth? Where do things come from, and where are they going? Whom will our actions harm, and whom will they benefit?

For example, the issue of plastic pollution grows

larger every year. Scientists tell us that every bit of plastic that has ever been created is still in existence. About 8 billion tons of plastic have been produced since 1950. Chemicals in plastic are toxic to plants, animals, and humans. Vulnerable people around the world are most exposed to toxins from plastic. However, we largely carry on contributing to the problem, blind to how it affects the poor, the earth, and our relationship with God.

We can begin to approach these large questions and problems by learning to listen – beginning with silence before God and holy attention to the world around us. Pope Benedict XVI, quoted in *Laudato Si’*, said, “We tend to demean contemplative rest as something un-

productive and unnecessary... But rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others...and motivates us to greater concerns for nature and the poor.”

Let us practice returning with our whole hearts to God by listening carefully for what God is telling us in “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” After we have listened, we can begin to repent of the harm we have done to

our relationships with God, neighbor, and all creation and take steps toward renewal. §



Questions for Reflection

How can I build in time for silent prayer?

How are my everyday choices affecting the earth and the people around me?

Questions for Reflection

UN Climate Talks End in Disappointment

The UN climate conference in Madrid December 2-13 failed to address major agenda items. Chloe Noel of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and Fr. John Brinkman, M.M., were present at the conference in Madrid.

The UN COP25 climate conference in Madrid fizzled out with little progress to show, despite a year of youth-driven climate mobilizations and extensive planning proceeding it. The two weeks of talks were punctuated with large civil society protests within and outside the UN conference center in favor of bold climate action, as well as attempts by several countries to undermine progress on the landmark 2015 Paris climate agreement, signed by 197 countries.

The UN Climate Secretariat hoped to complete the implementation rules for the Paris agreement and to secure more ambitious commitments from countries for 2020. The goal is to limit the global average temperature rise to 1.5 or, at maximum, 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels in order to avert the worst effects of climate change. Yet currently, according the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world is on a trajectory to rise 3.7 degrees by 2100.

The top agenda items at this year's conference focused on finance. Negotiators continued difficult conversations on rules for carbon trading markets meant to assist countries in reducing carbon emissions and for financing a global response to irreparable loss and damage of natural areas due to climate change. Underpinning these conversations was the need to protect human rights and nature. On these major agenda items, COP25 was an utter failure.

Developing rules for the carbon markets is the last big obstacle to completing the implementation rules for the Paris agreement. A carbon market system creates a market for carbon "units" or credits that governments and the private sector can buy and sell to stay within allotted carbon emissions targets.

MOGC shares the concerns of Pope Francis regarding carbon markets, as articulated in both *Laudato Si'* and the recommendations from the Synod on the Amazon. Carbon markets can be abused by wealthy governments and private interests at the expense of impoverished nations that are most vulnerable to climate change. Emissions reductions from these projects can be difficult to measure as well.

Ultimately, the governments failed to find consensus on a carbon market system and decided to delay the negotiations until next year. This is a good decision, as it is better to deliberate further rather than opt for a flawed deal.

Another central issue was the inclusion of human rights protections in the Paris agreement. Human

rights advocates argue that issues such as poverty, labor concerns and gender equity are often overlooked in environmental accords, leaving many communities vulnerable as governments make decisions about environmental projects and responses to climate-related disasters. Chloe Noel of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns worked closely with CIDSE, a network of Catholic social justice organizations of which MOGC is a member, to advocate in Madrid for human rights language to be included in the agreement. However, by the end of COP25, human rights protections remained largely absent.

Governments and other participants also highlighted the importance of nature-based solutions to reduce emissions. Father John Brinkman, M.M., focused particularly on this issue while in Madrid. Nature-based solutions include conservation and restoration of natural areas, but even these strategies need to ensure that they are not inadvertently harming the local environment and communities.

The greatest achievement at COP25 was the adoption of the Gender Action Plan (GAP). The GAP recognizes that women experience climate change differently than men due to historical and current gender inequities. This is more pronounced in developing countries and for indigenous peoples. The GAP text explicitly includes language about human rights.

Many people hoped that COP25 would end with a recommendation for financing the non-economic and economic costs of irreparable loss and damage caused by climate change. Examples of loss and damage include the disappearance of island nations due to sea level rise and farmers' inability to grow food after prolonged droughts. Island nations and some African countries are most vulnerable to irreparable loss and damage and have the least resources to respond. They believe that developed countries have a moral and historical responsibility to finance the response. President Trump has criticized this finance mechanism, calling it a scheme to redistribute wealth. Ultimately, no progress was made on this issue.

While COP25 was largely disappointing, eyes are already turned to COP26, scheduled for November 2020 in Scotland. The United States is on track to leave the Paris agreement on November 4, 2020, the day after U.S. elections. What will come in the year ahead? One thing is clear: the 197 signatories and all supporters of the Paris agreement have a lot of work to do. §

Pope Francis: “Re-animate the Economy”

Pope Francis has invited “young economists and entrepreneurs” from around the world to Assisi, Italy March 26-28 for the “Economy of Francesco,” a gathering to envision an inclusive, sustainable economy that brings “life not death.” The following is an excerpt from his letter of invitation to the gathering.

Dear Friends,

I am writing to invite you to take part in an initiative very close to my heart. An event that will allow me to encounter young men and women studying economics and interested in a different kind of economy: one that brings life not death, one that is inclusive and not exclusive, humane and not dehumanizing, one that cares for the environment and does not despoil it. 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.

Surely there is a need to “re-animate” the economy! And where better to do so than Assisi, which has for centuries eloquently symbolized a humanism of fraternity? Saint John Paul II chose Assisi as the icon of a culture of peace. For me, it is also a fitting place to inspire a new economy. There Francis stripped himself of all worldliness in order to choose God as the compass of his life, becoming poor with the poor, a brother to all. His decision to embrace poverty also gave rise to a vision of economics that remains most timely. A vision that can give hope to our future and benefit not only the poorest of the poor, but our entire human family. A vision that is also necessary for the fate of the entire planet, our common home, “our sister Mother Earth”, in the words of Saint Francis in his Canticle of the Sun.

In my Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’*, I emphasized that, today more than ever, everything is deeply connected and that the safeguarding of the environment cannot be divorced from ensuring justice for the poor and finding answers to the structural problems of the global economy. We need to correct models of growth incapable of guaranteeing respect for the environment, openness to life, concern for the family, social equality, the dignity of workers and the rights of future generations. Sadly, few have heard the appeal to acknowledge the gravity of the problems and, even more, to set in place a new economic model, the fruit of a culture of communion based on fraternity and equality.

Francis of Assisi is the outstanding example of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology. I think of the words spoken to him from the Crucifix in the little church of San Damiano: “Go, Francis, repair my house, which, as you see, is falling into ruin”. The repair of that house concerns all of us. It concerns the Church, society and the heart of each individual. Increasingly, it concerns the environment, which urgently demands a sound economy and a sustainable development that can heal its wounds and assure us of a worthy future.

Given this urgent need, each one of us is called to rethink his or her mental and moral priorities, to bring them into greater conformity with God’s commandments and the demands of the common good. But I thought especially of inviting you young people, because your desire for a better and happier future makes you even now a prophetic sign, pointing towards an economy attentive to the person and to the environment.

Dear young people, I know that you can hear in your hearts the ever more anguished plea of the earth and its poor, who cry out for help and for responsibility, for people who will respond and not turn away. If you listen to what your heart tells you, you will feel part of a new and courageous culture,

you will not be afraid to face risks and work to build a new society. The risen Jesus is our strength! As I told you in Panama and I wrote in my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*: “Please, do not leave it to others to be protagonists of change. You are the ones who hold the future! Through you, the future enters into the world. I ask you also to be protagonists of this transformation... I ask you to build the future, to work for a better world” (No. 174)...

That is why I would like to meet you in Assisi: so that we can promote together, through a common “covenant”, a process of global change... The name of this event – Economy of Francesco – clearly evokes the Holy Man of Assisi and the Gospel that he lived in complete consistency, also on the social and economic level. Read the entire letter at:

<http://bit.ly/FrancescoEconomy2020> §



Global Fragility Act: Action for Peace

The Global Fragility Act, signed into law in December 2019, was supported by many faith-based advocacy groups as a measure to more effectively prevent violence through peaceful means for vulnerable communities around the world.

On December 20, President Donald Trump signed the Global Fragility Act into law as part of a \$1.4 trillion government spending package for 2020. The Act will enable the U.S. government to more effectively prevent violence around the world through peaceful means, rather than responding only once violence has begun. At a time when partisan divisions and political gridlock dominate headlines, the inclusion of the Act in the spending bill demonstrates the ability of civil society groups, including faith-based groups, to garner bipartisan support for key violence-prevention and peacebuilding measures.

The Global Fragility Act was developed by civil society groups working on the ground in fragile countries and conflict zones around the world as a mechanism to allow the U.S. to better partner with them in meeting the needs of vulnerable and impoverished communities threatened by violence. A coalition of civil society groups led by Mercy Corps and the Alliance for Peacebuilding advocated for the Act, successfully convincing lawmakers of the need for a more effective U.S. response to fragility and potential violence.

According to Mercy Corps, the Global Fragility Act “treats the causes of violence rather than the symptoms” through several important accomplishments. These include focusing U.S. foreign assistance on preventing violence in fragile countries, increasing transparency and accountability by mandating biennial reports on implementation of the Act to Congress, strengthening research on the effectiveness of foreign assistance and diplomatic approaches to preventing conflict, and dedicating 1.15 billion dollars to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in fragile countries.

A country is considered fragile when the government is unable to respond effectively to crises such as economic decline, violent conflict, or natural disaster. Poverty, violence and environmental crises are interrelated, each contributing to the others, and they are both causes and effects of fragility. These problems weaken the state, which is in turn unable to effectively protect communities from their devastating impacts.

The Global Fragility Act empowers the U.S. to more effectively prevent this spiraling effect through early, non-military intervention coordinated by the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Building on Pope John XXIII’s famous exhortation, “If you want peace, work for justice,” Pope Francis reminds us that we cannot effectively address social concerns without also addressing environmental crises. By shifting resources to mitigating fragility, the Global Fragility Act allows U.S. government peacebuilding efforts to better reflect the idea of integral ecology, a concept promoted by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si’*.

Perhaps the most dramatic result of fragility and violence around the world is record-level mass migration and displacement. Nearly seventy million people are on the move, fleeing violence and persecution. While debates rage in the U.S. about immigration policy at home, the violence-prevention focus of the Global Fragility Act offers U.S. agencies abroad important tools for addressing the root causes of migration.

Together with the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (CNI), coordinated by Pax Christi International, the Maryknoll Office of Global

Concerns works to highlight effective alternatives to violence, or nonviolent tools such as diplomacy and increasing civic engagement. By emphasizing violence prevention through diplomacy and development programs rather than reacting to violence after it erupts, often through military intervention, the Global Fragility Act suggests a deepening understanding of and commitment to nonviolence and a just peace approach to conflict.

The Act received bipartisan sponsorship in both the House and Senate before being added to the 2020 government spending package. Civil society groups will now monitor the Act’s implementation, giving government agencies feedback and advocating for improvements and continued funding. Meanwhile, MOGC and partner organizations celebrate the passage of this crucial act and the positive impact it promises for vulnerable communities across the globe. §



Trade: NAFTA Reform Falls Short

The new U.S. Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA) offers a few improvements but falls short of expectations for many groups, including some unions and environmental activists.

On December 19, the Trump Administration's U.S. Trade Representative and the House of Representatives came to an agreement on Democrats' requested changes to the new North American Free Trade Agreement, now known as the U.S. Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA). The House passed the deal on December 19 with 385 votes to 41. Just two Republicans voted against the deal. The Senate has not yet passed the bill.

Both Democrats and Republicans are hailing the deal as a 21st century agreement and a template for future trade deals. Trade justice advocates are divided on their support for the USMCA, but most agree on one thing: this agreement falls short of being a model for progressive, 21st century trade agreements.

The Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment, of which MOGC is a member, prioritized advocating for the inclusion of strong and enforceable environmental and labor standards and climate action. The Working Group also advocated for the exclusion of special rights for corporations and heightened barriers to access of life-saving medicines. While lawmakers made some improvements, they did not take full advantage of this once-in-a-generation opportunity to fix an unjust economic model. The following is a rundown on some of the outcomes.

Labor

For the first time in two decades, the largest federation of unions, the AFL-CIO, supported an international trade deal. Some AFL-CIO-affiliated unions dissented, expressing disbelief that the deal will stem the tide of job outsourcing as promised and disappointment with the lack of strong enforcement measures for labor standards.

The agreement requires Mexico to pass labor reforms that make it easier for workers to form unions and that prevent labor violations. The agreement will also allow inspectors to visit manufacturing plants in Mexico where suspected labor violations are occurring and halt the shipment of products produced in these facilities if the company is violating labor standards. Over time, unions hope these measures will raise wages in Mexico and reduce job outsourcing. However, many unions do not believe that jobs lost to international outsourcing are ever coming back, especially due to other policies such as the 2017 tax law, which encourages the outsourcing of jobs for corporate tax breaks. The deal will also do nothing to prevent anti-union laws in the United States.

Access to medicines

The original Trump Administration agreement would have expanded patents on new classes of drugs called biologics, which treat life-threatening illnesses, such as cancer, making these drugs more difficult to access for many people. Thanks to grassroots advocacy and Congressional champions, like Representative Jan Schakowsky, the bipartisan agreement removed these new provisions and prevents companies from reformulating a drug to extend the patent life.

Reigning in the rights of corporations

One positive change to the agreement is the near elimination of the "Investor-State Dispute Settlement" mechanism that allows corporations to sue governments when they think their investments are under threat or treated unfairly. Corporations have used this mechanism to evade environmental, health, and other laws that protect the common good. This mechanism was eliminated for every industry except the oil and gas industry. Representatives for those industries fought hard to keep the provision.

Environment

Environmentalists expressed disappointment with the environmental provisions in the agreement, as they do not reflect the urgency of climate change. In fact, climate change is not mentioned in the agreement. While the deal includes adherence to the seven, binding multilateral environmental agreements that have been customarily included in trade deals since 2009, it does not incorporate other, more recent multilateral agreements.

On a positive note, the agreement eliminated a policy between the U.S. and Canada that required each country to export equal amounts of oil and gas to each other, a policy which could have driven up oil and gas consumption in the long term. However, the deal also makes it easier for Canada to export tar sands through the Keystone XL pipeline.

The deal added environmental enforcement mechanisms similar to the labor enforcement provisions. However, it did not create an independent body with the capacity to investigate cases of environmental injustice and make binding decisions.

While some improvements were made, this is not the transformational trade policy that MOGC and the broader trade justice movement seeks. §

Burma: Crossing the Point of No Return

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi defended the government of Burma (Myanmar) against charges of genocide at the International Court of Justice in the Hague in December, despite graphic evidence to the contrary. Kenneth Wong, a Burmese-American writer and lecturer at the University of Berkeley wrote about it on his blog <https://kennethwongsf.blogspot.com/>, which is reprinted here with permission.

Burma had been at a moral crossroads for some time now. [On December 11], it crossed the point of no return.

Acting as an agent of the country, Burma's (Myanmar's) State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, or the Lady, told the 16-member panel of judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that the evidence against her country – encompassing mass killings, village burning, rape, and the subsequent displacement of nearly 700,000 Rohingyas – did not point to genocidal intent. Instead, she called it an “incomplete and misleading factual picture of the situation.”

742,000 – the number of displaced Rohingyas currently living in a sprawling camp in Bangladesh, as recorded by UNHCR – is greater than the total population of [the Burmese city of] Mawlamyine (438,000 in 2019, per World Population Review).

Whereas her watered-down words of the atrocities astonished many in the international community, they galvanized her supporters. They organized rallies to cheer her on in Rangoon (Yangon) and other big cities. They switched their Facebook profiles to templates that read “We stand with you / We stand with DASSK / We stand with Mother Suu.”

Many of my Burmese friends and acquaintances on Facebook followed the trial's live broadcast. Whenever they heard Burma's legal team or the Lady make a particularly forceful point that resonated with them, they reacted in real time, copying the pasting the choice words into their status updates.

These include former classmates, childhood friends, Saffron revolution monks, and 88-generation student activists I personally know. [The 88 Generation Students is a Burmese pro-democracy movement known for activism against the country's military junta that began in 1988.]

The Guardian in its editorial calls the ICJ case against Burma “Humanity on Trial.” I suppose many of the Lady's supporters might think this is hyperbole. I do not.

The Rohingya crisis demands that those of us who are Burmese by birth or by blood dig deep into our humanity, overcome our biases, and stand up for the victims who have suffered much. It is a litmus test for our conscience, and many Burmese failed.

Defending the indefensible

Leading Burma's legal team is Professor William Schabas, a Canadian genocide researcher and scholar. In a 2013 Al Jazeera documentary on the Rohingya crisis, Schabas had said “We're moving into a zone where the word [genocide] can be used.” Back then, he argued, “Denying their [The Rohingyas'] history, denying the legitimacy of their right to live where they live, these are all warning signs that mean that it's not frivolous to envisage the use of the word genocide.”

[During his testimony], seemingly contradicting his own previous words, Schabas argued to the ICJ panel that evidence in the case against Burma did not show “the specific intent to perpetrate genocide.”

Responding to the deaths recorded in the UN Fact Finding Mission's report, Schabas said, “10,000 deaths out of a population of well over one million [Rohingyas] might suggest something other than an intent to physically destroy the group.”

To put it into perspective, 10,000 is more than one quarter of the population of Letpadan (38,000) and half the population of Loikaw (17,000). (City population statistics by the World Population Review)

Commenting on deaths resulting from poor conditions in the Rohingya camps maintained by the Burmese government, Schabas noted there are “human rights violations, of persecution, but not of destruction [of the group].”

Here's the shameful implication of Burma's legal defense: As a country, it is arguing that 10,000 deaths at the hands of its own military is too small a number; it hasn't killed enough to warrant international repudiation. It's too early, too soon to call it a “genocide,” in its view.

Strictly by the number, it's worth noting that the slaughter of 8,000 Bosniak civilians in Srebrenica during the Bosnian War is deemed a genocidal crime by The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

What it means if Burma prevails

Right now, with their eyes fixed on the immediate future, many Burmese feel they should at any cost get the case against the country dismissed. If the country were to be saddled with the label “genocide” or “ethnic cleansing,” sanctions will inevitably follow and the flow

of tourism will suffer.

But what is the true consequence – the long-term cost – if Burma were to prevail?

The day will come when the Burmese Army turns its guns and rifles toward another ethnic group – perhaps the Karens, the Shans, or the Arakenese – and launches a similar "clearance operation" in response to an attack from the group's armed militia.

"It cannot be ruled out that disproportionate force was used by members of the Defense Services in some cases in disregard of international humanitarian law, or that they did not distinguish clearly enough between ARSA fighters and civilians," conceded Daw Suu in her speech at the ICJ.

If it's acceptable for the country's armed forces to make no concerted effort to distinguish real terrorists from civilians who happen to look like them, and to write off the violence perpetrated against the Rohingyas as no more than the unfortunate consequence of a necessary but overzealous military response, how might one call for accountability when the same violations are directed at another group?

False promises

In assuring the ICJ and the world at large that the perpetrators will be brought to justice, Daw Suu argued, "Although the focus here is on members of the military, I can assure you that appropriate action will also be taken against civilian offenders, in line with due process. There will be no tolerance of human rights violations in the Rakhine, or elsewhere in Myanmar."

In 2018, two Reuters reporters, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, uncovered evidence of the Burmese soldiers' execution of a group of Rohingya civilians. Confronted with incontrovertible evidence (in the form of an excavated mass grave), the Burmese Army charged and convicted seven soldiers for the crime.

After serving less than a year, the guilty soldiers were pardoned by the Burmese Defense Chief Min Aung Hlaing. "Given the soldiers' dutifulness during their time in the Army, and in consideration of the petition, the military chief reduced their prison sentence from 10 years to one year with hard labor in accordance with military justice," reported *The Irrawaddy*.

In her speech before the ICJ, Aung San Suu Kyi said, "Many of us in Myanmar were unhappy with this pardon."

The two reporters who worked on the case were also charged with Violating Official Secrets Acts, then sent to prison. They served 500 days before a presidential pardon freed them. Put another way, the reporters who exposed the murder spent more time in prison than those who committed the murder.

The incident should cast serious doubts on the Burmese civilian government's ability to hold the perpetrators accountable, especially when they happened to be members of the military.

Bones will crow

Many Burmese friends argue, Daw Suu is compelled to defend the Army for the country's sake, to fulfill her duty as the savior of her people. This is nonsense. The Lady might not have been in a position to stop the Army's violent "clearance operations" once it got going, but she's not obligated to defend them when they stand accused of the horrible crimes they committed.

Are we to believe the testimony she gave before the ICJ is all a pretense for the sake of her homeland, that she is sacrificing her reputation to save her country? Her well-documented self-righteous character suggests nobody can make her say or do things she doesn't believe in. If she speaks in defense of the accused, we would do well to assume she voluntarily speaks out of her own conviction.

No matter the outcome of the case, I don't believe Burma can salvage its soiled reputation and tattered dignity – not unless it stops mistreating the ethnic minorities that calls it home, not until it finds the courage to stand up to the rising tide of intolerance within its citizenry.

What happened to the Rohingyas was wrong, in the same way what happened to six million Jews during World War II, what happened to the 500,000 Tutsis in Rwanda, and what happened to Anne Frank was wrong.

I for one am glad that a few principled Burmese are speaking up without waiting for the casualties to reach 500,000 or six million.

When the victims' bones crow, I can answer them with a clear conscience. ['Bones will crow' is a Burmese phrase. The Burmese use it to express the belief that bad deeds once hidden will be exposed to haunt perpetrators.]

For the record

A few decades later, the young Burmese who can see beyond people's skin color, nationality, and faith will demand to know what we – their elders – did when our own countrymen were committing unspeakable crimes.

When that day comes, let the record show I did not, out of consideration for kinship or friendship, use my words to give shelter to the guilty.

Let the record show I spoke up for the victims the best I could. §

'The Report': Film on CIA Torture Program

A new film entitled *'The Report'* depicts the decade-long, Senate investigation of the Central Intelligence Agency's torture program.

On November 5, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joined colleagues from the National Religious Campaign Against Torture for the Washington, D.C. premier of the *The Report*, a film about the Senate Select Intelligence Committee's 2014 investigation of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) torture program. The film offers a unique, engaging opportunity for United States citizens to understand the nature of the CIA torture program, its moral and practical failings, and the lengths to which the CIA and others went to stymie Senate oversight and sabotage the public release of the report.

The Report follows Senate staffer Daniel Jones as he works with the Senate Intelligence Committee to investigate the use of torture on suspected terrorists by the CIA following the September 11 attacks. Prompted by the CIA's destruction of interrogation videotapes in 2005, the real-life investigation continued over ten years.

For years, the CIA tried to prevent any part of the resulting 6,700 page Senate report from being released to the public. In the end, a redacted 500-page summary was released in 2014. In a statement at that time, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns recognized "the great importance of the publication of this document, which details terrible acts of horrific brutality... The report clearly documents that these immoral techniques often failed to generate intelligence or produced false information. (The intelligence ultimately provided could have been acquired by lawful means.) Finally, the report shows that the CIA misled both Congress and certain members of the Bush administration in order to obtain approval for its torture program."

Following the report's release in 2014, Senators John McCain and Dianne Feinstein co-authored the amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act seeking to ensure that U.S. agencies no longer use torture.

Past and present government officials continue a campaign of misinformation about the report's findings. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who previously served as Director of the CIA under President Trump, called the film *The Report* "fiction."

However, the filmmakers have been transparent about how meticulously the film was researched and how thoroughly the script was informed by the facts of the investigation. Daniel Jones, the Senate staffer played by Adam Driver in the film, joined the film's writer-pro-

ducer-director, Scott Z. Burns, at a panel discussion following the film's D.C. premier to describe the research behind the film. The panelists invited viewers to visit a website for the film which annotates the entire screenplay, with footnotes and links describing the real events the film portrays. Senator Dianne Feinstein, former chair of the Intelligence Committee, who is played by Annette Bening in the film, also attended the D.C. premier, along with fellow committee-members Senators Sheldon Whitehouse and Angus King. Other investigators who worked with Jones on the report and staff from the McCain Institute attended as well.

The film offers a valuable corrective to the CIA's claims that the torture program was legal and necessary, that it resulted in intelligence that saved the lives of U.S. citizens, and that the intelligence could not have been obtained another way. The Senate report – based in part on the CIA's own internal report on the program, called the Panetta Review, which the CIA under Director John Brennan tried to keep from Senate investigators – establishes that such claims are unfounded. The torture program produced no such intelligence, undermining the CIA's own legal justifications for the secret program.

No one was ever held accountable for the torture program. Indeed, former CIA director John Brennan is now a frequent commentator on cable news. Gina Haspel, who oversaw a military site where torture was used and ordered the destruction of video tapes of interrogations, is now Director of the CIA. In 2018, Maryknoll joined other faith groups in publicly opposing her nomination. During his 2016 election campaign, Donald Trump said he would bring back torture techniques such as waterboarding.

All U.S. citizens would do well to watch *The Report*, now streaming on Amazon. Burns and Jones also urged citizens to read the report itself, or listen to the audio book, read by the film's cast. Finally, to ensure that the U.S. never again engages in torture, the original, 6,700-page Senate Intelligence Committee report and the Panetta Review should be released to the public. As Daniel Jones said in a recent Washington Post op-ed, "the American public (should know) the full details of what the CIA did in its name. And with these facts transparently laid out, and with a commitment to never commit these crimes again, we can close this dark chapter once and for all." §

Geo-engineering: Solar Radiation Management

This article describes the numerous ways the geoengineering technology of solar radiation management is a false solution to the climate crisis.

The March-April 2019 edition of NewsNotes included an article examining the false promise of “geo-engineering,” or technologies which aim to manipulate the earth’s climate to combat climate change. That article explored problems with carbon capture and storage technologies that are expensive, unproven, and distract from better solutions to mitigate climate change.

Another principal form of geoengineering is solar radiation management (SRM). This false solution is appealing, as these technologies tend to be inexpensive and quick acting; however, they are unproven, can have negative side effects, and distract from better solutions.

The most common of these SRM technologies releases chemicals into the air to reflect more sunlight away from Earth, simulating events like the 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines, which released large amounts of sulfur dioxide into the air, causing a global cooling of near one degree Celsius for 15 months. Harvard University scientists are planning to carry out an experiment in 2020, the Stratospheric Controlled Perturbation Experiment, using planes to release calcium carbonate into the stratosphere to achieve a similar effect.

Canadian author and climate activist Naomi Klein points out a particular danger of SRM: “While the United Nations’ climate negotiations proceed from the premise that countries must agree to a joint response to an inherently communal problem, geoengineering raises a very different prospect. For well under a billion dollars, a ‘coalition of the willing,’ a single country, or even a wealthy individual could decide to take the climate into its own hands.”

This is especially concerning as SRM technology involves significant risks. One risk is the indefinite commitment it demands. Once begun on a large scale, any SRM project would have to continue indefinitely, as whatever greenhouse gases released during the project would manifest all at once if it stopped, a process called “termination shock.” Climate Analytics, a climate think tank, predicted that ending a project suddenly would result in “very rapid and large-scale planetary warming... within a timescale of months.”

Another risk is unknown weather effects. SRM would change global water cycles in unknown ways, likely affecting monsoon patterns on which billions of people in Asia and Africa. Klein paints a bleak but pos-

sible scenario: “Imagine this: North America decides to send sulfur into the stratosphere to reduce the intensity of the sun, in the hopes of saving its corn crops — despite the real possibility of triggering droughts in Asia and Africa. In short, geoengineering would give us (or some of us) the power to exile huge swaths of humanity to sacrifice zones with a virtual flip of the switch.”

A third risk is diminished agriculture and energy production. By reducing the amount of sunlight reaching Earth’s surface, SRM would also reduce agricultural production due to lower levels of photosynthesis. Solar energy production would suffer and wind changes could affect wind-based energy production.

Finally, there is a moral hazard risk involved. SRM and other geoengineering proposals provide a way for policymakers to avoid tough decisions about reducing greenhouse gas emissions — the only reliable long-term solution. Many conservative think tanks and public figures who deny that climate change is a problem or that it is caused by human activity have come out in favor of geoengineering efforts.

GreenFaith, a global, multi-faith environmental organization, published a report detailing their concerns with these technologies. They call for an international moratorium on the employment of SRM technologies “due to [their] high level of uncertainty in relation to risk and effectiveness.” Furthermore, “if [other] geoengineering approaches prove viable and are regulated appropriately, they should supplement emissions reduction efforts only temporarily, in limited circumstances, and under carefully prescribed conditions.” Fundamentally, “geoengineering must never substitute for robust emissions reductions.”

The international community cannot allow geoengineering ploys to distract from the more effective goals of phasing out the use of fossil fuels, moving to agroecological agriculture systems, creating a zero-waste circular economy and transforming our throw-away culture. Reducing inequality will also be important: an Oxfam study shows that 50 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions come from the richest 10 percent of the world’s population. If these individuals consumed at the level of an average citizen of the European Union, overall emissions would fall by almost one-third, even if the other 90 percent did nothing. We must all pursue the long-term solutions and authentic change necessary to address the climate crisis. §

North Korea: Human Cost of Sanctions

Korea Peace Now!, a global movement of women mobilizing to end the Korean War, commissioned an international and multidisciplinary panel of independent experts to assess the human cost of sanctions on North Korea, and particularly on North Korean women. The following is the executive summary of the 48-page report.

North Korea is one of the most sanctioned countries in the world. While sanctions used to target mostly the country's military and elite, they have evolved in recent years into an almost total ban on North Korea-related trade, investments, and financial transactions. Several UN agencies have raised alarm at the impact on the population, with growing calls for humanitarian and human rights impact assessments.

To better assess this issue, the Korea Peace Now! campaign commissioned a report from an international and multidisciplinary panel of independent experts, including some with extensive humanitarian field experience in North Korea. *The Human Costs and Gendered Impact of Sanctions on North Korea* represents the first comprehensive assessment of the adverse consequences of these sanctions, drawing on often neglected information from UN agencies on the ground as well as the authors' combined expertise in public health, law, economics, history, and gender studies. In particular, the report highlights the case of women as one of the vulnerable groups differentially affected by the sanctions.

Read the entire report on the Korea Peace Now! website. The authors examined the humanitarian, developmental, and gendered impact of sanctions.

Key Findings

Sanctions are impeding the ability of the country and of international aid organizations to meet the urgent and long-standing humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable parts of the population. Although the UN Security Council has repeatedly stated that the sanctions are not intended to have adverse humanitarian consequences, its case-by-case exemptions mechanism is insufficient to prevent this outcome in practice. Life-saving aid is being fatally obstructed by delays, red tape, and overcompliance with financial sanctions.

Sanctions are also impeding the economic development of the country. UN and unilateral sanctions have resulted in the collapse of the country's trade and engagement with the rest of the world, thereby undermining and reversing the progress that North Korea had made in overcoming the economic crisis and famine of the 1990s.

Sanctions destabilize North Korean society in ways that have a disproportionate impact on women, resonating with patterns observed in other sanctioned countries. The resulting economic pressure tends to ex-

acerbate rates of domestic violence, sexual violence, and the trafficking and prostitution of women. Sanctions also affect North Korean women differentially due to the dual social expectation that they be the primary caretakers of their families and communities, and workers fully integrated into the economy. Thus, sanctions doubly burden women through their adverse humanitarian and developmental consequences, especially when they impact their livelihood by targeting industries that have high ratios of female workers.

The report concludes by raising concerns that the sanctions in their current form may not be reconcilable with international law, especially humanitarian and human rights norms.

Key Recommendations

- 1) Resolve the security crisis that led to the current situation in accordance with international law.
- 2) Lift all sanctions that are in violation of international law, in particular of the UN Charter and of applicable human rights and humanitarian norms.
- 3) Adopt urgently, in interim, all measures available to mitigate and eliminate the adverse consequences of sanctions on the humanitarian and human rights situation in North Korea.
- 4) Conduct gender-sensitive humanitarian and human rights impact assessments of sanctions currently in place.
- 5) Ensure women's equal and meaningful participation in peace and security negotiations and processes, in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Take into account gender considerations and the rights of women in all deliberations concerning sanctions on the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea). §

Faith in action:

Share a 3-minute video about the report on social media <https://vimeo.com/380773115>

Read about Maryknoll Father Gerry Hammond's ministry in North Korea: <http://bit.ly/HammondMK>

Join the National Action to End the Korean War, organized by Korea Peace Now! in Washington, D.C., March 15-17, 2020 <https://koreapeacenow.org/>

Outcry Against Deaths of Migrant Children

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joined other faith-based and immigrant advocacy organizations in gathering to pray and protest on the anniversary of the death of Jakelin Caal Maquin, a child migrant who died after being taken into U.S. Customs and Border Protection custody.

December 8, 2019 marked the first anniversary of the death of seven-year-old Jakelin Caal Maquin of Guatemala, the first migrant child to die in U.S. custody in over a decade. She was the first of seven migrant children to die in the past year while in U.S. custody or immediately upon release. In light of this anniversary and of International Human Rights Day on December 10, faith-based and immigrant advocacy groups drew attention once again to the inhumane and unjust systems that allowed for the deaths of these children and the lack of investigation into their deaths that has followed.

On December 9, the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, of which the Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns is a member, held a candlelight vigil outside the headquarters of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) in honor of Jakelin and the other deceased migrant children. Attendees gathered around photos of the children surrounded by candles and flowers. Faith-based groups and religious leaders prayed for the children, naming each of them. They also prayed for the development of a just immigration system that protects the vulnerable. “God holds the lives of these children dear,” said a spokesperson from Sojourners, a Christian magazine. “And God will hold us accountable for how we treat children and their families.”

Members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus spoke at the event, condemning the treatment of migrant children and CBP’s refusal to administer the flu vaccine to people in detention. “This is a nation with a greater conscience than that,” said Representative Joaquin Castro of Texas, speaking on the failure to provide medical attention to people in detention.

Although the Center for Disease Control has recommended the flu vaccine for all people in immigration detention, CPB continues to refuse the vaccine for

people in their short-term processing centers. Three of the migrant children’s deaths involved the flu. According to autopsy reports, the other migrant children died of various health problems that immigrant advocates claim were not immediately identified or treated adequately while in detention, which they say is reflective of a trend of poor medical attention for detainees.

On Human Rights Day, December 10, the International Mayan League released a statement condemning the violation of human rights at the U.S.-Mexico border, particularly the rights of indigenous peoples. Five of the seven migrant children who died were of the Maya nation. The statement decries the failure of the

U.S. government to investigate the deaths of the children and reform the systems which dehumanize migrants and indigenous people: “because of the aforementioned human rights violations... [the Mayan League] continues to call for an independent, exhaustive, and transparent investigation concerning Maya children’s death and the deaths of all the children at the border, to hold all those responsible accountable for these deaths, and provide the necessary applicable justice and reparations.”

On the anniversary of Jakelin’s death, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns also released a statement calling on the U.S. government “to end the inhumane treatment of migrants, especially children, and to build just and humane immigration and border policy that respects the dignity of all people.” “These policies are unacceptable,” the statement reads. “Respect for the dignity of migrants, especially children and families, is central to our Catholic identity and our baptismal call to mission.” §



Statement on Israeli Settlements

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), a coalition of faith-based organizations working for peace in Israel/Palestine of which the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is a member, released the following statement on November 20 on recent decisions regarding Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

On November 18, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the United States will no longer consider Israeli settlements a violation of international law. As an advocacy organization that focuses on respect for human rights and international law, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) asserts that no official statement or act by the U.S. government can unilaterally erase decades of international law, including the 1998 International Criminal Court statute that recognized Israeli settlements as a war crime. This U.S. announcement sends a dangerous signal to the Israeli authorities that continued and increased violations of Palestinian human rights are acceptable to the United States government and will continue to go unaddressed.

The shift in U.S. policy follows a November 12 ruling by the European Court of Justice that products made in Israeli settlements could no longer be labeled as though they were made in Israel. The ruling stated that "Foodstuffs originating in the territories occupied by the state of Israel must bear the indication of their territory of origin." The Court then acknowledged that settlements "give concrete expression to a policy of population transfer conducted by that state outside its territory, in violation of the rules of general international humanitarian law."

In this current atmosphere where official annexation of the West Bank is on the table and attacks on civil society and human rights workers are intensifying, CMEP believes this announcement will encourage even more violent actions and calls for further land confiscation and displacement of Palestinians. Indeed, such calls began less than 24 hours after Secretary Pompeo's announcement.

In the pursuit of a just and durable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, CMEP recognizes that it is imperative to acknowledge that the settlement enterprise stands in stark opposition to the goals of peace and justice. Anything other than fierce opposition to the

support and expansion of settlements only solidifies and prolongs the conflict.

CMEP calls on President Trump and his administration to reverse this decision and adhere to international law and United Nations resolutions, such as U.N. Security Council Resolution 2334 acknowledging the violation of international law in the continued occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. We call on Congress to swiftly pass legislation affirming long-standing U.S. policy that settlements are a significant obstacle to any future resolution to the conflict.

CMEP's Executive Director, Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, says, "If the United States truly wants to be a constructive broker of peace, government officials must

stop making unilateral decisions in favor of Israel while relegating the Palestinians to an afterthought. The recent decision about the legality of the settlement enterprise is further evidence that the Administration is not pursuing a policy that will bring peace, justice, and dignity to both Israelis and Palestinians." CMEP laments this decision and believes acknowledging the detrimental effects of settlements, and their illegality under international law, not only serves

the cause of peace and justice in the Holy Land but also identifies real issues that must be addressed if there will ever be peace in the region. §

Faith in Action: Write to your Members of Congress to support a bill that would strengthen protection of the human rights of Palestinian children:
<http://bit.ly/HRPalestine>.

Photo of Itamar, an Israeli settlement in the West Bank by Daniel Ventura on WikiCommons.



Resources

- 1) Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns' 2020 **Lenten Reflection Guide** will be available February 1 at <http://bit.ly/2020LentGuideMOGC>
- 2) Watch a 3-minute video message from an Amazonian woman to participants at the **Amazon Synod** about life in her village: <http://bit.ly/Amazon3min>
- 3) **National Migration Week** is celebrated in the U.S. Catholic Church **January 5-11**. Find resources here: <http://bit.ly/NMW2020>
- 4) Read a letter from Cardinal Ramazzini of Guatemala to the Guatemala chapter of the **Maryknoll Affiliates**: <http://bit.ly/RamazziniAffiliates>
- 5) Watch the recording of a conference on the work of ecological theologian **Thomas Berry**, held at Georgetown University in October: <http://bit.ly/ThomasBerryGtown>
- 6) Find resources on the **UN COP25** climate conference from Texas Impact, the Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy: <https://texasimpact.org/project/cop25/>
- 7) Read Pope Francis's message for **World Day of Peace**, celebrated January 1, entitled, "Peace as a Journey of Hope: Dialogue, Reconciliation, and Ecological Conversion:" <http://bit.ly/WDP2020Jan1>
- 8) 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>
- 9) Read the Christmas message from the **Bishops of Haiti** on hope for radical change in the midst of crisis: <http://bit.ly/BishopsHaitiChristmas>
- 10) Read a message from the Bishops of South Sudan urging action and hope for lasting **peace in South Sudan**: <http://bit.ly/2Q9aOvE>
- 11) Attend **Korea Peace Network's Advocacy Days March 13-14** in Washington D.C. to advocate for peace on the Korean peninsula: <https://www.peaceaction.org/korea-peace-network/>
- 12) Explore a toolkit from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for **National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention month**, which is held in January. Find prayer resources, a backgrounder, talking points, etc.: <http://bit.ly/NSHTPJanuary2020>
- 13) Watch a 10-minute video on **climate refugees** from the Weather Channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDrEpj_sHBI
- 14) Read a statement on the **deaths of migrant children** and violation of indigenous peoples' rights at the U.S.-Mexico border by the International Mayan League: <http://bit.ly/IMLStatement2020>
- 15) Watch a recording of a webinar on the **political crisis in Bolivia** hosted by Global Exchange and featuring Dan Moriarty of MOGC: <http://bit.ly/BoliviaCrisisLIVE>
- 16) Listen to a podcast on **gang recruitment in Central America** and its relationship to mass migration from the region: <http://bit.ly/GangsCA>
- 17) Read a letter from **Pope Francis to young economists and entrepreneurs** inviting them to a gathering in Assisi, Italy to envision how to "re-animate the economy": <http://bit.ly/FrancescoEconomy2020>
- 18) Read a reflection on this year's World Day of Peace Message from Pope Francis by the co-presidents of **Pax Christi International**: <http://bit.ly/PaxChristi2020>
- 19) Read about the film "**The Report**," which depicts the investigation into the CIA torture program. This website includes an annotated copy of the script with historical detail: <https://genius.com/18263307>
- 20) Send a message to your Members of Congress urging them to oppose war with Iran: <http://bit.ly/NoIranWar2020>
- 21) Register for a virtual conversation to learn about Pope Francis's gathering in Assisi, Italy to "**Re-animate the economy**" in March 2020. The virtual conversation will be held **February 19 from 7-9 p.m.**: <http://bit.ly/FrancescoEconomyUSFeb19>