



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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

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Zimbabwe Bishops Defend Human Rights

The Catholic Bishops of Zimbabwe issued a strongly worded pastoral letter in defense of human dignity and fundamental human rights as the government clamps down on dissent.

Christian leaders are speaking out in support of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference after the country's leaders launched a vitriolic attack on Archbishop Robert Ndlovu of Harare and his fellow bishops, calling the Church's leadership "misguided and evil-minded" in their recent condemnation of the government's heavy-handed response to dissent.

The Bishops' Conference issued a pastoral letter on August 15 that criticizes the country's harsh treatment of voices of dissent. Many activists, political opponents and journalists are being held in prison after public protests were squashed by the government on July 31.

Zimbabweans, including leaders of the Baptist and Pentecostal churches, responded to the arrests by sharing the hashtag #ZimbabweanLivesMatter on social media. The Catholic bishops' pastoral letter also condemns corruption, widespread human rights abuses, and the government's handling of an economy in free fall.

Entitled "The March is not ended" in honor of the late U.S. Congressman John Lewis, the letter begins with a recognition of Lewis' lifelong commitment to defending civil rights. "This is our challenge in Zimbabwe today," the letter says, "between those who believe in the past and completed liberation and those who realize that the march is not ended. Peacebuilding and nation building are never completed tasks. Every generation has to establish national cohesion and peace."

"Fear runs down the spines of many of our people today," the letter states. "The crackdown on dissent is unprecedented ... Our government automatically labels anyone thinking differently as an enemy of the country: That is an abuse."

"It is not clear to us as your Bishops that the national leadership we have has the knowledge, social skills, emotional stability and social orientation to handle the issues that we face as a nation," the letter goes on. "All we hear from them is blame of our woes on foreigners, colonialism, white settlers, and the so-called internal detractors. When are we going to take responsibility? While our neighbors in the region are strengthening their democratic institutions, we seem to be weakening ours."

The Information Minister Monica Mutsvangwa responded immediately by calling the president of the Catholic bishops conference, Archbishop Ndlovu, "evil-minded," and seeking to lead the nation into the "darkest dungeons of Rwanda-type genocide" in pursuit of a Western agenda of regime change.

Hopes for political reform and economic recovery

initially rose when Emmerson Mnangagwa, former vice president for longtime strongman leader Robert Mugabe, won the presidency in 2018. But they faded quickly as economic conditions worsened and Mnangagwa's administration forcibly suppressed protests.

Leaders of the largest Protestant denominations and Evangelical groups, as well as the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe, collectively called for a "seven-year political sabbath" to address political polarization and economic decline starting in October 2019. Since then, inflation has only worsened, some say to over 800 percent, and an ongoing medical doctor's strike and chronic unemployment have left many people with no medical care, no jobs, and no hope for the future.

With 86 percent of Zimbabwe's 14 million people identifying as Christian, the governments aggressive response to the Catholic bishops' pastoral letter shocked many.

The Conference of Major Religious Superiors of Zimbabwe, of which Maryknoll Sisters are an active member, issued a message of solidarity with the Catholic bishops for their pastoral letter. "We note with concern the government's aggressive response to the pastoral letter by singling out one of the bishops while ignoring the issues that were raised in the pastoral letter. Our government ought to work toward finding lasting solutions to the crisis in Zimbabwe today."

The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe also took a public stand in support of the Catholic bishops' pastoral letter. "We stand with the truth that the Catholic Bishops so ably articulated," said Bishop Never Muparutsa, Presiding Bishop of the Pentecostal Assembly of Zimbabwe, describing the situation as a "multi-layered crisis of ... economic collapse, deepening poverty, food insecurity, corruption, and human rights abuses."

Other church bodies also expressed support: the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, the World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, World Communion of Reformed Churches and Methodist World Council, and Catholic Bishops of England and Wales.

Zimbabwe's justice minister, Ziyambi Ziyambi said the statement was an "insult" to President Mnangagwa and that the Foreign Minister Sibusiso Moyo was scheduled to meet with the representative of the Holy See in Harare to "ascertain whether or not such statements reflect the official attitude of the Holy See towards Zimbabwe's leadership." §

Rethinking Security in a Pandemic

This is the two-page brief on peacebuilding and security published as part of our election briefs series, Faithful Voting and Global Concerns. View the entire series of briefs here: <https://bit.ly/ElectionBriefsMOGC>

See

Recent global events call into question traditional approaches to security. A national security paradigm based on military defense cannot keep us safe from pandemics, food insecurity, or climate change. When communities in other countries suffer from these disasters, we feel the effects at home, too: COVID-19 continues to spread, migrants flee to our borders, violent conflict erupts over scarce resources, and the changing climate impacts us all.

The very notion of “national security” places undue emphasis on preparedness for war. Budget appropriation debates present national security, or defense, as one concern, vying for funds against global health initiatives, international development and humanitarian aid, and diplomacy. “Homeland Security” and border protection are promoted as national security concerns, while environmental regulations and public health initiatives are not.

The novel coronavirus pandemic is a dramatic reminder that our own security is bound up with that of people in other countries and that promoting true security requires an integrated approach. Addressing the interrelated issues that threaten human security – from ethnic conflict to food insecurity, threats to health and to the environment, poverty and lack of essential freedoms – requires an approach that is integrated, proactive, cooperative, and nonviolent.

Through constant preparations for war, the national security model fails both by heightening tensions between nations and by draining resources that could otherwise be invested in more effective, nonviolent means of building just peace. The United Nations offers “human security” as an alternative model. But member states continue to employ a national security approach, leading to the “security dilemma,” by which one nation, attempting to increase its security by building up military defenses, prompts other countries to do the same, thereby making everyone less secure.

Meanwhile, research indicates what makes societies truly more secure. Societies that are more equal, free, and democratic are more resilient to both conflict and disaster. Addressing the root causes of conflict, such as fragility born of resource scarcity and extremism, can prevent violence and atrocities. Nonviolent tools, from multilateral diplomacy to unarmed civilian protection, effectively decrease violence. Peacebuilding is more effective and peace more durable when women are at the fore. Nonviolent social movements succeed more often than violent

ones and bring about more durable change. By contributing to these efforts around the world, and working with allies and global organizations to build trust and foster dialogue with adversaries, the United States can more effectively collaborate on global health and environmental efforts that make everyone more secure.

Follow the Money

- United States defense and military 2020 budget: \$746 billion - \$1.25 trillion
- Change in President Trump’s proposed 2021 defense and military budget: ~0%
- Non-military international affairs 2020 budget: \$55.8 billion
- Change in President Trump’s proposed 2021 non-military international affairs budget: -22%
- Change to global health funding for 2021: -34%
- Annual cost of Global Fragility Act: \$230 million
- Amount Unarmed Civilian Protection advocates request: \$25 million
- Military defense funds in Senate COVID package: \$29.4 billion
- Funds specifically for weapons: \$8 billion

Judge

For decades, Church leaders have advocated for policies that promote nonviolence, dialogue, and cooperation over threats and violence, and directly link human security to development and mutual aid. Over fifty years ago, Pope Paul VI called for the establishment of a “world fund,” through which all countries would set

aside a portion of their military budgets for impoverished countries to use toward their own socio-economic development. “Is it not plain to everyone,” he asked, “that such a fund would reduce the need for those other expenditures that are motivated by fear and stubborn pride?”

The prophet Isaiah’s proclamation, “Justice will bring about peace; right will produce calm and security” (Is.32:17), inspired Pope Paul VI’s famous rephrasing: “If you want peace, work for justice.” Indeed, he did not just connect the two realms, but equated them, calling development “the new name for Peace.” Catholic social teaching has since then built upon Paul VI’s insights, urging a positive, just peace approach that focuses on care for the common good and integrates social justice, ecological, and other security concerns.

Pope Francis follows previous popes in emphasizing the inseparable nature of peace, economics, and the environment, promoting “integral ecology” and “integral human development.” A Catholic approach to peacebuilding should reflect an *integral security* approach that builds on positive peace and human security models.

The Holy See puts these teachings into action through diplomacy aimed at “humanitarian and integral disarmament.” The Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of Pax Christi International, works closely with the Vatican to promote a fuller understanding of non-violence and just peace, particularly in the Church’s response the COVID-19 pandemic.

Act


While most political leaders continue to think in terms of national security, we can seek policy commitments from candidates that move us toward integral security:

- Engage in diplomacy and multilateral processes: Renew the New START Treaty, re-join the Iran Nuclear Deal, stay in the Paris climate agreement, and support the World Health Organization.
- Include humanitarian foreign aid instead of increasing military spending, including for weapons sys-

tems, in COVID-19 relief.

- Decrease military spending and increase funds for nonviolent alternatives and conflict prevention, such as Unarmed Civilian Protection and the Global Fragility Act.
- Address domestic human security needs such as healthcare inequity, climate policy, education, etc. §

Maryknoll Experience



Maryknoll Lay Missioner Larry Parr (standing in the center) and the youth he accompanies in El Salvador seek human security, countering the growth of international gangs and improving conditions that lead many Salvadorans to migrate to the U.S. With the educational opportunities he helps provide, Parr says, “young people facing a reality full of gang and police and military violence can become leaders to transform their communities into an environment of peace and prosperity.”

Pray

Come Holy Spirit,
that we might turn swords into plowshares
and spears into pruning hooks,
that nation not lift up sword against nation,
and that we train for war no more.
Amen.

Faithful Citizenship

Find out where the candidates stand on peacebuilding and security issues. If a candidate’s position is unclear, reach out to the campaign and ask. Let candidates know you are concerned about human security, get them on the record, and vote for true security and positive, just peace!

U.S. Trade Policy: Putting People and Planet First

This is the two-page brief on U.S. trade policy published as part of our election briefs series, Faithful Voting and Global Concerns. View the entire series of brief here: <https://bit.ly/ElectionBriefsMOGC>

See

The modern-day international trade system is dominated by corporate interests and the world's most wealthy and powerful countries. International trade shapes inequality and poverty through its influence on earnings and employment opportunities in both developed and developing countries. Without specific consideration of vulnerable people and the planet, trade policies and agreements are a hinderance to just and sustainable development in the countries and areas where it is needed most.

In 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a three-country accord negotiated by the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States, set a template for modern global trade agreements. NAFTA fundamentally reshaped North American economic relations, allowing unprecedented integration between the developed economies of Canada and the United States and Mexico's developing one. It eliminated most tariffs on products traded between the three countries, with a major focus on increasing free trade in agriculture, textiles, and automobile manufacturing. Regional trade tripled under the agreement, while wages stagnated in Mexico and jobs were lost in the United States.

The World Trade Organization was established one year later. Since then, free trade agreements have become known for favoring corporations while writing the global rules that affect people's daily lives and the way industries treat the environment. For example, most free trade deals now include a mechanism for corporations to sue governments in private tribunals when they believe that government policy is threatening their investment or future earnings potential. This has allowed corporations the power to interfere with government efforts to establish regulations meant to protect the environment, public

health, and labor rights.

Researchers have documented the negative impacts of NAFTA: lower wages and more pollution, outsourcing of U.S. jobs, increasing loss of livelihoods for farmers, greater inequality, and increasing migration to the United States. For these reasons, politicians in both parties have been known to oppose free trade agreements over the years. In December 2019, the Trump administration completed an updated version of NAFTA known as the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). It was only after bipartisan negotiations that the USMCA won broad support on Capitol Hill. It entered into force on July 1, 2020.

Although dubbed a "21st century trade template," the USMCA deal still falls far short of the transformational trade policy needed for a just and sustainable world. Although it is the first trade deal after the passage of the landmark Paris climate agreement, there is no mention of climate change commitments and the deal establishes special protections for the oil and gas industry. And even with Mexico's new, required labor reforms under the deal, abuses continue along the U.S.-Mexico border, including the unlawful arrest of labor lawyer and activist Susana Prieto and illegal firings of workers' organizing unions.

The United States has also used trade policy as a weapon to sanction other countries. Under the Trump administration, the United States has used the threat or use of tariffs on steel, solar panels, and agriculture as a negotiating tactic with China, the E.U., Mexico, and Canada. These tariffs ultimately hurt U.S. farmers and manufacturers and international relationships.

Coronavirus Connection

The proliferation of trade agreements and a globalized economy have shifted production of the building blocks for life-saving medicines primarily to China and India. Large pharmaceutical companies have also bought up smaller ones and shuttered those factories to prevent competition. When China put stay-at-home orders in place, this affected the supply of several life-saving medicines around the world, as they could not be produced locally.

Judge

The Church teaches that the economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy. Nearly ten years before NAFTA, the U.S. bishops released the pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All* (1986) in which they stated, “Our faith calls us to measure this economy not only by what it produces, but also by how it touches human life and whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person.”

Maryknoll leadership has also expressed its perspective on trade policy in light of missionaries’ experiences, starting with a statement, “*Trading in Justice*,” released in 2002: “Time after time we have witnessed the disastrous impact on these communities of decisions made in distant or disconnected places. We see this happening once again as people in increasingly centralized positions of power negotiate trade agreements that place profit and growth before human and environmental well-being.”

In his 2009 encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI explained the need for a people-centered economy and for trade policy to allow sufficient national sovereignty to prioritize the needs of local people. In addition, the U.S. bishops have expressed their priorities for trade policy in light of Catholic social teaching, including in a recent two-page document released following the USMCA trade agreement.

Act

Encourage your candidates to go beyond the reforms in the USMCA to develop a transformational trade policy that achieves the following:

- Supports living wages for workers
- Guarantees affordable access to life-saving medicines
- Responds to the climate emergency
- Strengthens local economies, not corporations
- Reinforces labor standards, especially in Mexico, so that workers can organize without fear of retaliation. §

Maryknoll Experience



“The COVID-19 pandemic reveals the ways trade fosters dependence, making developing countries vulnerable to the whims of global markets. Uganda suffered export revenue loss when the pandemic put a damper on China’s demand for primary products from Africa. As the virus spread globally, the government required people to wear masks. The small supply of imported masks quickly disappeared. To fill this need, local tailors in Kitgum, Uganda began manufacturing them.”

- Fr. David Schwinghamer, MM

Photo: Students in the Ugandan Palabek refugee camp sewing masks. Photo credit: Salesians of Don Bosco

Pray

God of the desolate, our economy grows rich on cheap labor, we clothe ourselves in cheerful garments made by the sweat of the poor, delight in music played on machines made by those on subsistence labor. Our lives are full of luxuries carved out of the tears of the poor. Help us to work for a world in which the poor have equal dignity with the rich, and enjoy a fair share of the fruits of their labor. Help us to weep today with those who weep, that we might laugh with them when they rejoice in your kingdom.

- Rev. Doug Chaplin, Diocese of Worcester, Church of England

Faithful Citizenship

Explore your candidates’ websites to see if they express their priorities for trade policy. How do their platforms measure up to the priorities for just and transformational trade policy listed above? If a candidate’s position is unclear, reach out to the campaign and ask. Share with them your vision for fair and just trade policy.

Food Security: Building a Sustainable System

This is an abbreviated version of the two-page brief on food security published as part of our election briefs series, Faithful Voting and Global Concerns. View the entire brief here: <https://bit.ly/ElectionBriefsMOGC>

See

The International Monetary Fund has declared 2020 to be “a year of reckoning for the world’s food systems.”

Our global food supply chains have faltered under the weight of the coronavirus pandemic. Lockdowns and other restrictions on movement and trade mean that many people cannot access markets, threatening both their lives and their livelihoods. Concern is highest for those in countries across Africa and the Middle East as the virus threatens the informal trading networks many people rely on for survival. In parts of Latin America, lockdowns mean the sale of the harvest, its consumption, and the collection of seeds for the next season are at risk. In the United States, empty store shelves and long lines at free food banks during the pandemic expose the weaknesses of the highly centralized and just-in-time supply system.

In developing countries, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Program expect a “hunger pandemic” unless swift action is taken to ensure food supply chains keep running.

Before the coronavirus hit, we were already concerned for the victims in the global food system. According to the UN’s most recent State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report, almost 690 million people around the world went hungry in 2019. The hungry are most numerous in Asia but expanding fastest in Africa.

The UN report says a staggering 3 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet. In sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia, this is the case for 57 percent of the population. If recent trends continue, the Zero Hunger target of the Sustainable Development Goals will not be achieved by 2030.

At the same time, 600 million people were categorized as obese and 2 billion overweight because of imbalanced diets. Poor diets also contribute to conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, which in turn compromise immune health and make people more vulnerable to COVID-19.

The global food system also causes significant harm to the environment. Food produced through the overuse of chemicals, in monoculture cropping systems, and intensive animal farming degrades natural resources faster than they can reproduce and causes a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions, with livestock responsible for about a half of that.

The face of food security is the smallholder farmer. There are around 500 million smallholder farmers in the world, and they produce up to 80 percent of the food consumed in Africa and Asia. As a group, they are poor and vulnerable to food price increases and spikes. They are also stewards of increasingly scarce natural resources and are on the frontline of climate impacts.

Challenges to access to markets, financing, and trainings are even greater for women farmers, who constitute the majority of farmers in Africa. When women prosper, however, they tend to invest more in their homes and families, giving their children more nutritious food and keeping them healthy.

Judge

At the heart of the issue of food security is the sanctity of human life and promotion of life with dignity. Guided by Catholic social teaching we realize that the systemic problem of food insecurity is the consequence of systems centered on the market rather than on the human person.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis rejects an economy of exclusion and inequality that harms human beings and the environment. He asked, “Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving?”

Pope Francis reminds us that realizing the fundamental human right to adequate food is not only an economic and “technical” matter, but also principally an ethical and anthropological one. “Hunger and malnutrition can never be considered a normal occurrence to which one must become accustomed, as if it were part of the system,” the pope said in his message for World Food Day in 2013.

In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis says that forgetting people in favor of purely technical remedies separates “what is in reality interconnected” and masks “the true and deepest problems of the global system.”

Act

The rebuilding of economies after the COVID-19 crisis offers a unique opportunity to transform the global food system so that it is resilient to future shocks, environmentally sustainable, and capable of providing nutritious, culturally-appropriate food for all. We can urge our candidates to adopt four broad priorities, suggested by numerous UN agencies:

- **Resilient food supply chains.** Adopt more inclusive growth, including better policy dialogue and markets for smallholder farmers; address factors that limit vulnerable populations' access to affordable and adequate food.
- **Healthy diets.** Curb the overconsumption of animal and highly-processed food in wealthier countries and improve access to good nutrition in poorer ones by applying subsidies and taxes to improve well-being and land use efficiency, making healthy food more affordable globally, and slashing carbon emissions.
- **Regenerative farming.** Shift toward sustainable land and ocean farming by small-scale farmers connected to strong local and regional food systems to heal our soils, air and water, and boost economic resilience and local jobs.
- **Conservation.** Breed fewer animals to accommodate a shift toward more plant-based diets in wealthier countries to save ecosystems. Together with bold measures to eradicate the trade of wild animals, we can restore biodiversity, boost carbon sequestration, and lower the risk of future pandemics. §

Bangladesh: Resilience Amid Tragedy

Bangladesh has experienced severe flooding, storms, and loss during the COVID-19 crisis.

Severe flooding has struck Bangladesh again, submerging at least a quarter of the country under water, taking lives, and washing away livelihoods. In addition, in a major blow to the Church in Bangladesh, Archbishop Moses Costa of Chittagong, a beloved figure, died of COVID-19 on July 13.

According to the National Catholic Reporter, Archbishop Costa, age 69 and the secretary-general of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh, was a leader in the Church who, in the spirit of Pope Francis, modeled mercy and compassion and spoke out about systemic injustice and poverty. He was a friend of Maryknoll Father William McIntire who serves on mission in Bangladesh. The archdiocese of Chittagong called the archbishop's death an "an irrevocable loss for all of us."

Despite these challenges, Father McIntire says hope remains. "The 'good news' here is that we are 'holding our own' and seemingly 'bending the curve' both as regard the pandemic and the flooding," he writes. "During these 40 years [on mission here] in Bangladesh, I have found our people to be amazingly resilient, and that continues to be true now."

This severe flooding is only the latest in a pattern of increasingly severe and frequent river flooding and storms in Bangladesh, thought to be the result of climate change and sea level rise. Just two months ago, a cyclone decimated the county's southwest region.

These effects of climate change are felt most by the poorest in Bangladesh, and they are one major factor preventing the country from developing economically: the repeated devastation of infrastructure and liveli-

hoods by storms and flooding.

In order to mitigate this cycle, the UN is trying to fund an "anticipatory humanitarian action" project in Bangladesh that would provide cash assistance to vulnerable families before crises hit, so that they have the time and resources to move to safer areas, reinforce their homes, or invest in preparatory supplies. The Independent, a British online newspaper, reports that this kind of humanitarian model is becoming increasingly attractive and important in light of increasing vulnerability to climate change and compounding crises, such as the pandemic.

The data on COVID-19 in Bangladesh indicate that the country could be inching toward recovery. National lockdowns were implemented that appear to have helped in keeping the disease contained. While the test positivity rate remains just under 20 percent, the number of active infections is decreasing, and the health minister, Zahid Maleque, remarked in the Daily Star newspaper on August 14 that "the severity of the Covid-19 outbreak is decreasing."

Reflecting on these tough times in light of 40 years of mission in Bangladesh, Fr. McIntire remarked, "Our courageous and resilient Bangladeshi people seem to overcome all the odds and not just survive but also make substantial progress after the seeming disaster. God bless them all!"

Faith in action: Watch the recording of a 30-minute webinar on climate change, U.S. climate policy, and the upcoming U.S. elections. The webinar is part of our 2020 elections project, *Faithful Voting and Global Concerns*. <http://bit.ly/MOGCYoutube> §

COVID-19 and Human Rights Defenders

Organizations are documenting increasing human rights abuses in many countries during the pandemic.

We are seeing a growing number of threats to universal human rights norms around the world. In an increasing number of cases, governments are exploiting the emergency powers and lockdowns imposed to slow the spread of the coronavirus as a means to control their citizens. Human rights defenders have been particularly targeted, including activists, journalists, health professionals, women, and indigenous leaders.

The international spotlight is on several countries for their use of repressive tactics on dissidents, including arbitrary detention and excessive military and police force. A new report by Amnesty International, *Daring to Stand Up for Rights During a Pandemic*, explains that, “Where states were already pushing back on human rights long before the pandemic, this crisis has provided a new pretext to continue violating human rights, shrinking civic space, and attacking human rights defenders and perceived opponents.”

In the Philippines, President Duterte introduced emergency pandemic legislation in March that would jail anyone who created or spread “false information.” The police have arrested hundreds of people for violating curfews when many Filipinos are not allowed to work and are going hungry. In April, Duterte announced that police and military could shoot ‘troublemakers’ protesting during community quarantine.

Shortly afterward, Duterte and the Filipino Congress rushed through the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020. The law outlines a vague definition of terrorism that almost anyone could be accused of along with a jail sentence of up to 12 years.

The Filipino Catholic bishops’ conference released a pastoral letter in response, saying, “The return of ‘warrantless detentions’ through this new law cannot but remind us of the initial moves in 1972 that eventually led to the fall of democracy and the rise of a dictatorial regime that terrorized the country for fourteen years... While a semblance of democracy is still in place and our democratic institutions somehow continue to function, we are already like the proverbial frog swimming in a pot of slowly boiling water.”

According to Amnesty International, Zimbabwe has been another notable case. The country has an indefinite stay-at-home order in place, and people are protesting rising levels of hunger and political corruption related to food aid. Three women political leaders from the opposition party were abducted and tortured for participating in protests regarding the food shortage in May. Other leaders have been arrested for providing food.

Human rights violations and attacks on rights de-

fenders have also been rampant in several countries in Central America. In Guatemala, the human rights organization Udefegua recorded 494 attacks on human rights defenders in 2019, but in 2020 they documented 405 cases from January to May alone, most of which occurred during lockdown.

The latest annual report on threats to human rights defenders produced by Global Witness found that 2019 was the deadliest year yet for these defenders, but the organization predicts that 2020 will be even deadlier. Colombia and the Philippines combined accounted for more than half the murders, while Honduras was the deadliest per capita in the world.

Land conflicts and attacks on environmental defenders are on also the rise. Several countries, including the United States, have significantly cut back environmental regulations in recent months. While people have been placed under stay-at-home orders, extractive industries and agribusinesses continue to operate and receive new contracts. Pax Christi International and Oxfam have both recently released reports documenting the unique challenges posed to indigenous and rural communities trying to protect their land rights in resource rich areas of Latin America during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women face extra burdens as caretakers and activists as aggressors respond with gender-based violence.

For indigenous communities in Latin America, especially communities in voluntary isolation, not only do they need to defend their culture and land but also their health. The Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network, which was a driving force behind the 2019 Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region, is documenting COVID-19 cases and advocating for extractive industries and other outside interests to stay out of the Amazon during COVID-19. Indigenous communities have been hit disproportionately hard by the impacts of the pandemic.

As a sign of hope, the Pax Christi report highlights how communities in Latin America are finding new forms of resistance and resilience during the pandemic and proposing alternatives to the current extractivist economic model for the post-COVID world.

Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations, spoke early on in the pandemic about how this “human crisis was becoming a human rights crisis.” The UN has continued to stress that government action during this time of crisis must be “transparent, responsive, and accountable” and that press freedom and the role of civil society are “essential.” “[Our] message is clear,” Guterres said. “People – and their rights – must be front and center.” §

Youth Protests in Thailand

A new youth protest movement calling for greater democratic norms has emerged in Thailand.

In late July, youth in Thailand began taking to the streets in protest of their government, issuing a variety of complaints and demands. Among their grievances are the military's close involvement with the government; the lack of democratic norms and human rights protections in the country, especially for dissidents; and the economic crisis brought on by the pandemic.

This new protest movement has grown and evolved from high school and university student protests earlier this year. The initial protests were in response to what students described as a militaristic culture in Thai schools, which encouraged subservience to the government and monarchy and denied free speech to students.

As the movement has grown, and as it has been revived in recent weeks, it has taken on a wider set of issues, including calls for a new constitution, written by a democratically elected body, and economic support for those facing the worst of the growing economic crisis.

Some protesters have broken norms by criticizing the monarchy, represented by King Vajiralongkorn, who took the throne in 2016. They claim the palace has centralized power in the last few years and strengthened its

relationship with the military, including through transferring two army units to the king's personal control last year. In addition, they claim that the monarchy has been lavishly spending while Thai citizens are struggling to feed themselves in this recession.

Those defending the monarchy say that its close relationship with the military and its centrality to Thai culture provides a sense of unity for the Thai people. Criticism of the monarchy is punishable by up to 15 years in prison by law, and dissidents have disappeared in the past following complaints against the monarchy.

The main faction of the youth movement focuses on three central demands: discarding the military-drafted constitution, ensuring the safety and rights of dissidents, and dissolving part of the current Parliament. "Our main ideology is democracy," Jutatip Sirikhan, 21, president of the Student Union of Thailand, which has helped organize the protests, told Reuters.

Most recent reports have highlighted the government's efforts to silence this new protest movement through frequent arrests of its leaders. Despite this, youth protests continue daily. §

Two Books on the Church and Nonviolence

Look out for these two new books on Catholic nonviolence.

Two exciting new books address the Church's teaching on just peace and help advance a Catholic ethic of Gospel nonviolence.

The first, *Risk of the Cross: Living Gospel Nonviolence in the Nuclear Age*, is by Arthur Laffin of the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker in Washington, D.C. Laffin has long been active in faith-based nonviolent movements for peace and social justice.

According to a review in the National Catholic Reporter, *The Risk of the Cross* "tackles this crisis of faith [represented by the modern nuclear security paradigm], finding in the Gospel of Mark a vitalizing and nonviolent theology for reckoning with our nuclear danger." The book includes forwards by influential Catholic writer Henri Nouwen and Jesuit activist John Dear.

Laffin published an original version of the text along with Elin Schade and Christopher Grannis in 1981, intended to be a study guide for Catholic parish groups. This new, expanded version includes updated biblical analysis and information on nuclear policy and weaponry. You can order a copy at <https://bit.ly/2YDjRdp>

The second book, *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World*, is being compiled by Pax Christi International and the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative. The Catholic Nonviolence Initiative describes the book as "the culmination of a three-year global conversation among church leaders, community organizers, activists, social scientists and theologians about how the Catholic Church might return to its Gospel nonviolence roots and transform the world."

The book shares real examples of nonviolent interventions; explores the scriptural, theological, and historical foundations of gospel nonviolence; explains the most current social scientific findings on the efficacy of strategic nonviolence; and outlines a vision for how the Church can advocate for active nonviolence as a key component of Christian living. Ordering information will be available soon at <https://bit.ly/31x6ltC>. §

Tensions Over Ethiopian Dam

Ethiopia's continued construction of a major dam on the Blue Nile has caused consternation with neighboring Egypt and Sudan.

Renewed tensions over Ethiopia's major dam project on the Nile River, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), have prompted the African Union to intervene in mediation efforts. The Blue Nile is an essential water source for Egypt and South Sudan, whose leaders fear the project will threaten their already water vulnerable populations. However, the Ethiopian government insists that the hydro-electric power generated by the dam will not only help modernize its own economy but also contribute to regional development.

The Blue Nile, which originates at Lake Tana in Ethiopia, supplies more than 80 percent of the water that flows in the Nile from Khartoum, Sudan, to Egypt. Egypt fears that Ethiopia's growing use of the water for irrigation and electricity could cause major disruptions for its citizens, as it is uniquely water vulnerable among the countries along the Nile. Egypt is located in one of the harshest, driest deserts in the world and its 102 million people rely entirely on the Nile water for irrigation, domestic use, and electricity from the Aswan High Dam, the world's largest embankment dam, built in the 1960s.

To protect this vital water source, Egypt has signed two treaties governing control of the water in the Nile. The first treaty in 1929 was between Egypt and Great Britain, the colonial power in East Africa, which gave Cairo the right to veto projects higher up the Nile affecting its water share. The second, in 1959, between Sudan and Egypt, gave Egypt 55.5 billion cubic meters of Nile water per year and Sudan 18.5 billion cubic meters, out of an average total of 84 billion cubic meters. These treaties prevented the other countries along the river, which gained independence in the early 1960s, from utilizing Nile water resources for national development, a source of deep resentment ever since.

In 1999 over seven countries signed the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) to promote cooperation on the use of "common Nile Basin water resources." That initiative led to the Cooperative Framework Agreement that was signed by Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi beginning in May 2010. The 2010 agreement called for a spirit of cooperation and for the countries to refrain from significantly affecting the water security of any other Nile Basin State. Egypt and Sudan rejected this agreement, insisting that the agreement must also protect the current rights and uses of water by any of the Nile Basin States. Such protections would have allowed these two countries to continue using most of the Nile water, effectively denying the other nations from its use.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi laid the foundation for GERD in April 2011 and construction began in 2013. The GERD is a \$4.6 billion project which will eventually produce over six thousand megawatts of electricity, for domestic use and for export to neighboring countries. Egypt was hostile to the project from the beginning, prompting tense exchanges between the two nations.

In an attempt to resolve hostilities, in 2015, Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia issued a Declaration of Principles, also called the Nile Agreement, which highlighted the importance of fair and equitable use of the water, regard for others when embarking on projects on the Nile, and agreement on effective and binding mechanisms for settling disputes.

As Ethiopia persisted in construction of the dam, Egypt became alarmed and sought international mediation. In February 2020, the Trump administration unsuccessfully tried to mediate. Further mediation through the United Nations also failed in June, after which the African Union, under South African President Cyril Ramaphosa's chairmanship, took over. Since then talks have been intermittent. Ethiopia began filling the dam in July, a process that could take up to five years. On August 15, Sudanese and Egyptian officials met in Khartoum, Sudan, and called for a solution based on the 2015 Declaration of Principles.

The Ethiopian government argues that the filling will not divert sufficient water from the Blue Nile to adversely affect either Sudan or Egypt, but on July 15 the government of Sudan stated, "Measuring the Blue Nile level..showed a decline in water levels equivalent to 90 million cubic meters per day, which confirms the closure of the gates of the dam."

Experts say that there are actions that both Sudan and Egypt can take to compensate for loss of water from the Blue Nile. One is the completion of the Jonglei Canal, which is currently prevented by war in South Sudan and a lack of funding. This canal would speed the flow of water through the Sudd in central South Sudan and greatly reduce water loss due to evaporation. For more equitable use of water, Egypt could also dismantle the Aswan High Dam, as problems with its construction cause huge amounts of water to be wasted.

As of this writing, diplomatic talks have not yet resumed. Ethiopia is continuing to fill the dam and no military threats have emerged. Hopefully the African Union's mediation efforts can lead the three countries to an amicable solution. §

COVID-19 and Global Health

Dr. Susan Nagele, MKLM, who worked in East Africa for 33 years, explains how the COVID-19 pandemic is compounding other ongoing global health challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing serious setbacks in the global public health efforts to treat and control the spread of other life-threatening diseases, such as malaria, HIV, and tuberculosis (TB). These challenges are particularly dire for those living with these diseases in impoverished countries, where access to diagnosis, treatment and life-saving medicines were already limited before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Malaria kills at least half a million people annually and 90 percent of deaths from malaria occur on the African continent. Delay in treatment can cause death in just days, especially for children.

Annual malaria deaths had been decreasing in recent years but, according to Dr. Pedro L. Alonso, director of the World Health Organization's global malaria program, "Covid-19 risks [are] derailing all our efforts and taking us back to where we were 20 years ago." The New York Times reports that prevention of malaria with insecticide treated nets has been disrupted as distribution has been halted by travel restrictions for the pandemic. In addition, the economic crisis brought on by the lockdowns has made access to medicines impossible.

Each year in March, rains start falling in Uganda and bring mosquitoes and an uptick in malaria cases. At the Catholic Hospital in Kitgum, Uganda, consultation and treatment for malaria costs the equivalent of about three days' work at the typical wage. This year, the malaria cases increased as the COVID-19 lockdowns took hold. Now, many families are having problems accessing malaria medicine. Fr. David Schwinghamer, MM, in Kitgum, Uganda, reports that those without adequate funds purchase malaria medicines from less reputable sources for \$0.25 or go without treatment until they become very sick.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected people living with HIV. National Public Radio reports that, to date, HIV-positive individuals have not become as sick with COVID-19 as initially feared. Researchers posit that this is because those infected with HIV quickly followed public health guidelines, given their past experience with the HIV pandemic. Experts have also begun to study whether treatment for HIV offers some protection from the coronavirus.

As regular access to HIV medicine has been threatened by lockdowns, governments and health organizations are working to find solutions. The New York Times reports that, globally, about a quarter of people with HIV cannot access the medicines they need each day and some people have been sharing their drugs to stretch out their supplies. These drugs are usually distributed on a monthly basis and need to be taken properly to prevent the virus from developing drug resistance.

Some countries are considering dispensing medications for three to six months intervals to avoid this problem.

The pandemic could disrupt the fight against TB most of all. TB kills about 1.5 million people annually, mostly in impoverished countries. Like COVID-19, TB spreads through respiratory droplets, and experts estimate that during times of lockdown, especially in which families are living in small, cramped conditions, such as in informal settlements, one person could spread the bacterium to 15 other people on average. Lockdown measures could also decrease access to treatment; the World Health Organization (WHO) has received information from 121 countries reporting a decrease in the number of patients attending TB clinics.

Research and technology have shifted toward efforts to diagnose and treat COVID-19, to the detriment of progress in the fight against other diseases. For example, a test called GeneExpert that is regularly used to diagnose TB is now instead being used to diagnose COVID-19. In addition, research and manufacturing for COVID-19 tests and treatments have become so lucrative that it is causing companies to switch to manufacturing coronavirus tests.

When tests become unavailable and the diagnosis of TB is delayed, transmission continues unabated. Furthermore, when treatment is disrupted, TB resistance to drug treatment increases. Right now, cases of multidrug resistant TB are increasing.

An effective and safe vaccine will be key to managing the pandemic and alleviating these secondary affects for other disease epidemics. The WHO plans to set terms for a new pact, entitled COVAX Global Vaccines Facility, by August 31. It aims to avoid "vaccine nationalism" by providing COVID-19 vaccine distribution worldwide, targeting health care workers and those most at risk first. Under this plan, vaccines will be delivered to 20 percent of the populations of member nations as soon as vaccines become available.

The United States has yet to provide leadership and funding for these global strategies to manage the crisis. On July 9, 32 Senators signed a bipartisan letter to Senate leadership calling for "emergency funding for COVID-19 [that] includes a robust, coordinated, and sufficiently resourced international response." To date legislation to provide this languishes in Congress. Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, chief of the WHO, advises, "For the world to recover faster, it has to recover together, because it's a globalized world: the economies are intertwined. Part of the world or a few countries cannot be a safe haven and recover." **Faith in action:** Urge Congress to provide foreign aid for COVID-19 recovery:

<https://bit.ly/MOGCaidCOVID> §

Brazil: Fund for Landless Farmers

A new investment fund in Brazil aims to support small-scale, sustainable agriculture.

Landless and family farm movements in Brazil have launched an investment fund, Finapop (Popular Financing Program of Family Agriculture for Healthy Food), that will soon allow small-scale investors to support sustainable family agriculture in Brazil while earning a guaranteed 4 to 5 percent in financial returns. The fund aims to be more responsive to the needs of small-scale farmers than traditional lending institutions and help fortify family farms that produce up to 70 percent of staple foodstuffs in the country.

This initiative has gained the support of the Landless Workers Movement (MST), other landless movements, small-scale farmer movements, and farmer unions. The MST is a movement of landless farmers who occupy unused land in Brazil in an effort to redistribute land to rural workers and promote small-scale, sustainable family farming. The MST was founded in the 1980s and is the largest social movement in Latin America, now including about 370,000 families.

The MST responds to the long-standing, deep inequality of land ownership in Brazil, where approximately 2 percent of the population owns about half of all agricultural land. An article of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution stated that unused agricultural land should be redistributed to farmers, and the MST seeks to fulfil that obligation. But there have been numerous roadblocks to doing so, including the credit and banking systems in the country.

João Pedro Stedile, long-time leader of the MST (Landless Workers Movement), believes the fund will improve the situation of credit for family farmers while also providing better returns for those with savings to invest. Currently, he says, banks in Brazil charge an average of 48 percent annual interest on their loans – far too high for small-scale farmers. The government has a National Program for the Fortification of Family Agriculture that offers loans to farmers with only a 6 percent interest rate, but the bureaucracy has proven to be very difficult and the program tends to favor larger farms.

The National Bank for Economic and Social Development also has a program for farmers, but it can take many years to approve a project. Finapop promises to be far more responsive, as it is designed specifically for loans to cooperatives and associations of sustainable family farms, with much more advantageous terms. Farmers will have a one-year grace period and then five years to pay off the loan at only 4 to 5 percent annual interest.

While charging high interest rates on their loans, Brazilian banks provide minimal returns on savings accounts, averaging only 2.1 percent per year. With Finapop, investors will receive a 4 to 5 percent return on their investment, as most of the professionals involved in managing the fund – from lawyers to financial experts— are volunteering their time, thus keeping overhead costs to a minimum.

Finapop began in early 2020 with R\$1 million (U.S. \$182,000) raised from anonymous donors, which it loaned to projects in the southern part of the country, where landless movements have a strong presence. Some of the first projects supported included bakeries on landless settlements, honey cooperatives, and machinery to produce dairy products such as yogurt and cheese. A collection of farmer cooperatives joined together to build a glass factory to make receptacles for their organic agricultural products.

In July, a consortium of state governments in northeastern Brazil provided R\$5 million (U.S. \$910,000) to Finapop. R\$3 million (U.S. \$545,000) of that will be lent to a honey cooperative in Ceara state to be used to increase production from one to six tons of honey per day. Close to R\$2 million (U.S. \$365,000) will go to a cocoa cooperative in Bahia state to industrialize production of cocoa chips and chocolate bars.

The hope is that in November, Finapop will begin its third installation of loans with money from small-scale investors; so far, more than 1,750 plan to invest. The fund managers have approved 10 projects totaling R\$25 million for projects such as milk production in northeastern Sergipe state, credit co-ops in various states, and a family agriculture certification project. Initially, the project will only be open to Brazilian investors, but they hope to allow for international investors in the future.

Finapop represents an important opportunity for sustainable family farmers in Brazil. For the first time they will have access to credit at better terms than their larger competitors. In addition, people from around the country, perhaps the world, will be able to help them create a healthier and more just agricultural system. In a video conference about the fund, one of the founders, economist and engineer Eduardo Moreira, explained that “Finapop appears today to say, ‘Stop, because the world is all wrong. Let’s encourage the world that we believe in.’” §

Resources

- 1) From the Catholic Climate Covenant, use and share the a new resource, “**The Healing Power of Love in Action: Creation Care in a Time of Pandemic and Partisanship.**” This program focuses on St. Francis' Canticle of the Creatures and explores how it truly speaks to us in our era of climate change, pandemic, and partisanship. : <http://bit.ly/CCCHealingPower>
- 2) Explore this **liturgy guide for the Season of Creation (Sept. 1- Oct. 4)** from the Dominican Center: Spirituality for Mission, entitled “Season of Creation: Jubilee Time for Earth:” <http://bit.ly/DomCentJubileeEarth>
- 3) Watch videos of speakers in an **anti-racism lecture series** at the University of Notre Dame launched in August. Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Washington was the first speaker. The speakers for the rest of the series scheduled for this semester are listed: <http://bit.ly/KlauAntiRacism>
- 4) 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," the podcast will be released throughout the Season of Creation: <http://columbancenter.org/JubileePodcast>
- 5) Read a statement from Churches for Middle East peace, a network of which our office is a member, on the new **Israel-UAE peace agreement**: <http://bit.ly/CMEPUAE>
- 6) Explore a collection of resources on the unresolved **conflict on the Korean Peninsula** from the World Council of Churches, *The Light of Peace: Churches in Solidarity with the Korean Peninsula*: <http://bit.ly/LightofPeaceWCC>
- 7) Explore our resource page for **World Day of Migrants and Refugees**, to be celebrated on **September 27**, focused on the topic of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). On this page you can find a **homily written by Fr. Joseph Healey, MM**, in collaboration with South Sudanese IDPs, resources from the Vatican and U.S. Bishops' conference, and much more: <http://bit.ly/WMRD2020MOGC>
- 8) Explore some resources on our website for the **International Day of Peace**, celebrated on **September 21**: <https://bit.ly/32JfqyS>
- 9) Read **Pope Francis's** series of talks on a just recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, given at his regular Wednesday general audience: <http://bit.ly/FrancisCOVIDRecov>
- 10) Check out the latest policy briefs from UN Women, exploring a **gender-responsive recovery** from the pandemic: <http://bit.ly/UNWomenCov>
- 11) Read about a new docu-series, **Immigration Nation**, about the current era of immigration enforcement, now available on Netflix: <https://nyti.ms/3b74P4Y>
- 12) Read a new report from **Human Rights First** on the harm done by the Administration's third-country transit asylum ban, which returns asylum seekers in the U.S. to the first “safe” country they passed through while traveling: <http://bit.ly/HR13rdCountry>
- 13) The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan has released an English version of their **appeal to abolish nuclear power**. The strong statement came out after the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, the worst since Chernobyl: <http://bit.ly/JCBCFukushima>
- 14) Read about a letter signed by **152 bishops in Brazil** regarding the government's mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis: <http://www.fides.org/en/news/68488>
- 15) Watch a video of the side event from the UN High Level Political Forum, “**Stop Child Abuse in Social Media**,” organized by Sr. Marvie Misolas, MM, NGO representative to the UN: https://youtu.be/qzi_1NqDays
- 16) Join a webinar **Sept. 29 at 6pm EST** to learn practical steps for your church to become a **certified climate resilience hub**, provide much-needed support for the “new normal” in your community, and hear from existing climate resilience hubs. This workshop is free, co-hosted by Communities Responding to Extreme Weather and Creation Justice Ministries. Register: <https://bit.ly/32HnPmt>