



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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Nuclear Risk Rising

With the Doomsday clock set to 90 seconds to midnight, and Russia suspending participation in a key nuclear arms control treaty, the risk of nuclear war is higher than ever.

The risk of global nuclear disaster is escalating. On January 24, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock to 90 seconds to midnight – closer to global catastrophe than at any time in the symbolic clock's 76-year history. The Bulletin's Science and Security Board statement on the change attributed it largely to destabilization and nuclear threats stemming from Russia's war on Ukraine and the weakening of the multilateral infrastructure that has historically mitigated such threats.

As if to confirm the board's assessment, President Vladimir Putin announced on February 21, three days before the first anniversary of the Ukraine war, that Russia was officially suspending its participation in New START, the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty between the United States and Russia. Russia began refusing inspections of nuclear sites mandated by the treaty last year, citing the U.S. policy of inflicting "strategic defeat on Russia" through its support for Ukraine.

The Doomsday Clock statement calls on the United States, together with NATO allies and Ukraine, to pursue dialogue with Moscow aimed at nuclear risk reduction and peace negotiations.

"As Russia's war on Ukraine continues," the board writes, "the last remaining nuclear weapons treaty between Russia and the United States, New START, stands in jeopardy. Unless the two parties resume negotiations and find a basis for further reductions, the treaty will expire in February 2026. This would eliminate mutual inspections, deepen mistrust, spur a nuclear arms race, and heighten the possibility of a nuclear exchange."

While the report focuses mainly on Ukraine, other global developments highlight the dire need for nuclear arms control and disarmament. East Asia is of note in recent weeks. On January 11th South Korea announced for the first time that it may pursue its own nuclear weapons, or request the redeployment of U.S. nuclear weapons to the peninsula 32 years after their removal, if North Korean threats continue to escalate. Rather than prioritizing peace between the two Koreas, the US responded by sending more conventional weapons to the peninsula, and assuring South Korea of U.S. nuclear protection – although studies suggest such support may only further stoke the fears of South Koreans. Meanwhile, tensions between the United States and nuclear-armed China continue to escalate. And in a historic move, Japan has

announced its largest military build-up since World War II. Elsewhere, talks between the United States and Iran aimed at salvaging the Iran nuclear deal have stalled, and tensions between Palestinians and nuclear-armed Israel have increased.

People of faith, particularly in countries with nuclear weapons, must call on leaders to pursue a robust program of negotiations and disarmament. Pope Francis has repeatedly condemned not only the use but the possession of nuclear weapons, even as deterrence. The Holy See was among the first states to ratify the UN Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Pope Francis affirmed the promise of such efforts at a 2017 Vatican conference on nuclear disarmament, asserting "progress that is both effective and inclusive can achieve the utopia of a world free of deadly instruments of aggression, contrary to the criticism of those who consider idealistic any process of dismantling arsenals."

Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, discussing his landmark 2022 pastoral letter, "Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament," has promoted the five policy proposals of the Back from the Brink campaign: 1) pursue the global elimination of nuclear weapons, 2) renounce the current U.S. "first use" policy, 3) end the sole authority of the president to launch a nuclear attack, 4) take the U.S. nuclear arsenal off of hair-trigger alert, and 5) cancel plans to replace the U.S. arsenal with enhanced nuclear weapons.

On January 31st, Rep. Jim McGovern introduced a resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives, H. Res. 77, "Embracing the goals and provisions of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons" and calling on the U.S. government to pursue the five policy proposals of the Back from the Brink campaign. §

Faith in Action: Read more about the Back from the Brink campaign, and find out if your city, county or state has endorsed the campaign's proposals at <http://bit.ly/backbrink>

Then contact your Member of Congress and ask them to co-sponsor H.Res. 77 today at <http://bit.ly/77action>

Pax Christi International Statement on Ukraine War Anniversary

Let us look at all those civilians whose killing was considered 'collateral damage.' Let us ask the victims themselves. Let us think of the refugees and displaced... the mothers who lost their children, and the boys and girls maimed or deprived of their childhood. Let us hear the true stories...look at reality through their eyes...In this way, we will be able to grasp the abyss of evil at the heart of war. Nor will it trouble us to be deemed naive for choosing peace.

– Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti

One year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Pax Christi International expresses our deep concern for countless victims of a war that has led to death, injury, displacement, trauma, and ecological harm. This war has generated almost 6 million internally displaced persons and 8 million refugees; killed more than 7,200 civilians including over 400 children and hundreds of thousands of soldiers; and caused generational trauma.

The war of aggression against Ukraine has clearly demonstrated that no international authority exists with sufficient wisdom to effectively address the root causes or with adequate means to have prevented Russia's brutal invasion. International law provides every sovereign nation with the right to self-defense. In a world of highly destructive weapons, armed self-defense may trigger an escalation to extremes that can even lead to a nuclear war.

For this reason, Pax Christi International urgently calls on the international community to immediately facilitate diplomatic initiatives to restore the international order and the territorial integrity of Ukraine. We plead with Russia and Ukraine to enter negotiations directly, on neutral ground, and with a mutually agreeable mediator.

Insufficient investment in developing and scaling up proven effective nonviolent strategies for defense, including civilian based defense, has created the impression that self-defense is always armed. Many Ukrainians are demonstrating clearly and with great courage, however, that nonviolent defense can be very effective and could be much more readily available with significant investment in resources, training, and research.

Pax Christi International calls on the international community to invest in developing nonviolent strategies for defense and just peace.

As a human rights and peace movement, Pax Christi International advocates for the right of conscientious objection for soldiers and civilians on both sides of the

conflict. We call for sufficient independence for media, political opposition parties, and civil society in Russia; we highly value the many forms of nonviolent resistance to the war by Russian society; and we support all Russians who protest against the war, risking arrest and imprisonment.

This war also shows the immorality of the possession of nuclear weapons and the urgent need for nuclear abolition. President Putin's threat to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine reminded the world that a single nuclear bomb detonated could create a humanitarian disaster of unparalleled proportions. A full-scale nuclear war would spell the end of human civilization as we know it.

Pax Christi International calls on all States to delegitimize these weapons and strengthen the legal norm against their use by signing and ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Pax Christi International also urges a Human Security approach in Europe and in the world.

Russia should be included, as well as Belarus and Ukraine, in a broader security concept based on trust building and collective security, oriented by a just peace framework. A Human Security approach also recognizes with UN SCR1325 that peace and security efforts will be more sustainable if women take part in the prevention of violence, the delivery of relief, trauma healing, and recovery efforts for lasting peace.

The need for people-to-people peace processes that involve dialogue between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples, including women and youth, are important to the prevention and transformation of violent conflict. Pax Christi International supports initiatives that allow contact, cooperation, and healing.

Pax Christi International is a movement for reconciliation and active nonviolence, founded at the end of the Second World War with a deep belief in the possibility of just peace. We are painfully aware that war is not limited to Ukraine; that violence is endemic in many corners of the world; that a new logic of peace and nonviolence is urgently needed.

We call Pax Christi members and all people of good will to pray and to mobilize for peace, urging States to address the relationship between human security, care for creation, human dignity, and sustainable peace and to advocate urgently for dialogue. §

Japan's Shift in Defense Policy

Fr James J. Mylet, MM, describes the shift in military policy in Japan, where he lived for more than 40 years.

Following the end of World War II, with all the atrocities committed by Japan and its colonialization in the Asia-Pacific area, a revised Japanese Constitution was imposed by the occupying Allied Powers, led by U.S. forces. Article 9 in the Japanese Constitution states: "The state formally renounces the right of belligerency and aims at international peace based on justice and order." The article continues, "to accomplish these aims, armed forces with war potential will not be maintained."

During a visit to Washington in January, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida mentioned several major shifts in Japan's defense policy. First was the decision to allow Japan to possess enemy base strike capability by increasing the defense budget to 2% of GDP by 2027. A part of the plan is to purchase Tomahawk cruise missiles able to reach North Korea, China, and Russia.

This goes well beyond self-defense and Article 9. According to the highly regarded Japanese daily newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*, it goes beyond what the Japanese public will be willing to support.

President Joe Biden commended Japan's commitment to fundamentally strengthen its defense capabilities and reinforce deterrence to common threats. The Japanese Constitution still bars a NATO type military alliance.

What has been done more covertly in the past is now taking place openly. Presently there are joint military planning and exercises between the U.S. and Japan, with South Korea involved at times. Many in Japan would like to see more of an independent stance affirming Article 9.

Prime Minister Kishida stated that Japan is facing the most challenging and complex security environment in recent history. Things changed with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This was a huge shock to society in Japan and to the national security agencies, moving them to create new military capabilities.

There is also the nuclear threat from North Korea, with North Korean missiles regularly flying over Japan into the Pacific. China poses another threat with its aggressive military assertion in the East China Sea. There also is a tension over the dual claim by China and Japan to the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands, with its abundant fish stocks and a possible rich source of natural gas.

Japan's new budget strategy is being implemented without any debate in the parliament and without an adequate explanation to the public. Therefore, the strategy is felt to be undemocratic and it is predicted that Kishida will not obtain the broad support and understanding of the

Japanese public.

The first major shift in Japanese defense policy came in 2014 under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. He reinterpreted the Japanese Constitution to allow for the exercise of the right of collective self-defense, allowing the Japanese to participate in UN peacekeeping missions. This was hotly debated with much opposition.

With Russia's aggression against Ukraine breaching the very foundation of the rules that shape international order, how is Japan to respond?

One viewpoint is that Ukraine's defense capability against Russia was seen as insufficient, thus failing to discourage and deter Russian aggression. This is inaccurate, but according to this viewpoint, Japan needs adequate deterrence. In the listing of *Global Firepower (2023 World Military Strength Ranking)* Japan ranks 8th in the world and has about 250,000 active military personnel. So rather than appearing anemic, Japan is on the cusp of becoming a military superpower.

Concerns have been raised that Japan's possession of a counterstrike capability could backfire. It could prompt regional destabilization, be seen as a threat to other countries, and cause an arms race in the region. This rearmament of Japan would be opposed by a large number of people in Japan.

As the only country to be the victim of a nuclear attack and with pacifist principles in Article 9 of its constitution, Japan has long pushed for nuclear disarmament. However, the language in the U.S.-Japan agreement is ambivalent, saying that in the event of an "emergency", nuclear weapons would be allowed.

Obviously, Japan's defense policy is evolving, with several factors entering into play. The revised Japanese Constitution was imposed by the occupying U.S. forces. A number of people want the Constitution to be rewritten by the Japanese. Disregard for the world order and aggression on the world stage is a real concern.

The Japanese Catholic Church's position is that PM. Kishida is abandoning the exclusively defense-oriented posture and shifting Japan toward becoming a military superpower. This could even lead to using civilian seaports and airports for military purposes. The Church's position is that Japan should follow the path of peace through dialogue, especially because of its aggressive history in Asia, working toward reconciliation and solidarity with countries in the region. Pope Francis, on his visit to Japan in 2019, also stressed peace through dialogue. §

Philippines: U.S. Military Bases are a Danger

The following is an excerpt of a commentary by Irish Columban Missionary priest Shay Cullen, founder of the Preda Foundation, a charity to assist sexually exploited and abused children in the Philippines.

The growing tension in the Asia-Pacific region, with the Philippines at the center, makes it time for Filipinos to start to worry about possible war over Taiwan that would rain down Chinese missile strikes on any of the U.S. bases, now or in the future, in the Batanes Islands, Cagayan, Basa Air Base or nearby Clark, Subic Bay and parts of Mindanao and Palawan.

Last January 31, 2023, The Manila Times reported as follows:

A four-star U.S. Air Force general has warned of a conflict with China as early as 2025 — most likely over Taiwan — and urged his commanders to push their units to achieve maximum operational battle readiness this year. In an internal memorandum that first emerged on social media on Friday, and was later confirmed as genuine by the Pentagon, the head of the Air Mobility Command, Gen. Mike Minihan, said the main goal should be to deter and, if required, defeat China.

So, if there will be a major conflict here, it will be over Taiwan, and most certainly not over the Philippine atolls and sand banks taken and occupied by China from the Philippines and the few tons of fish stolen daily from Philippine waters.

...

According to some analysts, the missile war will likely be won by those with the most effective and accurate hyper-sonic missiles launched from the air or those forces with multiple, widely dispersed missile launch sites on land and ships that are too many to be attacked and overwhelmed simultaneously.

The recent agreements between the United States and the Philippine government of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. seem to be paving the way for this kind of strategy in the Philippines. There are already many U.S. marine missile bases dispersed, or will be, throughout the strategically located Japanese Senkaku Islands 170 kilometers from Taiwan and 330 kilometers from China. The marines from Okinawa are being re-trained, re-armed and re-deployed in small fighting forces without massive tanks and heavy armour, much to the disgust of traditionalist retired military officers.

...

It seems that the plan of the military alliance between the United States, Australia and the UK, known as

AUKUS, is to surround China with a steel chain of island fortresses bristling with multiple missile sites, too many to be suppressed by counter attack, but that can subdue the Chinese navy and strike its land-based launch sites if ever it comes to all out conflict and an attempt by China to invade Taiwan.

...

This huge growing U.S. presence in the Philippines, located inside Philippine military installations, is covered by the fig-leaf of the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) that shields the U.S. from criticism it is violating Philippine sovereignty by already having regular use of Basa Air Base in Floridablanca town in Pampanga; Antonio Bautista Air Base in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan; Benito Ebuena Air Base on Mactan island in Cebu; Lumbia Airfield in Cagayan de Oro City in northern Mindanao and an army jungle training base in Fort Laur, Nueva Ecija, and other unknown secret bases. Subic Bay and San Miguel Base in Zambales are next for U.S. occupation.

...

Subic Bay has been used for docking U.S. Navy ships and loading supplies and now with a U.S. company, Cerberus Capital Management, owning the former Hanjin shipyard in Subic Bay, we can expect more U.S. ships, like the USS New Orleans, to be based there. For sure, Chinese missiles installed on the seized Philippine atolls are now aimed at Subic Bay and San Miguel Base, Zambales.

...

The U.S. military presence in the West Philippine Sea has not deterred China from grabbing more atolls and islands from the Philippines and arming them with missiles. The Mutual Defense Treaty between the U.S. and the Philippines is of no help. There has to be an act of war by China against the Philippines to trigger a U.S. military response. Any such response will need the approval of the U.S. Congress. The presence of so many U.S. military bases inside Philippine bases is making the Philippines an open and vulnerable target for retaliatory strikes by China.

The deployment of so many U.S. servicemen in military bases all over the Philippines will speed up the expansion of the sex industry. Once again, we will see more human trafficking and sexual abuse and exploitation of women and children by U.S. servicement. §

Peru: Indigenous People Call for Justice

Protests following the failed coup attempt of the former president were met with deadly police violence

In the two months since Dina Boluarte was sworn on as president of Peru after the controversial departure of President Pedro Castillo, 48 people have been killed by Peruvian security forces. According to investigations by Amnesty International, 80 percent of these killings took place in indigenous areas of the country, even though these regions represent only 13 percent of Peru's population and protests took place on a national level.

Most of Peru exploded into turmoil following the fall from power of Castillo—a rural schoolteacher, farmer and union leader who won in run off elections on a promise to uplift those sectors of society that had become disenfranchised. It was precisely those groups who initially took the streets, calling for his return.

Castillo's brief time in the presidency was marked by two attempts by Peru's much maligned Congress to remove him from office. A third effort was underway on December 7 when Castillo attempted to circumvent this by abolishing Congress and declaring that he would rule by emergency decree.

Soon afterwards, Castillo was arrested and jailed, and his former vice-president, Dina Boluarte, was sworn in as Peru's sixth president in five years. Some decried this a self-coup orchestrated by the ex-president to dodge accusations of corruption. Others denounced it a legislative coup organized by Lima's political establishment to keep rural Peruvians disenfranchised. Within hours, the nation was rocked with protest.

Two teenage protesters in the southern Andean region of Apurimac were shot and killed by police on December 11, fueling outrage. Protests shifted focus, from calls to release Castillo to calls for Boluarte's resignation and early elections. As protests grew in size, so did police repression and killings, followed by the declaration of a state of emergency which sent the military onto the streets.

On December 15, hundreds of protestors in the Andean city of Ayacucho were blasted by tear gas canisters and bullets from Peruvian security forces, leaving ten people dead, including a fifteen-year-old.

In the face of outrage, President Boluarte dismissed the legitimacy of protests as being organized by violent groups, without showing any proof. Her army commander called out protestors as "bad Peruvians," "violent extremists," and "terrorists". This incited memories of the decades of violence of the insurgency of the Shining Path and the ensuing brutal repression of Alberto Fujimori's civic-military dictatorship. Since that time, the term "terrorist" has

been used to quickly discredit anyone who challenges the government.

After a brief reprieve over the Christmas holidays, protests started up again, with a tragic outcome. On Monday, mostly indigenous protesters poured in from rural areas to the southern city of Juliaca. As they converged on the airport Peruvian security forces moved in, killing 17 protesters including teenagers and a doctor attending the wounded. Most received shots to the back and head.

Maryknoll Sister Pat Ryan, a resident of Peru for 40 years and founder of the human rights group DHUMA, said of the incident: "What happened in the city of Juliaca can only be described as one of the worst massacres that have occurred in our country in recent years."

Shortly after, two other teens not involved in the protests were gunned down in a rampage of police repression, including sixteen-year-old Elmer Zolano Leonardo Huanca, a soccer-loving high school student who was bringing his mother's cart home after a long day of selling salteñas.

Huanca's mother, an indigenous Quechua woman who speaks no Spanish, is one of the members of the newly organized Association of Victims and Martyrs of January 9th who are seeking justice in the aftermath of the massacre. Jose Bayardo, a lawyer from DHUMA has been accompanying her said: "the victims were almost all indigenous people from rural areas. There is a racist component to this. Why are there so many deaths in the South? This was a massacre, but there has been no follow up by the government. This is another sign from the government that we are invisible. We mean nothing to them."

On February 9, a mass was held to commemorate the massacre, police unleashed more repression upon those gathering to mourn their dead, wounding dozens including a ten-year-old boy.

Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas Director at Amnesty International stated "It's no coincidence that dozens of people told Amnesty International they felt that the authorities treated them like animals and not human beings. The systemic racism ingrained in Peruvian society and its authorities for decades has been the driving force behind the violence used to punish communities that have raised their voices." §

Faith in action: Join us and the Sisters of Mercy in calling on Biden to denounce the repression in Peru.
<https://mogc.info/SM-Peru>

Nicaragua: Release of Political Prisoners

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega released two-hundred twenty-two political prisoners, exiling them to the United States on February 9. He also revoked their citizenship. The basis for this article was previously published on the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns website on February 15

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega released 222 political prisoners, exiling them to the United States on February 9.

Many of the people freed were imprisoned in 2021 during the buildup to Ortega's latest re-election, as we reported at the time. Following arrests under false pretexts and a sham election, the U.S. imposed sanctions. Some speculate that freeing the political prisoners was part of overtures seeking the relief of U.S. sanctions. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a press statement that the release is "a constructive step towards addressing human rights abuses in the country and opens the door to further dialogue" between both nations. President Ortega said of the exchange, "let them have their mercenaries."

Freedom came with a price. Hours after former prisoners headed to Dulles International Airport in Virginia, the Ortega-controlled legislature reaffirmed that all were "traitors" and amended the constitution to revoke their citizenships. Two of the prisoners refused such terms of freedom, including Catholic Bishop Ronaldo Álvarez of Matagalpa. The following day, his citizenship was also revoked and he was sentenced to 26 years in prison. According to Reuters, Bishop Álvarez was convicted of treason, undermining national integrity and spreading false news, among other charges.

Consequently, all these prisoners emerge stateless – a move illegal under international law.

While the release of political prisoners is welcome, the revocation of citizenship and expulsion is part of a trend of increasing authoritarianism under the Ortega regime. In 2018 we published a report by former Maryknoll Lay Missioner Catherine "Kitty" Madden on the protests and a violent crackdown that followed. In the build-up to the 2021 election, Ortega imprisoned five of his would-be opponents as well as many other critical voices – politicians, journalists, public figures, and Catholic clergy. The five presidential opponents are among those released this week. *Presas y Presos Políticos Nicaragua* notes that there are at least 38 more political prisoners still in detention. Through 2022, the Ortega government has also cancelled and expelled hundreds of religious and civil society organizations from the country, especially those based in the United States. The expulsions were ostensibly because "they hindered the control and surveillance of the General Directorate of Registration and Control of Non-Profit

Organizations" for failing to break down financial statements with details of donor addresses and phone numbers. The week following the release of the prisoners, another 94 people who had already fled the country were likewise declared "traitors to the country" in absentia and their properties in Nicaragua were seized.

The recent trend emanates from deep scars. Daniel Ortega was first elected president by a supermajority in what many viewed as a free and fair election in 1984. The Reagan Administration contested the election, however, and began illegally funneling arms and money to the government's violent opposition, the Contras, in the Iran-Contra Affair. After Ortega's first presidency, his party fell out of power until he regained the presidency by a 2006 election by a plurality vote. Since 2014, his party has amended the constitution to remove term limits, and he and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, are midway through a five-year term.

While we welcome the freedom granted to the 222, we lament that they are not able to remain free in their own country. The Biden administration granted the released prisoners humanitarian parole, connected the exiles with their families, friends, or good Samaritans, and expedited requests for work permits. Members of the high-profile group have been individually offered Spanish citizenship. It is unclear what the prospects will be for the many more who remain in wrongful detention in Nicaragua, Bishop Ronaldo Álvarez among them. We are likely to learn more about human rights violations experienced by the released prisoners while in detention. We also have yet to see if and/or how U.S. sanctions against Nicaragua will change in the future as a result of this development.

The dissatisfaction with the incomplete justice offered to the 222 was expressed elegantly in a press statement by Organization of American States: "What happened today is not a 'liberation.' These people were unjustly imprisoned – some for years – for thinking, expressing, or writing opinions contrary to the prevailing regime in Nicaragua. Many of them were tortured and cut off from all contact with the outside world. ...their rights must be restored as soon as possible." §

Africa: Heat and Drought

The African continent is experiencing unprecedented and severe consequences of extreme heat this year, from a three-year drought in the Horn of Africa and record-setting temperatures in the south.

In February, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) stated regarding the Horn of Africa: “Forecasts for the 2023 March-May rainy season point towards depressed rainfall and high temperatures.” This will constitute the sixth failed rainy season in the last three years and already millions of people in several countries are in famine conditions. Pastoralists in northern Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, and southern Ethiopia have lost over half of their herds. The conditions this year are worse than in 2011, when drought and famine led to 260,000 deaths in Somalia. ICPAC said that 23 million people in these countries are already highly food insecure, and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said that 1.3 million Somalians, 80 percent of them women and children, have been internally displaced by the drought. Over eight million, more than half of the country’s population, will need humanitarian aid this year.

At the same time, in January, a body of very warm, trapped air lingered over northern sectors of South Africa, from north-west to south-east parts of the country, resulting in a week in which temperatures were over forty degrees Centigrade (over 104 degrees Fahrenheit). As of late January, eight farmworkers had died, as well as a number of elderly people. Many people complained of difficulties sleeping. In the daytime, people could not escape the heat using air conditioning since South Africa is experiencing regular shortages of electricity – due to dry conditions among other factors. Farm animals have died from the heat, which also made it difficult for farmworkers to harvest crops, especially in the Province of Kwa-Zulu Natal, north and west of the city of Durban. Durban, a city of two million, had numerous calls for emergency treatment at hospitals due to heat exposure.

The South Africa Weather Service (SAWS) predicted that by this extreme heat would wane by February, but similar conditions would come back again. The Service gave advice to the population: avoid direct sunlight, drink lots of water, and taking time-outs from work in the hottest part of the day, especially if working outdoors. An article in Kenya’s Nation newspaper added that other parts of continental Africa are experiencing similar patterns of severe heat and drought, interspersed with epic downpours causing destructive flash floods, sometimes dumping a whole year’s worth of rainfall in one week.

In 2004, CSIR met in Johannesburg at a conference

of climate experts to deliberate on patterns of climate extremes already discernible. They predicted “that ever-more-extreme weather events being recorded globally would become obvious by the year 2030.” Their predictions were wrong only in their timeline. Already in 2020, northern South Africa and Namibia, as well as Botswana, were recording average temperatures over two degrees Celsius, which is well beyond the recommended threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius.

The latest report by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in its Africa section, stated: “Exposure and vulnerability to climate change in Africa are multi-dimensional, with socioeconomic, political, and environmental factors intersecting. Although Africa is one of the lowest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) causing climate change, yet key development sectors have already experienced widespread losses and damages attributable to human-induced climate change, including biodiversity loss, water shortages, reduced food production, loss of lives and reduced economic growth.”

The IPCC added: “Africa’s rapidly growing cities will be hotspots of risks from climate change and climate-induced in-migration, which could amplify pre-existing stresses related to poverty, informality, social and economic exclusion, and governance.”

Given these dire scenarios, one would have expected the Africa Union (AU) Summit, held in late February, to have diligently sought for non-GHG forms of economic development. But civil society organizations expressed skepticism that this would happen. While the AU Summit was taking place, Tanzania approved the \$3.5 billion crude oil pipeline from northwestern Uganda through pristine areas of western and central Tanzania. The government of Mozambique continues to firm up private and public commitments to exploit the huge reserves of natural gas off its northeastern coastline. President William Ruto of Kenya proclaimed himself an environmental champion at the Summit, downplaying his government’s advancement of coal mining.

One of the civil society organizers at the AU Summit, Courtney Morgan of the African Climate Reality Project, said: “Decision makers and policy makers should be supporting sustainable solutions for a fossil-free Africa. The neocolonial gas projects on our continent will only exacerbate the climate crisis.” §

Tanzania Seizes Maasai Cattle

After exposing cuts to public services for the Maasai in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area of Tanzania at the end of 2022, the Oakland Institute offers the following urgent update, detailing forced cattle seizures by the government in an ongoing attempt to force the Maasai off their lands.

The government of Tanzania is further escalating the pressure on the Maasai [in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area] by seizing their cattle. Once captured, the cattle are auctioned off and exported from the area, unless the owners manage to get it back by paying a ransom to the authorities.

Livestock is central to the Maasai culture and livelihoods. Losing cattle is therefore catastrophic for them. With this new tactic, the government's goal is clearly to drive them away from their ancestral lands. This is happening in Loliondo, in and adjacent to the 'Pololeti Game Reserve', which was created during the government's violent demarcation exercise in June 2022 and dedicated to trophy hunting by the United Arab Emirates (UAE)-based Otterlo Business Company (OBC).

These seizures are now increasingly being practiced near other "protected" areas of the country. This update provides additional evidence of the Tanzanian government's brutal campaign against the pastoralists.

In November and December 2022 alone, several massive seizures were carried out, including:

Loliondo, Ngorongoro District

November 26: 60 cows [belonging to] Sarkay Tiiyee from Malambo were seized at a water point, outside the illegally demarcated 'Pololeti Game Reserve' area.

November 27: Also in Malambo, 167 goats belonging to Kimani Taretoy Tiiyee were seized. The rangers demanded TSh 60,000 per goat and slaughtered 27 of them.

December 14: An estimated 1,772 cattle belonging to the pastoralists of Ngorongoro District were sold at a public auction by court order on the grounds that they had no owners and were unclaimed property. The cattle owners were reportedly threatened with trespassing and robbery if they tried to reclaim their cattle.

December 17: 600 sheep belonging to Malee Risando Lekitony were seized next to his boma. He had to pay TSh 2 million to get his sheep back.

December 19: Over 300 cows belonging to four families were seized at Oloosek, Ololosokwanan area within the newly created 'Pololeti Game Reserve' in Loliondo. The demand to release the cattle was TSh 100,000 per head—a very high number for the pastoralists. Given the fear of losing their cattle, the fine was eventually paid and cattle returned.

December 22: Approximately 400 cows from Arash,

belonging to herders from Sangok and Losekenja were seized in the 'Pololeti Game Reserve.' On Christmas Eve, the livestock owners inquired about the procedure to get the cattle back and found that all the cows had been sold.

Ngorongoro Conservation Area

Continued drought and restrictions on grazing areas cattle can access within the NCA have caused the deaths of hundreds of cattle, driving pastoralists further into poverty.

Tarangire National Park

December 17-24: an estimated 3,083 cattle belonging to herders living in Simanjiro District in Manyara Region were seized for allegedly entering Tarangire National Park and sold at an auction. Sources on the ground report the cattle were not in the park when they were seized.

Ruaha National Park

The government's use of cattle seizures to force pastoralists into poverty and drive them from their lands as seen in Loliondo is now being repeated in areas surrounding and within the Ruaha National Park. For instance:

November 22: Ruaha National Park conservation rangers seized 172 cattle in Mbarali District, Mbeya Region, belonging to Kideka Dabda. Even though Mr. Dabda showed up and the Mbarali District Court issued an injunction stating that the cattle should not be auctioned off, the cattle were still sold.

Just a few days later on November 25, the Minister of Lands, Dr. Angelina Mabula, at a public rally in Ubaruku in the Mbarali District, announced that villagers in 48 villages and townships in the district "encroaching" the Ruaha National Park must leave the park immediately.

December 2: 93 cattle from Madundasi Village (located south of Ruaha National Park) were auctioned off with the permission of the Mbarali District Court.

Due to the ongoing violation of human rights, Tanzanian civil society organization released a statement on December 20, condemning the cattle seizures. Local NGOs are calling for an immediate end to "military exercises carried out by the conservation rangers to unjustly arrest the herders and confiscate their livestock because those actions perpetuate poverty and cause suffering for innocent citizens." NGOs are asking for the government to compensate the pastoralists "whose livestock have been auctioned fraudulently, as the livestock is the primary support for the economy and the family's food security." §

Faith Groups Pressure Big Banks to Phase Out New Fossil-Fuel Financing

Members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) a coalition of over 300 global faith-based and values-based institutions have filed two shareholder proposals at six of the nation's top banks calling on them to reduce their financing of fossil fuels and fulfil their own public commitment to achieving net zero CO2 emissions by 2050, a target considered imperative to avoid catastrophic climate impacts.

The Maryknoll Sisters, a member of ICCR, were the co-filers of a shareholder proposal at JPMorgan Chase, which is considered "the world's worst banker of climate chaos" according to a recent report authored by Rainforest Action Network, the Sierra Club, and others.

Cathy Rowan, the representative to the ICCR for the Maryknoll Sisters stated: "Even though JPMorgan Chase, along with the other major US banks, committed to align its financing with the Paris Agreement, it has provided more financing to the fossil fuel industry than any other bank since the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015. The resolution we co-filed with the Sierra Club Foundation calls for the bank to align its actions with its promises."

The other banks which received shareholder proposals include Bank of America, Citigroup, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, and Wells Fargo. These are among the top fossil fuel funders in the world – all headquartered in the U.S. and leading players in the group of 60 banks that have invested a combined \$4.6 trillion into the fossil fuel industry over the past six years after the Paris Climate Agreement.

"In order to avert the worsening impacts of the climate crisis, we must stop the expansion of fossil fuels," said Dan Chu, Executive Director of the Sierra Club Foundation, the lead group in filings at JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Morgan Stanley, and Goldman Sachs. "All major U.S. banks continue to finance billions of dollars for new coal, oil, and gas projects every year. Such financing undermines the banks' net zero commitments and exposes investors to material risks. These shareholder resolutions simply ask banks to align their promises with their actions and to adopt policies to phase out the financing of new fossil fuel development. We have actively engaged with bank leadership so they are clear about what investors expect from their banks, and we anticipate strong levels of support this spring from fellow investors."

Similar shareholder proposals were filed at these banks in 2022 and received between 8-13% support at annual

meetings. The new 2023 proposal clarifies that they are not calling on banks to abruptly terminate client relationships, but to commit to a time-bound phase-out of new fossil fuel exploration while supporting their low carbon transition in a manner that is both credible and verified.

"The banks' objection to the language of last year's proposal was that it would cut off clients immediately and prevent banks from financing the net-zero transition, insofar as they couldn't support companies that may have low-carbon transition plans but are still involved in oil and gas development," said Paul Rissman of the Sierra Club Foundation. "This year's proposal encourages banks to finance companies that are certified by a credible third party to be on a net zero pathway while maintaining that financing for new fossil fuels is incompatible with the banks' climate commitments."

Said Kate Monahan of Trillium Asset Management, which led the filing at Bank of America, "The International Energy Agency's warnings are clear – we will not be able to achieve the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees if banks continue to finance new fossil fuel exploration and development. Bank of America has publicly committed to the Paris Agreement but continues to finance fossil fuel expansion with no phase-out plan, exposing itself to accusations of greenwashing and reputational damage. By continuing to fund new fossil fuels, Bank of America and others are taking actions with potentially catastrophic consequences."

With these new shareholder resolutions investors remind banks of the risks of failing to meet their own climate targets. By making exaggerated environmental claims – a practice called greenwashing – banks can risk incurring costly fines from regulators. They also risk losing capital from central banks that often come with more stringent climate restrictions.

"The financial services sector has an important role to play in addressing the growing climate crisis," Danielle Fugere, President of As You Sow, part of the group of investors who led these filings. §

Faith in action: If you own shares in Bank of America, Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, Morgan Stanley or Wells Fargo, please vote FOR the shareholder proposal calling for Time-Bound Phase-Out of Financing of New Fossil Fuel Exploration and Development when you get your proxy ballot.

U.S. Congress: PEPFAR and Farm Bill

A divided Congress and a feuding House chamber will make it difficult to focus on what needs to be done to keep U.S. programs for international HIV/AIDS relief and food aid.

One of the key leadership changes in Congress is the chair of the House Foreign Relations Committee. Rep. Michael McCaul, who was the top Republican on the committee in the last Congress, has taken the gavel. McCaul has been a supporter of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, and global food security issues in the past—he co-sponsored last year's Global Malnutrition Prevention and Treatment Act and the Global Food Security Act of 2022.

Many people in Washington are saying the contentious dynamics in Congress will make it a struggle to get much approved, or even voted on, in the year ahead. For international humanitarian and development advocates, the focus will likely be on renewing two vital mandates, the Farm Bill and the reauthorization of PEPFAR.

PEPFAR reauthorization

PEPFAR's mandate is up for renewal — a process that happens every five years. While the initiative has typically received bipartisan support, advocates say that education is essential with so many new members of Congress who might be unfamiliar with its work.

The easiest way to pass the bill would be to make no changes beyond extending the dates in the existing legislation — changing the date from 2023 to 2028. The key question is whether advocates or lawmakers will want to push for more changes, which would bring with it added risks. A more involved discussion about the bill could open the door to partisan political debates that could derail the process and complicate passage.

UNAIDS' report to the International AIDS Conference in Montreal in August 2022 underscored how years of steady progress against the disease had struggled during the crisis provoked by COVID-19, mass displacement and several international conflicts.

"The report has really bad news," said Matthew Kavanagh, a special adviser to the executive director for policy, advocacy and knowledge at UNAIDS, in a speech to the interfaith gathering. "But there's also some very good news, because we've built community, because we've built resiliency, because faith leaders have come together with community leaders and people living with HIV and built a response that's able to respond in times of crisis."

With these stresses in mind, some international health advocates suspect that PEPFAR itself might be interested in some changes, especially as the State Department

looks to create a Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy, which would include the U.S. Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator that runs PEPFAR. But to open the door to restructuring is risky when lawmakers have other priorities that could use funding.

The Farm Bill

Discussions have already begun around the Farm Bill, which is up for renewal again this year. The legislation authorizes key international U.S. food aid programs, including those that address both emergency and non-emergency hunger and nutrition needs.

In a recent Senate Agriculture Committee hearing, a USAID official asked lawmakers to give the agency more flexibility in how it delivers food aid so that it can be more effective. This is not a new request. The bill has typically included a number of provisions aimed at supporting the U.S. farming and maritime industries that international humanitarian groups have criticized as more costly and less effective.

While these debates aren't new, there is a greater "sense that there has got to be a better way," to address the growing global hunger challenges, said Bill O'Keefe, executive vice president for mission, mobilization and advocacy at Catholic Relief Services.

The polarization in Congress could make it difficult to find consensus on such a complicated piece of legislation—even one that has traditionally been bipartisan—to support the McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program, Food for Peace, and Food for Progress.

"What we've been hearing from [congressional] offices ... committee staff, both House and Senate, is that nobody has the faintest idea how this is going to go," O'Keefe said. "The trend line is towards less order [in Congress], and I think this is a further step in that direction because it's just so unpredictable." §

Faith in action: Tell Congress to renew funding for PEPFAR at <https://mogc.info/PEPFAR>
Tell Congress to renew the Farm Bill at <https://mogc.info/FarmBill>

CBP One App: Biased Against Dark-Skinned People

The agency's app is now the exclusive way to schedule appointments to request asylum. The app, rated 2.7 and 2.5 out of five in the Google and Apple stores, respectively, has limitations and errors that effectively exclude the most vulnerable populations of asylum seekers.

In October 2020, the U.S. Government rolled out CBP One™ “as part of [Customs Border Protection]’s comprehensive effort to improve the security of our nation’s borders while enhancing legitimate travel and trade.” CBP One, according to the agency, “will provide increased accessibility and transparency to some of CBP’s most utilized services.” As of January 12, 2023, asylum seekers applying to enter through the US-Mexico border must use CBP One App. However, this well-intentioned app has presented insurmountable problems to dark-skinned persons seeking entry to the United States at the US-Mexico border. The Guardian reports in an article titled “Facial recognition bias frustrates Black asylum applicants” that the app is unable to map the features of many darker-skinned asylum seekers. As a result, they cannot upload their photos to receive an asylum appointment with the US immigration authorities. Instead, hapless asylum seekers receive error upon error in the app.

Most people seeking asylum have gone through horrendous journeys to get to the southern border. Asylum seekers are fleeing real danger to their lives. The CBP One app adds a new layer of frustration onto the situation as it fails to perform its stated purpose, namely to “reduce wait times and help ensure safe, orderly and streamlined processing,” especially among Haitians and African asylum seekers, as well as some darker Venezuelans.

CBP has recently “tweaked” the app to include Haitian Creole in addition to English and Spanish. But not yet resolved are the issues of facial recognition of dark-toned faces. They argue that the app capture feature is not made to compare images in a database but acts rather as a “liveness detection.” How the images are used for biometric information is irrelevant if the end result remains the same: exclusion of a population because of skin tone.

This frustration has the capacity to expose these vulnerable persons to further exploitation at the hands of people who claim to offer help.

The app presents other layers difficulties to asylum seekers. At a basic level, it is not available to asylum seekers who lack a smartphone, and it is not functional



without a local service provider or reliable Wi-Fi and network coverage. The technological barriers present a form of discriminating against the most vulnerable persons.

Another issue with the app is that it does not allow for a family to schedule an appointment as a single unit. Each member must apply separately. Given that the slots per day a very limited and everyone is trying to get the application done, many families are unable to secure an appoint for all its members in one day.

lies are unable to secure an appoint for all its members in one day.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) says it is working to improve the app and expand its accessibility. Meanwhile, we call on DHS to offer an alternative to persons whom the app rejects. The decision to make the CBP One app the only means of scheduling appointments is not only discriminatory but also endangering the lives of the most vulnerable people. Human lives must take precedence over protocols. Heidi Cerneka, a Maryknoll Lay Missioner working in El Paso, Texas, says, “this app is definitely not the answer – or for sure it isn’t while we are spending way too much money on national guard, tanks and war toys to keep people from asking for asylum instead of investing that same money in more people to process asylum seekers, or more resources to allow people to ask for asylum through the app.”

Unfortunately, the Biden Administration is headed in a direction that is more exclusionary still. A draft rule has been released by the Biden Administration that would potentially deny the legal right to seek asylum in the United States for the majority of migrants who pass through other countries en route to the U.S. southern border. Under the recently proposed rule, countries must first apply for asylum in those countries they pass through. The rule is not yet implemented and is receiving public comments until March 27. §

Faith in action: Submit a public comment on the proposed rule that the administration must consider at <https://mogc.info/AsylumBanComments>

Guantanamo Bay Prisoner Released

The resettlement of Majid Khan from Guantanamo Bay prison to Belize, marks the first time a “high intelligence value” prisoner has been freed.

On February 2, Majid Khan was transferred from Guantánamo Bay to Belize. This followed Mr. Khan finishing a military commission sentence, pursuant to a plea and cooperation agreement with U.S. authorities. Mr. Khan was sent from secret CIA detention, during which time he was tortured, to Guantánamo in September 2006.

Susan Gunn, Director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, said in a press statement by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, “We celebrate the release of Majid Shoukat Khan and pray that he and his family can live, grow, and flourish in Belize. We commend the government of Belize for welcoming Mr. Khan and his family, demonstrating to the world that we each can

contribute to building peace. We especially wish to thank President Biden for his faithfulness to his pledge to end indefinite detention at Guantanamo Bay prison. To work for the resettlement of even one prisoner requires imagination and commitment – to justice, peace, and reconciliation. President Biden has demonstrated that it can be done. We look forward to celebrating the resettlement of more prisoners from Guantanamo soon.”

In a statement released via his legal team, Mr. Khan said, “I have been given a second chance in life and I intend to make the most of it. I deeply regret the things that I did many years ago, and I have taken responsibility and tried to make up for them. I continue to ask for forgiveness from God and those I have hurt. I am truly sorry. The world has changed a lot in twenty years, and I have changed a lot as well. I promise all of you, especially the people of Belize that I will be a productive, law-abiding member of society. Thank you for believing in me, and I will not let you down. My actions will speak louder than my words.”

Rev. Ron Stief, Executive Director of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, said, “Mr. Khan’s transfer to Belize is an important step towards closing the Guantánamo prison. Of the thirty-four Muslim men who are still held at Guantánamo, twenty have been cleared for transfer through review processes. We applaud the work of the U.S. government and other countries in repatriating or resettling the men cleared for transfer from the prison.” §



Photo of the January 11, 2023 Rally to Close Guantanamo in front of the White House

Lenten Reflection Guide: Inspired by Laudato Si’

The 2023 Lenten Reflection Guide: Inspired by Laudato Si’ from the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns contains reflections, questions, prayers, fasts, and actions based on each week’s Gospel reading and the experience of Maryknoll missionaries who have lived and worked with marginalized communities around the world. Reflections run from Ash Wednesday, February 22 through Palm Sunday, April 2

We invite you to use this guide individually or in small groups to reflect upon your life patterns, to pray more deeply, and renew your spirit to face the realities of our world.

Find the guide, in English and in Spanish, on our website at
<https://mogc.info/Lent2023>

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Resources

1. **Lenten Reflection Guide:** Download the guide with reflections beginning on Ash Wednesday, **Feb. 22** through Palm Sunday, **Apr. 2**
<https://mogc.info/Lent2023>
2. **Film: *Seeking Asylum: A Mother's Journey*,** a feature documentary film that bears witness to the endless deterrents migrants face when petitioning for asylum in the United States.
<https://www.seekingasylumfilm.com/>
3. **Report: "In Danger"** a UNAIDS 2022 report on the faltering progress made around the world treating and preventing HIV/AIDS
<https://mogc.info/UNAIDS2022>
4. **Report: "Climate Outlook"** by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development on the severe drought expected in Africa the months of March through May 2023
<https://mogc.info/Afr-Drought-2023>
5. **Report: "Banking on Climate Chaos"** on major fossil fuel funders by the Rainforrest Action Network, Sierra Club, and other partners
<https://mogc.info/BankingClimateChaos>
6. **Report: Peru** - "Lethal state repression is yet another example of contempt for the Indigenous and campesino population" published by Amnesty International <https://mogc.info/AmInt-Peru>
7. **Report: Doomsday Clock - Current Time** by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists on how close we are to destroying our world with dangerous technologies of our own making
<https://mogc.info/Doomsday>
8. **Proposal: "ICCR Shareholder Proposals"** text by the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility for the advancement of climate-forward lending policies for publicly traded banks
<https://mogc.info/ICCR-Proposals>
9. **Homily: Pope Francis in the Democratic Republic of Congo**, delivered Feb. 1 in Ndolo on the Ecumenical Peace Pilgrimage to South Sudan
<https://mogc.info/HomilyDRC>
10. **Homily: Pope Francis in South Sudan**, delivered Feb. 5 in Juba on the Ecumenical Peace Pilgrimage to South Sudan
<https://mogc.info/HomilySouthSudan>
11. **Event: Hope Into Action - Lent**, Zoom gathering on International Women's Day hosted by the SHARE Foundation, **Mar. 8**, 7PM ET.
<https://mogc.info/HopeInActionzoom>
12. **Event: Virtual Good Friday Way of the Cross for Economic and Ecological Justice** for **Apr. 7**, noon ET, details and registration coming soon at
<https://mogc.info/WotC-2023>
13. **Policy brief: "What is PEPFAR?"** short policy explainer for the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
<https://mogc.info/PEPFAR-explained>
14. **Policy brief: Farm Bill** information from the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture available here:
<https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/farm-bill>
15. **Policy brief: "The War in Ukraine: Impacts of Nonviolent Resistance and U.S. Policy Implications"** directed towards Congressional staff
<https://mogc.info/Nonviol-Ukraine>
16. **Report: Ukrainian Nonviolent Resistance in the Face of War** by the International Catalan Institute for Peace <https://mogc.info/ICIP-Ukraine>
17. **Article: Human Rights Defenders Killed** by Amnest International
<https://mogc.info/AmnIntl-Honduras>
18. **Article: International Womens Day** published by UN Women in anticipation of International Women's Day Mar. 8
<https://mogc.info/Intl-WomensRights2023>
19. **Maryknoll Lay Missioners Webinar** Join us on **Mar. 6**, 6PM ET or **Apr. 5**, 12PM ET to learn about Maryknoll Lay Missioners and discern if mission is right for you. <https://mogc.info/MKLM-Webinars>
20. **Maryknoll Sisters Podcast:** Educating the Youth in East Timor with Sr. Rolande Kahindo.
<https://bit.ly/MKSrPodcast>
21. **Maryknoll Missioners Webinars:** on **Apr 19**, 4pm ET, join Fr. Joe Thaler, MM, as he reflects on mission in Nepal and offers insights into mission with Native Americans. In the most recent recorded webinar, Maryknoll missioners discussed "Transformations through Immersion Trips"
<https://www.maryknoll.us/Resources/webinars>