

NewsNotes

a bi-monthly newsletter on international justice and peace issues



Maryknoll Office
for Global Concerns

September-October 2025 | VOL. 50, NO. 5

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50 years

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Peace, Social Justice, and Integrity of Creation

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Current status of bills:
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Maryknoll Lay Missioners at 50 are Hope in the Darkness

Lay Missioners joined with Maryknoll Sisters, Fathers & Brothers, and Affiliates for celebration and reflection on being missioners of hope in dark times.

Current and returned Maryknoll lay missioners from throughout the fifty-year history of the organization were present for a four-day jubilee gathering in Ossining, New York, on Aug. 14-17.

Fr. John Sivalon, MM, joined Sr. Ellen McDonald, MM, for the opening night keynote, "The Afternoon of Maryknoll." Fr. Sivalon spoke of noontime as a moment to take stock of the signs of the times. He described the United States today as "living under a demonic narrative of darkness," pointing to attacks on immigrants, cutting services to hungry families, ignoring climate catastrophe, arming the perpetrators of genocide, and a narrative of "populism, ultranationalism, and pseudo-Christianity" masking greed and racism.

In contrast, Sivalon described an ever-expanding narrative of light which defines Maryknoll, represented historically in the sharing of the gospel through evangelization, leading later to a "broader and holistic" narrative "emphasizing liberation, social justice, human development, and care for creation."

In this afternoon of Maryknoll, that narrative is yet more expansive, as science and mysticism combine to teach us a greater awareness of our oneness not only with God and one another but with all of creation.

"If we really believe in God's active presence," Sivalon shared, "then God is actively present everywhere without exclusion no matter how hidden that presence may seem because of the demonic narrative of darkness."

The next night, Marie Dennis spoke on "Claiming Hope in Times of Disorder and Despair." The former director of MOGC and current director of Pax Christi International's Catholic Institute for Nonviolence offered concrete examples of people around the world claiming and giving hope.

Noting the undermining of democracy in the United States and atrocities occurring around the world, Dennis reminded the gathered missioners of similar moments of violence Maryknoll have witnessed in mission. Just as Maryknoll missioners have always witnessed signs of hope amidst suffering, Dennis offered a powerful list of current examples including mass organization and public witness across the United States against attacks on immigrants and democratic institutions and support for genocidal violence in Gaza; the bravery of nonviolent

land and water defenders around the world; and the Economy of Francesco, a worldwide community of young people organized by Pope Francis.

More broadly, Dennis cited the coming together of two important developments in the thinking of the church, a "new logic for life" from which she draws the "deepest hope: cosmic consciousness and nonviolence."

"I believe that the intense cultural and political divisions we are now experiencing... are a fear-driven reaction to the deep, transformative change that is underway," Dennis said. "Our growing awareness that we are part of a cosmic whole and our embrace of nonviolence as the defining characteristic of our relationships with each other and with all of creation are, it seems to me, making it possible – absolutely necessary – to keep on claiming hope, even in times of disorder and despair."

On the third day, returned Lay Missioner Dan Moriarty, currently with MOGC, spoke on being "Missioners of Hope in Desperate Times." Many North Americans, he said, go into mission with a "fix-it mentality," seeking the quick and successful alleviation of suffering, but learn that mission often means remaining in situations where they can only be present to suffering and injustice. It is here that communities who have experienced generations of oppression teach a deeper kind of faith. Missioners learn to witness to God's reign even in a world where it is practically invisible.

As people urgently seek answers to what can be done when nothing seems to be stopping the "demonic narrative of darkness," Moriarty pointed to lessons from around the world, from African Americans to the unjustly imprisoned in Bolivia, the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa to the Palestinian notion of "sumud" – perseverance and steadfastness that defines faithful witness, and inspires nonviolence in the face of ongoing, horrific violence.

On the final day of the gathering, Moriarty and MKLM Executive Director Elvira Ramirez reported on Maryknoll Lay Missioners working with local partners to identify forms of violence in their communities, shaping ministries that express the organization's commitment to nonviolence as its central mission principle. ✞

FAITH IN ACTION: Watch recordings of these speeches and more at <https://bit.ly/MKLM50>

Global South Bishops Call for Climate Action at COP30

Catholic bishops from Africa, Asia and Latin America issued a joint statement to world leaders asking for transformative actions at the UN Climate Change Conference COP30.

In an appeal to world leaders on June 12, Catholic bishops from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, made the case for action at the UN Climate Change Conference in Brazil in November. “A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home” was written by bishops from the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), and the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM), and was coordinated by the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, collectively representing 820 million Catholics.

A prophetic call for urgent action

Citing the scientific consensus of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the bishops warned that global warming is on track to surpass 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, with devastating effects already felt in the Global South. Desertification alone is displacing or threatening the livelihoods of some 500 million people, while women, girls, and Indigenous peoples are disproportionately impacted.

“The climate crisis,” the bishops wrote, “is also a crisis of values that breeds violence.” They insisted that solutions must go beyond technical fixes to address deeper injustices—an economic paradigm based on extractivism, technocracy, and the commodification of nature. Instead, the bishops lift up an integral ecology that respects both human dignity and the rights of creation.

Rejection of false solutions

A central theme of the appeal is the rejection of so-called “false solutions,” particularly the financialization of nature through carbon offset schemes and profit-driven “green capitalism.” Such approaches, the bishops argue, shift the burden from the polluters to the poor while failing to address the root causes of the crisis.

Instead, the bishops call for the immediate phase-out of fossil fuels, with no new exploration, exploitation, or infrastructure. They denounce mining practices and “energy monocultures” that sacrifice communities and ecosystems. True solutions, they insist, must involve radical economic transformation, just transitions to renewable energy, and respect for planetary boundaries.

Commitments of the Church

The joint statement is not only a call to governments but also a pledge of responsibility from the Church in

the Global South. The bishops commit to:

- Defend the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples and local communities over their territories.
- Support agroecology and solidarity economies, as alternatives to extractive models.
- Provide educational programs on integral ecology, human rights, and sustainability.
- Promote spirituality in the arts, culture, and media that fosters ecological awareness and hope.
- Establish an Ecclesial Observatory on Climate Justice, through the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon, to monitor and denounce unfulfilled COP commitments.

Demands to the international community

The bishops demand that wealthy nations assume their “ecological and social debt.” They call for climate finance that is fair, accessible, and non-exploitative—funds that reach frontline communities directly rather than increasing debt burdens in the Global South.

The bishops also insist on:

- Zero deforestation in all biomes by 2030.
- Ambitious national climate plans (NDCs) that reflect the urgency of the crisis.
- Binding participation of civil society and faith-based organizations in climate governance.
- Protection of environmental defenders and vulnerable communities threatened by conflict and displacement.
- Policies to transform production and consumption patterns to be more equitable and sustainable.

A path of hope and conversion

While the document contains strong denunciations, it also radiates hope. The bishops invite all people of goodwill to a “path of ecological conversion,” rooted in solidarity, “happy sobriety,” and the wisdom of Indigenous traditions. They call for intergenerational justice—ensuring that today’s decisions allow future generations to inherit a habitable and flourishing Earth.

The bishops also reaffirm the Church’s prophetic mission to stand with the poor, to defend human rights, and to lift up voices from the margins. For the bishops of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, the climate crisis is not only a scientific issue—it is a spiritual test of humanity’s capacity for justice, solidarity, and care for our Common Home. ✠

Catholics Work Together to Defend Climate Rules in U.S.

Eight U.S. Catholic organizations are working together to keep U.S. regulations on greenhouse gas emissions from cars and power plants.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is trying to rescind the “Endangerment Finding”—a determination that the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere threaten public health and welfare, providing the legal basis for the EPA to regulate these pollutants under the Clean Air Act. Its repeal would clear the way for the rollback of critical climate protections, including regulations on greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles and power plants.

You can submit your own comment to the EPA until Sept. 22 to let them know how you would be impacted by ending the Endangerment Finding at <https://bit.ly/EPAsubmitcomment>

You can see the thousands of comments other people have submitted at <https://bit.ly/EPAviewcomments>

You can also add your name to a joint Catholic comment to the EPA. The deadline to sign is September 15. Add your name at <https://bit.ly/EPAcatholiccomment>

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joined forces with seven other U.S. Catholic organizations to gather nearly 5,000 signatures from U.S. Catholics on the joint comment to the EPA that says “do what is right and just – do not repeal the Endangerment Finding and do not strip away the life-saving greenhouse gas standards for cars and trucks.”

The joint Catholic comment explains the impact ending EPA regulations on greenhouse gas emissions would have on impoverished and vulnerable people:

“It is the poor and vulnerable who would be harmed the most by an abandonment of federal regulations of greenhouse gas emissions: the unborn children at risk of preterm birth and developmental delays, the elementary students missing school because of asthma symptoms, the grandparents developing lung or heart disease, the day-laborers suffering in extreme heat, and the Black and Brown communities who disproportionately bear these burdens due to redlining and systemic racism. These are the communities that the EPA will be abandoning through this rule.”

Archbishop Thomas Zinkula of Dubuque, Iowa, shared with us his comment to the EPA at a public hearing on Aug. 21. The archbishop said:

“My purpose in these brief remarks is to convey the moral responsibility we have to protect life, care for

creation, and defend the most vulnerable — responsibilities that are jeopardized by proposed rollbacks of the Endangerment Finding and vehicle pollution standards.

“In the Catholic Church, we believe that creation is a gift entrusted to our care. Stewardship of the earth is not optional; it is a moral duty. Protecting human dignity means protecting the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the climate that sustains life. Solidarity requires us to stand with the poor and vulnerable, who are always the first and worst impacted by pollution and climate disruption. To deny climate science is to deny reality and close our eyes to the truth of God’s creation. Love of neighbor demands action to prevent harm.

“The harm is real. In 2024 alone, the United States experienced 27 extreme weather events, causing at least 568 deaths. The past ten years have been the hottest on record, with extreme heat doubling U.S. deaths since 1999. Children, the elderly, and pregnant women are especially at risk. Vehicle pollution remains a major source of this danger, with 72 million Americans living near major trucking routes — disproportionately harming people of color and low-income families. Here in Iowa, we have seen record floods, tornadoes, and heat waves. From river to river, our people are suffering.

“Strong standards save lives. They prevent billions of tons of climate pollution, reduce smog and soot, and mean fewer cases of asthma and premature death. Families save thousands of dollars on fuel and health-care costs. These protections are good for people and good for God’s creation.

“So I urge the EPA: uphold the Endangerment Finding and maintain strong vehicle pollution standards. We will be judged by how we protect the least among us. The call before us is clear: protect human life, defend human dignity, and safeguard our common home.”

Catholic Climate Covenant’s Executive Director Dan Misleh also testified against the rescission of the Endangerment Finding at the public hearing on Aug. 21. He said, “The endangerment finding that governs EPA regulations on carbon dioxide and other pollutants is an essential part of promoting the common good. To rescind this finding and roll back these life-saving regulations is both ill-advised and a callous response to the suffering of people and the planet.” ✠

Global Plastics Treaty Setback

UN plastics treaty negotiations collapsed in August 2025 after countries failed to bridge fundamental divides, particularly regarding the contentious issue of whether to include limits on plastic production and restrict harmful chemicals.

Set the world on a path to ending plastic pollution forever,” said Inger Andersen, the Executive Director of the UN Environment Program (UNEP) to the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) tasked with developing an international binding agreement on plastic pollution at the opening of the latest round of negotiations in Geneva from August 5 to 15. Her words expressed the hope that the international community could overcome the lack of success that marked the previous round of negotiations in Busan, South Korea.

But after ten days of what was scheduled to be the final rounds of talks, countries had not agreed on a single article in the larger treaty or on next steps in the process.

The peril of plastics is daunting, as the UN Environmental Assembly (UNEA) has pointed out:

“Of the approximately 10 billion tons of plastic produced since the 1950s, studies show that over 8 billion tons are now waste, with between 10-15 million tons of plastic leaking into the marine environment each year. This number is expected to more than triple by 2050.

“Studies have linked unsustainable production and consumption patterns to the exponential growth in plastic pollution, which impacts human health as well as the health of terrestrial and marine ecosystems. In 2022 there were reports of plastic particles found in human lungs and in human blood, and a 2021 report found microplastics in human placenta.”

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development estimates that, without global action to curb plastic pollution, plastic production between 2020 and 2040 will grow by 70 percent to 736 million tons. Overall, less than 10 percent of global plastic waste was estimated to have been recycled in 2020, the rest disposed of in landfills, incinerated, or released into the environment.

Deliberations began in 2017 with UNEA passing several resolutions on the best ways to address plastic pollution. It established an Ad Hoc Expert Group (AHEG) to identify a broad range of responses, including voluntary and legally binding governance strategies. This group met four times up to the end of 2020 and issued a long

list of recommendations, which reflected a growing consensus on the need to address plastic pollution more broadly. This led to a series of meetings, culminating in the session in Busan, which was unable to finalize a treaty.

The two biggest sticking points were scope, i.e. whether the treaty should mandate large reductions in production leading to a total ban, and financing, whether developing countries that produce and profit from sales of plastics, should also contribute to the international financing mechanism.

Problematic areas were whether production and supply of plastics was under the mandate of the INC, questions of financial assistance for developing countries dealing with plastic waste, whether the treaty would include mandatory or only voluntary measures, and whether it would be international or national.

The failure of the INC deliberations was due, according to the New York Times, to “a league of petrochemical-producing nations staunchly opposed to any controls on production,” even though most environmentalists examining the issue of plastic pollution state that terminating the production of plastics is the only way to eradicate plastic waste. The New York Times also said that agreeing on a treaty using consensus-based negotiations seems to be increasingly out of reach.

As the conference concluded, dozens of delegations expressed disappointment that they could not reach an agreement. Some blamed the process, and a few said it was trying to go beyond its mandate by including plastic production and chemicals of concern in the treaty's text.

The goal of “ending plastic pollution forever” has suffered a setback but is not out of reach. It is now time to regroup, assess positions, and determine where there is common ground or room to compromise. Many negotiators are tempering expectations for an ambitious agreement and hope that, once adopted, it will be able to evolve and strengthen over time. As delegates left Geneva, some clung to their determination that “we’ll get it next time.” ✂

FAITH IN ACTION: Sign a petition at <https://bit.ly/PlasticPollutionCoalitionPetitions>

Haiti: A Perfect Storm of Suffering

As the violent crisis in Haiti deepens, Haitians in the United States are going to court to protect their right to Temporary Protected Status.

Haiti continues to spiral into lawlessness and grave suffering. According to a UN report, a record 1.3 million people in Haiti are displaced by gang violence, more than half of whom are children. Armed gangs have taken control of almost all of Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince in an extended conflict that has displaced more than one million people, killed thousands and fueled famine-like hunger. The situation in Haiti is a prime example of how organized crime can systematically drive displacement and transform crime into a mechanism for territorial and social control.

And yet, the Trump administration, without the required Congressional review process, attempted to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians in February. The TPS designation is typically accorded to individuals from countries experiencing crises, such as natural disasters and civil strife. It allows them to stay in the United States temporarily, with eligibility to work.

In late July, Haitian TPS beneficiaries filed a class action lawsuit against the Trump administration. The suit argues that "gang violence persists in Haiti as many gang groups operate with impunity, enabled by a weak or effectively absent central government, and that gangs inflict on Haiti terror, including rape and other forms of sexual violence." The U.S. State Department has advised American citizens not to travel to Haiti due to kidnappings, crime, terrorist activity, civil unrest and limited health care.

Rep. Cherfilus-McCormick and Senator Markey plan in mid-September to file an amicus brief to protect TPS for Haitians. In the brief, they aim to make it clear that Congress will preserve TPS and that ending TPS for Haitians will have a negative impact on the economy. At the time of publication, they were actively seeking cosponsors from their fellow members of Congress.

On August 3, an Irish missionary, Gena Heraty, director of St. Helene Orphanage in Kenscoff, south east of Port au Prince, was kidnapped along with seven Haitians, among them a 3 year-old child. They were held captive for almost a month. They were released on Aug 29. The orphanage is run by the international charity Nos Petits Frères et Soeurs and serves 240 children.

At the UN, Acting U.S. Ambassador Dorothy Shea announced that the United States and Panama are

proposing to the United Nations to establish a "Gang Suppression Force" to help curtail the escalating violence in Haiti. It is unclear how this force will differ from the current Kenya-led Multinational Security Support mission (MSS), which has been in Haiti since June 2024. In February this year, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, proposed an office that would provide drones, fuel, ground and air transportation, and other logistical support to the MSS.

The UN Secretary General urged the Security Council to "act without delay and authorize an international force, supported by the United Nations through logistical and operational backing, and predictable financing." He further pointed out that "Haiti is a perfect storm of suffering."

Seven countries, including the United States, informed the UN Secretary General that they were taking action on another of his recommendations: to form a "Group of Partners" to provide "high-level strategic direction, oversight, and political decision-making for any revamped security force." Besides the United States, the group includes Canada, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Bahamas and Kenya. The seven pledged to work to secure voluntary financial contributions for costs not covered by the UN Support Office, to facilitate an increase in force numbers and to provide coordination for a revamped force including putting a special representative in Port-au-Prince.

The ongoing crumbling of state authority and escalation of gang violence, beyond Port au Prince, have caused hospitals and schools to close, and random road blockades/takeovers have made delivering humanitarian aid unsuccessful. Although the school year is starting in October, more than a month late, there is no guarantee that parents will allow their kids to return.

Additionally, the UN has requested \$908 million for humanitarian support to 3.9 million Haitians in need of assistance. To date, less than 10 percent of this has been received, making Haiti, according to Guterres, "the least funded humanitarian appeal in the world." He fears that if the donors do not act quickly, about 3.7 million vulnerable people risk receiving no assistance at all. ✂

Haiti: Stop Illegal Weapons Trafficking from the U.S.

Ninety-six civil society organizations sent the following letter on August 26, 2025, to the leaders of the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security asking for immediate action to stop the flow of illegal weapons from the United States to Haiti.

We, the undersigned 96 organizations, are writing to express our support for the August 1, 2025, Congressional letter led by Representative Cherfilus-McCormick and Ranking Member Meeks and signed by 32 Members of Congress addressing the urgent issue of illegal arms trafficking to Haiti.

We call on you to take immediate action to stop the trafficking of guns to Haiti. The United States must do everything in its power to prevent Haiti, a mere 90-minute flight from Miami, from becoming a fully-fledged failed state run by criminal gangs, and an intermediary for drug and weapons smuggling in the hemisphere. Criminal gangs now control over 90% of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, as well as other large swaths of territory, terrorizing civilians with kidnappings, sexual violence, and indiscriminate killings. Gang sieges and arson attacks have internally displaced 1.3 million people, half of them children.

We urge you to take the following steps to safeguard U.S. national security, protect innocent Haitian civilians, and address the underlying causes of Haiti's instability and migration by disrupting the flow of illicit firearms and ammunition from the United States to Haiti:

- Increase U.S. Customs and Border Protection resources dedicated to screening the contents of ships exiting via the Miami River, a primary starting point for firearm shipments to Haiti.
- Work with the Department of Justice's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) to implement a strategy to increase the number of illicit firearms recovered in Haiti that are submitted for

tracing, similar to the work done recovering crime guns in Mexico.

- Take steps to require identity verification for all individuals sending packages to Haiti with a declared value under \$2,500, in order to close a key loophole exploited to ship firearms and ammunition.
- Initiate an interagency strategy, together with the Commerce Department, Department of Defense, and Department of Justice, to increase resources to stop the illegal flow of arms from the United States to the Caribbean. This strategy should include collecting and reporting to Congress and to the public data about arms export trends, arms trafficking trends, efforts to disrupt illegal firearm exports, and data on prosecutions of illicit arms trafficking to the Caribbean.
- Work closely with authorities in the Dominican Republic to stop arms trafficking through its territory to Haiti.
- Work with the U.S. Congress to pass the bipartisan Haiti Criminal Collusion Transparency Act to hold accountable Haitian actors connected to weapons trafficking.

Gang violence in Haiti is fueled by American-made weapons. Although more is needed from the international community and from Haitian leadership to solve the country's security crisis, getting arms and ammunition out of the hands of criminal gangs is the most constructive and efficient initial step the United States can take to bring security to Haiti, and to improve U.S. security as a result. ✂

FAITH IN ACTION: See the full list of signatories to the letter at <https://bit.ly/HaitiWeaponsLetter>



Sudan: Famine and Foreign Aid Cuts

As new frontlines in the Sudanese civil war worsen the humanitarian crisis, U.S. and U.N. agencies cut international humanitarian funding. Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns Fellow Mark Joyce reports.

The latest numbers from the UN about the humanitarian crisis in Sudan stemming from the war between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia and the Sudanese Army are staggering: 30.4 million people in Sudan need humanitarian assistance. More than 9.9 million people are displaced. 14 million children are out of school. 24.6 million people face high levels of acute food insecurity and 637,000 currently face “catastrophic food insecurity” – a term that means starvation.

In North Darfur, the RSF recently captured the Sudan-Libya-Egypt border region, which opens up new opportunities for them to advance on the Nile Valley and resupply through Libya. Having access to supply lines through Libya is critically important to the RSF due to heightened international scrutiny and pressure on Chad that have made the corridor from Chad to Darfur less viable. There are reports of increased air traffic into the south-eastern Libyan district of Kufra, allegedly from the UAE, signaling that supply lines have shifted.

Both sides of the conflict have been credibly accused of targeting civilians. Last month, the Sudanese Army was accused of using strikes in El-Fula and the town of Abu Zabad as a form of “collective punishment.” The United Nations reports that the strikes on El-Fula and Abu Zabad killed more than 20 people. The RSF, in North Kordofan’s Bara area and the villages of Shag Alnom and Hilat Hamid, in accused of killing 450 civilians — including 24 boys, 11 girls, and two pregnant women.

The United Arab Emirates exerts significant influence over the RSF. Gold is a major factor in funding both sides of the conflict, and the UAE is one of the main hubs for gold trade globally. A recent report by the UN panel of experts on Sudan suggests that around ten tons of gold, with a value of \$860 million, were extracted from RSF-controlled areas in 2024.

The ever-changing frontlines of the conflict have exacerbated insecurity and displacement among civilians. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recently reported that the UN had devised new plans to address the needs of 380,000 displaced people in the locality of Tawila, in North Darfur. The plan aims to increase life-saving assistance over the next three months, with a focus on food, health-care, water, sanitation, shelter, and protection. The plan

requires an estimated \$120 million for implementation.

This funding priority comes as OCHA faces a dire financial environment. Their 2025 funding request for \$44 billion to help “180 million people, including refugees,” was recently revised to \$29 billion after the United States cut its foreign assistance. Midway through the year, they have received only \$5.6 billion — less than 20 percent of their reduced ask. “We have been forced into a triage of human survival,” said Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief, Tom Fletcher. In April, OCHA was forced to cut staff by 20 percent due to a \$58 million budget shortfall. The \$63 million the United States once contributed annually would have accounted for 20 percent of OCHA’s extra-budgetary resources in 2025.

Chad, one of the world’s poorest countries, has received 1.2 million Sudanese refugees since the beginning of the war. The border town Adre, which had a pre-war population of 40,000, has seen an influx of 235,000 Sudanese refugees. The UN World Food Program (WFP) reported in June that it could not guarantee funding to support Sudanese refugees in Adre past July. The United States’ cuts to aid have forced the WFP to lay off 30 percent of its workforce and slash 30 percent of its funding for eastern Chad. In 2024, the United States contributed \$39.3 million to the emergency response in Chad. So far this year, it has contributed only \$6.8 million.

In an installment of Pax Christi International’s “Sudan Speaks” webinar series, three researchers spoke about the plight of Sudanese women who make up the majority of the displaced population and face disproportionate gender-based violence and food insecurity. Despite this hardship, all three speakers described the strength and resilience they have seen in Sudanese women.

Ferdous Abdalhameed, a community leader and advocate who was displaced from Darfur, said, “Keep talking about Sudan, keep talking about what is happening there. Don’t be silent, the least we can do is to talk about it. Whoever you meet, just tell them people are suffering there, people are dying there systematically and consciously. Women and children are suffering there, and they are hidden. No one can see them or feel them.” ✂

Gaza: Greek and Latin Patriarchs Speak Against War

In reaction to the Israeli government's announcement of a plan to take control of Gaza, the Greek Orthodox and Latin Patriarchs of Jerusalem issued the following joint statement on Aug. 26 calling for an end to the war.

A few weeks ago, the Israeli government announced its decision to take control of Gaza City. In recent days, the media have repeatedly reported a massive military mobilization and preparations for an imminent offensive. The same reports indicate that the population of Gaza City, where hundreds of thousands of civilians live — and where our Christian community is located — is to be evacuated and relocated to the south of the Strip. At the time of this statement, evacuation orders were already in place for several neighborhoods in Gaza City. Reports of heavy bombardment continue to be received. There is more destruction and death in a situation that was already dramatic before this operation. It seems that the Israeli government's announcement that “the gates of hell will open” is indeed taking on tragic forms. The experience of past campaigns in Gaza, the declared intentions of the Israeli government with regard to the current operation, and the reports now reaching us from the ground, show that the operation is not just a threat, but a reality that is already in the process of being implemented.

Since the outbreak of the war, the Greek Orthodox compound of Saint Porphyrius and the Holy Family compound have been a refuge for hundreds of civilians. Among them are elderly people, women, and children. In the Latin compound we are hosting since many years people with disabilities, who are under the care of the Sisters Missionaries of Charity. Like other residents of Gaza City, the refugees living in the facilities will have to decide according to their conscience what they will do. Among those who have sought shelter within the walls of the compounds, many are weakened and malnourished due to the hardships of the last months. Leaving Gaza City and trying to flee to the south would be nothing less than a death sentence. For this reason, the clergy and nuns have decided to remain and continue to care for all those who will be in the compounds.

We do not know exactly what will happen on the ground, not only for our community, but for the entire population. We can only repeat what we have already said: There can be no future based on captivity, displacement of Palestinians or revenge. We echo what Pope Leo XIV said a few days ago: “All peoples, even the

smallest and weakest, must be respected by the powerful in their identity and rights, especially the right to live in their own lands; and no one can force them into exile.” (Address to the group of refugees from Chagos, 23.8.2025).

This is not the right way. There is no reason to justify the deliberate and forcible mass displacement of civilians.

It is time to end this spiral of violence, to put an end to war and to prioritize the common good of the people. There has been enough devastation, in the territories and in people's lives. There is no reason to justify keeping civilians as prisoners and hostages in dramatic conditions. It is now time for the healing of the long-suffering families on all sides.

With equal urgency, we appeal to the international community to act for an end of this senseless and destructive war, and for the return of the missing people and the Israeli hostages.

“In the path of righteousness there is life, in walking its path there is no death” (Proverbs 12,28). Let us pray that all our hearts may be converted, so that we may walk in the paths of justice and life, for Gaza and for the whole Holy Land. ✠

FAITH IN ACTION: Find this and all public statements on the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem website <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/newsgate/>



Gaza: Orthodox Rabbis Call on Israel to Address Hunger

Eighty Orthodox rabbis signed the following open letter on August 20, 2025, demanding “moral clarity, responsibility, and a Jewish Orthodox response” to what they called a humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

The humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza is one of the most severe in recent history. While it began with the horrific terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7, 2023—a brutal act that justifiably demanded a strong military response and demand for the release of the hostages—this does not absolve Israel’s government from assuming its share of the responsibility for the profound suffering of Gaza’s civilian population.

Hamas’s actions have repeatedly shown a cynical disregard for the lives of the people it claims to represent, using civilians as human shields and rejecting ceasefire proposals. However, Israel’s prolonged military campaign, now approaching two years, has devastated Gaza. The death toll is rising with very significant losses of lives, and Israel’s limiting of humanitarian aid, at times completely halting the entry of food and medical supplies, has raised the specter of coming starvation. We affirm that Hamas’s sins and crimes do not relieve the government of Israel of its obligations to make whatever efforts are necessary to prevent mass starvation.

There have been months when Israel blocked humanitarian convoys on the mistaken premise that increased suffering would bring about Hamas’s surrender. Instead, the result has been the deepening of despair. The justified anger toward Hamas has dangerously expanded by some extremists into blanket suspicion of the entire population of Gaza—children included—tarnished as future terrorists. Meanwhile, in Yehuda and Shomron (the West Bank), extremist settler violence has resulted in the murder of civilians and has forced Palestinian villagers from their homes, further destabilizing the region.

Amid this devastation, the absence of a clear post-war vision from Prime Minister Netanyahu has allowed the most extreme voices in the Israeli government—including ministers from the religious Zionist community—to fill the vacuum with disturbing proposals. These include the forced “voluntary” exile of Palestinians from Gaza and the sacrifice of remaining Israeli hostages in the pursuit of an elusive “total victory.”

This moment demands a different voice—one grounded in our deepest Jewish values and informed by our traumatic history of being victims of persecution.

Orthodox Jewry, as some of Israel’s most devoted

supporters, bears a unique moral responsibility. We must affirm that Judaism’s vision of justice and compassion extends to all human beings. Our tradition teaches that every person is created *b’tzelem Elokim*—in the Divine image. We are the spiritual descendants of Avraham, chosen to walk in the path of Hashem, “to do righteousness and justice” (Bereshit 18:19). Allowing an entire people to starve stands in stark contrast to this teaching.

As we reflect on Tisha B’Av, the words of our prophets ring with renewed urgency. The Haftorah of Shabbat Chazon reminds us: “Zion shall be redeemed through justice, and those who return to her through righteousness” (Yeshayahu 1:27). And on the morning of Tisha B’Av, the voice of Yirmiyahu echoes through our prayers: “Let not the wise glory in their wisdom...but in this: that they understand and know Me, that I am the Lord who practices kindness, justice, and righteousness on the earth—for in these I delight” (Yirmiyahu 9:23).

These are not just poetic phrases. They are the foundations of our ethical obligation—to demand policies that uphold human dignity, to provide humanitarian aid wherever possible, and to speak out when our government’s actions contradict the Torah’s moral imperatives, no matter how painful this may be to accept.

The future of Israel depends not only on its military strength but on its moral clarity. Let us be resounding voices for justice, righteousness, and peace for all people—even and especially in the hardest of times. ✡

FAITH IN ACTION: See the full list of signatories to the letter at <https://bit.ly/OrthodoxRGaza>



Gaza: U.S. Christian Groups Oppose Israeli Military Plan

Twenty members of Churches for Middle East Peace released the following joint statement on Aug. 26 calling for Israel to halt its planned military offensive in Gaza City.

The war in Gaza is showing few if any signs of waning. Every day seems to bring news of additional horrors that pile suffering on top of suffering. All of the killing, starvation, and destruction violates the essential *imago dei* in every person and that is the foundation of human dignity and freedom. The recent determination by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) regarding confirmed famine in Gaza impacting over 500,000 residents underscores the grave danger Gazans face even without the threat of increased military operations. We mourn those Palestinian Gazans who will die in the coming days, and we raise concerns about the intensified risks to the Israeli hostages, due to the new escalations that are about to be implemented.

On August 8, 2025, Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Israeli Security Cabinet approved a new military campaign to re-occupy Gaza City and forcibly eject its 710,000 inhabitants. The plan simultaneously cuts an additional 340,000 people off from what few lines of assistance remain in the northern sections of the Gaza Strip. This military strategy not only puts half of Gaza's population in even more immediate danger, but could also result in the forced displacement of all of Gaza's population into the southern half of the strip. According to the latest UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) snapshot, an estimated 86.3% of the Gaza Strip is under the Israeli-militarized zone and displacement orders for civilians. This leaves only 13.7% of the Gaza Strip's original territory available for habitation outside a military zone for all of the Gaza Strip's population. The taking of Gaza City would further decrease this available space while squeezing much of the Gaza Strip's population into a piece of territory that is fundamentally unsuitable to allow such a densely packed population the ability to survive. The entire Gaza Strip has remained under Israeli military occupation since 1967, an occupation that the International Court of Justice deemed "unlawful" under international law.

Based on previous campaigns by the Israeli military forces in Gaza, the resultant expulsion of inhabitants from Gaza City and potentially northern Gaza would result in hundreds of thousands of people – many of whom are already malnourished and sick from a lack of adequate access to food, water, shelter or healthcare

– being forced to walk at least 10-20 kilometers in the intense heat, without proper access to food or water. Most of them are elderly, women and children, and cannot manage such an arduous. There are few to no functioning vehicles available to move so many people. Roads are damaged and destroyed, with remnants of war littering the entire Strip, so there are few clear avenues for safe movement. All of this displacement will occur within an active war zone under constant bombing, gunfire and shelling.

Assuming Palestinians can survive the proposed expulsion, they will then need to cross the Netzarim Corridor – a militarized corridor that the Israeli military bulldozed through the center of the Gaza Strip—which is notoriously dangerous to cross and has resulted in the deaths of numerous civilians and aid workers. Finally, assuming people make it into the southern Gaza Strip, they will arrive in a region equally devastated.

All of these actions proposed by Israel amount to collective punishment and forced displacement of an entire civilian population— a war crime as stipulated under the Fourth Geneva Convention (Articles 33 and 49). This displacement will result in a modern-day death march that is clearly intended to ethnically cleanse half of the Gaza Strip and compress all of Gaza's population into a tiny sliver of territory incapable of sustaining life.

Churches for Middle East Peace and the churches and agencies signed below call on the United States, the United Nations, and all governments with influence over Israel to reject this plan of ethnic cleansing unequivocally, to use all available leverage to press for an immediate and durable ceasefire, and to demand unfettered humanitarian access to all parts of the Gaza Strip through credible and experienced aid mechanisms and modalities, including UN agencies. Our faith, seeing the image of God in each and every human being, calls us to feed the hungry, offer drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit those in captivity. We therefore urge all parties to act with urgency to save lives and prevent this catastrophe from further deepening, and to work to address the core issues so that a long-term, durable and just peace can be achieved. ✠

FAITH IN ACTION: See the list of signatories at <https://bit.ly/CMEAug26>

Trump Administration Targets Legal Immigrants

The U.S. executive branch is waging legal warfare against the immigration designations that protect people from deportation back to the dangerous countries they have fled. Immigration Advocacy Intern Rehema Klueg reports.

With the passage of the “One Big Beautiful Bill” Act, the Trump administration now has \$170 billion in funding for border militarization and immigration enforcement, an amount greater than what Russia spent on its military budget while waging its invasion of Ukraine in 2024. The Trump administration has separately been working to revoke the legal statuses of immigrants lawfully in the United States.

A first step of the Trump administration’s attack on legal status was a revocation of Humanitarian Parole for Cubans, Haitian, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans (CHNV). In January of 2023, then-president Biden exercised his prerogative as president to grant people from these nations the permission to enter and temporarily reside in the United States on account of the urgent humanitarian concerns and political instability in their home countries. Humanitarian Parole is not automatic and requires an application with character evidence.

On his first day of his second term in office, President Trump issued an executive order titled “Securing Our Borders,” which, among other things, directed his Secretary of Homeland Security to end the CHNV Humanitarian Parole program. New applications for the CHNV Parole Program were paused the following month.

On March 25, two months into the new Trump administration, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) took a step further, announcing an early end to the CHNV Humanitarian Parole for immigrants currently living in the United States. Instead of a two-year parole expiration, parolees would have a maximum of thirty days left in the U.S. affecting roughly 532,000 people. The Supreme Court in May overturned a lower court injunction that would have prevented a premature end to humanitarian parole protections. As of now, Humanitarian Parolees who applied and were granted a two-year parole no longer have work authorization and are subject to deportation.

A separate effort to end the legal status of migrants has been an attack on Temporary Protected Status (TPS). TPS is a humanitarian protection program offered at the discretion of the DHS to allow people from designated countries experiencing extraordinary conditions to live and work in the United States for less than two years upon an application and criminal background check.

Unlike Humanitarian Parole, it does not require a financial sponsor.

Currently, there are seventeen countries designated with TPS, including Afghanistan, Ukraine, Syria, and Yemen. TPS designations expire within two years unless renewed. While the president has the legal right to allow any TPS to expire, his efforts have hinged on ending TPS prematurely and battling the existing deadlines in court.

On February 1, ten days into the new Trump administration, DHS Secretary Kristi Noem announced an end of TPS for roughly 350,000 Venezuelans subjecting them to an exit date of April 7. On May 19, an 8-1 Supreme Court temporarily allowed the administration to move forward with this action.

The Trump administration announced an end to TPS for Haiti on June 27 for more than 500,000 Haitians in the United States. A federal court in New York overturned the premature deadline imposed by DHS and restored a February 3, 2026, deadline four days later.

Most recently to the publication of this article, the Trump administration announced the cancellation of TPS for Nicaragua and Honduras on July 7 affecting roughly 4,000 Nicaraguans and 72,000 Hondurans.

These developments are particularly concerning in the face of escalating crises faced by these countries.

For the past several years, Cuba is grappling with the biggest economic crisis since independence. Similarly, Nicaragua is witnessing the ramifications of an authoritarian regime that has removed term limits, imprisoned political opponents, and used lethal force against protestors. In Venezuela, food scarcity and a lack of job opportunities have forced roughly 7.7 million people into exile since 2014. The Venezuelan government’s use of military tribunals, suppression of the free press, and extrajudicial killings have been on the rise since the Maduro regime stole the presidential election in 2024.

Sixty percent of Haiti’s capital city is under the control of gangs, and a UN report warns that gang violence worsened the first quarter of 2025, with a rise in murders, rapes, and kidnappings and with criminal groups expanding their reach beyond the capital city. ✂

FAITH IN ACTION: Tell Congress to maintain humanitarian protections for migrants. <https://bit.ly/TellCongressDefendMigrants>

The Struggle to Protect Farmers' Seed Systems

The following is a summary of a policy brief by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy about the unhealthy control industrial agriculture has over family farming around the world.

In every farming community across the globe, seeds are more than a source of food. They carry stories, culture, and resilience. For centuries, smallholder farmers have saved, exchanged, and shared seeds to ensure biodiversity, adapt to changing climates, and pass on knowledge to future generations. Today, however, these practices are under severe threat.

The rise of industrial agriculture has transformed seeds into commodities controlled by powerful corporations. Instead of being a common good, seeds are increasingly governed by intellectual property rights that limit what farmers can do with them. This system undermines food sovereignty—the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture systems—and threatens the future of agroecology, the farming approach that respects both the earth and local communities.

Seeds, Agroecology, and Farmers' Rights

Agroecology is gaining recognition as a pathway to healthy food systems, especially due to climate change. It builds on farmers' knowledge, promotes ecological resilience, and strengthens social equity. At its heart lies the right of farmers to “save, use, exchange, and sell” their own seeds.

The Threat of UPOV 91

The greatest challenge to farmers' seed systems today comes from the Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) and its 1991 convention, known as UPOV 91. Originally created in the 1960s, UPOV was designed to protect plant breeders' rights. But the 1991 revision expanded those rights dramatically, restricting farmers' traditional practices.

UPOV 91 prohibits the exchange and sale of seeds from protected plant varieties and only allows farmers to save seeds under narrow conditions—often requiring them to pay royalties to seed companies. The U.S., in trade agreements such as the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), pressures countries to comply.

Seeds as a Human Right

Farmers and civil society groups around the world have long opposed UPOV 91. They argue that restricting seed saving threatens the right to food. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Michael Fakhri, has affirmed that “to control seeds is to control life.”

The push for uniform commercial seeds also undermines biodiversity. When only a handful of “elite” seed varieties dominate, genetic diversity declines. This makes crops more vulnerable to pests, diseases, and climate shocks, leaving farming communities less resilient. Meanwhile, four global corporations—Bayer, BASF, Corteva, and Syngenta—control more than half the global seed market.

Alternatives That Protect Farmers

Fortunately, UPOV is not the only option. Other international agreements recognize the role of farmers as custodians of biodiversity. The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), adopted in 2001, explicitly acknowledges farmers' contributions and upholds their rights to save, use, and exchange seeds.

Similarly, the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Nagoya Protocol stress the importance of fair and equitable sharing of genetic resources, particularly recognizing Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge. More recently, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (2018) affirmed that access to seeds is a matter of justice and human rights.

U.S. Pressure and the Global Struggle

Yet U.S. trade policy continues to push UPOV 91 as the global standard. Industry groups like the American Seed Trade Association work with regional bodies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to harmonize seed laws in ways that favor corporate breeders. Countries that resist face pressure through U.S. trade reviews and special reports.

Farmers' movements across the Global South have campaigns such as #StopUPOV to defend their seed sovereignty. They call for policies that strengthen local food systems instead of weakening them.

A Call for Solidarity

For people of faith, this struggle over seeds is not a technical matter—it is spiritual. Seeds are a sacred gift of creation, meant to be nurtured and shared, not monopolized for profit. Faith groups can call for the U.S. to stop applying UPOV 91, and instead support trade deals that uphold farmers' rights, biodiversity, and food sovereignty. ✕

Resources

SIGN UP FOR A PILGRIMAGE near you during the Season of Creation (**Sept. 1 – Oct. 4**) <https://catholicpilgrimsofhope.org/>

CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS PASTORAL LETTER ON DEBT AND JUBILEE <https://bit.ly/CCCBlatter>

INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION HUMAN RIGHTS RESOLUTION that recognizes the rights of family members of people who are detained. <https://bit.ly/OASrights>

“THE ELECTIONS IN HONDURAS MUST BE PROTECTED” op-ed by Washington Office on Latin America, August 19, 2025. <https://bit.ly/WOLAHonduras>

“PERU’S AMNESTY LAW: CLOSING THE CIRCLE OF IMPUNITY?” article by Jo Marie Burt at Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) <http://bit.ly/WOLAPeru>

PERU: REPORT ON THIRD MEETING OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FROM THE PUNO REGION, August 19-20, in Spanish <https://bit.ly/PunoHR>

“VENEZUELA’S CRISIS: ONE YEAR AFTER THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION – MAIN TAKEAWAYS FROM WOLA’S REPORT” <https://bit.ly/WOLAVenez>

MARYKNOLL MONARCH INITIATIVE FREE ONLINE WEBINARS focused on care for the earth, human migration, and nonviolence organized by the Maryknoll Sisters and Lay Missioners in El Paso, Texas. <https://www.maryknollmonarch.org/>

MARYKNOLL LAY MISSIONERS 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION recordings: <https://bit.ly/MKLM50>

INTERFAITH LETTER TO CONGRESS ON THE RELIGIOUS WORKFORCE PROTECTION ACT organized by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. <https://bit.ly/R1VisaLetter>

USCCB COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION LETTER TO U.S. CONGRESS ABOUT FY2026 FEDERAL BUDGET, including the issues of religious worker visas, detention and deportation, and more. <https://bit.ly/USCCBFY2026>

COMPILATION OF STATEMENTS ABOUT MIGRATION BY U.S. CATHOLIC BISHOPS since January 2025. <https://bit.ly/BishopsStatements>

COMPILATION OF RECENT ARTICLES AND OP-EDS BY U.S. CATHOLIC BISHOPS ABOUT MIGRATION <https://bit.ly/BishopsArticles>

WEBINAR “DEPORTATIONS AND ASSAULTS ON HUMAN DIGNITY, A SPECIAL INITIATIVE ROUNDTABLE ON CATHOLIC PRINCIPLES, HUMAN COSTS, AND PASTORAL CHALLENGES” Register to attend live on **September 11 at 6pm** at Georgetown University or watch online at <https://bit.ly/GeorgetownWebinar>

“STAND WITH MIGRANTS” TOOLKIT TO PLAN A RALLY AND PRAYER VIGIL created by USCCB Justice for Immigrants Campaign and sent to all U.S. dioceses. Ask your pastor about it and organize a rally and prayer vigil in your community! <https://bit.ly/USCCBRallyToolkit>

“Your vigil or prayer service can be held at a local parish or organized as a diocesan-wide event. It could take the form of an interfaith gathering, reflecting a broad coalition of religious traditions united in support of migrants, or it may be specifically Catholic in nature. Whatever form it takes, let us remember Jesus’ words in the Gospel of Matthew: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

- Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso, chair of the USCCB Committee on Migration

