NewsNotes

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Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Peace, Social Justice, and Integrity of Creation

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Current status of bills:
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Letter to Congress on Illegal Boat Strikes, Threats to Venezuela

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joined 61 other civil society organizations in sending the following letter to Congress to express alarm at illegal military strikes and extrajudicial killings of civilians on boats off of the coast of Venezuela.

We, the undersigned human rights, labor, faith-based, civilian protection, foreign policy, and other civil society organizations with distinct areas of focus and expertise, many with extensive experience in Latin America, write to express our alarm at the repeated extrajudicial killings of unidentified civilians in the Caribbean, and the escalating risk of war caused by the Trump administration's recent illegal actions involving U.S. military forces. We urge you to assert your congressional power to block further unauthorized U.S. military action in the Western Hemisphere.

Since the beginning of September, the U.S. military has carried out multiple aerial strikes against civilian boats in the Caribbean resulting in over 20 civilian deaths. [As of Nov. 1, the number of deaths reported by the U.S. has risen to 64.] The Trump administration has not provided any valid legal justification for these strikes or any evidence to substantiate its claims that the victims were an imminent threat to the security of the United States. We fear that, barring decisive action by members of Congress, there will be more strikes, more extrajudicial killings, and potentially a full-blown limitless war with one or more countries in the region, with likely devastating humanitarian and geopolitical consequences.

This unauthorized military campaign did not come without warning signs. Before his reelection, President Trump threatened to mobilize U.S. military assets to wage a "war" on drug-trafficking organizations. Soon after taking office, the Trump administration began the entirely novel practice of classifying various regional drug cartels and criminal organizations as "foreign terrorist organizations" (FTOs) and Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs). FTO and SDGT classifications do not provide the U.S. government with authorization to use lethal force against members of these organizations. Yet, on August 8, 2025, the New York Times reported that Trump had signed a secret directive that "provided an official basis for the possibility of direct military operations at sea and on foreign soil against cartels." Soon afterwards, U.S. media outlets reported that the administration would be deploying significant air and naval forces to the southern Caribbean, including destroyers, a guided-missile cruiser, a nuclear-powered attack submarine and over 4,000 U.S. troops. Two weeks later, the first boat strike took place.

As Human Rights Watch noted, the extrajudicial killing of civilians by the U.S. military is a violation of customary international law and international human rights law, specifically the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which protects the right to life and due process, and to which the United States is a party. Senator Rand Paul further stated, "It isn't our policy just to blow people up [...] We arrest people. [...] even the worst people in our country, if we accuse somebody of a terrible crime, they still get a trial." In addition, these killings expose U.S. servicemembers to potential criminal liability under the federal murder statute.

These strikes are also not authorized under U.S. domestic law. Under Section 2(c) of the War Powers Resolution of 1973, which notes that the constitutional powers of the President as Commander-in-Chief to introduce U.S. armed forces into "situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances" may only be exercised pursuant to "(1) a declaration of war, (2) specific statutory authorization, or (3) a national emergency created by attack upon the United States, its territories or possessions, or its armed forces." These conditions have clearly not been met. Congress must reassert its war powers and condemn these unlawful strikes.

In addition to the boat strikes, administration officials have engaged in bellicose rhetoric including implicit threats of military strikes on Venezuelan soil, and it is now widely reported that the Trump administration is preparing for a war or military action against Venezuela with the goal of overthrowing the current government. For instance, on September 15, Secretary Rubio told Fox News "we're not going to have a cartel, operating or masquerading as a government, operating in our own hemisphere. [...] And [President Trump is] going to use the U.S. military and all the elements of American power to target cartels who are targeting America." In the weeks preceding the strikes, the Trump administration doubled the reward offered for information leading to the arrest of Nicolás Maduro and accused the president of being

the head of the "Cartel de los Soles" despite experts disputing the very existence of such a cartel, much less Maduro's leadership thereof. Broad economic sanctions have also fueled a catastrophic humanitarian crisis and the migration of millions of Venezuelans to neighboring countries and the United States.

The United States has justified its dangerous military escalation against Venezuela through claims of its involvement in the regional drug trade, despite the fact that Venezuela is a relatively minor player. Venezuela does not produce significant quantities of cocaine or fentanyl. Recent U.S. government estimates suggest that less than 10% of cocaine shipments bound for the U.S. transit through Venezuela. Nevertheless, the first two boats that were attacked were reportedly from Venezuela; President Trump claimed that their occupants were members of the Tren de Aragua (TdA), a criminal gang from Venezuela that has played a marginal role in drug trafficking to the United States. Although the administration has alleged that TdA is controlled by Maduro, the U.S. government's own intelligence agencies have contradicted this claim.

President Trump and Secretary Rubio should think twice about pursuing a policy of military escalation with Venezuela, a highly polarized and militarized country that has experienced destabilizing cycles of political violence and human rights violations. Recent polling shows that the American people overwhelmingly oppose involvement in a forced regime change effort against Venezuela, while other polls show that the vast majority of anti-Maduro Venezuelans oppose U.S. military action. Many in Venezuela fear that Maduro, who has announced that he will impose a "state of external emergency" in response to the threat of U.S. strikes, will use the threat as an excuse to clamp down further on internal dissent.

As has been widely reported, Venezuelan aircraft have come dangerously close to U.S. warships, and American vessels are operating in close proximity to Venezuelan military assets. While we are relieved that no direct exchange of fire has occurred, the Administration has knowingly put U.S. servicemembers into situations where armed confrontation is foreseeable. If U.S. forces are struck, the administration will bear the responsibility of unlawfully placing U.S. troops in harm's way without congressional authorization.

We are highly concerned that these unwarranted and illegal military strikes and extrajudicial killings of civilians will pave the way for more extrajudicial killings of civilians, as well as direct military intervention targeting Venezuela and other countries throughout the hemisphere under the pretense of fighting "narcoterrorism." Similarly, we are alarmed at recent reports that senior U.S. DEA officials pushed for military attacks against Mexico earlier this year. A conflict with or in Venezuela, Mexico, or any other country would have a tremendous destabilizing effect on the entire region, increasing the loss of human life, deepening poverty and internal displacement, and forcing out-migration.

We are also deeply concerned that this Administration could be attempting to provoke a military confrontation with the Venezuelan government in order to justify invoking the Alien Enemies Act to send Venezuelan nationals to inhumane, high-security prisons in other countries – similar to the fate of over 150 Venezuelans sent to the infamous CECOT in El Salvador in March. On the same day of the first attack on the civilians, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals rejected Trump's use of the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to expedite deportations without due process.

With the authority vested in you by the Constitution, we urge you to:

1. Support a War Powers Resolution (S.J.Res.83, H.Con.Res.51, H.J.Res.126) terminating unauthorized military action in the region, including any potential attacks against Venezuela, or against any organization designated on or after February 20, 2025 as a foreign terrorist organization or specially designated global terrorist, or against any states those entities operate in.
2. Reverse the U.S. military build-up in the Caribbean region, which experts agree risks dangerous escalation to conflict and is counterproductive in terms of counternarcotics objectives;
3. Require full accountability from the Trump administration for the actions that led to the deadly, illegal attacks perpetrated by the U.S. military against civilians in the Caribbean, including an investigation into who was killed;
4. Prioritize diplomatic engagement with governments in order to address drug trafficking in the region;
5. Provide acknowledgement and compensation for families of the victims of these extrajudicial killings.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue. In these unprecedented times, it is critical that the U.S. Congress reclaim its constitutional powers.

FAITH IN ACTION: Tell Congress Stop a War in Venezuela https://bit.ly/StopWarVenezuela

Bolivia: Elections, Change and Challenges

ON OCT. 19, BOLIVIANS ELECTED a new president, dark-horse center-right candidate Rodrigo Paz Pereira, who ran under the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). It is the first time in 20 years that Bolivia's Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party, has not won a national election, or even been on the ballot.

The election marks a generational change for the Andean country and takes place amid a deep financial crisis, which in turn will force the new president to make quick, dramatic decisions regarding Bolivia's international relations.

The MAS party splintered under outgoing president Luis Arce. Prior to being president, Arce was the Economic Minister for ex-president Evo Morales, also of the MAS, but each blames the other for a severe dollar shortage and worsening inflation.

As president from 2006 – 2019, Morales shifted Bolivia's economic model away from dependence on Western powers and financial institutions in favor of the Cuban and Venezuelan-led ALBA trade alliance and closer ties to China. He kicked out the U.S. Ambassador, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, and USAID, claiming they were plotting against his government. The two countries have not exchanged ambassadors since 2008.

President-elect Paz has promised to renew Bolivia's relationship with the United States, and with Western financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as he seeks help resolving the financial crisis.

Much of Paz's electoral success is attributed to his running mate, Edman Lara, a former police officer who gained fame denouncing corruption on Tik Tok. But Lara seemed especially popular among former MAS voters, and has received praise from Evo Morales, who told his followers to vote for the PDC.

The PDC does not have a majority in Congress, and Paz will have to ally himself with either the left (remnants of the MAS) or the far right. His plan to welcome increased U.S. influence is sure to alienate the left, and Lara has already made public statements expressing concern about the direction Paz might take, and saying the president-elect is not taking his calls.

Bolivia is one of the world's largest producers of cocaine, and human rights advocates are watching warily to see if Paz will welcome the DEA or U.S. military back to Bolivia, even as the Trump Administration carries out a series of extrajudicial killings of alleged South American drug traffickers.

Tanzania's Rights Crisis Deepens Amid Post-Election

THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN Tanzania leading up to and immediately after the Oct. 29 general elections rapidly deteriorated, marked by rampant violence, suppression of dissent, and a persistent lack of government accountability. These concerns have triggered alarms from domestic religious leaders and international human rights organizations, as well as a heightened travel warning from the United States.

The Justice and Peace Commission of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC) raised strong objections to what it describes as a climate of impunity in the days before the election. Archbishop Jude Thaddaeus Ruwa'ichi of Dar-es-Salaam, who chairs the TEC commission, warned during a Mass on Oct. 14 that the continued incidents of abductions and disappearances of opponents to the ruling political party threaten the fundamental right to life and human dignity.

Archbishop Ruwa'ichi stated that these acts of evil appear to be "orchestrated by organized groups" and expressed deep concern that authorities "sworn to protect life" have failed to publicly condemn or take action.

The environment further soured following the Oct. 29 general elections. Amnesty International reported that security forces used excessive force to suppress protests amid partial internet and electricity blackouts.

Amnesty's Deputy Director Vongai Chikwanda said that these actions resulted in the deaths and injuries of protesters, noting it was the third internet blockade in less than a year intended to silence dissenting voices.

The escalating unrest prompted the U.S. Department of State to update its Travel Advisory on October 31, increasing the level from Level 2 to Level 3 – Reconsider Travel. The advisory cited four primary risks: unrest, crime, terrorism, and the targeting of gay and lesbian individuals. The State Department noted that demonstrations are unpredictable, widespread, and lead to increased security presence and limitations on large gatherings by the government.

Nuclear Weapons Policies Raise New Alarms

OCTOBER 28 BEGAN THE 100 day countdown to the expiration of New START, the last remaining arms control treaty between the United States and Russia, threatening a new, reckless, and ruinously expensive nuclear arms race.

On October 29, President Trump announced that he had ordered the U.S. "Department of War" (not the Department of Energy, which oversees the U.S. nuclear arsenal) to start testing nuclear weapons. Energy Secretary Chris Wright has said the president did not mean exploding nuclear bombs, but rather testing other elements of nuclear weapons delivery systems. But other statements by the president imply he did mean bombs – a move that would reverse a 30 year moratorium on nuclear weapons tests.

Ongoing wars and growing nuclear arsenals compelled the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists to set the Doomsday Clock at 89 seconds to midnight this year, the closest we've ever been to global catastrophe.

The release of the Netflix movie A House of Dynamite has further heightened awareness of the threat posed by nuclear weapons. The Back From the Brink Campaign for nuclear disarmament is offering resources for hosting screenings of the film and conversations afterward. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has also created resources to accompany the film.

In this same spirit, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joined faith partners and disarmament advocates across the nation in a crucial week of action October 27-31, calling on Congress to: 1) Prioritize and support immediate negotiations of a new U.S.-Russia arms control agreement. 2) Pass legislation aimed at stopping and reversing a new arms race. 3) Commit to the ultimate goal of total nuclear disarmament once and for all.

The danger is not theoretical—it's immediate. Tensions over nuclear weapons are rising and the nuclear testing moratorium is under threat. Now is the time to unequivically say no to nuclear weapons.

FAITH IN ACTION: Write to your Members of Congress and learn how to host a film screening of "A House of Dynamite": https://bit.ly/NuclearCrisis

Read Back from the Brink's faith-based resource guide on nuclear weapons: https://bit.ly/BackfromBrinkFaithGuide

Pope Leo Affirms Laudato Si, Calls for Action

POPE LEO XIV CELEBRATED THE tenth anniversary of Laudato Si' by delivered a resounding affirmation of the Church's continuing commitment to care for our common home. Speaking to an international gathering of faith leaders, scientists, activists, and policymakers in Rome, he reminded us all that Laudato Si' remains not simply an environmental document, but a profound call to spiritual conversion and action.

Pope Leo described Laudato Si' as a "gift we have inherited" — one that has inspired many across the globe to give priority to the poor and to live out the Gospel by protecting creation. He celebrated the encyclical's ability to reach people beyond Church walls, sparking collaboration among people of all faiths and goodwill.

Yet he made it clear that the work is far from complete: "The challenges identified in Laudato Si' are even more relevant today than they were ten years ago."

Our new pope stressed that ecological conversion must start from the heart and begin from deep within. "We must shift from collecting data to caring," he said, urging the faithful to move from awareness to compassion, from study to service.

Pope Leo framed climate action as an integral part of the Christian faith, stating that ignoring creation is incompatible with loving God. He recalled Saint Francis of Assisi as a model of integral ecology, where love of God, neighbor, and creation are inseparable. He called the Church to nurture these four essential relationships — with God, with others, with nature, and with oneself — as the path to hope and peace.

"We are one family," he reminded us, "inhabiting the same planet that we must care for together."

The pope also challenged leaders and citizens alike to actively pressure their governments on climate change and advocate for stricter regulations, particularly as the world prepares for COP30 in Belém, Brazil. His closing question continues to be a clarion call to all Catholics: "God will ask us if we have cultivated and cared for the world He created… What will be our answer?"

FAITH IN ACTION: We are going to the UN Climate Change Conference in Brazil in November! Visit our website to find the latest news www.maryknollogc.org

Peru: Amazon Faith and Civil Leaders Call for Water's Defense

Amazon Water Summit delegates declare that water is a sacred gift and a fundamental human right, urgently calling for global action to protect it from destructive extractive practices..

More than 400 delegates from ten Amazonian countries and fourteen Peruvian regions convened for three days in October in Iquitos, Peru, for the Amazon Water Summit under the theme: "We Are Water, We Are Life, We Are Hope."

The gathering united a diverse array of participants—including Indigenous leaders, peasant and river communities, bishops, theologians, and pastoral agents—all committed to the defense of water, one of the planet's most endangered and essential gifts.

The Declaration on the Right to Water

Convened by the Apostolic Vicariate of Iquitos, the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM), The Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM), and the Vicariate of Water, the summit culminated in the creation of a bold and urgent Declaration on the Right to Water. This declaration asserts that the defense of water is inseparable from the defense of life itself.

The document opens with a stark assessment of the current crisis:

"Our rivers are being wounded by mining, oil, drug trafficking, and deforestation. The people who guard them are persecuted, murdered, and forgotten."

Participants denounced the prevailing extractive model that treats land and water as mere commodities, declaring instead that: "Water is not a commodity; it is a gift from God, it is a human right, it is a sacrament of life."

The Declaration urged governments "to stop viewing water as a source of power or profit" and to recognize it "as a right that cannot be denied or privatized." It also called upon the global Church and civil society to "defend life, care for our Common Home, and promote a culture of water based on respect, equity, and spirituality."

Insights from the Field

The conviction that water is sacred resonated deeply with attendees like Maryknoll Sister Patricia (Pat) Ryan, who has worked with rural communities in Peru's southern highlands. Sister Pat highlighted that the water crisis is not confined to the Amazon basin but originates in the highlands where the Amazon waters begin.

"There is no country that does not suffer from water problems… The same problem exists in every country. We are learning. Water is a living being. It has rights. It must be defended and protected."

Her organization, DHUMA (Human Rights and the Environment), has filed a case demanding water be recognized as a "subject of rights." DHUMA partner Yolanda Flores emphasized the responsibility to protect the polluted but powerful river: "If we don't take care of water, we won't have life. We have to change our priorities."

This message points to the core theme: we are water; to harm it is to wound ourselves.

The Church's Patoral and Prophetic Role

Bishops at the summit reaffirmed the spiritual and moral urgency of this mission.

- Cardinal Pedro Barreto (Archbishop Emeritus of Huancayo and REPAM founder) stressed the Church's role is now both pastoral and prophetic, engaging in dialogue with the world to care for our Common Home.
- Bishop Miguel Ángel Cadenas (Apostolic Vicar of Iquitos and summit host) emphasized that the Church's first task is to listen to those dedicating their lives to preserving the Amazon for a dignified life for all.
- Bishop Rafael Cob García (Vicar Apostolic of Puyo in Ecuador) said, "The right to water is the right to life. It is not an option for us as Christians but a moral obligation."

Together they affirm Pope Leo's vision that caring for our common home requires technical changes and spiritual conversion of priorities.

Global Appeal and Commitment

The Iquitos declaration transcends a regional statement, acting as a global appeal for conversion, policy change, and shared responsibility. It closes with a prayerful commitment:

"We commit ourselves to defend life, to care for our Common Home, and to promote a culture of water based on respect, equity, and spirituality."

The summit's message offers both a challenge and hope: faith communities must become powerful witnesses for the dignity of people and the rights of nature, because "We Are Water, We Are Life, We Are Hope."

Peru: Church Leaders Denounce Violence, Defend Human Rights

As Peru experiences a crisis of political upheaval and violent crime, bishops and men and women religious call on government leaders to reduce violence, respect human rights, and demonstrate a preferential option for the poor.

President Dina Boluarte, who had overseen one of the worst massacres in recent Peruvian history in 2023, was impeached and removed from office by Peru's Congress on Oct. 10 for failing to curb a wave of violent crime in the country. Weeks earlier, the Congress had passed an amnesty law pardoning members of government security forces who committed grave human rights violations in counterterrorism operations between 1980 and 2000. On October 21, the new president, José Jerí, announced a 30 day "state of emergency," ostensibly to fight crime, but also in the face of violent protests calling for him to resign.

A month before these dramatic changes, twelve of Peru's bishops released a statement condemning the amnesty law. The bishops, including two cardinals, restated "the Church's ongoing commitment to accompany the victims and their families, whoever they may be, as a result of the internal armed conflict that our country experienced."

"We deeply regret," the bishops said, "that, in this context of war, some of those who had the duty to care for their brothers and sisters abandoned their responsibility and responded to the barbarity of terrorism with equal barbarity. The assertion that war justifies any death, even the death of innocents, represents a grave wound in the fragile social fabric of our beloved country and weakens all efforts toward unity among Peruvians. No war 'is worth the tears of a mother who has seen her child mutilated or murdered,' or the loss of the life of a single human being, a sacred being created in the image and likeness of the Creator."

On Oct 10, Peru's Conference of Religious released the following statement regarding the ongoing violence in the country:

"The Conference of Religious Men and Women of Peru (CONFER), which unites all members of the Consecrated Life community in our country, wishes to express its profound concern regarding the institutional crisis in which we find ourselves. Faced with this crisis, the political authorities of both the Executive and Legislative branches, as well as other branches of government, appear to be prioritizing their own particular and group interests over those of the population, who suffer from rampant violence in our streets, as well as a lack of opportunities and services, especially for those living in the most vulnerable situations."

"As members of the Religious Life community in Peru, we accompany and walk closely with the people who suffer the most. We strive to be where no one else wants to be, where the State doesn't reach, where macroeconomic growth is not palpable. We have also walked closely with the families of victims of violence in all its forms. We are therefore witnesses that impunity in the face of injustice, the dynamics of abuse and violence, discrimination and rejection, are nothing more than fertile ground for more violence, more suffering, more poverty. We demand that political authorities put the interests of citizens first, and, in line with what Pope Leo XIV asks of us in his recent encyclical, give preferential consideration to the poorest.

"Our streets have run red with blood. And in the face of this, the government of Ms. Dina Boluarte, who has been impeached by the same Congress that shielded her seven times previously and sustained her in office since she assumed the presidency, has shown itself to be indifferent, without seeking the forgiveness or reconciliation necessary for social coexistence. Without clear policies to combat organized crime and without strategies to maintain security in the country, the population has been left at the mercy of violence and corruption. In response, citizens have expressed their discontent in various ways and will surely continue to do so until those who govern us demonstrate that they are not pursuing their own ambitions, but rather genuinely want to engage in politics, seeking the common good.

"From CRP CONFER PERÚ, we are committed to contributing to the construction of a true culture of encounter in our country, and we are aware that to achieve this level of dialogue, we must also denounce the injustices that affect those who suffer most. We invite all the people of God, as well as the various institutions of civil society and the State, to join us in working to overcome the crisis in which we find ourselves."

U.S. Ends Pivotal African Trade Program

With the end of the African Growth and Opportunity Act, sub-Saharan African countries have lost trade preferences with the United States, threating jobs in the textile, apparel and agricultural sectors.

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) provided eligible African countries with duty-free access to U.S. markets for over 6,000 products, but expired on September 30, 2025, leaving trade uncertain. While the U.S. government has signaled support for a one-year extension, no legislation has been enacted yet, creating immediate trade disruptions for countries like South Africa, Kenya, and Lesotho.

For over two decades, AGOA has been a pivotal piece of U.S. legislation defining commercial engagement with sub-Saharan Africa. Enacted in 2000, AGOA established a trade preference program, granting eligible sub-Saharan African countries duty-free access to the U.S. market for thousands of products, significantly easing the path for sectors like textiles, apparel, and certain agricultural goods. Its core objectives were to spur economic growth, promote diversified trade, and encourage political and economic reforms, such as the rule of law and market-based economies, in beneficiary nations. It served as a foundational tool for transitioning the U.S.-Africa relationship from one primarily based on aid to a mutually beneficial trade partnership.

AGOA's authorized lifespan, extended multiple times, officially expired on September 30, 2025. This expiration came despite strong lobbying and bipartisan congressional support for its renewal, leaving the future of U.S.-Africa trade in a state of uncertainty.

For African leaders and industries, the continuation of the targets and goals of AGOA remains vital. The trade preference program is credited with creating thousands of jobs, particularly in the apparel sector in Kenya and Lesotho, and boosting non-oil exports.

African governments and businesses view AGOA's duty-free status as essential for their products to remain competitive against lower-cost producers from Asia. The long-term certainty provided by a trade program like AGOA is considered crucial for attracting and retaining foreign direct investment necessary for building robust supply chains and diversified economies.

"Over 66,000 Kenyans in clothing and textile factories risk losing their jobs if the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade deal with the U.S. is not renewed by September 30," the Africa digital news agency DW Africa posted on Facebook on Sept. 8. "With estimates that each worker supports about five dependents, nearly 660,000 people could be impacted."

"AGOA grants duty-free access to thousands of African products and has fueled billions in investment, giving Kenya an edge over rivals like Bangladesh and Vietnam," DW Africa posted. "Without renewal, Export Processing Zones could downsize, affecting Kenya's economic lifeline."

The Trump administration's posture toward AGOA's renewal, however, has been characterized by uncertainty. While White House officials had expressed support for a short-term extension to allow for a comprehensive review and modernization of the framework, the administration has introduced new tariffs on imports from some African nations, directly undercut the preferential access promised by AGOA.

Some U.S. critics of AGOA argue that it did not generate sufficient reciprocal benefits for U.S. businesses, with some suggesting a need to shift toward free trade agreements or geopolitical goals, such as securing access to critical minerals.

The consequences of AGOA's expiration are already being felt. African exports that previously entered the U.S. duty-free now face higher Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) tariff rates, with some apparel and textile products facing double-digit tariffs. This significant increase in costs is a severe blow to vulnerable industries, threatening job losses and a reduction in export revenues.

Moving forward, the post-AGOA landscape presents a critical crossroads. African countries are being forced to pivot, intensifying efforts to leverage the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to build regional self-sufficiency and seeking to expand trade with other global partners like China and the European Union. For the United States, the lapse of AGOA jeopardizes its economic influence on the continent and risks ceding ground to strategic rivals.

While a short-term extension remains possible, the ultimate path for U.S.-Africa trade relations will likely involve either a heavily modified and modernized AGOA that includes new reciprocal terms or a shift to an array of bilateral trade agreements, forcing a new, more challenging era for commerce between the two continents

DRC-Rwanda Peace Deal Overshadowed by Minerals

A recent report by the Oakland Institute blames the slow-moving peace process between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda on maneuvering to secure control over Congolese mineral wealth..

The Oakland Institute released a searing critique of negotiations between Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda on implementing their peace deal as the two nations prepare for the fourth meeting this November. The Institute claims that "long-standing U.S. support for Rwanda made it possible for M23 [a Congolese Rwandan-backed rebel paramilitary group], to seize territory, capture key mining sites, and forced Kinshasa to the negotiation table with hands tied behind its back."

M23 Expansion and a Flawed Agreement

The peace agreement, initially signed in June, notably excluded key armed groups: the M23 rebels (widely regarded as a Rwandan proxy), the FDLR (a Hutu militia seeking to invade Rwanda), and local self-defense groups known as Wazalendo (patriots).

Since the agreement was signed, the M23 has reportedly expanded its offensive across North and South Kivu Provinces, continuing the unabated extraction of valuable minerals. These resources are primarily trafficked through Rwanda, and to a lesser extent, Uganda, before reaching international markets.

DRC President Felix Tshisekedi maintains that he will not approve a final peace treaty until Rwanda fully withdraws from eastern Congo and ends its support for the M23. While Rwanda demands the disarmament of the FDLR, the UN Group of Experts suggests this is a pretext.

UN Experts: Mineral Control, Not Defense, is Goal

A July report by the UN Group of Experts refuted Rwanda's claims of an existential threat, stating:

"Rwandan Defense Force's successive military engagements did not primarily aim at neutralizing the FDLR… Instead, RDF reinforcements and decisive military operations aimed at conquering additional territories, while RDF's continued presence enabled the M23 to consolidate control in eastern DRC, which secured Rwanda's access to mineral-rich territories and fertile land, decimated FDLR ranks, and guaranteed political influence in the DRC."

Sources close to the Rwandan government reportedly indicated that Kigali's primary objective was to control the DRC's territory and its natural resources.

The Oakland Institute asserts that Rwanda and Uganda, through periods of shifting alliances and hostilities, have turned eastern DRC into a "theater of proxy warfare" driven by economic gains. These actions, the Institute argues, are "deliberate efforts to control mineral-rich regions and assert dominance in Congolese affairs."

Humanitarian Crisis and U.S. Involvement

The conflict's toll on the Congolese people has been catastrophic. Three decades of war have resulted in an estimated 6 million deaths (including those from malnutrition and disease), widespread displacement, and the horrific use of sexual violence as a weapon.

The Oakland Institute's report, *Shafted: The Scramble for Critical Minerals in the DRC,* connects the current instability to a long history of foreign intervention driven by mineral interests, including coltan, diamonds, gold, cassiterite, copper, cobalt, and uranium.

The report highlights the historical context of U.S. involvement, referencing the CIA-orchestrated assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1960 and later support for Mobutu Sese Seku, as evidence of a long-term strategy to control the country's mineral wealth.

The Oakland Institute concludes that the "U.S.-brokered 'peace' deal" is the latest maneuver in this history, aimed at securing resources in the context of the United States' geopolitical struggle with China for control over critical resources.

"The incorporation of 'formalized' mineral supply chains from eastern DRC to Rwanda exposes the pact's true aim: Securing access to and control over minerals under the guise of diplomacy and 'regional integration.'… Framed as peacemaking, this is part of United States' broader geopolitical struggle with China for control over critical resources."

The Institute warns that far from fostering peace—with over a thousand civilians killed since the deal was signed—this arrangement risks deepening Congo's subjugation for the benefit of external powers, all while the suffering of the Congolese people continues unabated. For true peace to take hold in the DRC, the basic needs of its people must be prioritized over the value of its mineral resources.

Faith-filled Resistance to Immigration Enforcement

Faith-based organizations across the United States are mobilizing in response to the Trump administration's heightened immigration enforcement..

The Trump administration's aggressive immigration enforcement tactics—including deputizing state and local police, deploying National Guard troops to cities, and using masked, unmarked Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to detain suspected non-citizens—have escalated fear, anxiety, and family separation across the United States.

In response to this turbulent period, many people of faith are turning to Scripture for guidance and engaging in unprecedented acts of solidarity with immigrants. A frequently cited passage from Leviticus 19:33–34 reads: "When a stranger resides with you in your land, do not mistreat such a one. You shall treat the stranger who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the stranger as yourself, for you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God."

Church Leaders Urge Compassion

Guided by this biblical call, religious communities are taking action. On September 28, Catholics in Washington, D.C., held a procession in solidarity with immigrants, culminating in a Mass at St. Matthew's Cathedral. Cardinal Robert McElroy, Archdiocese of Washington, centered his homily on "hope amidst adversity," emphasizing the Church's primary obligation: "to embrace in a sustained, unwavering, prophetic and compassionate way the immigrants who are suffering so deeply because of the oppression they are facing."

Reflecting on the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Cardinal McElroy highlighted how the Samaritan was willing to "reject the norms of society" that would have excused him from helping a Jewish victim. He made clear, however, that he was not disputing the government's obligation to protect its borders and provide security, particularly concerning the removal of those convicted of serious crimes. Similar faith-based processions have been reported in cities including El Paso, Detroit, Atlanta, and Seattle.

Vigils and Walks for Justice

Across the country, groups are holding vigils at detention centers and ICE facilities to express support for their immigrant neighbors.

In New York City, the New Sanctuary Coalition organizes "Jericho Walks," silent, interfaith processions inspired by the biblical story of Joshua. Participants prayerfully circle the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building—site of dramatic, daily detentions by masked ICE agents—seven times. Not far away, interfaith groups maintain daily prayer vigils outside the privately-run Delaney Hall Detention Center in Newark, New Jersey, which was the scene of significant unrest and an escape attempt in June 2025 due to overcrowding and poor conditions.

In San Diego, Bishop Michael Pham, a refugee who fled Vietnam in 1980, and other clergy members participate in a program called FAITH (Faithful Accompaniment in Trust & Hope). They offer prayer and pastoral care to immigrants navigating court hearings and encountering ICE agents at the courthouse.

Seeking Access to the Detained

One of the most profound acts of solidarity has been the repeated attempts by clergy, religious sisters, and laity to bring the Eucharist to detainees at the Broadview Detention Center near Chicago. The facility processed over 5,200 individuals between January and July 2025.

Despite repeated formal requests, both an initial October 11 attempt involving several hundred supporters, and a larger November 1 event led by Chicago Auxiliary Bishop José María Garcia-Maldonado and over 2,000 faithful, were denied entry by ICE and the Department of Homeland Security. Officials cited "safety and security reasons and because of the transitory nature of the facility" for the refusal.

Similarly, in Florida, Bishop Thomas Wenski of Miami joined the "Knights on Bikes" (motorcycle-riding Knights of Columbus members) to pray outside the notorious "Alligator Alcatraz" detention center in the Everglades, demanding clergy access. Bishop Wenski stated that state and federal officials have failed to provide a timeline for when Catholic priests would be permitted to enter the facility, known for its harsh environment.

The movement is gaining momentum, with a nationwide "Catholic Public Witness for Immigrants" taking place outside ICE offices on Oct. 22, and another planned for Nov. 13.

FAITH IN ACTION: In Washington, D.C., a 30-minute prayer service is scheduled outside ICE headquarters (500 12th Street NW) on Nov. 13 at 8:30am. All are welcome. https://bit.ly/CatholicWitness

Catholic Church Responses to Authoritarianism in History

The Catholic Church and its members have served as crucial counterweights to oppressive governments throughout history, defending human rights under authoritarian rule.

The Catholic Church, with a moral mandate rooted in the inherent dignity of the human person, has historically played a vital and at times perilous role in the defense of human rights under authoritarian rule. While its institutional responses were not uniformly heroic—sometimes marked by quiet diplomacy or, in rare cases, unfortunate complicity—the consistent defense of fundamental liberties by the Vatican, bishops, religious orders, and lay organizations has provided a crucial bulwark against state terror.

This defense manifested in theological shifts, the creation of protected advocacy organizations, and the courageous personal witness of individual clergy and lay members.

Theological Shifts

Theological foundations for this activism were significantly strengthened by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and its subsequent application through Liberation Theology, particularly in Latin America. Vatican II emphasized the Church's engagement with the contemporary world and affirmed religious freedom as a cornerstone of human dignity. This was quickly adopted by Latin American bishops, who, at the 1968 Medellín conference, articulated a "preferential option for the poor."

This theological shift positioned the Church not as an ally of the traditional elite, but as an advocate for the impoverished and marginalized, precisely the groups most often targeted by repressive "national security" regimes. This provided the moral and intellectual framework for actively challenging dictatorships in countries like Chile, Brazil, and El Salvador.

Protected Advocacy Organizations in Chile

Institutionally, the Church's independent, global structure made it one of the few organizations capable of resisting state control and filling the void left by suppressed civil society. In Augusto Pinochet's Chile, Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez demonstrated institutional cunning and courage. After the military regime forced the dissolution of the ecumenical Committee for Peace, Cardinal Henriquez immediately replaced it with the Vicariate of Solidarity in 1976.

Because the Vicariate was established as an internal department of the Archdiocese of Santiago, the dictatorship struggled to close it down without appearing to directly attack the entire Catholic Church, a move with significant diplomatic and international repercussions. The Vicariate operated as a legal and humanitarian shield, documenting human rights abuses, providing legal aid to the families of the disappeared and detained, and becoming a central repository of truth and resistance. Similar Church-backed organizations emerged across the continent, offering sanctuary and support where the law offered none.

Courageous Personal Witness in El Salvador

The prophetic voice of individual church leaders further galvanized resistance. Archbishop Óscar Romero of El Salvador is the most globally recognized example. During his tenure, his weekly homilies were broadcast over radio across the country, serving as an alternative source of news that publicly denounced the violence and political assassinations carried out by the military and death squads.

His sermons transformed the pulpit into a public forum for human rights advocacy, culminating in his famous plea to soldiers: "I beg you, I beseech you, I order you: in the name of God, stop the repression!"

His subsequent assassination in 1980 only solidified his status as a martyr for justice and strengthened the resolve of local priests, nuns, and lay base communities (CEBs) who carried on the defense of the poor at the grassroots level.

Resistance Identity in Poland

Beyond Latin America, the Catholic Church was indispensable in challenging Soviet authoritarianism, most notably in Poland. Under Communism, the Church became the spiritual embodiment of Polish national identity and resistance against Soviet domination.

The 1978 election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope John Paul II, the first Slavic pope, was a powerful blow to the Soviet system. His visits to his homeland, drawing millions into public gatherings, lifted spirits and provided a moral sanctuary for the Solidarity trade union movement.

Churches served as protected spaces where opposition meetings, underground education, and uncensored discussions could take place, especially during periods like Martial Law (1981-1983). Priests like Father Jerzy Popiełuszko held popular "Masses for the Fatherland," providing a public platform for anti-Communist sermons and drawing huge crowds, embodying the nonviolent resistance that characterized the Solidarity trade union movement.

The Church often acted as an intermediary between the Communist authorities and the opposition (workers and intellectuals), particularly during crises. It helped to ensure the nonviolent nature of the opposition, preventing bloodshed that would have given the regime a pretext for brutal military suppression, as seen in other Soviet bloc countries.

Moral Positioning

In all these contexts, the Church's advantage was its spiritual authority. By defining human rights not as political demands, but as requirements of inherent human dignity derived from natural law and God's creation, it elevated the discussion above partisan politics. This moral positioning granted its members a degree of protection and its message a universal resonance that ultimately prevailed over darker forces.

Lessons from the Catholic Church in the Philippines

The Catholic Church's actions during the 1986 People Power Revolution in the Philippines offer powerful lessons for the Church in countries experiencing rising authoritarianism today.

The Catholic Church in the Philippines played an indispensable role as defender of human rights and mobilizer of civil disobedience, leading to the nonviolent downfall of the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship and the restoration of democracy.

Moral Conscience

Marcos's declaration of Martial Law in 1972 brought widespread human rights abuses, rampant corruption, and the dismantling of democratic institutions. As other civil society organizations were co-opted or crushed, the Catholic Church became the last bastion of organized opposition.

Led by Cardinal Jaime Sin, the Church consistently spoke out. Pastoral letters and homilies condemned human rights violations and electoral fraud, providing a crucial counter-narrative to state-controlled media. Church groups, such as the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), which was a part of the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines, actively documented cases of torture and killings, exposing the true nature of the regime and eroding Marcos's legitimacy.

Support for Dissidents

During Martial Law, churches and religious institutions became safe havens for dissidents, activists, and those persecuted by the regime. Monasteries, convents, and parish halls provided shelter and meeting places for opposition groups. The anonymity and respect accorded to religious spaces made them difficult for state forces to openly raid without risking significant public backlash.

Individual priests, sisters, and lay workers directly engaged in social justice work, ministering to the poor and marginalized, who were disproportionately affected by the regime's economic policies and human rights abuses. They not only provided material aid but also fostered a sense of community and solidarity, reinforcing the idea that they were not alone in their suffering and desire for change.

The Catalyst: Assassination and Snap Elections

The assassination of opposition leader Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. in 1983 dramatically intensified public discontent. The Church, through Cardinal Sin, was among the loudest voices demanding justice and accountability.

When Marcos called for snap elections in 1986 in a desperate attempt to legitimize his rule, the Church again played a decisive role. Cardinal Sin, along with other bishops, urged Filipinos to register and vote, emphasizing that participation was a moral obligation.

More critically, the Church organized the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL). This independent poll-watching body mobilized hundreds of thousands of volunteers to monitor polling precincts, guard ballot boxes, and report instances of fraud. When the official count contradicted NAMFREL's tally, the Church's endorsement of NAMFREL's findings solidified

public belief that the elections had been stolen.

The People Power Revolution: A Call to Action

The climax of the Church's involvement came in the four days of the People Power Revolution (February 22-25, 1986). When Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Armed Forces Vice Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos broke away from Marcos and barricaded themselves in military camps along Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), they were vulnerable to attack by Marcos loyalists.

It was Cardinal Sin's impassioned radio broadcast that proved to be the pivotal moment. "Go to EDSA. I ask you, my dear people, to support our two brave generals. Bring your rosaries. Bring your Bibles. I bless you," he declared.

The response was overwhelming. Millions of ordinary Filipinos, spurred by their faith and trust in the Church, streamed onto EDSA. Nuns, priests, and laypeople led prayers, offered food to soldiers, and stood peacefully in front of tanks. There were a number of priests who joined and were very prominent in the movement and gave much inspiration to Catholic believers.

This massive, nonviolent assembly, organized and sustained by the Church's call, presented an insurmountable moral and physical barrier to Marcos's forces. Priests and nuns were almost always put in the front lines of rallies to protect the people following.

It was common that the military would fire colored water from the fire trucks. The images of unarmed civilians confronting tanks with rosaries and flowers captivated the world and paralyzed the regime. The soldiers, many of whom were Catholic, found it morally impossible to fire upon their own people, let alone religious figures.

A Blueprint for Resistance

The Church's ability to transcend political factions and appeal to a deeper sense of national and moral identity proved invaluable. It demonstrated that in the face of an authoritarian regime, a strong, independent religious institution with a commitment to justice and human dignity can serve as an indispensable force for defending human rights and restoring democracy.

Stop Deep Seabed Mining

NOVEMBER 1 MARKED THE INTERNATIONAL Day of the Seabed—a moment to honor the vast, life-giving depths of one of God's most mysterious and life-sustaining ecosystems—the deep ocean.

As Catholics, we are called to protect our common home. The ocean's depths—teeming with life and vital to Earth's climate—are sacred gifts of God, not commodities to exploit.

Scientists warn that deep-sea mining operations—which involve dragging massive machinery across the seabed—would create plumes of sediment and noise pollution extending for miles, smothering fragile ecosystems and disrupting the migratory paths of marine mammals and fish.

Protecting this 'common home' means recognizing the deep ocean's crucial role in regulating global climate by acting as the largest active carbon sink. The destruction of these pristine, slow-recovering habitats is a profound moral failing that prioritizes short-term profit over long-term planetary health and our sacred duty as stewards of creation. This is an urgent issue of environmental justice for coastal and island nations reliant on healthy oceans.

The head of the International Seabed Authority released a statement criticizing the Trump admnistration's plans to mine in open ocean beyond U.S territory waters, stating that the unilateral action violates the "Common Heritage of Humankind" principle under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which designates the deep seabed beyond national jurisdiction as belonging to all nations. This move by the Trump administration directly challenges the International Seabed Authority, risking a dangerous geopolitical scramble for resources.

Join us in asking Congress to oppose the Trump Administration's executive order "Unleashing America's Offshore Critical Minerals and Resources" and H.R. 4018, which would fast-track deep sea mining in the open ocean outside of U.S. territorial waters, destroying habitats that have taken millions of years to form, and endangering marine life and coastal communities.

Mining the sea floor would cause irreversible harm to creation and threaten communities that depend on it. Please tell Congress to reject this reckless policy and support a global moratorium on deep sea mining to safeguard God's creation.

FAITH IN ACTION: Write to Congress at https://bit.ly/StopDeepSeabedMining

Resources

1. **Lifting the Catholic Voice on Climate Justice at COP 30:** Catholic Climate Covenant webinar recording and resources about COP30 UN Climate Change Conference. https://bit.ly/CatholicsCOP30
2. **New report "Catholic Approaches to Mining: A Framework for Reflection, Planning, and Action"** by University of Notre Dame, Laudato Si Movement, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and others. https://bit.ly/MiningCST
3. **"Roots of Resistance," annual report by Global Witness** documenting attacks on land and environmental protectors across the planet. https://bit.ly/GlobalWitness2025
4. **Fact Sheet, Changing Origins, Rising Numbers: Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States** by Migration Policy Institute https://bit.ly/MigrationPolicyData
5. **Advent Scripture Reflection Guide** by Pax Christi USA https://bit.ly/PaxChristiAdvent2025
6. **DACA Update**: An upcoming court order is expected to have a significant impact on the program and who can benefit from its protection. A new explainer is available from the USCCB in both English https://www.usccb.org/DACAupdate and Spanish https://www.usccb.org/actualizacionDACA
7. **Video Statement of Cardinal Cupich on Standing with Migrants** Archbishop of Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich released a video statement in solidarity with migrants: "I speak to you as your shepherd but also as a fellow pilgrim who shares the pain of many of our immigrant communities. Families are being torn apart, children are left in fear, and communities are shaken by immigration raids and detentions. These actions wound the soul of our city. Let me be clear. The Church stands with migrants." Watch the full statement at https://bit.ly/CupichVideo
8. **USCCB resources on Dilexi Te** - a four-page reflection guide and a prayer card inspired by Dilexi Te. This page will be updated as more resources become available https://www.usccb.org/dilexi-te
9. **"ICE Enforcement Impacts Immigrant Priests, Seminarians, and Religious in the U.S."**, OSV News. Bishop Joseph J. Tyson of the Diocese of Yakima in Washington said several seminarians in the diocese have self-deported to Mexico. https://bit.ly/ICEclergy
10. **Faith-based resource guide on nuclear weapons:** prayer, reflection, and action compiled for Nuclear Prayers Day on the 80th Anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing. https://bit.ly/NukesFaith
11. **2025 Rev. Drew Christiansen, SJ Lecture Series featuring Fr. David Neuhaus, SJ** speaking on "Equality, Justice, & Peace – A Catholic Vision for Reconciliation in Israel/Palestine Today" at the University of Scranton and hybrid online, **Nov.12**, 12:00-1:00 PM https://bit.ly/ScrantonNov12
12. **Let Children Live Campaign.** Sign up to receive the name and age of a living Palestinian child to lift up in prayer and to name when talking with your elected officials. https://letchildrenlive.com/en
13. **Amazon Water Summit Declaration** https://bit.ly/AmazonWaterSummit
14. **Pope Leo on the Tenth Anniversary of Laudato Si,** speech given at the Raising Hope conference in Rome, Oct. 1-3, 2025. https://bit.ly/PopeLeoLS
15. **Maasai Conservation Vision** – 24-page report launched by the Maasai International Solidarity Alliance (MISA) based on input from Maasai communities in northern Tanzania. A one-page summary, the report, and the latest MISA newsletter are available at https://mogc.me/MISA
16. **Maryknoll Sisters Mission Institute** new programs and dates for free online events. https://bit.ly/MKMissionInst
17. **Maryknoll Lay Missioners Immersion Trips** https://mogc.info/MKLM-Immersion
18. **Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers Mission Trips** https://mogc.info/MM-immersion
19. **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/