

NewsNotes

a bi-monthly newsletter on international justice and peace issues



Maryknoll Office
for Global Concerns

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Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Peace, Social Justice, and Integrity of Creation

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

Maryknoll Statement and Other Responses to U.S. Attack on Venezuela

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns released a statement on January 3, in the hours after the U.S. military intervention in Venezuela.

On January 3, the United States invaded Venezuela, arresting President Nicolás Maduro and his wife and bringing them to New York. President Trump has threatened a second wave of attacks if acting president Delcy Rodríguez, Maduro's vice president, does not comply with U.S. demands, leaving Venezuelans fearful and confused, especially after opposition leaders were sidelined despite a stolen 2024 election. Since September 2, the United States has carried out 35 air strikes on boats in the region, killing at least 115 civilians.

Faith leaders and international affairs experts have condemned the U.S. actions. Maduro was a dictator with a record of grave human rights abuses, but the invasion, without the permission of Congress, constitutes a violation of both U.S. and international law, and a dangerous precedent that destabilizes the region and the world.

Pope Leo XIV expressed "deep concern" in his Jan. 4 angelus address, calling for a path "guaranteeing the country's sovereignty, ensuring the rule of law enshrined in the constitution, respecting the human and civil rights of each person... with special attention to the poorest who are suffering from the difficult economic situation." The Venezuelan Bishops Conference issued a statement calling for peace, saying "we reject any type of violence."

Below is our statement on the crisis.

We witness with profound sorrow and alarm the reports of U.S. military strikes on Venezuelan soil and the forced removal of its leadership. We ask all people to join us in prayer for the safety of our brothers and sisters in Venezuela and for the wisdom of our leaders who hold the lives of so many in their hands.

Our friendship with the people of Venezuela is rooted in the Gospel's call to peace and the defense of human dignity. While we have long advocated for justice and the relief of suffering for the Venezuelan people, we believe that violence and unilateral military intervention are never the path to reconciliation. The bombardment of military bases and the capture of President Nicolás Maduro violate U.S. and international law, and risk igniting a wider conflict that will displace thousands and claim the lives of the most vulnerable—the poor families in the barrios of Caracas and rural

communities throughout Venezuela.

As a U.S.-based Catholic organization, we echo the words of Pope Leo XIV, who has consistently called for dialogue over force. We urge the United States to cease all military operations immediately to prevent further loss of life, respect international law and the sovereignty of nations, and pursue multilateral diplomacy in addressing the crisis in Venezuela. We call on Congress to assert its constitutional responsibility by invoking the War Powers Resolution to stop any further military action by the Administration in the region.

Join us in prayer for peace.

God of mercy and peace, we come before you today with hearts heavy for our brothers and sisters in Venezuela. Our hearts are with them in their hour of fear. Lord, hear our prayer and bring your peace.

We pray for the families in Caracas and across Venezuela who were awakened by the sound of explosions. Protect the children, the elderly, and the vulnerable from the physical and emotional scars of violence. Prince of Peace, guide us toward a nonviolent path.

We pray for our leaders and the leaders of all nations. Soften hearts that seek power through force and enlighten minds to see the path of dialogue. May they remember that every life is sacred and every act of war is a failure of peace. Holy Spirit, grant them the wisdom to be peacemakers.

Loving God, grant us all the strength to be your hands and feet in a time of darkness. Amen.

Other statements of note include:

- Pax Christi International: <https://bit.ly/494FdoQ>
- Washington Office on Latin America: <https://bit.ly/4qHfclx>
- American Friends Service Committee: <https://bit.ly/49G24Hm>
- Methodist General Board of Global Ministries: <https://bit.ly/49ITl6F>

FAITH IN ACTION: Send a message to Trump and the Congress to stop war on Venezuela at <https://bit.ly/4q6wMPJ>

New Era of U.S. Intervention in Latin America

The Trump administration's National Security Strategy marks a significant shift in U.S. policy toward Latin America.

The National Security Strategy (NSS) released by the Trump administration on December 4 marks a profound ideological shift in U.S. foreign policy. While the administration frames its “America First” doctrine as a “return to hemispheric defense,” critics and regional leaders view it as a pivot toward more assertive—and potentially interventionist—involvement in Latin American governance.

‘Trump Corollary’

The cornerstone of this shift is the introduction of the “Trump Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine, reviving the 1823 principle that the U.S. will not tolerate malign foreign interference in its hemisphere.

Regional Preeminence: The strategy asserts that U.S. security and prosperity depend on being “preeminent in the Western Hemisphere.” It argues the U.S. has the right to intervene to prevent “hostile foreign incursions” (specifically targeting Chinese and Russian influence) and to secure critical supply chains.

“Enlist and Expand” Alliances: The U.S. plans to “reward and encourage” governments and political movements that align with its principles. This has already manifested in increased funding and support for ideologically aligned leaders, such as in Argentina.

Direct Security Intervention: The NSS moves away from a “law enforcement-only” approach to cartels, instead labeling them as “narco-terrorists.” This provides a justification for the use of lethal force in other countries.

Economic Leverage: The administration is using “commercial diplomacy”—including tariffs and the cutting of development aid—to coerce local elites into cooperating with U.S. objectives on migration and trade.

Interference vs. Cooperation

The NSS has ignited debate over whether the “Trump Corollary” represents a defensive necessity or a return to 19th-century-style interference. The White House argues it is a vital shield against Chinese infrastructure projects and Russian military presence in the region. Critics describe it as neo-imperialism.

Security Operations and Sovereignty

A major point of contention is the shift in counter-cartel operations. By reclassifying cartels as “narco-terrorists,”

the administration justifies “lethal kinetic force” to stop a “fentanyl invasion.” By late December, the U.S. military conducted at least 30 strikes on vessels in the Caribbean and Pacific, resulting in at least 107 deaths. While the administration views these as surgical strikes against existential threats, critics see them as violations of national sovereignty that create a permanent combat zone.

Political Alignment and Coercion

The strategy's approach to political support has created a rift. The U.S. “enlist and expand” policy is evidenced by a \$20-billion support package for Argentina's Milei administration and praise for leaders in El Salvador and Ecuador. While the White House frames this as strengthening democratic partnerships, skeptics see it as a tool to destabilize institutions in non-aligned countries. For instance, tariff threats against Brazil are viewed as attempts to force political shifts favoring the United States.

Economic Leverage as a Border Tool

The administration has linked trade benefits and aid to a country's success in stopping migrant flows, arguing it is demanding “reasonable governance.” Critics, however, define this as economic coercion.

Recent Actions Under the Strategy

Since the strategy's release, several high-profile actions have fueled concerns about a new era of interference:

- Military strikes on Venezuelan boats and seizure of oil tankers;
- Military plans for maintaining access to the Panama Canal;
- The pardon of former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, previously convicted in the U.S. of state-sponsored drug trafficking;
- Tariffs on Brazil to challenge political positions.

Naming three threats in the Western Hemisphere – migration, drugs and crime, and China – the Trump administration asserts the right to strike its neighbors, potentially unleashing a new forever war. §

For analysis of other parts of the NSS, read commentary by experts at Brookings <https://bit.ly/4q8FnS7>.

Honduras at a Crossroads

With a dramatic, chaotic ending to the recent presidential election, Honduras is navigating the collision of corporate lawsuits, historical corruption, and the urgent struggle for democracy.

After nearly a month without a winner of the November 30 presidential election, the Trump-backed candidate Nasry “Tito” Asfura was declared president of Honduras by a razor-thin margin of 40.3% to Salvador Nasralla’s 39.5%. After delays due to technical issues and reported threats from President Trump to withdraw financial support to Honduras if Asfura didn’t prevail, the results remain disputed. The president of the country’s Congress, Luis Redondo, has called the election results “completely illegal” while outgoing President, Xiomara Castro, has alleged an “electoral coup”.

In response to this fraught moment, international human rights organization Global Exchange and its Honduran partner, the Center for the Study of Democracy (CESPAD), released a report on December 16, [Honduras Under Siege: Anatomy of an Electoral Intervention and the Path Toward Democratic Resistance](#), based on findings from international and national election observers.

The Legacy of the “Narco-Dictatorship”

The report contextualizes the current crisis in the 2009 coup and the subsequent twelve years of National Party rule under Juan Orlando Hernández (JOH), which Global Exchange describes as a “narco-dictatorship” that hollowed out state institutions for transnational criminal interests. Although JOH was extradited to the United States and convicted on drug trafficking charges in 2024, the report emphasizes that the structural corruption and “mafia-style” networks established during his tenure remain deeply embedded in the Honduran judiciary, military, and police. President Trump pardoned JOH on Dec. 1, 2025.

Corporate Lawsuits and “Parallel Justice”

The report highlights “corporate assault,” detailing how transnational corporations use the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism in trade deals to sue the Honduran government. Often brought before the World Bank’s International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes, these lawsuits target the government’s attempts to repeal JOH era laws, most notably the “Zones for Employment and Economic Development” (ZEDEs).

Human Rights and the Plight of Defenders

The report paints a grim picture of the safety of those who oppose these corporate and criminal interests.

Honduras remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for environmental and land defenders. Global Exchange specifically points to the September 2024 murder of Juan López, a prominent environmental activist who organized against mining projects in Tocoa.

The “siege” described in the title refers to the constant intimidation, criminalization, and assassination of Garífuna, Indigenous, and campesino leaders. Despite the reformist rhetoric of President Xiomara Castro’s administration, the state has been unable to dismantle the paramilitary groups and private security forces that protect extractive projects.

U.S. Interference and the 2025 Elections

Global Exchange criticizes recent statements by U.S. political figures, including President Trump and members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, arguing that labeling the Honduran government as “communist” or “unreliable” revives right-wing “strongman” politics, undermines Honduran sovereignty, and risks delegitimizing elections.

Social and Environmental Fragility

The report also touches on the intersection of climate change and migration. With the “Dry Corridor” suffering from erratic rainfall and Tropical Storm Sara causing widespread devastation in late 2024, the report links environmental collapse to the “push factors” of migration. It argues that as long as corporate “mafias” control natural resources and water, local communities will remain unable to sustain themselves, fueling migration.

Recommendations

The report concludes that Honduras is trapped between the desire to reform and a pushback from international capital and domestic elites. To break this “siege,” Global Exchange recommends that Honduras withdraw from international arbitration treaties that prioritize profits over human rights; abolish ZEDEs to restore full national sovereignty; establish an independent mechanism to protect human rights defenders; and prosecute those responsible for the murders of activists, and urges the international community, especially the U.S., to respect Honduran sovereignty and allow fair elections.

Global Exchange’s report serves as both a warning and a call to action to stand with the Honduran people in their struggle for democracy and dignity. §

The Wind Beneath My Wings for Care for Creation

Maryknoll Sr. Susan Nchubiri delivered the following remarks about environmental advocacy during a side event at the UN Environmental Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, on Dec. 4, 2025.

Ispeak today as an African Catholic woman. My African and Catholic belief systems shape my reflections on the care of the natural environment and all people. These two are the wind beneath my wings.

Growing up in the village, my mother and grandmothers told us stories about the interconnectedness and interdependence of people, nature, and the Supreme Being, the creator of everything. For example, among the Meru people, if the rains failed, the Mugwe (Seer) would involve the community in a rain-making ceremony. The community would choose an unblemished lamb or goat, a gourd of honey, various plant seeds to be blessed, and a few members would accompany the Mugwe to the sacred sites. He would lead the group in prayers for forgiveness and blessing. Part of the ceremony included planting small amounts of honey in castor oil sticks along the riverbanks. By the time they returned home from the ritual, it would be raining.

As a child, I remember following women and girls to collect firewood from the hills not far from my home. The adult women would tell us not to cut any green branches, saying that we needed to let them grow.

Unfortunately, this is no longer the case. When I go to the village, I feel sad that those beautiful hills have no more vegetation. All you see are red gullies and rocks. We can attribute this, of course, to population growth, modernization, the use of charcoal for cooking, greed and short-sighted political leaders, and a population that does not adhere to its traditional values of care and non-extraction.

I also remember how the sound of the river near my home soothed me while I slept and how I would go and sit with my feet in the water to sort things out in my head. The river, for me, acted as a healer and counselor. Today, one can hardly hear that sound because water levels have drastically reduced due to deforestation and a few political leaders diverting it to their farms, leaving very little for those downstream.

My Catholic faith teaches me to view the natural world as a gift and every person as God's image and likeness, and therefore, I must love and respect them. Love entails care, protection, and nurture.

At the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, we take the integrity of creation and the care of our common home very seriously. As missionaries, we have learned from the people among whom we live and work about best practices for advancing peace, justice, and the integrity of creation.

The Maryknoll Sisters, a Catholic congregation of religious women missionaries, to which I belong, have discussed the different stages of what we now call One Earth Community for over 20 years. In 2002, at their 15th General Assembly, the Sisters reflected on and discussed the theme "Mission: Evolving Towards a Global Community." Although the Sisters had been involved in caring for the environment for years before, it was at this assembly that they explicitly stated their oneness with the cosmos and the imperative to change our attitudes. They resolved to:

1. Develop a new understanding of justice as a right relationship between humans and the rest of creation, moving from a human-centered to an earth/cosmos-centered perspective.
2. Create sacred spaces to share our diverse experiences of the Divine, so that we may deepen our communion and be a healing presence within the cosmos.
3. Desire to own the deeper knowing that we carry within us of the oneness and interconnectedness of all creation.
4. Create collaborative approaches that enable multifaceted responses to emerging mission challenges and foster a sense of community that reflects the diversity of all people of God.
5. Desire to be a community that exercises faithful stewardship of its resources in a spirit of solidarity with each other and the poor, living in harmony with all creation.

Subsequent assemblies have further deepened these commitments and directives to live the spirit of One Earth community and work tirelessly to preserve it.

In 2015, Pope Francis issued an encyclical on the environment called *Laudato Si*, in which he called Catholics and people of goodwill to examine our conscience on "what kind of world we want to leave those who come after us?" (LS#160). He called us to an ecological conversion that

- Expressly addresses social exclusion and environmental devastation and degradation.
- Denounces "the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and technology experts. Based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, which leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit." (L S, #106)

- Opposes the illusion of domination and extraction of all Earth's resources, with the spiritual vision of the Bible that celebrates our interconnectedness with Earth and the responsibility to care for our common home, "The Gospel of creation."
- Radically acknowledges that the struggles for justice for Earth and justice for impoverished people are not

- only connected, but are in fact the same struggle.
- Calls for "every effort to protect and improve our world entails profound changes in 'lifestyles, models of production and consumption, and the established structures of power which today govern societies.'" (L S, #5) §

Tanzania: Bishops Call for Justice After Election Violence

The "wave of terror" surrounding general elections in Tanzania has plunged the East African nation into its most severe political and human rights crisis in decades.

IN THE MONTHS LEADING UP to the Oct. 29 election day, the Tanzanian government intensified its repression of opposition parties, most notably CHADEMA. Key political figures, including Tundu Lissu, were arrested on charges of treason, while legal reforms were weaponized to disqualify rival candidates. By election day, the environment was defined by fear, leading to a record-low voter turnout and widespread allegations of fraud as the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party claimed a landslide victory with over 97% of the vote.

As results were announced, spontaneous protests erupted in major cities like Dar es Salaam, Arusha, and Mbeya. The government responded with lethal force against unarmed civilians.

Human rights organizations and the UN have documented the harrowing aftermath. Estimates of fatalities range from hundreds to as many as 2,000 people. Reports suggest security forces removed bodies from streets and hospitals, burying victims in mass graves, and incinerating remains to hide the scale of the massacre. The government imposed an internet shutdown from October 29 to November 3, many say to hide their actions.

President Samia Suluhu Hassan justified the violence against protesters, claiming "substantial force" was needed to stop an attempted government overthrow, blaming "unpatriotic" youth and "foreign interference" for the unrest. She also announced that her administration has formed an inquiry commission to investigate the killings, though human rights groups question the investigation's independence.

In the face of state-sponsored terror, the Catholic bishops conference, known as the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC), has emerged as a leading moral authority. Led by Bishop Wolfgang Pisa, the Catholic bishops

issued a [statement](#) calling the killings "brutal and murderous" and rejecting the government's narrative that protesters were criminals, asserting that "the punishment for a protest is not death."

Archbishop Jude Thaddaeus Ruwa'ichi of Dar es Salaam further highlighted the horror, noting that many victims were "hunted and killed inside their homes" despite not participating in the protests. "Our country has been fractured," the archbishop said. "We have lost our sense of dignity. What we witnessed during the election week has wounded the soul of Tanzania. This nation has not only lost its respect, but it has lost her people, her very sons and daughters."

The Catholic Bishops of Tanzania have called for three actions to promote justice: an independent inquiry involving international stakeholders; the immediate release of the hundreds currently facing treason charges; and the return of bodies to families for dignified burial.

CHADEMA, Tanzania's main opposition party, has called for a transitional government, saying the current government has "no legitimacy." Tanzanian activists had planned a follow-up protest on December 9, Tanzania's Independence Day, but police were deployed heavily in major cities ahead of the protests, forcing people to stay home. §

FAITH IN ACTION: Sign a petition to demand an independent investigation. <https://bit.ly/4sgnJ0c>



Maryknoll at COP30 in the Amazon

Two Maryknoll representatives report on the UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Brazil.

Each afternoon in Belém, the skies over the Amazon opened without warning. Torrential rains drummed on canvas roofs and flooded corridors, sometimes forcing meetings to pause mid-sentence. Heat and humidity pressed in from all sides. In a city shaped by rivers and rainforests, nature poignantly took center stage at COP 30.

COP30 is the 30th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the global treaty where nearly every nation meets annually to negotiate collective responses to climate change. It took place in Belém, Brazil, at the edge of the Amazon Basin—one of world's most climate-critical and climate-vulnerable regions. A decade after the Paris Agreement established a framework to limit catastrophic warming, governments, civil society, and faith communities arrived amid climate-driven droughts, floods, and heat that cause lost homes, food, and lives—and with further delay only multiplying losses.

The official outcomes of COP30 fell short of the actions needed to prevent these escalating losses. While final texts acknowledged the gravity of the climate crisis and almost 80 countries pushed to include a roadmap to phase out coal, oil, and gas, a few fossil-fuel-producing nations blocked its inclusion in the final text. Despite overwhelming scientific consensus that they are primary drivers of climate change, the words “fossil fuels” were ultimately absent from the agreement, underscoring the persistent political obstacles that continuously delay urgent, decisive action.

“This COP left us with an outcome that refuses to confront the fuel feeding this global fire and withholds the financial resources needed to put the flames out,” said Lisa Sullivan of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

At the same time, COP30 reaffirmed the value of multilateral climate cooperation. Despite the absence of a U.S. delegation, all other countries remained engaged. The UN climate process is slow and imperfect, but remains the only forum where nations collectively confront this shared threat—and where global temperature trajectories have, albeit modestly, avoided worst-case scenarios.

Maryknoll was represented by Lisa Sullivan and Maryknoll Fr. Patrick Okok, originally from Kenya, whose participation brought a pastoral and Global South perspective. Reflecting on his experience, Fr. Okok called COP30 “an eye opener,” especially in witnessing so many nations confronting the reality of rising global temperatures together. Fr. Okok also observed that leaders from the Global South consistently emphasized a familiar imbalance: countries

that have contributed least to climate pollution are suffering the most. “We all see the problem,” he reflected, “but unfortunately we’re not being aggressive enough to address it.”

Beyond official negotiations, Belém buzzed with parallel gatherings. Tens of thousands participated in the People's Summit and the People's Climate march, while faith celebrations, symposiums and processions filled the city. Bishops and cardinals led a procession and Mass honoring Amazon eco-martyrs, with youth carrying banners of Chico Mendez and Sister Dorothy Stang. These spaces reflected a growing form of grassroots multilateralism and shaped the launch of the Just Transition Mechanism, a framework ensuring that the global shift away from fossil fuels does not leave workers and vulnerable communities behind, centering people—especially those in the Global South—in the transition to clean energy.

Catholic engagement was especially visible throughout these efforts. Hundreds of Catholics representing organizations from around the world participated, including cardinals and bishops from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and Canada. A joint statement from the Bishops' Conferences of the Global South emerged as a central moral reference point and was delivered to the COP 30 Presidency. Grounded in Catholic social teaching and pastoral experience, the statement called for climate action shaped by justice, solidarity, and care for creation. Maryknoll supported efforts to ensure that voices from frontline communities and church leadership were included in official COP spaces. Pope Leo sent a video message to clergy at COP30, saying “we are guardians of creation, not rivals for its spoils.” His words were a call for nations to take bold, decisive action in confronting the climate crisis, placing moral responsibility above political hesitation.

While COP30's official outcome failed to address the urgency of the fossil fuel transition, alliances of the willing—nations, Indigenous communities, grassroots movements, and faith-based actors—are stepping forward. The First International Conference for the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels, convened by Colombia and the Netherlands on April 28–29 in Santa Marta, Colombia, will be a pivotal moment. It offers a platform for committed countries to coordinate, share strategies, and demonstrate that bold, multilateral, grassroots-driven solutions are achievable. §

FAITH IN ACTION: Watch our Amazon to Action COP30 debrief webinar at <https://bit.ly/3MVCNAg>

Close Guantánamo Before It Gets Worse

The Trump administration aims to send thousands of immigrants to the Guantánamo Bay Detention Center where fifteen men remain in indefinite detention, 24 years since the hidden and abusive prison opened.

January 11 marks the 24th anniversary of the opening of the post-9/11 U.S. detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, long synonymous with torture, indefinite detention, and the erosion of fundamental human rights. In early 2025, the Trump Administration said it wanted to be able to hold 30,000 immigrants at Guantánamo. Since then, about 700 immigrants cycled through detention at Guantánamo, held in either the military detention facilities portion of the base or the adjacent Migrant Operations Center.

Of the 779 people imprisoned there since 9/11, only 15 remain. Of the 15, three have been cleared for transfer and three have never been charged with a crime. Despite recent efforts to resolve these cases through plea deals, those agreements are currently off the table, leaving cases stuck in pre-trial hearings with no resolution in sight.

A Legacy of Controversy

Established by the George W. Bush administration after the September 11 attacks, “GITMO” was designed to hold suspected terrorists and “enemy combatants.” The U.S. government initially argued that neither domestic nor international law applied there, triggering decades of legal and human rights controversies.

The faith community’s fears regarding the use of torture by the U.S. military were confirmed in 2004 with the release of photos of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib in Iraq. One of the most infamous photos was of a man standing on a thin box, his head hooded and his fingers extended out, connected to electrical wires. In response, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) was founded to expose torture at CIA “black sites” and Guantánamo and to call for the closure of these facilities.

Progress and Challenges

In 2014, after a decade of advocacy, the Senate Intelligence Committee released a report documenting post-9/11 torture. While the full 6,700-page report remains classified, a 500-page executive summary was released in the McCain-Feinstein Amendment. This legislation banned the CIA from using interrogation techniques not authorized in the Army Field Manual.

NRCAT has since expanded its mission to end solitary confinement in U.S. prisons. Under the UN’s “Nelson Mandela Rules,” solitary confinement exceeding 15 consecutive days is considered “prolonged” and may constitute

torture. NRCAT now partners with the ACLU and their “Unlock the Box” campaign to advocate for the federal End Solitary Confinement Act, which seeks to ban the practice for youth and implement rehabilitative alternatives.

Recent developments underscore the urgency for speaking out against torture and closing GITMO, including deplorable conditions in ICE facilities, the deportation of immigrants to third-party countries, and the administration’s stated desire to detain up to 30,000 immigrants at GITMO.

Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia has introduced resolutions in the Senate seeking information on the human rights practices of six countries to which the U.S. has reportedly deported immigrants who have no ties to those countries. A similar resolution regarding El Salvador failed in 2025. Using a process under Section 502B(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act, a Senator can force debate and a vote to scrutinize and restrict security aid to countries engaging in “gross violations of human rights,” requiring the State Department to report on these issues.

Even if the resolutions fail, they allow Senators to raise concerns on the floor about sending immigrants to places where they may be tortured. NRCAT has issued an action alert urging supporters to contact their Senators about it.

Speaking on Human Rights Day, Rev. T.C. Morrow, a United Methodist minister and NRCAT organizer, reflected on the spiritual and historical figures who fought for human dignity, from Moses and Isaiah to Gandhi and Eleanor Roosevelt, as well as current unsung heroes like pro bono lawyers, witnesses who record ICE arrests on their phones, and “survivors themselves who have shouldered the weight of detention and still turn towards life time and again.”

“The long arc of human rights work is carried by ordinary people making moral choices every day,” Rev. Morrow said. “Faith communities have always been a part of that arc, insisting that dignity is not optional.”

NRCAT is co-sponsoring vigils and rallies nationwide on January 11 and regularly on the first Wednesday of each month. If your religious organization would like to host or co-sponsor a Close Guantánamo event or to receive a “Close Guantánamo” banner, please contact Rev. T.C. Morrow, at tmorrow@nrcat.org. §

FAITH IN ACTION: Visit nrcat.org to join advocacy campaigns and to find resources for Torture Awareness Month in June.

UN Says Israel Has ‘De Facto State Policy’ of Torture

UN Committee Against Torture highlights allegations, including dog attacks and sexual violence, by Israeli military personnel, raising concern about war crimes.

The [UN Committee Against Torture report](#) released on November 28 details a series of profound concerns and recommendations regarding Israel's compliance with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Committee's findings address both the security challenges faced by Israel and the resulting human rights violations, particularly in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).

Condemnation and Disproportionality

The report opens by acknowledging the severe security threat to Israel and “unequivocally” condemning the October 7 attack. However, this recognition is immediately followed by noting “deep concern over the disproportionate nature of Israel's response to these attacks, which has resulted in a massive loss of human life and profound suffering for the Palestinian people.” This established the complex and urgent context for the Committee's review.

De Facto State Policy of Torture

One of the most serious allegations concerned “reports indicating a de facto State policy of organized and widespread torture and ill-treatment during the reporting period,” which the Committee noted had “gravely intensified since October 7,” suggesting a pattern of systemic abuse with official endorsement or tolerance, rather than isolated acts.

The Committee expressed concern about the living conditions imposed on the Palestinian population. It noted that various Israeli policies throughout its “continued unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,” if implemented in the manner alleged, “would amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading living conditions.” This expands the scope of potential violations beyond physical violence to encompass the effects of sustained restrictive policies on the dignity and welfare of the population under occupation.

Specific Violations and Legal Loopholes

It also highlighted several areas of grave concern reaching unprecedented levels, including the use of administrative detention, which allows detention without charge or trial, and unchecked settler violence against Palestinians.

A major focus of the Committee's recommendations was Israel's domestic legislation and legal practices, which it deemed fundamentally incompatible with its obligations under the Convention. It underscored that Israel “continues

to lack a distinct offense criminalizing torture,” a requirement for State Parties to the Convention.

The Committee criticized Israel's “necessity” defense, which permits public officials to be exempt from criminal culpability when “unlawful physical pressure is applied during interrogations,” stressing that justifications for torture or ill-treatment directly violates the Convention.

It also expressed concern over the continued use of undisclosed “special means” as a method of coercion in interrogations, noting that their secrecy makes accountability and independent oversight virtually impossible.

Urgent Recommendations

The Committee issued several urgent recommendations, the most immediate being for Israel to establish an “independent, impartial and effective ad hoc investigatory commission,” to review and investigate all allegations of torture and ill-treatment in the current armed conflict, and prosecute those responsible, including “superior officers.”

Crucially, the Committee made a direct demand for humanitarian action, urging Israel to ensure the “immediate entry of necessary humanitarian aid and aid workers into Gaza.” This recommendation was linked to the Committee's concerns about the suffering and cruel living conditions inflicted upon the Palestinian population.

Regarding legal reform, the Committee urged Israel to take three decisive steps:

1. **Enact a distinct criminal offense of torture** incorporating a definition consistent with the Convention.
2. **Provide information on the exact nature of the “special means”** employed in interrogations.
3. **Ensure that no exceptional circumstances are invoked to justify torture or ill-treatment**, closing the loophole created by the “necessity” defense.

In summary, the UN Committee Against Torture's findings on Israel represent a serious indictment of both its response to the October 7 attacks and its underlying legal framework regarding the prevention of torture. The report unequivocally demands accountability for alleged widespread abuse and systemic legal reforms to bring Israel into full compliance with its international obligations. §

FAITH IN ACTION: Tell Congress to pass the “Block the Bombs Act”, limiting weapons sales to Israel with Churches for Middle East Peace's action alert. <https://bit.ly/3MUU8JD>

Palestinian Christians Release Kairos II

IN NOVEMBER 2025, PALESTINIAN Christians released [Kairos Palestine II \(“A Moment of Truth: Faith in a Time of Genocide”\)](#), a 14-page update to the 2009 Kairos Palestine document, this time describing the situation in Gaza and Palestine as genocide and calling for a global Christian response of solidarity, resistance, and justice.

The statement was issued by Kairos Palestine, officially known as the Palestinian Christian Ecumenical Initiative. These Christian residents of Palestine assert that the current moment is not a “conflict” but rather a “genocide, ethnic cleansing and forced displacement” of a people suffering under “tyranny and an oppressive regime of settler colonialism and apartheid.”

The statement focuses heavily on the assault on Gaza, describing a war with massive casualties, the destruction of all components of life, and actions that “constitute genocide.” They see the war on Gaza as a continuation of the “Zionist project to seize all of Palestine, emptied of its Palestinian people.”

The statement condemns the unfolding actions as a “structural sin against God, against humanity, and against creation.” It challenges the global Church, particularly Western churches, expressing deep shock at those who “adopted the colonizer’s narrative or remain silent” in the face of what they call genocide.

Kairos Palestine explicitly rejects Christian Zionism, naming it a “theological distortion and a moral corruption” that promotes a “tribal, racist god of war and ethnic cleansing.” They call on the churches of the world to repudiate

this theology.

The authors outline a future not based on military power, but on the foundations of justice and equality. They reject the concept of a religious state that favors one citizen over another, instead hoping for a “civil, democratic state grounded in a culture of pluralism.”

The document offers a strategy for international solidarity: pressure, isolation, sanctions, and boycotts. It reaffirms the value of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, calling it an effective form of “creative resistance rooted in the logic of love and nonviolence.” It urges people of conscience to:

- Pressure their governments to ban arms exports to Israel.
- Call for the prosecution of war criminals at the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.
- Support prophetic Jewish voices that oppose Zionism, while boycotting dialogue with Zionist voices that support occupation and genocide.
- Visit Palestine to see the “living stones” (the local Christians) and “strengthen the steadfastness of the Palestinians and the Christian Palestinians” who face the profound threat to the birthplace of Christianity itself. §

FAITH IN ACTION: Follow Churches for Middle East Peace for education and advocacy on peace in the Holy Land. www.cmep.org

Pope Leo’s Message for Peace and Disarmament

THE WORLD IS STANDING AT a dangerous crossroads. As we enter the New Year, we are just weeks away from the expiration of the New START Treaty—the last remaining guardrail preventing an all-out nuclear arms race between the U.S. and Russia. This is just one of many broken relationships in the world today. To meet this fraught moment, Pope Leo has given us a vision for peace.

Don’t miss Pope Leo’s message for the World Day of Peace, available on the Vatican website. Describing the peace of Christ as “unarmed and disarming,” Leo presents a call to action centered on the concept of “disarmament”—not just of weapons, but of the human heart and modern technology. This prophetic call is what the world desperately needs right now—a world that is on the brink of a new nuclear arms race.

Please use the form on our website to tell Congress to speak out for extending the New START Treaty and reopening negotiations with Russia. If this treaty expires on February 5, 2026, there will be no legal limits on the world’s two largest nuclear arsenals for the first time in decades.

We need a groundswell of public pressure to ensure that members of Congress publicly support extending the treaty and demand a return to the negotiating table. §

FAITH IN ACTION: Read Pope Leo’s World Peace Day message, [available on the Vatican website](#). <https://bit.ly/3Ym3NLR> Tell Congress to support extending the New START treaty at https://maryknollogc.org/action/2026_new_start/

Cambodia and Thailand Land Conflict

Maryknoll lay missionary Hang Tran is in northern Cambodia providing care for people displaced by the recent violent border clashes between Thailand and Cambodia.

The root cause of the deadly clashes along the 508-mile land border between Thailand and Cambodia that has killed more than 30 people and displaced over one million goes back to colonial times when, in 1907, France drew the border between Siam (now Thailand) and French Indochina, which later divided into Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

The primary flashpoint is the area surrounding the Preah Vihear Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage site, located on a mountain range that provides a natural border between the two countries. After Cambodia gained independence from France in 1953, Thai forces occupied the temple. Cambodia took the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague, which ruled in 1962 that the temple itself belonged to Cambodia but left the surrounding area undefined, creating a contested zone that remains disputed. This ambiguity creates what Thailand calls the “disputed area” and what Cambodia considers its integral territory.

While the territorial dispute is the root cause, violent clashes have been triggered by specific political and nationalistic events. In 2008, Cambodia’s successful bid to register Preah Vihear as a UNESCO World Heritage site fueled nationalistic protests in Thailand. In 2025, the death of a Thai soldier who stepped on a landmine in the disputed zone led to ground fighting and airstrikes.

Although a comprehensive peace agreement was signed in October 2025, brokered by Malaysia, new border incidents occurred in early December, escalating into shelling, air strikes, and drone attacks. Both nations blame each other for initiating hostilities and claim self-defense.

Throughout, civilians on both sides of the border have borne the brunt of the violence. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced. Infrastructure, including hospitals, has been destroyed. Reports indicate that Cambodians working in Thailand have faced threats, while Thais have been assaulted by Cambodians in South Korea.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church has strived to help the local populations, providing food and temporary shelter to thousands of families on both sides of the border fleeing the renewed fighting.

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Thailand has [asked](#) “all dioceses, religious orders, Catholic organizations, and all benevolent Christians to show love and compassion to our brothers and sisters who are suffering through donations according to their ability via Caritas Thailand.”

Across the border in Cambodia, Bishop Olivier Schmitthaeusler, the Vicar Apostolic of Phnom Penh, has [asked](#) parishes to organize Masses and prayer services imploring peace.

Pope Leo XIV [appealed](#) at his December 10 general audience for a swift resolution to the crisis.

“I am deeply saddened by the news of the renewed conflict along the border between Thailand and Cambodia, which has claimed civilian lives and forced thousands of people to flee their homes,” he [said](#).

“I express my closeness in prayer to these dear peoples, and I call on the parties to immediately cease fire and resume dialogue.”

Caritas Cambodia has been collaborating with national and international organizations to provide emergency relief at 10 internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps. Recently, [Maryknoll lay missionary Hang Tran](#) joined a Caritas team in northern Cambodia to assist in three IDP camps hosted by local Buddhist temples. The services include temporary shelters, clean water, latrines, sanitation materials, and psychosocial care and support.

“My part was supporting emotional well-being through drawing and coloring. I made drawings of animals, houses, trees, etc. for the youth to color. In these moments, the kids were occupied with nature and familiar things that they can create with crayons and papers.”

Some of the children, Hang said, displayed symptoms of trauma from their experiences of hearing loud explosions and fleeing their homes in search of safety, such as difficulty sleeping or nightmares.

Some of the older adults are using skills they learned during previous wars. They can “recognize the directions of weaponry being fired by sound and were skillful in leading others to natural caves or underground bunkers for protection,” Hang said.

As of late December, tensions remain high, with Thai authorities seeking to repatriate up to 6,000 citizens stranded after Cambodia closed a key border checkpoint in the city of Poipet. §

FAITH IN ACTION: Find updates from Maryknoll Lay Missioners in Cambodia at www.mklm.org

G20 Summit in South Africa Holds the Line

Under threat of fracture, world leaders renewed their commitment to multilateralism while avoiding major decisions on debt relief for the Global South.

When leaders of the world's major economies gathered in Johannesburg for the G20 summit in November—the first ever held on African soil—few expected consensus. Deep geopolitical rifts, mounting global inequality, worsening debt crises, and the unprecedented boycott by the United States all cast long shadows over South Africa's presidency. Yet against the odds, the summit produced a leaders' declaration supported by all G20 members present, marking a rare and fragile victory for multilateral cooperation in an era of fragmentation.

For many observers, the significance of the Johannesburg summit lies less in bold new commitments than in the fact that the G20 did not fracture. With the United States absent and openly warning other countries not to endorse the declaration, South Africa succeeded in rallying overwhelming support around shared language of debt, inequality, climate change, and development. As one analyst put it, in today's geopolitical climate, "holding the line" may itself be an achievement.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa framed the summit as a moment to place the priorities of Africa and the Global South at the center of global economic governance. Those priorities are urgent. Across Africa, debt burdens have reached their highest levels in two decades, forcing governments to spend more on servicing loans than on health, education, or climate resilience. According to UN data, Africa's public debt reached \$1.8 trillion in 2022, while illicit financial flows and debt servicing together drain nearly \$180 billion annually from the continent.

Against this backdrop, the G20 declaration's recognition of debt distress matters. Leaders reiterated their commitment to improving the G20's Common Framework for Debt Treatments, calling for a process that is more "predictable, timely, orderly, and coordinated." While modest, this language signals acknowledgment that the current system is failing. Since the framework was launched in 2020, only four countries—Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Zambia—have completed debt restructurings, even as more than two dozen countries face debt crises.

Faith-based and civil society advocates have long argued that incremental reforms are not enough. Many debt justice advocates noted that the declaration stops short of proposing deeper, systemic solutions, such as a fair and transparent sovereign debt workout mechanism or stronger accountability for private creditors and credit

rating agencies.

If the debt outcomes were limited, the summit broke new ground in elevating inequality. A G20-commissioned report described today's situation as an "inequality emergency," noting that since 2000, the richest 1% have captured over 40% of new global wealth, while the poorest half of humanity received just 1%. The report's authors warned that extreme concentrations of wealth translate into extreme concentrations of power, undermining democracy and social cohesion.

One proposal to address this imbalance—a global inequality panel modeled on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—did not make it into the final declaration. Yet it quickly gained political momentum, with leaders from South Africa, Brazil, and Spain pledging to build a coalition to advance it. For advocates of economic justice, this represents a small but meaningful opening in a system that has long treated inequality as a secondary concern rather than a structural crisis.

Climate justice featured prominently in Johannesburg, particularly because the U.S. absence removed long-standing red lines. The declaration recognized climate change's "urgency and seriousness", reaffirmed the Paris Agreement, and emphasized the need for climate finance, disaster risk reduction, and adaptation support for vulnerable countries. U.S. absence and isolation may have made consensus easier in Johannesburg. Without the need to accommodate Washington's objections, other leaders were able to move forward together, underscoring that multilateral cooperation is possible even when powerful actors step away.

At the same time, the future remains uncertain. With the United States assuming the G20 presidency, officials have signaled plans to narrow the group's focus and sideline issues such as climate, health, and inequality. There is a real risk that the modest gains achieved in Johannesburg could stall or be reversed, particularly if key voices from the Global South are marginalized.

Still, the Johannesburg summit offers an important lesson. In a world marked by conflict, climate crisis, and widening inequality, spaces for dialogue and cooperation remain indispensable. The G20 is far from perfect, and it cannot substitute for more inclusive institutions like the United Nations. But when used strategically, it can amplify the voices of the Global South and keep justice-oriented issues on the global agenda. §

We Can End AIDS by 2030

Experts believe ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 is possible with enough political will, funding, and access to tools for prevention and treatment.

Today, 40.8 million people are living with HIV globally, 1.3 million new infections occurred in 2024, and 9.2 million people still don't access treatment. A failure to reach the 2030 global HIV targets in the next Global AIDS Strategy led by UNAIDS could result in an additional 3.3 million new HIV infections between 2025 and 2030.

UNAIDS (Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS) is the leading UN agency coordinating the global effort to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, uniting 11 UN organizations to drive a comprehensive response, focusing on prevention, treatment, rights, and data to eliminate new infections, discrimination, and AIDS-related deaths.

The United States had been a key partner and member of the UNAIDS since it began operating in 1996. But that relationship shifted significantly in 2025 under the direction of the Trump administration's "America First" global health strategy which calls on countries to take more fiscal responsibility for their own health. The United States began demanding bilateral agreements with countries that receive U.S. health funding, with Kenya being one of the first countries to sign such an agreement. The future of U.S. involvement in UNAIDS points toward more of these bilateral agreements where receiving countries take on leadership of their national HIV response by increasing domestic funding and improving health systems, while still receiving some U.S. resources to meet 2030 global AIDS targets.

Ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 is possible.

According to UNAIDS, the AIDS epidemic can end if we continue to improve access to testing, treatment, prevention, and by addressing stigma. After 40 years of research, long-lasting HIV-prevention injections now exist, removing the need for daily pills. People with HIV can live long, healthy lives with medication, and some have been functionally cured under specific medical circumstances.

Inequalities still exist, putting lives at risk.

The latest report from UNAIDS on the global HIV response details the far-reaching consequences of changes by the United States and other leading countries in 2025. Four decades into what was historic levels of cooperation, inequalities still persist for the most basic services like testing, treatment, and prevention, and even more so for new medications and technologies.

That is why UNAIDS calls on leaders and partners to:

- Reaffirm global solidarity, multilateralism and the collective commitment to fight and end AIDS.
- Maintain funding for the response.
- Invest in innovation, including affordable long-acting prevention and treatment options.

After decades of struggle, the global HIV response is close to ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. The world has come too far to let this historic progress unravel.

Prayer by the Maryknoll AIDS Taskforce:

*God of all compassion,
Comfort your sons and daughters
Who live with HIV.
Spread over us all your quilt of mercy,
Love and peace.*

*Open our eyes to your presence
Reflected in their faces.
Open our ears to your truth
Echoing in their hearts.*

*Give us the strength
To weep with the grieving,
To walk with the lonely,
To stand with the depressed.*

*May our love mirror your love
For those who live in fear,
Who live under stress and
Who suffer rejection.*

*Mothering, fathering God
Grant rest to those who have died
And hope to all who live with HIV.*

*God of life, help us to find the cure now
And help us to build a world in which
No one dies alone and where
Everyone lives accepted
Wanted and loved.
Amen. §*

FAITH IN ACTION: Tell Congress to continue to fund life-saving HIV/AIDS programs. <https://bit.ly/49h1wGO>

Resources

1. **US Escalation in the Caribbean and Latin America – Live Updates:** A comprehensive, up-to-date way to track what's happening with Venezuela. <https://bit.ly/4junlr0>
2. **Christmas Message from the Holy Land:** A collective Christmas message from Jerusalem Voice for Justice, including reflections by His Beatitude Michel Sabbah and Fr. David Neuhaus, SJ, regarding the situation in Palestine. <https://bit.ly/4bdgTCw>
3. **Christmas Message from the Catholic Bishops of Haiti:** The Catholic Bishops of Haiti offer their Christmas message to the people of Haiti, focusing on hope and solidarity amidst challenges. <https://bit.ly/3MSwKfU>
4. **Article: “Where Do the USAID Legal Battles Stand?”:** Analysis by DevEx on the ongoing legal struggles surrounding USAID and its implications for development work, published Dec. 3, 2025. <https://bit.ly/45msiw4>
5. **Pope Leo’s World Day of Peace Message - “Towards an Unarmed and Disarming Peace”:** Pope Leo’s annual message for the World Day of Peace, urging peace and disarmament for a harmonious world, issued on January 1, 2025. <https://bit.ly/49iLqfA>
6. **Two-Minute Summary of Pope Leo’s Peace Message:** A brief summary by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on Pope Leo’s World Day of Peace message. <https://bit.ly/3L5F9Mp>
7. **Five Takeaways from Dilexi Te by Pope Leo:** A summary of key takeaways from Dilexi Te, Pope Leo’s apostolic exhortation, written by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. <https://bit.ly/4jsJkyG>
8. **Christmas Hope for Sudan Action Alert:** Tell Congress to take action to protect lives in Sudan <https://bit.ly/4ssulZI>
9. **Robert Ellsberg on “Publishing in Service to the World Church”:** Robert Ellsberg reflects on his career at Orbis Books, sharing insights on publishing in service to the world church. Recorded by the Cushwa Center at the University of Notre Dame on Nov. 4, 2025. <https://bit.ly/3L9yhO4>
10. **Archbishop Timothy Broglio’s Statement on U.S. Military Strikes Near Venezuela:** Archbishop Broglio speaks out against U.S. military interventions near Venezuela in response to recent boat strikes in the Caribbean. <https://bit.ly/49iNggq>
11. **Video: “Uncharted Waters: U.S. Military Action in the Caribbean”:** A discussion hosted by WOLA on U.S. military interventions in the Caribbean and their wider implications, recorded Nov. 14, 2025. <https://bit.ly/4qdiHjF>
12. **Campaign to Write Letters to Political Prisoners in the Philippines:** Join the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP) to write letters advocating for political prisoners in the Philippines. <https://bit.ly/3N2cvfN>
13. **Webinar: “How to Advance Human Rights in the Current Context”:** A discussion by NRCAT on advancing human rights, held on Human Rights Day, Dec. 10, 2025. <https://bit.ly/4qu2Tc0>
14. **Podcast: “The Grim Side of El Salvador’s ‘Security Model’”:** A conversation with Beatriz Magaloni on the impact of El Salvador’s security measures on the country’s citizens, hosted by WOLA on Oct. 9, 2025. <https://bit.ly/45xpWUM>
15. **New Report on Honduras Elections:** The Organization of American States releases a new report on the recent elections in Honduras and their implications for human rights. <https://bit.ly/49APbOR>
16. **International Rescue Committee’s Emergency Watchlist for 2026:** The IRC’s annual humanitarian crisis prediction, focusing on countries like Sudan, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and South Sudan for 2026. <https://bit.ly/4jsKmyy>
17. **International Support for Metal Mining Ban in El Salvador:** Global faith organizations express support for El Salvador’s national ban on metal mining and its implications for the environment and people. <https://bit.ly/4aG3BhR>
18. **Advocacy to Address Mining Pollution in Peru:** Derechos Humanos y Medio Ambiente-Puno (DHUMA) leads efforts to address the environmental and human impacts of mining pollution in Peru. <https://bit.ly/4pWYoa0>
19. **Symposium: “Reimagining Economy: For People and Planet”:** Join the Symposium hosted by Siena University on **February 5, 2026**, exploring integral ecology and a new vision for the global economy. Free virtual registration. <https://bit.ly/3NpTG6c>