

# March-April 2026 | VOL. 51, NO. 2

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# Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

*Peace, Social Justice, and Integrity of Creation*

Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers • Maryknoll Sisters • Maryknoll Lay Missioners

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

# Witnessing ‘Neighborism’ amid the Siege of Minnesota

*As U.S. federal immigration enforcement turned violent, a civic culture of “neighborism” emerged in the Twin Cities. Greg Darr, Vocations Minister for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, reports from Minnesota.*

Minneapolis – the “City of Lakes” – has become, in recent years, more poignantly known for its curbside memorials – riotous islands of flowers, votive candles, signs, poetry, letters, teddy bears and photos that mark the open, communal wounds left by armed violence. One still flourishes from the 2020 killing of George Floyd by police. Another remains, in part, from last year’s mass shooting that killed two children and wounded thirty others at nearby Annunciation Catholic Church.

Two more curbside memorials have emerged in the weeks following the violence of “Operation Metro Surge”; one for Renée Good, the other for Alex Pretti. Their shooting deaths, roughly two weeks apart in January, by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, are a tragic addition to Minneapolis’ story.

Both Ms. Good and Mr. Pretti were 37 years old and U.S. citizens. Both were nonviolent legal observers acting within their constitutional rights to witness and document ICE’s violent actions. Both sought to protect their immigrant neighbors. And, in the wake of their killings by ICE agents, both were labeled by the federal government as “domestic terrorists”. Their curbside memorials, however, tell a different story – one of compassion and concern for the welfare of their immigrant neighbors. And, they point to a different way forward for our communities and our nation.

Operation Metro Surge represents the largest influx of armed federal forces against a U.S. state’s residents since the Civil War. Starting on Dec. 1, 2025, it promised, in President Trump’s words, to bring “reckoning” and “retribution” to the people of Minnesota. By January 26, some 3,000 federal agents were active in the state, largely concentrated in the Twin Cities— more than the combined police forces of Minneapolis, St. Paul and nearly a dozen nearby suburban departments. The operation also drew unprecedented levels of government-sanctioned violence and economic upheaval to communities throughout the state.

The Surge also sparked something else – a completely organic grassroots-initiated outpouring of support for Minnesota’s immigrant communities and those protecting them. This support includes rallies, rapid response teams and mutual aid organized by a coalition of churches, schools and businesses. Over 30,000 Minnesotans have

trained as legal observers, with artists lending creative vision to the movement. Among these efforts is Leo’s Towing, a small company that returns, free of charge, vehicles abandoned on roadways after drivers are seized by ICE. Another initiative, “Haven Watch Minnesota”, accompanies those released from detention into the extreme cold, often at night, without ID, money, phone or a way home.

As political leaders faltered, ordinary citizens stepped into the void. Whether acting on a single street or across the state, Minnesotans report that their primary motivation isn’t just ‘protecting democracy’—it is the deeply personal experience of finding community. My own parish, St. Joan of Arc Catholic Community, recently saw participation double in its “Welcome the Stranger” ministry. In reaching out to immigrant neighbors, new participants are discovering multiple ways to serve alongside a renewed sense of purpose, community, and even joy. Adam Serwer of The Atlantic summed up, *“If the Minnesota resistance has an overarching ideology, you could call it “neighborism”—a commitment to protecting the people around you, no matter who they are or where they came from... Minnesotans are insisting that their neighbors are their neighbors whether they were born in Minneapolis or Mogadishu. That is, arguably, a deeply Christian philosophy, one apparently loathed by some of the most powerful Christians in America.”*

Following Renée Good’s death, I visited a Somali-owned shop selling items from their culture. As a white Minnesotan and returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner in East Africa, I have always felt at home there. As I reached for a small flag of Somalia, the shop owner interrupted me, saying, “That flag is my gift to you. But, if you are going to take it, then you must also take this one.” He then reached into his overflowing bin of banners and, to my surprise, pulled out an American flag. He put it in my hand, saying, “Brother, this is the flag of our home – yours and mine. You cannot take that flag without taking this one. This one shows we are family.”

Like the flags at curbside memorials in Minnesota, we each bring our own remembrance to these uncertain times. The result may appear chaotic, but it’s in these places that the grieving experience consolation, the seeking find hope, and we discover, among our neighbors and family. Greg’s memorial photos available at <https://tinyurl.com/y3pu6nrx> §

# Praying With Our Feet For Immigrant Rights

*A season of holy resistance by faith groups is in full swing in Washington, D.C., against current federal immigration enforcement practices and funding.*

In the early months of 2026, the streets of Washington, D.C., became a landscape of prophetic witness. The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joined hands with Faith in Action and a broad coalition of interfaith partners for the “Praying with Our Feet” campaign—a sustained mobilization of prayer and protest focused on our nation’s social policies.

As a Catholic social justice advocacy organization, we chose to cosponsor and participate in these actions because our faith leaves no room for neutrality when human dignity is at stake, including the dignity of migrants and refugees. To “pray with our feet” is to acknowledge that our spiritual lives are inseparable from our public commitment to the “least of these.”

The primary catalyst for this campaign was the FY2026 federal budget negotiations. The “Praying with Our Feet” cosponsoring organizations stood in firm opposition to proposed increases in funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

Based on the belief that a federal budget is a moral document, dozens of faith groups participated to raise a strong call for justice to Congress. When resources are diverted away from humanitarian aid, housing, and legal pathways for citizenship toward increased immigrant detention and militarized enforcement, we are failing in our duty to protect human dignity and the sanctity of the family. Our participation was an act of “holy resistance” against the criminalization of those seeking safety.

The campaign was defined by two major days of action at the U.S. Capitol Building.

On January 29, the campaign held an interfaith prayer service at a local Lutheran church in Washington, to ground their actions in faithful witness to peace and love. Following the prayer service, a group of more than one hundred people, including Christian ministers, Jewish rabbis, and Muslim imams, marched to the U.S. Capitol where around 50 of them occupied the lobby of one of the Senate buildings in an act of nonviolent civil disobedience to signal to Congress that people of faith will not remain silent while immigrant families are separated by overly aggressive detention and deportation policies.

On February 12, the momentum continued as a delegation of faith leaders from Minnesota came to Washington to lead a press conference and rally outside of the U.S. Capitol

Building and meet privately with members of Congress. They expressed the depth of suffering that immigrants and citizens are experiencing in Minnesota due to the aggressive immigration enforcement by federal agents since last December. Faith leaders from other parts of the country and representatives of religious organizations in Washington, DC, joined in to highlight the national scope of this call for justice, showing that the demand for a compassionate immigration system resonates far beyond Minnesota.

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joined this campaign to amplify our voice for the voiceless. We are strengthened by the diversity of our partners, which include the U.S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Faith in Action, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, the Ignatian Solidarity Network, Faithful America, Pax Christi USA, Muslim Public Affairs Council, National Council of Jewish Women, Church World Service, Sojourners, and Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice, United Church of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the InterFaith Council of Metropolitan Washington.

As we reflect on this season of advocacy, we are reminded of the words of Pope Francis: “A faith that does not trouble us is a troubled faith.” The Praying with Our Feet campaign troubled the status quo in Congress by asserting that the migrant is not a line item in a budget, but a sibling in Christ.

Though the budget battles continue, our feet remain ready to act. We invite all our supporters to continue the pressure by contacting their members of Congress to tell them we need a budget that reflects the values of welcome, protection, and integration of our immigrant neighbors. §

**FAITH IN ACTION:** Tell Congress to ensure immigrant enforcement respects human dignity. <https://tinyurl.com/mu7k9fv3>



Hundreds gather at the Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Washington, DC, on January 29, 2026. (Photo/Olivia Engling)

# Bishops Across Americas Name Shared Concerns

**ELEVEN CATHOLIC BISHOPS FROM** the United States, Canada, and Latin America met in Tampa, Florida, for a biennial gathering aimed at strengthening continental unity. The meeting brought together representatives from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), and the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council (CELAM).

Following a three-day retreat (February 15–17), the bishops issued a joint statement titled “Message to the People of God on Pilgrimage in the Americas,” reaffirming their commitment to “walk together” as one Church. Despite the diverse national contexts of North, Central, and South America, the leaders highlighted common pastoral challenges that require a coordinated response.

A primary focus for the group was the “profoundly human reality” of migration. The bishops asserted that “no migrant

is a stranger to the Church” and called for continental coordination to support individuals from their points of origin through transit to their final destinations.

The bishops also emphasized a shared concern for the poor and the protection of Indigenous peoples’ rights. They discussed the “painful scourge” of human trafficking and “narco-culture,” as well as the growing polarization wounding public discourse and social cohesion. Finally, the bishops urged civil authorities to implement policies that safeguard the inalienable dignity of every person, particularly regarding migration legislation.

The gathering concluded with a call for parishes and families to act as “visible signs that fraternity is possible.” By focusing on a “synodal way” of governance and ministry, the bishops sought to bridge cultural and national borders, offering a message of hope and shared responsibility to the faithful across the Americas. §

# New Era of Solidarity for U.S. and African Bishops

**IN EARLY FEBRUARY 2026, CATHOLIC** bishops from the United States and the African continent met in Washington, D.C., to formalize a new era of spiritual and social partnership. The centerpieces of this gathering were the release of a landmark joint statement, “[Brothers and Sisters in Hope](#),” and



Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. (Photo/ThadeusOfNazereth, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons)

a Mass for Solidarity held at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

The joint statement was issued by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences

of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). The document advocates for robust U.S. foreign aid to African nations; protecting human dignity by emphasizing “people over politics,” especially in regions affected by conflict or environmental degradation; and equitable trade regarding Africa’s critical minerals (such as cobalt and lithium), urging that these resources benefit local communities rather than fueling exploitation and child labor.

The bishops celebrated a Mass at the Basilica to give liturgical expression to their partnership. Bishop Stephen Dami Mamza of Nigeria, who delivered the [homily](#), described the U.S. and African Churches as “two lungs of the same body, breathing the same Spirit.”

The liturgy incorporated diverse cultural elements, featuring hymns in languages such as Swahili, Lingala, and Bété. Following the Mass, the congregation processed to the Chapel of Our Mother of Africa in the crypt of the Basilica for a litany honoring African saints, reinforcing the message that the African diaspora is a vital gift to the global Church.

This event marked a strategic shift toward a more reciprocal relationship, moving away from a “one-sided” view of humanitarian aid flowing from the United States to the African continent toward a model of mutual theological and pastoral exchange. §

# Reflection: Walking for Peace with Buddhist monks

On Feb. 10, a group of nineteen Theravada Buddhist monks completed a 108-day, 2,300-mile “Walk for Peace” from their center for meditation in Fort Worth, Texas, to Washington, D.C., to share a message of peace, compassion and nonviolence. Stefan Andre Waligur, founder of [Community of Peace](#) in Louisa, Virginia, a Taize-style intentional community, wrote the following reflection on his experience accompanying the monks on their walk that day and participating in an interfaith service of welcome for the monks at the National Cathedral.

The final miles of the Buddhist monks’ “Walk for Peace” in Washington, D.C., were a joyful walk. I loved it! Together with my dear friend Bridget, we ate lunch with the monks before walking together to the National Cathedral. The place was packed, and it was a feast.

Regarding the walk, I can tell you this – those fellows walk at a good pace! I had trouble keeping up. Seeing



Stefan Waligur and friends walking with Buddhist monks in D.C. on Feb. 10, 2026.

the expressions of love and kindness on the faces of the people as we passed by was deeply moving. I was happy to see the monks. I was deeply moved to see the people who lined the road. Thank you, dear venerable people!

During lunch, we sat with members of the monks’ support team. They shared

some of their experiences on the road, starting all the way from Fort Worth, Texas. [Note: Most notably, one of the monks was severely injured in a traffic accident while participating in the early days of the walk, resulting in the loss of one of his legs.]

These venerable people who make up the support team work behind the scenes and get very little recognition. But without them, the monks would not be able to do what they do. So please give honor and thanks to and for these behind-the-scenes saints.

For me, the main message I received was a profound affirmation of the beauty and power of human goodness. This message shone brightly from both the people gathered and the monks who walked.

“The infinite goodness of the human heart,” Brother Roger Schutz, founder of Taize, used to say. There is within us all a source of goodness, of kindness, of compassion. Drink deeply from this well. Live from this wellspring. What is this source? For those who cherish the Jewish/Christian

tradition, it is the *imago Dei*, the image of God. God made us, says Genesis, in the very image of God. It is a beautiful image. A good image. A source of compassion, of wisdom, and love within.

“Today is my peaceful day.” This teaching, shared repeatedly by the monks at evening events during their walk across the country, is helpful. We can add...today is my compassionate day. Our intentions at the beginning of the day and throughout the day are like a guiding light. Today is my joyful day. We can add whatever descriptor we need. Today is my day of trust...of hope...of gratitude... We intentionally set the course for our day.

Every day here at Community of Peace in Virginia, we set the tone for the day by asking the question: how can we love the world today? It’s a good guiding question. On Fridays, every Friday, we say: this is my silent day. We practice silence every Friday.

The lifestyle of the Buddhist monks includes significant periods of silence. We can learn from this. What is our relationship with silence? How can we deepen our silent times? It is in silence that we can explore our inner life, our heart and mind. Just a little bit of silence in the morning goes a long way. In the silence, we can hear our hearts. We can open ourselves to the source of peace within. We can listen to the One who calls us beloved. Everything begins in silence. Go there. As often as possible.

Finally, many are asking: What now? How can the inspiration of this moment continue into the days ahead? I’ll share my own thoughts on this in another post. I’d love to hear from you regarding this question: How will you continue this walk for peace in your life? What new possibilities are you seeing for a more peaceful life?

I am feeling gratitude and excitement for this moment. It is an extraordinary moment. A moment I believe we all needed. All good things come from God. I give thanks. May we continue to be inspired and live more peacefully in this world. May it be so! §

**FAITH IN ACTION:** You are welcome to share your thoughts about the walk for peace with Stefan using the form on the Community of Peace website <https://tinyurl.com/yw29sd7f>

# Venezuela: Solidarity in the aftermath of U.S. attack

The [January 3 U.S. attack on Venezuela](#) and capture of President Nicolás Maduro continue to have dramatic reverberations inside Venezuela and globally. The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) has been following events together with partner organizations in Latin America and the United States.

MOGC senior program officers Lisa Sullivan and Dan Moriarty led a webinar, "[Venezuela: Behind the Headlines](#)," on January 8, in which Sullivan, a returned Maryknoll Lay Missioner who lived for 30 years in Venezuela, shared perspectives from people on the ground. That presentation led to others with international partner organizations, including a virtual gathering of North and South Americans to explore new structures for solidarity between faith groups in Latin America and the U.S.

Delcy Rodriguez, Maduro's vice president, is now acting president of Venezuela. She and the rest of the repressive apparatus of the Maduro regime are still firmly in place. Armed "colectivos" patrolled the streets in the wake of the U.S. attack, threatening anyone who spoke in favor of it.

There have been a few encouraging signs – some, but not most, political prisoners [have been released](#). But Rodriguez was sworn in as acting president, maintaining that Maduro is still the rightful president. If she were named president, the Venezuelan Constitution dictates that she would have to call for elections. By remaining as acting president, she can remain in power at least through U.S. takes over control the end of the year.

President Trump did not mention elections or human rights once during his press conference the day after the strike. He mentioned the released prisoners in his February 24th State of the Union address, but did not mention democracy or human rights more broadly. Instead, he has repeatedly spoken about oil.

Sullivan poses the question: is Venezuela really escaping dictatorship, or simply being refashioned into a new, U.S. petro-client state? She recounts the long history of Venezuela's natural resources being exploited by foreign powers, and how the government of Hugo Chavez, who took power in 1999 and, at a time of record-breaking international oil prices, was able to turn the country's oil wealth into historic social programs for impoverished Venezuelans who had been ignored by previous governments. But "Chavismo" devolved into authoritarianism, particularly under the [dictatorial rule of President Maduro](#) after Chavez's death in 2013. Mismanagement and the decline of global oil prices meant leaner times for Venezuela, but U.S. economic sanctions turned those pressures into a full-blown crisis. By 2018, the country was suffering from the largest peacetime economic collapse in history – the equivalent of three Great Depressions. The average Venezuelan

lost 20 pounds, and Sullivan herself turned to community farming, working with youth in her neighborhood to eke every calorie they could from the earth as 1.7 million percent inflation made buying enough food impossible. Roughly one in four Venezuelans fled the country, with only a small fraction migrating to the United States.

Now, it seems the principal interest of the United States in Venezuela is to bring the country's vast oil reserves – the world's largest – back under the control of U.S. corporations. Trump promises that the profits will benefit U.S. citizens first, but also Venezuelans. It is not clear how quickly or effectively the country's oil can actually be extracted, or how the two governments plan to share the resulting profits with their citizens.

Sullivan reports that her many contacts in Venezuela are feeling some hope with Maduro gone, but also much anxiety. House Speaker Mike Johnson told reporters after being briefed on the attack, "This is not regime change; this is a demand for change in behavior by a regime." As some of the most powerful and repressive figures from the Maduro government remain in place, Delcy Rodriguez meets with the heads of the CIA and U.S. Southern Command, the U.S. takes control of Venezuelan oil revenue, and illegal U.S. military strikes on civilian boats in the Caribbean continue unabated, it is unclear what kind of change the U.S. ultimately seeks, and what it will mean for ordinary Venezuelans. Meanwhile, factions within Venezuela could split, and the threat of further U.S. military intervention hovers should the government prove an inadequate partner for U.S. interests.

MOGC is collaborating with the Churches and Mining Network and other partners across the Americas to discuss what international solidarity means today. Latin American partners were quick to draw connections between [U.S. military interventionism in Venezuela and elsewhere](#), and the militarism of ICE raids on display in Minneapolis and other U.S. cities. Solidarity means not forgetting the plight of the Venezuelan people, including among migrants. But, whereas U.S.-Latin America solidarity has traditionally involved U.S. civil society groups supporting Latin Americans suffering U.S.-fueled violence, today, a new South-North solidarity is emerging in response to authoritarian violence in the United States, Venezuela, and beyond. §

**FAITH IN ACTION:** Use and share our Prayer for the People of Venezuela. <https://tinyurl.com/4ed5skym>

# Five Takeaways for Latin America in the U.S. Foreign Aid Budget

*The following is a summary of an article written by Maureen Meyer for the Washington Office on Latin America on Feb. 19, 2026.*

**T**he FY2026 U.S. foreign aid budget reflects a significant tug-of-war between the Trump administration's attempt to dismantle traditional aid structures and a bipartisan Congressional effort to maintain U.S. influence in Latin America. Here are the five key takeaways of the new foreign aid budget regarding human rights, democracy, and regional support for Latin America.

## **Congress Defends Democracy and Human Rights**

Despite the Trump administration's attempts to eliminate various democracy funds, Congress asserted that these programs are fundamental to U.S. national security. Congress appropriated \$205 million for the Human Rights and Democracy Fund and \$315 million for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), both of which the Trump administration sought to scrap. Also, Congress allocated a total of \$2.175 billion for democracy programs globally, with specific carve-outs for Venezuela (\$50 million), Cuba (\$25 million), and Nicaragua (\$15 million).

In Colombia, Congress earmarked \$15 million specifically for human rights programs and \$25 million for Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities, countering the Trump administration's pivot away from these priorities.

## **Strict Conditions on Regional Assistance**

Congress maintained rigorous "conditions" on aid, meaning governments must meet specific benchmarks to receive full funding. In Central America, 50% of select funds for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are withheld until the State Department certifies these nations are combating corruption and protecting journalists and activists. For Colombia, 25% of counter-narcotics funding and 20% of military financing are tied to progress in reducing coca cultivation and prosecuting human rights violations. Notably, for Mexico, human rights conditions are absent. Current restrictions focus almost exclusively on water delivery to the U.S. and the dismantling of fentanyl-trafficking cartels.

## **Organized Crime Remains a Priority**

While the administration proposed a "strategic pause" in new funding for International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE), Congress opted for robust support, appropriating \$1.4 billion to be used worldwide, far exceeding the administration's \$125 million request. To combat fentanyl use, at least \$150 million is specifically mandated

to counter the flow of synthetic drugs and precursors into the United States.

## **Support for Regional Bodies and Grassroots Development**

Despite executive orders reviewing the utility of international organizations, key regional bodies survived:

*Organization of American States:* Congress provided \$46.5 million for OAS, prioritizing its role in monitoring elections and protecting human rights.

*Inter-American Foundation:* The IAF, which focuses on localized community development, received \$29 million. While lower than previous years, this ensures the agency's survival after the administration attempted to rescind its budget last year.

## **Shift in Migrant and Refugee Assistance**

The budget saw a major structural overhaul, consolidating various accounts into a new "International Humanitarian Assistance" fund that Congress gave \$5.4 billion, which is nearly \$3 billion more than requested, but specific allocations for Latin American migrants remain vague.

Congress continues to view foreign aid as a tool to "deter unlawful migration" by supporting resettlement in host countries (like those housing Venezuelan refugees). Conversely, the Trump administration has signaled that with border crossings down, the migration crisis is "over," showing little interest in funding secondary migration prevention.

## **The Challenge Going Forward**

By passing this budget, Congress has asserted its independence. However, the path forward remains rocky. The Trump administration has previously shown a willingness to disregard funding directives, and the State Department's capacity is weakened by massive staff cuts and the absence of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Moving forward, Congress must look beyond "good intentions" and exercise robust oversight to ensure these funds are actually spent as legislated. §

*Read the full article at <https://tinyurl.com/4cyk5km5>. Learn more by watching the 30-minute video "Inside the U.S. foreign aid breakthrough and \$2B commitment to the UN" published on Jan. 15, 2026, by Devex, an independent media company covering issues that matter to the global development community. <https://tinyurl.com/52ev4tcc>*

# Beyond the Cuts: What U.S. Foreign Aid Survives

*In a definitive act of oversight, Congress restored billions in funding for global health and democracy, even as the traditional structures of U.S. foreign aid begin to dissolve. Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns Program Associate Fellow Mark Joyce reports.*

On February 3, President Donald Trump signed into law the FY 2026 budget, which funds the government through September and includes \$50 billion in foreign assistance spending, a 16% cut from 2025. Nevertheless, this budget represents bipartisan support for foreign assistance in Congress and is \$19 billion more than the White House requested.

Congress appropriated funds for global health, food security, and democracy promotion with provisions that affect the global AIDS program PEPFAR and the flagship U.S. humanitarian program Food for Peace. While this budget shows the resilience of bipartisan commitment to foreign assistance in Congress, it remains silent on the dismantling of USAID, with legacy USAID programs being transferred to the State Department and Department of Agriculture (USDA).

In a [statement](#), the anti-hunger Christian advocacy organization Bread for the World celebrated the budget: “This funding will fuel vital nutrition programs that provide emergency assistance to millions of children and families around the world suffering from severe acute malnutrition.”

[Christy Gleason](#), Chief Policy Officer for Save the Children, said, “The way we invest in children reflects who we are as a nation and how we show up in the world. Strong, transparent and effective assistance helps to save lives, prevent conflict and displacement, and creates the conditions for children and families to build safer, healthier futures.”

**Global Health:** The [U.S. Global Leadership Coalition](#) (USGLC) reports that \$9.42 billion in funds were earmarked for global health initiatives overall, close to the \$10 billion level appropriated in 2025. This includes funding for PEPFAR, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. The \$4.6 billion allocated to PEPFAR represents a 2% cut compared to FY2025; however, significant reforms are included. [ThinkGlobalHealth](#) argues that the required “comprehensive strategy to guide the structured transition of PEPFAR

supported programs to country-led ownership,” marks a fundamental shift away from being an open-ended emergency program towards domestic sustainability. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria received \$1.25 billion, which represents full funding of the U.S. pledge for the seventh and eighth installments. Furthermore, despite being zeroed out by the administration, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, received \$300 million.

**Food Assistance:** According to [USGLC](#), the major food assistance programs previously administered by USAID – Food for Peace and the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program – were transitioned to USDA. In total, they received \$1.44 billion in 2026, \$420 million less than in 2025. Food for Peace appropriated \$1.2 billion in

funding and was renamed America First International Food Assistance. [USDA announced](#) that they intend to enter into a \$452 million agreement with the World Food Program that includes provisions to purchase 100% U.S. commodities. This level of funding comes despite both programs being zeroed out in the administration’s FY2026

“Strong, transparent and effective assistance helps to save lives, prevent conflict and displacement, and creates the conditions for children and families to build safer, healthier futures.”

request.

**Democracy and Human Rights:** [WOLA](#) asserts that the House report accompanying the budget contains the language “defending democracy and human rights is fundamental to United States national security.” This language is matched with \$2.175 billion in total funding directed towards good governance, elections, human rights, and civil society. This includes \$205 million for a Human Rights and Democracy Fund administered by the Bureau of Human Rights, Democracy, and Labor at the State Department. While this is a 40% cut from the prior year, it represents a sizeable amount compared to the zeroed-out administration’s request for FY2026. The budget also included \$315 million for the National Endowment for Democracy and its core institutes. §

**FAITH IN ACTION:** Catholic Relief Service tool to tell your members of Congress to support lifesaving international assistance <https://tinyurl.com/2bzuw5zn>

# Threat of New Nuclear Arms Race Grows

*As the final treaty governing the world's largest nuclear arsenals expires without a successor, faith leaders and advocacy groups are calling on the United States to reject a new arms race and embrace a path toward disarmament.*

**O**n February 5, New START, the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty between the United States and Russia, expired. No follow-on treaty has been negotiated to prevent an arms race between the two superpowers, who already [possess nearly 90%](#) of the world's nuclear weapons.

On the last day of the treaty, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) [released the following statement](#) from Senior Program Officer for Peace and Nonviolence Dan Moriarty:

*Tonight at midnight, New START, the last remaining treaty capping the number of nuclear warheads in the U.S. and Russian arsenals, will expire, potentially unleashing a new arms race. As people of faith, we cannot remain silent. We can afford neither the monetary cost nor the existential risk such an arms race would pose. Catholic teaching holds that spending on such weapons constitutes a theft from the poor, and that the development and possession of nuclear weapons is morally unacceptable. They threaten human life and all of God's creation. On behalf of every community where Maryknoll missionaries have lived and worked around the world and our common home, and echoing the call of Pope Leo XIV and the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, we urge President Trump to maintain New START nuclear stockpile levels, pursue diplomatic negotiations for a follow-on treaty, and commit to concrete steps toward nuclear disarmament. We pray that the Prince of Peace guides us toward integral disarmament, to step back from the brink and free our world of nuclear weapons once and for all.*

Moriarty references the following [statement](#) from Archbishop Paul Coakley, President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB):

*The dangers posed by current conflicts around the world, including the devastating war in Ukraine, make the forthcoming expiration of New START simply unacceptable. I call on people of faith and all men and women of good will to ardently pray that we, as an international community, may develop the courage to pursue an authentic, transformative, and lasting peace. In his [address](#) to the diplomatic corps this year, Pope Leo XIV specified the importance of renewing the pact, saying that there is a 'need to follow-up on the New START Treaty,' and warning that 'there is a danger of returning to the race of producing ever more sophisticated new weapons, also by means of artificial intelligence.'*

*More broadly, in his message for the [World Day of Peace](#), the Holy Father cited St. John XXIII's call for 'integral disarmament' that includes adopting a mindset which realizes that 'true and lasting peace among nations cannot consist in the possession of an equal supply of armaments but only in mutual trust.'*

*I call upon policymakers to courageously pursue diplomatic negotiations to maintain New START's limits, opening pathways toward disarmament. International policy disagreements, as serious as they are, cannot be used as excuses for diplomatic stalemates; on the contrary, they should spur us on to more vehemently pursue effective engagement and dialogue. May the Prince of Peace enlighten our hearts and minds to pursue peace around the world in a spirit of universal fraternity.*

The USCCB has expressed to MOGC and other partners that President Trump's threats to begin nuclear weapons testing is also of grave concern. We are working closely with the Back from the Brink campaign and faith-based anti-nuclear weapons organizations to stop such testing before it begins, promoting an [action alert](#) urging citizens to contact their representatives in Congress:

## **Tell Congress No Funding for Nuclear Weapons Testing**

*For the first time in decades, a U.S. president is [threatening to restart](#) nuclear weapons testing — a dangerous and unnecessary move that would put countless lives, communities, and even our planet at risk.*

*Experts agree that there is no military or technical justification for explosive nuclear weapons testing, but there are potentially devastating consequences if we test again, shattering the global taboo that has helped keep our world safe for more than 30 years. Other countries have already signaled that if the U.S. resumes nuclear weapons testing, they will follow suit, further fueling the global nuclear arms race now underway.*

*Congress has the power to stop this — they can block any funding that would allow explosive nuclear weapons testing to resume. This issue is too important to our future for our elected officials to stay silent. §*

**FAITH IN ACTION:** [Add your name](#) to the Back from the Brink campaign to tell Congress not to support funding for nuclear weapons testing. <https://tinyurl.com/54kxkfx8>

# Foresight Africa Report in 2026

*The nations of Africa face numerous challenges, both internal and external, but the Brookings Institution's annual Foresight Africa report highlights areas where the continent can overcome headwinds, at least to some extent.*

The Brookings Institution's annual report of trends and policy recommendations for Africa outlines six areas: greater mobilization of Africa's own resource wealth for development; investing in human capital and quality jobs, especially for youth and women; leveraging its natural resources, including critical minerals, renewable energy, and the blue economy, to foster industrial development; strengthening peace, security, and democratic governance; firmly situating Africa in the new multipolar global order; and integrating intracontinental trade and technological innovation as a prime mover to economic progress.

The challenges are daunting. Pierre Nguimkeu, Director of Brookings Institution's Africa Growth Initiative, says: *"In 2026, Africa stands at a defining moment... The continent is poised to experience the world's fastest labor force expansion: a net increase of roughly 740 million working-age people by 2050, with 12 million young Africans entering the labor market each year—compared with only 3 million new formal wage jobs. At the same time, foreign aid, historically the region's primary source of concessional finance, is undergoing an unprecedented contraction. This decline comes just as Africa's capital needs are intensifying...and as more than half of the region's low-income countries face high risk of debt distress."*

Africa faces a gap between savings and needs for investment of \$245 billion per year up to the year 2029. As traditional aid declines, other sources can make up the difference, such as improving tax revenue collection, targeting multinational companies' tax avoidance, utilizing its natural resources for greater domestic profit, establishing sovereign wealth funds, optimizing diaspora remittances for social development (worth \$90.8 billion in 2023), and rectifying biases in credit ratings.

The report covered how African realities can serve as advantages and generate quality jobs at scale. These include a young workforce, a vast continental market, millions of entrepreneurial small businesses, broadening digital access, and immense agricultural capacity. An exciting essay opined that creative arts can generate many jobs, such as in the music and film fields.

Industrial growth is a promising area where Africa can advance rapidly. The continent possesses three major assets to achieve this growth: mineral resources, including the critical minerals for the energy transition such as cobalt, copper, and coltan; the blue economy, which leverages

ocean-based opportunities in renewable energy, sustainable fishing, transport, tourism, and more; and expansive renewable energy potential from solar, wind, geothermal, and hydropower. Mineral extraction, however, needs to be buttressed with far greater domestic and international efforts to combat gross exploitation of workers and promote human rights. Investments are also needed to help African nations capture more value from the minerals by refining them locally or even producing more finished goods.

Yet, Africa's commercial growth need not be limited to traditional manufacturing enterprises. The Brookings study "New Pathways to Job Creation in Africa" focused on activities that offer similar benefits to manufacturing, what the authors call "industries without smokestacks," including tourism, business services, agro-processing, horticulture and export agriculture, IT services, and transport/logistics. Constraints to this growth are the usual suspects like inadequate electricity, transportation, and digital connectivity. Beyond addressing those gaps, African nations must also invest in relevant skills training programs and create a regulatory environment that encourages innovation and competition.

Globally, there has been substantial democratic backsliding, from which Africa is not immune. Bolstering democracy in Africa requires three actions: ensuring free and fair elections; empowering oversight institutions, such as the legislature, judiciary, audit bodies, and anti-corruption agencies, to check the executive; and supporting robust non-state actors, including the media, universities, and civil society, to ensure leaders are responsive. Accountable democratic governance provides the best opportunity to avoid civil strife and promote economic progress.

Africa intends to claim its place in a multipolar world. The African Union's strategic plan, Agenda 2063, envisions Africa as a "united and influential partner" in global affairs, not simply accepting external priorities. This relies on substantial regional integration, which has been made more possible through the recent African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). Additionally, future international trade partnerships are in flux, continuing to evolve and shift. Success in intracontinental integration and diversification of trading opportunities can hasten economic growth in Africa.

To sum up, Africa has many challenges but tremendous promise. The full "Foresight Africa: Top priorities for the continent in 2026" report is at <https://tinyurl.com/thun2pd9> §

# Africa's Energy Leap: Leading the Global Transition

*Some African countries are bypassing the era of fossil fuels to pioneer decentralized renewable energy, a historic shift that highlights the growing economic dominance of green power and the urgent need for global climate equity.*

A profound transformation is unfolding across the African continent, challenging the traditional narrative of industrial development. Africa is currently “leapfrogging” the carbon-heavy path of the past in favor of a future powered by renewables. This shift is not merely a response to environmental necessity but a pragmatic strategy to build modern, decentralized energy systems from the ground up.

Much like the way many African nations bypassed the installation of landline telephone wires to move straight to mobile technology, many are now skipping the era of centralized, coal-fired power plants. Data from the past year reveals a historic turning point in this transition. According to reports from the Global Solar Council, Africa recorded its fastest solar growth to date in 2025, adding 4.5 gigawatts of new capacity—a 54% year-on-year increase.

While industrialized nations struggle with the expensive process of retrofitting aging, fossil-fuel-dependent grids, nations like South Africa, Nigeria, and Egypt are leading the charge in new capacity. This progress is projected to accelerate, with a potential sixfold rise in annual capacity additions by 2029, potentially bringing over 33 gigawatts of new solar capacity to the continent.

By utilizing localized solar power, energy can reach remote clinics, rural schools, and smallholder farms without the need for the massive, environmentally destructive infrastructure typical of Western industrialization. This decentralized model has the added benefit of empowering local communities to manage their own resources and reducing dependence on distant, often unreliable, state-run utilities.

The momentum seen in Africa is part of a broader,

unstoppable global trend. Despite the continued profits of fossil fuel companies and the influence of the defense industry, the global economy is signaling a massive pivot. A striking indicator of this shift is found in the changing landscape of global investment: by 2026, for the first time in history, the world is on pace to spend more on green energy infrastructure than on total military expenditures.

This represents a monumental milestone in resource allocation. It suggests that the sheer scale of the renewable energy market has become a dominant economic force. However, while Africa's initiative is a significant feat of economic resilience, it does not change the scientific reality of climate change. The warming of the planet is driven by the cumulative volume of greenhouse gases released since the Industrial Revolution. Since the United States and other G20 nations are responsible for the vast majority of these historical emissions, they hold a unique “climate debt” to the rest of the world.

The United States' recent withdrawal from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) creates a significant gap in international cooperation. By stepping back from these accords, the U.S. effectively shifts the burden of managing a global crisis onto the Global South—the very region currently leading the way in renewable innovation despite having contributed the least to the problem.

True equity in the energy transition requires that the nations that built their wealth on carbon also lead the way in funding the transition for everyone else. Relying on African nations to innovate their way out of a crisis they did not create is not a sustainable global strategy. The U.S. remains a primary driver of climate change, and its absence from international frameworks does not remove its responsibility to provide the affordable capital and technical support that Africa needs to scale its success.

The fact that global spending on renewables is now outpacing military budgets proves that the tools for a sustainable world are being manufactured at an unprecedented scale. However, the eventual success of the “Green Leap Forward” depends on the world's largest economies acknowledging their role in the global carbon budget. Authentic stewardship of the planet requires that the historic polluters match Africa's ingenuity with the financial resources necessary to address the damage already done. §



“Solar energy is driving change across rural Africa” (Photo/IAfrica76, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons)

# Renewable Energy and Land Use

*Renewable energy technologies—solar, wind, bioenergy, hydropower, and geothermal—interact with land systems in complex ways, influencing land health and productivity, the provision of ecosystem services, and local socio-economic outcomes. The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) report “Natural Fit: Renewable Energy and Sustainable Land Management,” addresses this conundrum and offers achievable solutions.*

In 2024, there were still 666 million people who lacked access to electricity and 2.1 billion people who still relied on traditional biomass for cooking. The worldwide shift toward cleaner energy sources is rapidly gaining momentum. By 2024, renewable energy supplied 29.9% of electricity generated globally, made up 46% of total installed generating capacity, and represented more than 90% of all newly added capacity. Solar energy alone grew by an unprecedented 29%, maintaining its pattern of doubling its total global capacity roughly every three years. This growth is expected to speed up even more as major sectors such as industry and transportation transition to electrification to cut greenhouse gas emissions. As a result, electricity's share of overall energy use is projected to rise from 25% in 2023 to 55% by 2050, supporting the goals of the Paris Agreement to limit the increase in global temperatures to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

At the same time, costs for renewable sources of energy continue to decline. For instance, the price of solar energy has fallen by roughly 85%–90% since 2010, turning it into one of the most affordable electricity sources in many regions by 2024. Meanwhile, advances such as battery storage systems and modern grid management technologies are also becoming less expensive, supporting the reliable and practical integration of variable renewable sources like solar and wind power. The potential benefits of renewable energy, especially in undeveloped tropical countries seemingly caught in a desperate cycle of poverty, are immense.

Many actions are needed, such as sound policies, governance and regulatory frameworks, financial incentives that attract direct investment, capacity building, particularly at the local level, and protection of community tenure rights. In addition, though, it is necessary to address the dilemma of land use, as renewable forms of energy have a larger land footprint than traditional fossil sources of energy. Solar power uses roughly twice the land area of coal for the same electricity output, while wind power can need up to twelve times as much land. This footprint comes not only from the direct taking of land, but also from the infrastructure required (e.g., access roads, transmission lines, power substations), which can have an adverse effect on the local ecology. Excessive land use is not the only

negative component of renewable energy. The extraction and procurement of essential metals, such as cobalt, copper, lithium and coltan, to name just a few, can be destructive to the rights of Indigenous communities, human health and the environment.

However, these land use estimates account for the spacing required between solar panels and wind turbines, but much of the land between them can still be used for other purposes. Furthermore, the land use factor ebbs in contrast to the underground impacts of activities related to geothermal, natural gas, and coal mining, which can disturb water cycles and soil integrity.

The authors of this report recommend a number of actions that can mitigate land misuse or deterioration. Dual land-use systems enable energy production while also supporting other goals like food security, biodiversity conservation, land restoration, and climate change mitigation. Renewable energy projects can be set up on previously degraded land, such as abandoned farms, unused buildings, canals, and reservoirs. A practice called Integrated Landscape Management (ILM) integrates renewable energy facilities with sustainable farming, such as regenerative agriculture, agroforestry, and silvopastoralism, which can increase food production, enhance drought resilience, conserve biodiversity, and reduce post-harvest losses. Land degradation can be reversed by building solar and wind farms, where through shading or wind protection, clean energy can be provided while promoting soil health and vegetation growth under the solar panels. Bioenergy can be produced by harvesting invasive species or cultivating feedstock on marginal or degraded land.

Sustainable Land Management (SLM) involves the responsible use of land resources—such as soil, water, plants, and animals—to meet evolving human needs. At the same time, it focuses on preserving the long-term productivity and health of these resources, ensuring their ability to continue supporting future generations. These goals can be achieved even with renewable energy's larger land footprint if all facets of land use are integrated in a productive and sustainable manner. §

The full “Natural Fit: Renewable Energy and Sustainable Land Management” report is available at <https://tinyurl.com/4j2azkkr>

## Join Churches for Middle East Peace Advocacy Summit

**CHURCHES FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE** will host the Joint Christian Advocacy Summit 2026 in Washington, D.C., from May 5-7, 2026.

Focused on the theme “Do Right; Seek Justice: Christians Uniting Against Oppression in Palestine/Israel,” this event aims to mobilize advocates, feature expert speakers, and facilitate meetings with Congress to influence U.S. policy towards a just peace in the Holy Land.

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns is proud to co-sponsor this important event for building peace in Israel and Palestine. More than 35 church denominations and organizations are members of Churches for Middle East Peace and have chosen to ground the purpose of the summit in the teaching from Isaiah 1:17: “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

“I will participate in the Joint Christian Advocacy Summit

because our faith demands we ‘do right and seek justice’ for those suffering in the Holy Land,” said Susan Gunn, director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

“When I visited Jerusalem and the West Bank two months after the Hamas attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, I heard from local faith leaders and human rights defenders about the trauma experienced by people in Israel and in Gaza, and the escalating violence in the West Bank. Since then, the harrowing urgency has grown.”

“We cannot remain silent while human dignity is stripped away and human lives are lost. I invite all Christians to join us in Washington, May 5-7, to urge U.S. leaders to pursue policies rooted in human rights and immediate relief. Sound and holistic U.S. policy is crucial to achieving and maintaining just and stable relationships in the Holy Land.”

Register at <https://jointsummit2026.com/>

## Faith Groups Call for U.S. Return to Global Climate Table

**IN A SIGNIFICANT PUSH FOR** continued international cooperation, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and a broad coalition of faith-based organizations are advocating for a reversal of the Trump administration’s decision to withdraw from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

On January 9, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns released a [statement](#) expressing its firm opposition to the withdrawal. “Faith requires us to be stewards of God’s creation,” said Lisa Sullivan, Senior Policy Officer for Integral Ecology at the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. “Withdrawing from this framework is not just a policy shift; it is a rejection of our duty to protect our common home and the future of all humanity.”

This position was further amplified on February 26, when the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns joined a diverse group of religious organizations in a [joint letter](#) delivered to the U.S. Senate. The letter frames climate change not just as a political issue, but as a profound moral crisis.

“Together, our religious teachings call us to protect the Earth,” the signatories wrote, emphasizing the need to stand in solidarity with vulnerable communities already facing the devastation of intensified floods, droughts, and wildfires.

The coalition warned that isolationism has severe consequences for the nation’s security and prosperity. They argued that withdrawing removes the U.S. voice from the

global conversation at a critical juncture, allowing international competitors to seize the lead in clean energy innovation. The letter also noted that the move threatens public health, as increased fossil fuel pollution and heatwaves are projected to drive up healthcare costs and premature deaths.

While acknowledging that honest disagreements exist regarding specific policy approaches, the faith groups urged the Senate to uphold the principle that the United States must remain “at the table” to shape solutions. They characterized U.S. participation in the UNFCCC as a “covenant of global accompaniment”—a pledge to meet one of the most significant challenges of our time with hope and just stewardship. §

**FAITH IN ACTION:** Sign up to receive Catholic Climate Covenant’s 2026 Earth Day program focused on energy issues and faithful climate action. Access prayers, reflections, and community tools to deepen your commitment to caring for God’s creation. Explore ways to advocate for policies that protect our common home, support vulnerable communities most affected by climate change, and encourage your parish or community to take meaningful environmental action. <https://tinyurl.com/u56y57mv>

# Resources

1. **Webinar: Witnessing “Neighborism” amid the U.S. Federal Government Siege of Minnesota on March 5:** MOGC webinar featuring Maryknoll Vocations Minister Greg Darr reporting from Minneapolis. Join live or watch the recording. <https://tinyurl.com/4spkxkx7>
2. **Lenten Reflection Guide – A Journey Toward Peace:** A Lenten reflection guide from the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns offering prayers, reflections, and actions for building peace during Lent 2026. <https://tinyurl.com/bdh9h9u7>
3. **Running List of ICE Deaths and Shootings During Trump’s Second Term:** The Week maintains a regularly updated list tracking deaths and shootings involving ICE. <https://tinyurl.com/hf9tzazw>
4. **For Lent – “An Invitation to Ecological Conversion for U.S. Catholics”:** A three-page guide of prayer, study, and action ideas for Lent from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. <https://tinyurl.com/4r2zx38d>
5. **USCCB and CLINIC Support Lawsuit to Overturn End of Birthright Citizenship:** The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. support legal action challenging the administration’s executive order seeking to end birthright citizenship. <https://tinyurl.com/ycp6b5uv>
6. **The Catholic Church’s Position on Birthright Citizenship:** Background and policy overview from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. <https://tinyurl.com/32k8bcms>
7. **CLINIC Files Lawsuit Challenging U.S. Travel Ban:** Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. announces legal action opposing the reinstated U.S. travel ban and its impact on immigrant families. <https://tinyurl.com/8dnrsh8n>
8. **“Ecuador’s Security and Human Rights Crisis Deepens”:** The Center for Economic and Policy Research examines escalating violence and human rights concerns in Ecuador in its Feb. 20 news round-up. <https://tinyurl.com/4xrp79rr>
9. **Pax Christi International Statement on the “Board of Peace”:** Pax Christi International critiques the so-called “Board of Peace” and calls for authentic nonviolent peacebuilding. <https://tinyurl.com/37b37ekv>
10. **Friday Fast for Justice (Lenten Series):** A virtual workshop series hosted on Fridays during Lent by the Georgetown University Center on Faith and Justice, connecting faith, fasting, and social justice. <https://tinyurl.com/42mww7p3>
11. **Earth Day 2026 Catholic Program (April 22):** Pre-register with Catholic Climate Covenant to receive this year’s Earth Day program focused on energy issues and faithful climate action. <https://tinyurl.com/u56y57mv>
12. **Statement on U.S. Withdrawal from Multilateral Institutions:** Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) responds to the January 7, 2026 executive order withdrawing from multilateral institutions. <https://tinyurl.com/4kv97h8u>
13. **Response to U.N. Financial Emergency:** Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations calls for urgent support and funding to address the United Nations’ financial crisis. <https://tinyurl.com/mrjs4te5>
14. **The Case Against Economic Sanctions** by the Center for Economic and Policy Research. Download the 20-page report <https://tinyurl.com/nhz5sr9w> or two-page summary <https://tinyurl.com/4686a39n>
15. **“The Climate Crisis is a Moral Crisis”** – statement on Feb. 12 by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns regarding the U.S. EPA decision to rescind the Endangerment Finding. <https://tinyurl.com/347cux8s>
16. **Our Children’s Trust Petitions to Protect the Environment** – Eighteen U.S. children filed a petition for review of the U.S. EPA decision to rescind the Endangerment Finding. <https://tinyurl.com/y6bv6ppc>
17. **Launch of Mining Divestment Platform** on Feb. 5 by Catholic groups including Churches and Mining Network, the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council (CELAM) <https://tinyurl.com/3th7s8sd>
18. **Prayer Litany for Peace** on the U.S. attack on Iran on March 1 written by the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns <https://tinyurl.com/nhk4fvy9>
19. **Maryknoll OGC Statement of Court Decision to Block the End of TPS for Haitians** released on Feb. 3 <https://tinyurl.com/4h2xrah5>