



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

A bi-monthly newsletter of information on international justice and peace issues

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Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns:

Peace, Social Justice and the Integrity of Creation

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Maryknoll Missioners Take Climate Action

Maryknoll missioners took actions to respond to the cry of the Earth leading up to the UN Climate Talks (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland, in November.

The Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers and the Maryknoll Sisters completed major actions to address climate change in the weeks leading up to the UN Climate Talks. Coming at it from different angles, the missioners share the understanding that the world has yet to address the true scale of the climate emergency.

As previously reported by Fr. Frank Breen, MM, the Society adopted a major paper on climate change at its General Chapter in July. “From now on, Maryknoll [Fathers and Brothers] seeks to integrate the care of creation in all that we are and all that we do.” Fr. Breen reported that the Chapter concluded with a long list of recommendations, including “setting aside one percent of the Society’s annual budget designated for actions that combat climate change.”

And, in September, the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers completed construction of 12 solar carports spanning two parking lots at their New York campus. According to an article in Solar Power World, the project provides the Society with “covered parking, downward-facing LED parking lot lighting to increase nighttime security and a visible green initiative — all while extending 10% electricity bill discounts to Maryknoll and local community members through community solar.”

The Maryknoll Sisters have also taken action.

As the Maryknoll Sisters representative to the UN, Sr. Marvie Misolas, MM, presented on a webinar about climate adaption as seen in the Philippines, where, she says, people are exhausted by extreme hurricanes that bring torrential rains, violent winds, and mudslides. Sr. Misolas was one of six panelists who spoke about spirituality as a source of resilience to climate change. Saying that the world needs to make a “big shift on climate action at COP26,” Sr. Misolas called us to “righting our relationship” with Earth and offered Thomas Berry’s ten principles of jurisprudence to understand “our place as humans in the evolutionary deep time.”

And on Oct. 26, the Maryknoll Sisters delivered a four-minute video intervention as part of the UN High-level Thematic Debate “Delivering Climate Action: for People, Planet & Prosperity.” The three-part testimony, delivered by Srs. Anastasia Lott, Marvie Misolas, and Rebecca Macugay, can be viewed starting at 3:48:40 of the recording. The following is the transcript.

Climate Solutions Fund

The directives of the Maryknoll Sisters Congregation require that our investments in capital markets fur-

ther the mission, align with our values and advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We advocate for a just transition to a low-carbon economy by encouraging companies to reduce emissions in line with a 1.5°C warming scenario. We have been part of successful efforts calling on major banks to commit to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from their financing activities. Through participation in the Climate Solutions Fund - a collaborative initiative of 16 congregations of Dominican Sisters and a global Wall Street investment firm. Our anchor investments have attracted additional investors, providing a pool of more than \$130 million. We hope our efforts will spark a movement of integrated climate solutions that are responsive to Pope Francis’ moral call to humanity in Laudato Si to care for God’s creation and God’s people.

Women-led Climate Action

What does it look like when women lead climate action? Women are leaders in climate adaptation. In 2016, in Antipolo, Philippines, women participation in reforestation and afforestation programs is part of a community-based watershed conservation program, the Marikina Watershed Protected Landscape, a reef-to-ridge initiative in adaptation-mitigation program. This is a sub-national level initiative conserving fresh water sources directly beneficial to surrounding communities. This program is a multi-stakeholder participation that people’s organizations composed of local women and environmental advocacy networks. Local women-initiated leadership in the implementation process: from seeds/wildlings collection, setting -up nurseries, participation in government meetings and capacity building workshops, sale of seedlings to the government, planting and monitoring. Women leading climate action have shown interconnectivity of solutions.

Sacred Trust with Creation

In April 2012, we the Maryknoll Sisters entrusted 43 acres of the 60-plus acre property at our Center in Ossining, NY to the Westchester Land Trust that will ensure that the area is kept in its natural state. The Conservation Easement is to protect the environment which contains both native woodlands and wetlands. The trust is more than a legal agreement. It is a sacred trust.

We believe that creation is a primary source of revelation of the Divine Presence. It is a form of ecosystem-based adaptation that will help towards the attainment of 1.5 degree Celsius. §

COP26 Urgent Appeal Led by Pope Francis

Pope Francis gathered religious leaders and scientists at the Vatican to issue an appeal to world leaders for urgent action at the COP26 UN Climate Talks.

The following is the executive summary of the five-page appeal issued by Pope Francis and more than 40 religious leaders and scientists on October 4, 2021, to call on the international community to raise their ambition and step up their climate action ahead of COP26:

Today, after months of dialogue between faith leaders and scientists, we come together united to raise awareness of the unprecedented challenges that threaten our beautiful common home. Our faiths and spiritualities teach a duty to care for the human family and for the environment in which it lives. We are deeply interdependent with each other and with the natural world. We are not limitless masters of our planet and its resources. Multiple crises facing humanity are ultimately linked to a crisis of values, ethical and spiritual. We are caretakers of the natural environment with the vocation to care for it for future generations and the moral obligation to cooperate in the healing of the planet. We must address these challenges using the knowledge of science and the wisdom of religion. We must think long-term for the sake of the whole of humanity. Now is the time to take transformative action as a common response.

We need a framework of hope and courage. But we also need to change the narrative of development.

Climate change is a grave threat. We advocate for common but differentiated climate action at all levels.

The world is called to achieve net-zero carbon emissions as soon as possible, with wealthier countries taking the lead in reducing their own emissions and in financing emission reductions from poorer nations. All governments must adopt a trajectory that will limit the global average temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. We beg those nations with the greatest responsibility and present capacity to provide substantial financial support to vulnerable countries and to agree new targets to enable them to become climate resilient, and to adapt to and to address climate change. The rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities must be given special attention.

We appeal to governments to raise their ambition and their international cooperation to: favour a transition to clean energy; adopt sustainable land use practices; transform food systems to become environmentally-friendly and respectful of local cultures; end hunger; and to promote sustainable lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production. Full consideration must be given to the effects on the workforce of this transition.

We call upon financial institutions, banks and investors to adopt responsible financing, and on civil society organisations and everyone to face these challenges in a spirit of collaboration.

For our part, we underline the importance of:

- deepening our efforts to bring about a change of heart among members of our traditions in the way we relate to the Earth and to other people;
- encouraging our educational and cultural institutions to strengthen and prioritise integral ecological education;
- participating actively in the public discourse on environmental issues;
- engaging our congregations and institutions with their neighbours to build sustainable, resilient and just communities;
- emphasising the importance of reducing carbon emissions;
- encouraging our communities to embrace sustainable lifestyles;
- striving to align our financial investments with environmentally and socially responsible standards; and
- evaluating the goods we purchase and the services we hire with the same ethical lens.

Future generations will never forgive us if we miss the opportunity to protect our common home. We have inherited a garden: we must not leave a desert to our children. Scientists have warned us that there might be only one decade left to restore the planet. We plead with the international community, gathered at COP26, to take speedy, responsible and shared action to safeguard, restore and heal our wounded humanity and the home entrusted to our stewardship. We appeal to everyone to join us on this common journey.¶

Faith in Action: Download and share our two-page policy brief on climate change to learn how to see, judge, and act on climate change. Go to: <https://bit.ly/MOGCPolicyBriefs>

Essential Energy Transition

In July the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) issued a report titled “World Energy Transitions Outlook: 1.5 C Pathway,” exploring technology, investment, and policy choices necessary to achieve a sustainable, resilient and inclusive energy future. Complementing this, in September the UN General Assembly held a High Level Dialogue on Energy that issued 137 commitments called “Energy Compacts.” Unlike modest commitments made at previous international conferences, the specter of alarming climate change impacts in recent years mobilized government, business and civil society to propose accelerated action.

Goal Seven of the Sustainable Development Goals states: “Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all by 2030,” yet a number of indicators in 2020 showed that the world is not on track to meet these goals: 2.6 billion people use dangerous and inefficient cooking systems that kill millions annually; 750 million people still lack access to electricity; energy production is responsible for 75% of greenhouse gas emissions; and one-quarter of health clinics in Africa ground to a halt during the pandemic due to lack of power.

At the same time, the demand for energy to meet these goals while also keeping temperature rise below the 1.5C threshold can, at first blush, appear mutually contradictory. Energy-related carbon emissions increased by 1.3% annually between 2014 and 2019; 80% of the world’s population live in countries that are net importers of fossil fuels; and investments in energy transition under the Planned Energy Scenario (PES) fall \$2.7 trillion less per year than what is required to keep temperature increase at the 1.5C target.

At the end of October, just prior to the COP 26 Climate Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, the UN issued a report saying that even the updated pledges made by a number of countries would produce only one-seventh of the additional emissions cuts needed to limit total global warming to 1.5C. The newest round of climate promises, known as Nationally Determined Contributions, will result in an increase by the year 2100 of 2.7C (4.86 degrees Fahrenheit), which would put our species in peril, according to the UN Environment Program (UNEP).

The IRENA report states that it is possible to reach the target of only 1.5C increase by 2050 but “[i]nternational cooperation is an essential piece of the global energy transition.” It says that over 90% of solutions will involve renewable energy through direct supply, electrification, energy efficiency, green hydrogen and bioenergy combined with carbon capture and storage. Energy transition investment will need to increase by 30% over planned investment to a total of \$131 trillion between now and 2050, but this can result in a cumulative payback of \$61 trillion by 2050.

The IRENA report calls for various measures, fore-

most among them the elimination of market distortions that favor fossil fuels, such as subsidies. It is likewise essential to reform carbon pricing (mainly through taxation) and create incentives for energy transition solutions. There has been a rapid rise in innovative solutions, such as electric mobility, battery storage, digital technologies and artificial intelligence, but these shifts have drawn attention to the need for sustainable exploitation and management of rare earths and other minerals, and investment in the circular economy.

Other measures include new and smart grids that are enhancing the power sector’s ability to cope with the variability of renewables. Nations need to cease investments in oil and gas, and carbon capture and storage may be a transitional solution. Policies should promote resilience, inclusion, and equity, and protect workers and communities affected by the energy transition.

Climate protection will not be the only positive outcome: there will be 122 million jobs created by 2050; gross domestic product (GDP) will have a 2.4% greater increase over the Planned Energy Scenario (PES) by 2030; welfare measurements, such as health, pollution, and impacts of extreme weather events will improve. However, there can be important differences in how benefits are distributed among countries and regions.

The High Level Dialogue on Energy (HLDE) expanded on the IRENA report, bringing together 150 world leaders from government, business and civil society, including a number of Heads of State, resulting in a commitment of \$500 billion, with more expected, to implement voluntary commitments called “Energy Compacts,” in order to achieve the Paris Agreement goals by the year 2030. Two realizations spurred these compacts: first, recognition that the multiple climate crises must be faced with urgency; and second, recognition of the global benefits of the “energy revolution” in transitioning to renewable and sustainable energy.

HLDE Co-Chair Achim Steiner said: “What is good for the planet is good for people,” in new ‘green’ jobs, improved livelihoods, and health and survival benefits for both humans and nature. §

Climate Change Policy Brief

Inspired by the gospel and Maryknoll missionaries' commitment to stand with vulnerable communities around the world, we offer two-page briefs as resources on the intersection of global policy and Catholic social thought. Here is an excerpt. Find the complete policy brief at <https://bit.ly/MOGCPolicyBriefs>

In 2021, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a shocking report on the latest climate data, saying we have reached a “code red for humanity.” These leading scientists say it is indisputable that human activities are causing climate change, making extreme climate events, including heat waves, heavy rainfall, and droughts, more frequent and severe – at a rate unprecedented in the last 2000 years.

These changes are prompting increased crop failure, food insecurity, forest fires, and sea level rise. And these conditions are driving migration, homelessness, loss of livelihoods and biodiversity. Climate change is altering our fundamental relationship with nature and each other.

Climate change touches all of our lives, but some people and places are affected more severely. Both in the United States and around the world, populations marginalized by gender, race, class, caste, religion, ethnicity, and ability are more vulnerable to climate impacts and less able to respond. Also, while high-income nations produce the bulk of emissions, low-income nations, which produce far less emissions, bear the brunt of climate impacts without the resources to respond.

The United States, the world’s wealthiest nation and highest emitter, has a unique responsibility to reduce emissions and assist low- and middle- income countries to transition to renewable energy and adapt to climate change. Examples include investing in solar panels, sea walls, and drought-resistant crops, as well as financing relocation for some communities.

In the report, scientists tell us that current emissions have made lasting damage but some warming can be reversed if countries work together to make deep and rapid emissions cuts. The best-case scenario is to keep the average global temperature rise to 1.5 °C (2.7 °F) above pre-industrial era levels, the goal set by the Paris Agreement in 2015.

As Pope Francis and more than 40 religious leaders said in their appeal to world leaders at the UN Climate Talks in Scotland, “We have inherited a garden: we must not leave a desert to our children.”

Facts About Climate Change

- Climate change in the U.S. is projected to increase inequities, strain infrastructure and the electric grid, cause sea level rise and biodiversity loss, and disrupt agricultural patterns in the next few decades.

- To limit warming to 1.5 or 2 °C , countries will have to cut their greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by around 2050. To reach that goal, emissions would have to start dropping “well before 2030” and be on a path to fall by about 45 percent by around 2030.

- The earth has already experienced 1 °C of warming due to human activity and is on track to reach 1.5 °C by about 2040.

COVID-19 and Climate Connections

As typhoons and hurricanes hit parts of Asia and Central America, people have had to shelter together, increasing the risk of transmission. In the Amazon, smokey fires and COVID-19 compromised indigenous peoples’ respiratory systems, making them more sensitive to the health impacts of both. In East Africa, where very few have access to covid vaccines, millions of people are struggling to survive climate-fueled floods in South Sudan and droughts in Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya.

Maryknoll Experience

“...[We] study and discuss Laudato Si’ in the rural parish [in El Salvador] where I live and we implement what we can through our agricultural and environmental ministries... The main effects of climate change here are the abnormally extreme wet and dry seasons and catastrophic storms that result from altered weather patterns. Insufficient or excessive rainfall leads directly to hunger among the poor...”— Peg Vamosy, Maryknoll Lay Missioner

Prayer

Pray All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one. - Pope Francis, Laudato Si'

Three Ways to Take Action

Sign up to receive our action alerts to tell your elected officials to care for Creation. www.maryknollogc.org

Join the Laudato Si Movement to connect with Catholics around the world. www.laudatosimovement.org

Connect with U.S. Catholics at the Catholic Climate Covenant www.catholicclimatecovenant.org §

Climate Change: Problems with Net Zero Pledges

Corporations and institutions like TIAA are pledging to achieve carbon neutrality but critics say net zero pledges delay meaningful reductions in greenhouse gases and provide cover to those unwilling to commit..

In response to the climate emergency and increasing loss of biodiversity, many countries, corporations, and financial institutions are making pledges of “net zero” carbon emissions. The idea is to reduce carbon emissions in their activities as much as possible and then use “offsets” or carbon saving projects elsewhere, to arrive at a net of zero emissions.

Yet studies have shown that offset projects, that range from tree planting to energy efficiency initiatives and the use of carbon capture technologies, are wracked with problems and allow major emitters to continue polluting while not actually reducing greenhouse gases. In an emblematic campaign, hundreds of civil society organizations are pressuring a major retirement fund, TIAA, to go beyond its net zero pledge.

As explained in a report from major social and environmental organizations on carbon markets and net zero pledges, “offsets do not actually reduce atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO₂). At best they lead to no net increase in atmospheric concentrations... ‘Net zero’ is a smokescreen, a conveniently invented concept that is both dangerous and problematic because of how effectively it hides inaction.” Net zero allows carbon emissions to continue while supporting projects with questionable reductions in carbon emissions.

It is difficult to measure carbon emissions of industrial processes. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found margins of error of up to 60% in measuring emissions from oil, gas and coal industries and 100% with some agricultural processes. A Tufts University study of websites offering offsets showed that estimated emissions for a flight between Boston and Frankfurt ranged from 1.43 to 4.14 tons of carbon. On the other side of the equation, it is even more difficult to measure the amount of carbon that a parcel of land sequesters. Biomes are complex, with overlapping causes and effects, and the science is constantly being updated based on new information, resulting in new calculations.

Perhaps the fundamental problem with carbon offsets is the concept of “additionality”—GHG reductions that are additional to what would have happened without the offset. For example, a landowner says that they planned to deforest their land but will now maintain the trees and sell off the value of the carbon they sequestered. Yet there is no way to verify what people would have done, leaving this crucial step open to fraud.

A study of the Clean Development Mechanism, the world’s largest carbon market, found that only a fraction of the offset projects were truly additional and there have been cases where businesses deliberately increased their emissions in order to be paid to lower them in an offset project. Investigative journalist Dan Welch sums it up well, “Offsets are an imaginary commodity created by deducting what you hope happens from what you guess would have happened.”

Worse than being ineffective and a distraction from real climate solutions, offset projects are often very destructive to indigenous and traditional communities. Tree planting projects in Guatemala, Ecuador and Uganda have evicted thousands of families from their traditional lands, disrupted water supplies, and have not provided promised income to local communities. The Santa Rita hydroelectric dam in Guatemala is an emblematic case. Despite letters from local indigenous communities saying they had not been consulted or given approval to the dam, the CDM board approved the project. Resulting conflicts over the dam have led to the deaths of seven people and many injuries.

Jason Miller, senior editor at Investment Monitor, warns that net zero pledges could also create more environmental problems while trying to address climate change. The transition to clean energy will require copious amounts of minerals, including rare earth minerals with limited availability, and the mining and processing of these minerals require massive amounts of energy and water and destroy habitats. The International Energy Agency predicted that mineral demand for use in electric vehicles and batteries will jump at least 30 times by 2040, marking a “shift from a fuel-intensive to a material-intensive energy system” that will create serious environmental and social problems.

In an effort to draw attention to the failings of “net zero” pledges, hundreds of civil society organizations are pressuring TIAA, the Teachers, Insurance and Annuity Fund, a retirement fund with more than one trillion dollars in investments, to go beyond its recently announced net zero pledge. TIAA is a trend leader in investment circles so if it changes its policies, other investment funds will likely follow. §

Faith in action: Sign a petition to tell TIAA to divest from fossil fuels and land grabs

<https://bit.ly/TIAAdivestpetition>

Nonviolence and the Web of Creation

Dan Moriarty, Sustainable Pathways to Peace coordinator for the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, spent 17 years in Bolivia, first as a Maryknoll lay missioner and then as director of immersion programs at the Maryknoll Mission Center in Latin America.

On September 21, I hosted a webinar for the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, “Nonviolence and the Web of Creation,” exploring the connections between gospel nonviolence and care for our common home. We held the event in conjunction with the Pax Christi International-sponsored Catholic Nonviolence Days of Action, which take place annually between September 21st, International Day of Peace, and October 2nd, International Day of Nonviolence.

I was joined virtually by Tania Ávila Meneses from Bolivia. A Quechua Indigenous theologian, Tania serves as coordinator of the Bolivian Amerindia theologians network; on the Indigenous Peoples’ and Women’s teams of the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM); and on the Integral Ecology Commission of the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Religious. We worked together for many years at the Maryknoll Mission Center in Latin America. In 2019, at the personal invitation of Pope Francis, Tania participated in the Synod on the Amazon at the Vatican.

Our 30-minute presentation explored the ways Andean cosmovision can help Catholics to better understand gospel nonviolence in the context of Catholic teaching on integral ecology, particularly as presented by Pope Francis in his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, and in the synod’s concluding document, *Querida Amazonía* (Beloved Amazon).

More than a theology or a philosophy, cosmovision refers to a people’s integral way of understanding and relating to the universe, as well as to God and one another. According to Andean cosmovision, all the elements that sustain life within a given ecosystem – humans, plants, and animals, but also earth, water, and air – are considered living beings in relationship with one another. Relationships are grounded in the value of reciprocity – not transactional, but relational, marked by mutual aid and harmony. Reciprocity and harmony define right relationships between humans and with the rest of nature.

Harm done to the environment, then, is a form of violence: it harms a member of the community. Broken relationships with nature lead to suffering. “Living well,” according to the Andean concept of *sumaq kaw-say* or *buen vivir*, means healing such ruptures and nurturing relationships in which all beings have what they need to thrive – a concept not unlike that of just peace, or shalom.

Church leaders draw similar connections. When describing his prophetic resistance to nuclear arms, Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen described the weapons as a threat not just to humans, but to all God’s creation. In his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis grounds all of Catholic social teaching in the assertion that we are “sisters and brothers all,” but cites as well St. Francis of Assisi’s use of the words “brother” and “sister” to describe his relationship to nature. And in *Laudato Si’*, Francis lists attacks on nature among forms of violence, and condemns theologies that emphasize humanity’s dominion over God’s creation, describing us instead as creatures within it, with a “relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature.” He points to St. Francis’ experience of harmony with nature as healing the broken relationship between humanity and the rest of creation.

Tania goes one step further, asserting that we can learn how to heal and achieve harmony from the earth’s own way of shaping relationships. “The earth,” she says, “can teach us to be nonviolent.” She cites the example of a cactus flower “transforming reality with nonviolence” by boldly asserting itself in all its fragile beauty, thriving in the midst of a thicket of needles, while allowing the needles to thrive as well. She points to human cooperation with nature through successional agroforestry, in which crops of diverse sizes and life-cycles are grown together. They care for one another, providing each the shade or sun it needs. And while monocultures eventually sap soil of its capacity to sustain them, a diversity of crops maintains healthy soil, which in turn nurtures the life of the plants.

“We humans can re-learn what is in our nature,” Tania tells us, “because it is woven into us as humans, this option for a way of life that is nonviolent, that protects and cares for creation, that understands itself to be interdependent.”

The webinar was designed to reflect the theme for this year’s days of action, “Nonviolence as a way of life in the web of creation.” Additional events were held by Pax Christi members in Australia, Austria, Burundi, Canada, the Democratic Republic of Congo, England and Wales, Flanders (Belgium), Germany, Italy, Scotland, and at the United Nations in New York. §

Faith in Action: Watch the webinar with Dan Moriarty and Tania Ávila at bit.ly/NVCreation

Peace, War, and Sanction in Afghanistan

Nearly two months after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Afghans and peacebuilding experts are watching closely to see how the United States might continue to employ violence in the country via two means: economic sanctions that hinder desperately needed humanitarian aid, and “over the horizon” armed drone strikes.

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is dire. United Nations World Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley told Reuters in October that 22.7 million Afghans were “facing acute food insecurity and ‘marching to starvation.’” Beasley is urging governments to reallocate money marked for economic development programs in the country, to address the emergent hunger crisis.

Meanwhile, billions of dollars belonging to the Afghan people were frozen in overseas Afghan government accounts after the Taliban took over the country in August. Civil society groups are urging that funds from these accounts be released, with adequate oversight to ensure they are used for humanitarian aid and not to support the Taliban.

Organizations on the ground have warned that U.S. sanctions on the Taliban are already having a chilling effect on humanitarian efforts, as financial institutions and non-governmental organizations alike fear running afoul of U.S. prohibitions. In an October 26 panel, “Prioritizing Afghan Voices: How the International Community Can Assist Afghanistan,” sponsored by the University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute of International Peace Studies, Rini Amiri of the NYU Center on International Cooperation put the resulting dilemma in stark terms: “There is no moral high ground in starving the Afghan population.”

Of central concern for groups working in Afghanistan is the U.S. “material support” law forbidding any form of support or collaboration with terrorist groups or their members, including the Taliban. The Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan makes it prohibitively difficult to operate effectively in the country without inadvertently contravening such laws. This is not only true for aid and development work, but for peacebuilding.

Even as the United States government dialogues with the Taliban, non-state peacebuilders seeking to understand or strengthen more moderate forces within the Taliban risk violating material support laws by doing so. According to a joint report from the Alliance for Peacebuilding and the Charity and Security Network, even meeting and sharing a cup of tea with a member of the Taliban or a former member of a terrorist group – key partners for peacebuilders in helping the country transition from war to peacetime – could contravene the law.

Peacebuilding is crucial, not only to heal the coun-

try from decades of war and protect women and ethnic and religious minorities targeted by the Taliban, but to avoid further armed conflict. Experts warn that international terrorism will again operate from Afghan soil. Afghan Ambassador to the United Nations Ghulam Isaczai told the Notre Dame panel that Al Qaeda currently operates in 15 Afghan provinces. The Taliban has a history of protecting Al Qaeda, but other groups, such as the Daesh/ISIS group that killed over 170 Afghans and 13 members of the US military in an August 26 bombing in Kabul, oppose the Taliban, threatening ongoing internal conflict.

Meanwhile, the White House and Pentagon have repeatedly declared that the United States will maintain an “over-the-horizon” capability, meaning the ability to launch air attacks, primarily by armed drone, into Afghan territory from bases or ships outside the country. Already, during the pullout, the U.S. responded to the ISIS bombing in Kabul with a drone attack. While officials initially reported that an ISIS target had been hit and an imminent second bombing had been thwarted, a New York Times investigation soon led the Pentagon to admit it had hit the wrong target: an Afghan employee of a U.S.-based aid organization, with a car full of children and groceries. Ten people, including seven children, were killed.

The Kabul strike, like so many other drone attacks in which civilians have been killed, happened with U.S. troops, CIA, and other personnel on the ground. Without such human intelligence inside Afghanistan, over-the-horizon strikes are even more likely to result in civilian deaths, creating anger and resentment, driving more Afghans to join terrorist groups, and further destabilizing the country.

As long as drone strikes continue and material support laws and other U.S. sanctions hamper aid and peacebuilding efforts, the United States’ longest war is still not over. It is time to listen to Afghans, and invest in peace. §

Faith in Action: Start a Sponsorship Circle to support newly arriving Afghans as they settle into their U.S. communities. This new initiative will allow community organizations and groups of five or more individuals to come together to support our new Afghan neighbors. <https://www.sponsorcircles.org/>

Nuclear Disarmament Policy Brief

Inspired by the gospel and Maryknoll missionaries' commitment to stand with vulnerable communities around the world, we offer two-page briefs as resources on the intersection of global policy and Catholic social thought. Here is an excerpt. Find the complete policy brief at <https://bit.ly/MOGCPolicyBriefs>

Nuclear weapons and climate change are widely recognized by scientists and security experts as “twin existential threats” to life on earth. While much more action is needed, the gravity of climate change has largely entered the global consciousness, thanks to global youth activism. But since the end of the Cold War, the nuclear threat has failed to grab the public imagination in the same way.

Experts warn that the danger of nuclear annihilation is greater than ever, citing the dismantling of the global arms control regime, as world leaders walk away from agreements and multilateral structures which reduce the nuclear threat with no plans for how to replace them. Vast resources are spent on new nuclear weapons, including the development and deployment of “low-yield” nuclear weapons which can be used to wage “winnable” wars and new Pentagon plans for a nuclear first strike.

Nukes By the Numbers

- Nuclear weapons spending in 2022 White House Budget: \$43.2 billion.
- Estimated cost of replacing Minuteman III ICBMs: \$100 billion
- Projected cost of building and maintaining the U.S. nuclear arsenal for the next 30 years: \$1.5 trillion
- Estimated cost for World Food Program to avoid famine affecting 270 million people in 2021: \$5 billion.
- Number of U.S. nuclear warheads: Total: 5,800 (1,750 deployed warheads, 2,050 stockpiled warheads (both active and inactive), plus 2,000 retired, intact warheads.) The U.S. and Russia possess approximately 90% of the world’s estimated 13,000 nuclear warheads.

Coronavirus Connection

The coronavirus epidemic has been a stark reminder that we live in a globally interdependent world. True security demands international structures for building trust and cooperation. “We are witnessing an erosion of multilateralism which is all the more serious in light of the growth of new forms of military technology. Such an approach seems highly incongruous in today’s context of interconnectedness; it represents a situation that urgently calls for the attention and commitment of all leaders.” – Pope Francis, “Address of the Holy Father on Nuclear Weapons,” Nagasaki, 24 November 2019

Maryknoll Experience

Maryknoll Sister Jean Fallon worked in Japan with survivors of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Na-

gasaki. She has said, “At some point, the people of the world are going to wake up. They’re just going to get to a point in the world where they’re going to say, ‘If we don’t stop this, there’s not going to be anything left on Earth.’ There’s more than one power at play here, and that’s the power of the people and the power of God.”

Judge

Pope Francis and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have repeatedly condemned the possession of nuclear weapons – even for purposes of deterrence – as sinful and unacceptable. Nuclear weapons are a threat to life and to our common home, and money spent on our nuclear arsenal should instead be spent to promote economic and climate justice, and build a security regime rooted in trust and enforced by effective, nonviolent measures. Nuclear disarmament is an essential element of the Church’s call to protect all life and defend human dignity.

Prayer

“In a single plea to God and to all men and women of good will, on behalf of all the victims of atomic bombings and experiments, and of all conflicts, let us together cry out from our hearts: Never again war, never again the clash of arms, never again so much suffering! Come, Lord, for it is late, and where destruction has abounded, may hope also abound today that we can write and achieve a different future.”- Pope Francis, Hiroshima, 24 November, 2019

Take Action

Catholics in the United States face a disheartening gap between U.S. nuclear policy on the one hand, and the clear teachings of the Church on the other. But there are practical, achievable steps policymakers can take toward the ultimate goal of total nuclear disarmament. Read the latest information and analysis on nuclear arms policy from the Arms Control Association at <https://www.armscontrol.org/>

Also, send a message to President Biden telling him to take concrete steps to rid the world of nuclear weapons. <https://bit.ly/NuclearDisarm> §

Global Food Crisis: U.S. Needs New Priorities

U.S. farm, food and trade justice advocates call on Pres. Biden to end the pro-corporate agriculture agenda in U.S. international policy and work more collaboratively with partners at UN food agencies.

On World Food Day (Oct. 13), the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and 66 other U.S. civil society, food producer, and environmental organizations sent a letter to President Joe Biden expressing the urgent need to transform U.S. priorities at UN agencies addressing global food systems.

The U.S. farm, food and trade justice advocates urge Pres. Biden to “fundamentally reorient the U.S. government’s approach to global policy development on food and agriculture issues, breaking with the U.S. government’s historical alignment with corporate agribusiness and neoliberal, unregulated trade orthodoxy.” In particular, they call for the Biden administration to mandate a new policy direction for engagement with the three UN food and agriculture agencies based in Rome —the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP).

This reform is urgent, the letter says, and must “prioritize the rights and livelihoods of workers, food producers, and frontline communities, ensure food security through food sovereignty in the U.S. and abroad, while mitigating climate change, restoring biodiversity, and addressing corporate power in global food systems.”

Acknowledging the actions the Biden administration has taken to address failings of the corporate food sectors in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic – investing in local food systems and family-scale food providers, decentralizing food supply chains and the agricultural processing sector, strengthening competitiveness and anti-trust standards, and promoting racial equity in the U.S. food system – the advocates express dismay that the Biden administration’s efforts “have not extended beyond our national borders.”

The letter describes the Rome-based UN agencies as the places where “some of the most challenging and central issues facing rural communities” are addressed, and where policy guidelines for national governments are developed “through an inclusive process that provides producers, workers, and other frontline constituencies an autonomous and institutionalized ‘seat at the table,’ therefore providing critical political legitimacy to this multilateral space.”

Looking back at the four years under President Trump, the advocates describe the U.S. delegation to the UN food and agriculture agencies as “openly defiant and obstructionist” of the agencies’ policy processes,

damaging “not only the reputation of the United States but also the integrity of important global policy instruments.” They conclude, “[t]his pro-corporate agriculture agenda must change under your watch.”

In-line with the Biden administration’s public commitments on human and worker rights, racial and gender justice, trade reform, and addressing the climate crisis, the advocates call on Pres. Biden to adopt new commitments when engaging with the UN agencies:

Human rights: Articulate a commitment to advancing food workers’ rights, Indigenous People’s right to sovereignty and self-determination, and the rights of peasants and other rural peoples. Also, work with Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, (which enshrines the Right to Adequate Food, Right to Water, and Right to Health).

Racial Justice: Strengthen the rights and livelihoods of communities of color, regardless of nationality and geographic location, in UN food and agriculture policy negotiations.

Address the climate, biodiversity, food and water crisis through agroecology: Publicly commit to supporting agroecology in alignment with 10 elements on agroecology developed by FAO, and 13 principles developed by the High-Level Panel of Experts of the UN Committee on the World Food Security.

Trade: Publicly commit to a comprehensive review of how U.S. food and agriculture trade policy can advance a rights-based Just Transition. Refrain from trade challenges to other countries’ efforts to advance food sovereignty, the Right to Adequate Food, biodiversity protection, and confront climate change. Engage the civil society organizations of this letter and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food on how to both leverage and reform U.S. trade policy.

Strengthen participatory, multilateral policy-making: Demonstrate U.S. dedication to democratic policymaking in international fora by establishing mechanism for public comment from U.S. constituents on U.S. priorities in international food and agriculture policy negotiations. Take decisive action to strengthen the UN Committee on World Food Security. Institutionalize transparency and disclosure procedures for U.S. officials’ engagement with corporate agribusinesses.

The 67 food and agriculture experts see these transformative changes as the “best hope” protecting food systems and ensuring an end to hunger globally. §

Central America: Changing U.S. Policies for Migrants

The Root Causes Initiative is working to address the underlying structural and historical conditions driving people to migrate from Central America.

In December of 2019, Hope Border Institute and Faith in Action gathered with Central American and Mexican leaders in Mexico City to understand and process the exodus of children, families, and adults from the region in 2019. “We sought a deeper analysis of why so many had chosen to leave the places they love,” said Dylan Corbett, executive director of the Hope Border Institute, “and make a dangerous journey to a country that has taken unprecedented steps to keep them out and block them from accessing protection.”

“We came away realizing that fundamental change in U.S. policy is needed if we’re going to help create a Central America where families can thrive, access good economic opportunity and live in safety.”

The resulting framework for planning and action, described on the Faith In Action website, has brought together hundreds of organizations and two dozen Catholic and Episcopal Bishops and other religious leaders from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico and the United States, who have shared their lived experiences and analysis with each other and with the Biden Administration. Their goal is to change U.S. policies to create more peaceful, just communities in the region and to treat migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border with dignity.

One taskforce of the Root Causes Initiative is working on changing the mechanism that USAID has for financing projects in Guatemala, where, up until early September, the United States had been dumping thousands of expelled migrants in a remote town in the jungle along the border with Mexico. The U.S. policy to send deportees on flights to southern Mexico caused an outcry among human rights groups, including the Root Causes Initiative, after around 2,500 of deportees, reportedly coming from nearly a dozen countries, were dropped at the small border outpost of El Ceibo, Guatemala, without resources to get home. After meeting with Guatemalan officials, the Biden administration agreed to send only Guatemalan and Honduran deportees and only on direct flights to Guatemala City.

The Root Causes task force on Guatemala wants to make civil society a priority with USAID in Guatemala. They aim to strengthen the ability of indigenous peoples, youth, and women to get funding from USAID. At a recent planning meeting, some advocates named the need to strengthen ties among Guatemalan civil society actors and those in neighboring countries like Nicaragua, in or-

der to be heard over the voice of Mexico, which has the overwhelming attention of the United States in negotiations over the direction of U.S. investments.

Problems with USAID funding run deep. The Root Causes Initiative Steering Committee sent a letter of concern to Administrator Samantha Power on Oct. 19 after learning that “five months ago, on May 18, without transparency, USAID/OTI used a process designed for urgent acquisition of supplies and services to give a U.S.-based for-profit company a \$135 million three-year no-bid contract to manage a Central America Regional Initiative.”

The stated purpose of this project contracted to Maryland-based Creative Associates International by USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) is to “increase the ability of the most vulnerable communities and individuals to advocate for themselves and meaningfully improve their living conditions, increase perceptions of opportunity and fairness in economic and political systems, and contribute to the body of knowledge on how to effectively address the root causes of migration by developing and testing new theories of change.”

The letter from the Root Causes Initiative says “These laudable goals focused on citizen empowerment, improvements in living conditions, and broader economic and political change have been a major focus of our conversations with USAID and other Biden-Harris Administration officials, and represent a positive shift from past security-focused approaches to addressing migration from Central America. However, they cannot be achieved without close partnership with civil society organizations that have deep knowledge and experience in the complexities of social and political change in their countries.”

The letter lists nine questions, including “Why was this decision not made public?”, “Why did USAID/OTI sign such a large contract with one for-profit company?”, and “Why did USAID/OTI not work through or consult with organizations in the region?”

Another activity of the Root Causes Initiative is a series of meetings of bishops of southern U.S. border areas and Central American countries. The seventh meeting was held Oct. 25-28 in Honduras. The goal of these meetings is dialogue to improve the communication between countries and among immigrant houses and churches so we work together to provide refuge. §

Philippine Media Statement on Nobel Peace Prize

The Philippines is ranked as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists.

The Nobel Peace Prize for Filipina journalist Maria Ressa has brought global attention to the struggle for human rights and press freedom in the Philippines. It is also the first time the prize has been awarded to a journalist. Ressa shares the award with Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov.

The Philippines is ranked by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) as being among the most dangerous places in the world to be a journalist. The situation has only worsened under President Rodrigo Duterte, whom RSF once called a "predator of press freedom."

When sworn in as president in June 2016, Duterte issued a grim warning: "Just because you're a journalist, you are not exempted from assassination if you're a son of a bitch. Freedom of expression cannot help you if you have done something wrong." RSF reports that four photojournalists were killed in 2020.

The government has developed several ways to pressure journalists who dare to be critical of the President Duterte and his "war on drugs" which Human Rights Watch says has led to the deaths of over 12,000 Filipinos to date, mostly urban poor. At least 2,555 of the killings have been attributed to the Philippine National Police.

Reporters Without Borders explains that after targeting the Daily Philippines Inquirer, the president and his staff embarked on a judicial harassment campaign against the news website Rappler and its editor, Maria Ressa, who has been the target of at least ten arrest warrants on a range of charges, all equally far-fetched.

After the Nobel committee awarded the Peace Prize to journalists Maria Ressa and Dmitri Muratov on Oct. 8, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalist issued the following statement, signed by 42 media organizations and 156 individuals:

"We join our fellow Filipinos in celebrating the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize given to journalists Maria Ressa and Dmitri Muratov.

"We applaud the Nobel Committee's recognition of the courage not just of these two journalists but of so many others who speak truth to power "in a world in which democracy and freedom of the press face increasingly adverse conditions."

"As Filipino journalists, we are concerned about the fragile state of press freedom in our country, especially as the 2022 elections draw near. The climate for independent reporting is fraught. Lawsuits have been filed in an attempt to silence our colleagues. ABS-CBN,

the country's largest broadcast network, has been shut down. Frontline journalists, many of them just in their 20s and 30s, bear the brunt. They are moving targets for death threats, insults and unrelenting trolling.

"The pandemic has made access to information and to officials particularly challenging. Financially, news organizations are hurting. Politically, their legitimacy is under attack. But so many soldier on, bringing fact-based news and opinion in the belief that truth-telling matters, even in the era of lies and disinformation.

"Press freedom in the Philippines is resilient and enduring. This resilience was forged over time, from the struggle against colonial rule, the tyranny of authoritarianism and the challenges of democracy. Filipinos have defended press freedom because they know it is their right and that their hard-word democracy cannot thrive without it.

"The coming elections will be a battle between truth and lies. As journalists, we promise to remain true to the standards of fact-based and ethical newsgathering. But we are outnumbered by professional public relations staffs and troll factories. We alone cannot fight the deluge of disinformation in an election where the future of our democracy is at stake.

"We, therefore, call on all those running for public office to make clear their stance on press freedom and to be transparent about their public relations efforts. We ask political campaigns to respect the rights of journalists to report freely, without fear or favor. Before his death, Jose Luis Gascon, the late chair of the Human Rights Commission, proposed a Media Safety Unit. We endorse this proposal and hope that the new chair of the commission will be true to its mandate to safeguard our human rights.

"We call on social media companies to make their platforms safe for journalists.

"Finally, we ask the public to support a free press and journalists who expose lies and stand up for truth."§

South Sudan: Climate-fueled Suffering

As half a million people in South Sudan face their third straight year of extreme flooding that the UN says is fueled by climate change, Maryknoll lay missioner Gabe Hurrish writes in his newsletter about the growing hunger and violence in the world's youngest nation.

As I have mentioned in my previous communication, violence continues across South Sudan. Most recently, in a high-profile killing, two Catholic Sisters and three others were ambushed along a highly traveled road (see trucker strike below). This is terrible but not uncommon in this virulent country. So many murders are occurring every day. The United Nations has reported that most of it is committed by armed militias who are supposed to protect their communities but instead turn on them.

Security forces are becoming more and more onerous, and both journalists and human rights activists are being harassed, arrested and disappeared. Just on September 1, security authorities in South Sudan arrested two activists amid claims that they were among individuals behind a planned demonstration to call for the ouster of President Salva Kiir. Most people are never seen or heard from again after they have been arrested by the feared security apparatus. This is the kind of situation that the southern Sudanese people fought against for over 50 years under Arabic northern rule.

Politically, even Vice President Riek Machar was reportedly kicked out as leader of his party, which highlights divisions within the opposition. The government army and the opposition armies are turning on themselves and killing their own men! They are not paid, not fed, not clothed, and they have heavy weapons with nothing to lose. So this is a big problem. I wonder who controls these young men? A recent United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UN MISS) report stated that the violence is growing and they do not have the resources to mitigate every incident. One would think, with an annual budget of \$1.6 billion, they would be able to do a comprehensive job.

The World Food Program (WFP) here has run low on cash and has announced it has to suspend food deliveries. So even the United Nations doesn't have enough resources to save lives. Almost 400,000 people suffer from floods and have no food.

According to WFP, 60% of this country suffer from food insecurity. That is to say, they don't have enough food year round or have high risk of losing their crops. Sixty Percent!!! Just for awareness to put it a bit in perspective: That is roughly equivalent to all of the 12 most populated states in the USA combined: California, Texas, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois,

Ohio, Georgia, North Carolina, Michigan, New Jersey, and Virginia. Comparable to all those states not having enough to eat ... for a year!

Due to an influx of IMF dollars, the exchange rate on the black market dropped by roughly 33%. Ostensibly this was to stabilize the failing economy, but market prices did not concurrently decline, so many people lost a lot of purchasing power. At the same time, prices of imports have increased due to an international trucker strike. This has caused food and fuel prices to rise sharply. The strike was started because the South Sudan government would not provide safety for truck drivers who were being killed weekly while driving on the main highways from Kenya and Uganda.

Many people are now looking at the failed state of South Sudan, and of course the United States invested billions in this country — with, in the end, not much to show for it. There are many similarities between the Afghanistan situation and the situation here in South Sudan — as far as investing lots of money, resources and time and finding in the end a failed state.

The security apparatus in the country seems to be gaining more and more influence, with less and less control from politicians. Media personnel are being arrested and harassed and lawyers and human rights activists rounded up and disappeared.

So the situation here is not good. People are suffering. Crime and violence are increasing. It is not an easy place to live and work. We continue to pray for a change of heart amongst those who are in control. Too many lives are senselessly lost. Thank you for your support and prayers. §

Faith in Action: All are invited by Friends in Solidarity with South Sudan for an evening with world-renowned author John Grisham on Wednesday, Nov. 10 at 8 p.m. Eastern. John will talk with Sister Joan Mumaw, IHM, about his new novel "Sooley" which tells the fictional story of a 17-year-old South Sudanese basketball player and the experiences of his family in South Sudan. The webinar is free, but registration is required. <https://bit.ly/SooleyWebinar> After Nov. 10, look for the recording of the webinar on their website <https://www.solidarityfriends.org/>

Resources

1. **Research on U.S.-China dialogue** by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, the American Friends Service Committee, and four independent researchers reveals that the U.S. gained significant benefits from official dialogue mechanisms with China. <https://bit.ly/USChinaDialogue>
2. **Watch *Oh Mercy - Searching for Hope in the Promised Land***, a free, 12-minute documentary about the plight of forced migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers trapped on the U.S.-Mexico border, who were denied entry into the United States under the ‘Migrant Protection Protocols’ (MPP). <https://bit.ly/OhMercy>
3. **Pax Christi International offers a new publication: *A Policymaker’s Tool for Effective, Nonviolent Strategies for Sustainable Peace***. The short, practical brochure illustrates how nonviolence at the policy level has been proven effective around the world. Available in English, French, Spanish and Italian. <https://bit.ly/PeacePolicyToolkit>
4. **New Report from the UN NGO Committee on Migration** "*Report of a Survey on Migrant and Refugee Victims of Xenophobia, Racism and Intolerance in the Context of the Coronavirus Pandemic.*" The findings in this document are based on the latest survey of NGOs, concerning their efforts to serve migrant communities and help eradicate xenophobia and racism. <https://bit.ly/NGOCommitteeMigration>
5. **New report describing how people experience climate change in their daily lives in five countries** where Church World Service works: Cambodia, Georgia, Haiti, Indonesia and Kenya. <https://bit.ly/CWSClimateReport>
6. **Guatemala Human Rights Commission** has been publishing weekly updates on the human rights situation in Guatemala. Read them on their blog at <https://bit.ly/GHRCblog>
7. **Guatemalan human rights:** 40 years ago the Guatemalan army disappeared 14 yr old Marco Antonio Molina Theissen. He remains missing. Jo Marie Burt of the Washington Office on Latin America analyzed the importance of the resulting human rights trial in 2018 that managed to hold the intellectual authors of wartime atrocities responsible for their acts. <https://bit.ly/JusticeWeDeserve>
8. **2020 was the deadliest year on record for environmental activists**, with 227 documented murders, according to a Global Witness report — and more believed to have gone unreported. <https://bit.ly/GlobalWitness2021>
9. **New report on how religion aids peaceful change** by the U.S. Institute of Peace. <https://bit.ly/ReligionAidsPeace>
10. **Anti-War & Pro-Peace Resources Database** created by World Beyond War. Search by topic, language and resource type. <https://worldbeyondwar.org/resources>
11. **Read the latest progress on the Iran nuclear deal** and efforts to return the United States and Iran to compliance in the 2015 Iran nuclear deal written by Kelsey Davenport of the Arms Control Association and published by the U.S. Institute of Peace: “Explainer: On Iran’s Nuclear Progress” <https://bit.ly/JPCOAupdate>
12. **Webinar: *The Politics of Land: Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial Perspectives on the Situation of First Nations in Canada***, public lecture by Professor John Berkman, Visiting Fellow at the Laudato Si’ Research Institute. **Nov. 11, 11:30am Eastern.** Register at <https://bit.ly/PoliticsofLand>
13. **New integral ecology guide for local communities**, inspired by The Economy of Francesco. Learn ways to move away from a planet-destroying model of economics and bring to market solutions that will secure our future. <https://bit.ly/IntegralEcologyGuide>
14. **Webinar: Talk with Author John Grisham about “Sooley”** a fictional book about a young South Sudanese basketball player and his family. Hosted by Friends in Solidarity with South Sudan, Wednesday, **Nov. 10 at 8 p.m. Eastern.** <https://bit.ly/SooleyWebinar>