



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

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El Salvador: Update on elections.....	3
Guatemala: Search for mining justice.....	4
Honduras: Sex workers targeted.....	6
Argentina: Harvard investments harm communities.....	7
South Sudan: Bishops issue exhortation.....	8
Kenya: Surge in anti-terrorism actions.....	9
Syria: Women seeking peace, security.....	10
Philippines: Calm amidst the storm.....	11
Myanmar: Hope, terror share new dawn.....	12
Immigration: Take action during Lent.....	13
Threat of growing inequalities.....	14
A politically possible alternative to GDP.....	15
Keystone XL: Challenges to pipeline.....	16
UN: Family farming in the future.....	17
Breakthroughs in access to HIV medicines.....	18
Resources.....	19

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El Salvador: Update on elections

The following article was written by Eben Levey, who is spending several months as an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC). Eben and MOGC staff member Susan Gunn traveled to El Salvador in early March as part of a delegation to observe the run-off election on March 9.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of El Salvador's presidential election on February 2 was the lack of surprises. In what was widely hailed as El Salvador's smoothest election, the three-way race between current Vice President Salvador Sánchez Cerén (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, FMLN, incumbent left-wing party), former mayor of San Salvador Norman Quijano (National Republican Alliance, ARENA, right-wing party), and ex-President Antonio Saca (Unidad Coalition) ended with no candidate receiving more than 50 percent of the votes, forcing a runoff election scheduled March 9.

Polls going into the first round showed Sánchez Cerén (shown at right) hovering around 50 percent, yet his 48.9 percent result on February 2 was not enough to avoid the runoff. With Quijano 10 percentage points behind Sánchez Cerén, the FMLN will be favorites in the upcoming runoff. The biggest question will be where the Saca voters turn to. Having received only 11 percent in the February elections, Saca is now out of the race. As such, both the FMLN and ARENA are actively courting his voters, sparking rumors on both sides of backroom deals to deliver Saca's votes to the other party. ARENA spokespersons have claimed that the FMLN supported the Saca candidacy in order to split the right, while the FMLN fears that Saca voters will return to ARENA, the party that expelled Saca on internal charges of corruption (officially) and picking the wrong candidate in the 2009 elections (unofficially).



In 2009, the FMLN, the former guerrilla organization turned political party, won the presidency by fielding a moderate newcomer to the party, Mauricio Funes. Since the FMLN's ascent to the presidency, the party has expanded social programs, halted mining operations, and brokered negotiations between gangs to bring down the murder rate. As a candidate, Sánchez Cerén has primarily campaigned on the promise to continue the achievements of the Funes presidency.

Leading up to the February 2 election however,

there were doubts that all would go smoothly. Quijano campaigned around the twin pillars of public security and free-market solutions. In particular, ARENA criticized the FMLN for catering to gangs in facilitating the gang truce rather than attacking the gang problems with a *mano dura*, or a firm hand. Initially, Quijano promised to end the social programs that current President Funes has put in place. However, once Quijano realized just how popular the social programs are, Quijano argued that many of them would remain in place should he be elected, but that privatization would make these social programs more efficient. Furthermore, in a trope that was repeated again and again in the Salvadoran media, Quijano and ARENA denounced the FMLN for planning to steal the elections. During an ARENA assembly in September, Quijano stated: "Faced with the certainty of defeat, [the FMLN is] preparing electoral fraud, for which they are counting on the shameless support of the corrupt and traitors like Tony Saca and his group that allow themselves, without decency, to do the dirty work."

The attempt to paint the then upcoming elections as fraudulent was nothing short of an attempt to undermine the gradually improving and democratizing institutions of government, above all the Supreme Elections Tribunal (TSE in Spanish initials). During the Funes administration, the Salvadoran legislature passed an extensive electoral reform law that has improved the transparency and accessibility of the electoral process. Institutional reforms brought in additional observers and party representatives to the operations of the TSE, increasing transparency and preventing any single political party from controlling the operations of the TSE. On the ground, the reforms introduced "residential voting," an increase in the number of voting centers across the country in an effort to increase accessibility and transparency. This makes the process of voting easier for citizens by reducing the distance they must travel to vote while simultaneously introducing checks against fraud so that non-residents cannot be bused into a location to stuff the ballot boxes. The reforms also extended suffrage to the national police, who had previously been banned from voting, as well as to Salvadorans living abroad.

Following the ease of the first round of elections, all signs point to the runoff occurring without major problems. One member of the CISPES election delegation described the first round: "Although there were isolated incidents of problems and small violations of elections law, everything went overwhelmingly smoothly." However, the right wing has ratcheted up attacks on the

FMLN and the elections process in a desperate attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the democratic process. Former U.S. Representative Jim DeMint (R-SC), now president of the Heritage Foundation, recently published an op-ed in the Miami Herald that falsely argued that an FMLN victory would turn El Salvador into a narco-state and would endanger safety in the United States. In large part, this smear campaign is an attempt to distract voters and observers from the major setbacks that have hampered Quijano's campaign. Quijano's top advisor, for-

mer President Francisco Flores, was indicted for embezzlement of government funds. Additionally, President Funes announced that a number of businesses are under investigation for allegedly instructing their employees to vote for particular candidates. However, most polls and media coverage point toward a Salvadoran populace that is willing and able to exercise their electoral rights despite the lies that the right wing is spreading in a desperate attempt to win the runoff election.

Guatemala: Search for mining justice

The following article was originally published in the December 2013 issue of El Quetzal, the newsletter of the Guatemala Human Rights Commission-USA.

Guatemala has endured conflict over mining for several decades, but over the last couple of years, the number and intensity of the conflicts have escalated.

Communities that oppose mining in Guatemala have been met with intimidation, cooptation, and even deadly violence. The violence is generally carried out by private security guards hired by the mining companies, but it is committed with the tacit approval of the government. The perpetrators all too often walk free, or, in cases when they are charged, are exonerated by Guatemala's weak and corruptible judicial system.

Although the companies that mine Guatemala's soil are domestic, they are universally contracted by, or subsidiaries of, foreign corporations. So, alongside ongoing local efforts to halt mining, affected communities and their allies have sought creative ways to hold the parent companies accountable abroad. Three struggles against mining over the last year have successfully brought their fight to mining companies in the U.S. and Canada: La Puya, San Rafael las Flores and El Estor.

Since March of 2012, residents of the municipalities of San Jose del Golfo and San Pedro Ayampuc – just an hour outside Guatemala City – have blocked the road leading to a proposed mine. Residents set up a camp site and continue to take turns using their bodies to halt construction of the mine. This movement is often referred to as "La Puya."

The mining company, along with police, has tried to break through the roadblock various times, but each time they have been peacefully repelled. In addition, one leader, Yolanda Oqueli, was shot in June 2012 – a crime for which no one has been held accountable. There is a constant fear of another attack or violent eviction.

The project is owned by an American engineering firm, Kappes, Cassiday and Associates (KCA), so members of La Puya looked to cross-border organization to bring the fight to the U.S. Yolanda, as well as fellow activists Tono Catalan and Alvaro Sandoval, has spoken to U.S. audiences in Washington, D.C. and Ft. Benning, GA, mobilizing them to contact KCA as well as the U.S. government to demand that the rights of protesters be respected.

Then, in June [2013], Alvaro traveled to Reno, Nevada where KCA has its headquarters. Alvaro joined local anti-mining activists to stand up for the rights of communities in both the U.S. and Guatemala to have a say in what happens to their local environment. Americans have made it clear that if activists at La Puya are injured or arrested, KCA could be partially liable.

A common tactic used during the Perez Molina administration has been to provoke violence, or directly carry out attacks, claiming there is evidence of organized crime, and then use that as justification to respond with heavy military repression. Over the last several months in San Rafael las Flores, where residents are opposed to a silver mine, there have been multiple violent incidents. Poor investigations carried out by the Public Prosecutor's Office and the outright manipulation of evidence by police make clarification of the facts unlikely. Nevertheless, the government has blamed groups protesting the El Escobal Silver Mine. (The protesters have denied the accusations.)

What is clear, however, is that some attacks were perpetrated by the Canadian mining company, Tahoe Resources, and its private security firm. On April 27, [2013,] a group of local residents left a protest camp along the road that passes directly in front of the mine. When they passed the front gate, security guards opened fire on them from the other side. The head of mine security, Alberto Rotonda, was caught on tape ordering their

execution. Though Rotonda was arrested, he was only placed under house arrest, and his trial has been interminably delayed.

At the beginning of June, Canadian groups lodged a complaint with the Ontario Securities Commission asking them to investigate Tahoe Resources for the shooting. The complaint alleges that Tahoe's disclosure about the attack was insufficient and inaccurate. Tahoe's shares dropped after the complaint was filed, down to about \$12 a share in July after reaching a high earlier in 2013 of nearly \$19 per share. The price has since rebounded, and on October 13 the company made its first shipment of silver concentrate. Still, the market's reaction to the complaint demonstrates that Canadian mining companies who perpetrate violence can be hit where it hurts: their profits.

Victims of violence at the hands of a private security firm hired by HudBay Minerals have also taken their fight for justice to Canadian soil; however, in this case they are using the Canadian courts.

In 2007, as part of ongoing conflict over a nickel mine in El Estor, Izabal, 11 women were gang raped during a mass eviction. Then, in 2009, a schoolteacher was killed and a young man was paralyzed – all allegedly by private security personnel hired by a subsidiary of HudBay Minerals. (The women report that they were also raped by police and soldiers).

HudBay Minerals has argued that it can't be held accountable for abuses committed by a subsidiary. However, the plaintiffs claim that HudBay made decisions on the ground for its subsidiary. They also claim that

HudBay was negligent in hiring unlicensed, untrained security guards in a country overrun with violence and ruled by impunity.

In July [2013], the Ontario Superior Court ruled that the case can be heard in Canada. This opens the door for other, similar cases – where subsidiaries of Canadian companies commit abuses outside of Canada – to be tried in Canadian courts.

The ruling established that the plaintiffs will have to show that either HudBay minerals had direct and complete control over its subsidiary, Compañía Guatemalteca de Niquel (CGN), or that it was negligent in not preventing the violence caused by CGN. Part of the plaintiff's claim of negligence is based on Guatemala's high murder rates, especially of indigenous leaders, and Guatemala's high rate of impunity. Thus, this case will put Guatemala's government itself on trial. The plaintiffs argue that Guatemala is so violent that a mining company that ordered the eviction of indigenous communities should have known that human rights abuses would be committed.

The last few years have shown us that any company that mines in Guatemala where there is community resistance could be considered negligent. With evidence of systematic violence and heavy-handed repression against anti-mining movements, one could argue that human rights violations are to be expected. Similarly, impunity for attacks against anti-mining groups is so widespread that victims have no chance of finding justice in the country.

Whether the case of gold mining at La Puya, silver mining in San Rafael, or nickel mining in El Estor, years of sustained community resistance show no signs of relenting. Meanwhile, transnational mining companies that benefit from government corruption and entrenched impunity, disregarding basic human rights obligations to increase profits, should perhaps not be so confident they will get away with it.

Photo of sign from La Puya from the Guatemala Solidarity Network/UK



Honduras: Sex workers targeted

The following article was written by Eben Levey, an intern who is working with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns this year.

Honduras currently has the highest murder rate in the world and the city of San Pedro Sula is the most violent city within the country. Since the end of 2013, an often overlooked and discriminated against section of society has found itself subject to even higher levels of violence and injustice. The community of sex workers in San Pedro Sula suffered nine murders in the span of one month, eight of whom were women, and one transgender sex worker.

While sex work is legal in Honduras, the individuals who are part of this economy rarely are subject to the protection of the state, either in terms of labor law or the basic protections from violence and exploitation. Rather, as a writer for Amnesty International described their situation: “Those who murder sex workers believe they can literally treat these human beings as garbage... Such violence takes place against the broader backdrop of widespread gender- and sexuality-based violence that imperils women and LGBT persons all through Honduras.”

The recent spate of killings began on December 13, 2013 when witnesses reported that a group of men in a minivan stopped and began to argue four female sex workers. After a few minutes, the men opened fire and killed Ana María Sánchez Zaldívar (37), Doris Malene García (30), and Milagro Rosario Bonilla (52). The fourth woman, Zoila Yamileth Sánchez Zaldívar (30), was taken in the van and later found dead by gunshots in another part of the city.

Two weeks later, on December 30, in a remarkably similar scenario, five female sex workers were attacked outside of a bar in the city center. According to the media report in *La Tribuna*, a blue van containing at least four men pulled up and opened fire on the group of women, killing three immediately, and sending two to the hospital, one of whom died from gunshot wounds the following day. Police said that the victims, Irina Marisela García Maradiaga (23), Irma Melisa Benítez Lewis (21), Sandra Liseth Aldana Perez, and Gabriela Alejandra Osorto (21), were attacked because of failure

to pay extortion money to organized crime elements.

Finally, on January 7, a transgender sex worker, Marco Noé López Castillo, was abducted by a group of armed men. Her corpse was found early the following day, strangled to death, with arms and legs bound behind her back. Police announced that they had suspects in her murder, but did not provide further details to the press.

The issue of these killings goes far beyond isolated incidents of violence against sex workers. So many murders occurring in the space of less than a month seems to indicate that perpetrators of violence against women and LGBTI individuals are secure in their impunity. In fact, civil society groups reported that at least 606 women were killed in 2012, the highest rate of femicide in Honduras since 2005, indicating that Honduran government is not accomplishing its mission of protecting vulnerable members of society.



“No more femicides.” Photo by Flickr Lunita lu, under Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC 2.0)

In mid-January, members of RedTraSex Honduras, a transnational network of sex workers in Latin America and the Caribbean, met with the National Institute of Women (INAM in Spanish initials) to demand accountability and justice for the increasing numbers of sex workers, female, homosexual, and transgender, who had been victims of lethal violence in the previous months. RedTraSex also presented a formal demand to the authorities of San Pedro Sula for thorough investi-

gations into the murders of sex workers.

As some of the most marginalized members of society, sex workers, and particularly LGBTI sex workers, are victims not only of a climate of violence, but also of a Honduran state unwilling or unable to tackle the high levels of impunity. Given the murder rate in the country, the killings of sex workers are often uninvestigated, and are left attributed to organized crime and disagreements between sex workers and clients. As Juan Orlando Hernandez, the new president of Honduras, begins his first year in office with a promise to crack down on organized crime and impunity, we hope that he remembers that sex workers are human beings that deserve the protection of the State and the law. The protection of human rights should not and cannot be a process that only applies to certain groups, but rather is the fundamental mission of the State to protect the most marginalized and vulnerable actors in society.

Argentina: Harvard investments harm communities

In April, two Argentines will travel to Harvard University to talk with students, teachers and administrators about how the university's investments – two Argentinian timber companies located near the Paraguay border – are harming their communities.

In 2007, the Harvard endowment bought EVASA and Los Misiones, today worth a combined \$55.2 million and encompassing 217,166 acres of land, more than 50 times the size of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

When they visit Harvard, the Argentines – two community leaders who, as of publication date, have not yet been identified – will share with the students the reality of destroyed wetlands, decreased biodiversity, falling water tables, increased respiratory illnesses, horrible working conditions, and the use of toxic fertilizers without required safety equipment.

International Forestry Investment Advisors, which counsels large investors about land investing, predicted an annual return of up to 31 percent, while being environmentally sustainable and socially responsible. Part of the companies' profitability is predicted due to the region's ideal growing conditions, which allow trees to grow up to four times faster than in Europe and the U.S.

However, according to ecologist Juan Jose Neiff, the eucalyptus and pine trees planted by the companies in massive plantations "generally reduce fauna complexity and cause species segregation, leading to an associated loss of biodiversity." Local residents report far fewer plant and animal species in and around the plantations.

The tree plantations also use enormous amounts of water that affects local communities. Jorge Vicente, a 50-year old local resident reports that before the arrival of the plantations, he would have to deepen his well every six years, but since their arrival, he needs to do so every two months. The fact that the plantations are often closer to wetlands than is legally allowed is a particular problem. "The wetlands near the trees are drying up. There is no more water," Vicente says.

While EVASA and Los Misiones report benefitting local communities with good jobs, locals tell a different story. One woman who lives near a plantation says, "The timber plantations don't create jobs for the community.



Photo of Los Misiones, Leandro Kibisz, available under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic license.

Before the timber plantations came, we grew cotton. ... Now there is no work. The timber plantations are there, so you can't plant cotton or other crops." The vast majority of the jobs provided are seasonal and precarious. Those lucky enough to find more permanent positions report difficult working conditions, from forced unpaid overtime, unsafe conditions on the plantations including the use of toxic pesticides without adequate safety equipment and unsanitary living conditions in company dormitories.

The trucks hauling lumber out of the plantations cause serious problems for local residents. They destroy local roads, especially during the rainy season; in dry times, they create dust storms that increase respiratory problems, especially in children and elderly. The local doctor reports that respiratory problems have become the number one cause of visits to his clinic.

Unfortunately this is not the first time that Harvard investments were tied to illegal and immoral actions. The Chilean logging company Agricola Brinzal, 99.99 percent owned by Harvard, was found guilty of multiple violations of Chilean forest laws. Agricola Duramen Limitada, another Chilean company owned by Harvard, has been fined by Chilean courts for similar activities. In late January 2014, Romanian authorities detained the director of Scolopax, a timber company 100 percent owned by Harvard, for accepting multi-million dollar bribes and luxury gifts in exchange for illegally acquiring land for Harvard.

Emilio Spataro, director of a local environmental group, perhaps best summarizes the visitors' message: "We want the true owners of EVASA and Las Misiones, who profit from the destruction of the environment, of the Ibera wetlands, the exploitation of labor, and lack of respect for communities, to know that they are responsible for the conflicts they are causing, that are increasing in the region, and to have a willing attitude to listen the different voices that critique what happens and to sit down and have a dialog to resolve each problem in a responsible manner. That is the avenue to solutions."

Faith in action:

Learn more about this campaign at www.responsibleharvard.com and search for "Harvard in Ibera."

South Sudan: Bishops issue exhortation

For many the recent crisis in South Sudan has led to a feeling of disappointment; the great promise of a liberated nation seems to have dissolved into widespread violent clashes of unspeakable horror. While much of South Sudan is not caught up in violence, the conflict the broke out in late December 2013 grows wider by the week. Reports from the newest nation in Africa paint an increasingly depressing picture of violent clashes in several cities in the northern part of the country. Both the government and those seeking to overthrow the government have broken a recent cease-fire agreement.

Nevertheless, in the midst of what appears to be a tragic dissolution of their nation, countless South Sudanese are working daily to promote an end to the violence and to forge a pathway to peace and reconciliation. They are not waiting for the guns to fall silent before making plans for peace.

One such group is the Catholic Bishops Conference of Sudan. Even before the outbreak of the current cycle of violence, the bishops warned that, with the arrival of independence, it was no longer “business as usual” in South Sudan. By January 31, as the violence that had erupted in Juba spread to several other cities, the bishops went even further and issued a forceful pastoral exhortation entitled “Let Us Re-found Our Nation on a New Covenant” that boldly declared the vision of a free and democratic South Sudan had been shattered and that the nation needed a new foundation.

The Catholic bishops’ exhortation is based on their own experience as pastors. They describe the present situation of both Sudan and South Sudan as perhaps the gravest ever faced by the Sudanese people. According to the bishops, the blood of innocent victims – of murdered children and raped women – as well as the plight of 800,000 internally displaced people “calls out to God

from the ground.” They then list the many causes of the frightful violence engulfing parts of South Sudan: failure to deal with tensions within the governing party (the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement, SPLM); poor governance that allows power to become con-

centrated and personalized in the hands of a few; corruption and nepotism; and negative narratives that serve to poison social relations.

The way forward in South Sudan will not be easy. According to the bishops, the present governing party needs democratic reform. Each side in the present conflict must have an opportunity to tell its side of the story openly and without the proliferation of negative narratives that only serve to inflame more violence. In addition to exhorting all sides to put down their weapons, the bishops are realistic in their prescriptions of what needs to be done. While reconciliation is always a hope, the bishops speak clearly about other steps that have to be taken before the space for reconciliation is created: peace through a cease-fire; truth-telling; justice which requires some restitution; and forgiveness and mercy. Their vision of how to resolve or transform the present conflict is much broader than a negotiated settlement or externally brokered peace accord.

A vital part of the exhortation concerns media reporting on the current crisis in South Sudan. Here the bishops are rather blunt: “We are critical of the conduct of both national and international media institutions.” They condemn reports that are based on information which may not have been accurate because such reports may have inflamed violence and revenge attacks. But the exhortation is not all about condemning others. The bishops also commit themselves and their rather extensive resources to the rebuilding efforts that are necessary within the new nation. In particular, the bishops offer their Catholic radio network and other media resources to support the process of peace and reconciliation.

In the hardest-hitting section of their exhortation, they question why religious leaders have been excluded from peace talks in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. They wonder why only military-led groups are invited and, without naming names, state openly that the present outbreak of violence is due to a handful of political leaders.

In the conclusion, the bishops declare that: “We are convinced that we stand at a decisive moment in the history of South Sudan. Fundamental choices must be made about how we deal with our past and present history, about how we govern ourselves as a nation, about how state institutions serve the poor. We must seize from the present crisis an opportunity to re-found our nation on democratic principles of dialogue, inclusion, and respect for diversity, God’s gift to humanity.”



Roman Catholicism is the largest Christian denomination in South Sudan; President Salva Kiir, left, is a Catholic.

Kenya: Surge in anti-terrorism actions

In the wake of the terrorist attacks that took place on September 11, 2001, the United States increased its funding of anti-terrorism programs in numerous countries around the world. In 2003, almost \$11 million was given to Kenya. Part of this funding went for an anti-terrorism instructor training held in New Mexico in May of that year. Between 2002 and 2007, Kenya received a total of \$21,938,000 for anti-terrorism activities; in 2004 it established its own Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU).

After the terrorist attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi in September 2013, Kenya escalated its anti-terrorism efforts and the result, according to some organizations, has been the flagrant abuse of the human rights of certain groups. The city of Mombasa located on Kenya's Indian Ocean coast has been the center of numerous such abuses.

In 2012-2013 eight Muslim leaders and three madrasa teachers were killed in the Mombasa area. As of early January 2014 all of these deaths were unexplained and uninvestigated; no one had been held accountable. In addition, a Kenyan national named Mohammed Abdulmalik was arrested in 2007 by Kenyan police, interrogated and then taken to Nairobi airport and handed over to U.S. personnel who rendered him to Djibouti and from there to Afghanistan and finally to Guantanamo where he is still held in imprisoned.

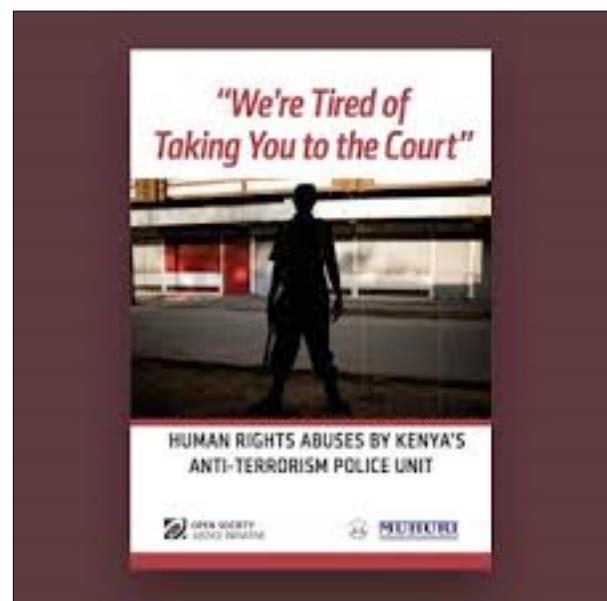
These and many other abuses of the ATPU are closely documented in a report entitled "We're tired of taking you to the court," published by the Open Society Justice Initiative and Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI). According to the report, in its efforts to combat terrorism in Kenya, "the ATPU has committed a wide array of human rights abuses that violate international, regional and domestic law" including the use of excessive force during house raids, torture and ill-treatment of detainees, arbitrary detentions, including disappearances, and rendering terrorists suspects to countries where they face a real risk of torture. Kenya's Prevention of Terrorism Act of 2012 also comes in for criticism: Like many anti-terrorism laws passed since September 2001, this act contains vague definitions of terrorism and expands police powers that can be used against various groups that may be at odds with the government including religious groups.

That the tension between the government of Kenya and Muslim groups in Mombasa is growing is evident from the recent incident at the Masjid Musa mosque in

Mombasa. This mosque had been selected as the venue of a convention by Muslim youth who had chosen to be aggressive, assertive and threatening in their behavior. Some believe that these young people are disappointed in local Muslim leadership and have begun to adopt a radical expression of Islam. Police allowed the youth to assemble but then entered the mosque and arrested between 70 and 126 members of the meeting, including two women. In response to this and other incidents, President Uhuru Kenyatta declared that on TV that "we are a tolerant society, we respect all religions, but under no circumstances will we allow places of worship – be it a church, a temple or a mosque – to be used to radicalize our youth and threaten the lives of Kenyans."

"We're tired of taking you to the court" claims that the current anti-terrorism strategy is not only unlawful but also counterproductive. The incident at the Masjid Musa mosque seems to bear this out. Young Muslims, according to the authors of the report, are turning to violent groups like Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujaahidin for their inspiration and are demanding answers to the many deaths of Muslim leaders from the coastal area. In addition, the police of the ATPU are losing credibility because of aggressive and hostile tactics. As a result, the police do not get useful intelligence from communities in which suspected terrorists live. This comes at a time when Kenya is actually undertaking widespread police reforms, some of which have been signed into law but have not been fully implemented.

Read the report at the Open Society's website, www.opensocietyfoundations.org.



Syria: Women seeking peace, security

Marie Dennis, co-president of Pax Christi International, contributed the following reflection.

On February 22, the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2139 demanding “that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, promptly allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, including across conflict lines and across borders.”

In the resolution, the Council strongly condemned the widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by Syrian authorities, and urged all parties involved in the conflict to lift sieges of populated areas, including in Aleppo, Damascus and rural Damascus, and Homs. They underscored the importance of medical neutrality and demanded the demilitarization of medical facilities, schools and other civilian facilities.

The Security Council members requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the resolution by all parties in Syria in 30 days and every 30 days thereafter, and said “upon receipt of the Secretary-General’s report, [the Security Council] expresses its intent to take further steps in the case of non-compliance with this resolution.”

According to the UN, over 100,000 people have been killed and an estimated nine million others driven from their homes since the conflict erupted between Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and various groups seeking his ouster nearly three years ago. More than 2.4 million refugees are registered in the region: some 932,000 in Lebanon; 574,000 in Jordan; some 613,000 in Turkey; 223,000 in Iraq; and about 134,000 in Egypt.

In their resolution, the Security Council emphasized that the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a political solution and expressed support for the UN-sponsored direct talks between government and opposition representatives.

Despite reports that negotiations had all but collapsed, Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN-Arab League Joint Special Representative, said the parties had agreed that a new round of talks would focus on violence and terrorism, a transitional governing body, national institutions and national reconciliation.

In addition to meeting the massive humanitarian needs of the Syrian people, keeping peace talks alive is crucial or the spiral of violence will almost inevitably worsen. Negotiations are repeatedly undercut by the continued supply of weapons to all sides, permitting those who refuse to negotiate to keep fighting. Many Syrians

committed to nonviolence and organizations working in solidarity with them, including Pax Christi International, are pleading for an immediate end to the delivery of arms, ammunition and weapons parts to combatants in Syria and an immediate end to international support for foreign fighters operating in Syria.

Negotiations that include the explicit participation of delegations representing Syrian women as mandated by UNSC Resolution 1325 and subsequent declarations are also more likely to be successful, recognizing the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, including in peace negotiations themselves.

On January 6, in collaboration with a group of independent Syrian women and the Syrian Women’s Forum for Peace, more than 60 Syrian women from a number of Syrian districts and governorates met in Damascus to discuss the role of women in peacemaking and to articulate the priorities of Syrian women for the Geneva II conference.

In preparation, the Syrian Women’s Forum for Peace had organized three workshops in Sweida, Hama, and Latakia and distributed a questionnaire on Syrian women’s priorities for the Geneva II Conference to more than 6,000 women in all parts of Syria. The Syrian Women’s Forum for Peace, formed in October 2012, is working for a peaceful political transition to democracy in Syria and building a broad-based coalition of Syrian women across the political spectrum.

The January gathering resulted in the Syrian Women’s Charter, which calls for an end to the flow of weapons and militants into Syria, access for aid to communities in need, and a lifting of economic sanctions on Syria: *We ... are a voice of Syrian women nationwide, a reflection of a mosaic of Syrian society, narrators of suffering and pain experienced by Syria, and evidence of the sustainability and life of Syrian society. ... We must emphasize the unity of the country and reject any political settlement made on an ethnic, sectarian or denominational basis ... We aspire to build a future Syrian state that will honor its citizens and their basic human rights ... We emphasize the need to involve women from inside Syria in negotiating processes as representatives of the larger Syrian fabric. Women must have an equal role to men in advocating for their needs and priorities, and for designing the future Syrian state ...*

For more information visit <http://www.el-karama.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/SyrianWomenChart-Jan2014final.pdf> and the most recent statement on Syria from Pax Christi International at www.paxchristi.net.

Philippines: Calm amidst the storm

The following piece was written by Fred Goddard, former coordinator of the Maryknoll Affiliates; after living in the Philippines as a lay missionary many years ago, Fred moved back there in 2012. Maryknoll has served in the Philippines for several decades, but currently does not have missionaries in the areas that were hard hit by the recent typhoon. However, another mission order, the Redemptorists, have served in this area for a long time; the following is an account of some of the important work that is necessary after a natural disaster strikes and is most seamlessly accomplished by communities who have deep ties to the area.

It has been more than three months since Typhoon Haiyan (locally known as Typhoon Yolanda) struck the Philippines as one of the strongest such storms in recorded history. Yet, for most people living in the hardest stuck places, they are now trying to survive a different kind of “storm” that is more subtle. These are the day-to-day struggles of the survivors trying to recover from the devastation of November 8, 2013. The people are still dealing with the most basic needs; a place to sleep, rebuilding their homes, finding work and even just finding something to eat. At the same time, the survivors are coping with the psychological trauma of losing so many loved ones, sometime almost entire families.

Much praise has gone toward the response of the international community, but that will only last a short time. The government response has also been frequently criticized for not responding fast enough, not reaching many communities and for political fighting between local government officials and the national government. Valid or not, recovery is slow. Typhoon Haiyan is the Philippines’ Katrina, but on a much larger scale.

Amidst this political turmoil is the quiet and calming presence of the Redemptorist community in the central part of the Philippines. Thousands of people took shelter in the Redemptorist Church in the hard-hit city of Tacloban, which was frequently in the news. Yet, as the press has moved on to other stories, the Redemptorist community continues the hard work of recovery.

The Redemptorists have focused much of their efforts on Tacloban and on Bantayan Island, which is north of the island of Cebu. However, through what has been organized as a “General Mission,” they are spreading out to other parishes, especially in Eastern Leyte. Early efforts were focused on relief, but as response came in from the government, they have shifted to recovery and

rehabilitation.

Redemptorist Brother Karl Gaspar, an old friend to many Maryknoll missionaries, wrote, “The work involved with the General Mission is immense considering the thousands of households we hope to reach out to.” In the Redemptorist parish alone, there are roughly 3,000 households, most of which were badly affected by the typhoon. The greatest need is healing from trauma and stress. One of the greatest concerns is if anyone will be left to rebuild, as those who can afford to leave or have relatives elsewhere have abandoned many of the hardest hit areas.

Those involved in the General Mission have done visitations to temporary shelters and tents and listened to people’s stories of survival and struggle. They tell the missionaries their stories that are still so fresh in their memories. The volunteers and Redemptorist community have family prayers, incorporating rituals of grieving over their dead. Brother Karl also wrote, “As there have been reports of ‘children’s voices weeping and mothers’ groaning’ we’ve been asked to find ways to help still these voices.”

Brother Karl goes on to say, “Liturgical celebrations have been celebrated among the ruins of this disaster for people to be affirmed in their belief that God never abandoned them in their hour of need. Sermons touched on the theme of God as vulnerable, too, but also caring and compassionate. People wept at being assured that God listens to the cry of the poor.” The Redemptorist community has done psycho-social integration sessions with the youth and children using art therapy, but often the volunteers need as much care as the survivors after listening to the many stories and exposure to the devastation.

Recently, I was personally struck after hearing from a good friend who had just returned from a mission trip to New Orleans where they are still rebuilding communities and lives almost nine years after Hurricane Katrina. If it takes that long for a country with so much wealth and so many resources to rebuild, how much longer will it be for the people of Samar, Leyte and the central part of the Philippines? At least while the inner psychological storms continue to rage and survivors are often battered by the daily struggles to recover, the Redemptorist community and the many volunteers involved in the General Mission now and in the future provide some calm amidst the storm.

Myanmar: Hope, terror share new dawn

“We are preparing for the dawn of a new era of freedom, democracy, justice, peace and hope ... a new era of fraternity,” wrote Archbishop Charles Bo of Yangon as 2014 began. “There are many reasons for hope ... We are just at the very beginning of a new chapter” in our country’s history, he said.

Burma, also known as Myanmar, has only recently emerged from nearly 50 years of strict military dictatorship, with a history of ethnic strife, corruption and human rights violations. In 2011 the military junta was ostensibly dissolved and reforms begun.

“In the past two years the restrictions on freedom of expression have been relaxed, there is more space for civil society, the media and political actors, there have been preliminary steps towards peace in the ethnic states, and many political prisoners have been released,” the Archbishop commented.

Notable among those released was political activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who was elected to parliament in 2012. That same year, the U.S. and other nations lifted most political and economic sanctions, and a U.S. ambassador was reinstated. There is a sense that the country is emerging from its long repressive isolation. Elections are scheduled for 2015, and Aung San Suu Kyi and others are calling for a reform of the Constitution, which enshrines near complete power with the military and currently bars her from running for president.

Church leaders, notably Archbishop Bo, now speak openly and forcefully to insist that inter-religious understanding and respect for human rights are essential to achieve unity and peace in this union of 134 different ethnic groups with a majority Buddhist population.

However, scores of political prisoners remain in custody and military leaders – sometimes doffing their uniforms in favor of street clothes to enhance the image of a “civilian” government – seem loathe to relinquish power. This control has enabled them to enrich themselves by confiscating protestors’ homes and land, and maintaining a state monopoly on resources such as teak and minerals, while playing off tensions between ethnic minorities to their own advantage. Worse, critics say, government-sanctioned violence against the Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic group, has increased dramatically since 2012.

Western Myanmar’s Rakhine state has experienced several waves of violence between Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists in the past two years. The Rakhine, much like the government, consider Rohingya to

be illegal Bengali immigrants from nearby Bangladesh if they cannot trace their parentage from Rakhine who were registered by the government in 1982, and deny them citizenship and corresponding rights to healthcare and education. In Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine state, nearly 140,000 Rohingya have been forced into refugee camps or remain in Muslim-only ghettos barricaded with barbed wire and armed guards.

On January 13 at least 40 Rohingya men, women and children in the village of Du Chee Yar Tan in Rakhine State were killed by a Buddhist mob, leaving some of the victims’ decapitated heads in the village water tank. In a special report on Jan. 23, UN human rights chief Navi Pillay condemned the massacre and urged the government to act quickly. “I deplore the loss of life in Du Chee Yar Tan and call on the authorities to carry out a full, prompt and impartial investigation and ensure that victims and their families receive justice,” Pillay said in a statement.

After Doctors Without Borders, the Rohingya’s primary healthcare provider, treated survivors of the attack, the government ordered it to stop its medical services to the Rohingya, alleging favoritism. The government did not renew its Memorandum of Understanding with Doctors Without Borders in January, and on February 27 ordered the group to stop its services to people living with HIV/AIDS and malaria in Rakhine, Shan and Kachin states and Yangon Region, where it had been serving 17,000 HIV patients.

The government seems disinclined to protect the human rights of ethnic minorities such as the Rohingya, since its policies promote the dominance of the Burmese ethnic group and the Buddhist majority. Indeed, documents leaked to Fortify Rights, a human rights group focused on the Rohingya, show evidence that the persecution of Rohingya is official state policy.

In a report published February 23, Fortify Rights says documents dating back over the past 24 years show systematic control of the ethnic group’s movement and rights, including limiting the number of children they may have, where they can live or travel, and preventing their access to healthcare and education. An estimated 1.3 million Rohingya are denied citizenship under national law.

“These policies are being supported by the highest levels of government, the same officials now being courted by Western governments,” said Matthew Smith, executive director of Fortify Rights and a co-author of the report. “These officials don’t see the need to end

abuses of the Rohingya as part of wider reforms... It's plain to see authorities have made life so intolerable for Rohingya that in many cases they have no option but to flee to another country," Smith told the Union of Catholic Asian News. As a result, nearly 80,000 Rohingya have paid smugglers to take them on perilous sea journeys to Thailand, Malaysia or Bangladesh, some of them drowning in the attempt.

Archbishop Bo has condemned "the tragedy of an entire people, [the Rohingyas], treated as if they were not human.... It breaks my heart to see the rising hatred and religious intolerance in Myanmar, and even more so to see waves of horrific violence and destruction. I am therefore writing this personal appeal to my Buddhist and Muslim brothers and sisters, to call for voices of peace and harmony to speak out loudly, to urge the government to take urgent action to protect vulnerable communities and stop those who incite or perpetrate hatred and violence, and to urge all communities to unite to build a nation in which people of all religions and

ethnicities can live with respect for each other, in peace and dignity."

In a powerful homily December 8, Archbishop Bo compared the nine journeys of Mary to the suffering of Myanmar: "We are a nation on a search. Thousands who disappeared. Thousands who were taken away after the midnight knock at the door. Over 150,000 lives were lost during Cyclone Nargis. Those who died in [the 1988] revolution, those who disappeared. Mostly women, mothers and sisters are searching for their husbands, brothers and sons. A nation in search of itself. The 2007 saffron revolution took hundreds of youth to unknown death camps. Many monks too perished in that secret war..."

"After decades of oppression and injustice and isolation, at last we have an opportunity to build a nation of freedom, open to the world. A nation in which we can be ourselves at last, prosper and fulfil the full potential of our Golden Land... For the first time in more than 50 years, there are reasons to be hopeful for Myanmar ... [but] this is just the very beginning of the beginning."

Immigration: Take action during Lent

In collaboration with the Justice for Immigrants (JFI) campaign of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB), the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) urges you to take action for immigration reform during Lent 2014. The members of the JFI coalition have created a toolkit, available in PDF format on the MOGC website, which includes 40 days of strategic, coordinated prayer and action.

Every weekday, we will pray for a specific Catholic member of Congress. Find the calendar with members' names and numbers on the MOGC website. If you are a constituent, you are especially encouraged to reach out. Please contact the MOGC office if you need a hard copy of the calendar and Lenten toolkit mailed to you.

Additionally, the Fast for Families campaign, sponsored by dozens of organizations, invites those who are able to fast every Wednesday during Lent "to repent from an immigration system that tears apart families. [This is] a prophetic witness to the moral urgency of commonsense immigration reform so that all might have the opportunity to be citizens with equal respect and dignity." Sign up to participate in the Wednesday fasts at <http://fast4families.org/join-us/>.

Advocates for immigrants' rights in the U.S. are deeply concerned that access to citizenship will be lost in the upcoming negotiations on immigration reform. In June 2013, the U.S. Senate passed an immigration bill

that contains a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented persons in the country. However, the House of Representatives has, to date, refused to consider a bill with a path to citizenship, suggesting that they could simply give legal status to some immigrants or not confer any legal status at all.

For several reasons, the U.S.CCBB strongly supports a path to citizenship for the undocumented, including:

- An immigration bill that does not provide a path to citizenship but simply legal status would sanction a permanent underclass, with one portion of the population without the same rights as the majority. As history has informed us, this is a recipe for social unrest and potential exploitation of a minority population. It would keep a large group in our country disenfranchised, unable to petition their government as the majority can and unable to choose their leaders.

- Citizenship provides full protection from deportation. Under current law, a person can be deported for a wide variety of nonviolent offenses, such as drug possession, petty larceny, or fraud, even if they are permanent residents with a green card. With citizenship, the federal government cannot deport a person from the country, away from their family and livelihood. Thus, anything less than citizenship would subject a portion of the population to penalties not applicable to the majority.

Threat of growing inequalities

On January 20, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Joseph Stiglitz, professor at Columbia University and recipient of the 2001 Nobel Prize in Economics, gave the keynote address at a roundtable, themed “The threat of growing inequalities: Building more just and equitable societies to support growth and sustainable development,” hosted by the Italian mission to the United Nations, the Italian Institute of Culture, the International Development Law Organization and the UN Department of Public Information. Sr. Claris Zwareva attended and wrote this report.

In addressing the issue of inequalities, Stiglitz quoted Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said, “True revolutionary values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of our present policies. On the one hand we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life’s roadside but that will be an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be changed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life’s highway ...” and, “[We] must honestly face the fact that the movement must address itself to the question of restructuring the whole of American society. There are 40 million poor people here and one day we must ask the question ‘Why are there 40 million poor people in America?’”

This problem highlights the economic system and broader distribution of wealth that in recent years have caused much suffering and weakened societies. Stiglitz pointed out that during the recent economic recovery, 95 percent of all gains have gone to the wealthiest one percent of the population. This unequal distribution of wealth has “hollowed” out of the middle section of the population whose salaries have remained stagnant for four decades. Other forms of inequality also exist: the inequality of opportunity, inequality of wealth, inequality of access to education, inequality to clean environments, as well as inequality due to gender, often ingrained through cultural practices and discrimination.

The growth in inequalities is not only determined by the laws of economics but is also determined by politics and the policies that govern them. This dynamic weakens social cohesion and results in conflict among those involved who perceive and resent injustice in the distribution of wealth.

Stiglitz noted that prosperity can be obtained either by generating new wealth that increases the gains or by moving existing wealth from the bottom up towards the upper one percent, creating inequality in consumption

patterns. “Righteous indignation” comes into effect when workers’ demands such as just remunerations, access to national patrimony that is held by a few and equality of opportunity are not granted. In such situations of injustice, workers get angry and take to the streets demanding change.

This element of radical change is central to the success of the post-2015 development agenda. In order to correct the imbalance that is resulting in social unrest, the funneling of wealth to the top one percent ought to be corrected in order to bridge the gap that has continued to deepen. The world does not lack resources for all to live in equality and in dignity but the distribution of available resources has not been equal. Distributive justice guided by ethical principles that promote equality need to accompany the discussions that will lead to a robust and successful post-2015 development agenda.

Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, suggests that the post-2015 development agenda stand on the firm foundation of human rights, along with the principles of equality, nondiscrimination and a broader sense of equity. At a roundtable discussion held on February 4 she put forward three ways that this can be done: first, by integrating a cross-cutting focus on equality and non-discrimination throughout all goals, targets, and indicators; second, by setting a stand-alone goal of equality and non-discrimination; and third, that, at the international level, the goal should be global partnerships that address inequalities between countries and the establishment of a global governance that calls all countries to accountability.

Nations must work together to end the vicious cycle of inequalities-deprivation-poverty by establishing policies that address inequalities in order to strengthen peace and security. All should work towards reducing the growing inequalities that continue to separate us and to end the culture of “haves” and “have-nots.” As Jesus prayed that “all may be one” (John 17:21) so must we work that no one goes to bed hungry nor freezes to death for lack of housing.

In his recent apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis said “no” to the economy of exclusion, an economy that kills, and “no” to inequality. “How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. The excluded are not the ‘exploited’ but the outcast, the ‘leftovers.’”

A politically possible alternative to GDP

Many have expressed concerns with the use of gross domestic product (GDP) as a measure of the well-being of a country. (See related articles on the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns' website.) Simon Kuznets, the founder of the U.S. national accounting system, warned, "[T]he welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income." As Robert Kennedy famously opined, GDP "measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile."

But workable alternatives are not yet part of mainstream policy discussions for a variety of reasons. Now a paper prepared for Congress – “21st Century GDP: national indicators for a new era,” written by Ben Beachy and Justin Zorn, public-service fellows at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government – has recommendations that may be able to break the political stalemate and create feasible alternatives to the monolithic GDP figure.

While complaints about the GDP are not new, alternatives to it have had varied and limited levels of success in terms of having an effect on public discussions and policies. Beachy and Zorn examined these experiences and found a number of key technical questions to consider when constructing a GDP alternative.

First, should the supplemental indicators be a single number made by aggregating variables or a dashboard of various disaggregated variables? The authors choose the first option and point to Maryland’s Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) that has been influential in public discourse because it aggregates its 26 variables into one number that is easy to be understood and discussed in the press. “Maryland’s aggregated GPI tells a clear, potent story about the state’s sustainable economic welfare – that it has not risen for three decades,” while state-level dashboards like Virginia Performs’ 49 variables or Oregon Benchmarks’ 158 variables have not made headlines in newspapers or influenced election cycles.

Second, if you use an aggregated number, how should it be portrayed? One option is as an adjustment to GDP where you alter the original amount, adding the dollar value of positive things like household labor and volunteerism while diminishing the value for negatives such as income inequality, pollution. This has the advantage of being easily understood, but introduces the difficulty of determining a price for non-market values (what is the monetary value of shorter commute times? Or the true monetary value of an acre of undisturbed forest?)

Another option is to portray the alternative as a composite index that assesses the relative performance

on different variables on a scale of zero to one (for example, educational attainment, pollution, child mortality). These numbers are then averaged (usually with equal weighting between the variables) to determine a final welfare score. This option has the advantage of not needing to determine the monetary value of difficult items like biodiversity, but is not as clearly understood by the public and the weighting of variables is arbitrary. “What,” the authors ask, “is the relative importance of health versus education versus income?” Most composite indexes avoid the difficult task of weighting more important items more heavily by weighting them all the same. But as the authors point out, “declaring commuting time and deforestation to be of exactly equivalent importance for human welfare seems specious.”

Beachy and Zorn choose the adjusted GDP format as the most easily understood and likely to have an impact on public discussion and policies. The difficulty of defining prices for non-market items will improve with time, they say, as research improves.

Finally, what variables should be chosen to be part of the alternative to the GDP? The authors gathered input from interviews with a wide range of political players and commentators, and created five different GDPs: **G1:** Current GDP; **G2:** Current prosperity measures this year’s purchasing power satisfaction. It begins with current GDP and discounts for income inequality, debt-financed consumption above a critical threshold, stolen goods, defensive purchases (locks, alarm systems...) and damage from accidents; and adds in the value of goods and services provided by household labor, volunteers and the non-profit sector, as well as the informal sector; **G3:** Sustainable prosperity accounts for future potential satisfaction. It begins with G2 and subtracts for future damage from current-year carbon emissions, potential business losses from crime, and productive capacity loss from accidents. It then adds or subtracts the value of changes in stocks of physical capital, human capital (health/education), financial capital, intellectual capital (research and development) and social capital; **G4:** Current well-being measures this year’s satisfaction from purchasing power, societal health and the environment. It starts with G2 and then adds the value of leisure time, community cohesion and preventative health measures while subtracting the value of environmental degradation (smog, pollution...), commuting time, and injuries from crime or accidents; and **G5:** Sustainable well-being accounts for future well-being. It starts with G2 + G3 + G4 and then adds or subtracts the future effects

of changes in the value of natural resources, changes in community cohesion, preventative health, and increasing or decreasing levels of crime and accidents.

These proposals present a workable alternative that should appeal to people of various political persuasions. "As new comprehensive accounting measures, G2-G5

hold the power to break through tired left-right divides in a common reassertion of what constitutes progress," explain Beachy and Zorn. By doing so, their proposal could play an important role in finally moving beyond GDP toward better measures of progress.

Keystone XL: Challenges to pipeline

John Simurdiak, a student at St. Norbert's College who is an intern with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns this semester, prepared the following article.

When the Canadian energy company TransCanada first applied for a presidential permit that would enable the construction of a new tar sands pipeline running from Alberta to Nebraska, the request was rejected by President Obama on the grounds that not enough time was given to complete a proper evaluation. The application was resubmitted in the spring 2012, and has been waiting for an answer from the president ever since.

In July 2013, President Obama clarified in a speech that he would not approve of the Keystone XL pipeline if it would make a significant contribution to the problem of carbon pollution. While the environmental impact of the pipeline is not the only factor being taken into consideration by the president, it is undeniably the greatest cause of controversy, and the greatest obstacle for TransCanada and the proponents of the pipeline.

The U.S. State Department released its final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on January 31; its finding that the environmental impact of the proposed pipeline would be negligible has failed to convince those already in opposition to the project.

It is widely accepted that refinement of tar sands, being 17 percent more carbon intensive than average standard crude oil, has a significantly negative impact on the environment. One of the points made in the report, however, is that the Keystone XL pipeline is nothing more than a means of transportation, asserting that the project would do little, if anything at all, to stop the expansion of the tar sands industry in Canada. (Alternative methods of transportation, such as rail, have been found to be two to 2.5 times as costly as the proposed pipeline.) The State Department's claim also relies on the assumption that the price of oil will rise to exceed \$105 per barrel by 2020, noting that many alternative projects that have been proposed will not be profitable if oil prices stay under \$100 per barrel. The future of oil prices however remain very uncertain, as other experts

such as the traders of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange predict that prices will drop to \$73 per barrel by 2019.

Another concern for environmentalists and local landowners is that the Keystone XL's leak detection system would fail to catch leaks smaller than 500,000 gallons per day. Potential spills would be nearly impossible to clean up because, unlike conventional oil, tar sands sink when spilled in waterways. Both of these concerns are acknowledged by the State Department's report.

The environmental impact of the pipeline remains hotly contested despite the State Department's report, but it is not the only point of contention. Before approving the project, President Obama still needs to decide whether or not the tar sands pipeline is in the United States' national interest. Like most environmental issues, the debate would appear to be about whether the economy takes precedence over the environment or vice versa. Opponents of the pipeline say that the proposed pipeline is not in our national interest in either area: Since the vast majority of oil to be sent down to refineries in the Gulf will be for exportation to world markets, the project would not help to make the U.S. any more energy independent. Gas prices in the U.S. would not decrease, but would actually be expected to increase in the Midwest, where selling oil to world markets is currently not an option. It has also been determined that the project would employ 3,900 construction workers, less than 2,000 per year, 15 temporary contractors, and only 35 jobs would be permanent. In addition, only 10 percent of these construction jobs would be filled locals, those living along the route of the proposed pipeline. In contrast, agriculture alone in the states through which the pipeline is to pass employs over 570,000. In an economy of 150 million working people, the economic impact of this project would be negligible.

With a guaranteed negative impact on the environment, the risk of devastating effects on the communities living along the route, and little economic gain, we can only hope that President Obama recognizes that the proposed Keystone XL project is not in our national interests, and should not receive approval.

UN: Family farming in the future

The United Nations has declared 2014 to be a year to focus on the importance of family farming. Much of the discussion about the future of farming has focused almost exclusively on the question of how much food is produced, with an emphasis on projected increases in population that will require much more food. The UN hopes that this year's focus on smallholder farmers will show how agriculture is critical not only for producing food (smallholders already produce 70 percent of the world's food), but also for eradicating hunger and poverty, providing livelihoods, protecting the environment and developing rural areas.

An oft-repeated statistic in the food-agriculture debate is that since the human population is estimated to reach nine billion people by 2050, we must double food production in order to feed everyone. Many argue that the only way to guarantee food for all is through more extensive use of fertilizers, pesticides, genetically modified organisms and other fossil fuel dependent solutions.

But those who believe that we need to double food production ignore some key factors that could change: First, they assume that we will continue to waste 30 to 40 percent of the food produced around the world as we do today. By confronting this problem, which is not a technically difficult issue, we would have more food available with the same amount of production.

They also assume that as people gain income, they will continue to increase their meat consumption. Meat is incredibly inefficient way to produce food calories. More than one-third of the world's grains are fed to livestock on factory farms. The UN Environment Program estimates that "the calories we lose from feeding cereals to livestock instead of directly to people totals an equivalent that could feed 3.5 billion people." (emphasis in original) Through education campaigns, we can reduce the amount of meat consumed.

Finally, the idea that only industrial agriculture is capable of producing enough food ignores studies that show that smallholder, sustainably produced food can be as, or even more, productive than industrialized ag-

riculture. (See links at U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance and Food Myths.org.) Since industrial agriculture relies on a number of inputs predicted to be scarcer in coming decades, such as phosphorous, petroleum, and natural gas, to think of this type of farming as a long-term solution is specious at best.

An important aim of the UN International Year of Family Farming is to move the debate beyond simply food production and recognize the other important aspects of agriculture within society.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), "[f]amily farming is the predominant form of agriculture both in developed and developing countries" with over 500 million family farms worldwide. Ironically, half of the world's hungry are smallholder farmers, trapped in a cycle of poverty, made worse by decades of price volatility, underinvestment in agriculture, and increasingly, by the effects of climate change. So any actions to improve the situation for smallholder farmers will by definition be effective in curbing poverty and reducing hunger.

Family farms are also important in achieving sustainable development, as they tend to have more diverse crops, preserve traditional food products, and spend their money locally, thus supporting agricultural and non-agricultural jobs in the region.

Industrial farms tend to plant vast fields of one crop only – known as monocropping – with heavy use of chemical fertilizers and herbicides, while producing few jobs and extracting money from local economies into the coffers of distant corporations.

During the International Year of the Family Farm, the UN asks everyone interested to help spread the word about the importance of these farmers and will work with governments to help improve their living and working conditions. As the campaign says, "Facilitating access to land, water and other natural resources and implementing specific policies for family farmers (credit, technical assistance, insurance, market access, public purchases, appropriate technologies) are key components for increasing agricultural productivity, eradicating poverty and achieving world food security."

Learn more at the FAO's website, www.fao.org.



Photo by Jim Stipe

Breakthroughs in access to HIV medicines

The following article was written by Cathy Rowan, who has contributed dozens of articles on the topic of corporate accountability to NewsNotes over the years.

The last few months have seen important developments in the efforts to increase access to medicines for people living with HIV and AIDS. The Medicines Patent Pool Foundation is experiencing a significant uptick in the number of brand-name pharmaceutical companies agreeing to license their patents for the production of generic versions of needed, new formulations of medicines to treat HIV and AIDS.

The Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) is a UN-backed initiative that negotiates voluntary licenses based on a public health perspective and creates a pool of relevant patents to enable the manufacture and sale of generic medicines in developing countries. The licensing agreements it negotiates are transparent and posted on the MPP website, <http://www.medicinespatentpool.org>. They are also consistent with the use of World Trade Organization TRIPS flexibilities for protection of public health.

In December 2013, Bristol-Myers Squibb signed a licensing agreement with the MPP for the generic production of a key HIV medicine, atazanavir (ATV). The new agreement will allow for the manufacture of the drug by generics manufacturers anywhere in the world and for its sale in 110 countries, which is expected to cover 88.4 percent of people living with HIV in middle- and low-income countries. It is the first drug in the Patent Pool for second-line treatment (given when the virus no longer responds to first-line therapies).

Members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), including the Maryknoll Sisters, played an important role in brokering the relationship between the drug company and the MPP as representatives from both organizations attended a multi-stakeholder roundtable on “New Mechanisms to Promote Access and Innovation to Medicines in the Development World,” that ICCR convened with Oxfam International, Doctors Without Borders and Knowledge Ecology International in 2011.

According to Greg Perry, executive director of the MPP: “This agreement will allow manufacturers worldwide to produce more affordable versions of ATV, and to combine ATV with other medicines to make treatment easier and more accessible in developing countries. WHO [World Health Organization]-recommended second-line treatments such as ATV are becoming increasingly important, with over one million people projected

to be on them by 2016 and many more needing access to them. All of our partners are essential to ensuring the Medicines Patent Pool concludes agreements that increase access to important HIV medicines, and we are grateful in particular for the support of investors and members of ICCR.”

ICCR has been a vocal supporter of the MPP since its founding in 2010. Gilead Sciences became the first company to join the Patent Pool, sharing licenses with generics manufacturers for its vital HIV and Hepatitis B drugs.

After ongoing encouragement from ICCR shareholders, ViiV (a joint venture of Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline and Shionogi) joined the pool in February 2013. ViiV’s licensing agreement will allow for the generic production of a key pediatric HIV medicine, abacavir, which is recommended by the WHO for the treatment of infants and children with HIV. ViiV also agreed to negotiate further licenses for the manufacture of new, better-adapted pediatric medicines that ViiV is currently developing, once regulatory authorities approve those drugs.

In August 2013, Roche and the MPP announced an agreement to increase access to and reduce the cost of valganciclovir, a medicine that treats a viral infection that can lead to blindness in people living with HIV. Currently, the most widely used treatment for this virus in developing countries requires injections directly to the eye. Valganciclovir is an oral medicine that up until now has been unaffordable. The Roche-MPP agreement lowers the price and creates a market for the generic production of the drug, further reducing its cost.

AbbVie (which spun off from Abbott Laboratories in 2013) is in negotiations with the MPP for licenses for its pediatric formulations. What makes this news significant is that AbbVie/Abbott has never granted a voluntary license for a generics manufacturer to make any of its HIV medicines for use in the developing world.

Merck and Johnson & Johnson are the only two major U.S.-based pharmaceutical companies that make medicines to treat HIV and AIDS that are not in formal negotiations with the MPP.

In addition to its work with brand-name companies, the MPP now has six generics manufacturer-partners, who are working on 26 projects developing generic HIV medicines.

According to the MPP, 23 developing countries are already benefitting from access to more affordable, quality-assured first-line treatment regimens as a result of Patent Pool licenses.

Resources

- National Migration Conference, July 7-10:** Hosted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/ MRS), the Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC), and Catholic Charities USA, the National Migration Conference will be held in Washington, D.C. from July 7-10. The conference is intended to build the capacity of the Catholic Church and society to advance the life and dignity of the human person in our work with immigrants, migrants, refugees, unaccompanied migrant children, victims of human trafficking, and other vulnerable people on the move. To learn more, visit www.nationalmigrationconference.org or contact MRS at (202)541-3000.
- World Report 2014:** Human Rights Watch's (HRW) 24th annual review of human rights practices around the globe summarizes key human rights issues in more than 90 countries and territories worldwide, drawing on events through November 2013. Download the entire report as a PDF from HRW's website (www.hrw.org); order a hard copy through Amazon; or contact HRW at (212)290-4700.
- Border Songs:** This 31-track double CD, in English and Spanish, includes recordings from a variety of artists including Pete Seeger, among others. Spoken word on the album includes a dramatic reading by Chicana performer Denise Chávez, excerpts from an interview with Charles Bowden and an animal fable by M. Henry that will both entertain a child and inspire an adult to think. All proceeds will be donated to No More Deaths, a volunteer faith-based organization that places water in the Arizona desert. Each album sold provides 29 gallons of water, or the equivalent in food, medical supplies or blankets to people in extreme need. This diverse collection of border songs is held together by a common thread—a deep concern and solidarity for migrants and for people of all ethnicities, regardless of their country of origin. \$28.96+shipping. Order from Amazon: <http://www.bit.ly/BorderSongs>.
- Latin America Working Group (LAWG) publications:** LAWG has several resources available on topics ranging from U.S. military intervention in Latin America to the cost of the ongoing U.S. embargo against Cuba. New publications include *Perilous Journey: Kidnapping and Violence against Migrants in Transit through Mexico*: Five years ago, advocates at migrant shelters along the south-north train route began to document and gather first-hand accounts of migrants who had survived kidnapping. These accounts give a fuller picture of the depth of this humanitarian crisis and steps that authorities on both sides of the border can take to prevent and bring justice to this horrific violence that has traumatized migrants and their families across the region; and *Time to Listen: Trends in U.S. Security Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean*: While military-to-military relations remain robust, the U.S. diplomatic efforts are flagging in Latin America and the Caribbean. Much of it has to do with a failure to listen to Latin American leaders' growing calls for change. Crammed with statistics and graphics, *Time to Listen* guides readers through today's trends on the U.S. security relationship with Latin America. Download reports or order from LAWG: www.lawg.org/our-publications, or call (202)546-7010.
- Voices Against Violence:** This 124-page educational handbook, with curriculum, is from the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and UN Women. Designed for various age groups ranging from 5 to 25 years, it provides young people with tools and expertise to understand the root causes of violence in their communities, to educate and involve their peers and communities to prevent such violence, and to learn about where to access support if violence is experienced. Download the handbook at <http://www.unwomen.org>.
- China's Congo Plan: What the Economic Superpower Sees in the World's Poorest Nation:** This e-book by Jacob Kushner probes the Africa-China relationship. DR-Congo is known for its poverty and conflict, but it is home to an enormous wealth of buried minerals. Already, tens of thousands of Chinese people now work there, digging and processing ore. Today, two Chinese state-owned companies are opening the biggest mine DRC has ever seen, spending billions of dollars to build new roads and modernize Congo's infrastructure. Available from iTunes, Barnes & Noble, Amazon and Kobo.

