

JUSTICE AND PEACE

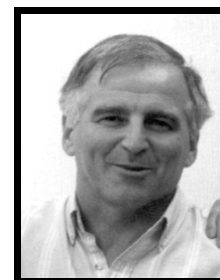
Volume 4, Issue 1

January 2002

Published by the Oblate Justice and Peace/Integrity of Creation Office

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From the Director

Peace and Greetings in the New Year!

Our new year begins as the old one ended – at war. Still mindful of the terrible events of September 11, we continue to mourn the victims of the attacks, praying for them and for their loved ones. As the conflict in Afghanistan continues, we include in our prayers victims of war everywhere, especially those who suffer most - the children.

For Catholics, as for many people of faith, we are faced with the biblical command to love our neighbor and to be builders of peace. As our country and its allies go after those who continue to threaten us, we have to reflect more deeply on the meaning of the Pope's instruction to foster a culture of life, and not death. From the just war to the death penalty, from abortion to euthanasia, we are confronted with the difficult task of reconciling our stance in defense of all life with the need to protect and defend the innocent. It is fitting that many religious communities offer the space where people can come together to pray and seek the Lord's guidance in building a peaceful future.

At home, we are looking at the possible causes of violence and many have pointed to the disparity between the rich and the poor. We are all aware of the devastating poverty that affects billions worldwide. However, a recent report from the U.S. Congressional Budget Office paints a shocking picture back home. Adjusting for inflation, the average middle-income family earned \$41,400 in 1979, a figure which rose to \$45,100 in 1997, a 9 percent increase. Meanwhile, people in the richest 1 percent saw their income sky-rocket from an average \$420,200 to a massive \$1.016 million, a 140 percent increase. To put it another way, the income of the richest 1 percent was 10 times that of typical families in 1979, and 23 times and rising in 1997.

Both home and abroad, the greatest nation faces the greatest challenges in acting justly, loving tenderly and walking humbly with our God. May the challenges of the New Year invite each of us to listen more closely

to the teaching of Jesus, whose birth we have celebrated, in which the poor inherit the earth and the peacemakers are blessed indeed.

“Some years ago a famous novelist died. Among his papers was found a list of suggested plots for future stories, the most prominently underscored being this one: “A widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live together.” This is the great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a large house, a great “world house” in which we have to live together-black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu— a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace...The large house in which we live demands that we transform this world-wide neighborhood into a world-wide brotherhood. Together we must learn to live as brothers or together we will be forced to perish as fools.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?, 1967

Catholic Leadership Calls for Tolerance and Peace in the Wake of the Terrorist Attacks

- *No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness*

On New Year's Day, **Pope John Paul II offered these words in his annual World Day of Peace Message:** "The shattered order cannot be fully restored except by a response that combines justice with forgiveness. True peace, therefore, is the fruit of justice, that moral virtue and legal guarantee which ensures full respect for rights and responsibilities and the just distribution of benefits and burdens. But because human justice is always fragile and imperfect, subject as it is to the limitations and egoism of individuals and groups, it must include and, as it were, be completed by the forgiveness which heals and rebuilds troubled human relations from their foundations.

In this spirit of reconciliation, the Pope has invited leaders of the world's religions to come to Assisi on Jan. 24, 2002, to pray for peace. By gathering in solidarity in the hometown of St. Francis, the Pope seeks to remind the global community that "genuine religious belief is an inexhaustible wellspring of mutual respect and harmony among peoples; indeed, it is the chief antidote to violence and conflict."

The pope has called upon all Catholics to pray and to work for peace and mutual understanding among religions and to join with him in the **Day of Prayer on January 24th.**

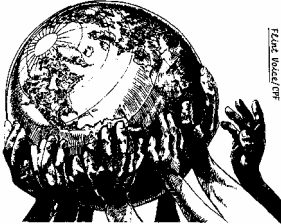
- *Living with Faith and Hope After September 11*

In mid-November 2001, the U.S. Bishops Conference held their annual meetings in Washington, D.C. Of note was the release of the statement, "**A Pastoral Message: Living with Faith and Hope After September 11.**"

The statement addresses several issues relating to the terrorist attacks and the challenges facing the Middle East. The bishops re-affirm the Vatican's support for a viable Palestinian state, call for weapons reduction and disarmament, and condemn the economic sanctions against Iraq. With regard to the war against terrorism, the bishops emphasize that "a broad range of non-military measures must be pursued...acts of ethnic and religious intolerance towards Arab-Americans, Muslims, or any other minorities must be repudiated...(and that) the suspension of refugee admissions is particularly inappropriate."

An Excerpt from "An Interfaith Statement on Trade and Investment"

The following is excerpted from “An Interfaith Statement on Trade and Investment,” authored by the Washington, D.C.- based Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment, of which the OMI JPIC office is a member. The Working Group includes representatives from a broad spectrum of religious institutions and faith-based organizations in the U.S. who believe that international trade and investment policies and practices present a serious moral challenge because of their profound effect upon the lives of people around the world and upon Creation. Consequently, the Working Group seeks to encourage and facilitate deeper involvement by communities of faith in the public debate on trade and investment policies. To view the complete document, visit the OMI website: www.omiusa.org. This document is also available in electronic or hard copy in French, English and Portuguese upon request.



In an age of increasing economic integration and interdependence between the nations and peoples of the world, mounting global inequities have come into sharp focus. While technological and other advances have made it possible for segments of humanity to achieve unprecedented material prosperity, large numbers of people have become mired in poverty, hunger, and disease. In the midst of growing disparities and injustices between and within countries, governments and international economic institutions have increasingly sought market-driven policies, particularly the expansion of international trade and investment. This limited approach has too often served to aggravate the problem.

It is our belief, as members of diverse faith communities, that moral and spiritual principles can provide guidance in the search for practical measures to address the profound ethical issues raised by international trade and investment. In this spirit, we offer the following five principles, each accompanied by our observations and visions for the future. These principles apply to all actors, public and private, engaged in international trade and investment. We believe that adoption of these principles will assist people everywhere to shape international trade and investment so that they advance the goal of a more just, more sustainable, and more prosperous human society.

PRINCIPLES:

- ❖ International trade and investment systems should respect and support the dignity of the human person, the integrity of creation, and our common humanity.
- ❖ International trade and investment activities should advance the common good and be evaluated in the light of their impact on those who are most vulnerable.
- ❖ International trade and investment policies and decisions should be transparent and should involve the meaningful participation of the most vulnerable stakeholders.
- ❖ International trade and investment systems should respect the legitimate role of government, in collaboration with civil society, to set policies regarding the development and welfare of its people.
- ❖ International trade and investment systems should safeguard the global commons and respect the right of local communities to protect and sustainably develop their natural resources.

From the moment you arrive at Colombo's international airport, the sizable security force reveals an atmosphere filled with tension and a citizenry in constant fear of targeted acts of violence. The sight of armed military personnel in public places and strategically important checkpoints has long been the case in Sri Lanka, where the government has attempted to use its military to keep the upper hand in its struggle with the Tamil Tigers. Last August, the dangers of this conflict were evident when the Tigers launched an attack on the airport, destroying a number of airplanes while demonstrating their ability to penetrate such security measures and seriously disrupt airport operations. The attendant impact on commerce and tourism in the country was also greatly devastating.

For the past thirty years, such attacks have dominated life on this small island nation. Even prior to the current civil war, clashes between the Sinhalese and the Tamil people, who are the ethnic minority, prevented peaceful coexistence. The Tamil Tigers for the Liberation of Elam (LTTE), a paramilitary group that often engages in violent acts against the dominant Sinhalese, continue to control a significant portion of the Jaffna peninsula and the north and east coasts of Sri Lanka. In many nations throughout the world, including the U.S., the Tigers are branded terrorists and are prohibited from fundraising and sponsoring public events. LTTE followers and supporters both in Sri Lanka and in exile throughout the world look to them to secure through violence what years of public advocacy and negotiation have been unable to achieve—a degree of respect and freedom for the Tamil people in Sri Lanka and the recognition of their language, culture and traditions.

The divisions and tensions that hinder mutual understanding and cooperation between the two sides are manifested in a variety of ways throughout the country. During the second day of my trip, I became keenly aware of one of the profound implications of this tension when I addressed a group of Tamil and Sinhala youth. Very few of them understood English and thus my words required translation in both Tamil and Sinhala. I was struck by the fact that the translators were all adults over forty years of age. This runs contrary to my experience in a number of other countries, where the children serve as translators for their parents and older relatives. The separation of young people from adjoining cultures and useful languages indicates that tensions are being passed along to the new generations, perpetuating the division and further damaging future relations. The decision to codify this division by making Sinhala the country's official language, and consequently, to establish two separate school systems in which English is taught on a very limited schedule, contributes significantly to the gulf which has been created between these two ethnic groups, especially among the young people.

During my six-day journey to the Vanni and to the peninsula of Mannar, an area partly controlled by the LTTE and the rest heavily patrolled and dominated by the Sri Lankan military, my conversations with Tamils and Sinhalese offered a unique perspective from which to experience the impact of this ongoing struggle. People are quick to relate the stories of atrocities, torture, embargoes, heroes and victims in great detail and with deeply felt emotion. Hearing their stories, I found myself recalling on many instances my visits to Northern Ireland over the last twenty years and my visit to Palestine and Israel this past summer. Their tales of horror, including the deaths of innocent bystanders, are intensely personal and recounted in many communities. The visual impact of neighborhoods in the north and east divided by waves of barbed wire fences and separated by walls of fear and hostility is one not soon forgotten. The numerous checkpoints and barricades, which make even the most ordinary movements of citizens in communities bordering those areas controlled by the LTTE difficult and time consuming, are equally intrusive and dehumanizing.

With the election of a new government on December 5, 2001, there is great hope that a new era of reconciliation and peace has dawned. The people have decided that a change in the control of the parliament and a new prime minister might bring an end to this terribly violent conflict and realize the promise of a better future for all. The President, whose party lost the election, will remain in her position until 2005, though her control over the various branches of the government is significantly diminished. Nonetheless, she has pledged to work with the opposition party and to lend her support to the process for a peacefully negotiated resolution to the civil war. The new government has thus far shown that it intends to act on its pledges. Plans to lift the embargo on medicines and essential consumer items going into the rebel controlled area of the country was recently announced and the government of Norway has been invited to return as the impartial mediator of a negotiated settlement. Measures have also been taken to dismantle all military roadblocks, which for years have given the impression of a state of siege in all major cities. These and other steps are intended to improve the climate for dialogue.

In the midst of this conflict and search for a negotiated settlement, all religious leaders are challenged to participate in the peacemaking process. As the Holy Father reminded us in his January 1st Message, the search for peace, which is rooted in justice, must also include forgiveness. With over 200 priests and brothers ministering throughout Sri Lanka, we Oblates are called in a special way to show our solidarity and support by keeping these efforts in prayer and by encouraging the LTTE and the Sri Lankan leadership to make every effort to end the violence. In the U.S., we hope to continue to gain support and secure additional resources from the U.S. government for the negotiations until peace is realized.

News From Oswald Firth, OMI

I am in the process of organizing a "Journey of Peace and Friendship" to the North with 30 other organizations. We are leaving on the 19th of January and will return on the 21st. We have already met the Archbishop of Colombo and obtained his blessings. I have also contacted the Bishop of Mannar and sought his advice regarding travel to 'uncleared areas'. Before we depart, there will be religious services at the shrines of the four main religions. This will be in Colombo. I have also met and consulted the Minister of Rehabilitation and Resettlement on our journey and had briefly discussed how the government is progressing with the Norwegian facilitators of the peace process.

Oswald Firth, OMI is Director of the Center for Society and Religion in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The AIDS Pandemic: A Call to Action to Pharmaceutical Companies Séamus Finn, OMI

The statistics on the plight of the more than 30 million people who are HIV-infected are numbing. The stories of orphaned children and communities who have lost a generation of parents, potential teachers and leaders have been writ large.

The Global Aids Fund, established by the Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, estimates that \$10 billion dollars a year is required to wrestle with the suffering and consequences of this deadly pandemic.

Over the past eighteen months, we and other shareholders have engaged the top ten U.S. pharmaceutical companies and a number of European pharmaceutical companies, pressing them to be more generous in their responses to the crisis. In most cases, this is achieved through filing shareholder resolutions and addressing the objectives of these resolutions in dialogues and at annual shareholders meetings.

The five areas of concern for us and for other religious colleagues and nongovernmental organizations are the following:

- Making more medicines available to clinics and hospitals throughout Africa that need them.

Rural clinics, hospitals and hospices have identified specific medicines for the treatment of people who are HIV-positive, afflicted with TB or malaria or other opportunistic infections associated with the AIDS virus. Part of our agenda is to persuade companies who manufacture or distribute these drugs to donate a quantity of those medicines to these places of treatment and refuge.

- Eliminating all barriers to patents and intellectual property rights that prevent countries from accessing life-saving medicines.

At the 4th Ministerial of the World Trade Organization in Doha in November 2001, NGO's were successful in pushing governments and others to make it somewhat easier for sovereign nations to manufacture the medicines that are crucial in responding to health emergencies. However, some strings are still attached to the ways in which countries such as India or Brazil may export their generic medicines to other countries.

- Exploring ways, financial or otherwise, in which the companies can contribute to the functioning and resourcing of the Global Aids Fund.

A number of items remain to be clarified concerning the Fund. What is clear is the need for more pledges from countries, corporations and individuals. As of December 2001, the US has (after a great deal of arm twisting) agreed to donate \$735 million. Given our share of the global economy, our proportionate contribution to the Fund should be \$2.5 billion. With regard to the private sector, we hope to push companies to be very specific about their donations to the Fund. Thus far, however, few companies have yet made formal pledges.

- The establishment of a sustainable global pricing structure for countries that are imprisoned by poverty, disease and debt.

The expectation that the poor and less developed countries can pay the same amount for medicines as people in North America and Europe is simply not realistic. This leaves the poor totally dependant on the generosity of the donating corporation or creditor nation to acquire adequate medicines.

- The active advocacy of more poor country policies at the level of the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association and its international corollary.

The size and profitability of pharmaceutical companies is well documented. Their research and manufacturing of medicines is of utmost importance for all of humanity. However, the pharmaceutical industry is not like any other business in the service or manufacturing sectors. Without the necessary medicines to treat known viruses and infections people will die.

In collaboration with many other religious congregations and concerned shareholders we are calling on the companies to come together to make a more generous response in this time of crisis. Working with colleagues in the public policy sector we are supporting efforts to increase the response of the U.S. government to the Global Aids Fund.

HIV/AIDS-TB-MALARIA SHAREHOLDER RESOLUTION 2002

WHEREAS:

The HIV/AIDS epidemic constitutes a global emergency – one of the most formidable challenges to human life and dignity as well as to the effective enjoyment of human rights;

By the end of the year 2000, 36.1 million people worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS, 90% in developing countries and 75% in Sub-Sahara Africa;

Effective prevention, care and treatment strategies will require increased availability of, and non-discriminatory access to vaccines, sterile injecting equipment, drugs, including anti-retroviral therapy, diagnostics and related technologies, as well as increased research and development;

Availability and affordability of drugs and related technology are factors to be reviewed and addressed. There is need to reduce the cost of these drugs and technologies;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

Shareholders request the Board of Directors to develop and implement a policy to provide pharmaceuticals for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria in ways that the majority of infected persons in African nations can afford.

A report of the development and implementation of such a policy (omitting proprietary information and at reasonable cost) would be sent to shareholders six months after the 2002 annual meeting.

On November 16, 2001, the 21st anniversary of the death of the four American women in El Salvador, Fr. Leo LeBlanc, OMI, Fr. Lorenzo (Larry) Rosebaugh, OMI, and eight Oblate Novices from Godfrey, Illinois boarded a bus in St. Louis, Missouri, for Columbus, Georgia, to participate in the annual non-violent march to close the School of the Americas.

Lorenzo Rosebaugh, OMI, Maryknoll Fr. Roy Bourgeois and Linda Ventamiglia were the first to commit acts of civil disobedience at Fort Benning to bring attention to the atrocities committed in Latin American countries by soldiers trained at the SOA. In 1983, they dressed in store-bought military uniforms, entered the base and passed out leaflets to Salvadoran soldiers training there. The three were arrested by the FBI after their fourth trespass. Lorenzo interviews Quilin Bouzi, a Haitian and Oblate Novice in Godfrey, concerning his first protest at Fort Benning.

L: Quilin, why did you choose to participate this year in the non-violent march at the SOA?

Q: First of all, I knew that members of the Haitian Military were trained in the SOA. In particular, two Haitian generals who trained there, Col. Gambetta Hyppolite and Col. Frank Romain, were responsible for thousands of Haitian deaths, the majority being women and children. I also went to Fort Benning to be a voice for the voiceless, for the poor and oppressed in my country.

L: On your arrival to Fort Benning, what were your first impressions?

Q: I was astonished by the large crowds since the city authorities had done all in their power to call off the gathering. Not until three days before the march were we notified that it was still on, but under what restrictions, no one knew for sure.

Because of the events of 9-11, many of us felt our presence this year at Fort Benning would be of even greater significance. Committed to non-violence, we are saddened by the U.S.'s military response to the attacks on the World Trade Center. In our opinion, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, will bring about more and more acts of terrorism and violence. Our bombing of Afghanistan has left more than seven million refugees and an untold number of innocents and civilians dead.

Shortly after arriving in Columbus, we proceeded to the Bradley Theater where every seat was occupied. Here, we were welcomed and informed that attorneys representing the "marchers" and those representing the city of Columbus were in court until 5:30 p.m. the day before, waiting to hear whether a procession through the city streets to the gates of Fort Benning would be permitted. To the surprise of everyone, Federal Magistrate G. Mallon Faircloth (who had recently sentenced 88-year-old Sr. M. Dorothy Hennessey, OSF, and twenty others to six month prison terms for protesting the SOA), entered the courtroom and clearly stated that he wished to abide by the First Amendment of the Constitution, which gives people this right to march. With these words, a grand applause echoed throughout the theater.

From the theater we walked to the South Park baseball stadium. What impressed me here was the large number of young people, many from Jesuit colleges around the country, along with large groups of religious women and many from Peace communities such as the Catholic Worker and Pax Christi.

Among songs and street theater, were testimonies from women and men working in third world countries. They described the torture, massacres and total disregard for human life carried out by those trained at the SOA, one such atrocity being the fumigation of hundreds of thousands of acres of cocoa in Colombia causing illness and death, and the means of survival for the Colombian people.

As I sat there listening to the many testimonies, I was taken back to 1985-1986 when the Haitian poor began standing up and denouncing the regimes of Baby Doc Duvalier. *Campesinos*, catechists, sisters, students, and priests were arrested, dragged from their homes in the middle of the night, their bodies often discovered in the streets the next morning. All these things flooded my mind as tears rolled down my cheeks. It was almost too much for me.

L: Amongst all you experienced at Ft. Benning, is there any one thing that stood out the most?

Q: Yes, it was the solemn procession at the gates of Fort Benning Sunday morning. A prayerful atmosphere accompanied the over 10,000 people in attendance. As names of the victims of the massacres, tortures and disappearances were read aloud, all responded by saying, "*Presente!*" This procession immediately made me think of the non-violent march in Haiti on April 26, 1986, led by Fr. Aristide (now President of Haiti) from his church on the Ft. Dimanche military base, where massive torture and killing took place. The majority of those taken to this military base were never seen again.

L: Quilin, now that you have gone to Fort Benning, do you feel any good will come from the annual peace demonstrations there?

Q: Before going to Fort Benning, I had no idea of what impact it might have on me. But having been there, I can say with all my heart that I felt a part of the remnant spoken of in the Bible. A remnant of believers who know our strength when united, know too that our prayers and nonviolent actions will someday bring the closing of the SOA. And that the love we show living out a non-violent lifestyle will help others to believe Jesus' teaching to 'Love Your Enemies' and 'Do Good to Those Who Hate You' is really the only road to Lasting Peace.

Lorenzo Rosebaugh, OMI and Quilin Bouzi write from the Oblate Novitiate in Godfrey, Illinois.

ACTION ALERT: Momentum Builds to Close the SOA

SOA Watch is nearing its goal of securing 100 cosponsors for HR 1810, the bill to close the SOA/WHISC (Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) by January 2002. Ninety-four congressional representatives have thus far pledged their support. Please keep up the pressure by contacting your representative and asking that they co-sponsor HR 1810 right away! If your representative is already on board, please call and offer thanks for his or her support. By keeping the pressure on Congress we can close the SOA!

To find out who your representative is, go to: <http://www.congress.org>

To view current co-sponsors of HR 1810: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d107:HR01810:@@P>

For a list of past supporters who have not yet signed on: <http://www.soaw.org/legalert.html>

At a recent Sunday mass at Mary Immaculate Parish in Pacoima, California, we offered an intention “In honor of all those who have lost their lives crossing the border in Tijuana.” While political and human tragedies affecting persons who seek to move to better places do not supplant the traditional religious meaning of “Las Posadas,” the modern-day need of persons and families seeking shelter and a better life does not escape the consciousness of those who participate in Posadas events.

Because the biblical journey of Mary and Joseph is so close to hearts and experiences of many of our immigrant parishioners, the commemoration of Las Posadas is an important event for our parish community. We sing “Las Posadas” as the Entrance Song at each of our Eucharists on the last Sunday in Advent. In the days leading up to Christmas, the celebration spills out of the church building and hall, as families re-enact the Posadas event in their neighborhoods. Often we hear of the fact that for many in the community, this is their only contact with the celebrating church throughout the year. This tradition is a favorite for children as well, who often dress up as Mary, Joseph, and the angels and process through the streets, or most often, through the public housing and tenement buildings in which they live.

This advent, as I went to participate in such a Posada, I realized that I didn’t know exactly where the apartment was located. Happily, songs to the Virgin, bright candles and a prayerful procession in a neighborhood adjacent to a small commercial district, were more than sufficient signs to direct me to the presence of the Church in the barrio.

After singing the traditional verses of “Pidiendo Posada,” we packed into a small apartment, replete with the home altar, and continued to sing, drink Christmas punch, and eat the food the families had prepared.

Before leaving, participants from inside the apartment, as well as more neighbors from outside, gathered around the door to pray and remember Jesus’ birth. At the door was placed a small glass jar for donations to the church. This collection, representing the unity of the faithful in this neighborhood, was not an unimportant gesture of fellowship with our bigger community of the parish.

Spiritually, the verses of the Posadas, which move from hostile rejection to a recognition of the Queen of Heaven and José, and an acceptance of the presence of God in the stranger, have great power still in softening the hardness of our hearts and preparing us for that great coming of the One who continuously seeks Posada in all of us.

Jim Fee, OMI is the pastor of Mary Immaculate Parish in Southern California.

Celebrated in many Latin American countries, “Las Posadas” is the reenactment of the story of Mary and Joseph as strangers and foreigners in Bethlehem, seeking shelter and hospitality in the hours before the birth of Jesus. In several border towns in Mexico and the U.S., it has become an annual pilgrimage to show solidarity across the walls that divide our communities.

Millions of migrants have sought shelter, hospitality, and survival by attempting to cross our southern border, refugees from conflict, natural disasters, and a harsh global economy. The Posadas story calls us to see in the struggle of the holy family the parallels of the difficult journey of our migrant sisters and brothers, and to remember those who have died in their search for a better life for their families.

Campaign in Support of Life

Reemphasizing the Pope’s call to “*respect, protect, love and serve life*,” the U.S. Bishops Conference issued their *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Campaign in Support of Life* in December. This document, released in anticipation of the National Prayer Vigil for Life on January 21st and the March for Life on January 22nd expresses the need for a consistent ethic of life and includes recommendations for protecting life and promoting human dignity through public education campaigns, pastoral care, public policy, prayer and worship.

"A consistent ethic of life, which explains the Church's teaching at the level of moral principle— far from diminishing concern for abortion and euthanasia or equating all issues touching on the dignity of human life—recognizes instead the distinctive character of each issue while giving each its proper place within a coherent moral vision. As bishops of the United States we have issued pastoral letters on war and peace, economic justice, and other social questions affecting the dignity of human life—and we have implemented programs for advancing the Church's witness in these areas through parishes, schools, and other Church institutions (e.g., *Communities of Salt and Light* [1994]; *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching* [1998]). Taken together, these diverse pastoral statements and practical programs constitute no mere assortment of unrelated initiatives but rather a consistent strategy in support of all human life its various stages and circumstances.

"To focus of the evil of deliberate killing in abortion and euthanasia is not to ignore the many other urgent conditions that demean human dignity and threaten human rights. Opposing abortion and euthanasia "does not excuse indifference to those who suffer from poverty, violence and injustice. Any politics of human life must work to resist the violence of war and the scandal of capital punishment. Any politics of human dignity must seriously address issues of racism, poverty, hunger, employment, education, housing and health care" (*Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 23). We pray that Catholics will be advocates for the weak and the marginalized in all these areas. "But being 'right' in such matters can never excuse a wrong choice regarding direct attacks on innocent human life. Indeed the failure to protect and defend life in its most vulnerable stages renders suspect any claims to the 'rightness' of positions in other matters affecting the poorest and least powerful of the human community" (*Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 23)."

Eco-Park Projects Postponed in Bangladesh

With the installation of the new government in October 2001 came some welcome news for the Khasi and Garo people of the rural hills of northwest Bangladesh. The Eco-Park Projects undertaken by the previous government, which threatened to displace hundreds of tribal families and destroy their means of livelihood, have been postponed. The announcement was delivered in the First Parliament meeting of the new government in October. Most likely, the decision to shelve the reforestation projects in Madhobkunda and Muroichhara stemmed from a drive to drop the "luxury projects" of the past government rather than a recognition of the rights of the tribals. The country's foreign exchange is now in a precarious position and the present government says it is due to over-planning of unneeded projects by the past government.

Nonetheless, the Khasi and Garo people, along with countless supporters throughout the world who tirelessly protested against the parks, are optimistic about the prospect of attaining permanent cancellation of the projects. On behalf of the Oblates who minister to the Khasis and Garos, the JPIC office wrote letters to ambassadors and to U.S. government officials, and advocated with other religious congregations in the U.S. for the return of the lands to the tribal people. Additionally, many intellectuals, professors, social and cultural activists, students supported the tribal people in programs of public gatherings, social mobilizations, hunger strikes, and press conferences organized in the city and the hills.

Many challenges still lay ahead for the Khasis and Garos, however, as they have yet to attain written title to their land. Although they have inhabited this land for well over a century and consider it their ancestral land, the government claims ownership of the land and used the fact that the Khasis and Garos do not have title to evict them in the first place. The Khasis and Garos hope to convince the government to extend to them the same rights offered to the tribal people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in southern Bangladesh. There, the government recognized the Tribals' traditional land rights. Should the government extend this rule to the Khasis and Garos, or deliver proper title to the land, they believe they will be able to live without fear of future eviction of their people in the name of such "Eco-parks" or "development projects."

Catholic Campaign Raises Awareness of Poverty in America

One in six children in the U.S. lives in poverty, according to the current census figures. This rate is actually higher than it was in 1979 and the U.S. ranks higher in this category than most industrialized nations. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), a project of the U.S. Bishops Conference, is seeking to raise awareness of the plight of the nearly 12 million children who suffer among us, during Poverty in America Awareness Month this January.

"December brings outpourings of good will and concern for the poor, but in January the nation returns to its usual routine and the poor are still poor," said Father Robert Vitillo, executive director of CCHD. "By focusing on poverty in January, we hope to remind Americans early each year that poverty remains very much a part of American life."

"Poverty touches all ethnicities and races, ages and family types in the United States.
One in 11 families, one in nine Americans, and one in six children are poor."
-U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2001

Legislative Update

Clean Diamonds

The House passed (408-6) H.R. 2722, *The Clean Diamond Trade Act* on November 28, 2001. A bill with similar language in the Senate is fairly likely to pass through committee and be signed into law this year. H.R. 2722 permits the President to prohibit the import of rough diamonds into the U.S. from countries that are not implementing either a system of controls required by UN Security Council resolutions or the Kimberley Process – or a system described in the bill. It also calls for negotiation, in concert with the Kimberley Process, on an international agreement designed to eliminate the illicit trade in diamonds and for Bush to seek additional UN Security Council resolutions imposing embargoes against countries engaged in the trade of conflict diamonds.

Death Penalty

The Senate Judiciary Committee held hearings in June 2001 regarding the *Innocence Protection Act of 2001 (IPA)*. IPA seeks to address problems of fairness in order to avoid wrongful convictions and executions. It requires states to provide qualified and experienced attorneys to all defendants facing the death penalty, and allows for greater access to DNA testing. Both bills (S.486 and HR.912) have record levels of bipartisan support - 24 (4 R, 19 D, 1 I) original cosponsors in the Senate and 215 (45 R, 169 D, 1 I) in the House.

Bills introduced to *place a moratorium on executions by the Federal Government* and urge the States to do the same while a National Commission on the Death Penalty reviews the fairness of the imposition of the death penalty have far fewer cosponsors and are tied up in committee.

Hunger to Harvest

A major victory in the effort to reduce poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, the House passed HConRes. 102, the *Africa: Hunger to Harvest Resolution* in December, following its passage in the Senate in July 2001. The bill directs the U.S. to commit to increased levels of effective, poverty-focused development assistance to sub-Saharan Africa until progress is made toward reversing current levels of hunger and poverty; urges the President to work with the heads of sub-Saharan African countries, and with U.S. and sub-Saharan African private and civic organizations to increase development assistance; and directs Congress to undertake a multi-year commitment with other donors to provide the resources necessary to cut hunger by one-half in that region (such funding should support both bilateral and multilateral poverty-focused development efforts).

Landmines

A few cosponsors have joined the *Landmine Elimination and Victim Assistance Act of 2001*, introduced in March. Currently, Sen. Patrick Leahy has 30 co-sponsors, Rep. Lane Evans has 90. The bill urges President Bush to join the International Mine Ban Treaty as soon as possible, directs the Department of Defense (DoD) to field alternatives to anti-personnel mines, and directs Bush to create an inter-agency committee on landmine victim assistance.

The DoD recently recommended to Bush that the U.S. abandon all efforts to join the Mine Ban Treaty by 2006 or ever, abandon all efforts to get rid of "dumb" mines by 2003, eliminate the search for landmines alternatives program and assert the need for U.S. mine deployment in Korea and elsewhere.

Antipersonnel landmines maim and kill upwards of 18,000 people each year, mostly children, farmers, and other innocent civilians, and render land useless for cultivation. Most of the world's nations, including almost all of NATO, have joined the Mine Ban Treaty. In Afghanistan, there are an estimated 8-10 million landmines on the ground, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis and putting U.S. ground troops at greater risk.



OMI JPIC OFFICE

The OMI Justice and Peace/Integrity of Creation Office coordinates the advocacy efforts of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate on behalf of the interests of the poor and abandoned in the U.S. and in the more than 65 countries where the Oblates are in mission. These efforts include coordinating the corporate responsibility program to insist on just practices and policies by corporations in their worldwide operations. Our work also includes advocacy with the U.S. government and other international institutions on a variety of issues, and supports the community organizing efforts of the Oblates in the U.S.