

# JPIC REPORT



A publication of the OMI Justice and Peace/Integrity of Creation Office

Without justice and love,  
peace will always be the  
great illusion.

- Archbishop Hélder Pessoa  
Câmara

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## From the Director:

The first signs of spring are already obvious in the plant life around the Oblate house in Washington. After a winter that saw record snow fall in the area, with schools, businesses and government offices closed down or interrupted for many days, these harbingers of spring are most welcome.

Two massive and terribly destructive earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, sandwiched around the winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, turned our attention to the movement of the tectonic plates that form the earth's surface. They remind us at the same time of the precariousness of our journey on earth and of the awesome power latent in the natural order. Scientist tell us that the diving of the Pacific plate under the Chilean plate some twenty miles below the surface of the earth may have shifted the earth's axis and ever so

slightly shortened the hours of daylight that we experience.

Our immediate attention turned to the incredible destruction of buildings and tremendous loss of life, especially in Haiti, caused by these earthquakes. At the same time, we have witnessed the generous response in solidarity from across the world to both tragedies. We have seen and heard numerous stories of heroic rescues and survival, alongside descriptions of the loss and suffering that have interrupted so many lives and will continue to do so for years.

The feverish debate and hardened differences that have emerged in the United States around the issues of health care, climate change, financial regulatory reform, jobs and immigration, rightly recede into the background when such tragedies occur, but they do not go away. The ongoing search for political solutions to all of

these very difficult and contentious issues serves to remind us of the messy work that often goes into making our and other societies work, and the difficulty of finding a working consensus.

As the church walks along the Lenten-Easter journey and the Oblate congregation prepares for a General Chapter in September focused on the theme of conversion, we can all take advantage of these invitations and opportunities for reflection. We can ask how we can better participate in the collective process of building up the many communities of which we are members. On a global level, the question becomes how we can more effectively realize our commitments to be in solidarity with the far flung communities across the world who depend on our solidarity, and who reach out to us for support in times of tragedy and disaster?



**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 serving as a resource for province membership, supporting the community organizing efforts of the Oblates in the United States, and 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 United States government and other international institutions on a variety of justice and peace issues.

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Rev. Séamus Finn, OMI  
*Director*  
 Christina C. Herman  
*Associate Director*  
 Mary O'Herron  
*Associate for GAJPIC Service and Corporate Responsibility*  
 George Kombe Ngolwe  
*Advocacy Associate*

**JPIC Report** is a publication of the OMI Justice and Peace/ Integrity of Creation Office  
 391 Michigan Avenue NE  
 Washington, DC 20017

Tel: 202.529-4505  
 Fax: 202.529-4572  
[www.omiusajpic.org](http://www.omiusajpic.org)

## News and Happenings



### 2010 Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) Conference & Lobby Day: Justice in Africa - On Whose Terms?

The conference is scheduled for April 17- 19, 2010, with a keynote speech by Fr. Peter Henriot, S.J., from Zambia. Some of the themes to be discussed are: Obama's Africa policy, Restorative Justice and Food Security, and twinning practices between Catholic parishes in United States and Africa.

Join hundreds of faith-based advocates in shaping U.S. policy towards Africa. Oblates have an AFJN organizational membership. More information at: [www.afjn.org](http://www.afjn.org)

### The CSA at LaVista

The Community Supported Garden at La Vista has a new farmer for the 2010 season! Eric Stevens and his family have moved to the Godfrey, Illinois area, and Eric is hard at work getting seeds started in the greenhouse and planting spring greens. The CSA at Godfrey has been wildly successful, both in terms of providing produce to the many subscribers to the CSA, but also in the creation of community and connecting families - especially children - with the source of their food.



### Earth Literacy Program: Exploring the Sacred Universe

6:00 pm Tuesday, Aug. 3 through 1:00 pm Tuesday, Aug. 10, 2010



All around us evidence is mounting that the current industrial perspective is harmful both to Earth and to humans. The needed corrective includes not only practical lifestyle changes, but also a shift in our basic understanding of what it means to be human on this rare and lovely planet.

Join the staff of the Oblate Ecological Initiative this summer and explore Creation's integrity for a week along the bluffs with a community of learners. Together we will explore the profound shift in understanding evoked by the story of an evolutionary universe. As we sit with the wonder, awe and newness of the Universe Story, we'll also critically examine the perceptions that currently fashion our cultural worldview.

This week-long program includes:

- guided activities and instruction
- immersion in direct experience of the natural world
- practicing skills for a more ecologically-conscious life
- contemplating the story of an evolving Universe
- examining the perceptions that fashion the current cultural worldview
- deepening our appreciation for the inherent spiritual
- dimension of our sacred universe

Registration information will be sent upon request - call 618-466-5004; Cost: \$550. Overnight programs must be pre-registered. Overnight retreats must be paid in full with registration due 14 days prior to the retreat. If you are unable to attend, 75% of the cost is refundable up to two weeks prior to the beginning of the retreat.

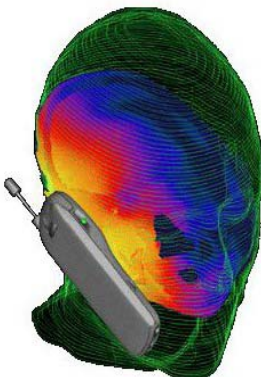
## Resources

### Keeping Healthy, Protecting our Communities:

**GoodGuide™** is a website that provides **reliable information on the health, environmental, and social impacts** of products and companies. GoodGuide's mission is to help consumers find safe, healthy, and green products that are better for the individual and the planet.

The initiative began as a UC Berkeley research project, and is now an independent "For-Benefit" company. The aim is ultimately to shift the balance of information and power in the marketplace. To see the ratings on the things you eat and use each day, visit [www.goodguide.com/](http://www.goodguide.com/)

**The Environmental Working Group** is a highly-respected group that has been working for the past 17 years to inform the public about the health effects of chemicals and hazards of commonly used products. If you've ever wondered about what chemicals are in your food, or how much radiation your cell phone discharges, check out their website at [www.ewg.org/](http://www.ewg.org/). It is a trusted and indispensable resource that covers a lot of ground.



### Transition Movement US

The Transition Movement is "part of a vibrant, international grassroots movement that builds community resilience in response to the challenges of peak oil, climate change and the economic crisis. ..." It seeks to strengthen communities against the effects of these challenges, leading to more abundant, fulfilling, equitable and connected lives. **Learn more at [www.transitionus.org/](http://www.transitionus.org/)**

The Transition movement first gained 'official' status in Denver, Colorado and has expanded to 60 towns and cities across the country. If you are interested in moving your community to a more sustainable future, the website offers excellent resources and suggestions on organizing.

### Green America

Do you wish it were easier to purchase green, sustainable and equitably produced goods and services?



Join Green America (formerly Coop America). You will not only receive their National Green Pages, a compendium of over 2,000 green businesses around the country, but also a subscription to *Real Green*, their bi-monthly newsletter on green purchasing and investing.

### Center for the Advancement of a Steady State Economy (CASSE)

"Perpetual economic growth is neither possible nor desirable. Growth, especially in wealthy nations, is already causing more problems than it solves. Recession isn't sustainable or healthy either. The positive, sustainable alternative is a steady state economy..."

Learn more about what a steady state economy would look like – check out the CASSE website at: <http://steadystate.org/>

Dr. Herman Daly, respected ecological economist is on the CASSE Executive Board and is contributing to a new blog on the CASSE website (click on Track). Daly is particularly interested in the intersection of economics, ethics and sustainability. Along with theologian [John B. Cobb, Jr.](#), he coauthored *For the Common Good: redirecting the economy toward community, the environment and a sustainable future*. Daly is considered revolutionary among economists for placing the economy within the physical environment on which it depends for its material inputs. The environment, of course, is a place of limits: limits on raw materials and limits on places to store pollution. Daly shows that the economy must observe limits too.

The FAQs and Myths and Realities sections of the CASSE website (click on Discover) are particularly informative.



## Book Nook



### Public Produce: The New Urban Agriculture

Darrin Nordahl. Island Press. 2009. 177 pages. Reviewed by Mary O'Herron

With full and detailed attention to the history of food production in the U.S., Mr. Nordahl argues that public spaces could provide a new agricultural shift without compromising their attractiveness. In seeking viable solutions for hunger, he examines not only publicly-owned and maintained areas, but also some privately-owned 'publicly-occupied' areas like hospitals, churches, parks or shopping areas. Much effort, water, fertilizer, etc., is expended to produce areas that are aesthetically-pleasing, but that could instead be put to better practical use.



Nordahl describes vividly how, after World War II, people in the US began moving to the suburbs from farm and city areas. Suburban land became more decorative than useful, encouraged by zoning laws which prohibited farm items, especially animals, and actively discouraged growing produce as the perfect lawn and neat plot became increasingly important.

As the distance between farms and living areas grew and the farms themselves became vast, the food production system has been transformed into an industrial model. Today, most people don't have any real connection to the sources of their food. Food typically is packaged - the fact that it comes from the earth gets lost.

At present, food production is highly dependent on fossil fuels. Cheap oil has made possible low-labor, high-tech agribusiness, as well as the increased distance from farm to market. In one startling statistic, Nordahl says that it often takes 10 calories of fossil fuel energy to get 1 (one) calorie of food to a U.S. supermarket.

Other issues raised in the book include "food security" and "food justice." Food security refers to when food processing is so centralized that the food supply could be easily poisoned; It already is vulnerable to deadly outbreaks of e coli and salmonella. "Food justice" is an issue because processed and fast foods, which are generally cheaper than

fresh food, have a higher fat and carbohydrate content which is distinctly related to the rise in obesity, especially among low income people. Poor areas tend to have few if any grocery stores, making fresh food unavailable to them, unlike unhealthy fast food.

In looking for workable solutions to the problem of hunger in the US, Mr.



*The Mayor of Denver encouraged a vegetable garden to be planted in front of the City and County Building in Denver's Civic Center Park*

Nordahl sees hope in creative and industrious people and municipalities with a drive to plant and grow edible plants for the general public to enjoy. Nordahl makes a compelling case for using public land to grow food as an important contribution to the problem of hunger.

A good example of the use of public space for growing food can be found in Denver, Colorado. There, **Transition Denver** (see entry on p.3), in partnership with business and civic organizations, founded the *Grow Local Colorado Campaign* to promote local food production. Their goal in 2009 was the planting of 2009 new gardens.



## Congressional Updates

### Comprehensive Immigration Reform Legislation Introduced

On December 15, 2009, US Congressman Luis Gutierrez (D – Illinois) introduced the Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity (CIR ASAP) Act of 2009 in the American House of Representatives. CIR ASAP (H.R. 4321) has already earned more than 90 co-sponsors.

The Oblate JPIC office praises this proposed legislation as a vital step in addressing the broken immigration system and asks for your help in getting it passed in Congress. We look forward to seeing legislation from the United States Senate addressing this critical issue, and we urge the Obama Administration to provide the leadership needed to make comprehensive immigration reform a reality in 2010.

The CIR ASAP bill, if passed, would strengthen border security, and provide an earned legalization process for undocumented workers and qualified undocumented young students.

#### Major aspects of the CIR ASAP legislation include:

##### Border Security Enforcement:

Focus on ensuring adequate training and equipment for border agents; security of ports of entry; and

combating drug, firearm, and human trafficking. CIR ASAP sets strong medical and other standards for handling immigrants held in detention; bars separation of families in detention except in exceptional cases; requires alternatives to detention and repeals the 287(g) program which has been abused in targeting the undocumented. CIR ASAP would create oversight through the courts and an Ombudsman.

##### Earned Legal status for the Undocumented:

Creates a program providing conditional non-immigrant status for undocumented workers (and their spouses and children) in the U.S., which is valid for six years. The applicant/s must first pass a background check, have no serious criminal conviction, and pay a \$500 penalty. Immigrants with conditional status would have permission to work and travel. They could apply for green cards if they work, study, or contribute to society through military or community service, pay taxes, keep a clean criminal record, and meet English and civics requirements. CIR ASAP includes the **Dream Act** which creates a pathway to citizenship for thousands of young students who were brought to the United States years ago as children.

##### Protection of All Workers:

Incorporates the AgJOBS Act (H.R. 2414), which provides agricultural employers with a stable, legal labor force while protecting farm workers from exploitative working conditions. Unauthorized farm workers would be able to legalize their status. Establishes stricter requirements to

protect American workers, for example by prohibiting participation in the H-2B visa program of employers who have conducted a mass lay-off in the past year, and by expanding requirements for recruiting American workers before hiring foreign nationals.

##### Improving Detention Conditions:

Requires Department Homeland Security to meet minimum requirements to ensure the humane treatment of detainees with medical and mental health screenings, protection from sexual abuse, care for victims, and reports and investigations of abuse. Creates independent immigration detention commission to investigate and report on detention compliance.



#### TAKE ACTION: Now it's Time for Congress to Step Up

- Urge your Member of Congress to co-sponsor the CIR ASAP Act. Dial 202-224-3121 and ask for your Representative's office.
- Call the White House and ask the President to keep his immigration 2010 reform promise. English: 866.584.0773 | Español: 866.974.8813
- Joining the mobile action network by texting the word 'justice' to 69866.

Questions? Contact George Ngolwe, [gngolwe@omiusa.org](mailto:gngolwe@omiusa.org)

## The Hard Road to Reconciliation – The Sri Lankan Scene

Oswald Firth, OMI

The Presidential Election in Sri Lanka, considered by many to be a turning point for a nation recently embroiled in a thirty year war, and a harbinger of a lasting peace, has left the country further divided along ethnic lines.

Since its independence from the British in 1948, Sri Lanka, a splendid island nation reputed for its natural scenic beauty and legendary hospitality, is home to over 14 million Sinhalese and some 4 million Tamils, out of a total population of 20 million inhabitants. The rest are an assortment of minority groups who live peacefully among the two major communities. The Tamils, who form a majority in the



North and East of the Island, have always felt that they were not treated equally by consecutive post-colonial governments that have been predominantly Sinhalese.

Non-violent political efforts by Tamil leaders to obtain equal rights for their community - whether in terms of language or self government – failed. This led to segments of the Tamil youth resorting to arms in order to carve out a separate state

combining the North and the East – considered by Tamils to be their ‘traditional home-land’. This separatist effort was crushed in May of last year in a bloody defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the death of most of their leadership.

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The recent Presidential Election has offered no solution to longstanding Tamil grievances.

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The country is now in a post-war, post-presidential election mood. With only 20% of the Tamils voting in the North, the writing on the wall is clear that the Tamils do not trust the Sinhala politicians in the South to guarantee their regional autonomy and self-rule. 63% of those votes went to retired General Sarath Fonseka and 24% to the incumbent, not because they loved the army commander who routed the fierce Liberation Tigers more, but because they loved President Mahinda Rajapaksa less. The message is that they have not forgotten or forgiven the ‘war without witnesses’. Last spring, over 350,000 innocent civilians were cornered in a ‘no war zone’ where at least 20,000 of them were mercilessly mowed down and massacred. Those who managed to flee were treated like common prisoners and herded into camps surrounded by barbed-wire from which they were unable to leave until the camps were opened in early December 2009. These incidents are still vivid in the minds of the Tamils.



IDPs learn how to avoid mines in their resettlement areas.

People in the north are facing fatigue and apathy. Having denied those in the camps vital medical assistance and especially freedom of movement, any attempt from the government towards reconciliation that lacks a political solution will be rejected. They feel their fate of being a neglected community has been sealed. Healing and reconciliation will necessarily involve trust and confidence building, a journey that is bound to be slow. If it is to happen at all, it must be a people to people effort. Both Tamils and Sinhalese have lived together for ages without the intervention of political figures who now disseminate racial dissension and division for political expediency.

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Reconciliation will be difficult, and efforts will need to begin at the community level.

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The Oblates have given the lead in the needed work of rebuilding shattered relationships. Last year, they formed small teams of religious sisters – Sinhalese able to speak Tamil – to enter the camps and mingle with the Tamil women and their



families. This was called a 'ministry of presence' and it has been very successful. The religious sisters gradually set up about twenty Montessori type schools for the kids within the camps. With some 100,000 people still living in the camps, these schools are very important. They are currently teaching some 750 children. Hardened hearts have begun to melt. Tension and fear have begun to ease. Tenu-



ous strains of trust are emerging. Last December, the Oblates and nuns brought their La-Kri-Vi children (known as kids with valiant hearts) from the South to spend Christmas in the camps. Kids of both communities exchanged gifts, sang songs and acted skits. When the time came to depart, it was a scene of

laments and tears. The wounds are beginning, gradually, to heal - through children.

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The Oblates are taking a lead in promoting needed reconciliation.

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The leadership of the two Oblate provinces – Colombo and Jaffna – in one of their joint sessions, decided to re-establish the Oblate pre-novitiate in the North (once the scene of relentless war). There, prospective candidates to the Oblate way of life will live and learn together to be missionaries to the poor of both communities. This decision will mark a further vigorous step towards advancing a spirit of harmony and dialogue between the two communities. One resulting imperative of this decision would be for the Sinhala recruit to become

conversant in the Tamil language, and vice versa, so that he could become, as John Paul II once said in a Peace Day message "a craftsman of a new humanity".

The local Church, where all ethnic communities with their deep rooted cultural values and time-tested traditions form parts of the living body of Christ, must take the lead in addressing the legitimate grievances of these communities in the quest for peace. In this context, the Oblates, with over 150 years existence to their credit and the largest men's religious body in the Island's Church history can become a visible sign and a standard bearer to other religious congregations who may be inclined to seriously engage in this timely ministry of national peace and reconciliation.

### War Refugee Resettlement: Report from the field

The camps for IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) in the north - opened in early December of 2009 - still contain over 100,000 refugees. Those who have left have either resettled or have been taken to other camps. The refugees receive a food ration and are able to move in and out of the camps; with permission they can stay outside several days. There is a shortage of teachers, as they have been asked to return to their schools in the resettlement areas. About 750 children are in a Montessori program set up by Sisters working with the Oblates.

In Kilinochchi, people are slowly resettling. Priests and Sisters are already operating in some parishes. Damaged churches and mission houses all need significant repairs. The Sisters are living in their own convents, under difficult circumstances. Oblates have moved in and are carrying out repairs in OBTEC, in Kilinochchi, and in Mulankavil, the location of the Orphanage.

Refugees who return to Kilinochchi are first kept in the school where they are registered. They are then taken to their places of origin and asked to identify their homes. If the land mines are cleared, then they are allowed to put up a hut for which the government provides 5 tin sheets and some rafters. They are given a ration on a weekly basis, but apart from that are expected to find their way. If their places are not yet cleared of mines, then they are asked to put up huts in some common areas until their own places are cleared for them to return.

The Army forms a large presence in the north, with cordial interactions reported. Yet, there is also fear and insecurity. There is no electricity, but water is supplied. Some have cleaned up their wells and are using that water. Some NGOs have been given permission to help with the resettlement program, but under strict conditions and monitoring by government forces.





decisions of trustees of pension funds, the fiduciaries of endowments and trusts, consultants and money managers, investment scheme innovators, and the financial activities of wealthy individuals and investors, including music, film and sports stars.

New regulatory reforms should be legislated, and enforced with improved government regulation. Strong codes of conduct and ethical behavior by corporations and individuals involved in the financial services sector, though, will also be critically important in the elimination of irresponsible and excessive risk taking.

For each of us who participate in the financial sector in any number of ways, it may be a good time to consider criteria we use in making purchasing decisions, small and large: our banking and credit card services, i.e., do they have codes of conduct; how are our personal funds, pension funds, or the funds of organizations or institutions that we support invested; are the investments consistent with what we believe or value?

The commitment of individuals engaged in the financial markets - through their own investments or pension schemes - to a philosophy that is ethical and embraces the common good can be both a witness and a prod to the broader financial sector. Together these groups can make a contribution to the restoration of confidence and trust in the financial system as they bring the well being of people and the earth to the center of the system's framework and activities.

## Haiti: The Long Road to Recovery Christina Herman

**T**he massive earthquake that took so many lives in Haiti left the country's political and economic center devastated. Damage from the January 12th quake has been estimated at between \$7.2 billion and \$13.2 billion.

Through the Church in Latin America Office and Catholic Relief Services, the USCCB has directed tens of millions of dollars in private donations to relief and reconstruction. Fr. Andrew Small, OMI, recently appointed Director for the Church in Latin America, has accompanied two delegations of US Bishops to assess the needs of the stricken Church. Religious groups, including the Oblates, have also raised significant amounts to feed, clothe and care for the orphaned and displaced.

The death toll, estimated at over 200,000, included many church leaders. Haitians lost their beloved Archbishop Joseph Serge Miot and Bishop Charles Benoit, Vicar General of Port-au-Prince as well as over 115 religious. The Oblates lost one student, Scholastic Brother Weedy Alexis.

Many churches, schools, clinics and other buildings were damaged beyond repair and will need to be replaced. The Oblate scholasticate and the complex in Fondwa ("Fond d'Oies") a parish in the mountains near the epicenter of the quake, were completely destroyed. The Provincial House in Port au Prince was also badly damaged.

There were stories of near-misses, like that of Fr. Ray Lacasse, and the two

women travelling with him as the earthquake struck. On the road south out of Port au Prince, huge boulders tumbled onto the road, narrowly missing their vehicle. Fortunately, they arrived safely at the Oblate compound in Les Cayes.



Port au Prince Cathedral

Oblates in that city, about 100 miles south of Port au Prince, run the largest orphanage in Haiti. In the weeks following the quake, they added 100 kids from hard-hit Leogane to their group of 650 abandoned children.

People streamed out of Port au Prince after the quake, and many have relocated to the countryside. But because so much of the food and other supplies have always been channeled through Port au Prince, the countryside has experienced real shortages. This disruption has been worsened by the endemic poverty. A recent Catholic Relief Services report says many families that have taken in refugees are subsisting on little more than one meal a day.

Governments are reducing Haiti's international debt, a step to be applauded. But donors must be careful not to lay on more debt during Haiti's rebuilding. In addition, there has been talk about the importance of de-centralizing the economy and political power, but the development model that is ultimately adopted depends on who is at the table when these larger questions are decided.

## A Central American Pilgrimage: Reflections on Martyrdom Warren A. Brown, OMI

In the recent memory of the Church there have been numerous instances of martyrdom for the faith throughout the world. Some of the more tragic but inspiring stories of those who died for the faith were written in Central America during the past thirty years or so. I was privileged to participate in a pilgrimage/retreat this past January 11-22, 2010, sponsored by the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. Along with twenty priests and deacons, I visited some of the martyrdom sites of those who died defending their faith in El Salvador and Guatemala.

We walked on the 'holy ground' where men and women who spoke out on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised - many of whom were indigenous and campesinos - were martyred. As martyrs, they gave their blood for speaking out for the faith in the gospel. Those whose stories we shared and whose world we entered were Archbishop Oscar Romero, Fr. Rutilio Grande, SJ, Jean Donovan, Sr.

Dorothy Kazel, OSU, Sr. Ita Ford, MM, Sr. Maura Clarke, MM, Fr. Ignacio Ellacuria, SJ, Elba and Celina Ramos, Fr. Stanley Rother, Fr. Bill Wood, Bishop Juan Gerardi, Sr. Diana Ortiz, OSU, and many other men and women whose

names have not been forgotten by those who knew them and their courage.

The retreat team for this pilgrimage included companions, colleagues, fellow ministers and friends of those who had suffered and died. Our retreat masters were those who had died or suffered, but whose life story and spirit spoke louder and more eloquently than any retreat homily because it was written with the loving and courageous action of lives which followed the path of Jesus the Savior. As we traveled to the different sites we were accompanied by veteran men and women Maryknoll missionaries who themselves had many stories to tell of faith, witness and courage in the face of violence, torture and fear.

Many of the missionaries we met along the course of the journey continue to reach out to those most in need. Projects



The pilgrimage group with children from the local community of Santiago Atitlan

in which they are involved include: an AIDS clinic, a soy milk distribution center, a farmers' cooperative, and a Catholic Worker house for youth trying to escape gangs, among many others. The testimony of the martyrs gives new vision and focus to these efforts of current missionaries.

Any pilgrimage is an opportunity for reflection on the journey of life as one travels from one pilgrimage site to another. In this particular pilgrimage we were led to reflect on the blood which was literally poured out again and again by those whose lives had been full of the enjoyment of life, faith and compassion. One of these martyrs - Fr. Rother, of the archdiocese of Oklahoma City - was killed in 1981 by unknown assailants in his rectory in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala. It is thought that his murder was due to the fact that he was publicly supportive of the indigenous peoples who were being mistreated and even massacred by the Guatemalan Army. After his death, an indigenous woman



Warren Brown, OMI, in front of scene of Lake Atitlan and surrounding countryside, Guatemala

came and scooped up some of his blood to be preserved in a jar along with his heart in a memorial altar in the parish church. Ten years later when the heart and blood-filled jar were removed to be placed in a more permanent memorial, the blood was found not to be congealed, but miraculously fluid, as it was the day it was spilled on the floor.

The Central American pilgrimage invited us to consider how we can make the world a more peaceful place to be today and how we can be more conscious of the plight of the poor and abandoned in our society. We were impressed by the number of mission-minded men and women from the United States who came to the assistance of the people in Central America, but at the same time, were chastened by the fact that our US government had supported Guatemalan and Salvadoran governments in wars in which thousands of innocent people had suffered and died. These included many courageous men and women of faith who worked in solidarity with indigenous people and the poor. Knowing that the world is still far from perfect, we were inspired to become more perfect witnesses of the faith and Christ's love each day and to encourage our communities to be more conscious of those living on the margins.

As one of the veteran missionaries shared with us, "You have to take your martyrs and saints where you find them." They are not up on some beautiful pedestal, they are found in the dust and ordinariness of life where the true measure of faith and compassion is found, shared and treasured.



## At the United Nations

by Daniel LeBlanc, OMI

### The United Nations in Early 2010 ...

This year has found us playing "catch up". At the end of last year, global governments failed to reach agreement at a major summit in **Copenhagen** to prevent dangerous climate change. Many alternatives are now being explored in an effort to reach consensus by the end of this year at a follow-up conference in Mexico. [www.un.org/wcm/content/site/climatechange/gateway](http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/climatechange/gateway)

Meanwhile, Bolivia's president, Evo Morales, has called for a conference of the peoples of the world in Cochabamba, Bolivia, at the end of April. The idea is to give voice to the concerns of ordinary people concerned about and affected by climate change in an effort to influence their governments. I will come back to this.

A major concern at the UN - and with just reason - continues to be the **earthquake in Haiti** and the huge loss of life and the destruction of a vitally important part of the country - its capital. We Oblates, as always, accompanying the people, have lost much. The UN also has lost lives. We are all committed to accompany those who have survived and to help them find ways both to re-build their lives and to make a better world for themselves.

As mentioned above, the "**People's World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth's Rights**", will be held in Bolivia, from April 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>. <http://pwccc.wordpress.com/> Everyone is welcome. There are 16 working groups that will be discussing different aspects and themes from all over the world. **To participate in the discussion** and be heard, whether you plan to go to the conference or not, just click on the link above, register as if you might be going and decide in which of the discussion groups you would like to make your views known. All comments will be taken into account in the eventual preparation of a document which will then be given to all of the world's governments. This document will serve to give our political leadership a sense of what people think about the question of climate change and what ideas people have come up with to help solve the problem.

Amidst these 'headline' events, the usual work of the UN has continued. The **Conference on Social Development**, focusing on the theme of social inclusion for all, concluded in mid-February. The **Conference on the Status of Women** was held in early March and looked at the advances made in the last 15 years since the momentous Beijing Conference. Toward the end of April, we will take a look at what is happening with Indigenous Peoples at the annual **UN Forum on Indigenous Issues** in New York.

(cont. on p. 13)



## Indigenous Villages and Forest in Bangladesh Threatened by Logging

Christina C. Herman

**F**our indigenous villages in Bangladesh, with their 500 Khasi residents, will be destroyed if logging by a local tea estate owner is allowed to continue. An Oblate priest, Fr. Joseph Gomes OMI and other colleagues from the environmental community have been working with the Khasi people to protect the forest and their villages. The Washington JPIC Office has asked the State Department to raise concerns with the Government of Bangladesh regarding this situation.

Two years ago, four thousand trees were chopped down on lands traditionally controlled by the Khasi people of the Sylhet region of north eastern Bangladesh. The owner of a local Tea Estate was initially granted permission by the government to cut the trees. But the logging created serious ecological damage, and threatened the very existence of the Khasi inhabitants of the four villages. The indigenous communities organized against the logging



*Khasis protesting logging in 2008*

and protested vigorously. For the Khasi, trees are essential for Pan (betel leaf) cultivation, their only livelihood. The Khasis still do not have clear title to their lands, de-

spite years of paying taxes on them, leaving them vulnerable to this sort of exercise of power.

In a huge victory for the Khasis, the local Deputy Commissioner decided in early January that no more trees may be cut from any Khasi Punji (indigenous village) in the area. Unfortunately, this victory, which would have saved many villages and thousands of trees on the Tripura Border with India, has been short-lived. In response to a case filed by the Tea estate owner, the Bangladesh High Court in late February over-turned the decision to stop the logging.

### **Background: Khasis organize to protect their forest**

APRA (Adibasi Poribesh Roskhya Andolon or Save Indigenous Environment Movement) is an organization that has led the movement to save the local indigenous environment. APRA is a member of the national group, BAPA (Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon or Bangladesh Environment Movement). **Fr. Joseph Gomes, OMI**, Regional Coordinator of APRA, has worked with the Khasis in a major struggle to save the forest against powerful and well connected interests. Numerous local, regional and national protest events, coupled with strong advocacy at the national level pushed the Bangladesh government to conduct at least two formal inquiries to review the logging decision, ultimately revoking the permission.

The dispute was thought finally to have been decided on January 6th,



Fr. Gomes, OMI examining logging damage

2010. The Ministry of Environment ordered the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Moulavibazar District (Sylhet) to settle the dispute by sitting down with BAPA, the Khasi leaders and the Tea Estate Authority. Fr. Joseph Gomes, OMI was joined by Sharif Jamil, (APRA National Coordinator and BAPA Joint Secretary) in successfully arguing the case on behalf of the Khasi people before the government panel charged with investigating the logging controversy. The two men offered strong arguments regarding the ecological and human-rights impacts of the logging.

But they recently learned that the Tea Estate owner then quietly filed a case with the High Court in Dhaka asking for this decision to be overturned. On February 22, the court issued a Rule Nishi against the respondents (all government positions) giving an order to allow the logging to proceed. The existence of the Khasis in the affected area was completely ignored.

*(cont. on next page)*



(Bangladesh cont...)

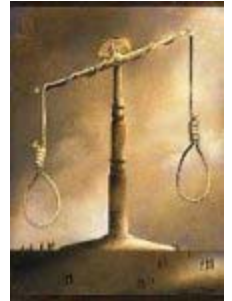
The rights of indigenous peoples have been recognized in Bangladeshi national legislation as well as in the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Because they rely on the trees for their survival, the Khasi are the best hope for the continued protection of the forests in eastern Bangladesh. Protection of forests has been recognized in international fora as an important means to mitigate global warming. Forests serve as a vital carbon sink and financing for their preservation has been enshrined in major climate change agreements.

## Domestic Human Rights Update: Death Penalty Sentences in the U.S. Decline in 2009

The United States finished 2009 with the fewest death sentences since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976, according to an end of year 2009 Death Penalty Information Center report.

With States forced to cut essential services, the death penalty has come under scrutiny for its excessive costs. New Mexico became the 15th state to abolish the death penalty, citing the expense of appeals and maintenance of death row prisoners. For other states, the decline is attributed to public skepticism about the government's ability to avoid mistakes and get the death penalty right, especially in the light of the exoneration in 2009 of nine men previously sentenced to death.

Learn more at [www.deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org)



## At the United Nations (cont.)...

Finally, during the first two weeks of May, the **Conference on Sustainable Development** will take up issues related to transport, chemicals, waste management (hazardous & solid waste), mining, and a 10 year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption & production patterns.

For more information on these gatherings, see:

*Social Development* – [www.un.org/esa/socdev/csd/2010.html](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/csd/2010.html)

*Status of Women* – [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/)

*Indigenous Peoples* – [www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/)

*Sustainable Development* – [www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd\\_csd18.shtml](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_csd18.shtml)

The **global financial crisis continues to be a focus**, especially in trying to determine how to avoid this in the future. The financial crisis, the on-going food crisis and the ecological crises of climate change and species extinction are all of grave concern.

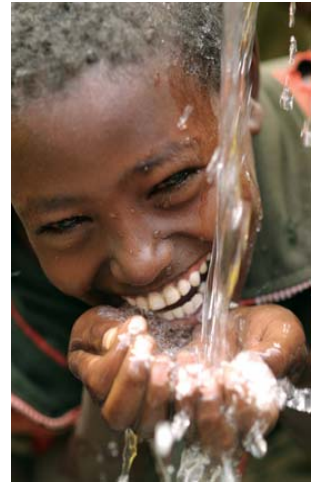
An important **conference on disarmament** will also be held this year. If countries understand that nuclear armaments, in particular, are not needed, it would potentially free up huge sums that could be used to reach the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**. In September the Heads of States and Governments will meet to evaluate how far the world has gone to reaching the goals set in 2000.

As is to be expected at the UN, there are many different points of view on what is to be done. It takes a long time to reach consensus, but I believe the best solutions are arrived at through conversation and seeking agreement. Non-governmental organizations bring an important grassroots perspective to the formal and oft-times politics-laden deliberations of governments, a perspective which is both appreciated and respected.

Although many feel far from the deliberations at the UN, I can assure you that there is much hope for a better future, through dialogue, peace and justice.

## Eco-Tips

Less than **1%** of the world's water is easily accessible fresh water and the United Nations (UN) forecasts that **by 2030** almost **half** of the world population will live in areas facing water stress or **water scarcity**. Check out our new brochure on **saving water** at [www.omiusajpic.org/resources/publications/](http://www.omiusajpic.org/resources/publications/). Oblates can request printed copies from the JPIC Office.



**Are you**, or people you know, concerned about the **health affects of environmental toxins?** If so, check out the website of the **Environmental Working Group;**



[www.ewg.org/](http://www.ewg.org/) for information on everything from safe and **effective sunscreens** to chemicals to avoid in skin products and common cleaners. The EWG is a well-respected source of **information on chemicals** and their effects, particularly on children. Interested in learning more? Download our brochure on Earth Friendly Products at [www.omiusajpic.org/resources/publications/](http://www.omiusajpic.org/resources/publications/)

**Hungry** for fresh, healthy vegetables? Plant a garden and reap the benefits. **No extra land?**

Create a container garden, find a **local farmers** market or subscribe to a **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**. Our new brochure, **Focus on Food**, lists resources that can help find locally produced food. You will help develop a strong community-centered economy in the process. **Download** the brochure from our website: [www.omiusajpic.org/resources/publications/](http://www.omiusajpic.org/resources/publications/)



## Oblate Parishes in Houston Join Ecumenical Effort to Press for Immigration Reform

Fernando Velazquez, OMI

Oblates from the Houston Area have been engaged in a series of public meetings and parish-based organizing to press for comprehensive immigration reform.

The Oblates participated in a day-long Interfaith Clergy Convocation on Immigration Reform at St. Paul's United Methodist Church on January 11, 2010. Organized by The Metropolitan Organization of the greater Houston Area (TMO) to which the three Oblate Parishes in Houston, - St. Patrick, Immaculate Conception and Immaculate Heart of Mary - belong, the convocation involved over 400 Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist and Jewish leaders.

The Convocation began with an Interfaith Prayer Service led by all the mainstream religious leaders. Hymns, songs and scripture passages in English, Hebrew and Spanish set the religious mood for the rest of the day's events.

At a Press conference following the prayer service, the religious leaders publicly presented their faith-based position on immigration reform. Opening with the statement that God calls all to "Welcome the stranger," the churches affirmed the dignity of all human beings, regardless of race, social status, ethnicity, documented or undocumented. "We are called", they asserted, "to treat our immigrant brothers and sisters as being in the image of God."



Some of the 400 religious leaders who met at Saint Paul's Methodist Church in January to push for immigration reform.

The religious leaders presented the following Principles based on their faith statement. They called upon the Obama Administration and the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress to commit to:

- 1) ***Uphold family unity as a priority of all immigration policy;***
- 2) ***Create a process for undocumented immigrants to earn their legal status and eventual citizenship;***
- 3) ***Protect workers and provide efficient channels of entry for new migrant workers;***
- 4) ***Facilitate immigration integration;***
- 5) ***Restore due process protections and reform detention policies;***
- 6) ***Align the enforcement of immigration laws with humanitarian values;***
- 7) ***Immigration is a matter of human rights.***

The clergy convocation ended with a call to be "Moral Agents" in our local communities where, through faith

based groups, we can reflect on the way to respond "no por caridad sino por justicia." These organized faith based groups would be the key to educate and inform about the myths and realities of immigration.

St. Patrick's Church, which is administrated by the Oblates, did not hesitate to be "Moral Agents" and organized a faith-based group to respond to the call of justice.

The group of leaders and also those guided by the local TMO also organized an immigration workshop for the community in English and Spanish. Those who attended heard the Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration, the myths and realities of immigration and the call to action. Small group discussion and personal stories were the highlights of the workshops.

Among those attending were people that in one way or another have been affected by the recent immigration raids. Community leaders were also present at some of the meetings.

The Oblates continue to respond to the call for justice on behalf of those affected by the current immigration laws. Our charism invites us to see the world with the eyes of a crucified Lord. Through the lives of the marginalized, and hearing the cry of the poor - as in the case of our immigrant brothers and sisters - we continue to commit ourselves to be "Moral Agents" in the world.

# OMI JPIC OFFICE



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Please find more information on the issues in this newsletter on our website at: [www.omiusajpic.org](http://www.omiusajpic.org)

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*Promoted by Love, Empowered by Prayer and Alive with the Spirit of Christ. In that way we would be making the Church a happier home for Justice and Peace.*

**- Archbishop Denis E. Hurley, OMI**  
(1915 - 2004), former Archbishop of Durban, South Africa.



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*“Preach the Gospel. Use words if necessary.”  
St. Francis of Assisi*

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