

JPIC Report



Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples

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POPE FRANCIS

This is our sin, exploiting the Earth and not allowing her to give us what she has within.

University of Molise on
Saturday, July 5, 2014

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Fr. Séamus Finn, OMI



First lunar footprint projected on Washington Monument - Photo: Sr. Emily Tekolste, SP

The 50th Anniversary celebration of the Apollo 11 moon landing is an observance for all of us to consider the significance of this event and consider both the discoveries and questions that this historic achievement has occasioned. The numerous video and print commemorations that have been rolled out in recent weeks have also awakened many recollections and reflections for the more than 600 million people who are reported to have watched on TV.

One insight highlighted by even the astronauts themselves is not only that we were able to land on the moon, but that for the first time we were able to look back on our planet earth and realize, perhaps for the first time in a visible format, that we are part of a vast interdependent solar system that is responsible for the orchestration of the ebb and flow of tides and oceans, governs the cycles of light and darkness and the delicate process of photosynthesis that renews the air we breathe.

By coincidence, amid the Apollo celebrations, we also marked the fourth anniversary of the publication of *Laudato Si'*, the papal encyclical by Pope Francis. In the encyclical the Holy Father places “care for our common home;” “Mother Earth,” within a religious context and explores in depth themes such as interdependence, fragility, climate change and biodiversity, all themes that have been studied with increased intensity since the first lunar landing.

The encyclical goes on to highlight the urgency of the response that is needed by people across the world, and for believers, places that response squarely within their religious vocation. The document has been studied and taken up by leaders from across different religious traditions, by governments, corporations and institutions as they consider their responsibilities to address some of the most pressing social and ecological crises that we face. A good example of the extensive reach of the encyclical was a two-day conference at the UN headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, jointly organized by UN departments, the Vatican and other regional organizations. In her opening remarks, the Deputy Executive Director of UNEP, Joyce Msuya, expressed hope “in the young women and men around the world who are —

drawing on both faith and science to campaign for change and to raise awareness about how to live more sustainably.” The forthcoming Synod of Bishops on the Pan-Amazon region in October 2019 will be a great opportunity for us all to learn about this privileged region on our planet, the threat that it is under, and the destructive exploitation that the indigenous who live there face.

Many dioceses and parish communities have established committees to coordinate responses to the encyclical at a local level. Numerous retreats, conferences and study groups have also been established to help deepen our understanding of the challenges we face and to support strategies and projects that have been created to help us all to care more responsibly for our common home. As we prepare for the fifth anniversary celebration of the encyclical in 2020, the OMI JPIC office will continue to share resources to deepen our understanding of *Laudato Sí* and to identify specific activities and actions that we can embrace and thereby live more sustainably.





Forum participants - Photo: Broddi Sigurðarson

UNITED NATIONS Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples

By **Fr. Daniel LeBlanc, OMI**

The **UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES (UNPFII)** was held from April 22nd to May 3rd this year. This was the 18th consecutive year in which the forum was held at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York. This year Indigenous Peoples all over the world celebrate and work diligently to maintain and assure the survival of Indigenous languages. The International Year of Indigenous

Languages was a United Nations observance in 2019 to raise awareness of the consequences of endangerment of Indigenous languages across the world, with an aim to establish a link between language, development, peace and reconciliation. It was very interesting to note that more than ever this year, when Indigenous spoke, they proudly began what they wanted to say in their own language and only then switched to one of the —

official UN languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic). It was wonderful to hear and experience. The main theme of the UNPFII this year was “Traditional knowledge: Generation, transmission and protection.” This theme was chosen because more and more the traditional millennial knowledge of Indigenous Peoples in the protection of the environment is being recognized as helping the rest of the world to combat climate change and environmental degradation. Traditional knowledge is also being recognized as a major force in helping in the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sessions were held, according to the program, from 10:00 to 1:00 and from 3:00 to 6:00. This allows us of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Indigenous Peoples to collaborate in what we call Side Events or Parallel Events, especially in the 1:00 to 3:00 time frame, both inside the UN and in other locations nearby. We, members of the NGO Committee on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, organized and co-sponsored a number of these events with other committees and working groups (the NGO Mining Working Group, the Justice Coalition of Religious [JCoR] the “Red Eclesial PanAmazónica” [REPAM], the Indigenous Missionary Council [CIMI in Portuguese], the Kil-GaDo-Waak [Grandmothers Council], the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Vivat

International, the International Federation of Social Work [IFSW] and many others).

The Forum this year once again was a wonderful opportunity to see so many Indigenous friends from around the world, meet new people and to encounter many religious women and men who work actively with Indigenous Peoples in different parts of the world. Of course, some of the religious are Indigenous themselves.

It is difficult to give a real sense of the excitement and joy of the peoples during this yearly conference in writing, but I would like you to know that Indigenous Peoples are filled with hope...

On Friday, August 9th, the United Nations commemorated, as it does each year, the International Day of Indigenous Peoples. This event included prayer, music, speeches, etc. and can be viewed on UN Web TV. Anyone can do it. All you must do is tune in.

It is difficult to give a real sense of the excitement and joy of the peoples during this yearly conference in writing, but I would like you to know that Indigenous Peoples are filled with hope, even amidst so many problems and difficulties. They, like all of us, look to a better future for their children and following generations.

So many times, I have heard the people say, “It is our responsibility to make the world a better place than we found it for ourselves and for the next seven generations.” How I wish that all of us, not just the Indigenous Peoples, had the same vision and goal in mind.

The Personal Costs of Mining

By **Br. Joey Methé, OMI**

Formed by a meteorite impact nearly 2 billion years ago, the Sudbury basin located in Northern Ontario, Canada, produces nearly 30% of the world's nickel. This is the key ingredient to make stainless steel. From cellphones to utensils to weapons all use minerals found below the surface of my home region of Sudbury, Ontario.

I come from a family that has been involved in mining for two generations. Many family members and childhood friends work for mining companies, unions or industries related to extractives. My grandfathers, both maternal and paternal, came from farming families who had been cultivating the lands of Northern Ontario for generations. Though they lived hard lives, their work fed their families and their communities. By the middle of the 20th century, their livelihoods were impacted by the arrival of cheaper produce and foods from elsewhere, thus forcing them to seek work below the land their ancestors had toiled and cultivated for generations.

I remember my dad spoke of going down below the surface of the earth as a life-changing experience; he often compared mining to combat because he and his comrades battled the harsh and dangerous work environment – all so they could feed their families. Over the years, many of my dad's co-workers have



INCO Superstack Sudbury - Photo: User P199 (wikimedia.org)

died in mining accidents. Underground workers sacrifice their health working for 12 hours at a time while the mining companies who employ them and profit the most from their labor do little to appreciate or protect them – unless they are legislated to do so.

Fast forward to May of 2014, I'm a member of a communications team working for a major political party during that year's provincial election in

Ontario. We had been informed of a major 'cave-in' at Lockerby mine near my hometown of Sudbury, Ontario. As we were planning our response to the mining accident, little did I know this would hit so close to home. Marc Methé, my cousin, went to work underground that day full of aspirations for the future, never to come back out —



Selfie of Marc - Photo: Marc Methé

alive. He died in that ‘cave-in’ along with another co-worker, Norm Bisailon, a father of two. Marc was kind and smart – destined for great things in his life. He would help anybody if he could! His job as contractor for Taurus Drilling was a stepping-stone for him. He worked hard and had big plans. Most of all, he wanted to make his family proud – and we were! His untimely death resulted in a grieving family that, to this day, still await answers and accountability from the companies responsible for his death.

According to the website, TheWorldCounts.org a non-profit data-driven statistics website, on average 15,000 people die in mining accidents every year around the globe with over 7,500 deaths this year alone. These numbers are very conservative estimates based on reported numbers of deaths. The real numbers can only be higher because reporting is not mandatory in all countries, nor are all mining operations legal in many places. Marc’s death highlights the plight of workers worldwide who fight for justice in similarly dangerous conditions. When companies are not being held accountable, this endangers the lives of all those whom they employ.

So, what can we do? How does our faith call us to justice in the face of these kinds of injustices? Firstly, it is important for people of faith to minister to working families, especially when we

find ourselves in regions impacted by extractive industries such as mining. By familiarizing ourselves with the lived experience of workers, we

can begin to appreciate the daily sacrifices workers make going underground. Secondly, we can help by supporting workers and their families during labor disputes. And finally, we can get involved in

local community groups working and fighting for ecological justice. By being present in these kinds of milieus, we can get a feel for issues that concern local communities affected by the extractive industry.

Being in solidarity with the most vulnerable is not only part of the Oblate charism, but also our way of following the call of Jesus, who Himself came from a working family of ‘tektons’ (laborers).

EVERY YEAR, OVER
15,000
 MINING FATALITIES ARE REPORTED
 SOURCE: THEWORLDCOUNTS.ORG



Marc Methé's family - Photo: Mélanie Methé

Socially Responsible Investing

By **George Ngolwe**

Missionary Oblates continue to engage actively with companies through the US Province (USP) and Oblate International Pastoral Trust (OIP). Our primary engagement methods are through proxy voting, attending annual general company meetings, drafting letters of concern to companies and filing resolutions. The US Province and OIP corporate engagements focus on the issues that companies must address:

- ▶ **Executive Pay-Incorporate Diversity & Sustainability**
- ▶ **Lobbying Expenditures Disclosure**
- ▶ **Paid Family Leave**
- ▶ **Report on Obesity Risks**
- ▶ **Report on Board Oversight of Consumer Data Breaches**
- ▶ **Lobbying Expenditures Disclosure on Climate**
- ▶ **Human Dignity Respect & Protection**
- ▶ **Separate CEO & Chair**
- ▶ **Stranded Assets Due to Climate Change**
- ▶ **Business Standards and Risk Management**

Corporate Wins

In June 2019, shareholders and other investors celebrated Bank of America's decision to stop financing private prisons and migrant detention companies. Other banks that have taken similar action are JPMorgan Chase and Wells Fargo.

Corporate Dialogues

JPIC staff recently participated in an investor dialogue with **Western Digital** representatives. It was an opportunity to bring the faith perspective to this exchange centering on workers' rights. We also learned about Western Digital's sustainability efforts and organizational policies and disclosures regarding human rights. In May 2019, our partner organization, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) and other investors filed a resolution as a result of alarming reports of potential human rights abuses at multiple locations of GEO Group's privately owned and operated immigration detention facilities. The resolution passed with majority shareholder support. **Amazon:** Investor letter on labor rights: Missionary Oblates JPIC, partnering with Investor Alliance on Human Rights, sent a letter to Amazon Inc. requesting a discussion on the labor rights situation within Amazon's operations and supply chain. The investors are urging Amazon to fulfill its responsibility to respect human rights as outlined in the United Nations (UN) Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Shared Interest Fund (South Africa)

On April 25, Fr. Séamus Finn, OMI, represented the ICCR and the OMI at the 25th anniversary of Shared Interest Fund held in New York City. Missionary Oblates (USP) continue to collaborate with Shared Interest to promote positive social investing in Southern Africa. The organization raises capital in the United States and operates as a positive social impact fund to support micro finance, agricultural cooperatives and other small businesses in South Africa and neighboring countries. Shared Interest's partner organization in South Africa is Thembanani International Guarantee Fund (TIGF). Shared Interest Fund prioritizes social impact investing in Southern Africa with operations in South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Eswatini (Swaziland).



Fr. Séamus speaking at Shared Interest

[READ MORE AT SHAREDINTEREST.ORG](https://www.sharedinterest.org)

Solidarity with Migrants and Refugees

By **George Ngolwe**

As people of faith, we are called to love our neighbor. “As the father has loved me, so I have loved you. Dwell in my love.” (John 15:7) Furthermore, Jesus commands us to, “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and to love your neighbor as yourself.” Today, many countries around the world are facing a migrant and refugee crisis. In the United States, the recent image of a father and his almost two-year-old daughter lying dead on a bank of the Rio Grande River shows the human toll of the brewing migrant crisis at the US-Mexico border. As thousands more migrants and refugees flee violence and persecution, the

United States as a world leader must show moral leadership and ethical obligation to generously welcome asylum seekers.

In June, the U.S. House of Representatives voted for and passed the American Dream and Promise Act of 2019. The bill, widely supported by faith leaders around the country, would offer permanent legal protection to “Dreamers” (immigrants brought to this country as children) and those covered by the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) programs in the United States. —

If signed into law, H.R. 6 would provide a pathway to citizenship for qualifying Dreamers, Temporary Protected Status holders and those covered by Deferred Enforced Departure in the United States.

Across the United States, Catholic organizations and other faith communities are offering pastoral support to families in their local communities that have been living in fear due to new immigration policies and rhetoric of mass detentions and deportations. In addition to the crisis on the border involving migrant children, the decision to cancel Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for some migrants, thereby revoking their ability to remain in the United States, has put more families in separation limbo. These diverse faith organizations continue to remind elected leaders to uphold dignity and show compassion for all migrants and refugees in all communities.

#RefugeesWelcome

#ProtectTPS

#ShareJourney

#HeartsNotWalls

#MigrationMonday

#WorldRefugeeDay

Our Sacred Earth: Reconnecting Wildlife and Habitats

By Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND

Recently I had the opportunity to represent the Oblate Ecological Initiative at a Pollinator Dinner at the St. Louis Zoo. The theme for the evening's presentation was "Reconnecting Wildlife and Habitats." The speaker shared the grim awareness that the more "connected" humans become, the non-human life with which we share this planet becomes increasingly disconnected. Wildlife are becoming isolated in patches of habitat surrounded by a human-dominated landscape. This results in species population decline and possible extinction.

Why should Catholics care? In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis points out that, "God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement." We care because we are joined by God in an intimate relationship with the world around us! We have a responsibility to care for all life.

Our speaker offered many ways to address the problem of habitat fragmentation, and —



Pollinator Garden - Photo: Sr. Maxine Pohlman SSND

two solutions stood out for me: establishing protected areas close together and managing land in ways that allow wildlife to thrive. The Oblates have been committed to just these solutions, especially on their property in Godfrey, Illinois.

In 1993 when OMI leadership decided to dedicate 16 acres at their Immaculate Heart of Mary Novitiate in Godfrey as an Illinois Nature Preserve, they were leading the way in a growing movement. Now there are several miles of contiguous habitat along the Mississippi River which is a flyway for migratory birds. This area is also the route for the great monarch butterfly migration. The Novitiate lies in the heart of this region, and the protected land is a key player in connecting isolated bits of habitat, ensuring continued life for many species as well as beauty for the human eye.

Also at this Pollinator Dinner I received a map showing significant preserves, gardens, parks

and projects in the greater St. Louis area that together are connecting habitats for the health of wildlife. To my delight La Vista Ecological Learning Center, which maintains a large pollinator garden, was included as one of 25 places in Illinois highlighted on the map.

Looking at the broader picture, I had to think of Oblate parishes and retreat centers where there is an opportunity to choose how land is to be cared for. Our speaker ended his remarks with a challenge for all of us, “Everyone has a part to play in wildlife conservation, and everyone can make a difference. By starting right at home, growing native plants and encouraging others to do so, you can help create habitat corridors for



Eagles on the bluffs - Photo: Nathan Anderson (unsplash.com)

wildlife.” Starting right at home might mean on parish land or at a retreat center.

These special places where people of faith meet offer an opportunity to educate and live the message of *Laudato Si'* in which we are called to “care for our common home.”

The United Nations Intensive Study program

By **Bayor Chantal Ngoltoingar**

From June 3 to 7, 2019, I participated in the United Nations Intensive Study program, led by Dr. Courtney Smith, Senior Associate Dean and Associate Professor for the School of Diplomacy at Seton Hall University in New Jersey. The program is jointly organized by the School of Diplomacy and International Relations of Seton Hall University and the United Nations Association of the United States of America. The objective of the program is to expose students to potential work possibilities with the UN and offer those working on UN related topics the chance to share their experiences, challenges, and solutions, as well as network with other students from around the world. Several topics were on the table: UN relations with the US, UN budget, current day challenges such as the global refugee crisis, climate change, human trafficking, gender issues, human rights, and malnutrition. We discussed strategies to mobilize the global community, peacekeeping missions, laws of the sea, financing for development and public-private partnerships. At each presentation, the opportunity was offered to us 57 participating students to ask questions and give input, which led to very fruitful dialogue. Half of the students came from China and Canada. We were also able to attend a meeting of the security council and follow live negotiations among different state actors around the “sustainable development goals” (17 SDGs, 169 Targets). Finally, we visited various UN offices. As a native French speaker,



Bayor proudly holding her certificate - Photo: Br. Joey Methé, OMI

I was delighted to meet and have conversations with Chinese students speaking excellent French.

Given my work on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) it was also a privilege to interact with UNFPA, UN women and especially with the representative of the United Kingdom (UK) on gender issues. We discussed the issue of FGM as a harmful tool used to bolster child marriage in certain countries. I made a case for why this ritual must be addressed in the context of child abuse, as a health risk to women and girls, and an outright crime. Lastly, I had the opportunity to advocate for increased FGM funding for Chad, my country of birth. I also shared a book I wrote on FGM called, *L'Obscurité Sous le Soleil (Darkness Under the Sun)*.

I was very grateful to attend this UN immersive training where I received a certificate and academic credits towards my bachelor's degree at the Catholic University of America.



Every so often, Gail Taylor, JPIC colleague and Three Part Harmony farm (3PH) owner, brings us containers of freshly harvested food. A typical batch may consist of kale, swiss chard, zucchini, lettuce, potatoes, and carrots. 3PH is a 2-acre urban garden located on the grounds of the U.S. provincial offices and residence in Washington, DC. Getting to share in the garden's harvest is a fantastic perk of working so close to it. Oblates and staff at the provincial administration office are blessed to regularly benefit from garden-fresh food that is as 'local' as it gets. Once in a while, 3PH's donated shares include flowers. Case in point, golden sunflowers from our recent batch brightened our office reception area for many, many days.

Sometimes our share also includes exotic vegetable varieties, for e.g. Mizuna (a variety of Asian greens), stimulating conversation among ourselves on what could be ways to prepare an unfamiliar food item. Occasional items like fresh ginger, exotic mushrooms, fresh garlic bulbs, and garlic scrapes are always in high demand. However, we are grateful for everything and feel blessed to share in awesome-tasting fresh food.

Successful farming requires substantial effort – sowing, plucking weeds, irrigating and overall nurturing – to get from seed to ready-to-eat crop. We are inspired by Gail's hard work, generosity and cheerful nature. We commend her fierce commitment to urban farming, food sovereignty and mentoring new farmers. Washington, DC Oblates and OMI staff would like to express gratitude to Gail for consistently blessing us with delicious, divine food! Have a nice summer!

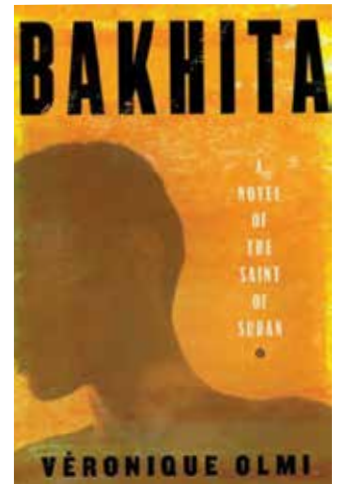
Bakhita: A Novel of the Saint of Sudan

by Véronique Olmi – translated by Adriana Hunter New York – Other Press – 2019

Book Review by Mary O'Herron

Canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2000, St. Josephine Bakhita may be named the patron of trafficked people. This book tells the story of her life from her capture until her death in 1947 as a nun in northern Italy.

Around the year 1875, for the second time in a few months, raiders swept through Bakhita's village in Darfur, Western Sudan, abducting her along with any others they could capture. She was barely seven years old. Forced to walk, chained to others for months under scorching sun, she saw and experienced unspeakable sufferings. She was sold several times, undergoing brutal treatment over and over, and at around thirteen was sold for the final time to an Italian family living in Sudan. At one point, she was taken to Italy where she cared for a young girl. When the child's mother joined her husband in Sudan for a while, the little girl stayed in Italy and was placed in a convent with the Canossian sisters. Bakhita also went to the convent to help care for the child. It was here that she first learned that there was a God and about Jesus.



Bakhita was not her real name. She could not recall her name and was given the name Bakhita, an Arabic word meaning “the lucky one.” Later in her life, when people became interested in her background, she was interviewed and in trying to tell her story gradually remembered more and more of her early life – but never her name or the names of her parents or her village. Those interested in her story pieced her background together from what she remembered and from reading about history of the area. She recalled her mother describing her as “gentle and good” and Bakhita lived out that description no matter what happened around and to her. A few things of note in her story:

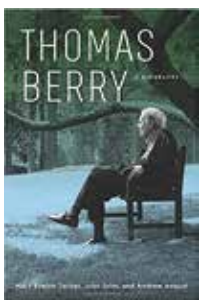
- ▶ **She was very hard to understand because she didn't know any language well and spoke a mishmash of Arabic, Turkish and Italian. Also, she had a hard time understanding those around her causing her to live a rather isolated life.**
- ▶ **Her dark skin in a light-skinned world in Italy caused various reactions beginning with fear and derision to eventual peaceful respect. She was called “the Moreta” dark one. After going to Italy, only once did she see someone with dark skin. So she really stood out.**

- ▶ **She maintained an interior joy that helped her have compassion for those who were poor and suffering. She had a special heart for poor, hungry children and was ingenious at figuring ways to feed, clothe and comfort them.**
- ▶ **Having been brutally treated early in her life, she had life-long pains that increased the older she became.**

The book teaches several lessons. For instance, not surprisingly, those who were enslaved were miserable due to lack of freedom and brutal treatment, but more surprisingly, the slave raiders, drivers, and owners – anyone in a position to subjugate the slaves – came across as unhappy. Clearly, being cruel to others causes its own misery. In this book, Bakhita's story is told so well that in spite of the heart-rending events described, it is hard to set the book aside – it is compelling from beginning to end.

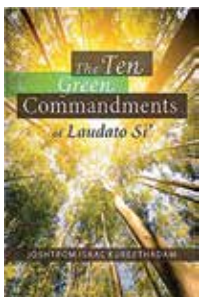
Reading Suggestions

Check your local bookstore or order online!



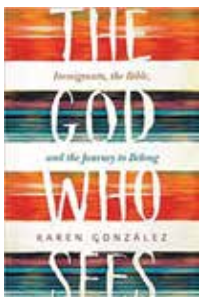
THOMAS BERRY: A BIOGRAPHY by Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, Andrew Angyal

Thomas Berry was one of the twentieth century's most prescient and profound thinkers. As a cultural historian, he sought a broader perspective on humanity's relationship to the earth in order to respond to the ecological and social challenges of our times. This first biography of Berry illuminates his remarkable vision and its continuing relevance for achieving transformative social change and environmental renewal.



THE TEN GREEN COMMANDMENTS OF LAUDATO SI' by Joshtrom Kureethadam

Fr. Joshtrom Kureethadam, one of the church's top experts on the document, provides a thoughtful, passionate, and highly accessible commentary on its key ideas and themes. Faithfully attentive to the outline of the six chapters of the encyclical, Fr. Joshtrom has also insightfully arranged the book according to the See-Judge-Act methodology that is increasingly used in spirituality, moral theology, and the social sciences.



THE GOD WHO SEES by Karen Gonzalez

Here is a riveting story of seeking safety in another land. Here is a gripping journey of loss, alienation, and belonging. In *The God Who Sees*, immigration advocate Karen Gonzalez recounts her family's migration from the instability of Guatemala to making a new life in Los Angeles and the suburbs of south Florida. In the midst of language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and the tremendous pressure to assimilate, Gonzalez encounters Christ through a campus ministry program and begins to follow him.

The Black Time Has Come

By Fr. Ali Nnaemeka, OMI

The rise of the Black Sun
Innocent like a charcoal
Biting mercilessly like cold
Ravaging force of the harmattan
But too long silenced like the death

In the past voluntarily subdued
Made to appear like a villain
Sold in the markets like cows
Dragged to plantations in the north
But always rebounded like a ball

Made vulnerable with reason
His language and culture vilified
His kids made to doubt themselves
And live and fight like betta splendens
Though guided home like Colobopsis explodens

Time has come for you to rise
You black children of the Mother Earth
And face your destiny like lions
Sight, fight, bite and shed your light
Pick yourselves up and walk head high

For the Black Time has indeed Come!

UPCOMING

ICCR 2019 Annual Event
October 29 in New York City
Taking a Stand: Corporate Action to Protect Human Rights Defenders

2019 ICCR Fall Conference
From October 28th until November 1st

2020 ICCR Spring Conference
From March 2nd until March 6th

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COMMITTEE

Dr. Victor Carmona - Chair
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Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND
Fr. Ray Cook, OMI
Fr. Séamus Finn, OMI
Fr. Daniel LeBlanc, OMI

STAFF

Fr. Séamus Finn, OMI, Director
George Kombe Ngolwe, Associate Director
Fr. Daniel LeBlanc, OMI, International JPIC Office
Rowena Gono, Communications Coordinator
Bayor Chantal Ngoltoingar, Office Coordinator
Br. Joey Methé, OMI, JPIC Fellow and Designer

CONTACT US

OMI USA JPIC
391 Michigan Avenue NE
Washington, DC 20017

Tel: 202.529-4505
Fax: 202.529-4572

www.omiusajpic.org

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