



Newsletter No. 58

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DEAR READERS,

Welcome to the 58th Online Issue of the VIVAT Newsletter!

We extend our warmest wishes to all of our members during this joyous and blessed time of year. Throughout this edition, we hope that you will enjoy stories from our members all around the world furthering the inspiring missions of peace and justice, and spreading hope to all in need.

Our members commemorated World Food Day on October 16 by actively participating in conferences at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) in Rome, where key stakeholders representing governments integrate numerous non-governmental organizations into collaborative partnerships to address the issue of global hunger. Other members also share in this edition their work on mining and land rights in Latin America, and how they have elevated their work to include key faith leaders in the struggle. You will also read about our incredible members in the Philippines who have been working tirelessly to help victims of the earthquake and typhoon that have devastated the lives of many regions in the country, as well as others in Bolivia advocating for children held illegitimately in detention, and still others in India promoting the rights of the Dalits Christian population who are often the victims of widespread discrimination.

From all of us in VIVAT New York and Geneva, we wish you a blessed, peaceful Christmas!

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World Food Day - the Continuing Challenge of Hunger

This year on 16 October, 2013 World Food Day was formally marked at the United Nations FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) headquarters in Rome. Pope Francis sent a message to the Director General of FAO, Mr. Jose Graziano da Silva on the occasion. His message was delivered to the entire gathering by the Holy See's Permanent Observer to FAO, Archbishop Luigi Travaglini.

The Holy Father's message began: "The World Food Day places before us one of the most serious challenges for humanity: that of the tragic condition in which millions of hungry and malnourished people still live, among them many children....It is a scandal that there is still hunger and malnutrition in the world. It is not just a question of responding to immediate emergencies, but of addressing together, in all areas, a problem that challenges our personal and social consciences, to achieve a just and lasting solution." No doubt having in mind the searing images of the dramatic rescue of lives of refugees in the Mediterranean Sea – and often loss of life – and his own personal experience from his trip to Lampedusa, Pope Francis continued: "No one should be obliged to abandon his (or her) country and his (or her) own cultural environment because of the lack of essential means of subsistence."

The entire message of Pope Francis on World Food Day is a fitting commentary for the world community and perhaps particu-

larly for us members of religious communities as we struggle to determine the best ways for us to respond to the continuing scourge of hunger in the world and the 'Zero Hunger Challenge' that is now the official goal of FAO and the entire UN system.

From 7-11 October, 2013 at FAO Headquarters in Rome, as the Representative of ICR at FAO Group I participated in the entire week of the Committee on World Food Security, CFS Session 40 Meeting. VIVAT International represents a very significant part of the some 20 men's and women's religious communities which formed an Association called the ICR at FAO Group and through it now sponsor a religious presence/impact at FAO. One major part of that activity is to participate in the annual CFS Session. The CFS at FAO is the key world-wide multilateral and intergovernmental policy forum on food and agriculture. There were nearly 750 participants, including more than 120 government delegations, almost 100 civil society organizations and 50 private sector organizations (and NGOs are numerous among both civil society and private sector groups). All participants met together and interacted together. Since a major reform of the CFS at FAO in 2009 all these groups, not just government delegations, are considered stakeholders and active participants in the full processes of developing the policies and programs (and monitoring and evaluating the achievements, successes

and failures in the implementation of these policies and programs) of the CFS. Two other UN Agencies based in Rome, WFP (World Food Program) and IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) partner with FAO in the CFS.

As the Representative of the ICR at FAO Group of Religious Communities I am active at all stages of these deliberations. As a participant and under the umbrella of the CSM - Civil Society Mechanism set up by FAO to enable broad non-governmental participation of voices in the preparation and monitoring of FAO policies and Programs I lend my voice to help pull together key messages and strategies during the year as part of the ongoing Working Groups on various important issues.

The FAO Division of Partnerships, which deals with integrating non-governmental partnering groups like our ICR at FAO Group into FAO's overall work stressed to me that they look to the 'value-added' that a Group like ours brings to the FAO table. I believe a strength we have is the sheer number of our Congregation members living at local village and local neighborhood levels throughout the world. I believe then my challenge with you in VIVAT and our common challenge is to see how we can mobilize, organize our individual and collective voices to both take from FAO the policies and programs it formulates to help 'eliminate hunger in our time' and make these known to ourselves and our people at

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the local level and then to collect our members' experience of how well the FAO programs and policies are actually working at the local level to really bring about the 'elimination of hunger' which is its goal.

Pope Francis, in his World Food Day message, mentioned one theme that is a key part always of our life and work. He said: "we are already at the doors of the International Year (International Year of Family Farming-2014) that, by FAO's initiative, will be dedicated to the rural family....The Catholic Church follows this path with you..." I hope to work with you in VIVAT in this coming year on these two challenges: awareness building of FAO's policies and programs and building awareness and supporting in particular the International Year of Family Farming mentioned by Pope Francis.

The SOFI 2013 (State of Food Insecurity-2013) Report of FAO states that there are still some 836 million hungry in our world, down but not by that much from last year's figure of 872 million hungry. The 'Zero Hunger Challenge' is our continuing common challenge.

*By Kenneth Thesing, MM
ICR at FAO Group – Representative*

"We know that
a peaceful world
cannot long exist,
one-third rich and
two-thirds hungry."

-Jimmy Carter

International Year of the Family Farming (IYFF)

The next year deserves special attention from all who work for the poor and struggle against world hunger. It is the International Year of Family Farming.

One of the most efficient ways of working for the poor and for those who face hunger is to support food producers. Among these, there are the family farmers, responsible for 70% of human food in the world. The term "family farming" encompasses the full range of food production on a small scale, employing mainly family labor: farmers, herders, fishers and food gatherers in forests.

We all know the food crisis in the world and the hunger that still affects 840 million people. We also know the difficulties of family farming in the face of the growth of Agribusiness, control of agricultural inputs and seeds by a few multinational companies, and the increasing concentration of land in the hands of large landowners in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Today several FAO's officers recognize that for years, family farming was abandoned by governments, which today is being considered as the economic activity with the greatest potential to increase food supply and improve the living conditions of the populations of rural areas that have become vulnerable.

The good news is that the UN declared *2014 the International Year of Family Farming*. The enactment of this celebratory year is not a spontaneous grant from the governing bodies of the UN or the states which compose it, but the result of a long and intensive awareness campaign, led by *World Rural Forum*, based in Spain, and backed by more than three hundred international organizations.

The objective of the IYFF is: *To achieve specific policies that favor the recognition and development of sustainable family farming nationally, regionally and internationally*. VIVAT International supports this campaign. So that many more will have life.

In the face of hunger and malnutrition in the world, we must raise awareness of the importance of fighting against hunger and promoting initiatives in favor of producing more food.

Suggested actions:

- make confreres, parishes, schools and social works in our care know this event;
- disseminate the news release in social networks, in websites of the provinces, communities and parishes;
- contact organizations of farmers, fishermen and the like, groups of social economy and local organizations that work for the poor, to get to know their initiatives and concerns, and offer support where necessary

By Claudio Weber, SCJ

Land Grabbing & the Impact of Large Scale Mining Projects

Faith Leaders & Civil Society United for Resistance in latin America

From 4 to 9 November, Lima hosted three international events on the impact of large scale mining projects and the conflicts they are increasingly causing all over Central and South America due to deleterious effects on indigenous people and local communities who are repressed when they seek to resist.

The first meeting gathered thirty religious and lay people representing nine countries. Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala are countries where local communities and indigenous people's are increasingly becoming displaced as a result of land grabbing in relation to large scale mining projects. Vital ecosystems are being destroyed, and human rights violations such as violent persecution and repression of human rights defenders are occurring. The meeting gathered both lay and religious working in the countries affected to share grassroots experiences from the communities they work in, from a human rights based approach. Participants sought to identify and develop short and medium term strategies in response to the complex reality of large-scale mining projects. Both national and international NGOs were

present, including the *Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros de América Latina* ([OCMAL](#)), CEHPRODEC from Honduras, and GRUFIDES from Perú, [Justiça nos Trilhos](#) from Brazil. From New York VIVAT International, Franciscan International and Mercy International were present, all of which have special consultative status at the UN. Misereor from Germany which has been supporting the Catholic Church in Latin America on mining issues was also represented.

Upon conclusion, participants presented a request to the Bishop's Conference of Brazil (CNBB)- represented in Lima by Bishop Guilherme Antonio Werlang, President of the Episcopal Commission for Charity, Justice and Peace of CNBB - to organize a broader and more inclusive Latin America meeting in 2014 on "Churches and Mining". Furthermore, Fabio Ferreira, a Franciscan Minor Friar based in Rome indicated he would relate to the Vatican the concerns discussed. Participants hope that Cardinal Peter Turkson of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace will meet with victims of mining operations and call on religious congregations to strengthen the existing efforts that they are

already undertaking at the grassroots level to accompany and assist victims of large scale mining projects; these are the "new poor".

A meeting coordinated by Mining Watch, a Canadian NGO, also took place in Lima, bringing together leaders of 25 NGOs and social movements. In this forum participants analyzed key aspects of large-scale multinational companies that are currently on the frontline of exploring, extracting and trading raw minerals in Latin America.

The third meeting held in Lima was convened by OCMAL, an international network of social movements, organizations and community leaders, fighting against the destructive impact of mining. The 5th OCMAL biannual meeting was attended by 70 participants from nine countries in Central and South America. Participants discussed the need to ensure that mining induced conflicts are known internationally and that communities and human rights defenders who are persecuted or at risk because of their resistance work receive the necessary support.



Mining Towards the Common Good

Days of Reflection with Mining Executives at the Vatican

“A Breath of Fresh Air!” That is the comment I hear most often from people here in Rome who are attuned to the often unexpected but always interesting and challenging words and actions of Pope Francis. Is it possible that he has injected a new ‘gene’ into the ‘genome’ of Church and Society, inserting the gene of dialogue, goodness and transparency into Cardinals and businessmen of the extractive industries? And so it is that representatives of the Church and of the mining industry held a meeting at the Vatican’s Pontifical Council chambers, convened by Cardinal Peter Turkson on the theme “Mining towards the Common Good”.

I had asked myself: why would CEO’s of powerful corporations even want to be at the Vatican, let alone enter into a discussion with a Cardinal and Church people? Yet, to quote one participant, a Day of Reflection was exactly what we needed: “It’s the first meeting I’ve attended where we are able to talk together openly and frankly about our issues,” said one. Views were expressed and slowly apprehensions fell, differences were resolved and cynicism was overcome, to be replaced by growing trust and dialogue.

The CEO of AngloGold first suggested the idea of a Conference at the Vatican to Cardinal Peter Turkson last January. Cardinal Turkson is president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP). A native of Ghana, he is used to arriving at decisions by consensus through ‘palavers’ as is customary among African leaders. He is endowed with a spirit of good-heartedness, an innate wisdom and a set of social skills that give him an approach all his own, quite different from the usual Western model of inter-action with people to resolve issues. He quickly recognized the impor-

tance of the suggestion and together they planned for a Day of Reflection on June 7th with the purpose of discussing a ‘better way forward for the mining sector in building relationships with communities’.

As a first step for dialogue, the Cardinal offered practical business principles that can guide everyone in the service of the common good: “Leaders in the mining sector are called to engage with the contemporary economic, political, social and cultural world. We hope to provide the executives, their employees, the investors, subcontractors and all relevant stakeholders with practical principles that can guide everyone in the service of the common good, insisting on human dignity, equitable distribution and sustainable development,” he said.

Members of the Integrity of Creation Working Group (ICWG) and others were present along with the Cardinal’s staff. The group had organized a world-wide survey of religious communities on the Impact of Mining with regard to the following objectives: 1. Promote the common good through a more equitable distribution of the benefits of mining and the elimination or reduction of harmful effects. 2. Benefit local residents and assure their participation. 3. Contribute to the development of the peoples and countries in whose territory the natural resources are found. 4. Promote the legitimate interests of the mining company and its shareholders. 5. Respect limited natural resources and conserve the environment.

The exchange proved promising and participants readily agreed that this was a good exercise. They decided to hold another Day of Reflection, this time involving a larger group of mining company executives and

Church representatives. Enjoying the warm hospitality of the Cardinal, we headed for a nearby restaurant to enjoy typical Roman cuisine and continue with our sharing.

This second Day of Reflection happened on Saturday, September 9, with over 20 CEO’s of the world’s top mining companies and a dozen Church and religious leaders. Participating industry leaders included CEOs of Newmont, Anglo American, Rio Tinto. Representatives from Catholic NGOs and clergy included Oxfam America’s president Ray Offenheiser and Seamus Finn OMI of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, a theologian who has been a leading shareholder activist on mining issues.

Although on that date Pope Francis was leading a day of prayer and fasting to avert the threat of a US military intervention in Syria, he realized the importance of the event and took the time to meet with and bless the participants in the hope that they would be involved in a process guided by moral principles to seek the common good of all.

The purpose of the gathering was to ‘create a harmony of interests involving investors, managers, workers, their families, the future of their children, preservation of the environment and contribution to world peace’. The last objective obviously refers to the many situations of conflict in which the mining sector is involved.

What next? The positive results obtained on both Days of Reflection enable us to hope that we have a template to organize similar regional encounters so that constructive dialogue may continue with all the stakeholders.

Camille Piche, OMI

Voices in Brazil

New Mining Code in Brazil Jeopardizes Human Rights

In recent years, the mining industry in Brazil has exploded in size and output. From 2001 to 2011 production has increased from 1.6 to 4.1 percent of national GDP, establishing Brazil as the largest mineral producer in Latin America. The Brazilian Ministry of Mines and Energy predicts that this growth will continue and that by 2030 Brazil will be producing triple its current output. To facilitate this growth, mining companies have expanded aggressively across Brazil, with a particular focus on the undeveloped and resource-rich Amazon region.



As experienced with other industries, the expansion of the mining industry across Brazil has led to conflict with indigenous peoples already occupying the land. Contributing to this conflict, industrial-scale mining dangerously pollutes the local water supply and ecosystem. Furthermore, mining companies often disregard the right of local landowners, such as indigenous tribes and afro-descendants, to give their consent to developers. This disregard for FPIC (Free, Prior, and Informed Consent) is a clear violation of indigenous people's human rights, enshrined in both the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the International Labor Convention No. 169, which Brazil ratified in 1989.

Unfortunately, new legislation in Brazil threatens to further erode the ability of a wide variety of stakeholders such as indigenous communities, family farmers, and the urban poor to protect their rights. Since 2009, the Brazilian government has been in closed negotiations with the mining industry over a proposed overhaul of Brazilian mining regulations. The industry has criticized these regulations, which date back to 1967,

as bureaucratic and not transparent. An update of the legislation would produce more effective regulation and higher tax revenue for the Brazilian government. However, the proposed bill also includes provisions that would drastically erode the authority of indigenous tribes over their own land. Specifically, complementary law No. 227, proposed along with the new legislation, would eliminate indigenous claims to land in "cases of relevant public interest". This clause would clear the way for mining companies to appropriate and exploit indigenous land without the local community's consent. With the inclusion of complementary law No. 227, Brazil's mining legislation overhaul poses a great threat to the country's vulnerable indigenous populations.

Finalizing the mining legislation this summer, the Brazilian government has pushed the legislation forward at a breakneck pace and allowed for little consultation with civil society or indigenous peoples. Despite negotiating with the mining industry for four years, the Brazilian government allotted only 90 days, from July to October for civil society consultations. In addition, the government originally fast-tracked the legislation, allowing the legislation to skip ahead to the top of the legislative agenda. This fast-track designation threatened to further

erode the ability of indigenous peoples to democratically participate in the law-making process.

On the national level, a conglomeration of stakeholders including leaders of affected communities, NGOs, academics, and politicians organized to protest the bill's fast-track designation and lack of human rights language. This group, which labeled itself The National Committee for Defense of the Territories Against Mining, carried

out protests across Brazil. These protests, which included occupying a central mall in the capital Brasilia and marches in many smaller communities, mobilized thousands of citizens concerned about the harmful effects of mining development.

Observing the danger posed by the proposed Brazilian legislative overhaul and the outcry from the National Committee, VIVAT acted to serve as a voice for local groups in established human rights channels. In conjunction with partners both on the ground and at the UN such as members of the Mining Working Group, VIVAT pressured the Brazilian government through a variety of channels to both extend the civil society consultation period and include greater respect for the human rights of indigenous peoples in the proposed legislation. The letter-writing campaign, part of the larger outcry, led to the removal of the legislation's fast track distinction. Subsequently, the package of regulations has remained at the committee level in the Brazilian parliament and is expected to be voted on early next year. VIVAT and the national committee in Brazil will continue to advocate for the development of a just new code, ensuring that the outcome text includes a commitment to human rights and protection for the underrepresented communities threatened by mining.

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Right to Water

It is more than a cliché to say that we humans depend on water. Human existence could not be assured were it not for the presence of water on our planet. When new planets are discovered in our universe, the first question asked is: Does it have a source of water?

In 1966 the international community elaborated the right to food. Looking at Article 11 of the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural rights, we see that this right to food is outlined. The first paragraph from the relevant article reads:

Article 11

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>

But there is no mention of such a right to water. At the time, the authors of the Covenant did not reflect on the right to water. Yet, nature itself supports the contention that we have this right. We have a natural right to water, a right that has to be respected and protected by all National Governments around the globe.

In September of this year the people of Turkana region of Kenya received the good news that massive underground water reserves were discovered in their territory. This is one of the hottest, driest and poorest regions of Kenya, and severe droughts are frequent.

With the discovery of two enormous underground lakes the fresh water supply for the people and cattle of the region has been assured for the next eighty years. Their right to access to safe drinking water can be assured.

In recent years a number of actions have been taken within the UN on the issue of water. The Human Rights Council adopted a resolution in March 2008 on human rights and ‘access to safe drinking water and sanitation’ and where deep concern was expressed – “that over one billion people

lacked access to safe drinking water and that 2.6 billion lacked access to basic sanitation”.

The resolution of 2008 also established the mandate of the ‘Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation’. This mechanism can be used to enable people who are deprived of water, to

The **Resolution 64/292** acknowledges that clean drinking water and sanitation are integral to the realization of all human rights.

gain access to this basic right. All information on the mandate is available here:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/WaterAndSanitation/SRWWater/Pages/SRWWaterIndex.aspx>

Often there is a difficulty to realize such rights, to move from policy to reality. To help people turn this important human right into reality, the Special Rapporteur is preparing a handbook on the meaning of the human right to water and sanitation, and its implementation. This will be ready by September 2014.

“As human rights, all people, without discrimination, must have access to safe drinking water and sanitation, which is affordable, acceptable, available and safe,” Ms. de Albuquerque said. “States must continually take steps to ensure that access to these fundamental rights is guaranteed.”

Twin Disasters in Southern Philippines

First there was an earthquake then there was a super typhoon. Both were very destructive. Both took so many lives and destroyed so many properties. Both wreaked havoc on Mother Earth only three weeks apart.



The earthquake in Bohol island claimed more than 200 lives and

knocked down century old churches, cut down strategic bridges, destroyed roads and tore down houses. With more than 6,000 after shocks, the trauma of the people never ends. Six weeks after, many people still live in shelters and tents outside their houses. Very slowly they try to reconstruct their livelihood for daily food. Relief goods are now waning in favour of typhoon Haiyan victims.

Typhoon Haiyan, on the other hand, far worse than the earthquake in Bohol, brought unfathomable suffering on the people. The fury of the wind and the surging water killed thousands and thousands. We will never know the exact number of lost lives. Surely, it's three or four times more than what authorities have been telling the public. Infrastructures, public and private alike, were all razed to ground level. The government estimates five years to rehabilitate the areas hit by the typhoon. Leyte, a major source of electricity in neighbouring islands including Bohol, may take six months to restore energy production.

The responses from those not affected by the typhoon have been so generous and fast. In both disasters, donations in cash and in kind came in droves. Many came not only from abroad but from domestic sources as well. Many also offered their talents and human power to process and distribute the goods.



Students, professionals and community people alike came to volunteer.

Despite the twin disasters, all hope is not lost for people who are reared to be resilient. People who have been used to man-made disasters are also bound to endure natural calamities. The people will rise again. Given help, the people will move on. The urgent task of distributing emergency goods has been going on and believed to have reached most parts of the affected areas. Rehabilitation and reconstruction would be next. Public buildings have to be restored along side the houses of the people. The works are arduous and expensive for people who are not even sure where to get their next meal but with little help, these times of pain and suffering would also pass by.



By Eugene Docoy, SVD

Children in Detention in Bolivia

Every day in Bolivia over 1000 children under six wake up in prisons for crimes they have not committed. In addition to them, there are other minors, adolescents and youth living in detention guilty only of falling through the cracks of contradictory legislation and policy gaps. Bolivia ratified the International Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and ten years

later enacted its “Código del Niño, Niña y Adolescente (CNNA)”. The Law 2298 “Ley de Ejecución Penal y Supervisión”, however does not include any directives on children visiting parent detainees. Furthermore, it stipulates that children can only live with their parents in detention up to the age of six. National statistics show though that in December 2012 there were 1056 school aged children living in prisons across the country.

Through its “Pastoral Penitenciaria”, members of VIVAT International in Bolivia seek to accompany detainees, their spouses and children living in detention. Volunteers provide services including counselling, after-school support, orientation on health, nutrition, and disease prevention. The presence of volunteers creates spaces of interaction and engages the children in a way that breaks their daily routine at the prisons.

Children attend schools close to the prisons and often recount being stigmatized by their classmates for being children of de-



What happens in the parent-child relationship in the prisons

tainees. The hostile environment they live in often results in children adopting a defensive and aggressive behaviour and a very different language from children living “outside”. At the “Penal de San Pedro” in Bolivia’s capital La Paz there are 2500 detainees and almost 300 children aged 0 to 15. Children are allowed to go in and out the prison freely. They play in the detention courts and speak with detainees. Many remain idle when volunteers are not around. Tensions and conflicts are the daily bread of life in detention, exposing them to all sorts of information and risks undermining their safety and development. Instances of child abuse, emotional as well as physical, including sexual abuse have occurred.

At the national level the Government of Bolivia indicates it wishes to keep children away from prisons. However in the absence of clear policy the issue persists. Leonardo Da Silva Costa, CSSp National Coordinator of the pastoral care programme at detention centers in Bolivia related to VIVAT International office in New York that the

development of a plan spelling out concrete actions to ensure the prevention, protection and accompaniment of children of detainees is urgent. He points to the fact that the establishment of orientation and support services for families should be an urgent priority as “*In the absence of a support programme or public policies, a monitoring system overseeing its implementation or*

some incentive, or support to the relatives enabling them to assist children whose father or mother is detained, children will end up abandoned, become victims of violence or on the streets”. A woman living in a detention centre in Miraflores, a single parent of 7 children of whom she has no news since she entered the prison, shared “*In these circumstances the worst punishment I am living through is being far from my children, not being able to see them daily, not being able to caress them, feed them or ensure they have clothes to wear, this is my greatest suffering*”.

Detainees and their spouses often point to job loss, lack of resources and income opportunities for the spouses to be able to take care of their children if living outside of prisons as well as the fear of the disintegration of the family unit as some the main reasons for their situation.

There is an urgent need to create special child protection measures and enabling conditions for children to live in freedom outside of prisons while still maintaining their relationship with parents in detention.

Constitutional Rights of Dalits Christians

Dalit Christians are constitutionally deprived of their rights

VIVAT International, India held a three day workshop, 12-14th September 2013, on the theme: Constitutional Rights of Dalits Christians and Rights of Migrants at SVD Provincialate, Indore. It was organized by the founding members of VIVAT International – Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) and Society of the Divine Word (SVD). Sixty-five members from the SSpS, SVD and OMI Communities participated in this workshop.

Fr. Devasagayaraj, Fr. Bosco, SJ, Fr. SM Michael, SVD, and Bro. Varghese Thekenath, SG were the resource persons. Fr. Michael addressed the theme “Constitutional Rights of Dalit Christians” and highlighted the fact that while only 2.3% of the population in India is Christian about 80% of them are Dalits and Tribals. He stressed that the Dalits who embraced Christianity believed that in Christianity and in the Church they would receive dignity denied to them in Hindu society. Unfortunately, Dalit Christians continue to suffer the same discrimination as in the past but now it is not only from upper caste Hindus, but also from the upper caste Christians, the State and the Church.

This discrimination of Dalit Christians goes against the Constitution of India. The founding fathers of the Constitution believed that a modern India must be a free India built on justice, equality, liberty, fraternity, and secularism. They enshrined these cardinal principles in our Constitution. These pillars of our democracy are guaranteed to all Citizens of India by Articles 14, 15, 16 and 25 as fundamental rights. It is understood that the Constitution gives freedom to anyone to change their faith. A scheduled caste person can become a Christian, a Christian can become a Hindu, Mus-



lim or Buddhist. Fr. Bosco, SJ briefed the participants on the history of casteism in Christianity. He explained the socio-economic condition of Dalit Christians in India elaborating the discrimination and untouchability experienced by them even in the Church. Bosco also spoke on the constitutional safeguards for scheduled castes and explained how Dalit Christians are constitutionally deprived of their rights. Additionally, the discrimination experienced among Christians within the church on the basis of caste was one of the major points of discussions. He stressed that a change of mindset is necessary to enable Dalits to reclaim their dignity. There is a growing need for all to join the struggles of Dalits to make them feel respected and accepted as equals.

Fr. Devasagayaraj spoke on the “history of casteism in Christianity”. He explained about the socio-economic condition of Dalit Christians in India elaborating the discrimination and untouchability experienced by them even in Church. He also highlighted the Church’s response and the ways and means by which we can avail the constitutional rights to dalit Christians.

Br. Varghese Thekenath spoke on “International Human Rights Law and the Mission of the Church”. He informed the partici-

pants of the new phenomenon of the Human Rights paradigm as an emerging new religion in the world. He brought out the innate meanings of ‘rights’ and ‘human’. He said that to be human is to be created in the image and likeness of God. The most important and effective ministry we should participate in is the defense of people’s God given human rights. At the end of his presentation

Varghese indicated that we should seek to collaborate with International Human Rights Agencies specially the Human Rights Council.

The action plan that emerged from the participants is to:

1. Change any negative mindsets through awareness, education, formation, ongoing formation and participation in various movements to end discrimination and exclusion.
2. Help others to view Dalits more positively through the formation and training of local community leaders.
3. Share information on the situations of Dalit Christians and their struggles through social networking, group mails and bulletins and fact sheets.
4. Document discrimination and share it with the Bishops Conference of India, and VIVAT International.
5. Build up leaders through leadership training programs.
6. Provide quality education to Dalit Christians.
7. Raise awareness through training programs, protest rallies, Sunday sermons etc.
8. Network with Dioceses, other faith traditions, NGOs and those committed to ending discrimination of all kinds.

By Roy Thomas, SVD

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VIVAT International Workshop in Anglophone, West Africa

Members of five religious congregations from Nigeria and Ghana gathered together to participate in a VIVAT INTERNATIONAL Workshop for English-speaking West Africa. The workshop held in Ghana at the Divine Word Catholic Conference Centre in Adoagyiri – Nsawam from the 1st to the 7th of December 2013 was a forum for the 46 religious men and women to reflect on the JPIC concerns of their countries and the role of VIVAT in helping to address these concerns. Two lay members of both the SVD and the CSSp also participated in the workshop.

The Religious Congregations from Ghana and Nigeria namely, the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS), Society of the Divine Word (SVD), Congregation of the Holy Spirit (CSSp), Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary (MSHR) and Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit (CSSp) enthusiastically deliberated on issues that cut across their ministries. The reports of the JPIC national/province coordinators including violations of human rights and the ecological crisis seriously facing both countries became urgent matters to be tackled not alone but as a network of congregations.

The participants reflected deeply on the Scriptural Foundations of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), The Social Teachings of the Church, UN Declaration of Human Rights, Principles of Advocacy, and Culture & Violence: Challenge to Advocacy. The VIVAT Executive Team took the participants through topics concerning the nature, scope and functions of the United Nations Organization, the NGOs and other civil society groups.



The Executive Team enlightened the group on the genesis of VIVAT and its role on Advocacy in the national, international and UN levels.

In their communiqué at the end of the workshop, the participants committed themselves to realize the values of the Kingdom through the Advocacy of VIVAT International. They affirmed that VIVAT International is a practical tool in working for justice, peace and preservation of the integrity of creation.

“We recognize with deep sadness the violations of human rights in our countries. We are at this moment particularly concerned about charcoal burning and witch camps in Ghana, and corruption/injustice in the educational sector and water and sanitation issues in Nigeria. These impoverish the lives of our brothers and sisters and our ecosystem,” said the group.



The theme of the workshop was “Working for Justice, Promoting Peace and Preserving Lives”

Additionally, they said “We believe that God created enough resources to serve everybody on earth. The abject poverty and injustice which our sisters and brothers are suffering from are results of structural problems created by human beings and can be addressed, trusting in God. In the same vein, we are facing an ecological crisis as a result of unbridled plundering of the natural resources of the Earth and the need is now more urgent than ever to make an option for life, preserve and protect our natural resources and biodiversity. We will support and promote sustainable development as an alternative.”

In their deliberations the group realized that building the kingdom of God is synonymous with creating a just society. They stated, “We are equally very conscious of our fragility on this faith journey. However, we are confident that we certainly have something to offer and we are committed to these issues for the next three years. We therefore give our hands in fellowship to the different Governments of our countries, the International community, other NGOs, women and men of good will to collaborate with us on this noble project.”

In their plan of action the group firmly concluded that it has now become imperative to have a VIVAT International branch in Ghana and a similar workshop and national office in Nigeria to give more energy to JPIC ministry in their countries.

By Maria Vilma Espinosa, SSpS

Faith Leaders Commit Civil Disobedience for Immigration Reform

On 29th October a hundred people gathered in New York City outside the Varick Street Detention Center, where immigrant detainees are held awaiting deportation. The diverse crowd included legal and undocumented migrants, DREAMERS, faith leaders from various Christian denominations, representatives of civil society groups and many ordinary people, all of whom took to the streets on a cold autumn morning because of their a deep shared concern for the inhuman “limbo” situation in which too many immigrants in the US have been living for long periods of time. While the long awaited immigration reform remains stalled, countless immigrants are seeing their human rights being affected and the unity of their families impeded.

A rally was convened by New Yorkers for Real Immigration Reform and its ally the Interfaith Network for Immigration Reform. ***The New Yorkers for Real Immigration Reform campaign is a statewide campaign coordinated by***

the New York Immigration Coalition and endorsed by 170 labor, business, faith, grassroots and immigrant organizations from across the state. The coalition is calling for an overhaul of the immigration system to meet the needs of the economy and keep families together. At the end of the rally in Varick Street 10 people committed civil disobedience and were consequently arrested. Among them a Catholic nun, a pastor and a Bishop who with the other immigration reform activists occupied the street blocking traffic at W. Houston St. near the immigration facility. Within minutes they were charged by the police for disorderly conduct and taken away. Through their action they expressed deep commitment to just and humane immigration reform.

The civil disobedience action took place in the context of a nation-wide escalation by immigration advocates in the month of

October, with over 180 events held in 150 cities in 40 states. One of the goals of many of these actions was to apply pressure on House leadership to allow swift congressional action, including a vote on immigration reform. The long awaited reform is expected to provide a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and protect immigrants from deportation.

During some of the speeches at the rally the faith leaders present highlighted how many immigrants and their families in their own faith communities across the US are victimized in their daily lives by the lack of an appropriate immigration system. It is urgent that faith leaders continue to be the voice of the voiceless and to speak out within and beyond their Church communities to convey the plight of the many immigrants who are already making a significant contribution to this country and whose cause must be made known.

VIVAT International: Mozambique and Brazil for Justice and Peace

On September 4-7, 2013, Comboni Missionaries and Comboni Sisters of Mozambique and Brazil who are responsible for the sector of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) held a seminar –open to other institutes and interested lay people – in the Mozambique city of Nampula, in order to share pastoral work experiences connected to the new forms of slavery. Dario Bossi, a Comboni missionary from Brazil, spoke on the conflicts over land ownership and on the social and environmental impact of mining. Comboni Sr. Clara Torres Acevedo, with her experience of work in Mozambique and in South Africa, developed the topic of human trafficking, especially where women and children are involved. The conclusion reached was that the JPIC pastoral, if it is going to be effective, must be done through networking at both the national and the international level. The Comboni Forum continues in the life and in the commitment of many brothers and sisters, dedicated to the cause of the Kingdom. Daniel Comboni continues to inspire the practice of liberation carried out by his missionaries.

[read more.](#)

VIVAT INTERNATIONAL

In our longing for Peace...

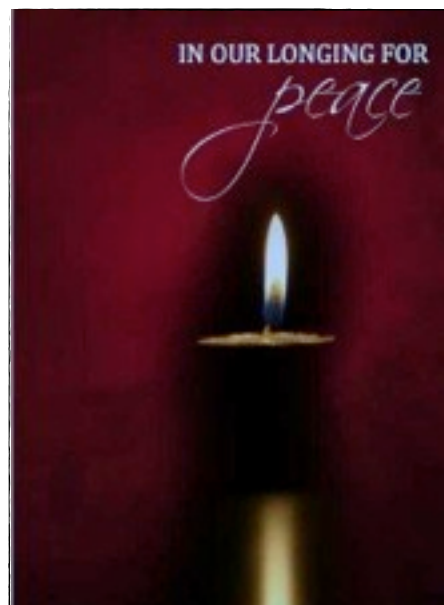
... we remember and celebrate God-with-Us!
God is with us in our joys and our pains;
... in our struggles and our accomplishments;
God is with us in our dreams and disappointments;
God is with us in our successes and our failures.

In our experiences of violence and compassion, fear and heroism,
our trust is in this God-with-us.

As members of VIVAT International our hope for a better world is grounded
in this trust.

Our efforts and courage to make a difference, to be a voice for the voiceless,
are sustained by the presence of this God-with-us.

This is the message of Christmas, where a helpless infant proved too strong for the powers of violence and injustice.
This Jesus, this God-with-Us, is the wellspring of our hope, joy, efforts, and longing for peace.



Blessed Christmas and peace-filled New Year to all!

Sr. Maria Theresia Hörnemann SSpS
President of VIVAT International

Upcoming Events

January	February	March
January 6-10 <u>Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, 7th session, New York</u>	February 3-7 <u>Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, 8th session, New York</u>	March 20-21 <u>Commission on the Status of Women, 58th session, New York</u>
January 27 VIVAT Board Meeting, Rome	February 11-21 <u>11-21 February 2014: 52nd Session, Commission for Social Development, New York</u>	