

Latin American Council of Churches congratulates the United Nations on historic recognition of access to safe water as a human right

Quito, August 4, 2010

Ref: Water as a human right

“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.” Matthew 10:42

H.E. Dr. Ali Abdussalam Treki,
President of the 64th Session of
the United Nations General
Assembly

The Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), representing 178 churches in 20 countries in Latin America, wishes to recognize in a special way the resolution approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations last Wednesday, 28 July. This resolution recognizes the right to safe water and adequate sanitation as a basic human right essential for life and integral and interrelated to all human rights.

CLAI congratulates the United Nations for this historic event and in particular thanks Bolivia and the other 33 co-sponsors of this resolution. We are very happy that, as

made evident in the adoption of the resolution, there is a consensus that is growing in the international community.

This consensus, and in particular the decision and view of the 122 countries who affirmed the resolution last Wednesday, have much in common with the path and work of CLAI itself. At the international level as a member of the Ecumenical Network Water and in our work in communities and churches throughout Latin America, CLAI is working and will continue to work so that everyone has the necessary access to water and sanitation.

Water is the most basic element for life. It is also a living sign of the grace of God and an essential component in order to fulfill the desire of God that we all may have a full life. With the people of Bolivia and everyone fighting for just access to water, as CLAI we commit ourselves to continue to labor and pray for the full and abundant life that God intends for creation.

Yours in Christ Jesus.
Rev. Nilton Giese
General Secretary of CLAI



Water scarcity (Nygus FAO Water Unit)

“Oscar Arnulfo Romero” Reflection and Solidarity Group in Cuba celebrates its 25th anniversary in frank macro-ecumenical dialogue

By José Aurelio Paz
Havana, May 20, 2010 (ALC)

“That work be the source of material wealth to be shared with justice, because we should not fall into giving as helping out of charity (when) the construction of a better future has priority and urges living life in a spirit of solidarity,

gentleness and equity,” said Gabriel Coderch, General Coordinator of the “Oscar Arnulfo Romero” Reflection and Solidarity Group, at the ending of the celebration of the 25th anniversary of this Catholic movement that is ecumenically inspired in the broadest possible sense.

Some 80 participants took part in the different debates, representing

a wide range of institutions and leaders from diverse geographical regions of the country, many of them belonging to the 14 Integral Neighborhood Transformation workshops, a project of the Reflection Group, along with Christian centers, members of the Islamic community, Catholic and Protestant churches, and the University of Havana, among others, all with a commitment to community work, be it at the academic level or that of neighborhood contexts.

“Change so as to remain: roads of growth,” “Living out participatory processes with a liberating pedagogy,” and, “Integrating new meanings for good living,” were some of the themes dealt with at the gathering held in the “Faith of the Valley” Achievement Center of Havana.

During the last session of the three day dialogue specific issues were discussed, such as gender and violence, masculinities, and family and sexual diversity, and included



Raúl Suarez at gathering for Romero

Church related organization in Brazil rejects distribution of transgenic seeds

Porto Alegre, June 14, 2010
(ALC)

The Center for Support to the Small Farmer (CAPA), which is linked to the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), and the Forum of Family Agriculture of the Southern Region of Rio Grande do Sul, has in a press release rejected the distribution of transgenic corn seeds.

At the end of May a decision was taken by the State Fund Council for Support of the Development of the Small Rural Establishments (FEAPER), freeing the inclusion of transgenic corn seeds in the Exchange-Exchange program that finances and subsidizes the purchasing of seeds by family farmers.

“The incentive given by an organism of the government for the use of transgenic material is contradictory. It brings serious implications for the environment, for the maintenance of the biodiversity and for the family farmers themselves, in a strategic area for the production of foods,” says the statement by CAPA and the Forum of Family

Agriculture.

They alert that it is impossible to implant the necessary process of isolation in the environment of the small rural landholdings. Furthermore, it adds that what is even more serious still is that the decision by FEAPER opens the possibility for the distribution of sterile seeds - with a terminator gene - a technology that means that the farmer is forced to buy new seeds for each crop.

As a result, there is an impediment for the planting of the seeds that the farmer has chosen because of having to pay the “due” royalties. “We are talking about the right to free access to genetic resources and about the most significant tradition of family agriculture: that of keeping, reproducing and propagating their own seeds,” says the statement.

CAPA and the Forum of Family Agriculture ask that, contrary to what FEAPER has decided, the government authorities place more economic and human resources in favor of the biodiversity, and the restoration and conservation of the local seeds.

Latin American Council of Churches intercedes on behalf of jailed Mapuches on hunger strike in Chile

Santiago, August 1, 2010

In a letter addressed to the President of the Republic of Chile, Sebastián Piñera, the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) has asked for the immediate release of 32 Mapuche Indigenous persons, being held in four prisons, and who have been on a hunger strike for over three weeks, in protest against the situation that they are in.

Chile has a historical debt with the Mapuche people, says the letter, recalling that they represent 6.6% of the 16 million Chileans. CLAI echoes the protests of Chilean evangelical Churches that consider the matter of the Mapuches to be a social problem, and not one of police control, "resulting from the exclusion from the economic, political, social and cultural life, that which they have suffered for centuries."

The 32 Mapuche are imprisoned in the Concepción, Temuco, Angol and Valdivia prisons. Their hunger strike is in protest against the marginalizing of their people in their struggles for their ancestral lands, identity, language, sacred fields and cultural symbols.

In the letter signed by the General Secretary, Pastor Nilton Giese, CLAI requests the abolishing of the antiterrorism law that came about during the dictatorship of



Repression of Mapuches

Augusto Pinochet for the purpose of pursuing and eliminating opposition movements. "Today, that anti-

democratic law impedes that the cause of the Mapuche people be treated with justice," says the letter.

Churches are still reproducing aesthetic models and "Europeanized" behavior, says Afro-Christian Gathering in Brazil

São Paulo, June 3, 2010 (ALC)

The Christian churches in general reproduce a racist and sexist discourse that impedes the fomenting of congregations that are really inclusive, according to the participants of the III Afro-Christian Gathering at the Methodist University of São Paulo (UMESP), held from May 28 – 30.

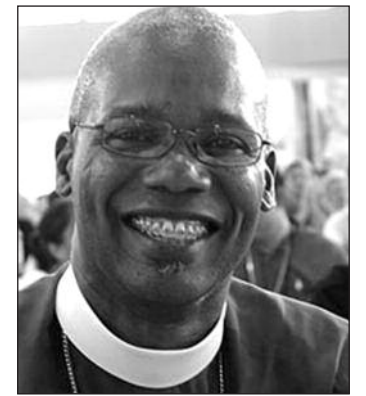
The idealized image of a Christian in Brazil is that of a white person, with the decision making processes delegated to the men. Many blacks belonging to Christian religious segments try to adapt themselves to that image, whitening their aesthetics, minds and spirituality, pointed out participants at the gathering. The event dealt with matters that are pertinent to the self-esteem of Christian blacks, their biological and psychological characteristics, and their self-acceptance and how they are welcomed in the society and in the context of the churches.

Meeting with the theme "Gender and Blackness - A Christian Perspective," the gathering in São Paulo had as a guest speaker the President of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), Bishop Julio Murray, who spoke on the subject of "Myths and Challenges of Black Masculinity." Siomara Rita da

Silva also spoke at the gathering, offering contributions to the discussion on "Aesthetics from the Perspective of the Health of Black Women."

"These two themes developed by Bishop Murray and by Siomara will serve as incentives so that the Christian communities can discuss matters that are pertinent to black masculinity and feminism, with another prism," noted Professor Selenir Kronbauer, Coordinator of the Identity Group of the Faculty of Superior Theological Studies.

As immediate results of the gathering, the participants intend to act as multipliers of actions addressed to the strengthening of the black person's self-esteem, by motivating the formation of study groups on the subject.



Bishop Julio Murray (WCC)

"Without churches the progress is not long-term," observed the Rev. Nilton Giese, General Secretary of the Latin American Council of Churches, as Haitians rebuild their churches and look towards the future with hope

Puerto Príncipe, June 16, 2010 (WCC)

The holy places of Haiti were not spared by the devastating January 12th earthquake. Throughout the capital city, Port-au-Prince, many churches are rebuilding out of the rubble. The Holy Trinity Cathedral, one of the landmarks of the city known for its beautiful murals painted by famous Haitian artists, was among those churches that collapsed during the

earthquake.

Only the ruins of the church are left, but the plan is to rebuild the church again. "Haiti will come back," Father Ogé Beauvoir from the Holy Trinity Church said while speaking with the Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), who visited the ruins of the church together with an ecumenical delegation of six church leaders from different parts of the world. "Fellowship is the answer to the challenges we are facing today," Tveit told Father Beauvoir, assuring him of the ecumenical movement's support in building a new post-earthquake Haiti.

The purpose of the ecumenical visit was to express solidarity and offer pastoral support to the churches as they participate in the rebuilding of Haiti and in offering their service to the Haitian people. Since the earthquake, Haiti has received support and accompaniment from churches all around the world. The Haitian churches have encouraged the WCC to continue its support on a long-term basis.

One of the concerns of the general secretary of the Caribbean Conference of Churches, Mr. Gerard Granado, has been the lack of cooperation between the different agen-

cies responding to the earthquake. "There are lots of actors doing lots of things, but they have never come together to share resources for the benefit of the Haitian people. The earthquake has been an eye-opener in that sense," he asserted. In his prayer in the collapsed Russian Orthodox School, Granado assured Father Jean-Chénier Dumais of the Haitian Orthodox Mission that the work doesn't end now. Instead, he said, we will share these experiences together and we will together ask for strength to rebuild Haiti after the tragedy.

"Churches play an important role and they have enormous influence," said the Rev. Carlos Ham, WCC program executive for the Latin America and Caribbean region. The role of the churches is to raise awareness of the situation and to pray for the Haitians, he said. The visit to church buildings of different denominations that were destroyed in the quake was one concrete way the ecumenical team expressed solidarity towards the Haitians, he continued.

In a panel discussion on Tuesday involving representatives from several Haitian denominations, the ecumenical delegation shared their thoughts about the role of churches, emphasizing that the

church must respond on all levels of reconstruction and remain in the community long-term. "Without churches the progress is not long-term," observed the Rev. Nilton Giese, General Secretary of the Latin American Council of Churches.

When it comes to concrete aid work, the task has been given to the ACT Alliance, which is an alliance of churches and church-related organizations working together in humanitarian assistance, development and advocacy. "ACT has been strong in Haiti since the beginning of 2000," said Prosperity Raymond, the country representative of Christian Aid, a member of the ACT Alliance. "After the earthquake, we were able to start working together and supporting each other due to good cooperation and collaboration in the past."

The panelists agreed that the role of the churches is to speak on behalf of those who need assistance and support and to work together to benefit the people, particularly those in need. "There are two tasks for the churches," Tveit said. "One is to be able to say what needs to be changed and the other is to interpret the vision revealing how to make that change. What churches and the ACT Alliance can do together is to help make the voices of the people heard

on different levels."

In the courtyard of the collapsed Church of God the reconstruction work is under way. The four-floor building collapsed just before a service was about to take place. The choir members were able to run out through a hole in the wall, but the church lost two of its members. Members of the Church of God are clearing rubble in the blazing sunshine during the hottest time of the day. For delegation members, this is a sign of real commitment to God and neighbor.

"The demolishing was started right after the earthquake, because we want to get people back here," Brother Saül Raphaël from the Church of God told the ecumenical delegation. In two days the congregation will have its first service in the roofless space. Hearing this impressed the delegation. "I want to thank you sisters and brothers from different parts of the world for sharing with us this very special situation. I can assure you that you are in our prayers," Tveit said to the members of the church while in their sanctuary. "It is encouraging to see the hope for the future. That is hope that we can share together."

(Maria Halava, from ACT Alliance, reported from Haiti) Source: World Council of Churches, WCC: <http://www.oikoumena.org/en/news-management/eng/article/1634/haitians-rebuild-their-ch.html>

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Solid steps in Cuba consolidate strategic alliance around the theme of women and gender

By José Aurelio Paz
Havana, May 31, 2010 (ALC)

The task of awareness raising and training for overcoming the unjust and unequal relationships between men and women has joined together the Women and Gender Program of the Council of Churches of Cuba (CIC) and the Women and Gender Justice Pastoral Ministry of the national roundtable of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) on the island, in a strategic way for reaching the largest number of people possible. According to the Reverend Raquel Suárez, the program is giving continuity to the suggestions arising out of the I Ecumenical Gathering of biblical-theological and pastoral reflection from the perspective of the reality of women, held last November in the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Matanzas.

Several formation workshops have been carried out during the first quarter of this year, in conjunction with other ecumenical organizations, for the purpose of combining efforts, knowledge and resources so as to be better able to involve more lay leaders and pastors of the member churches of CIC and the CLAI national roundtable. These efforts are also being recognized and supported by the Christian Institute of Gender Studies and the "Oscar Arnulfo Romero" Reflection and Solidarity Group.

"Our thematic axis of the year," said Suárez, a pastor of the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba, "is the overcoming of intra-family and social gender violence, seen from daily experiences, biblical-theological reflection, the social sciences and a transforming pastoral ministry." The workshops, which have been held in various provinces of the country, have brought together women and men from a broad spectrum of denominations, with the intention of enriching a family pastoral ministry growing out of the reality of the Christian communities.

"Violence occurs on many occasions in a subtle way and is manifested in multiple forms," adds the



Gender Equality (ALC)

religious leader, "from physical aggression to psychological abuse, and originates in the unjust and unequal relationships of power among the members of the family and the society. In Jesus of Nazareth we have an alternative in the conception of the terms of power and authority as a practice of service and love toward our neighbor. Thus, it becomes our paradigm of being human in terms of the essential aspects such as love, respect and dignity, transgressing all practice or law that separates, oppresses, excludes or condemns. The biblical texts offer us the opportunity to see God acting in favor of the weakest in situations of family violence and the patriarchal system, manifested in the history of Israel, and how those conflicts were faced. Analyzing them in their historical-cultural context helps us to discern the liberating and normative Word."

Suárez added that the workshops have revealed that in the programs for women, men and the family in the churches these themes are not always considered, nor are biblical texts read that can alert to such situations of intra-family and social violence. "We know of women heroines like Sara, Miriam, Esther, Judith, Mary, Jesus' mother, Martha and Mary, but we do not make others principal characters whose names

are not even remembered," she pointed out. "So we have also taken into account the history of the daughters of Zelophehad; Queen Vashti; Tamar, the daughter of David sexually violated by her half-brother Amnon; the Syrophenician woman; the children wanted to be kept away from Jesus' teachings; and to the women of the communities of Timothy and Titus, condemned to silence and submission to their husbands, among many, and other different stories.

"From all of this it becomes apparent that the authority of the male and of the woman in the home should be based on the model and the conception that Jesus had of power. We are not to confuse the power that 'the kings and rulers who lord it over, and dominate the nations and the peoples' practice when establishing family, interpersonal and social relationships; because Jesus told us: 'among us it will not be like that. The greatest is the one who serves, who loves neighbor as he/she loves him or herself, the one that suffers, the one that gives his/her life for the friend ...' The first space where we are to build the Kingdom is in the home and the family, something that we sometimes forget or which is difficult for us," Suárez concluded.

The CLAI-Puerto Rico National Roundtable emits declaration about university strike

San Juan

A resolution of the CLAI-Puerto Rico National Roundtable about the student strike at the Puerto Rico University (UPR) affirms that "Reconciliation and peace are essential Christian values for life together within our society." Issued on May 16, the document states that "Living in harmony involves a genuine effort to clarify points and let the truth carry us to the affirmation of justice."

CLAI, through its National Roundtable, urged the university community to resolutely continue the dialogue in order to achieve an initial solution in order to pursue a permanent exchange between the parties concerned for the preservation of a peaceful atmosphere on the campuses. This appeal is made while CLAI invites

the UPR to open the books of the institution so that the reality of the fiscal position of the University may be clearly known.

The ecumenical organization also called for the elimination of Certification 98, which removes necessary aid to the most disadvantaged and gifted students so that they might have the opportunities to develop their maximum academic and personal potential.

The CLAI resolution states that the University of Puerto Rico is a heritage and should be maintained and preserved for future generations of the country. In closing, CLAI calls for unity, citing the biblical text of I Corinthians 1:11, which states, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ", that brothers and sisters would be in agreement and that there would be no divisions but that they live in harmony.

In Brazil, women theologians and pastors analyze the reality and new theologies of the continent

August 19, 2010 (ALC)

From July 28-30, approximately 40 women theologians and pastors from the Brazil, Andean and Río de la Plata regions of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) participated in the "Strengthening and Knitting Our Networks" gathering, held at the Methodist University of São Paulo (UMESP), Brazil, organized by CLAI's Women and Gender Justice Pastoral Ministry. The objective of the gathering was to analyze the reality and the new theologies of the continent, and to provide for continuity for what is being articulated by the women theologians and pastors present in the Church and in society, in the recovering of historical memory and reflecting on empowering aspects in biblical-theological elements relevant to the third millennium in the continental context.

The women drew up a combined declaration where they recognize, among other themes: the existence of gender violence that is expressed in an exponential way in increasing practices of femicide, trafficking and sexual exploitation of women, girls and boys; the 'feminization' of poverty;

that women have a significant intellectual production in different epistemological areas, but there exists a process of making that work invisible and silencing it, not only by men but also by women, in academic circles and ecclesiastical institutions; the concentration of men in the exercise of power and in the decision making processes, even in the church; the materialist vision of women and their bodies. The participants called on the communities of faith, their leadership, and the whole of society, to become aware of and reject and denounce these realities, within their different spheres of action. The women theologians and pastors reaffirmed their theological and pastoral vocation, "in a hope of solidarity for justice and life."

The gathering was made possible thanks to the support of the Regional Missionary Initiative in Latin America of the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries (JGMG), of the Reformierte Landeskirche Aargau, of the Mission 21 Evangelisches Missionswerk Basel, of the Evangelical Theological Community of Chile, and of the Council of Evangelical Methodist Churches of Latin America and the Caribbean (CIEMAL).

CLAI Youth Ministry facilitates efforts for Haiti and Chile

By Karen Ettlín*

Under the slogan "Solidarity without Borders", the Global Youth Voluntary Service Day (GYSD) took place in Uruguay with more than 1,500 adolescents and young people participating. The Global Youth Voluntary Service Day is an annual global event which aims to build the foundations of an international network of organizations that promote youth participation, service and entrepreneurship, and seeks to educate the general public, media and political leaders about the annual contributions of young volunteers worldwide. Fundamentally, the intention is to mobilize GYSD adolescents and youth

to meet the needs and restore the rights of their communities through volunteering, and to promote effective practices related to service, civic participation and contribution in today's world.

In Uruguay, this event takes place in different departments, formatted according to the needs, characteristics and preferences of its protagonists. This year the GYSD was conducted in Canelones, Cerro Largo, Colonia, Durazno, Maldonado, Montevideo, Rocha, San José, Salto, Treinta y Tres, and Montevideo.

Specifically this year, analyzing the current national and international context, it was decided to work for people affected by disasters in Haiti and

Chile, with the primary objective being voluntary actions, the collection of funds to these destinations and contributing to the Solidarity Plan and the National Emergency System. On this basis, the motto that was identified during the conference was "Solidarity without borders."

However, according to the different profiles of our volunteers, the local needs, and the contacts made in previous years, the service activities included a great variety of tasks in social institutions, both public and private.

Also, assuming the objective of further facilitating the exchange and understanding between volunteers from different organizations, this year it was decided to work in ten activities

in different neighborhoods in the city of Montevideo.

CLAI Participation

As has been done since 2007, the CLAI Youth Ministry joined in the proposal, with participation from thirty teens and young people from different congregations. Groups were formed, and some went to institutions and the main plaza of Montevideo to raise funds and other resources for needs, while others worked in a public school district, a Care Center for Children and Families of the Anglican Church, and a children's home in the Pentecostal Church. The work involved cleaning, painting, repairs and organic gardening.

In the words of one participant: "The volunteering personally makes me feel useful, that I can be of help to others, not only to those who I want to be with, but also to those who I don't know. I am also introduced to a number of people who have the same call, who do not expect anything in return, but only the certainty of having reached out to those in need. The satisfaction of helping others gives me great joy and even greater is to recognize in it the living example of our Lord Jesus Christ, as stated in Matthew 20:28, '...I have not come to be served but to serve...'" (Nina Manzini, Pentecostal Church).

* Delegate for the CLAI Youth Ministry for the GYSD

Colombian Congress honors Episcopal Diocese for 50 years of justice, pastoral ministry

By Matthew Davies
August 11, 2010 (ENS)

The Senate of the Republic of Colombia has conferred one of its highest honors on the Episcopal Church of Colombia in recognition of its pastoral care and social development work over the past 50 years. The award marks the first time that a non-Roman Catholic denomination has been recognized in this way by the Colombian Government.

Episcopal Church of Colombia Bishop Francisco Duque-Gómez accepted the Order of the Congress of Colombia on behalf of the diocese at an early July ceremony held at the Constitution Hall in Bogotá, the nation's capital city. The recognition, Duque said, "makes us proud" and the diocese "renews its commitment to work in the service of everyone, but particularly in the service of the poor, the homeless, displaced and persecuted."

In 2010, the diocese is celebrating 50 years of presence in the Republic of Colombia. The diocese was officially constituted as a missionary church by the Episcopal Church's General Convention in 1963 and has since been committed to outreach ministries in support of the most vulnerable groups in its



Bishop Francisco Duque-Gómez accepts the Order of the Congress of Colombia (Diocese of Colombia ELO)

society, especially the hungry and homeless, children and widows.

The diocese is part of Province IX of the Episcopal Church. With its 21 congregations, it has made strategic alliances with local governments in an effort to maintain and strengthen its aid programs. Through one such ministry in Cali, Colombia's third-largest city, the diocese partners with the municipality to provide food to 80 senior citizens. In Bogotá, the diocese works with abandoned children, single mothers and assists young people with drug problems and homelessness.

The Honorable Charles Schultz, presenting the award on behalf of the Senate, spoke about Duque's "dynamic, spiritual, social, educational and ethical leadership" and emphasized the church's role in human rights, in respecting the dignity, integrity, liberty, equality and justice of all human beings.

The Rt. Rev. James H. Ottley, former bishop of Panama and former assisting bishop of Southeast Florida, and his wife Lillian attended the ceremony as Duque's special guests. Blanca Lucia Echeverry, Duque's wife, and lay and clergy members of the Episcopal Church in Colombia were also present. Duque, a trial attorney and specialist in social sciences, said the diocese will "continue the mission which Jesus Christ commanded us to preach — the good news of hope, love, peace and salvation."

Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, who visited Colombia in July 2007, said, "I am delighted that the transformative ministry of the Diocese of Colombia has been recognized and celebrated by the government of Colombia. May this ministry continue to bless so many of 'the least of these' whom Jesus says are his presence in the world."

Source: Episcopal News Service, ENS:
http://www.episcopalchurch.org/81803_123750_ENG_HTML.htm



Monsignor Rafael Urrutia (EDH elsalvador.com)

Salvadoran Catholic Church asks that fiscal reform project not affect the poorest

San Salvador, August 10, 2010
(ALC)

Monsignor Rafael Urrutia, Pastoral Vicar of the Catholic Archdiocese of San Salvador, has asked President Mauricio Funes that the new fiscal reform project be revised, in an exhaustive way, so that the poorest sectors in the country not be those most affected by the measure. The Ministry of the Treasury of the country has a proposal that would include the payment of taxes by the so called "informal merchants," the majority of whom, as is well known, are parents of marginalized families who attempt to survive the economic crisis with sales not accounted for in State registers.

Monsignor Urrutia has asked the president that the new measure not become an additional load for the poor families that have to daily work miracles in the streets so as to be able to feed their children. According to the pastoral vicar,

the Catholic Church is aware that all over the world the payment of taxes is obligatory, according to the ordering of society, and so it is not in opposition to taxation, only asking that the taxes be established with justice and equity, so that those who have more be those that pay more.

The church is open to all kinds of dispositions that contribute to the improvement of the country, said the prelate, but the vision of the common citizen that bears the heaviest brunt of the crisis cannot be neglected. He said that it will be necessary to carry out a technical study to see if the application of the fiscal proposal is really feasible, with the family economies of the lower income popular sectors kept in the foresight.

The proposal made by the Ministry of the Treasury to the presidency is that the informal merchants also pay taxes and, in addition, the complete elimination of the refund of the benefits that the salaries receive annually as a result of tax retentions.

Church World Service (CWS) praises UN resolution, introduced by Bolivia, on water access as human right

August 2, 2010 (CWS)

Church World Service is praising a UN General Assembly resolution on July 28 that recognizes the human right to access to water and sanitation. The historic non-binding resolution - approved by a vote of 122 for, 0 against and 41 abstentions - was introduced by Bolivia and co-sponsored by 33 other countries. The resolution states that the UN General Assembly recognizes "the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights." The adoption of the resolution without a single "no" vote "is an important indication of an emerging international consensus on the human right to water for consumption, personal hygiene and sanitation," said David Weaver, CWS's accredited representative to the UN.

The resolution refers to the Millennium Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations in 2000, that commit governments to work to halve the number of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2015. In September, the United Nations will hold a summit to assess progress made toward achieving the eight goals.

Church World Service and other



Accessing reliable sources of water for drinking, cooking, hygiene and household needs, and agriculture (Paul Jeffrey ACT Alliance)

organizations had urged the United States government to support a UN General Assembly consensus resolution. When it became apparent that consensus on a text on the human right to water was not possible, the U.S. abstained. Explaining the vote, John F. Sammis, U.S. Deputy Representative to the UN Economic and Social Council, said in a statement: "The United States is deeply committed to finding solutions to our world's water challenges. We support the goal of universal access to safe drinking water. Water and sanitation issues will be an important focus at this September's Millennium Development Goal Summit. The United States is committed to working with our development partners to build on the progress they have already made in these areas as part of their national development strategies. Water is essential for all life on earth.

Accordingly, safe and accessible water supplies further the realization of certain human rights, and there are human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation."

Weaver said of the U.S. vote: "While abstaining on this resolution, the statement of the U.S. government in support of the progressive realization of the human right to water is a positive development from the position of previous administrations."

The resolution was based partly on the work of Catarina de Albuquerque, appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council based in Geneva as an independent expert on the human right to water and sanitation. Through the Ecumenical Water Network and directly with de Albuquerque's office, Church World Service is working to provide the UN with examples of "best practices" for the fulfillment of the right to water and sanitation.

The expected next steps for the UN on the matter include de Albuquerque working to assist the Human Rights Council and UN member states to define what the scope and content of the human right to water and sanitation is.

Source: Church World Service, CWS:
http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=9785&news_iv_ctri=1361

"Oscar Arnulfo Romero" ...

From page 1

the awarding of the "Faces of Solidarity" distinction to five people, in recognition of their broad social commitment. Those distinguished were Nidia Arrobo Rodas, Director of the Indian People Foundation of Ecuador; Joel Suárez Rodés, Coordinator of the "Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr." Memorial Center (CMLK); Juan Ramón de la Paz Cerezo, a retired Anglican priest, and Caridad Diego Bello, head of the Office for Attention to Religious Matters.

All five are people who have played an important role, from different perspectives, in supporting the projection and development of this group of lay Catholics that, outside of the Roman Catholic institutional structures of the island, have persisted in a social commitment to the Cuban socialist process and who are also investigators of the different realities that surround the faith.

Referring to the current world hegemony of powers, Coderch remarked that, "The powerful try to use the crisis to destroy hope. There have been deceptions, doubts, errors, but the future belongs to those who

trust and wait, and hope never defrauds."

Baptist pastor, Reverend Raúl Suárez Ramos, Director of the CMLK, when speaking at the closing of the event, emphasized that "... the present moments that we are living are very special, and I believe that the decisive battles are not those that are behind, but rather those that we from now on will have to confront. And it is in those battles that we need to remember how we began, because that first breath is the one that should encourage us to take all the steps that we may have to take, in the name of God and also in the name of our peoples and our history."

"We have to rescue the hunger and the thirst for justice of ... (those gone before) ... their courage, their bravery, values for which they gave their lives. For that reason I deeply appreciate this group that today celebrates the 25th anniversary of its foundation, for having brought to Cuba the memory, the prophetic nature, the commitment and identity of Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero," concluded Suarez.

(Author's note: Written with the help of Aïmara Cepeda, communications specialist of the Council of Churches of Cuba.)

Methodist Church of Mexico asks for justice for laid off electrical workers

Mexico City, July 28, 2010 (ALC)

Admitting that it has not always made the necessary effort to place itself at the service of the people, to listen to them, the Methodist Church of Mexico has made a call to all the social sectors and those in government to act with justice in the case of the liquidation of the state company Luz y Fuerza del Centro (Center Light and Power). The October 9, 2009 edition of the Mexican government's Official Bulletin informed of the government's decision to liquidate the company, a task assigned to the Service for the Administration of Properties. The decision affected an innumerable

number of workers' families.

The Mexican Methodists, gathered for their XXV Annual Conference from July 15-18, asked for sensibility on the part of the authorities, so as to be able to listen with attention to the proposals coming from the people, and assume ethical values of transparency and fidelity in the keeping of their word. The statement by the Methodist Church invites people to know, meditate on and experience the Word of Life, "so that we build a nation with justice and peace for all its inhabitants." The document asks for justice in the form of a proper application of the Federal Work Law in this case of the liquidating of the electricity company.

Lutheran Diaconia Foundation (FLD) Tenth Anniversary highlights Family Agriculture and Ecology Program

Porto Alegre, July 20, 2010 (ALC)

The Lutheran Diaconia Foundation (FLD) in Brazil highlighted the areas of family agriculture and ecology, for projects that foster food sovereignty and nutritional safety. Linked to the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), the foundation supports civil society projects that are also a witnessing to Christ - the dimension of helping one's neighbor without discrimination because of religious creed, ethnic group or gender.

On Saturday, July 17, the FLD completed ten years of activities, supporting more than 500 small and medium projects in different areas of the country over that period. Headquartered in Porto Alegre, the priority areas of the work of the FLD are family agriculture and ecology, popular education, the generating of employment and income, and accessible health care for all. The FLD accompanies and directly assists three



Brazil (WCC)

strategic partners: the Center for Support of the Small Farmer (CAPA), the Mission among Indians Council (COMIN) and the Collectors of Recyclable Materials Movement.

In addition to those direct partners, FLD supported, with great effect on the society, the Right to Memory and Truth project as a result of the consequences of the 1964-1985 dictatorship in Brazil, together with the Free Agency for Information, Communication and Education (ALICE) and the Special Secretariat for Human Rights (SEDH).

Also to be distinguished is FLD's

participation in the ACT-Alliance, launched worldwide at the beginning of this year. The ACT-Alliance is a humanitarian aid organization supporting social development projects, gathering together organizations in 125 countries and with representation in 90 of them, and with an overall team of 30,000 persons. The FLD is a founding member of the Alliance which, even without having been formally constituted, rendered and continues to render humanitarian aid to the people of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and surrounding areas, affected by the February 12, 2010 earthquake.

The FLD receives project proposals of up to 40,000 Brazilian Reales. Over the recent years, the average approved project has been between 10,000 and 15,000 Reales. The amount reviewed for logistical support of seminars and events is 5,000 Reales. In addition to providing financial support, the FLD serves as consultant and accompanies the development of the projects and, many times, the groups themselves.

Evangelicals take part in symbolic act in memory of the victims of the political violence in Peru

By Víctor Liza Jaramillo
Lima, August 25, 2010 (ALC)

Representatives of the principal Protestant organizations of Peru took part in the "In your name I reaffirm my hope" gathering, held on the occasion of the VII anniversary of the presentation of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR) officially celebrated on August 27. Present were Pastor

Darío López Rodríguez, President of the National Evangelical Council of Peru (CONEP), and the leader of the National Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru (UNICEP), Pastor Eleazar Soria. Also present was the Bishop Emeritus of Chimbote, Monsignor Luis Bambarén, former President of the Peruvian Episcopal Conference (CEP).

The symbolic act consisting of recording the names of the victims

of the political violence (1980-2000) on stones that were placed around "The Eye that Cries" memorial monument, was organized by institutions such as Amnesty International, the Pro Human Rights Association (APRODEH), Art for Memory, Paths of Memory, the National Coordinator of Human Rights, Peace and Hope, and the Rural Educational Services (SER).

When speaking, the Reverend Darío López sustained that

Christians cannot be indifferent in the face of the pain of the relatives of the victims of the violence, because the God in whom we believe loves justice and struggles to achieve it. On the other hand, he recalled that an important sector of the Evangelical community in Peru has played a fundamental role during the armed conflict, aiding the victims, raising its prophetic voice in the face of the violation of human rights, and defending the

innocent unjustly imprisoned. Pastor López concluded by saying that the church needs to maintain its memory alive and follow on the path of those Christian martyrs who opted to walk on the side of the weak and excluded of society.

Approximately a thousand victims of the internal conflict were of Evangelical affiliation.

Council of Churches of Puerto Rico denounces aggression against Baptist Minister in the Capitol Building in San Juan

An official statement released by the Council of Churches of Puerto Rico manifests its indignation and rejection "given the acts of uncontrolled violence and abuse of power by public order officials against dozens of peaceful demonstrators on the grounds of the Capitol Building." Since Thursday, July 1, Puerto Rico is experiencing a state of consternation, after the police strongly repressed university students and professors who had led a massive popular protest to the entrance of the Capitol Building on Wednesday.

San Juan, July 5, 2010 (ALC)

According to the statement, during the confrontation the police attacked, without reason, the Reverend Ángel Gutiérrez Rodríguez, an ordained minister of the Baptist Churches of the country and a collaborator of the Council of Churches, while he was documenting the peaceful youth demonstration inside the Capitol Building. The statement says that the Rev. Gutiérrez was hit by police on his back, shoulder and right arm, and his body kicked, as well as being sprayed with pepper gas in his face,

causing him to receive medical attention in the Diagnostic and Treatment Center of the capital city.

"For over a year now we have been denouncing the present government's oppressive tendencies, both in the administration of justice as in the approval of laws and, more recently, the use of the police force against the citizens. More and more the number of victims multiplies and we ask, until when? What right does the government have to set loose an entirely ferocious violence toward different sectors of the civil society?" asks the Council of

Churches' statement.

"It is said that violence is always a manifestation of power, and is unleashed by the selfish desire 'to be and to have more power' than the other. Violence breaks the balance of the fair and normal relationships of society, from the family to the State itself. Its perversity has no limits and generates injustice on the one hand, and violent response on the other.

Because of that the biblical prophets are so sensitive to the corruption brought about by power that engenders injustice and poverty (Amos 3:9ff; 5:7, 10-12; 8:4-6). Here, the government processes have become violent in themselves, affecting institutions, leaving the workers without pay, staining the environment, seeking the absolute control of processes and marginalizing the people from

even the right to be present to observe the legislative administration itself. What example of tolerance, of appreciation for others is the government showing when it openly attacks citizens making use of their constitutional and civil rights? Where is the moral strength of the State to seek to eradicate domestic violence when the government itself has become an aggressor of its own people?" says the statement.

The statement, signed by several Lutheran, Methodist and Baptist bishops and pastors, and other churches represented, concludes by making a call to the whole civil society with the purpose of continuing to organize itself to stand up for its democratic rights, "by means of a broad participation and the deepening of the social, economic and political discussion. This is a time to stand firmly and conscientiously. We pray that the God of Life transform the hearts of those who, in one way or another, hold power, so that they use it for the benefit of the poor and excluded and not against them."



Demonstrations in Puerto Rico (ALC)

Colombia: coffee, drugs and solidarity fatigue

Geneva, July 2, 2010 (WCC)

Solidarity fatigue is one of the main obstacles faced by Colombian civil society organizations struggling to find a resolution to the country's 40-year long internal armed conflict, an ecumenical gathering has been told. Participants also heard a renewed call to action. "For many, Colombia equals coffee and drugs," said Presbyterian theologian Milton Mejía. Those stereotypes are compounded by a decades-long internal armed conflict that "seems to be worsening constantly," Mejía added, the result being "a widespread loss of interest and fatigue."

According to Mejía, who coordinates the Observatory of Church and Society at the Reformed University of Barranquilla, this solidarity fatigue affects even international organizations towards which Colombians turn for support. As a consequence, Colombians face difficulties when trying to explain the extent and urgency of the humanitarian crisis in their country. However, Mejía made a plea for support to initiatives like the Ethical Truth Commission, aimed at protecting the rights and collective memory of the victims of state crimes. He also asked for the implementation of an accompaniment program modeled on the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine Israel.

Mejía spoke at a hearing session of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Global Ecumenical Network on Migration, which held its annual meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 24-30 June. The session focused on what ecumenical organizations in Colombia have labeled as the worst humanitarian crisis of the Americas and one of the most serious in the world.



El Árbol displaced Colombians shelter (Vanessa Kritzer LAWG)

According to government statistics, 3.2 million Colombians have been forced from their homes by the violence, but non-governmental organizations raise that figure to 4.6 million. In 2008 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees had estimated in 552,000 the number of Colombians seeking refuge in other countries. In a context where the internal armed conflict involves the military, rebel groups, drug-traffickers and paramilitaries, Colombian churches and ecumenical organizations label the country's situation as marked by an ethical crisis.

"There is an inversion of basic values in society," said Mejía. "A culture of lawlessness has been established; any means can be used to achieve goals; victims are portrayed as guilty and perpetrators made to look like heroes," he added. According to Mejía, the government's propaganda machine downplays the armed conflict for the benefit of business while it demonizes political opposition, human rights defenders and judges who investigate crimes by the paramilitary. "We are all labeled as sympathizers or advocates of terrorism - or useful idiots," said Mejía.

However, Mejía highlighted the fact that communities and social organizations "offer resistance to this logic and try to build alternatives." Even if "sometimes the dream of building a better future seems to be a nightmare," he added, "we keep working to achieve truth,

justice and reparations".

The WCC Global Ecumenical Network on Migration (GEM) will hold its 2011 meeting in Colombia. "It will be a concrete sign of solidarity with the churches and the affected population," said Sydia Nduna, WCC program executive for Migration and Social Justice, speaking on behalf of the GEM. According to Nduna, participants coming from abroad will have the opportunity to interact with the local churches. They will hold consultative and advocacy-focused meetings with government officials, church leaders and civil society organizations. A three-day public hearing on conflict situations worldwide will be followed by visits to camps of internally displaced people and refugee camps at the borders with Ecuador and Venezuela.

Between now and the GEM hearing and meeting next year in Colombia, added Nduna, it is expected that any WCC-led initiative on the country will take into account the humanitarian crisis and the migration perspective.

Among the ecumenical partners working together in Colombia are the WCC, the Latin American Council of Churches, ACT Alliance, the Colombian Ecumenical Network, the Inter-Church Commission on Justice and Peace, and the Latin American Network for Migration.

Source: World Council of Churches, WCC: <http://www.oikoumene.org/news-management/eng/article/1634/colombia-coffee-drugs-a.html>

Two religious minority parties in Costa Rica considered dangerous for democracy

San José, May 23, 2010 (ALC)

"The presence of parties that are clearly self-defined as being religious, in the Legislative Assembly of the Republic, is nonsense however it be examined," according to Professor Hugo Mora, of the University of Costa Rica, in an article published in the *La Nación* newspaper last week. According to the professor, the democratic institutions are in danger when religious fundamentalism infiltrates them, referring specifically to the participation of two minority parties led by two Protestant pastors in conflict, in the new Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica.

"Democracy is the result of a long political struggle, frequently bloody, against the aspirations of the religious hierarchies to retain power, exercised directly or in connivance with other political systems, as in the case of monarchies and dictatorships," says Mora in his article. "To arrive at the widespread conviction that sovereignty and political power in a nation originate in the popular will, and not in a supernatural entelechy, required a great qualitative leap in its moment; and continues to do so."

He affirms that religion can be a basis, "certainly debated," that forms individuals morally but not for assuming the leadership of a State, "not even to permeate its structures: religion is better served when it is limited to private confines, not when it meddles in the political life of the peoples and citizens. Examples abound, here, there and in all times... Likewise, it is disastrous, ominous, fatal to now have two pastors as representatives, invested with the power that the very



Department of Ecumenical Research, Costa Rica, DEI (DEI)

same laws give them, but operating with their own sectarian agenda, not for the benefit of the general community, but of minority groups, when the benefit of the general community should be attended to by parties that are free of religious virus."

In another part of his article, Mora considers this presence in the political sphere to be "a danger" for democracy, mentioning as examples the infiltrations of religious fundamentalism at the government decision-making levels, the United States, and "in a more evident way, the phenomenon presents itself in the Middle East, where the Jewish State is subjected to the demands and pressures of some small religious parties which, in addition, try to impose on the rest of the population customs and prejudices characteristic of other times." He adds that the same thing happens in most of the neighboring Muslim countries, where this fundamentalism "imposes on the politicians and the population beliefs and practices contrary to the most basic human rights."

"All told," the article concludes, "the majority parties, as well as the minority having agendas oriented toward serving the whole of Costa Rican society, should review their programs so as to make them attractive and inclusive for all. The risk they run for not doing that will be to lose voters in favor of minuscule opportunist political groupings, having an agenda of their own sectarian and divisive interests, corroding the necessary social cohesion based, above all, on civic values."

At People's Conference in Bolivia, Christians commit to help Mother Earth

Cochabamba, April 22, 2010 (WCC)

In an ecumenical declaration presented at the final session of the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, Christian organizations and individuals stressed the positive role that religions and spirituality can play for a more harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. The April 19-22 conference in Cochabamba is hosted by Bolivian president Evo Morales. Over 10,000 people are attending, according to media reports, many of them from indigenous peoples and environmental networks.

"Climate change is the product

of a human mentality which regards nature as an object of domination, exploitation and manipulation and the human being as its owner and the measure of all things," the ecumenical declaration states. Its signatories "recognize that a certain interpretation of the Judeo-Christian tradition has contributed to fostering this kind of anthropocentrism and merciless exploitation of nature, misinterpreting the responsibility of being a 'caretaker' and advocate for the creation, entrusted to humanity by the creator."

The declaration goes on to call for a new spirituality of respectful coexistence, to be forged in a dialogue among the peoples of the Earth. It is part of the contribution a coalition

of Christian organizations brought to the conference. The coalition also organized panels on religions - especially Christianity - and climate



World People's Conference on Climate Change, Cochabamba, Bolivia (The City Project WCC)

change and the presentation of recent publications on the topic. It includes the World Council of Churches (WCC) and its Bolivian

member churches as well as the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), and is coordinated by the Andean Ecumenical Higher Institute of Theology (ISEAT).

"The People's Conference was an opportunity to listen to those who will be most affected by climate change," said Dr Guillermo Kerber, WCC program executive on climate change. "The WCC sees it as an instrument to build a global consensus on climate change and put forward the perspective of actors who have not been heard enough in the United Nations negotiation process - such as the indigenous peoples."

Source: World Council of Churches, WCC: <http://www.oikoumene.org/>

“I learnt to hold on to values – justice, human dignity, non-violence, tolerance.” Growing up under Chilean dictatorship shaped General Secretary-elect’s vision for Lutheran World Federation

Growing up in Chile under the rule of a military dictatorship and suffering the resulting losses of freedom “profoundly shaped” the values of the General Secretary-elect of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). In an address to the LWF Eleventh Assembly on July 26, Rev. Martin Junge said that during his formative years, he “learnt to hold on to values – justice, human dignity, non-violence, and tolerance – which the political and social contexts were belying almost daily.”

August 1, 2010 (LWF)

Junge said that words from the pulpit affirmed these values in the people of his home church, inspired them to have hope, to develop “that evangelical stubbornness that leads to creative resistance,” and liberated in them the energy “to turn to their neighbors who were suffering from persecution, hunger, illness and from the loss of their rights.”

The story of his faith journey reveals that he understands the mission of the church holistically, the General Secretary-elect said. “I believe that proclamation, diakonia and prophetic presence in society (advocacy) belong intrinsically together. They all influence each other in a process of transformation.”

Illustrating this point he challenged the Assembly to ask what sense it would make to engage in advocacy, defending the rights of people, if at the same time the proclamation from Lutheran pulpits is the bad news that people are dirty sinners, worth nothing but harsh punishment.

“What sense would it make,” he added, “if we feed people in need through diakonia but build fences around the table of the Lord, making

it an exclusive event for a few? What sense would it make to proclaim the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ, who became one of us in order to show God’s solidarity and compassion, if this Gospel does not move us to solidarity with and compassion for others?”

There needs to be coherence, and also sound balance, between these three dimensions of holistic mission, Junge said. Achieving this coherence and balance “is going to be a task for the LWF in the years to come.”

Three key concepts as orientation points

He told the Assembly there were three aspects of the LWF’s nature that will be orientation points for his service as General Secretary. Firstly, there is the LWF’s polycentric nature, meaning that it does not have one center but many. “The LWF is globally present,” he said. Each member church brings something valuable to the table. “There is no church in this communion which doesn’t have something to give. There is no church in this communion which isn’t in need to receive.” He urged member churches to “circulate and share” their capacities, experience and knowledge.

A second concept is that of



The Rev. Martin Junge (LWF D. M. Gröttsch)

transcontextual dialogue. Junge said that this term expresses the idea that, while the human race is increasingly interconnected through various forms of media, it has not learned how to live as neighbors. Churches need to be “contextual,” he said, “responding to conversations, challenges, needs and questions, which are identified locally.”

This sort of active engagement with and contribution to “the wider questions of our neighborhood” is also an excellent entry point for inter-religious conversation, with a particular emphasis on diapraxis, he said.

Inclusiveness is the last concept that “will shape the way” in which he will serve the communion, Junge said. Noting that advances have been made over the years to more actively and intentionally include women and youth in the life and decision-making processes of the LWF, he said that “there is homework left for us.”

“We have quotas but often we have difficulties reaching them,” he said, noting that decisions made in an Assembly might not be enacted

locally. But even if quotas are reached, this is not sufficient, he said. Reaching quotas “might ensure presence, but not necessarily participation.”

The LWF needs to be transformed by the power that women and youth bring to the global communion, the General Secretary-elect said. “It is time for us men to get involved in making our churches and the communion more inclusive.”

“Grace always finds its way to the neighbor”

Junge stressed that grace has two dimensions – vertical and horizontal. The vertical dimension is grace coming to us as a gift from God, “similar to the rising sun.” The horizontal dimension of grace compels us to serve others. “Grace doesn’t live enshrined in individual lives,” the General Secretary-elect said. “Grace will always find its way to the neighbor. A self-confined grace, a grace that is egoistically stocked and jealously fenced from others, will vanish like the manna in the desert.”

“There is an economic order that is absolutely unfair, unjust and a deep expression of sin, depriving millions of human beings of their rights and even their lives.” Citing hunger, child soldiers, HIV and climate change as just some of the world’s sorrows the LWF is called to address, Junge said that the sorts of change required to care for our neighbors is “of a deeply spiritual nature.”

We Lutherans hold to this theological emphasis on grace, as revealed in Jesus Christ, in the incarnation, he said. “Jesus Christ came right into the midst of this world . . . and we are caught by God’s movement towards the world.” Because God through Jesus Christ gives such a strong witness to God’s love for the world, “we too understand that we are called to not only live in this world, but also to love it and to love our neighbor.”

Reformation belongs to entire Body of Christ

The General Secretary-elect foreshadowed that he will be proposing that the LWF should hold its next Assembly in 2017, thus making it an event marking the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. “The LWF needs to mark this anniversary,” he said, adding that it needs to be an ecumenical event. “The Lutheran Reformation is not the exclusive property of Lutheran churches. It belongs to many other churches.” It is meant to be a contribution to the entire Body of Christ, and that is the way we should be commemorating it, he said.

Source: Lutheran World Federation, LWF: <http://www.lwf-assembly.org/experience/lwf-assembly-news/news-detail/article/600/8/>

Nerva Cot Aguilera, Latin America’s first Anglican woman bishop, dies at 71

Havana, July 11, 2010 (ENS)

Retired Suffragan Bishop of the Episcopal Church of Cuba Nerva Cot Aguilera died suddenly on July 10 after a brief battle with severe anemia. She was 71. Cot became the first female Anglican bishop in Latin America when she was consecrated in Havana’s Holy Trinity Cathedral in June 2007.

Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori said she is “deeply saddened” by Cot’s death. “She was a friend and colleague, and I know the church in Cuba will miss the gifts she offered, even in retirement,” said Jefferts Schori.

“She provided good leadership in the Episcopal Church of Cuba as they began to explore the possibilities of a second diocese. This Episcopal Church holds her, her family, and her colleagues, in our prayers.”

Cot was selected as bishop suffragan in February 2007 by the Metropolitan Council that provides oversight to the Cuban church and on which Jefferts Schori serves. As bishop suffragan, Cot was responsible for the churches in western Cuba. Cot previously worked as a secondary school teacher and was one of the first three Episcopal women priests ordained in Cuba in 1987.

Her daughter, Marianela de la Paz Cot, was ordained in February 2007, and her husband, the Very Rev. Juan Ramon de la

Paz Cerezo, is dean of Holy Trinity Cathedral in Havana. Another son is a priest and another daughter is a church administrator. The funeral was held July 11 at the cathedral in Havana.

Source: Episcopal News Service, ENS: http://www.episcopalchurch.org/79425_123406_ENG_HTML.htm



Cot, Nerva (ALC)

Proposed legislative bill seeks to penalize religious abuses and manipulations in Colombia

By William Delgado (ALC)

“The person who using a sect, congregation or religious doctrine perturbs, affects or deteriorates the behavior of its followers by partially or definitively removing them from their social, cultural, economic or family environment, by creating an addiction or servitude to the preacher or to the sect, congregation or church itself, will incur in a prison sentence of four (4) to eight (8) years,” reads the text of one of two articles that Colombian Congressman Pablo Enrique Salamanca seeks to have added to the Colombian Penal Code. The other article, which determines the “Circumstances of punitive aggravation,” points out that: “The person who, besides the previous conduct, persuades, deceives or constrains another to give to the same sect, church or congregation money, personal belongings and properties will incur in a prison sentence of six (6) to twelve (12) years. The sect or religious congregation that incurs in the charges foreseen in the two previous arti-

cles will be subject to the loss of dominion in favor of the persons affected.”

“The State cannot remain impassive in the face of the repeated and multiple abuses of which thousands of Colombians have been victims by imposters who, presenting themselves as pastors, authorities or spiritual counselors and abusing the apparent intellectual frailties, manipulate persons, swindling them of their belongings, disguising them, and removing them from their family, social, cultural and economic environment,” said Congressman Salamanca. “These repugnant abuses of manipulation do not exclude Christian religious congregations, Catholic, or the like; some sects impose on their followers certain behaviors that go against the free development of the personality, forcing them to assume a certain position with regard to the world, and they even negatively intervene in their manner of dress, feeding, and their sexuality also,” added Salamanca.

IV Americas Social Forum gathers in Asunción, Paraguay, August 11-15

Asuncion, August 9, 2010 (Foro Social Américas)

The first decade of the 21st century marked a unique period of transformations in the Americas. Ours is a continent in turmoil, where new types of resistances and revolutions come together in the quest for a new society, and at the same time, continue to be deeply-rooted in our traditions, in the sovereign construction of common life projects which leave behind the capitalist exploitation, colonial and imperialist domination, patriarchal and racist violence, wars, destruction of peoples and cultures, and predation of nature.

These are times of historical synthesis, where transformation projects can only be seen from a point of view of multiple dynamics and leaders from the past and the present, who have contributed to build collective experiences in the midst of injustice, and who have been frequently rendered invisible or underestimated. Radical challenges lead us to connect these times with facts which have been ongoing for centuries. This long-term duration can also be detected in the continuous existence, in spite of it all, of economies and cultures from/to peoples and life; it is also present in our intense colonial and imperialist heritage, full of induced conflicts which are revived at convenience from time to time, to affect the will of integration of peoples, transcending times and borders, to show itself strengthened in these times where we rememorize the bicentennial of uncompleted independences.

During this decade, the World Social Forum and Americas Social Forum, as a space gathering and fostering ideological and movement struggles, has contributed to strengthen Latin American identity as a melting pot of diversities, to articulate advances aligned by a multiplicity of actors with a common destination. In brief, we have come a long way since the neoliberal threat of ALCA and its defeat, the

relaunch of FTAs and other neoliberal tools, to reach vision and policy innovations falling under the concept of 'Buen Vivir' (good living), food sovereignty and other types of sovereignty -economic, energetic, financial, UNASUR, ALBA. It has also contributed to integrate movements of the North to our continental transformation, a process never seen before.

These changes make their way in the midst of a political acceleration modifying scenarios like never before. Only during the short time separating the third Americas Social Forum from the fourth edition - 2008 to 2010, new coincident facts transform the scenario: the outbreak of the crisis and the announcement of recovery or a way out led by the spokesmen of capital - which will not hide its comprehensive, systemic, civilizatory nature; the end of the "Bush era" with its resulting expectations and early disappointments marked by the continuity of militarist policies to preserve political hegemony in the line of armed neoliberalism; the unexpected coup d'état in Honduras -which generated repudiation all around the world; and the resistance of peoples who search for a true democracy based on a constitutional overhaul, encouraged by Latin American experiences and solidarity throughout the world.

Within this framework, the IV ASF takes place in Asuncion, Paraguay, from August 11 to August 15, 2010. From the dynamism of our reality and hand in hand with the protagonists, we anticipate the confluence of a range of issues and topics: the memory and fundamental presence of indigenous peoples of the Southern cone together with peoples coming from around the continent, the peasant force in the definition of new alternatives of life for all of us, escalating remilitarization, the struggles expressing the urgency of other production and life schemes to overcome the extractivist model; our experiences in the crisis and visions on its outputs, the inter-

relation and conflicts between movements and governments in the construction of change, new proposals coming from the youth, urban cultures, and much more.

Paraguay hosts the IV Americas Social Forum, an opportunity to update and deepen common visions and agenda of the struggles led by our continent; opening up to an exchange modifying the little knowledge the world has on the amazing history and reality, already marked by change. The Southern Cone, from its diversity and solidarity between peoples and movements, becomes the headquarters for this IV Americas Social Forum. The organization of the IV Forum at its continental level has been ongoing up until August 2010, where specific meetings take place as part of the preparation process, with several initiatives of deliberation, mobilization, solidarity, and resistance that are already registered in the vast calendar of actions of movements and entities which are part of the process, and that will converge in the collective construction of the programming of the Forum, from its continuities, innovations, and strengthening.

Main Themes IV FSA

1. Scope and Challenges of the Changes in the Hemisphere: post-neoliberalism, integration, socialisms, Good Living and civilizational changes
2. Militarization and imperial domination strategies, resistance alternatives from the peoples
3. Defending and transforming the conditions and ways of life in the face of predatory capitalism
4. The ideological dispute: communication, culture, knowledge and education.
5. Original, Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples and Nationalities: the challenge of plurinationality
6. Memory and historical justice

Source: Foro Social Américas, FSA: <http://www.forosocialamericas.org/>



Logo, Americas Social Forum. (FSA)

IV Americas Social Forum ends with three presidents present

With a unanimous shout of "Our America is on its way!" in reply, the IV Americas Social Forum ended on August 15, after having taken place in Asunción, Paraguay since August 11.

By José Aurelio Paz (ALC)
Asuncion, August 18, 2010

The presence of Presidents José Mujica of Uruguay and Evo Morales of Bolivia, along with host President Fernando Lugo of Paraguay, left the gathering with a feeling that there is a great reservoir

of new ideas in the integration of Latin America, in which the peoples are participants.

At the closing event a declaration of the social movements present was read by the organizers, which begins by expressing its solidarity with the new Paraguayan process that is advancing with "deep

changes, toward the recovering of the sovereignty of its territory, common goods, energy resources, in the thrust of the Agrarian Reform and the democratization of its wealth."

The declaration then expressed that in the last decades there has taken place on the continent a reuniting of the social movements and the indigenous peoples in the struggle against capitalism. "Over the last years the renewed social struggles have led to the exit of

Human Rights in Honduras:

Where time, a year after the coup, has not quenched the thirst for justice

Tegucigalpa, June 30, 2010
(ALC)

Despite a year having passed, on June 28 thousands of Hondurans marched under a strong military and police presence, in order to show to the world that the thirst for justice has not been quenched, following the June 28, 2009 coup d'état. The resistance marched for over three hours from Coloma to San Pedro de Sula, with some 3,000 members of the National Front of Popular Resistance (FNRP) who blocked the bridge over the Blanquito River, in Choloma, in protest against the violation of human rights that the current government has carried out during the past year, and in demand of a national Constituent Assembly.

The national newspaper, El Tiempo, gave preference on its front page to the headline, "On 28/6 a calvary began: Pepe Lobo," while the international press mentioned the difficult situation that continues a year after the coup. For his part, former president Manuel Zelaya continues denouncing the North Americans as being the principal unseen actors of his deposition and of the tragedy in which the people of Honduras have been sunk.

The purpose of Monday's march was to reach the House of Government, but the police did not allow the demonstrators to get close. Trucks full of military troops arrived at the points of gathering where the worker's unions and the public in general were concentrated, in order to intimidate those who were shouting slogans against the current administration of Porfirio Lobo and the violation of human rights in the country, in addition to the murders of eight journalists in just two months.

Even though Monday was the height of the popular demonstrations, marches, vigils and blockades of highways had begun since last weekend, among other actions seeking to demonstrate that the Honduran people continue to fight for a true democracy. In the meanwhile, the Platform of Human Rights has announced that it will

install a Truth Commission to act as a parallel model to the one set-up by the Government and the Organization of American States (OAS), which has done nothing up until the present time to discover and reveal the authentic reality of what is happening in the country.

It has been announced that the new Truth Commission will be made up of significant personalities like the Argentineans Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Nobel Peace Prize recipient, and Nora Cortiñas, leader of the Mothers of the May Square-Foundation Line; in addition to Luis Carlos Nieto of Spain; Mirna Perla, of El Salvador; Craig Scott, of Canada; Elsie Monge, of Ecuador; François Houtart, of Belgium; the Costa Rican Francisco Aguilar and the Hondurans Helen Umaña and Fausto Milla.

Hundreds of members of Zelaya's Liberal Party also converged with the demonstrators in the march. The former president's followers joined in denouncing the violations and demanded the return of Zelaya, along with a Constituent Assembly. Carlos Reina, of the Resistance, said that they are moving forward with the collecting of a million signatures to request the reforming of the nation's Carta Magna. For his part, Zelaya, exiled in the Dominican Republic, again denounced the United States as being principally responsible for the coup, affirming that it had been planned in the Palmerola military base by the Southern Command, and "clumsily executed by the bad Hondurans," according to a letter distributed to various news media.

The spokesperson for the State Department Office for the Western Hemisphere, Virginia Staab, responded to the affirmation, denying the accusations that Washington was involved in the political phenomenon that has brought Honduras to the current crisis, but Zelaya insisted that, "If the United States were not dictating the guidelines to the coup sectors, we would already have achieved reconciliation."



National Front of Popular Resistance demonstration, Honduras (Honduras Resists)

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Despite everything, we have the ability to change the reality, and that is hope: Interview with Nobel Peace Prize laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel

By Paolo Moiola
Buenos Aires, May 8, 2010

The 1980 Nobel Peace Prize Winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel has his views clear. War, peace, economics, government, he sees without ambiguities. Born in Buenos Aires in 1931, this professor of architecture, painting and sculpture was honored by the Norwegian Nobel Committee for his work defending human rights during the 1976-83 dictatorship in Argentina. Latinamerica Press collaborator Paolo Moiola spoke with Pérez Esquivel about his work 30 years later and his unshakable faith in another kind of world.

You fought for human rights during the dictatorship. What is the situation like today?

Human rights are not just those that we fight for during a dictatorship. There are also economic, social and cultural rights. There are educational and labor rights, the right to inform oneself and to be informed. There are those dubbed "third generation" rights, in which is included the right to a [healthy] environment. As a whole, human rights are integral and indivisible, just as democracy is inseparable from human rights.

Everyone speaks about human rights, but people see the issue differently.

It's true. There are governments that have signed but not ratified [international] agreements. For example, the United States has still not ratified the [UN] Convention on the Rights of the Child. How could it be that a great power that says it defends democracy opposes that? This goes far beyond the personal will of [US President Barack] Obama. It's the policy of the United States that imposes its will on the rest of the planet, but all of that could end because no society is static, just like human rights, which are permanently dynamic in life. A declaration is not just words. It's a dynamic in society and in people's consciences. I think that in the next few

years we're going to see fundamental changes. Today there is a void of values ... but we shouldn't give up hope.

You were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, just like Obama. What do think about his receiving this award?

I was surprised, but I sent him a congratulatory note. I wrote Obama that I was surprised about his designation, but that now, with the Nobel Peace, he should be coherent, working and fighting for peace. But sadly, Obama has suffered a metamorphosis. Each day he mimics more [ex-President] George W. Bush. It cannot be that he puts in seven military bases in Colombia, that he agrees with the reactivation of the United States Fourth Fleet of the Navy [which operates in the south Atlantic], that he sends 30,000 soldiers to Afghanistan to a lost war, adding death and pain to those people's lives, and those of US and NATO soldiers that come home dead or incurable. Those are wars of rich countries against poor countries. They are economic wars or for the appropriation of natural resources. If this is the US and Obama's policy, it has nothing to do with peace. I think peace is something else. Peace is a lifelong project; and Obama's project is one of death.

Nevertheless, Obama's election generated a lot of hope, above all, outside the United States.

I think Obama has reached the government but not power. It's one thing what Obama wants as a person and another what he can do as the head of a power that imposes the conditions. He's a slave of some concentrations of power: the US military-industrial complex, the Pentagon, the CIA, the large multinational corporations.

You insist that multinationals have a large role in the global situation.

Multinationals don't have borders and they move about the world to take resources away from the people. The United Nations has sounded



Nobel Peace Prize laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel. (Davide Casali Latinamerica Press)

the alarm about food sovereignty. According to the [United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization] FAO, 35,000 children die of hunger every day. What is that? That is the challenge we must face. [Some] big multinationals work with monoculture. But nature never created monoculture, but instead diversity to create equilibrium. They are destroying a creation of God. Only sowing the seed of solidarity and work can we have peace and life.

You are a Christian rebel...

Yes, I do have a Christian base, which for me is fundamental. My source [of inspiration] is the gospel. I grew up with the Franciscans and I follow that spirituality like that of blessed Charles de Foucauld of France.

It's often said that the [Catholic] Church always stands with who's in power. Do you agree with that?

No, not the church, but its hierarchy and not even all of it. Look at the walls of this office. There is Evaristo Arns, bishop of São Paulo. Here is a photo of Mons. [Enrique] Angelelli, a martyr, killed during the [Argentine] military dictatorship. I think about a figure like Mons. [Óscar] Romero. I am a man of

meditation and prayer. For me, one's actions should be transcendent at its core. There are values and principles. Every person is a brother or a sister, even if they are my enemy. When it's said "love your enemy," what is it saying? Not to do damage to them, but try to transform their heart. I am a survivor and the only thing that got me through those moments was my faith. After 32 days in a filthy dungeon [without any light], they opened the door and I saw that on the wall, a prisoner had written with his own blood: "God does not kill." That is a profound testament of faith.

What was prison like during the dictatorship?

I was in prison for 14 months and afterward I was freed but watched. On May 5, 1977, they detained me [in Buenos Aires], put me in chains and put me on a death plane that flew some hours over Rio de la Plata and the sea. In the end, they decided not to throw me off because of strong international pressure. I have to thank God because I'm still here to work and tell that story. How could I not have faith? For me, faith is life.

Despite everything, you've always had faith.

Because, despite everything, we have the ability to change the reality, and that is hope.

As president of the International Academy of Environmental Sciences based in Venice, what did you think of the UN Climate Change talks in Copenhagen?

I think the only thing that Copenhagen showed was that nothing was approved. People understood that it is a war between impoverished countries and rich countries, which want to take away their resources, and that's why they send in their armies, their multinational forces, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank. That is tragic. Through the Academy of Environmental Sciences, we've proposed the creation of an international criminal court for the environment and an international environmental observatory for multinational companies who are the main ones responsible for the destruction of the environment. Mining and soy farming companies come to mind, contaminating companies from the North are sent to Latin America, Africa and Asia. They are the ones who appropriate the seeds and if a campesino uses it, they accuse him of being a criminal.

Where do you see hope?

In the Latin American campesino movement, which is spreading to Africa and Asia, trying to establish South-South links. These campesinos want land so they can work it, not to exploit it; to create life, not for death. Unlike the multinationals, which are destroying it to make more money in less time. Another thing to watch is the indigenous movement, which is recovering its [collective] memory and language and is organizing. Also important are the women's movements, which are advancing in all fields with their sensibilities, their distinct way of seeing things.

Source: <http://www.lapress.org/articles.asp?art=6126>

IV Americas Social Forum...

From page 8

neoliberal governments and the emergence of governments that have carried out positive reforms, such as the nationalization of vital sectors of the economy and of transforming constitutional definitions. But the right on the continent is rapidly connecting itself, to stop any process of change, and continues acting from its political, economic, media, and judicial enclaves," denounces the declaration.

Likewise, the declaration speaks of an offensive on the part of an integrating strategy ("integralismo"), including the military, with the coup d'etat in Honduras, the increase of the U.S. American military presence

in the region through agreements for enclaves of military bases, with the Fourth Fleet included, as "a systematic effort at destabilizing democracy on the continent."

"We denounce the ineffectiveness of the de facto President of Honduras, Porfirio Lobo. At the same time we recognize the resistance of the people and we support their struggle for a constitutional restitution that establishes a true democracy... We are in solidarity with the struggle of the people of Haiti that do not need a military intervention neither an economic occupation for their reconstruction."

The declaration also demands that the debt be unconditionally annulled, thus rejecting the new

"illegitimate re-indebtedness" of that nation, while at the same time condemning the wave of Free Trade agreements in all their versions, the desire to perpetuate "the same exploiting, excluding and depredatory primary model, causing displacements and migrations; the current systemic crisis demonstrates the exhaustion of the capitalist model and, more specifically, of its center of power: the banks, the transnational corporations and the governments of the Group of Eight; today more than ever their intentions of drawing the whole world to a limit, including, to have the threat of a nuclear war on the part of the United States, are visible."

The first of the three presidents

present to speak was José Mujica of Uruguay, who spoke of fighting for multiple democratic models as long as "there are multiple peoples, with multiple races, religions and multiple ways of thinking, and the true struggle is to learn how to live without attacking others, because freedom cannot be at heads with diversity." He concluded by saying that the road ahead is long, as is it the commitment and the hope.

Evo Morales, of Bolivia, referred to the importance of the forum, describing it as being a great school: "School for us, for you, but, fundamentally, above all, a great ideological, cultural, and programmatic lesson for the new generations."

In turn, the Paraguayan leader,

Fernando Lugo, spoke of "not losing the horizon of the light that intoxicates us," in reference to the new process of democratization in Latin America. With regard to the IV Americas Social Forum, he described it as being a facilitating process for Latin American unity in the search for the "big homeland, of our homeland that seemed to be a frustrated dream nearly two centuries ago and which today is in progress, here and now." He expressed gratitude on behalf of the Paraguayan people for "this manifestation of deep solidarity. The presence of all of you is the force of all us to follow the irreversible road of change."

Missionary Indigenous Council (CIMI) Report points to omission of the State in the support of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil

Brasilia, July 14, 2010 (ALC)

The Missionary Indigenous Council (CIMI), a body linked to the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB), made known the central points of the 2009 report about violence against indigenous peoples, indicating that in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul (MS), 54% of the murders of indigenous people in the country took place. Of the 60 cases reported last year in the country, 33 took place in that state. In addition to that macabre fact, the government led other forms of violence and disregard through omission in the conflicts over land and violence, in which agricultural business and large scale land holdings - with the support of the rural



land holders and of the State - and the indigenous peoples, as victims, are opposed to each other.

The reports published over the last five years indicate flagrant differences in relation to the other states. The accusations provoked such a repercussion in the Brazilian and international press that the CIMI Council led by President Dom Erwin Kräutler, and the General Secretary of the CNBB, Dom Dimas Lara Barbosa, visited Guarani Kaiowá communities in March of this year. The purpose was to know firsthand their reality and demonstrate the support of the Catholic Church to

those people groups.

The racism against the indigenous population in MS is institutional, said investigator Tatiana Bonin, who holds a Doctorate in Education from the Federal University do Rio Grande do Sul. Her investigation relates the strategies of confinement of the 1920s with the current invasions of lands, threats and crimes practiced by large proprietors against the Guarani Kaiowá, which "today make up the largest ethnic group in the country, and also that on which have fallen most greatly the effects of a model of occupation and exploration of lands

for agricultural business."

The report shows a growing process of criminalizing leaders and an increase in actions against indigenous peoples in different states of the country. In the case of the Tupinambá, five natives of the Serra do Padeiro, in the municipality of Buerarema, were captured by the Federal Police, handcuffed, immobilized in the jail and later attacked with pepper gas and electrical shocks in the dorsal and genital body areas. The purpose of the abuses was to intimidate them so that they would leave the land that they occupy. In the same way, 35 Xukuru

leaders, of Pernambuco, were processed for various crimes related to their struggle for the recognition of their territory.

Violence and environmental damages are also noted in the report, such as the lack of a demarcation of the indigenous lands and of conflicts around hydroelectric projects, ecotourism, gas pipelines, mineral exploration, railroads and waterways. Those projects impact indigenous territories and affect the lives of various peoples, including those who live in voluntary isolation.

Peace and Hope welcomes new law of consultation of Indigenous Peoples in Peru

By Víctor Liza Jaramillo
Lima, May 26, 2010 (ALC)

Following the approval of the Law of the Right to Previous Consultation of Indigenous Peoples on May 19, the Peace and Hope Association expressed its agreement with this decision by the Peruvian Legislative Power that is in accordance with Agreement 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO). Through an official statement, the institution which is a defender of human rights recognizes that this new norm "is perfectible," and that at the same time "it constitutes a great advance along the long road in pro of the inclusion of the Indigenous Peoples" in the decisions that the State makes with regard to those measures that could affect the rights of the first peoples.

Peace and Hope also expresses its recognition of the Andean and Amazon organizations, "which amid numerous obstacles have made the approval of this law possible," and highlights "the organizational capacity, spirit of dialogue and political maturity" in their struggle for their vindications and rights. The association also believes that this fact should encourage the citizens of Peru to work "not only so that

the rights of the communities and excluded peoples are recognized by the State," but that they should also bring about "a great educational and awareness-raising crusade so as to create a culture of respect for differences and social inclusion in our society."

Apart from that, the statement expresses that "the true development and sustainability of the country will only be possible if we are capable of building a society without exclusions, where justice and truth are embraced every day." Finally, Peace and Hope reaffirms its commitment to continue accompanying all excluded groups "that dream of a country not only economically prosperous, but also with sustainable ethical foundations."

On May 19, the Congress approved this law with 62 votes in favor, 7 against, and 6 abstentions. Prior to the approval of the law, one of the articles that caused controversy among the legislators was modified so as to incorporate the "consent" between the State and the indigenous communities in regard to the measures that affect them directly, as established in Agreement 169 of the ILO. In the same article, the last paragraph that indicated that the communities were not entitled to the right to veto of any law, was eliminated.

Lawmakers in Bolivia vote for Indigenous Justice

La Paz, June 14, 2010
(Latinamerica Press)

Lawmakers in Bolivia's lower House of Congress on June 8 approved a new law to require the state to recognize indigenous communities' justice systems and customs. The bill now goes to the Senate, where the ruling Movement to Socialism party, which strongly supported the bill, has a two-thirds majority. The recognition of indigenous justice follows the line of the newly-implemented Constitution, which declared Bolivia a plurinational state.

But opposition lawmakers and officials argue that the measure could lead to violence and mob law, in the wake of several lynchings that they say will be sanctioned by the government if the law is definitively passed. Members of an indigenous community in the Potosi province in late May said they lynched four police officers for allegedly accepting bribes so that cars from neighboring Chile could pass through

the area. Opposition lawmakers held up a sign that said "Stop the cruel killings in the name of native justice," local media reported. Two weeks after the police officers were killed a 51-year-old man in the same region was lynched, who had been accused of raping a woman and of theft.

But while far from the norm, these violent cases have opened a debate on indigenous justice and whether the state should regulate it. The foundation of Rigoberta Menchú Tum, an indigenous leader and winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize, said that in Guatemala, her native country where some 40 percent of the population is indigenous and engaged in a constant struggle for their customs to be recognized by the state, violent acts such as these "are a product of desperation of the communities' that have been abandoned by the state." Communities in Ecuador and Peru have also long fought for their native customs and justice to be recognized by the state.

Activists demonstrate at Forum of Latin American and Caribbean Environment Ministers in Panama, rejecting mining and hydroelectric projects



XVII Forum of Environment Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean, Panama (ALC)

By Julio A. Carles
Panama City, May 3, 2010
(ALC)

The inauguration of the XVII Forum of Environment Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean in Panama City included a surprise: a group of environmental activists took advantage of a press conference organized by the General Administrator of Panama's National Environment Authority (ANAM), Javier Arias, to express its rejection of the mining and hydroelectric projects being developed in the country.

The demonstrators showed a poster and shouted slogans before the perplexed look of the ministers and officials of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). For about 15 minutes, the activists interrupted the protocol of the opening of the Forum. Just when Arias began speaking, the demonstrators got up, showing a poster, and shouting slogans against the Panamanian organization and the mining and hydroelectric projects. Perplexed, Arias was speechless for several minutes. Also surprised were

the UNEP Regional and Adjunct Directors, Margarita Astrálagua and Ángela Copper. "Mining = death, Panama without mines now," read the poster that was placed behind the local and international officials.

Arias attempted to restore order, but the shouts of the three activists who had broken through the protocol impeded it. "ANAM is not fulfilling its work, because it is allowing the construction of hydroelectric plants that cause damage to the protected areas," shouted the demonstrators, adding to the perplexity of many of those present at the forum. That organization, they added, should follow the example of other countries of Central America that are having the mining companies leave, as in the case of Costa Rica.

Arias tried to calm down the demonstrators, alleging that he respected their point of view but that they were being disrespectful to the UNEP representatives and the 24 environment ministers that were there. He added that, independently of the decision that the country takes with regard to the mining and

hydroelectric projects, ANAM's mission is to protect the environment and, at the same time, "find the most appropriate way for development, using the technology that is friendliest to the ecosystems."

For Lino Von Saenger, one of the activists, it was a peaceful protest. "The true wealth of Panama, now and in the future, is in its forests and rivers," he said. "Since the former government administration, Panama is being handed over to the short term interests of the mining industry, and this needs to stop," he warned.

On the other hand, an UNEP official commented on the need for the countries to carry out a study on the costs and benefits of the projects. However, she did not want to speak about the matter of mining in Panama, saying that each country is sovereign in the taking of its decisions. The environment ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean hope to be able to approve a document that seeks, among other things, to protect the biodiversity of the region.

Food security further undermined by climate disasters in El Salvador and neighboring countries

By Edgardo Ayala
San Salvador, June 16, 2010
(IPS)

Adverse climatic conditions and weather-related disasters are damaging crops in El Salvador and neighboring countries in Central America, aggravating the food vulnerability that the region already faces. In late 2009, for the first time ever, Guatemala was included on a worldwide list of countries in crisis requiring external assistance, compiled by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). In September and October of that year, the El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) climate phenomenon led to a shortage in rainfall throughout Central America, which negatively affected the planting of grain and bean crops in areas of Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, according to the FAO report. Then, in November, Hurricane Ida struck Central America, causing severe damage to agricultural infrastructure in parts of the region. In El Salvador, heavy rains left 198 people dead and 15,000 homeless, in addition to 239 million dollars in losses and damages.

"All of my efforts were destroyed. Only a small part of my corn crop was saved," Isidro Rivas, 48, a farmer in the village of Izcanal, 45 kilometers east of San Salvador, told IPS. The torrential rains unleashed by Hurricane Ida flooded his three

hectares of corn, sorghum, pepper and papaya crops.

El Salvador and Guatemala were battered by the force of nature once again in late May, this time by the passage of Tropical Storm Agatha. Losses in the agricultural sector have been estimated at six million dollars in El Salvador, according to official figures. However, the full economic impact of the storm has yet to be calculated, although it will be massive, stated Alexander Segovia, the technical secretary to the president of El Salvador. "Whether it is flooding or drought, extreme weather conditions always hurt agricultural yields, especially since approximately 60 percent of grain crops in El Salvador are grown on hillsides," Edgar Cruz of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) told IPS.

El Salvador, which never produces enough garden vegetable crops to fully meet domestic demand, will now have to increase its imports by 30 percent, according to estimates from the Salvadoran Chamber of Agriculture and Agribusiness (CAMAGRO), quoted in La Prensa Gráfica. CAMAGRO reported that at the beginning of the year, El Salvador imported six out of every 10 garden vegetables consumed in the country, but now, because of the damage caused by Agatha, it will have to import nine out of 10. This has already led to rising vegetable prices in the country's stores and markets.



Wake of Tropical Storm Agatha in Central America

"The most practical way of measuring the level of food security is by determining whether a country is self-sufficient in the production of a particular product, in other words, if it produces a sufficient amount to satisfy domestic consumption," said Cruz.

The outlook for agricultural production in the near future is not encouraging. An extremely active storm season is expected for both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, in accordance with the updated forecast released in early June by Colorado State University in the United States. The university's forecast team has predicted 18 tropical cyclones in the Atlantic and 12 in the Pacific over the coming months. Many small farmers do not have the means to recover from the damage wrought to their crops by heavy rainfall.

"I was really worried. Without a harvest you have no income, and with no income you go hungry," said Rivas, a father of five. His family was one of 3,136 in the central Salvadoran provinces of La Paz and La Libertad who received assistance from a FAO-sponsored program launched in December 2009. The aim of the program was to restore the means of survival for families who had lost everything to the torrential rains caused by Hurricane Ida, by providing them with the supplies needed to set up household gardens and chicken coops, as well as seeds to replant their bean crops.

For the household gardens, the program provided each family with 25 pounds of fertilizer, a hoe, shovel and spade, and enough radish and string-bean seeds to plant an area of 50 square meters. This component of

the program was coordinated by the National Center for Agricultural and Forestry Technology (CENTA), a government agency, which also distributed bean and cucumber seeds. Each family was also given 10 laying hens, one rooster, and the mesh netting needed to build a pen. In addition, one veterinary kit with vaccines and vitamins was provided for every 25 beneficiaries.

Most of the program beneficiaries in the village of Melara are women. Although they had raised poultry in the past, this was the first time they got fully involved in farming work. "I had never done it before. I had no idea how to plant a cucumber or a radish. I even got blisters on my hands from working the land so much," said Rosa Olivia Amaya, 28. Once they had chickens and vegetables, she said, they recovered from the worry that loomed over them after Hurricane Ida: what to feed their children.

But only months after harvesting their first crops, the farmers of Melara saw Tropical Storm Agatha destroy 50 square meters of cucumber plants - a small area of land compared to the total area of crops planted through the program, fortunately. The storm also destroyed 300 pounds of fertilizer, according to Luis Valladares, an agricultural engineer at CENTA.

Source: Inter Press Service News Agency, IPS:
<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=51829>

In the Gran Chaco, indigenous youth tracking their peoples' futures

August 17, 2010 (CWS)

In the remote Bolivian Gran Chaco countryside, a Guaraní teenager and an old man walk side by side through the dry brush, looking at the ground and the horizon, the boy taking notes to reconcile with a global positioning system (GPS) mapping project he has in progress. The teen is one of tomorrow's generation of indigenous leaders in the vast Gran Chaco region of South America, spanning parts of Bolivia, Argentina and Paraguay. He and other indigenous youth are now mapping out the future for their people and delineating their past, in part by using GPS technology to document their peoples' legal cases to reclaim their ancestral lands. Armed with their high-tech skills, the Chaco youth have still had to call on their elders to visit the lands with them and show them historical points to be mapped, bringing the two generations closer.

But GPS training is just the technology tip of a broader youth education initiative supported by humanitarian agency Church World Service in the Gran Chaco. Young men and women from Guaraní, Qom and other indigenous groups are gaining higher education opportunities, training in community development, and accessing technology rarely available to the region's marginalized groups. In Argentina, 18 indigenous teenagers have already become leaders in their communities after training in how to analyze community problems and develop projects to

solve them.

"We're nurturing leaders," said Martha Farnelo, CWS communications officer based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Farnelo recently led a group of supporters from the United States who met with indigenous students in the Argentine Chaco. "The indigenous communities of the Gran Chaco are depending on the new generation to protect their survival as a people, and to help continue struggles like cases to reclaim their ancestral lands that take a long time to realize," Farnelo said. "As part of our long-term Chaco initiative, an increasing number of young men and women are now completing high school, and many are going on to universities and vocational institutes—in some cases for the first time in the history of their communities."

As one indigenous Paraguayan student told a group of North American supporters, "We study for our indigenous community. Math is intimately linked to rights. Even when you read the law you have to understand the numbers in order to use that legal right. My diploma will belong to my community. I have to work to give it back to my community. I have to help."

Church World Service partner organizations in the Chaco initiative are helping provide and find other sources for scholarships and are securing safe housing arrangements for indigenous students, as they leave the familiarity of home for further education. In Paraguay, ten indigenous young people received the opportunity to attend university,

through six scholarships from a binational company and four from the Embassy of Venezuela to study in that country. In Argentina, one student graduated as a geography professor, another recently graduated as a lawyer and another as an economics professor. Two indigenous graduates of a law school in Bolivia now work for the Office of Indigenous Affairs of the Municipality of Villa Montes.

One group of Qom youth in Argentina says completing their education has raised their self-esteem and strengthened their cultural identity—and they're returning home, with training in nursing, law, and bilingual and primary education. Students in Castelli, Argentina, told a recent group of New England visitors why they're learning. "Today, we haven't quite arrived. Our communities are not OK. By studying, we hope to obtain what we want and the well being of all." "Through education we can know what our culture is and not lose our dialects," said another. "We'll be able to manage in both languages. Other peoples have lost their language. Only in the Chaco have communities held on to Qom, Wichi, Mocovi (languages)."

"In indigenous communities where unemployment, alcoholism and suicide rates among youth are especially high, initiatives like the Chaco program are not only giving young people encouragement, they're giving entire communities hope for the future," said CWS's Farnelo.

On the technology side, Church World Service's Chaco program,

launched in 2005, began providing GPS training for indigenous adults and youth to shore up land claims with detailed documentation. Teenagers are using GPS to refine maps of indigenous territories, marking land boundaries and indicating sites such as burial grounds. In Argentina, since the program began, 18,939 hectares have been digitally mapped in that country, which assists in land claims. Twenty-five Argentine youth are also now trained to use tools and instruments for the planning and management of the indigenous territories. One youth who trained in GPS and other informational technology was contracted by the government of the Chaco Province in Argentina to accompany an official in all of the indigenous communities he covered while evaluating possible irregularities in land allocations that may have slighted indigenous communities.

Last year the Argentine government signed an agreement to provide a donation of 140,000 pesos (about US\$37,000) to support the process for the indigenous Guaraní community of Vinalito to take possession of land they had been granted collective title to in 2008. Work is underway to secure potable water, basic housing and other services, and several families have already moved onto the lands.

Ten more young Bolivians also learned GPS last year, so they can participate in their peoples' demands for land access and defense of the territories' natural resources. In 2009 the Bolivian government took neces-

sary steps to prepare the transfer of title for 10,000 hectares to local indigenous communities. Indigenous legal advocates participated by monitoring the government's work and ensuring that it was carried out successfully. The Ministry of Land signed an agreement dedicating the necessary resources for carrying out similar work in additional lands marked for these communities.

In Paraguay, indigenous groups received two favorable rulings on their right to their ancestral lands from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. However, the government has yet to comply, meaning two decades of advocacy must still continue.

Across Chaco's tri-national expanse, the Church World Service supported indigenous youth initiative is being supported and implemented through a collaboration between CWS, strong local partner organizations like the Center for Regional Studies of Tarija, the Committee of Churches for Emergency Assistance, the Pastoral Team for Ministry with Indigenous Peoples, the Foundation for Development in Justice and Peace, and the United Board of Missions Ecumenical Group, and with funding from the public sector and secular and faith-based sources such as the Presbyterian Hunger Program and United Methodist Committee on Relief.

Source: Church World Service, CWS:
http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=9853&news_iv_ctri=1361

2010 Interfaith Statement: A Time for Inspired Leadership and Action

We, 80 senior leaders of the world's religions and faith-based organizations together with 13 youth delegates, from more than 20 countries representing Aboriginal, Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Shinto, and Sikh religious traditions, have convened in Winnipeg, Manitoba on the eve of Canada hosting expanded global summits.

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This September, we approach the two-thirds point for the deadline to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals—eight goals that, if achieved, would bring hope to millions and be a major step toward a more sustainable global future.

In the spirit of continuity and persistence, we carry forward important work begun in annual gatherings of religious leaders during earlier G8 summits.

Acknowledging our common humanity and embracing the imperative to treat all persons with dignity, we affirm that no one person is more or less valuable than another. We urge the political leaders to consider first the vulnerable among us, particularly our children, and to work together to address the dehumanizing scourge of poverty and injustice, and practice and promote care for our common environment, the Earth.

In our diverse faith traditions we have rich histories and powerful dreams for ending poverty, caring for the Earth and being peace-builders. We acknowledge our own shortcomings and inadequacies, we commit to continuing these life-giving actions in the service of the common good. While recognizing efforts already made to address many of these challenges, we expect government representatives to set aside short-term agendas and work together for a future that allows all people on this planet to thrive.

Military power and economic dominance are the basis for inclusion in a G8 and G20 global leaders' summit. The voices of the other 172 members of the United Nations are absent. In our faith traditions, we strive to listen to the weak and the vulnerable. Their voices must be included in decisions that affect them and all of us. At the summits in 2010, we expect leaders to put first the well-being of the majority of the world's population, of future generations and of the Earth itself. From our shared values we call on leaders to take courageous and concrete actions:

—to meet the immediate needs of the most vulnerable while simultaneously making structural changes to close the unacceptable growing gap between rich and poor;

—to prioritize long-term environmental sustainability and halt the harmful acceleration of climate change caused by us, while addressing its impacts on the poor; and

—to work for peace and remove factors that feed cycles of violent conflict and costly militarism.

Address Poverty

Almost half the people on this planet live in poverty and insecurity in terms of the fundamental requirements for life with dignity. The most affected are women and children, indigenous peoples and people with disabilities. A record one billion people are now chronically hungry — one in seven does not have the food needed for basic life. All this is happening in the context of a growing gap between the rich and poor, worsened by current undemocratic economic and governance systems.

The magnitude of poverty would be overwhelming were it not for the knowledge that this global inequity can be transformed into a shared life of human flourishing for all. Together, we have the capacity and the global resources to end extreme poverty and its impacts. In the past 18 years, a combination of health interventions and decreasing poverty levels resulted in a 28% reduction in global under-five mortality rates — from 90 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 65 deaths per 1,000 in 2008. Change is possible.

A common tenet in faith traditions is that we should treat others as we would have them treat us. This “golden rule” is a basic human principle that cuts across cultures and faith traditions, and calls us to a collective standard of mutual care.

Poverty is frequently the result of food, energy and economic crises originating in wealthier sectors of society. It is also the consequence of the culture of greed, corruption, conflict, and over-consumption. Poverty is local and international. The suffering of anyone is of concern to us all.

In 2010, we expect inspired leadership and actions to address poverty!

—Wealthy countries must do their share: take all necessary steps to achieve the Millennium Development Goals; invest 0.7 % of Gross National Income in development assistance in a transparent and accountable manner; cancel debts of poor countries without regressive conditions; halt capital flight from poor countries to wealthy countries; hinder the free flow of speculative money, maintain business and labor ethics, foster conditions for the development of small business, ensure workers earn living wages and receive decent treatment; and make poverty reduction a priority in trade and international financial negotiations.

—All countries must do their part: educate girl children to high

school level as one of the most effective development interventions; practice good governance; combat corruption, and put in place poverty reduction policies that ensure everyone has access to basic rights such as nutritious food, safe water, health care, education and economic opportunity.

Care for the Earth

All our faith traditions call us to careful stewardship of the Earth. Climate change has become an urgent manifestation of our collective abuse of the very environment that sustains the fullness of life. We see the consequences in melting ice-caps and rising sea levels, lost habitats for threatened animal and plant species, and erratic weather that threaten the lives of millions.

As scientists discover new accelerators of climate and ocean change and note the compression of time available to avoid irreparable damage, it is clear that bold action is needed now. We must move beyond short-term political interests and arguments over who pays. In our indivisible planet we all pay — and future generations will pay dearly — if we continue to delay decisive action now.

The Earth, our home, is a gift from the Creator. Our faith traditions call us to relationships of mutual care and nurture between people and ecosystems. Faith communities see the environment through a lens of life on the planet as a unified whole, not unlike the cells of a body, infinitely differentiated in form and function yet deeply interdependent. In this framework, industrialized countries have caused a disproportionate amount of environmental damage. The strategy of promoting endless development and high consumption lifestyles must be challenged.

The roots of this crisis are spiritual and moral. Consequently, we need a renewed eco-ethic that restores right relations between North and South by generating new economic paradigms and policies that are compatible with the Earth's regenerative abilities and by promoting just distribution of resources. The need for a new generation of rights related to ecology is becoming apparent. As faith communities, we must move to action-oriented results, networking, and building morally sustainable communities.

In 2010, we expect inspired leadership and actions that care for the Earth!

—Wealthier countries must come to a more profound understanding of the interdependence of life and take courageous steps needed to care for the planet. In the realm of climate change, concrete plans must be implemented to ensure global average temperatures do not exceed a 2° Centigrade increase from pre-industrial levels.

—In developing countries, the challenge is complex since growth,

poverty reduction and environmental stewardship must journey together. This requires innovative leadership in these countries along with increased collaboration between rich and poor countries to protect agricultural lands from tourism and industrial developments, and support climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Invest in Peace

The well-being and shared security of all can only be realized when grounded in justice. Shared security focuses on the fundamental inter-relatedness of all persons and the environment (World Religions Summit, Sapporo 2008). Civilians in the world's poorest countries are the primary victims of war, insurgencies, criminal activities and other forms of armed violence. At the same time, we are collectively affected and implicated in global turmoil through our common humanity and through the priorities we set.

One clear example of misplaced priorities is global military spending, estimated to be US\$1,464 billion for 2008, while support for United Nations peace-keeping operations is only US\$9 billion. NATO countries account for over 2/3 of this global military spending; these payments for military services are more than 20 times the annual world financial contributions to Official Development Assistance. Another example of misplaced priorities is the continuing threat of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction that represent a moral affront to human dignity and a grave danger to life.

We are aware that there are those who use religion to justify violent acts against others, and thereby offend the true spirit of their faith and the long-standing values of their faith communities. We condemn religiously motivated terrorism and extremism and commit to stop the teaching and justification of the use of violence between and among our faith communities. Our faith traditions are steeped in the promotion of love for one another and deep respect for all humankind; peace and justice walk hand in hand. Our most inspiring teachings are stories of reconciliation and compassion. We will collaborate to create paths of peaceful and sustainable coexistence.

In 2010, we expect inspired leadership and actions that invest in peace!

—We call on governments to halt the arms race, make new and greater investments in supporting a culture of peace, strengthen the rule of law, stop ethnic cleansing and the suppression of minorities, build peace through negotiation, mediation, and humanitarian support to peace processes, including the control and reduction of small arms that every year are the cause of over 300,000 deaths globally.

—We call on states with nuclear

weapons to make immediate and substantial cuts in the number of nuclear weapons and to cease the practice of having nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert. Let these be the initial steps in a defined process leading to the complete and permanent elimination of nuclear weapons.

—We call for the establishment of transparent and effective dialogue mechanisms between international organizations and faith communities that takes advantage of the peace-making potential of religion.

Our Commitment

We recognize that we share responsibility to be and act for the change we want to see. We reaffirm our own commitment to call on our communities and members to:

—demonstrate solidarity with the poor and vulnerable in our society and the globe;

—monitor the compliance of our governments in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and, whenever possible, hold them publicly accountable for such compliance;

—confront consumerism, reduce consumption and change our lifestyle to give testimony to better stewardship and live more lightly on the Earth;

—cultivate the positive peace-building influence of religion and invest in building the capacity of our communities to participate in peacebuilding and peacekeeping activities;

—promote co-existence among different religious and ethnic communities while welcoming immigrants and refugees; and

—grow the collaboration of faith traditions to provide leadership, research and action, work to engage our own communities on the issues, and maintain continuous consultation and evaluation of these global political summits in the coming years while building political support for the changes we seek.

Our Deep Desire for 2010

As people of faith and as concerned global inhabitants, we urge our communities to do our part to end poverty, care for the Earth and invest in peace, including building a movement of political participation that makes seemingly impossible change possible. In a spirit of positive collaboration, acknowledging that both political leaders and faith leaders carry tremendous responsibility for setting the parameters for our common life, we will monitor the decisions our government leaders take, including decisions made at the 2010 political leaders' summits in Canada. We expect follow-through on past promises. We expect bold new actions based on the values and recommendations outlined here. If we fail in these goals, we fail our children who look to us to secure a viable future for them. Our prayers and wishes for wisdom and compassion are with our political leaders at this critical moment.