

J/P Alert

CONFERENCE OF MAJOR SUPERIORS OF MEN *JUSTICE AND PEACE OFFICE*

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CMSM:

- *assists major superiors in their role as leaders;*
- *promotes dialogue and collaboration with the conference of bishops and other major groups in church and society;*
- *provides a corporate influence in church and society.*

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Haiti Delegation Finds Complex and Desperate Situation

A CMSM-sponsored delegation visited Haiti December 13-17, 2004 renewing CMSM's commitment to solidarity with the Haitian people and Religious that was affirmed at the 2000 Annual Assembly in New Orleans. CMSM, LCWR, CLAR and the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) first committed to making Haiti a policy and action priority at the last Inter-America Conference in Canada. Since then CMSM adopted a resolution confirming the priority. This was the second delegation, the first being in 2001. Events in Haiti in 2004, the unrest and overthrow of Aristide, the natural disasters caused by Tropical Storm Jeanne, and the increased violence in recent months, precipitated the idea of a delegation.

CMSM board member and Missionhurst Provincial Bill Quigley, CMSM member and Spiritan Provincial Jeff Duaiame, CMSM JP Committee member Missionary of Africa Phil Reed, and CMSM JP Director Stan De Boe, OSST, made up the delegation. Bill and Jeff had been in mission in Haiti and speak Creole fluently, which was an asset to the delegation.

The delegation met with members of Religious Conference of Haiti, the Haitian Bishops' JP Director, Jan Hansens, CICM; the staff of Catholic Relief Services in Haiti;

representatives from Fondwa University, Fonkoze, and Center for Interdisciplinary Reflection and Research, the Political Affairs Director of the UN efforts in Haiti (MINUSTAH), and U.S. Ambassador to Haiti, James Foley. A meeting scheduled with several bishops had to be cancelled because of the unrest in Port-au-Prince on the day of the meetings and the inability to get around at that time.

The situation in Haiti is not as easy to assess as U.S. media might like to report it. There are great divisions between city and countryside, wealthy and poor. The political situation is more than just pro-Aristide and anti-Aristide, it is a complicated issue of lack of trust in any government; concern that the international community will continue interfering in Haitian politics without any concern for the Haitian economy, infrastructure, or civil society; factions from the ex-military and other gangs who control different parts of Port-au-Prince or the countryside; lawlessness and violence; and the incredible lack of economic opportunities available to people.

At most meetings one of the themes that kept coming up was the need for education in Haitian society to change the attitudes of the people. According to Hansens, after the experience of slavery and colonialization, followed by years of dictatorships that fostered conditions of virtual slavery and colonialization, Haitians are conditioned to

still respond from those attitudes. There is an inherent distrust of authority, a helplessness about the situation, and the situation of “maronage” – what we might call “hidden agenda” where what you are told is not always the true nature of a persons feelings and intents. This conditioned attitude needs to change and it needs to begin with education about civil society from the earliest stages of a Haitian’s life. Haitian children need to be taught the necessity of working together and pooling resources, this needs to also lead to education about how to function in civil society on all levels. What is also needed, according to Fr. Joseph Phillipe, CSSp, the director of Fondwa University, is education for management that is not dependent on old models coming from slavery and colonialization. His organization educates Haitians in areas of agricultural management, providing scholarships to individuals who commit themselves to returning to their towns to assist with new projects, thus providing for reform and stemming the brain-drain in the country.

The meeting with Ambassador Foley focused on U.S. policy in Haiti. Concern about U.S. interference in the government was foremost, given the role the U.S. military played in ousting Aristide both times. Ambassador Foley spoke about the need for free and fair elections, set for this coming September that would give the Haitians a legitimate government. Bill Quigley pointed out that the Aristide government was democratically elected and yet the U.S. led his ouster both times. This has eroded any confidence in the Haitian people that their voice in an election is at all effective. It could have great impact on the next election, when people might question participating in something that might once again be overturned. The international community needs to assist Haiti with development, economic aid, health care, etc. Without the effective backing and support of the international community, any democratically elected government will not be able to respond to the pressing needs of the nation.

During the last Congress, the HERO act was introduced that would have given special trade status for textiles imported from Haiti. This would have been one small step to assist with economic recovery in Haiti. The Congress failed to pass it, and the Administration did nothing to encourage the legislation. Without this trade concession, the textile industry in Haiti will suffer because factories may be closed and their work moved

to the growing industry in Asia. This is another lost opportunity.

According to people we met with, the only institution functioning in Haiti is the church. The church is at the center of providing humanitarian aid, health care, education, and maintaining some order in the country. While bishops, clergy, religious, and laity are divided on the issue of Aristide, they are working together to challenge the interim government, the international community and the people of Haiti to work to find just and lasting solutions to the many problems in Haiti. Whatever their political persuasions, the delegation met dedicated women and men who are immersed in some of the most volatile areas of the country. They impressed on the delegation the desperate situation that currently exists. While poverty has been a way of life for many in Haiti in years, they are seeing how it has changed and gotten worse. In the past, some told us, it was not unusual for the women to come to church begging for assistance for their families. Now, not only the women, but the men, too are begging for their needs. Given the hierarchy of poverty, the situation for women and children has worsened if now the entire society is clamoring for what little is available. The work of some religious has been effected by the increased violence. Since it is quite often unsafe to freely travel, maneuvering the various areas controlled by warring gangs and ex-military, religious have had to limit the work they are doing for their own safety. Most of the church work in Citie Soliel has been stopped because of the dangerous conditions that exist there.

The Haitians that the delegation met with said that one thing that is needed is for the information about what is happening in Haiti, what the people of Haiti are experiencing needs to be told. In addition, they encouraged others to visit to see the reality on the ground – not only the extreme poverty, violence, and hardships, but also the points of hope where efforts are being made to address these problems and find solutions for the future.

A more complete report is being prepared and when it is completed it will be posted on the CMSM website.

Tsunami Unleashes Many Disasters

The tsunami that caused the destruction of vast areas of south Asia and the deaths of nearly 120,000 has also resulted in other disasters in the region. News reports

have focused attention on the need to provide for emergency housing and medical assistance, providing food and water, and search, rescue and recovery efforts. The Justice and Peace Office issued a statement and urged CMSM members who wished to offer financial assistance to contact Catholic Relief Services. CRS is on the ground already providing relief and assistance. CRS is also interested in cooperating with CMSM members who have members and communities in the regions affected by the tsunami.

Another consequence of the tsunami is the large number of orphans left after their parents were killed or are still unaccounted for. These children have become one of them most vulnerable groups in the region and reports indicate that they are being further victimized through human trafficking. UNICEF and other child welfare groups warn that trafficking gangs may be trafficking children by selling them into forced labor or even sexual slavery in wealthier countries. Others indicate that they are being sold for adoption. If these reports and warnings are confirmed, this would vastly deepen the suffering of children already struck hard by the earthquake and tsunami. Children are being removed from their home areas before it is confirmed if they are orphaned, and making it more difficult to reunite them any family members who may have survived.

At a CRS meeting this situation was discussed and CRS has no indication that this taking place on a wide scale and are following the reports. Staff there seems to think that media attention to this may be sensationalized. Trafficking gangs have been active in this region for years and they are probably taking advantage of the situation, but the extent to which they are working now has not been determined.

Human trafficking is a justice issue that is given priority through a 2001 Joint CMSM-LCWR Resolution and CMSM is a member of the Catholics Against Human Trafficking Coalition. The JP Office will be following this situation and provide updates and suggest appropriate actions that might arise as a result of this potential human rights abuse.

For more on the relief efforts and for resources for prayer and action, visit the Catholic Relief Services website at www.catholicrelief.org.

There are also efforts underway to cancel the international debt owed by the countries affected by the tsunami. Many of them are the most heavily indebted in the world and the disasters will only serve to worsen the situation. Millions of people are totally dependent on the international aid that is pouring into the region and these nations will need billions of dollars in economic assistance to rebuild infrastructures and provide for the many who are displaced at this time. For more information on what you can do to urge the international community to cancel the debt of these countries, visit the website of Jubilee Network, USA at www.jubileeusa.org.

Ecumenical Advocacy Days and Annual JP Directors Gathering

“Make All Things New” is the theme for the third annual ecumenical gathering in Washington, DC, March 11-14, 2005. The conference brings together faith-based social justice advocates from many Christian traditions to focus on critical regions and issues including Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, U.S. foreign and domestic policies, eco-justice, and Jubilee and economic justice.

The gathering will feature challenging speakers, issue briefings, advocacy training workshops and a Lobby Day on Capitol Hill when participants will speak with their Senators and Representatives and key Congressional staff.

A PDF version of the brochure is available on the CMSM website and more information is at www.advocacydays.org. CMSM is one of the sponsors of the event and leaders, JP Coordinators, religious information and others are encouraged to participate.

The Advocacy Days will be followed by the annual gathering of JP Coordinators in Washington, DC, beginning the evening of March 14 and ending the afternoon of March 15. This meeting is an excellent opportunity for the JP Office and congregational JP Coordinators to dialogue on issues and priorities, to network, and to learn about the broad justice agenda of religious men in the U.S. This year the meeting will be open to all CMSM related participants to the Ecumenical Advocacy Days. More details about the gathering will be sent out soon. Save the dates. Pass this on to your JP Coordinators and others who might be interested.

New Book Honoring Bishop Romero

Monsignor Romero: A Bishop for the Third Millennium is a collection of speeches given in honor of the late archbishop by distinguished visitors to Notre Dame University. It examines Romero's role as a model bishop for the new millennium. It places particular emphasis on his commitment to human rights, his innovative implementation of the option for the poor, his dedication to the Church, and his views of the role of the laity. It is also an inspirational account of Romero's deep and abiding faith that seemingly insoluble problems can be resolved by following the Spirit. Edited by Robert S. Pelton, CSC. It is available from University of Notre Dame Press, www.undpress.nd.edu. The cost is \$22.50 plus \$4.50 shipping and handling.

Sudanese Sign Peace Accord

On January 9 the Sudanese government and southern rebels signed a peace agreement that will cover the next six years. After over two decades of conflict in the south which has resulted in some of the worst atrocities in recent history, this peace agreement is a step forward, although Human Rights Watch warns that the continuing atrocities in Darfur and impunity for war crimes jeopardize the prospects for peace. The agreement calls for the government to withdraw at least 91,000 troops from the rebel-controlled south within two and a half years, while the rebels have eight months to withdraw their forces from the north. The Sudanese constitution will be rewritten to ensure that Islamic law, Sharia, is not applied to non-Muslims anywhere in the country. There are also protocols for sharing legislative power and natural resources. In addition, the south will vote on independence in 2011 and U.N. observers will monitor the cease-fire and demobilization of troops. Absent from the agreement, however are provisions for a truth commission and prosecutions or other forms of accountability for past abuses in the conflict.

For more information on these developments in Sudan, visit the Human Rights Watch website at www.hrw.org.

The Death of Innocents: An Eye Witness Account of Wrongful Executions. Helen Prejean, CSJ. Random House Publisher, 2004. This review is excerpted from an internet review: In her latest book, Prejean takes on the new moral edge of the debate on capital punishment: What if we're killing the wrong man? She traces the historical underpinnings of executions in this country, demonstrating that it is no accident that over 80 percent of executions in the past twenty-five years have been carried out in the former slave states. She also raises profound constitutional questions about an appeals system that decides most death cases on procedural grounds without ever examining their merits.

To date, 113 wrongfully convicted persons have been freed from death row. If constitutional protections—due process, assistance of counsel, and equal justice under law—are truly being respected, how is it possible that these people were convicted in the first place? And how can we accept a system so rife with error?

Sister Helen Prejean takes us with her on her spiritual journey as she accompanies two possibly innocent human beings to their deaths at the hands of the state. Prejean implores us to reflect on what is perhaps the core moral issue of the death penalty debate: Honorable people disagree about the justice of executing the guilty, but can anyone argue about the injustice of executing the innocent?

Helen is currently traveling the country to promote her book and raise awareness about the issue. If you'd like more information about the speaking tour or about her work, visit her website at www.prejean.org.



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