

J/P Alert

CONFERENCE OF MAJOR SUPERIORS OF MEN JUSTICE AND PEACE OFFICE

IN THIS ISSUE

- **Catholic Committee of the South Seeks Support from U.S. Religious**
- **U.S. -- Andean Free Trade Agreement**
- **House Committee Slows Escalation in Columbia**
- **Good News, Bad News for Immigration**



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.*

June 2004

Catholic Committee of the South Seeks Support from U.S. Religious

The U.S. Catholic Bishops of the South have issued a pastoral letter "Wardens from Wall Street: Prison Privatization," in which they note the "rise of for-profit private prisons in the South and in the nation" because "previous attempts to introduce the profit motive in to prisons have failed to respect the fundamental human dignity of every prisoner." In the pastoral the bishops call for an end to all for-profit prisons and have adopted a resolution based on Catholic Social Teaching that highlights how for-profit prisons infringe on the rights of persons and use human beings as commodities for financial gain.

CMSM has received a request from the Catholic Committee of the South to ask religious institutes to join them in the resolution opposing privatization of prisons. CMSM has resolutions condemning the death penalty and has been active in supporting legislation and policies to reform our prison system. The national Conference has not taken a position on this issue, but it is passing this request on to CMSM members.

The bishops have recommended draft language for a resolution:

Consistent with Church teaching, there are some things that must never be bought and sold in the market place. This includes taking away another human being's freedom,

separating them from others, preventing them from communicating with others, and the use of physical, even deadly force against them.

It would not be appropriate for our judicial system to be run by a private, for-profit corporation. Yet many states employ private, for-profit corporations to carry out the sentences of the judicial system and incarcerate prisoners.

In addition, those corporations that operate private prisons cut services, cut employee wages, and cut the number of employees. An industry-wide survey in 1997 found 49% more inmate-on-staff assaults and 65% more inmate-on-inmate assaults in for-profit private prisons than government-run prisons, indicating that their dehumanization escalates the level of violence.

Ultimately, for-profit, private prisons increase their bottom line through the buying and selling of human misery. Contracts are made with state and federal governments for bodies to fill beds. The higher the count, the higher the profit.

(Name of Religious Congregation) join the Catholic bishops of the south in their call for an end to all for-profit, private prisons.

We acknowledge that the Church's social teaching from Rerum Novarum is clear:

- *The human person cannot be treated as a commodity*
- *It is shameful and inhuman to use people as things for gain*

This is a fundamental moral and ethical question.

If your congregation adopts this resolution, please forward a copy to Rev. Les Schmidt, Liaison of the Catholic Committee of the South, Sacred Heart Church, 1821 Holton Avenue, Big Stone Gap, VA 24219. Also, please forward a copy to the CMSM JP Office. A copy of the Bishops' pastoral can be found on the CMSM website.

U.S. – Andean Free Trade Agreement

On May 18th, the Bush Administration launched negotiations to create a Free Trade Agreement with the Andean region. Colombia, Ecuador and Peru are already participating in the negotiations, and Bolivia may join the agreement as well.

The Andean FTA will contain rules on market access, investment, services, intellectual property, government procurement, labor and the environment. These rules – modeled on those in the NAFTA agreement and the recently concluded trade agreement with the Central America (CAFTA) – create sweeping new rights for multinational investors, but do very little to guarantee the fundamental human rights of workers, protect the environment, or promote equitable development. There is fear that this free trade model could destroy good jobs and lower working standards throughout the Andean region.

The administration hopes to fast track the negotiations in eight sessions of two days each and complete them by February 2005. The next sessions will take place in Atlanta on June 14-18 and in Trujillo, Peru on July 25-28. Like CAFTA and NAFTA, the AFTA talks will likely be carried out in secret, with no negotiating texts published until the agreement is completed.

House Committee Slows Escalation in Colombia

The Bush Administration's policy toward Colombia was dealt a blow on May 12 when the House Armed Services

Committee approved an amendment by Rep. Gene Taylor (D-MS) to restore the troop cap for Colombia. The original request from the Bush Administration was to double the number of U.S. troops permitted in Colombia and increase by 50% the number of contractors. Committee Chair Duncan Hunter (R-CA) tried to go one step farther and attempted to remove the troop and contractor cap entirely from the version of the defense authorization bill put forward to the committee for approval.

But in the Committee, Rep. Taylor offered an amendment to restore the cap on troops to the level of 500 troops, a considerably smaller increase than requested by the Bush Administration. This amendment won by a show of hands on a vote of 32-24. The House Defense Authorization bill was scheduled to go to the full House in late May with the troop cap in place. There was still the possibility that a negative amendment could be offered on the House floor that would lift the caps or increase the number of troops and contractors permitted. Please consult www.wola.org and www.lawg.org for more background and updated information.

Good News, Bad News, for Immigration

On May 19, 2004 the House of Representatives passed the 2005 National Defense Authorization Act that contains legislation that authorizes U.S. Armed Forces to be deployed on active duty to assist the Border Patrol in patrolling the Canadian and Mexican borders. This use of the military further stretches an over-committed military and it violates the Posse Comitatus Act that prohibits use of the military for internal enforcement of anti-narcotics or immigration laws. Last year the Senate rejected this measure and you are urged to contact your Senator and urge them to remove Section 347a from the final bill.

On May 25 Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Reps. Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) and Robert Menendez (D-NJ) introduced the Safe Orderly Legal Visas and Enforcement Act (SOLVE) (S 2381, HR 4262) that will legalize immigrants living and working the US, reunifies immigrants with family members, and establishes a new temporary employment program with stronger protections for workers. Contact your Senators and Representatives and urge them to support this legislation and protect the rights of immigrant workers in the US.

Stan De Boe, OSST/Editor