

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.*

February 2005

Use of Torture by U.S. Personnel Still Not Addressed Adequately

Over the past few months several military personnel have been tried and convicted of abusing detainees at the Abu Gharib prison in Iraq. The photographs, reports, and testimonies that revealed this abuse of power shocked most Americans and sensitized them to the dehumanizing use of torture. Amnesty International recently issued a report "USA: Human Dignity Denied: Torture and accountability in the 'war on terror,'" which catalogues the United States' three year descent into the use of torture and warns that without a comprehensive, independent investigation into the U.S.'s torture and ill treatment of detainees, the conditions may remain for further abuse to occur.

When the first reports of the torture surfaced, the CMSM Executive Committee issued a statement on the use of torture in Iraq calling for an apology to the victims; a complete investigation into treatment of detainees and prisoners; prosecution of abusers; release of information about detainees in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay; granting access to independent international monitoring groups; and a Congressional oversight hearing. However, little has done been by the Administration to

address the issue of use of torture. Some low-level military personnel have been convicted, but no higher level officers have been investigated.

The nomination of Alberto Gonzalez for Attorney General renewed the debate and interest in the use of torture by military personnel. Mr. Gonzalez has been identified as the author of some memorandums justifying the use of torture in some situations while he was counsel to the President.

While the Administration and the military have voiced their opposition to the use of torture, they have yet to take any steps to ensure that torture will not be used and that the U.S. will adopt and comply with international covenants regarding the use of torture.

Since the statement issued in May, 2004 is just as valid today as it was nearly a year ago, the Justice and Peace office will renew efforts to work with our partners, including Amnesty International, to raise awareness about the use of torture, to call on the Administration to take effect actions to end the use of torture and to bring to justice those responsible for the inhuman treatment of detainees; and to encourage our members to take action by writing or calling their representatives regarding this matter.

The Executive Committee Statement can be found on the CMSM webpage, www.cmsm.org. You can access the Amnesty International Report at www.amnestyusa.org/waronterror/document and there are suggestions for action at takeaction.amnestyusa.org/action and follow the links on torture abuse.

**NEW INFORMATION:
Ecumenical Advocacy Days and
Annual JP Directors Gathering**

The final preparations are being made for the Ecumenical Advocacy Days, "Make All Things New" in Washington, DC, March 11-14. Information about the conference is available at the website www.advocacydays.org.

During those days Catholic participants will meet during lunch on Saturday to network and to dialogue about the perspectives of Catholic Social Teaching in relation to our work as advocates for justice.

The EAD is followed by the annual Justice and Peace Coordinators' Gathering. This year the meeting will begin on March 14 at 6:00 p.m. with an informal dinner at Washington Theological Union followed by a discussion about the role of U.S. religious in advocating for justice issues. Those gathered will help identify priorities and goals for the upcoming year.

On March 15 the meeting will continue at Centro Maria, near Catholic University, at 9:30 a.m. and will end at noon. We are awaiting word from leadership of the Democrats and Republicans in Congress whom we hope will meet with us to further the dialogue about the importance of the voice of U.S. religious at this time. As soon as our speakers are confirmed, you will be notified.

You should have received a letter with more details about the gathering. The meeting is open to Justice and Peace Coordinators, Major Superiors, CMSM members, and partners in the justice work. If you need more information please don't hesitate to contact Stan De Boe, OSST at 301-588-4030 or sdeboe@cmsm.org or Russ Tests at 202-541-5245 or testa@wtu.edu.

Haiti Solidarity Week February 20-28

On February 29, 2004 President Jean Bertrand Aristide was forced into exile following weeks of violence and unrest in Haiti. The year since he left Haiti has brought no relief and no end to the violence and unrest in the nation. The current interim government has no credibility or power, gangs and former military control the nation through intimidation and violence, the people are continue to spiral into poverty and oppression, and the U.N. forces have failed to bring about any stability. Flooding in May killed 1,600 people in the south and Hurricane Jeanne destroyed Gonaives, killing at least 2,500 people.

Now, more than ever, Haiti needs our solidarity. In December a CMSM delegation visited Haiti and the plea that was heard was, "Tell our story." The plight of the people of Haiti must be known. February 20-28 has been designated Haiti Solidarity Week. During that week people are encourage to take action on behalf of the people of Haiti.

Some ways you can show your solidarity:

- Contact your Representative and ask them to support legislation that will end discrimination against Haitian refugees and to reintroduce the Haitian Economic Recovery and Opportunity Act, which was not acted on in the last session of Congress.
- Reflect on the current situation of the Haitian people. The CMSM delegation report will soon be posted on the website. See that for more suggestions and information. You can also visit the Haiti Reborn website at www.quixote.org and follow the links from there.
- Remember the Haitian people in prayer in your communities and ministries.

CMSM, LCWR, CLAR and the Canadian Religious Conference have identified Haiti as a priority for our concern. Haiti Solidarity Week is one opportunity to highlight the plight of the nation and to reflect on our commitment to solidarity and action.

Stan De Boe, OSST/Editor