

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.*

April 2004

Religious Conferences Express Concern for Situation in Haiti

The leadership of the Conference of Latin American Religious (CLAR), the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC), LCWR, and CMSM met for their annual meeting in Washington, DC March 2-5. During this meeting events in Haiti were unfolding at a rapid rate. The country was enveloped in a civil war and President Aristide was forcibly removed from office and went into exile. While it was reported that U.S. Marines were deployed to assist with controlling the violence and bringing about stability, it is still uncertain what role they actually played in deposing Aristide. The leaders of the four conferences remained in contact with the Haitian Bishops' Conference and Religious Conference during those crucial days and remained apprised of the situation.

In recent years the four Conferences have made Haiti a particular region of concern and solidarity. In 1999 they declared Haiti a principal collaborative focus and called on the international community to respond to the humanitarian, economic and political needs of Haiti. In August 2000 CMSM adopted a resolution of solidarity with the people of Haiti. And in 2001 the leaders of the four Religious Conferences met in Port au Prince for an immersion and fact-finding experience. Again the Conferences repeated their call for close and sustained attention to the needs of Haiti.

In close collaboration with our partners in Haiti, the leaders of the Inter-American Conferences issued a statement regarding the current situation in Haiti on March 5. The statement called on the nations currently working in Haiti to restore order and to help return its society to more stable foundations. The statement, which you can find on the CMSM website (www.cmsm.org) called on the international community to provide assistance to Haiti by providing humanitarian aid, disarming of all factions bringing violence to Haiti, training in conflict resolution and processes of reconciliation and assisting the Haitian people to form a transitional government leading to elections. There are several other points listed in the statement.

CMSM will continue to collaborate with our partners in Haiti during this time of transition.

US Reverses Policy on Landmine

On February 7 the Bush Administration reversed U.S. policy regarding the use and manufacturing of landmines, abandoning the commitment to ratify the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. The Administration maintains the right of the U.S. to use what are referred to as "smart" landmines and stated that it would maintain the current stockpile of older landmines until 2010.

In 2001 CMSM and LCWR sent letters to Bush Administration officials expressing

concern that the U.S. remains the only member of NATO that has not ratified the treaty and called on the President to maintain the policy that would have led to ratification in 2006.

Following the change in policy, the Conferences issued a joint statement saying the reversal of the policy is “deplorable.” The statement goes on to say, “We are saddened that our nation will not halt the production and use of landmines because we know that this does not reflect the values and aspirations of the people of our country – to protect the safety and rights of all people, especially the most vulnerable in our world.”

A complete copy of the statement can be found on the CMSM website. For more information about the new U.S. policy and how you can respond by urging the President to reconsider this decision, visit the U.S. Campaign to Ban Land Mines at www.banminesusa.org. You can also urge your Representatives to support the "International Disabilities and Victims of Landmines, Civil Strife and Warfare Assistance Act" that would assist thousands of landmine survivors worldwide with medical and rehabilitative care. A sample letter can be found at the above website. It is estimated that there are currently 60 million active landmines sowed around the world and every year thousands of innocent civilians are killed or maimed by these weapons.

House and Senate to Consider Changing Assistance for Low Income Housing

The House and Senate are both poised to consider a significant change in low income housing assistance that would affect millions of people struggling to meet their basic needs. For many families, high housing costs present a major obstacle to their progress, leaving them unable to pay for utilities, food, clothing, transportation, childcare, or health care and placing many at risk of becoming homeless. Section 8 of the U.S. Budget provides a voucher program that offers assistance and hope by preventing homelessness, helps seniors and persons with disabilities to live with dignity in decent housing and in supporting families that are striving to make progress towards self-sufficiency.

The budget requests for Fiscal Year 2005 would restructure this aid by giving the funds as a block grant to be administered by public housing authorities and reduces assistance to households with severe housing needs. Assistance would be shifted to recipients who could pay

more than 30 percent of their housing costs, eliminating those most in need of the assistance. The budget also reduces the amount of funds available by \$1 billion, which would eliminate assistance for 250,000 households.

NETWORK and Catholic Charities USA are following this issue closely and CMSM has joined them in urging our Representative to maintain Section 8 housing assistance without the changes proposed in the budget for FY2005. For more information contact either of the organizations. NETWORK's website is www.networklobby.org and Catholic Charities' is www.catholiccharitiesusa.org.

Resources:

Colombia in Crisis – Resource Series. Published by Church World Service. The UN has characterized the present situation in Colombia as the worst humanitarian crisis in the Western Hemisphere. An estimated 3 million Colombians have been displaced from their homes, making this one of the most serious internal displacement situations in the world. The ongoing violence has affected minorities and human rights defenders, including religious leaders and church communities. These individuals are organizing to restore peace and promote human rights. Some of their inspiring and hopeful projects are highlighted in this three part series on U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Colombia; Colombian Churches: Targeted for Promoting and Defending Human Rights; and Afro-Colombians: Promoting Alternatives to Violence, Displacement and Impoverishment. Each are 6 pages and cost \$.40 each. To order call 800-297-1516.

Conferences and Meetings

May 23-25, Washington, DC Pentecost 2004: A Call to Unity: Making Poverty a Religious and Electoral Issue. Sponsored by Call to Renewal, the conference will bring together religious leaders of many denominations to focus attention on issues of poverty during this election year and to urge politicians and candidates to make elimination of poverty a priority in the U.S. For more information contact Call to Renewal at www.calltorenewal.org or by phone at 202-328-8745.

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