

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.*

May 2005

New Legislation Introduced to Close SOA

In March, Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) introduced legislation to suspend operations of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC, formerly known as the School of the Americas). According to SOA Watch and Amnesty International, the legislation, "The Latin America Military Training Review Act of 2005" (HR 1217), would suspend all activities of the program pending a full investigation of SOA's use of training manuals that included illegal tactics such as torture, execution, and kidnapping and arresting a target's family members. If passed, the legislation would create a commission appointed by Congress that would seek to determine who was responsible for drafting, approving, and using the training manuals; how they were used; and what impact they had. Based on the findings, the Commission would make recommendations for accountability. The legislation would also create a commission to evaluate and make recommendations for appropriate forms of US training of foreign security personnel.

The legislation currently has 78 bi-partisan co-sponsors and more are needed. You can see a list of co-sponsors on the SOA Watch website (www.soaw.org). If your member of Congress is not a co-sponsor, you are urged to contact your Representative and

ask him/her to support the legislation. You can also find more information about the legislation on the SOA Watch website and the Amnesty International website (www.amnestyusa.org).

There needs to be accountability for the use of the training manuals. Without accountability impunity flourishes and creates an environment in which similar abuses can be committed. It is essential that the US not contribute to human rights violations by training foreign security personnel in tactics that violate human rights. Without accountability, there is great risk that similar crimes may occur again.

Peace Activists Massacred in Colombia

In late February eight members of the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community in northwest Colombia, most of them women and children, were massacred. According to the Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns and the Latin America Working Group, both close collaborators with CMSM, reported on the massacre. Among the victims were internationally respected peace leader and co-founder of the San Jose Peace Community, Luis Eduard Guerra, his son and partner. Witnesses identified the assassins as members of the Colombian military.

CMSM has had a long concern about human rights abuses in Colombia, the

national office urges you to contact U.S. government officials and ask them to call on the Colombian government to conduct a transparent and thorough investigation of the massacre. Action is important and necessary at this time because it is believed that the Congress will take up legislation regarding Colombia in June or July. "Plan Colombia," which is up for renewal this year, has failed. Peace in Colombia is possible but not through more U.S. military aid to Colombia or U.S.-sponsored fumigation. A new Colombia policy should prioritize social aid, not an inhumane and ineffective military approach.

In 2002 CMSM adopted a resolution supporting policies regarding Colombia that promote peace and human rights and dignity. That resolution called on the U.S. government to prioritize protection of human rights and to provide aid that supported development and social programs.

For more information about the massacre, the current situation in Colombia, and drafts of letters and talking points, visit the websites for the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (www.maryknoll.org) or the Latin America Working Group (www.lawg.org).

Amnesty International Issues Report on Global Use of Death Penalty

On April 5 Amnesty International issued "The Death Penalty Worldwide: Developments in 2004" which documents the trends of the use of the death penalty worldwide. According to the report, at least 3,797 people were executed in 25 countries and at least 7,395 were sentenced to death in 64 countries. The U.S. contribution to the worldwide total dropped from 65 in 2003 to 59 in 2004. However, the U.S. remains one of the top executing countries along with China, Iran, and Viet Nam.

Five countries abolished the death penalty for all crimes in 2004: Bhutan, Greece, Samoa, Senegal, and Turkey. At the year's end, 120 countries had abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

AI has called on the U.S. to abolish the death penalty and applauded the March 1 Supreme Court decision removing the U.S. from the list of nations that execute juvenile offenders. The U.S. was the last country in the world to formally reject the application of the death penalty to minors.

New Analysis Claims Deaths in Darfur Nearing 400,000

In the most comprehensive statistical analysis to date experts have concluded that close to 400,000 people have died in Darfur in the last two years. Analysts from the Coalition for International Justice, Northwestern, and Toronto Universities estimate that 140,000 people have been killed by Sudanese government forces, and their proxy militia and 250,000 Darfur civilians have died from either disease, starvation, or exposure. This is about 500 people a day.

The analysis was done by reviewing the available data of recorded deaths from violence, disappearances, disease, starvation and exposure during flight in Darfur. Analysts also interviewed 1,136 refugees and used data collected from the World Health Organization's survey of deaths in refugee camps. Based on these statistics, the researchers estimate that the number of persons who have died or disappeared between February 2003 and April 2005 is close to 400,000.

As the numbers grow and the attacks persist, international organizations are denied access to civilians in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The report issued by the researchers concluded that "despite the death toll so far, not enough is being done to save the thousands who will inevitably die unless the world community supports the type of intervention needed to stop the killing."

Stop Torture

The United Nations has designated June 26 as International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. Under international law, the prohibition against torture is unequivocal. Yet torture is practiced in more than 150 countries around the world. Many in the U.S. were appalled when reports surfaced about the use of torture by U.S. military at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. Amnesty International has asked CMSM to join them in promoting their project "Stop Torture" that provides resources, information, and actions to focus attention on the devastating effects of torture on persons. For more information about their campaign to end the use of torture, visit their website at www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture.

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