

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.*

July 2004

Crisis in Northern Uganda

Northern Uganda has been embroiled in a brutal conflict for over 18 years. The conflict involves the Ugandan military on the one hand, and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group that has had the support of the government of Sudan, on the other. An estimated 1.5 million people have been displaced because of this war and the civilian population is suffering tremendously due to lack of food, safe drinking water, sanitation and other basic supplies. The situation is worsened by the LRA's brutal attacks targeted at the civilian population.

The most striking effect of this war is the abduction of children by the LRA to serve as slaves and combatants. They are tortured or killed if they attempt to escape. Thus the "night commuters" phenomenon has emerged – tens of thousands of northern Ugandans, mostly children leave their families before sunset every night to make their way to shelters in larger towns for fear of being abducted.

It is for this reason that a United Nations official recently noted that northern Uganda may be the biggest forgotten and neglected humanitarian crisis in the world.

The Catholic Task Force on Africa (CTFA), a coalition of Catholic organizations following the situations in several African nations, has made the crisis in northern Uganda a

priority. In June CTFA sponsored a Congressional briefing featuring Archbishop John Baptist Odama of Gulu Diocese. Archbishop Odama is a tireless advocate for peace in northern Uganda and his diocese includes the most affected districts of the region. He is chair of the Acholi Religious Leader's Peace Initiative, which includes Christian, Muslim, and traditional religious leaders working to promote peace and end the conflict in Uganda.

The Senate has passed the Northern Uganda Crisis Response Act (S. 2264) that supports a peaceful resolution to the conflict; working with the Ugandan government and the international community to provide humanitarian aid and development assistance; and directs the Secretary of State to submit a report on the conflict in Uganda, including actions carried out by the U.S. and the international community to protect displaced civilians. The House is set to consider the Senate resolution. Contact your Representative and urge him/her to support the Northern Uganda Crisis Response Act.

For more information on the crisis in Uganda visit the Catholic Relief Services website at www.catholicrelief.org.

Setback for Human Rights by Supreme Court

On June 30, the last day of the Supreme Court session, the justices narrowed the definition of cases that can be brought to U.S. courts by foreign nationals under the Alien Tort Claims Act. This law passed by the first Congress in 1789 gives foreign nationals the right to sue the U.S. government and U.S.-based businesses and organizations for alleged violations of international law that take place outside of the U.S. The justices' decision will still allow the U.S. government to be sued for violations such as torture, genocide, slavery and apartheid and other things that are widespread violations but raises questions as to whether U.S. corporations doing business in repressive countries can be held accountable for their practices. The first test of the justices ruling will probably be the litigation on behalf of victims of abuse at Abu Ghraib in Iraq and the detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This decision is a victory for U.S.-based corporations that were being sued for aiding and abetting human rights abuses of repressive governments with whom they did business. This is a setback for human rights, particularly in a globalized world where U.S. corporations are increasingly taking their business to developing countries where human rights and workers' rights are not protected and international laws are ignored and violated.

Water as a Human Right

Water is essential to sustain life. In 2002 the U.N. adopted access to water as a human right and the 145 nations that have adopted the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are committed to gradually ensuring fair and non-discriminatory access to safe drinking water.

Daily, the right to water is violated. One billion people lack adequate access to safe drinking water and 2.5 billion have no access to proper sanitation. Five million people, mostly children, die unnecessarily from water-related diseases each year. At least 300 million people live in regions of severe water shortages. This is not a problem that only affects other countries. Three of our fastest growing states – California, Texas, and Florida – have limited fresh water supplies.

Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) has introduced the Water for the World Resolution (H.Con.Res. 468) that would urge the U.S. government to take a lead role in address-

ing the impending global water crisis, protecting our fragile freshwater resources, and ensuring that all people have access to clean and affordable water. Contact your representative and urge him/her to become a co-sponsor of this legislation.

There are several sources for learning more about water as a human right. The Ecology Working Group of the JPIC Coordinators in Rome has prepared a booklet, *Water for Life: In Defense of Our "Sister Water" (How Religious Can Express Reverence and Concern for the Precious Gift of Water)*. It is available in a downloadable version at http://www.ofm-jpic.org/aqua/dl/english/water_en.pdf. Credo International has a fact sheet available if you contact them at credointl@aol.com. The Africa Faith and Justice Network is following the legislative issue. Their website is www.afjn.cua.edu.

Conference Focuses on Migration and Refugees

The University of Notre Dame is hosting an international conference on Migration and Theology September 19-22, 2004. Theologians and pastoral workers from around the world will gather to reflect on the implications that migration has for our church and world today. Speakers include Gustavo Gutierrez, Donald Senior, Olivia Ruiz, Drew Christiansen, Virgilio Elizondo, Peter Phan, and others. For more information and to register on line go to www.nd.edu/~latino/migrationtheology.

Resource

The Middle East Educational Wall Poster – A full color 27x36 two sided poster that contains 25 country profiles, 29 maps and 75 graphs and charts. Side One features a satellite image of the entire region from the Mediterranean to Pakistan, surrounded by detailed social and political profiles of 25 countries and succinct statistics about religion, recent history, military expenditures and capabilities, global economics, trans-national corporations, oil and the fresh water crisis. Side Two focuses on Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Iraq, and the role of the U.S. in the region. The map resource is supported by a website that includes all of the data on the map in printable formats to be used as handouts and briefing sheets. Posters are \$15.00 or if laminated, \$29.50. You can order on line at www.sunship.com/mideast/poster or by phone at 250-935-6483.

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