



J/P ALERT

CONFERENCE OF MAJOR SUPERIORS OF MEN JUSTICE AND PEACE OFFICE



January 2010

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Catholic Social Ministries Gathering Feb. 7-10, 2010, Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill

The theme for the 2010 Gathering *Charity in Truth: Seeking the Common Good*, gives witness to the recently released papal encyclical [Caritas in Veritate](#).

The Catholic Social Ministry Gathering brings together diverse individuals to discuss common issues and concerns. We will discuss global and domestic issues on human life and dignity and justice and peace that challenge our society and our world. There will be briefings, workshops, and strategy sessions on topics facing our various ministries.

We have worked for several months to put together an exciting and focused agenda bringing together experts and visionaries.

- **Fr. Allan Figueroa Deck, SJ, Ph.D.**, Executive Director of the Secretariat for Cultural Diversity in the Church, USCCB
- **Mr. John Carr**, Executive Director, Justice, Peace and Human Development, USCCB
- **Dr. Maryann Cusimano Love**, Associate Professor, Department of Politics, The Catholic University of America
- **Mr. Ray Boshara**, Vice president and Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation
- **Mr. David Brooks** and **Mr. Mark Shields** of the *PBS NewsHour*

We are pleased to have as the presider and homilist for the CSMG Opening Liturgy, **Bishop William Murphy** Bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre and Chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development.

A centerpiece of our Gathering will be [an afternoon on Capitol Hill](#), where we will bring our concerns about policies affecting those who are poor and vulnerable to our legislators and we will hear from our Congressional leaders.

The 2010 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering provides an unequalled opportunity to see old friends, meet new ones, learn about Catholic social mission, and participate in discussions on some of the most important issues our society. We would like very much to count you among the Gathering participants.

Please [register online](#) and make plans to join us in Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill, February 7-10, 2010.

Advocacy Groups Decry Profiteering by Vulture Funds in Liberia

UK Judge Awards Funds \$20 million, More Than Liberia's Total Spending on Education Last Year

Wednesday, December 02, 2009 (Washington, DC) - Leading global development and Africa advocacy groups reacted with outrage today to news that a London court recently awarded two Vulture Funds a \$20 million judgment against Liberia. This amount of money represents the country's entire education budget and 150% of their spending on health in 2008.



On November 26, the British High Court announced that Vulture Funds Hamsah Investments and Wall Capital were to be awarded \$20 million based on a default judgment received in 2002 by previous creditors in New York courts. The Vulture Funds had recently acquired the loan to Liberia on the secondary market. The original credit, dating back to 1978, was estimated to be worth \$6 million, but it had been in default since 1984.

Advocates point out that Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's government has demonstrated its commitment to start fresh by clearing its past debts, even those incurred by dictatorial governments and used to fuel and finance the 14 years of civil war. In 2007, Liberia paid off its arrears to the World Bank and African Development Bank, and in April of this year successfully negotiated a \$1.2 billion buy-back of its commercial debt. Under the aegis of the World Bank, the process was widely acknowledged by creditors to be fair and open.

However, Hamsah Investments and Wall Capital were the only two private creditors that refused to participate.

"The Liberia case is a textbook example of kicking a country while it's down," said Ruth Messenger, President of American Jewish World Service. "Liberia has done everything right to gain debt relief, yet our system allows an off-shore, unaccountable corporation to hold out on the deal and instead profiteer in international courts by squeezing the country for funds representing more than its entire education budget."

"U.S. taxpayers who finance debt relief for poor countries intend for that money to be redirected towards poverty alleviation, not into the private accounts of Vulture Funds that operate in secret and without any sense of corporate responsibility," said Melinda St. Louis, Deputy Director of Jubilee USA Network.

Gerald LeMelle, Executive Director of Africa Action stated, "We call these debts illegitimate precisely because of irresponsible lending policies by U.S. and UK based international financial institutions, and military support that protected and defended the regime of a dictator, Samuel Doe, while he mismanaged the country's resources and looted Treasury. The final insult is that now poor Liberian people are being asked to pay back wealthy investors."

This judgment in favor of the Vulture Funds sets back much of the progress made in Liberia,

a country that ranks 169 out of 182 in the UN's Human Development Index. In response to last week's news, the Liberian Finance Minister Augustine Ngafuan has told reporters that the country is unable to pay the awarded judgment.

The advocacy groups note that because Vulture Funds are set up in tax havens of the British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands, Hamsah Investments' and Wall Capital's actions and their principal beneficiaries are almost impossible follow.

"There is an ever-urgent need for the U.S. and the UK to prevent raw exploitation of poor countries and profiteering on their debt relief. The most recent judgment will unfortunately result in Liberia facing ever larger barriers to providing the necessary social services to lift its population out of poverty," said Nicole Lee, Executive Director of TransAfrica Forum.

Advocacy groups dismayed by this latest attack by Vulture Funds point to the urgent need to pass legislation currently before the U.S. House of Representatives and the UK government to prevent the further misuse of US and UK courts for debt profiteers. The Stop VULTURE Funds Act, H.R.2932, introduced by Representatives Maxine Waters and Spencer Bachus on June 18 of this year, would prohibit sovereign debt profiteering from poor countries and require greater levels of transparency by creditors suing those poor countries.

"These Vulture Funds are violating the promise of debt relief and Liberia's path to peace and economic stability," decried Emira Woods, a Liberian national and Co-director of Foreign Policy in Focus at the Institute for Policy Studies. She added, "After 26 years of war, Liberia's schools and healthcare centers remain severely underfunded. Unemployment is over 80%. The government and people of Liberia cannot have scarce resources funneled to Vultures. Women and children will pay the heaviest price. Congress and the courts must act urgently to clip the wings of these Vultures."

For more information visit:

www.jubileeusa.org/

www.africaaction.org/

www.transafricaforum.org/

Another Protester of Pacific Rim Mining Corporation's El Dorado Site Assassinated in El Salvador

[Press release from the [Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador](#) (CISPES). Contact: Alexis Stoumbelis, CISPES - (978) 394-0425]

On December 26, Dora "Alicia" Recinos Sorto, age 32, was assassinated, the second anti-mining activist killed this week in the small community of Nueva Trinidad in the department of Cabañas. Recinos Sorto was eight months pregnant and carrying her two-year old child when she was shot on her way back from doing laundry at a nearby river. She and her husband, José Santos Rodríguez, were outspoken opponents of the non-operational El Dorado mine which Pacific Rim, a Vancouver-based mining company is desperate to reopen despite widespread community opposition.

Rodríguez is a board member of the Environmental Committee of Cabañas, an organization that formed to educate the community about health and environmental risks of cyanide contamination from gold extraction.

The Committee's vice-president, Ramiro Rivera, was gunned down on December 20 despite having been under 24-hour police protection since being shot eight times in August. Salvadoran President Mauricio Funes vowed to investigate the murder, stating, "I hope this case will not remain in impunity the way that so many others do." These attacks follow the late June kidnapping, torture and assassination of Marcelo Rivera (no relation), in the nearby municipality of San Isidro.

Earlier this year, Recinos Sorto reported that her husband was receiving death threats and that unidentified men had come looking for him at their home. Oscar Menjivar, the man accused of shooting Rivera in August, had previously attacked Rodriguez with a small machete. Menjivar's neighbors report that he was one of Pacific Rim Mining's paid "promoters". According to Rodriguez, "It is Pacific Rim who is responsible for this, because Oscar and I were great friends before they arrived. They are the source of all of this."

The ongoing violence in Cabañas, including assaults, attempted kidnappings and death threats, seems to be centered around the controversial presence of Pacific Rim Mining in the region, with prominent anti-mining leaders coming under attack. Pacific Rim ceased operations at El Dorado after local protests forced the company out and the Salvadoran government subsequently denied extraction permits. President Funes also stated his opposition to the project during his presidential campaign earlier this year and University of Central America polls show that over 62% of the population opposes gold mining.

In response, Pacific Rim opened an investor-state arbitration case against the Salvadoran government in April under the U.S. --Central America Free Trade Agreement, or CAFTA (Pacific Rim filed the suit through a recently acquired subsidiary, Pac Rim Cayman, based in Reno, Nevada.) According to Pacific Rim CEO Thomas Shrake, the company is seeking "hundreds of millions" of dollars in the arbitration, which is scheduled to begin in early 2010. In November, Pacific Rim received notice from the New York Stock Exchange that it is in danger of being delisted after posting net losses for five straight years; the company then announced that it will seek to generate CDN \$2.36 million by selling shares of stock to finance its legal case against the Salvadoran government. The company does not have any other mining projects in operation.

Critical Legal Group's Abandonment of Death Penalty Draws Attention

When the American Law Institute, the group that had provided the model death penalty legal code used by most states, said there was no workable death penalty system last year, the abolition movement took notice. Now, a [major New York Times piece](#) published Jan. 4, 2010, is exploding across the Internet, and the broader public is paying attention. The first line of the piece says it all, "Last fall, the American Law Institute, which created the intellectual framework for the modern capital justice system almost 50 years ago, pronounced its project a failure and walked away from it."

U.S. Senate Policy Advisor and Children's Advocate to Lead Catholics in Alliance

Washington, DC -- Morna Murray, senior counsel and policy advisor for Sen. Robert Casey, Jr. of Pennsylvania, has been named President of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good. An expert in children's issues, poverty, health-care reform and other social justice causes central to faith in public life, Murray brings varied experience at nonprofit organizations and on Capitol Hill. Prior to her tenure with Sen. Casey, Murray was the Director of Youth Development at the Children's Defense Fund, where she served as a senior advisor to President Marian Wright Edelman. Her diverse portfolio of issues there included the needs of low-income and disadvantaged children, early childhood development and education, and juvenile justice.

Murray will begin on Jan. 19.

"The Alliance is excited to welcome this successful advocate and policy expert to our organization at a time when critical moral issues such as economic justice, health care, child

welfare, immigration reform and building a culture that honors the sacred dignity of all life require strategic leadership from the Catholic social justice community," said Fred Rotondaro, Board Chair of Catholics in Alliance.

"Having seen her dedication and skill up close, the Alliance and its members are fortunate to be welcoming Morna Murray as their new president," said Sr. Carol Keehan, DC, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Catholic Health Association of the United States. "Morna's distinguished background in advocacy and public policy, coupled with her passion for social justice, make her an ideal fit for the Alliance, which will benefit greatly from her insight and leadership."

Murray succeeds Alexia Kelley, former Executive Director of Catholics in Alliance, who was named the Director of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the Department of Health and Human Service last spring. Victoria Kovari, National Field Director for the Alliance, has served as Interim Executive Director.

"This outstanding appointment will help the Alliance build on its success as one of the most effective Catholic organizations impacting the debate over the role of faith in public life," said Stephen Schneck, Director of the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at the Catholic University of America. "Morna's leadership qualities and tireless commitment to the common good are well known on Capitol Hill. This is a tremendous choice."

Founded in 2005 to help expand the dialogue on faith in public life and promote the broad spectrum of justice issues at the heart of Catholic social teaching, Catholics in Alliance has emerged as leading voice in the progressive faith community. In 2008, Catholics in Alliance convened a Convention for the Common Good in Philadelphia, a first-of-its-kind event that attracted some 900 participants representing more than 20 religious and Catholic organizations across the country. Along with a coalition of faith-based partners, the Alliance has recently worked to advocate for health-care reform as an urgent moral imperative. In 2010, the Alliance will focus on advocacy campaigns related to poverty reduction, the needs of low-income and disadvantaged children, comprehensive immigration reform, climate change and common-ground efforts to reduce abortions.

Film Review: Immigration Reform and Border Walls

By Matthew Myers

[Matthew Myers is a master's degree student at the Washington Theological Union and an intern in the CMSM Justice and Peace Office.]

Following healthcare reform, comprehensive immigration reform (CIR) is the next significant public policy issue to face Congress in the upcoming legislative session. Current CIR legislation proposed by Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) includes numerous directives for border security, visa and employment reform, and legalization/integration for undocumented persons, as well as safeguards to prevent human trafficking and to promote migrant family unity. While this legislation addresses specific border security concerns like provisions for border enforcement and combating criminal activity, some migrant advocates claim insufficient attention is given to prevention of migrant deaths in the US/Mexico border region. In fact, according to a Government Accounting Office report, border-crossing migrant deaths have doubled since 1995. Why are more migrants dying on our border?

One migrant advocate, John Carlos Frey, created a documentary film entitled *The 800 Mile Wall* to increase awareness about the rising number of migrant deaths in our border region. In his film, Frey interviews a vast array of individuals: INS and UN officials, local and national policymakers, university researchers, human rights advocates, and migrants. Although expressing varied perspectives on immigration reform overall, every interviewee agreed on one crucial point: many of the growing number of migrant deaths on the

US/Mexico border are caused by walls and canals constructed by the US government.

As Frey illustrates in *The 800 Mile Wall*, current US border policy employs a "prevention through deterrence" strategy. Using a combination of fences, canals, and concentrated policing tactics, this plan "funnels" migrants away from less risky border-crossing routes toward more remote areas with harsher terrain. Border-crossing migrants tend to follow these more hazardous routes to avoid detection and deportation. However, these routes significantly increase the amount of time migrants spend in the dangerous conditions of the desert and limit the probability of finding life-saving assistance if necessary. These factors increase their likelihood of death by exposure or dehydration. According to the "prevention through deterrence" strategy, the mortal danger of border-crossing should deter migrants from undertaking the journey. Unfortunately, most data indicate this dangerous border policy has little to no deterrent effect upon potential migrants.

Perhaps the most poignant parts of the film are when migrants themselves are interviewed, some during their journey through the border region. Border-crossing men and women share their stories and their physical hardships on camera. Also included are several touching visuals of materials abandoned in the desert by migrants -- infant carriers, clothing, religious articles -- all telling a piece of a border-crossing struggle. These interviews and images help viewers avoid understanding border policy as a pure abstraction and connect us with the real people and their very real struggle for survival.

In trying to tackle the complexity of border policy in 90 minutes, *The 800 Mile Wall* necessarily skims some issues too lightly. Little consideration is given to the myriad causes (e.g., exploitative international trade agreements, oppressive governments) of migration from Mexico and Central America into the United States. Also, few suggestions are offered to develop more humane border and immigration policies. These limitations do not, however, undermine the powerful message of the film: walls are not safe or effective and must not be considered an option in future CIR debates.

Overall, *The 800 Mile Wall* is an instructive film that powerfully illustrates the harsh life-and-death struggle of border-crossing migrants. It readily complements several of the educational resources and programs provided by the USCCB on comprehensive immigration reform (see www.JusticeForImmigrants.org). For additional information about the film, visit www.800milewall.org.

Justice for Immigrants Postcards



Take Action!

Immigration reform legislation may soon be considered Congress. Help us show your Senators and Representatives that Catholics and other supporters of immigrants want our elected officials to enact meaningful and compassionate immigration reform. Click on the "Take Action" link to fill out and send your postcards to your federal lawmakers.

A Catholic Response Study Guide to Climate Change

The Catholic Church calls us to be responsible stewards of this planet and to put into action Catholic social teaching. The National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) has developed a web-based study guide to introduce you to a structured approach to help move through the steps of understanding and applying Catholic teachings as these relate to climate change.

Climate Change: A Catholic Response Study Guide is designed to help you apply Catholic social teaching to climate change and prudent energy use. We invite you to visit our website and use the guide for a self-guided study session.

Ecumenical Advocacy Days



A Place to Call Home: Immigrants, Refugees, and Displaced Peoples March 19 - 22, 2010 Washington D.C.

[REGISTER NOW](#)

And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' -Luke 9:58

Jesus had no place to lay his head. Neither do tens of millions of migrants, refugees and displaced persons. Be a part of an action weekend addressing this global injustice. Join hundreds of faith-based advocates in taking action on U.S. legislation that will welcome immigrants, protect refugees, and prevent displacement of millions.

Worship, study and dialogue with hundreds of people of faith at the annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days. Then join us as we go to Capitol Hill to advocate for our members of Congress to remedy these global injustices. The 2010 conference will be held March 19 - 22 at the DoubleTree Hotel in Crystal City, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C.

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.*

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It is also sent to justice and peace directors of CMSM member organizations, and to others who have expressed an interest.

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