

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

*a bimonthly newsletter on information on
international peace and justice issues*

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Peace *must* be possible

Once again the world has witnessed the devastation of war. We open this issue of *NewsNotes* with three reflections that underscore its tragic consequences. The first includes excerpts from the letters of former Maryknoll lay missionary Cathy Breen, who stayed in Baghdad throughout the war simply to “be with” the Iraqi people. After the U.S. troops entered Baghdad, Cathy wrote:

And so it goes. Anger, fear, relief, weariness, sadness, tears. I find tears coming that I can't stop in these last days. Today I spoke with one of the mothers here in the hotel. There are deep dark circles around her eyes. "We are so tired," she said wearily. "Twenty-five years and we are so tired. This is my country. We want no Saddam, no Bush. We are so tired."

So tired of war ... a world so tired of war...

The word of God and the gift of encounter with sacred, threatened lives around the world make it clear that peace must be possible, there must be another way. If we cannot see it then our lens is too narrow, our vision short sighted - our hope, our claim on life diminished.

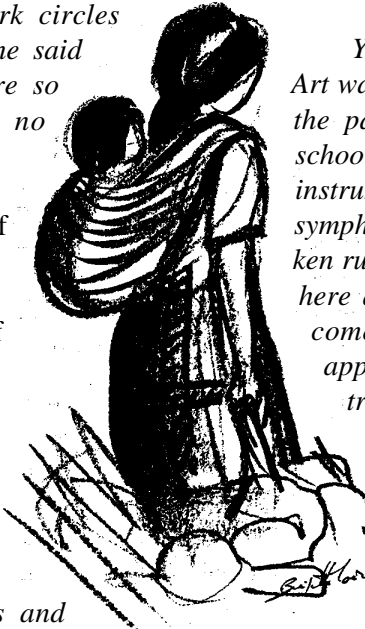
I can't express the deep sadness and desperation that afflicts all of us here. Burnt cars, bombed and burning buildings, looting and shooting. A gun can be bought for \$3.00 on the street. Hospitals looted and roads blocked. Ambulances and police cars stolen. Hospitals no longer functional. The sick and dying turned away. There are no longer any statistics to be had. No records of birth, death, health or having studied. Books burned, no school or university. Stores closed, schools closed. Lawlessness and anarchy. No electricity.

The sick and dying turned away ...

A person who works with the Islamic Relief whose offices are in the hotel related having seen five bodies dead on the side of the street today in the city. Someone from our team saw the nurses digging graves for the babies in front of the Children's hospital as they can't get them to the cemetery.

Digging graves for the babies ...

The lens through which these experiences force us to look is very wide - it evokes from us a yearning for peace that goes beyond our national security or even the absence of war and terror. It cannot be accomplished by global control. It is much, much deeper than that - shalom, salaam - an integral well being that embraces all human beings and the rest of creation, drawing us deeper and deeper into the kind of right relationships reflected in the best impulses of every major religious tradition.



Yesterday the Baghdad School of Ballet and Art was looted... The piece of a shattered violin on the pavement greeted us as we approached the school.... In one of the rooms where the musical instruments are stored, Hishaam, a member of the symphony orchestra, picked his way through broken rubble of instruments. "I studied here. I taught here and then directed here. Why? Why?" Overcome with emotion, he couldn't go on. As I approached the entrance where the administration and classrooms were, the figure of a skeleton used in Anatomy class with an instrument case leaning on it was strewn by the front door. Tragically appropriate. Death of a civilization and culture. Here a couple of pianos had been dragged out into the foyer...I heard the sound of someone fingering one of the pianos ..., one that though broken still played! It was Majid, one of the instructors and also symphony orchestra member. I took a broken chair from a nearby room and silently placed it near him. He sat and began to play soulful songs that expressed his own grieving. And he played and he played and he played. On and on and on.

Death of a civilization and a culture ... Will the terrible loss of human life on both sides, the destruction of irreplaceable cultural treasures, the devastation of homes and hospitals and lives, the ecological damage, the psychological and physical injuries have a lasting impact? War is always a defeat for humanity! Can any lessons emerge from the rubble of Baghdad and Basra to help the human community avoid these scenes in the future? Perhaps we need new architects - the mourning mothers and broken musicians may help us find a place to start.

Struggling for peace: Lessons from Africans

The following reflection is written by Maryknoll Fr. Dave Schwinghamer, M.M.

As the events of recent months teach us, the waging of war also mobilizes the passion for peace. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the war-torn areas of sub-Saharan Africa. For the last 55 years Maryknoll missionaries, through extensive contact with ordinary African people, have witnessed both the spread of violent war and the relentless struggle by ordinary people to find a path to peace. Their efforts have taught us a great deal about this elusive human treasure.

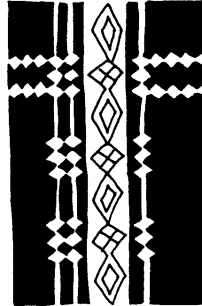
Some members of Maryknoll have spent time serving the hordes of war-related refugees in Somalia, Sudan, and Tanzania. Others have ministered to communities in the midst of aerial bombardment in southern and central Sudan. Still others have counseled victims of mass communal violence in Rwanda and comforted the families of soldiers killed in the Uganda/Tanzania war. At the grassroots level in Mozambique and Zimbabwe, Maryknollers have worked with communities involved in the process of post-war reconstruction. At present, our peace advocacy efforts include action on two protracted conflicts: the civil wars in Sudan and Burundi.

In all these situations of conflict we have come to know dedicated African peacemakers – individual men and women who, often at great risk to themselves, carry on the struggle for a lasting peace. We are heartened, therefore, by the recent call by the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letter "A Call to Solidarity with Africa." If U.S. Catholics answer this call, they cannot help but come into contact with Africans who seek our solidarity and have some lessons to share with us on how to make peace.

For the last seven years I have been in contact with refugees from the central African countries of Rwanda and Burundi. I came to know the *wakimbizi* through Maryknoll's response to the refugee crisis evoked by the assassination of the president of Burundi in 1993 and the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Along with several other Maryknollers, I had the opportunity to live and work with the hundreds of thousands of refugees who still scramble to survive in UN administered camps in western Tanzania.

Through contact with these hardy farming people, I have come to learn about the causes of the conflicts that have engulfed their societies and to appreciate the many

solid peacemaking efforts undertaken by church, civil society groups, as well as individuals all over Africa. Here are some lessons about war and peacemaking that I think U.S. American peace advocates might draw upon from the experience of African peacemakers.



First, the place of peace is often found somewhere between vengeance and forgiveness. This place is called reconciliation. The efforts of South Africa to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) were based on the refusal to follow the impulse of retaliation against the crimes committed during the apartheid era. The TRC attempted to establish a restorative rather than a retributive form of justice as one of the basic building blocks of peace. Our post-9/11 United States might learn from this courageous effort to rely in a nonviolent path to dealing with social enemies.

Second, negotiated peace accords do not ensure permanent peace. African peacemakers have learned through the experience of Angola, Sudan, Rwanda, and Burundi that the sense of community and a will to reconcile cannot be imposed through accords but must grow out of a genuine transformation of the causes of conflict. U.S. citizens concerned about peace might try to keep this lesson in front of government leaders who are about to unveil a "roadmap" for peace in the Middle East. (*see page 21.*)

Third, small arms and landmines are the major weapons of mass destruction in Africa. The vast majority of them are imported. The leadership of the Catholic Church in Africa has made an explicit appeal to leadership of churches in the west to do something about this trade. Catholics should present this appeal to Catholic legislators as a pro-life issue.

Fourth, throughout Africa the "force more powerful" is slowly spreading. Peace groups and movements for nonviolent change are active and engaged in many countries. Their existence is sometimes very precarious. Their good efforts may seem small and immature compared to the extensive movement for peace in the U.S. Nevertheless, they not only deserve our solidarity, but through their tireless and often defiant challenge to authoritarian governments, they can teach us that realistic alternatives to violence, even in the most acute circumstance, are possible.

War's embrace

The following reflection on life during war is written by Kathy McNeely, a Maryknoll lay missionary currently on staff with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. In the mid-1980s, before joining Maryknoll, Kathy worked with Witness for Peace in Nicaragua. We invite others to share their reflections on the impact of war in their lives; if you are interested in sharing your stories, please send them to the Maryknoll Global Concerns Office at ogc@maryknoll.org, or use the mailing address found in the inside front cover..

It was April 1986, the hottest, driest time of year in Nicaragua. The *contra* had just attacked a small village and a nearby column of Sandinista soldiers rushed to its defense. Seven civilians were caught in the crossfire, one of them an 11-year-old boy. He was stretched out on a metal table. His forehead was bandaged where the bullet struck and his nose and mouth were stuffed with cotton and gauze. A photographer, Paul, and I escorted the boy's mother to the morgue. She stopped about ten paces from the table and sobbed. I stood at her side. Before I knew it her head was on my shoulder and I could no longer tell the difference between tears and sweat as my t-shirt took on a deep hue.

It seemed like an eternity as we stood there holding one another, as Paul moved around the table snapping shots of the boy, of her, of me. Nearly 16 years later, I cannot forget the scene. Two solitary figures stand before the sight and smell of senseless death and hold one another because somehow all life depends on that embrace.

In April in Nicaragua, heat and humidity build up before the rain falls in May. The season's naturally hot days are made even hotter by the fact that farmers, eager for the rain, prepare their fields by slashing and burning the weeds and tilling the black soil below. In the context of a war, the driest time of the year is the easiest time to move troops. Add to this an injection of \$100 million approved by the U.S. Congress in the summer of 1986, and you get a predictable and powerful *contra*-sponsored spring offensive. The *contra* moved from village to village slashing and burning, only their targets were not fields of weeds, but villages, homesteads and cooperatives where civilians lived.

Three of us were assigned to follow the spring offensive for the month of April. After each attack we would go to the village, photograph what we could, interview the survivors, record the names of the dead, and attend the funerals. The reports we composed were compiled and sent to Congress to let them know how U.S. tax dollars were being spent.

The memory of that embrace lives on in me because holding her at that moment was the only thing I could do. In fact, I held her because I needed to. Her embrace revived

in me a sense of humanity that the war was trying to snatch away. I had spent weeks moving from bedside to funeral, from one smoldering village to the next horrid attack, taking it in stride, focusing on getting the story back home. The more I focused on that mission, the less I allowed myself to feel the heartbreak. But in that morgue, the pain riveted through me; it ran through my body like water, sweated out my pores and rolled off my cheeks in boundless tears.

The boy's mother and I depended on one another to sustain life. In that shared embrace filled with sweat and tears we both came away comforted that humanity triumphed, that the war had not stolen from us our ability to touch and to be touched. We knew that by any other cast of the die it could have been one of us lying on that metal table with selected body parts stuffed with cotton and wrapped in gauze. We shared that human vulnerability, but somehow we were strengthened by it.

This experience comes alive for me as I read reports from Baghdad. I think of the troops on both sides, of the fear, pain and trauma they've just lived through. I think too about the people who were killed as they went about the routines of their daily lives, and about the many ways that families have been torn apart. As I read the letters from former Maryknoll lay missionary Cathy Breen and other non-Iraqi citizens there to accompany the people, I wonder whether they have at times felt defeated by death.

The war in Nicaragua never made much sense to me, nor to the people who lost family members, houses, farms and what little they owned. What did make sense was that embrace. It breathed new life into me when I had thought all was lost.

Today I pray that the world remember the humanity that an embrace offers. I pray that these memories flood the dreams and waking moments of our leaders who make decisions about unleashing even more violence. There is something deep in the human spirit, a spark of something that allows us to defy a war's power to take away our human instinct to love and nurture one another. This spirit that calls us to love and to embrace is what will revive us in these desperate times.

"All life is sacred"

The following statement was written by "Catholics for a Peaceful End to War and Terrorism," an ad hoc coalition of Catholic groups and individuals which was formed after the attacks on September 11, 2001.

In the weeks since the U.S. initiated the war in Iraq, we have witnessed once again the death and destruction suffered by a people made to endure the violence of war. ... [W]e spoke out at the start of this war to remind people that our own church leaders had characterized this war as unjust and immoral. ... We said then that, "All life is sacred, and we mourn the loss of any life – Iraqi or American, civilian or military."

In these past weeks we have witnessed scenes of tremendous violence and human suffering brought about by this war on our TV screens, on the Internet, and in our newspapers. We have seen bodies of victims, often innocent civilians, sometimes entire families, killed by bombs, shot at military checkpoints, or in the crossfire of battle. Homes have been destroyed, cities left without electricity, water, and telephones. Hospitals have been damaged by bombs and ransacked by looters. Medical personnel lament that they are overwhelmed with wounded and no longer have the medicines, equipment or bed space to deal with the injured. We have seen photos and heard stories from the National Museum of Iraq as looters robbed and destroyed the cultural heritage of Iraq and, indeed, the cultural roots of our common history.

And we have seen the faces of grieving family members of U.S. troops killed in this war, a war of choice, not of necessity.

Sadly, we also hear our national leaders — those who, against the will of the international community, decided to perpetrate this war — announce that they are not responsible or accountable for this destruction. We hear them proclaim that there will be no accounting for Iraqi casualties, combatant and non-combatant, nor an acceptance of responsibility for the collapse of social order and the chaos that is now being experienced in many parts of Iraq. ...

As people of a gospel faith, we cannot keep silent before so much death and destruction, before the suffering of the Iraqi people. Nor can we be silent as our government leaders fail to share with the world the real human costs of this war.

The gospel tells us that we must embrace truth, love our enemies, feed the hungry, care for the wounded ones on the side of the road, take responsibility for our actions and

their motivations. The U.S. must accept its "grave responsibility before God, [its] conscience, and history" by taking responsibility for the chain of events sparked by its decision to go to war.

We therefore call upon our government leaders to:

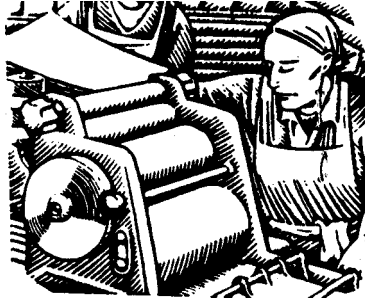
- stop the war in Iraq immediately and reject consideration of any new theater of military action;
- repudiate the immoral and dangerous policy of "pre-emptive war;"
- account for the casualties, both civilian and military, caused by this war, including allowing free access to human rights, humanitarian and other non-governmental organizations seeking to carry out this accounting;
- take responsibility for the social chaos caused by the war as well as our direct and indirect complicity in the destruction to Iraq's infrastructure, and do everything possible to restore electricity, water, sanitation and communications systems;
- ensure that hospitals and other health care delivery systems are immediately restored to full service;
- protect the population, the country's economic resources and cultural inheritance from injury and destruction by looting and vengeance;
- turn over humanitarian aid efforts in Iraq to the United Nations and/or other international agencies;
- begin immediately to clean up the lethal aftermath of our munitions, including depleted uranium, unexploded bomblets from cluster bombs, and other toxic or dangerous materials that pose a future threat to the Iraqi people.

We also call upon the UN to immediately lift the 12-year-old economic sanctions and to help empower Iraqis as soon as possible to determine the future of their own nation.

Tremendous damage has been caused by this war — to the Iraqi people, to the Arab world, to the reputation of the U.S. in the international community, to the UN and other international alliances and organizations, to the hopes of addressing the root causes of terrorism that afflicts our world and threatens our own people here in the U.S. We call upon the community of faith and the citizens of this country to reassess the role of the U.S. in the world. Are we a force for good, for justice and peace, or are we perpetrating and deepening the cycle of violence we claim to be fighting?

Resources

- 1) **National Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice Conference:** Please join leaders from local religion-labor coalitions and religious denominations to strengthen local efforts and enhance public policy advocacy for workers. **May 18-20, 2003**, Washington, D.C. For more information, contact the National Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice, 1020 W. Bryn Mawr, 4th Floor, Chicago IL, 60660; tel: (773)728-8400; fax: (773)728-8409; www.nicwj.org; sara@nicwj.org.



- 2) **Stopping War Where It Begins: Organizing Against Militarism in Our Schools:** Sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee's Youth and Militarism program, this conference will be held **June 27-29, 2003** in Philadelphia. Designed for all those who believe that schools should be about education, opportunity, building social justice and teaching peace. Workshop and panel topics will include: youth/peer organizing and ally support work; countering JROTC proliferation; No Child Left Unrecruited (Behind) Act; presenting alternatives to military enlistment; strategies/approaches to counter-recruitment work; recruitment and ROTC on college campuses; military recruiting and race, gender and ethnicity; and conscientious objection and draft registration. For more information on the conference contact: AFSC Youth & Militarism Program, 215-241-7176; youthmil@afsc.org.

- 3) **"All Come Bearing Gifts:"** The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services, along with Catholic Legal Immigration Network, present the annual national migration conference, **July 6-10, 2003** in Washington, D.C. It is intended to enable participants to: educate policy makers to the challenges and abuses refugees, immigrants, migrants, and people on the move face throughout the world and in this country; increase capacity for resettlement of refugees; understand the scourge of human trafficking and its many victims; provide a vibrant and sustainable welcoming ministry in dioceses and parishes in service

to immigrants, refugees, migrants and people on the move; and replicate best practices being employed by the various service networks. For more information, contact the USCCB/Migration and Refugee Services at (202)541-3352; 3211 Fourth Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017; or go to www.usccb.org/mrs/index.htm

- 4) **"A World on the Brink: A Gated Empire or Global Solidarity?":** Pax Christi USA will hold its annual national assembly **August 1-3, 2003** at St. John's University, Jamaica, NY. Keynote speakers will be Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and Pax Christi International President, and Njoki Njehu, director of 50 Years is Enough. Some of the seminars offered include: "The Spirituality of Vulnerability," "Operation Endless Deployment," "Pacem in Terris at 40," and "God, Globalization and All God's Children." For more information, contact Pax Christi USA at www.paxchristiusa.org, or call (814)453-4955. PCUSA's mailing address is 532 W. 8th Street Erie, PA 16502.

- 5) **The Iraq Briefing Book** was produced by the Iraq Policy Working Group, a diverse group of national and international religious, humanitarian, public interest and arms control organizations who are working with Congress to promote effective policies on Iraq (including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns). The briefing book provides information about a wide range of issues related to a possible war with Iraq, and was hand-delivered to the offices of every new member of Congress in January 2003. The briefing book is available only through the internet; to download portions of the briefing book, go to www.iraqbriefs.org.

- 6) **New resources from the Jubilee USA Network:** Jubilee USA recently updated its education and action packet. Learn more about the debt crisis, World Bank and IMF policies, the current debt relief plan, advocacy strategies, and more. \$5. Contact Jubilee USA at (202)783-3566, or email coord@j2000usa.org. Also, ask for information about how your church or worship community can become a "Jubilee Congregation." For more information, contact Mara Vanderslice at (202)783-0129 or write mara@j2000usa.org.