

The e-bulletin for the North West, linked to the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN), is produced jointly by the dioceses of Lancaster, Liverpool, Salford, Shrewsbury and Wrexham. Please send diary dates to anneoc980@hotmail.com

CATHOLIC BISHOPS CALL FOR URGENT CAMEROON PEACE TALKS

Source: Global Campaign for Peace and Justice in Cameroon 17/2/2020

Roman Catholic bishops from around the world are calling on the Cameroon government to hold urgent peace talks with the country's English-speaking separatists and moderates. As violence grows in the central African country, church leaders are urging President Paul Biya to enter negotiations to find a peaceful constitutional settlement that addresses the grievances of the Anglophone community. Human rights groups report that both the Cameroon armed forces and secessionist militias have terrorized unarmed civilians, burned villages, closed schools and hospitals, and brought the economy to a stand-still in English-speaking regions of the country. The UN estimates that 656,000 Anglophone Cameroonians have fled their homes to avoid the violence, while at least 2,000 people are thought to have been killed.

The bishops have signed an open letter to President Biya, coordinated by the non-partisan Global Campaign for Peace and Justice in Cameroon. The clergymen urge the president, who has been in power since 1982, to join inclusive Swiss-led negotiations aimed at finding a peaceful solution to long-standing Anglophone concerns.

In his 2020 New Year's message, President Biya reaffirmed his determination to defeat secessionist forces using military means. The bishops take no side in the conflict, but they believe there can be no military solution to the current insecurity. Civilians-including Catholic priests-have been kidnapped, and Catholic-run schools and clinics have been forced to close. An estimated 800,000 children are unable to attend school.

The current wave of violence began in 2016 when the Francophone-dominated government imposed French lawyers and teachers on English-speaking courts and schools. However, Anglophone grievances are rooted in a 1961 UN-backed independence referendum that failed to offer English-speaking Cameroonians, who represent 20% of the population, the chance to form their own country. Especially since 1972, there have been allegations that the Francophone-dominated central government in the capital of Yaoundé has marginalized the mainly Anglophone North West and South West regions.

Responding to international pressure, the Cameroon government held a Major National Dialogue in October 2019. However, the talks were widely boycotted by Anglophone groups, while other members of civil society were unable to attend. The government subsequently granted Special Status to the two Anglophone regions. However, critics argue that the promised increase in autonomy remains loosely defined, with power remaining in the centralized and largely Francophone administration in Yaoundé. Despite the dialogue, the violence is worsening, with an estimated 50,000 people in refugee camps across the border in next-door Nigeria. The text of the open letter is as follows:

Dear President Biya, We, the undersigned Roman Catholic bishops from across the globe, write to respectfully urge your government to participate in proposed Swiss-led peace talks aimed at ending the violence in Cameroon's North West and South West regions. We stress that we are impartial. We are motivated by our concern about the suffering of unarmed civilians, and the stability and prosperity of Cameroon. Violence and atrocities on all sides have forced 656,000 Anglophone Cameroonians from their homes, kept 800,000 children from school (including 400,000 from Catholic schools), caused 50,000 people to flee to Nigeria, destroyed hundreds of villages and resulted in a death toll of at least 2,000. Each of these lives is precious, and we mourn their suffering and wish to prevent more loss of life and innocence.

There will be no military victory for any side. A lasting solution to Cameroon's problems must come from a mediated process that includes Anglophone armed-separatist groups and non-violent civil-society leaders. If all parties treat each other as they wish to be treated, a solution is possible.

We applaud the Cameroonian government's Major National Dialogue several months ago. However, it did not stop the violence. We believe the proposed Swiss-led talks offer the best path to an appropriate political solution through inclusive negotiations. The success of these talks will be critical in Cameroon's journey towards ensuring peace and your legacy as an effective leader in a troubled region. It is our sincere hope that all interested stakeholders will join these talks and show a spirit of cooperation, pragmatism, and realism to ensure these negotiations succeed. This is what the people of Cameroon, your sons and daughters, God's children, expect and deserve. Only true peace will allow Catholic dioceses, clinics, and schools to once again minister safely to the blessed congregants and citizens of Anglophone Cameroon.

Yours sincerely,

Bishop Siegfried Jwara, Vicariate Apostolic, Ingwavuma, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa; Bishop John Keenan, diocese of Paisley, Scotland; Bishop Noel Simard, diocese of Valleyfield, Quebec, Canada; The Most Reverend Charles Hammawa Jalingo, diocese of Tabara State, Nigeria; Bishop Mark Davies, diocese of Shrewsbury, England; Archbishop Peter Loy Chong, archdiocese of Suva, Fiji; Bishop Bart van Roijen, diocese of Corner Brook and Labrador, Canada; Bishop Thomas R Zinkula, diocese of Davenport, Iowa, USA; Bishop Terence Draine, diocese of Middlesborough, England; Bishop Antonio R Tobias, Emeritus of Novaliches, Philippines; Bishop Albert Thevenot, diocese of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada; Bishop Ray Browne, diocese of Kerry, Ireland; Bishop Jose Cabantan, diocese of Malaybalay, Philippines; Cardinal Soane Patita Mafi, diocese of Tonga, South Pacific; Archbishop Donald Bolen, archdiocese of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada; Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan, diocese of Waterford et Lismore, Ireland cc: His Holiness Pope Francis.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE SITUATION IN CAMEROON

When the international community ignores escalating atrocities of the kind happening in Cameroon, it often ends up paying a massive bill. Sooner or later, we must fund refugee camps and peacekeepers, host negotiations, accommodate thousands of migrants seeking asylum, and then help rebuild shattered nations. It makes more sense to use diplomacy to stop the violence at an early stage, finding a political solution to a political problem through inclusive peace negotiations.

Cameroon, a central African country best known for soccer, is gripped by a conflict between the French-speaking majority (80%) and the historically marginalised Anglophone minority (20%). Grievances boiled over in 2016 when the Francophone-dominated regime of President Paul Biya imposed French-speaking judges on Anglophone courts, and Francophone teachers in Anglophone schools.

Impartial observers such as the International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International report that the government is responded to peaceful Anglophone demonstrations with disproportionate force. Its soldiers are burning down English-speaking villages, and the UN estimates 656,000 people have fled into the bush where they live in dire conditions. Two thousand people have been killed, and 50,000 are now refugees in neighbouring Nigeria. There are credible reports of soldiers shooting civilians from helicopters, spraying tear gas at people emerging from Sunday mass, and committing atrocities as they rampage through villages.

The regime's tactics have fuelled secessionist militias which have become increasingly violent. Bandits take advantage of the lawlessness to loot, kidnap, intimidate and kill unarmed civilians and government officials. Anglophone opinion is split: hard-line separatists demand that the English-speaking regions become a new country called Ambazonia; while more moderate Anglophones seek increased autonomy or devolution through a Quebec-style constitutional settlement. Strikes enforced by the Ambazonian secessionist militias have closed businesses and clinics, with an estimated 800,000 children missing out on school for several years.

Representing moderate Anglophone opinion is the Roman Catholic church, which calls on the government to allow a genuine, inclusive dialogue and to investigate attacks on civilians. The bishops warn that a volatile situation may deteriorate further. Under international pressure, the government held a national dialogue in October 2019. However, few Anglophone leaders could attend, and there was insufficient focus on the roots of the Anglophone crisis. The arrest of Anglophone journalists and opposition figures, and the reported torture of dozens of activists, has fed a lack of trust.

President Biya, in power since 1982, believes military force will defeat the secessionists. Until there is a unified and coherent Anglophone position, he will likely divide and rule. Biya also survives because of his usefulness to the international community: Cameroon is fighting Nigeria's Islamist Boko Haram rebels in its Far North. In addition, the country hosts 350,000 refugees fleeing the violence in the Central African Republic and Nigeria. Biya is supported by France, which has units of its Foreign Legion stationed around the region. Whereas the British left Africa at independence, the French never did. They remain closely involved in the economic and military life of their former colonies. Cameroon's oil may be off the coast of the English-speaking region, but it is French companies running the rigs.

Until 1960, there were two Cameroons: the larger territory was administered by France, using the French legal and education systems and language. In the south and west, the British were in charge. At their schools, students spoke English and studied for O and A Levels, and in their courts, English common law was dispensed by English-speaking judges. In 1961, a referendum asked the inhabitants of British Cameroon if they wanted to join next door Nigeria or French-speaking Cameroon. A third choice - independence - was not on offer. By default, the English-speaking Cameroonians found they were a minority in the new nation. A constitution guaranteeing equal rights was soon disregarded, and the Francophone majority took positions of power in the military and in government. Until recently, only one of 36 cabinet members is Anglophone. And Cameroon long since ceased being a democracy: Amnesty condemns Cameroon's jails ('deplorable'), and the government's track record of having journalists arrested and tortured. The World Justice Project ranks Cameroon as 109th out of 113 countries surveyed, worse than Afghanistan and Venezuela.

The UN Secretary-General has called for inclusive talks, but as is often the case, the African Union takes no position on the violence beyond mild reprimands. The UK government stands by the disputed referendum that lurks behind Anglophone grievances. Meanwhile, the USA has cut some military aid and removed Cameroon's preferential trade status in response to human rights violations.

A Swiss NGO has proposed inclusive talks to be held in Switzerland, a proposal supported by many Anglophone groups. The Global Campaign for Peace and Justice in Cameroon believes these talks represent the best way forward. We are academics and activists who advocate a peaceful resolution of the Cameroon conflict through inclusive and substantive negotiations. We seek a sustainable constitutional settlement, and an end to impunity, while remaining impartial on the core issue of state form. The UK branch is part of an international group, based in Toronto.
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38940>

NJPN's Kevin Burr writes: A member of our parish has been telling me of the abductions, destruction and executions by insurgents in the area of English speaking Cameroons he comes from. This appeal has only been signed by three UK Bishops [one from Scotland and two England including Shrewsbury's Mark Davies – Ed.] Please do everything you can to put pressure on the UK parliament [and your local Bishop –Ed.] to take a more active interest in the responsibilities it has in managing the affairs of this region.

VATICAN SPEAKER TELLS NJPN: 'THIS MUST BE THE DECADE FOR ACTION, INSPIRED BY LAUDATO SI'

Ellen Teague 10/2/2020

A speaker from the Vatican's Dicastery for Integral Human Development has told Justice and Peace campaigners in England and Wales that 2020-2030 should be a "decade for action", responding to "the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor". He urged around 40 Justice and Peace activists "to ignite our parishes", inspired by *Laudate Si'*, which he described as "a wonderful document". The way we are organising our society is destroying God's creation, he said, and parishes could play a huge role in protecting nature and promoting justice and peace.

Fr Augusto Zampini was addressing the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN) meeting in Bristol on Saturday 8 February. Hosted by Clifton J&P Commission, the meeting took as its theme '*Our Common Home - creative responses*'. Originally from Argentina, Fr Augusto is Director of Development and Faith at the Vatican's Dicastery for Integral Human Development. A former student at Bath University, and a consultant for a time with CAFOD, he was involved in preparations for last October's Amazon Synod at the Vatican. Pope Francis' much-awaited exhortation on the Pan-Amazonian synod will be released next week, bearing the title, '*Beloved Amazonia*'.

"We must connect science to faith" Fr Zampini urged, pointing out that scientists have warned for decades about climate change and that anticipated changes are already underway. "Don't accept the narrative denying what the scientists are saying", he said, and he called for listeners to take seriously the mission of Pope Francis to point out the human roots of "unprecedented social-economic-ecological crises". The consumerist and throw-away culture were among the problems identified and the failure to value other creatures and give them space to live. He used the word 'Ecocide' several times to explain what is happening, and highlighted Paragraph 74 of *Laudato Si'* which suggests that "injustice is not invincible".

Fr Zampini felt civil society is increasingly speaking out on the streets because of the lack of political will to address fundamental issues destroying 'our common home'. Showing a satellite image of Australia in January, with hundreds of fires burning, he warned that the planet is adapting to climate change and heading towards becoming a planet inhospitable to human life. "We will have a different house if nothing is done", he said.

Following Fr Augusto's talk, Phil Kingston, of Holy Family, Patchway, and a member of Christian Climate Action explained why he has been involved in civil disobedience and advised on how to cope with anxieties over "our common home". He has been arrested several times recently for nonviolent direct action highlighting inadequate action on climate change and the link between environmental destruction and the global economy. He expressed admiration for the leadership offered by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* to hear "the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor". He feels only a widespread movement of civil disobedience will force politicians and leaders of corporations to meet the challenges of our times. Nikki Jones, founder of local charity, *Avon Needs Trees*, spoke about buying land between Chippenham and Calne for reforestation.

NJPN business included discussion of plans for the July 2020 annual conference, being planned by the Northern Dioceses Environmental Group, the NJPN Environment Group, Nottingham Diocese J&P and Green Christian. It aims to update Christian witness for justice and peace in the light of recent developments in papal teaching, thinking on integral ecology, movements such as 'Extinction Rebellion' and scientific advice to policy makers. Systemic change to address economic-ecological crises will be explored and inspirational initiatives which lower carbon footprints and build a sustainable future.

Saturday's event, at St Nicholas of Tolentino Parish Hall, Bristol, was attended by Justice and Peace fieldworkers and activists from Clifton and other dioceses including Arundel and Brighton, Birmingham, Cardiff, East Anglia, Hallam, Liverpool and Westminster. They were joined by organisations, including CAFOD and Pax Christi, and religious, such as the Columbans.

CAFOD highlighted its '*Generations Unite*' initiative, where each diocese has been partnered with a young climate leader or group from the global south to be inspired by and accompany during 2020. It is hoped this will enable people to adapt to a warming world and address the climate crisis.

Find out more at <https://cafod.org.uk/News/Campaigning-news/Generations-Unite-campaign>

North West CAFOD news: Mary Moeono Kolio, 28, from New Zealand is partnered with the dioceses of Lancaster, Liverpool, Salford, Shrewsbury and Wrexham. Mary is the voluntary coordinator for the Wellington, New Zealand branch of the Pacific Climate Warriors. Communities in the Pacific Islands are on the frontline of climate change. Many are being forced to adapt to ever-changing and dangerous weather conditions or flee their lands. Young activists like Mary are organising their communities to protest, demonstrate and call for change. They encourage young people to see themselves as climate leaders. Read Mary's story <https://projects.cafod.org.uk/mary/>

Pax Christi has a new nonviolence initiative for Lent. *NonvioLent* is inspired by Pope Francis' call to 'set aside every act of violence in thought, word and deed, whether against our neighbours or against God's creation' and by the work of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative to share widely an understanding of nonviolence as both a way of life and a gospel approach to challenging injustice. **Lent Resources** including the NonvioLent blog with words and images are available at <http://paxchristi.org.uk/product-category/len-and-easter>

The Columbans reminded the meeting that 14th February is the closing date for their young journalists' competition, '*Tackling our Throwaway Culture*'.

www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/ <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38891>

LIVERPOOL ARCHDIOCESE TARGETS HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Ellen Teague *The Tablet* 6/2/2020: Liverpool Archdiocese is planning a new initiative to combat “the scandal of modern-day slavery”. After a January talk by Kevin Hyland, the UK’s first Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, there was a commitment to encourage catholic parishes to get involved in the ecumenical effort. On the eve of the 8 February, the feast of St Josephine Bakhita, the patron of victims of trafficking and those who work to combat it, the Salvation Army will help the archdiocese trial a model for a parish meeting at St Vincent’s in the city. In March there will be an event at the Anglican cathedral, and in April a walk of witness in the city centre.

Steve Atherton, the Liverpool Archdiocese justice and peace fieldworker, reports that, “in July we hope to gather reps from parishes across the archdiocese for the launch of a diocesan wide campaign”. Pope Francis has been vocal in his opposition to trafficking, which he has termed “a crime against humanity” for its dramatic, and inhumane, “commercialisation” of other human beings. The churches have been heavily involved in combating modern slavery. The Medaille Trust, for example, was formed by religious congregations and runs a network of safe houses for rescued victims of trafficking. In 2015 the UK government passed the Modern Slavery Act, designed to combat modern slavery in the UK.

In an era of geopolitical upheaval and climate change, human trafficking has become a key concern for both religious and secular human rights organisations. In 2019, the UN announced that human trafficking cases had reached a 13-year high, with women and children being especially targeted. Victims are transported from their country of birth for a wide variety of purposes, such as forced marriages or even organ donation, but the two most common remain forced labour or the sex trade. Convictions for human trafficking have also increased, however, as campaigners have raised public awareness around the phenomenon. Four people have been arrested by Police Scotland in the last week, as part of a national crackdown on trafficking north of the tweed. Charities have warned, however, that the majority of trafficking continues to take place in regions where there are few legal consequences to the practice.

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/12453/liverpool-archdiocese-targets-human-trafficking>

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: TRAFFICKING AND MODERN SLAVERY

Steve Atherton *The Tablet* 6/2/2020: Since the awful revelation last November of the death of 39 Vietnamese people in the back of a refrigerated container lorry in Essex, we have all become much more aware of the extent of people smuggling. It begins in what we used to call “the third world”, but which should be called “the majority world”, where there is poverty, hunger, war, environmental disaster, poor job prospects and limited opportunities for all but the very rich or the very lucky. False promises are made and people leave their homes, hoping to better themselves. Nobody mentions the word slavery. Misled by promises of employment and the hope of financial reward, they take the risk of leaving behind their families and their communities.

It’s a highly organised and extremely profitable illegal trade that sends the poor of Asia, Africa and the Middle East on dangerous journeys to the West in the hope of a share in our riches. The terrible truth is that people are a more profitable than drugs and it’s a lot less risky trade for the dealers. There are a lot more arrests for drug smuggling than for people trafficking.

Estimates vary about the numbers involved worldwide. At the low end it’s 21 million people; at the high end it’s 45 million. High or low, they are enormous numbers. In Europe numbers are estimated at around the 3-4 million mark; in the UK estimates are around 136,000. If you wonder where they end up, the awful answer is “everywhere”. Modern slavery is in every town in the country; in occupations where people aren’t paid a proper wage, live in cramped conditions, aren’t properly clothed, have their housing costs deducted from a tiny wage, or aren’t properly fed; they are picking and packing fruit and vegetables, washing cars, working in nail bars, delivering pizzas or leaflets, begging in the streets, in domestic servitude, selling drugs in ‘county lines’ and, of course, in the sex trade. They are even used for organ harvesting.

The churches have been heavily involved in combating this terrible trade. The Salvation Army is the lead organisation in caring for adult victims; the Church of England has the Clewer Initiative; in the wider RC church we have the Medaille Trust, The Passage and several initiatives are being developed in Salford and other dioceses. As well as a strategy of speaking to every parish in Birmingham archdiocese, the Medaille Trust runs a network of safe houses for rescued victims of trafficking.

In 2015 the UK government passed the Modern Slavery Act and appointed Kevin Hyland as the UK’s first Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. As a senior police officer, with helicopters, armed police, search dogs and electronic surveillance at his disposal, he found that his most useful resource was groups of religious sisters. The power of trustworthy kindness encourages us to believe that we can make a difference.

In Liverpool, with its history of “Better Together”, there are the beginnings of ecumenical and secular cooperation to combat this scandal of modern-day slavery. After Kevin Hyland’s talk at the annual Justice and Peace Memorial Lecture in January, experts from different fields opened up some of the complexities of the subject with a view to encouraging parishes to get involved. On the eve of the 8 February feast of St Josephine Bakhita, the patron of victims of trafficking and those who work to combat it, the Salvation Army will help us trial a model for a parish meeting at St Vincent’s in the city; in March, there will be an event at the Anglican cathedral; in April a walk of witness in the city centre; in July we hope to gather reps from parishes across the archdiocese for the launch of a diocesan wide campaign. Please remember us in your prayers.

• **Steve Atherton is Justice and Peace fieldworker for the Archdiocese of Liverpool.**

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/blogs/1/1354/hidden-in-plain-sight-trafficking-and-modern-slavery>

STREATHAM: TWISTED RELIGION CANNOT DESTROY LOVING FAITH IN COMMUNITY

Jon Kuhrt 3/2/2020

I have lived in Streatham, South London for 17 years. It's where my three children have been raised and go to school. It's where we go to church, where my wife works and where countless friends live. We are proud to say that Streatham is our community.

Yesterday, a young man attacked members of our community on Streatham High Road with a knife. He entered shops we know well and attacked people shopping. He injured 3 people before being shot by Police. Just as the attack was unfolding I was walking towards the High Road on my way to Streatham Baptist Church to run our weekly youth group which starts at 3.30pm. Normally we have around 15-20 young people coming along. But as I was walking I started to get messages and calls from parents asking about the incident. Rumours were flying around about what had happened and whether another attacker was being pursued. Understandably, many parents wanted their children to stay in.

In the end, we had 8 young people come. Meeting in that context was a bit surreal but it felt more important than ever. As normal, we played games for the first hour. In the heat of football and a new game which involved throwing lots of soft balls at each other, thoughts about what had happened were temporarily suspended. After the games, we scrapped the theme that we had planned and instead just sat in a circle and talked.

Yesterday, the group was all boys, mostly only a few years younger than the attacker. Many were shocked at what had happened in their area. One of them said 'When it happens in London Bridge or somewhere central, it feels different. I never thought I would see Streatham on the news like this.' They just talked and the other leader and I mainly just listened. We did not need any starter questions, video clips or planned material to prompt discussion. We sat and shared how we were feeling. It was a precious time. We ended up talking about fear and the impact of the attack. We talked about why the most common command in the Bible is 'Do not fear' and 'Do not be afraid'. And then one of the young people prayed – for us and for the community. I was so glad to be there: to be part of this group, to be part of this community.

The Streatham attack yesterday is yet another example of lives ruined by someone holding twisted religious beliefs. The fact that he wore a fake bomb belt shows the 'religious' nature of what happened. This is someone who wanted to kill and maim as many people as possible before being martyred. We cannot pretend this has nothing to do with religion.

In the sharpest possible contrast are those who because of their faith, go out of their way to help others. In our community, the different churches work together in a partnership called *Love Streatham* which shows practical love to the community. This year, 7 churches are working together to host a Night Shelter for local rough sleepers. Across the country there are over 140 of these kind of schemes, where churches and other faith groups open their doors to welcome in homeless people. And it is not just Christians. In Streatham people who never attend a church service have got involved to volunteer and this has further built community. In Westminster, the Night Shelter I was also part of setting up involves the local synagogue and mosque as well as 13 churches. And last week, I heard an inspirational Muslim woman, Salma Ravat, speaking at a conference about her establishing the *One Roof* Night Shelter in Leicester. Her Muslim faith was integral to why she established the shelter and she partners with Christians, Hindus and Jews to show practical care to homeless people.

In the face of hate and violence, we often need force. And we are grateful that the Police were able to limit the carnage. But this kind of force will never be enough. We also need more love. We need a story, a message, a motivation which is stronger than warped religion of terrorist ideology. We need to build bridges and connect, to show love across divides. And we need to do this locally, in concrete ways which build community. As someone in our youth group shared yesterday *'fire cannot put out fire'*. It reminded me of the words of Martin Luther King: *"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."*

I am proud to call this part of South London my community. And this morning I am more motivated than ever to love Streatham.

<https://gracetruth.blog/2020/02/03/streatham-twisted-religion-cannot-destroy-loving-faith-in-community/>

• **Jon Kuhrt** has worked with people affected by homelessness and poverty for 25 years. He is a former CEO of West London Mission and is now a government adviser focusing on how faith and community groups address rough sleeping.

HEARTBROKEN BRITISH MEP IN TEARS DURING FINAL BREXIT SPEECH IN BRUSSELS

29/1/2020: Remainder MEPs applauded Molly Scott Cato MEP who broke down during her speech. She hugged her colleague as fellow Green Party MEPs gave her a standing ovation. Speaking in Brussels, Ms Cato said: "As the Brexit losses mount we must counter the betrayal narrative with those who promoted the doom strategy tried to shift the blame for the damage on to the EU and for those of us who argued against it.

"Our future as a country has no clear shape beyond a few slogans," she added "We must demonstrate compassion and solidarity with EU citizens living in the UK who feel vulnerable and fearful. We must revitalise the friendship groups and associations that thrived in the decades before we joined the EU. Now is not the time to campaign to rejoin but we must keep the dream alive especially for young people who are overwhelmingly European. I hold in my heart the knowledge that one day I will be back in this chamber celebrating our return to the heart of Europe."

Watch the speech on YouTube: https://youtu.be/3Buts8BW_Pl

BREXIT POSTER BEING INVESTIGATED AS 'RACIALLY AGGRAVATED' INCIDENT BY POLICE

Jack Peat 2/2/2020: Posters pinned on doors of a tower block telling residents to only speak English are being treated as a "racially aggravated public order incident" by police. The signs, carrying the title "Happy Brexit Day", were found stuck on fire doors across all 15 floors of Winchester Tower in Norwich on Friday morning. The posters, images of which were shared on social media, were first spotted on the day the UK officially left the EU and said: "We finally have our great country back. We do not tolerate people speaking other languages than English in the flats. We are now our own country again and the Queens (sic) English is the spoken tongue here. If you do want to speak whatever is the mother tongue of the country you came from then we suggest you return to that place and return your flat to the council."

Norfolk Police confirmed they were investigating the incident after officers visited the block on Saturday night after all the posters had been taken down. In a statement, the force said: "Those posters kept by residents have since been seized for forensic inquiries and we will be working with the council to examine any available CCTV. There is no place in society for hatred and intolerance. Nobody should have to face intimidation because of who they are and it is more important than ever that we stand together in the face of hostility. We remain committed to helping people feel safe and secure as they go about their lives. The matter is being dealt with as a racially aggravated public order incident."

On Twitter, the council said it had reported the incident to police, adding: "Norwich has a proud history of being a welcoming city, and we will not tolerate this behaviour." One city councillor, speaking to the *Eastern Daily Press*, branded the posters "abhorrent" and a "hate crime."

<https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/brexit-poster-being-investigated-as-racially-aggravated-incident-by-police/02/02/>

ANTI-CHINESE RACISM 'EVEN REPORTED AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS' AMID VIRUS OUTBREAK

Joe Mellor 6/2/2020

China's ambassador to the UK has condemned "hatred" against Chinese people amid the coronavirus outbreak, claiming abuse had even been reported at primary schools. Speaking at a press conference in London, Liu Xiaoming said: "I think the general public is very supportive. There are some cases of hatred, discrimination, against Chinese nationals. I think there are many reasons for it. Lack of understanding of the epidemic. Of course, there is also some deep-seated racism. Not only in this country, but anywhere. I think in a crisis like this countries should stand together."

The comments came as York University – where one of the confirmed UK cases studied – issued a statement condemning reports "from students and staff of abuse and racism" since the outbreak. There were also reports that a woman had been verbally and physically abused at Sheffield University for wearing a face mask. Mr Liu added that the Chinese embassy had received similar reports from universities "and even in some middle schools and primary schools". "People should realise that we have a common enemy of mankind. We should say 'no' to discriminatory words and behaviour," he said.

There have been several reports of verbal and physical abuse against east Asian residents in Britain in recent weeks. On Wednesday Health Secretary Matt Hancock condemned "racism and insensitivity" aimed at Chinese and east Asian people, adding: "None of these attempts to dehumanise an entire ethnicity should be allowed to prevail."

A number of British Asian people have reported hostile treatment in public since the virus prompted international news coverage. MiMi Aye, a Burmese food writer from London, posted photos from a journey on the Tube on Tuesday which showed people opting to stand rather than take the seats next to her. "I got on to the Victoria line at Highbury and Islington and was on my way to Oxford Circus. Platform was full, carriage was full," she told the PA news agency. "I noticed that no-one had sat down either side of me and I thought, 'Huh, that's weird'... I decided to take photos of the empty seats around me. People around me looked very uncomfortable and wouldn't catch my eye. I'm not going to say that it was definitely because of racism. Because most of the time when stuff happens I never know for sure."

<https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/anti-chinese-racism-even-reported-at-primary-schools-amid-virus-outbreak/06/02/>

PITY THE NATION

Pity the nation whose people are sheep and whose shepherds mislead them

Pity the nation whose leaders are liars

Whose sages are silenced and whose bigots haunt the airwaves

Pity the nation that raises not its voice except to praise conquerors

and acclaim the bully as hero and aims to rule the world by force and by torture

Pity the nation that knows no other language but its own and no other culture but its own

Pity the nation whose breath is money and sleeps the sleep of the too well fed

Pity the nation oh pity the people who allow their rights to erode and their freedoms to be washed away

My country, tears of thee, sweet land of liberty!

— **Lawrence Ferlinghetti** San Francisco, January, 2006

• Ferlinghetti's poem was inspired by **Khalil Gibran** in the book *The Garden of the Prophet* published posthumously in 1933.

Read Gibran's poem <http://www.lebanonrenaissance.org/assets/Uploads/13-Pity-the-nation-by-Gibran-Khalil-Gebran.pdf>

POPE FRANCIS DISCERNS 'THIRD WAY' FOR THE AMAZON

Austen Ivereigh *The Tablet* 12/2/2020

While the world was waiting with bated breath for a historic decision on whether to ordain married men in Amazonia, Pope Francis was busy going in a very different direction. Some will see *Beloved Amazonia* as ducking an historic challenge, leaving the Church in limbo in order to avoid a contentious decision that would have deepened divisions. But right at the end of the document, Francis offers a revealing window onto his discernment: *Beloved Amazonia* is less about avoiding conflict than about seeing another path where the Holy Spirit is calling the Church.

In paragraph 104 the Pope observes that when pastoral workers propose “opposed forms of ecclesial organisation” in response to challenges, it is likely that the true answer lies in “transcending the two approaches and finding other, better ways, perhaps not yet even imagined.” In the following paragraph he says solutions often come in the form of a “greater gift” that God is offering from which “there will pour forth as from an overflowing fountain the answers that contraposition did not allow us to see.” This is vintage Bergoglio: in a context of polarisation in the Church the mistake is to try to resolve it by allowing one side to defeat the other. Rather, by patiently and attentively holding together the polarity – positions that pull in a different direction – the leader allows for the possibility of a “third way” that the Holy Spirit offers.

Looking back at the synod last October, it was clear that positions over the so-called “*virii probati*” were becoming more, not less entrenched. Around two-thirds of the Amazonian bishops arriving in Rome favoured in principle a move to ordain married men to enable the Eucharist to reach far-flung communities, but many were cautious about the wider impact of the change. Opposition from the curial cardinals, meanwhile, was intense. Some of it was hysterical – conservative cardinals such as Robert Sarah claiming the Amazon synod was a means of foisting a progressive German agenda onto the Church – but a lot of it also came from moderate, thoughtful curial cardinals closely aligned with the pontificate or appointed to the synod by Francis himself. They warned that the precious gift of clerical celibacy could not be suspended for the purpose of increasing access to the Eucharist without eroding the gift of celibacy in the whole Latin Church, and that therefore this had to be a worldwide decision of the bishops, not just of a region.

By the second week of the synod, people close to the pope were telling me he was deeply troubled by the deepening divide over the issue and couldn’t see an obvious way through. Although the synod final document’s paragraph 111 got over two-thirds (128) of the votes, it also attracted the largest number of negative votes (41). That, too, was a sign: in Jesuit “discernment in common”, one sign of the Spirit is a peaceful consensus that results from a changing understanding. In the family synod of October 2015, for example, the two-thirds majority reflected a conversion on the part of many synod fathers to seeing the Eucharist for the divorced as a matter of case-by-case discernment, not of law and doctrine. There was no such conversion in the October 2019 synod on the *virii probati* issue. As Francis recently told a visiting American bishop, he didn’t see the Holy Spirit at work in that issue. Without such a sign, Francis was never going to move decisively on a disputed question. *Beloved Amazonia* does not close off the possibility, but passes over the whole issue, putting the focus firmly on the bigger picture of how the Church and the world can see the region as God does, and act in response.

For Francis this was always the key challenge for the synod: to open up to new thinking in order to implement the vision of *Laudato Si’*, lifting his encyclical off the page and putting it into action. In a sign of his frustration with the media’s inability to grasp that bigger picture, Francis had urged reporters in that final speech not to focus on who appeared to have won out in “minor disciplinary matters” but to “take time to look at the diagnoses, which is the dense part, the part where the synod expressed itself best.” In a region that dramatically encapsulates the showdown between the technocratic paradigm and an alternative future, the Church was being invited to show the world how to respond to the plight of the land, its people and its creatures.

As *Beloved Amazonia* puts it, “we believers encounter in the Amazon region a theological locus, a space where God reveals himself and summons his sons and daughters”. The exhortation is all about rising to that challenge, and hearing that summons, which for Francis is evangelisation: how to achieve what he calls “a renewed inculturation of the Gospel in the Amazon region”. The sign of that inculturation will be a distinctive kind of holiness, that will in turn act as sign to the whole Church. Francis’s dream for the Amazon is that will be the place that the Gospel triumphs over technocracy. The exhortation is about the new mindset that the Church needs to embrace that challenge.

This is a new kind of exhortation, one that doesn’t subsume the synod’s final report in a papal document but responds respectfully to the local Church’s discernment with a discernment of his own. This was the first ever “territorial” synod, in which the bishops of nine countries were brought together to ponder the conclusions of a two-year consultation of more than 60,000 people across the region – one of the most extensive, and remarkable, soundings of the people of God ever undertaken. Despite differences over the ordination question, it wasn’t hard to hear the Spirit speaking through the gathering: in the appalling testimonies of suffering, in the urgency of the economic and ecological crisis, and in the hope that the native peoples were placing in the Church.

The pope makes clear at the start that he has no intention of either replacing or duplicating that text; instead, he holds it up, formally recognising it, and urges everyone to read it. This has never been done before by a pope in response to a synod, although it is in many respects similar to the way Benedict XVI received the 2007 Aparecida document, which the then Pope respected as the magisterium of the Latin-American church, saying there was no need to “respond” to it. (The main author of the Aparecida document, now Pope Francis, commented at the time on Benedict’s response, which deeply moved him.)

Francis has decided nothing: *Beloved Amazonia* has no new laws, or doctrines, statutes or structures. The synod final report remains in place, and the Amazonian bishops can continue to advance its proposals, most of which depend more on their own actions and decisions than on Rome's say-so. Two of the structural proposals that would require the pope to agree – an Amazonian bishops' body, and an Amazonian liturgical rite – are noted favourably in the exhortation as suggestions of how to deepen collaboration and inculturation, but it is over to the Amazonian bishops to ask the pope for these when they are ready to.

What is clear from *Beloved Amazonia* is that for the Church to be better present in this uniquely challenging environment it must look to and recognise what the Spirit is currently doing in the region. Almost all of the region's Catholic communities are run by lay people, 60 per cent of them women; only a tiny proportion have resident clergy. In paragraph 94 Francis notes that "wherever there is a particular need, he has already poured out the charisms that can meet it." Where are those charisms being poured out? A Church with Amazonian features requires "the stable presence of mature and lay leaders endowed with authority", he says, adding that such people are "familiar with the languages, cultures, spiritual experience and communal way of life" of the region. A Church "open to the Spirit's boldness" will allow "the growth of a specific ecclesial culture that is distinctively lay."

This paragraph follows on from a call for greater access by people to the sacraments, and for the Church to foster vocations and send more missionaries to the region. But he is quick to add that facilitating a greater presence of ordained ministers would be a "very narrow aim were we not also to strive to awaken new life in communities." In other words, sacraments alone are not sufficient to evangelise. The objective is to "promote an encounter with God's word and growth in holiness" for which "various kinds of lay service" are necessary. This is in many respects the heart of Francis's response to the question of ministries: rather than obsess about access to the Eucharist, important though that is, the Church needs to enable and empower the work the Spirit is already undertaking through lay people inculturating the Gospel in the region.

The really radical move, however, is in paragraphs 99 to 103, which best reflect Francis's discernment of where God's gift of creative new thinking is making itself felt. The synod final report had called for bishops to be able to endow lay or religious men and women with authority "through a ritual act" on behalf of the Christian community, such that their authority would be recognised also "at the civil and local levels". At the time, one of the synod's organisers told me that this was "much bigger than the female diaconate", given the number of women who lead Amazon communities; and also better reflected the desire of those women to have their authority recognised but without being clericalised.

In *Beloved Amazonia* Francis takes this idea and underpins it with his authority, but specifically for women. Women who play a central role in Amazonian communities should be given leadership roles than do not entail ordination, he says, adding that "these services entail stability, public recognition and a commission from the bishop." This, he says, would also allow women to have a real and effective impact on the organisation, the most important decisions and the direction of communities, "while continuing to do so in a way that reflects their womanhood."

For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, the Pope is not just following a path out of the debate over the *viri probati*, but looking to a whole new kind of female-specific leadership in the Church. No wonder that two paragraphs later he notes how "in this historical moment, the Amazon region challenges us to transcend limited perspectives and 'pragmatic' solutions mired in partial approaches, in order to seek paths of inculturation that are broader and bolder." Years from now, people may see this as the major fruit of the Amazonian synod.

To focus too much on internal church questions, however, is to miss the real point of the pope's remarkable exhortation. The mission comes before the Church, which is a means not an end. The mission is the inculturation of the Gospel. As the Gospel spreads, the hermeneutic (the way the world is seen) changes. For Francis, the battleground is between two hermeneutics. Thus far, the one that has dominated is the technocratic or colonialist hermeneutic, the idea that Amazonia is an "an enormous space to be filled, a source of raw resources to be developed, a wild expanse to be domesticated", ignoring the rights and values of the people and their lands, exploiting and enslaving them. It is this hermeneutic that lies behind the appalling "injustice and crime" of international and national businesses in the area, as Francis calls it.

Using a classic Ignatian conversion method, the Pope asks us to experience shock and shame at the resulting destruction, before offering us the possibility of an alternative future: other methods of herding and agriculture and sources of energy; other ways of earning a living that do not destroy people and the environment. This new future can only come about in partnership with the poor of the region, and with the native peoples whose ancestral connectedness with the natural world is where God's summons can be heard.

During the synod there were many testimonies from native leaders about the hope they were placing in the Church to rescue them. Corrupt institutions and politicians took the side of the powerful; only the Church, they said, had the ability to listen and the global clout to speak with them and for them. Francis in *Beloved Amazonia* time and again places the Church alongside them, giving them voice, and pledging to stand not just with them, but with the birds and the trees and the fish. "If we respond to this heart-rending plea," he says in paragraph 57, "it will become clear that that the creatures of the Amazon region are not forgotten by their heavenly Father ... Jesus himself cries out to us from their midst." But for the Church to be the agent of the region's transformation, it must be itself converted, learning to love the region and its peoples. In the second section, "a cultural dream", Francis quotes from poets and songs from the area, urging the Church to help protect the roots of indigenous culture. In paragraph 79, he gently rebukes the hysterical Catholic commentary around the so-called "Pachamama" statuettes that dominated much of the media coverage of the synod.

(The statuettes were simply carvings of a native pregnant woman brought from a market in Manaus that missionaries brought with them to Rome that were included in some of the liturgies. Indignant claims from some North American conservative Catholic media that they were “idols” led to a traditionalist throwing them into the Tiber, from which some were rescued by police.) “It is possible to take up an indigenous symbol in some way, without necessarily considering it idolatry,” the pope notes, adding that “a myth charged with spiritual meaning can be used to advantage and not always considered a pagan error.”

For Francis, inculturating the Gospel means to perform the Incarnation. “Preaching must become incarnate, spirituality must become incarnate, ecclesial structures must become incarnate,” he notes right at the start. His entire text can be read as developing that proposition: identifying the obstacles and the temptations that impede inculturation. The Gospel can only transform the region, he suggests, when we learn to look on the region with the eyes of the Good Shepherd – with love for its people and their culture, feeling indignation for their sufferings, and with the urge to come alongside them. In this way, the Church will be able to “reject nothing of the goodness that already exists in Amazonian cultures, but brings it to fulfilment in the light of the Gospel.” The Church, in short, must hear the call to conversion from the heart of the rainforest, and be willing courageously to change.

Perhaps the greatest paradox of *Beloved Amazonia* is that, just at the moment when it rejects an anticipated change in the Church’s practice, it asks the Church to embrace another change – the one the pope hears the Spirit calling for. Some will be frustrated, disappointed and perplexed. Others will be delighted. But one thing is clear: this is a pope who takes seriously government of the Church by discernment. And who will follow the Spirit when it blows where it wills.

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<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/12469/pope-francis-discerns-third-way-for-the-amazon>

Text: 'Querida Amazonia' - 'Dear Amazon' - Pope Francis' Post-Synodal Exhortation on the Amazon
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38905>

DISAPPOINTMENT, OUTRAGE OVER PAPAL DOCUMENT ON THE AMAZON

Heidi Schlumpf *National Catholic Reporter* (USA) 12/2/2020

Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation on the Amazon disappointed those hoping for an opening of clerical roles to married men and women, with many noting that the pope failed to extend his prophetic voice about environmental injustice to injustices in his own house, the church. Many women were especially outraged over the document's language of complementarity.

Querida Amazonia, the pope's response to last October's Synod of Bishops, did not grant the bishops' request to open priestly ordination to married men and the possibility of women deacons, both in an effort to address the severe lack of ministers in the nine nations of that region.

Reading the document was “demoralizing” and “painful,” especially given the pope's lyrical language about his dreams for the region, said Casey Stanton, who works in parish ministry and said she is called to the diaconate. “But then you get to the paragraphs about women ... and it just feels like the dream stops short of including them and including me,” said Stanton, a minister of adult faith formation at Immaculate Conception Church in Durham, North Carolina. She admitted that she did not expect a change in church teaching from the papal document, but “just wanted him to keep the conversation open in this slow-moving church. Instead, I think what the pope has done in this document is to close the door,” she said. After the testimony of women at the synod, the pope's response is “willful blindness,” Stanton said, adding, “I can't imagine what the women in the Amazon feel.”

Those who work for church reform also reacted negatively to the Feb. 12 release of the document. “We are profoundly shocked and disappointed,” said Linda Pinto, co-chair of CORPUS, a church reform group that advocates for an inclusive priesthood. “We were hopeful that this process would begin a Vatican II approach to governance and that leadership would listen to the needs of the people,” Pinto told NCR. “One of our deep regrets is that this, like our culture, has devolved into an either/or, black or white, conservative or progressive fight, which loses the focus that this is about the needs of the people of God.”

The pope's failure to see “similar power structures at play” in the degradation of the earth and the degradation of women also was criticised by the Women's Ordination Conference. “With *Querida Amazonia*, the Pope is willfully turning his back on the calls of women for recognition of the sacramental ministries they offer the people of the Amazon and the global church,” said a statement from the Women's Ordination Conference (WOC), which noted the lack of women as official participants in the synod. “This shows, yet again, that a synod without the equal voice and votes of women will never produce fruit that satisfies the urgent needs of the people of God,” the WOC statement said.

During the synod in October 2019, representatives from the Amazon reported that Catholics sometimes go months without the Eucharist because of a lack of clergy, especially in rural regions. *Querida Amazonia* emphasises the importance of the Eucharist, but rather than respond to the bishops' request for allowing ordination of married men, the pope urges church leaders “not only to promote prayer for priestly vocations, but also to be more generous in encouraging those who display a missionary vocation to opt for the Amazon region.”

Theologian Dan Cosacchi said he was trying to avoid an "ideological reaction," but noted that "prayers for vocations to the priesthood, by themselves, simply are not enough for these people. More action is required. I am reflecting on this document from a socioeconomic location where I own a car and can attend a Eucharistic liturgy at a dozen different places, at a convenient time of day for me, all within a five-minute radius from where I live and work," Cosacchi told NCR in a written comment. "I remember the many Catholics in countless Amazonian regions and communities who have gone years since being able to attend such a Eucharistic celebration," said Cosacchi, assistant professor of religious studies at Marywood University in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

At least one Latin American commentator noted that because expectations had been raised about the possibility of openness on the issue of married clergy and women deacons, the disappointment was greater. "A unique historic occasion has been lost," said José Manuel Vidal, director of the Spanish-language Religión Digital.

In a press conference following the release of the papal document in Rome, Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny said proposals in the synod's final document that may not be mentioned in *Querida Amazonia* "remain on the table," according to NCR Vatican correspondent Joshua McElwee. Czerny was responding to a question about the possibility of priestly ordination of "viri probati," older men of proven character, often already serving as deacons.

The document's use of the language of complementarity and warnings about a "functional approach" in the section on "The strength and gifts of women" did not raise optimism about further discussion of women deacons. The document criticised a "reductionism [that] would lead us to believe that women would be granted a greater status and participation in the Church only if they were admitted to Holy Orders."

"Women make their contribution to the Church in a way that is properly theirs, by making present the tender strength of Mary, the Mother," the pope wrote, adding, "This shows the kind of power that is typically theirs." "That approach would in fact narrow our vision; it would lead us to clericalise women, diminish the great value of what they have already accomplished, and subtly make their indispensable contribution less effective," the document said.

Theologian Natalia Imperatori-Lee said she was going to take up Pope Francis on his invitation, in an earlier part of the document, to feel outrage, especially about his continued use of "spousal" language in the section about women. "The pope seems to want it both ways. A fundamental equality with a differentiation of roles," Imperatori-Lee said to NCR in an emailed response. But the spousal metaphor contains a "fundamental inequality," she said. "Men are to women as Christ is to the church. That is not equality in any sense. ... When we transpose this to the human realm with men/women in the places of Christ/church, it's misogyny."

She also noted the pope's praise of "generous women" in the Amazon who have "have kept the Church alive in those places through their remarkable devotion and deep faith."

"What strikes me about the way Francis talks about women's roles in this letter is that he envisions women as Mary the mater dolorosa, not the Mary of the Magnificat," said Imperatori-Lee, professor of religious studies at Manhattan College in New York. "Yes, women do this. But we don't want to be called in only in hospice," she said. "We shouldn't pretend that odes to women's fierce and tender love of things on the verge of death is a compliment. We don't just want to hug the dying. We want to (and can, and have, and do) prevent it from getting that bad."

• Heidi Schlumpf is NCR national correspondent.

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/disappointment-outrage-over-papal-document-amazon>

MARTIN SHEEN RECITES RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S POEM AT CLIMATE CHANGE PROTEST

India Today Web Desk 11/1/2020

Hollywood actor and activist Martin Sheen recited Rabindranath Tagore's poem *Where The Mind Is Without Fear** while addressing the audience at the Fire Drill Fridays event in Washington, DC on January 10. The event is a weekly climate change protest organised by Jane Fonda. On stage, Sheen exclaimed, "Clearly, the world will be saved by women. Thank God they outnumber us men," while applauding Jane Fonda.

He continued, "You know, the Irish tell the story of a man who arrive at the gates of heaven and asks to be let in. St Peter says, "Of course, just show us your scars." The man says, "I have no scars." St Peter says, "What a pity. Was there nothing worth fighting for?"

Borrowing from Tagore, Sheen added, "We are called to find something in our lives worth fighting for. Something that unites the will of the spirit with the work of the flesh. Something that can help us lift up this nation and all its people to that place where the heart is without fear and the head is held high, where knowledge is free, where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls, where words come out from the depth of truth, where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection, where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sands of dead habit, where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action into that heaven of freedom, dear Father, let my country awake."

Watch on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/eOqKDxAgHpY>

* written in 1910 before India's independence – Tagore's vision of a new and awakened India

END HUNGER UK IS REVIEWING AND REFRESHING ITS APPROACH

Niall Cooper, Church Action on Poverty 10/02/2020

Church Action on Poverty has been a leading partner in the End Hunger UK campaign over the last few years. End Hunger UK is in the process of reviewing our strategy and plans. Over the past three years, we have achieved notable successes, not least:

- A growing recognition by charities and the public that the root causes of hunger are insufficient household income and an inadequate social safety net.
- A commitment by the UK Government to measure household food insecurity. The first data is currently being collected, and due for publication in the first quarter of 2021. This was confirmed by the new Government last month.
- The Mayor of London Sadiq Khan also adopting this commitment as a flagship policy in the Greater London Authority's refreshed London Food Strategy.
- The Government providing £2m in funding for school holiday food and activity programmes. A further £9m was committed to the programme for 2020 last month.
- An extra £1.7 billion of measures announced in the 2018 Budget because of greatly increased awareness of the impact of Universal Credit on family incomes.
- Significant collaborative action between partners, led by Sustain, to highlight the threat to household food insecurity from a no-deal Brexit, winning £2m from Welsh and Scottish Governments (but not Westminster) to help buy food for the most vulnerable.
- A marked shift in the approaches taken by influential End Hunger UK partner organisations, based on our common understanding of the unique role and strengths of each in stimulating public and parliamentary recognition and achieving change.
- The Trussell Trust has moved from being a delivery-focused food bank network, towards being an advocate for people experiencing financial and personal crisis, vocally campaigning for 'upstream' measures such as an end to the five-week wait on Universal Credit.
- The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) has established itself as a vocal and effective contributor to the debate, providing a fuller picture of the extent and depth of need across the UK, as well as a channel for the voices of some of the most marginalised communities.
- Church Action on Poverty has developed a high level of expertise on involving 'experts by experience' in advocacy and decision-making, and has helped many more people experiencing food insecurity to voice concerns to those in a position to make a difference.
- Nourish Scotland, working with Oxfam GB, the Poverty Alliance and Child Poverty Action Group Scotland, has greatly developed its Menu for Change approach, working in locality to develop an effective whole-systems-based response to food poverty and vulnerability.
- The Food Foundation has established the Children's Future Food Inquiry, influencing decision-makers by bringing voices and concerns of young people to the fore.
- Sustain has built momentum for notable changes within London, the Sustainable Food Cities Network and Food Power network, shifting the emphasis of local authority and community responses to those that look 'Beyond the Food Bank'.
- Over 18,000 individuals and 140 groups have taken action as part of End Hunger UK: signing petitions, writing to their MPs, attending conferences, or organising photo stunts and other events.

The work to create a society where everyone has access to good food, and no one has to go to bed hungry, will continue. We'll share more news soon. **Niall Cooper, Director of Church Action on Poverty and chair of End Hunger UK**

#REDHANDDAY 12 FEBRUARY - INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

ForcesWatch: It's a shame the UK Government is not acting on its own words about the need to protect children in situations of armed conflict (<https://t.co/lnPYpDXzdt>), by raising the age of military recruitment in the UK to 18, as the UN has long been calling for. Meanwhile, the head of the @BritishArmy training establishment for under-18s suggests that the army is some sort of welfare service for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is a particular concern because research shows that young people with a background of adversity are more susceptible to mental health conditions and issues relating to stressful experiences. See the discussion on page 19 of our report:

<https://www.forceswatch.net/resources/selling-the-military-a-critical-analysis-of-contemporary-recruitment-marketing-in-the-uk/>

SELLING THE MILITARY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY RECRUITMENT MARKETING IN THE UK

February 2019: This report, written by **ForcesWatch** and published with the public health charity Medact, analyses the way the armed forces market their careers to adolescents and young people, creating powerful messages that which exploit developmental vulnerabilities and social inequality, risking the health and well-being of recruits. Narratives of camaraderie and self-development also serve to promote an uncontroversial and depoliticised idea of the military more widely which promote self-fulfilment in the context of conflict. The report calls for military marketing campaigns to be evaluated and regulated in line with recent developments in medical understanding of adolescent psychologies, how young people are more vulnerable to sophisticated marketing techniques, and in the context of recent research on the risks associated with military recruitment for young recruits in particular. It recommends that the interests of the youngest recruits would best be safeguarded by raising the age of recruitment to 18. It also makes recommendations for increasing accountability, transparency and critical awareness around military marketing.

<https://www.forceswatch.net/resources/selling-the-military-a-critical-analysis-of-contemporary-recruitment-marketing-in-the-uk/>

A THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR REJECTING POSSESSION AND USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Source: Pax Christi 13/2/2020

Two weeks ago the Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN) hosted a symposium on the Pope and the Bomb at Georgetown University, Washington DC. Archbishop Tomasi and Alessio Pecorario from the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development were present. It was aimed at bringing the Church's absolute rejection of nuclear weapons to the US Catholic community (including the bishops and students) and thus ultimately to generate more of a debate about the horror of US nuclear policy.

Ken Butigan from DePaul University and Marie Dennis of Pax Christi's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative gave the following paper: "We are called to confront the existential threat that nuclear weapons pose to humanity by clearly and wholeheartedly embracing the universal ethic of nonviolence—rejecting violence and killing, returning good for evil, healing divisions, responding to the cry of the poor, loving enemies and putting sacrificial love into action for a just, peaceful and reconciled world. Such a paradigm shift is essential if we are ever to counter the profoundly destructive spiritual impact and pervasive menace of nuclear weapons.

Many years ago, Jesuit peacemaker Rev Richard McSorley, SJ wrote: "The taproot of violence in our society is our intention to use nuclear weapons. Once we have agreed to that, all other evil is minor in comparison." Consent to the presence of nuclear weapons in our world not only accepts the risk of a nuclear conflagration in the future, but also undermines the ethical foundations for the common good here and now. To retain nuclear weapons escalates the possibility of their use, which would unleash suffering on an unimaginable scale. "War always does grave harm to the environment and to the cultural riches of peoples, risks which are magnified when one considers nuclear arms and biological weapons." Further, the production and testing of nuclear weapons in themselves have enormous environmental consequences and social costs, including the theft of critically needed resources from the poor and the development of complex and authoritarian national security systems to maintain them.

Nonviolence is a paradigm of the fullness of life, a spiritual orientation, a way of life, and a practical method for confronting violence and fostering just peace. We know that "it is truly a formidable undertaking to work for peace by living the practice of nonviolence." Yet, active nonviolence is critical to healing our world. Nonviolence calls us to be persons of integrity who as social beings and members of a global community share in a universal responsibility for the common good.

Dr Martin Luther King, Jr called nonviolence "the love that does justice." Dorothy Day named it "love in action." Historian Jonathan Schell called it "cooperative power," while the nonviolence scholar Stellan Vinthagen called it "a stand against violence without using violence." But nonviolence is deeper still. Nonviolence is a radical engagement with the suffering of our world and all the forms of violence which spawn that suffering: our own violence; the violence between persons; the violence a community experiences; the structural violence that excludes and diminishes; the violence nations impose on nations; and the violence inflicted on the earth. Each of these unleashes waves of suffering. Active nonviolence seeks to engage and end this suffering by confronting violence with love and determination.

In his age rife with structural violence, Jesus proclaimed a nonviolent Reign of God rooted in the unconditional love of God. Jesus called on his disciples to love their enemies (Matthew 5: 44); to offer no violent resistance to one who does evil (Matthew 5: 39); to become peacemakers; to forgive and repent; and to be abundantly merciful (Matthew 5-7). Jesus embodied nonviolence by actively resisting systemic dehumanization, as when he defied the Sabbath laws to heal the man with the withered hand (Mark 3: 1-6); when he confronted the powerful at the Temple and purified it (John 2: 13-22); when he peacefully but persistently challenged the men accusing a woman of adultery (John 8: 1-11); and when, on the night before he died, he commanded Peter to put down his sword (Matthew 26: 52).

In his preaching and his life, Jesus revealed that God calls us to live nonviolently: to make peace with one another; to resist the violence and injustice that threaten or destroy peace; and to foster a Church and world where the fullness of just peace is the birthright of all. As Pope Benedict XVI said: "Jesus came with only the strength of love, totally without violence, even to the point of going to the Cross. This is what shows us the true face of God, that violence never comes from God, never helps bring anything good, but is a destructive means and not the path to escape difficulties ... This is Jesus' true message: seek peace with the means of peace and leave violence aside."

Christian nonviolence is a spiritual path rooted in the Gospels and a counter-intuitive strategy for the transformation of the world. When the disciples James and John asked Jesus if he would like them to command fire to come from heaven and consume a Samaritan village that had not received them, "he turned and rebuked them" (Luke 9:51-54). He is teaching them - and us - that violence and destruction are not the way forward. Over 75 years into the nuclear age, we are called to end the threat, possession and potentially catastrophic fire of nuclear weapons by pursuing a spiritually-grounded nonviolent life: to pray for the grace of nonviolence; to study nonviolence; to train for nonviolence; to practice nonviolence; to spread the vision and methods of nonviolence.; and to foster nonviolent strategies to promote just and sustainable peace.

Pope Francis said: "A culture of nonviolence is not an unattainable dream, but a path that has produced decisive results. The consistent practice of nonviolence has broken barriers, bound wounds, healed nations." Nowhere is this transformation more desperately needed than in freeing the world from the terrifying threat of nuclear weapons."

Pax Christi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative www.nonviolencejustpeace.net
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38915>

NEW REPORT SHOWS 1.8 MILLION PEOPLE IN UK FACE MAJOR FLOOD RISK

Source: CAFOD 5/2/2020

The number of people in the UK facing floods during the winter is more than the population of Birmingham and Manchester combined, according to a new report. Published by campaign organisation The Climate Coalition and the Priestley International Centre for Climate, the report warns that the UK is already seeing wetter winters and more frequent and intense weather extremes due to climate change. Around 1.8 million people are now living in areas with significant risk of flooding. In two recent studies, researchers found the likelihood of extreme rainfall happening in the UK had increased by approximately 40% because of climate change.

The report comes weeks after floods wreaked havoc for thousands of households in Yorkshire and the Midlands, with a month's worth of rain falling in some parts of South Yorkshire in November.

Ministers must require new homes to be compatible with a net zero emissions target, help homeowners to make their houses more energy-efficient and improve flood defences in vulnerable areas, The Climate Coalition argues. The Coalition, which is made up of groups ranging from CAFOD and Christian Aid to the National Trust, WWF and the RSPB, is releasing the report as part of its **Show The Love** campaign, which celebrates things people love but that could be lost due to climate change.

The report describes how major floods have caused devastating damage to UK households over recent years: The past dozen years (2007-19) have seen a major flood event nearly every year with almost 100,000 properties damaged in England, according to data provided to The Climate Coalition by the Environment Agency.

Coastal, surface or river flooding is causing more than £1 billion worth of damage a year in the UK. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) told the report authors that the floods in Yorkshire and the Midlands in November 2019 led to more than 2,250 insurance claims for flood damage from homeowners with at least £45 million expected to be paid out to cover damaged homes and possessions.

One of the worst affected places during the November 2019 floods was Bentley, in South Yorkshire, where more than 400 homes were damaged. Previous flooding in the town in 2007 had left residents priced out of home insurance by high premiums and a £7,500 excess in one case. Flooding has also made it difficult for residents to sell or move home. Catherine Berry, a community volunteer who helped the clean-up in Bentley after November's floods, said: "This is a deprived area with a large number of vulnerable people. There are people with COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) who've been left with no choice but to live in homes with damp up the walls. For a lot of families and individuals here £100 a month premiums are just not affordable. We had one family who were going to put their house on the market to move somewhere bigger, but they're not going to be able to sell their house now in this area."

Alisa Dolgova, Manager of Prudential Regulation, and a climate change specialist at the Association of British Insurers (ABI), warned: "If we see a greater increase in the extreme weather events that we've had over the past decade then that will inevitably be reflected in insurance costs."

The Climate Coalition says the government must act urgently to strengthen flood defences and put in place plans to end the UK's contribution to the climate crisis. The report argues that stricter controls on building homes in areas at risk of flooding and planting more trees in urban areas will both reduce the risk of flooding and help to cool cities during heatwaves.

The Coalition also says that improvements to homes - which contribute one-fifth of UK emissions - will play a key role in meeting the government's target of cutting emissions to net zero. Measures include heating homes using ground or air source pumps and making houses more energy-efficient with better insulation, glazing and draught-proofing. George Clarke, architect and TV presenter, said: "There is no question that living in a low-carbon home is better for our health, the planet and our energy bills. At this time of year, the cost of heating our homes is a strain on millions of households. Homes across the country are leaking energy from poor insulation and design, further and unnecessarily adding to the bills of low-income households and dragging them into fuel poverty."

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said: "Adapting to the inevitable changes in our climate is vital, and we are taking robust action to improve the resilience of our people, economy and environment, including by investing £2.6 billion over six years to better protect our communities from flooding and erosion. Tackling climate change and the impact on our environment is both a national and international priority. The UK is already leading the way by delivering on our world-leading target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. We will ask our partners to match the UK's ambition at this year's COP26 talks in Glasgow."

Sarah Croft, Campaigns Manager at Catholic aid agency CAFOD, said: "This report shows how once-in-a-generation events have become a regular reality for communities here in the UK. It demonstrates how the climate crisis is no longer something that belongs in the future but is already with us - and that's even more the case for people in the world's poorest communities. We need the government to put in place the measures recommended in this report so we can protect our own homes and also our common home from the impacts of the climate crisis. It's particularly important the government does this and leads the way as the host of this year's UN climate talks."

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38858>

Full report available at: www.theclimatecoalition.org/s/Home-Truths-Report-Embargoed-until-2230-040220.pdf

CATHOLIC ORGANISATIONS INVITED TO JOIN GLOBAL DIVESTMENT ANNOUNCEMENT IN MARCH 2020

Helena Ritter 15/2/2020: The World Council of Churches, the Global Catholic Climate Movement, Operation Noah, Green Anglicans and Green Faith are inviting religious and spiritual institutions to commit to divest (disinvest) from fossil fuels and join a global divestment announcement on 26-28 March 2020. More than 160 Catholic organisations around the world have now made commitments to divest from fossil fuels. In January, Middlesbrough and Lancaster Dioceses joined the Epiphany Declaration for Fossil Free Churches, becoming the first Catholic dioceses in England and Wales to divest. Several Catholic religious orders in the UK have also made divestment commitments, including the Passionists, the Congregation of Jesus, the Religious Sisters of Charity, the Presentation Sisters and Franciscan Sisters Minor.

The year 2020 is a crucial time for climate action. It must be the peak year of overall global greenhouse gas emissions, with a rapid decline in emissions through to 2030, if we are to limit global average temperature rises to 1.5°C. By divesting from fossil fuels, Churches and faith organisations can demonstrate moral leadership and emphasise the need for urgent action from the UK Government, especially with the UN climate talks (COP26) set to take place in Glasgow in November 2020.

The extraction and burning of fossil fuels is one of the main drivers of the growing climate crisis. In spite of the climate emergency, the fossil fuel industry is planning to increase production and invest trillions of pounds in exploration and extraction of new fossil fuel reserves over the next decade, when the vast majority of known reserves must remain in the ground if we are to have any chance of meeting global climate targets. Last October, a Guardian report showed that Shell and Exxon are planning to increase production of oil and gas by 35% between 2018 and 2030 - the 12 years when global carbon emissions need to fall by 45% if we are to meet the Paris Agreement target of limiting global average temperature rises to 1.5°C.

Divestment from fossil fuels is a powerful action that faith institutions can take in response to the climate emergency - shifting investments out of the problem and into the solution. It involves a commitment to divest any investments in fossil fuel companies within a five year timeframe. Even if your faith institution doesn't currently hold investments (for instance if it only has a bank account), it can make a strong statement by pledging to not invest in fossil fuels in the future. While investments in fossil fuel companies were historically considered a safe investment, they are now seen as increasingly risky. The former Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, warned in a recent interview that unless firms wake up to the climate crisis, many of their assets will become 'worthless'.

Catholic dioceses and religious orders may hold investments in fossil fuel companies. Operation Noah, the World Council of Churches, the Global Catholic Climate Movement and others are inviting faith institutions such as these to divest from fossil fuel companies and join the global divestment announcement. If you would be interested in finding out more about how your diocese, religious order or faith institution can divest from fossil fuels, visit the *Bright Now* website or contact Helena Ritter on helena.ritter@operationnoah.org

Operation Noah is a Christian charity working with the Church to inspire action on the climate crisis
www.operationnoah.org <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38925>

PAKISTAN COURT RULES MEN CAN MARRY UNDERAGE GIRLS

Source: ACN Fionn Shiner and Marta Petrosillo 5/2/2020

Underage girls can be married as long as they have had their first menstrual cycle, a High Court in Pakistan has ruled, in accordance with Shari'a law. The Sindh High Court in Karachi passed down the ruling in a hearing on Monday (3 February) about the alleged abduction, forced conversion and marriage of Huma Younus, a Catholic girl taken from her home on 10 October 2019. Her parents believe her marriage is invalid in line with the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act, which forbids marriage under the age of 18.

Huma's parents produced evidence - including a baptismal certificate and testimony from her school - purporting to show she is 14 years old, born on 22 May 2005. The judges, Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro and Irshad Ali Shah, ruled that, as per Shari'a law, even if Huma was a minor, the marriage between her and her alleged abductor, Abdul Jabbar, would be valid as she had already had her first menstrual cycle. Huma's mother, Nagheena Younus, told Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) that Christians are not treated as equal citizens in Pakistan. She said: "Once again, justice has been defeated and, once again, our state has shown itself unable to treat Christians as Pakistani citizens."

The Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in 2014 in order to stop forced marriages to minors in the province, primarily of Hindu and Christian girls, where it is prevalent. Commenting on the law, Huma's lawyer, Tabassum Yousaf, told ACN: "We hope that the law could have been applied for the first time in this case. But evidently in Pakistan these laws are formulated and approved only to improve the image of the country in front of the international community, ask for development funds, and freely trade Pakistani products on the European market." Huma had been summoned to appear at yesterday's hearing - which would have been the first time a victim of forced conversion and marriage has appeared in a Pakistani high court - but in the event was not present.

At Ms Yousaf's request, the judges instructed the investigating officer, Akhtar Hussain, to examine Huma to determine her age. Ms Yousaf claimed that Mr Hussain is colluding with Huma's alleged abductor. Ms Yousaf said: "It is clear that since [Mr] Hussain has been put in charge there is a high probability that the test results [of Huma's age] will be falsified. But we keep hoping that the girl being underage will be proven so that she could be placed in women's shelter, and removed from her rapist." There will be another hearing on 4th March.

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38862> www.acnuk.org

BISHOPS OF ENGLAND AND WALES REJECT 'PEACE FOR PROSPERITY' PLAN

Zenit Staff 33/2/2020

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales on January 30, 2020, voiced opposition to the "Peace to Prosperity" plan for the Holy Land proposed by the US Government. The UK government has expressed support for the plan. The Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land issued on January 29, 2020, also raised concerns about the 'Peace-to-Prosperity' plan. The Bishops' statement follows:

'Our governments have a responsibility to uphold international law and protect human dignity in the Holy Land. This unilateral initiative does not do so. We are extremely concerned that the UK government has welcomed the proposal. The government should continue to insist upon meaningful dialogue, a viable two-state solution and the application of international law.

We echo the words of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land:

For decades the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict has been at the centre of many peace initiatives and proposals for a solution. As has been said many times in the past, we think that no proposal and no serious perspective could be reached without the agreement of the two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians. These proposals have to be based on equal rights and dignity. The plan "Peace-to-Prosperity" does not contain these conditions. It does not give dignity and rights to the Palestinians. It is to be considered a unilateral initiative since it endorses almost all the demands of one side, the Israeli one, and its political agenda. On the other hand, this plan does not really take into consideration the just demands of the Palestinian people to their homeland, human rights, and a dignified life.

This plan will bring no solution, but rather will create more tensions and probably more violence and bloodshed. We expect that the previous agreements signed between the two parties be respected and improved based upon complete human equality among peoples. We call on all churches to pray for the Holy Land, to work towards justice and peace and to be the voice of the voiceless.'

The Rt Rev Declan Lang, Bishop of Clifton, Lead Bishop, International Affairs Catholic Bishops' Conference England and Wales
The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, Lord Bishop of Southwark, Lead Bishop, International Affairs Church of England 3/2/2020
<https://zenit.org/articles/bishops-of-england-and-wales-reject-peace-for-prosperity-plan/>

UK ORGANISATIONS URGE GOVERNMENT TO CHALLENGE US 'PEACE PLAN'

28/1/2020: Statement endorsed by a coalition of UK-based humanitarian, development, human rights and faith organisations working to support the rights and welfare of the Palestinian people:

Last May, a group of UK-based humanitarian, development, human rights and faith organisations working to support the rights and welfare of the Palestinian people raised the alarm over President Trump's so-called 'peace plan'. Since then, we have witnessed only further devastating human impacts of occupation: increasing rates of demolition of Palestinian structures and the displacement of families, obstruction of access to healthcare and education, and the chronic deterioration of the Palestinian economy which is leading to unemployment and destruction of livelihoods.

There is a major risk that the so-called 'peace plan', set to be released imminently, will lead to the formal annexation of Palestinian land, perpetual Israeli occupation, and the negation of Palestinians' collective right to self-determination. Such an outcome will only deepen poverty and polarisation. Formal annexation would also seriously breach a foundational principle of the post-WWII international legal order, with implications far beyond the Israel-Palestine context. Palestinians are already losing their land with creeping de-facto annexation of the West Bank forcing them to become perpetually aid dependent despite abundant natural resources.

A sustainable peace for Palestinians and Israelis can only be built on the foundations of international law. We are deeply concerned that the basic human rights and civilian protections guaranteed to the Palestinian people are now in even greater danger. We therefore reiterate our urgent call on the UK government, parliamentarians and civil society organisations to reaffirm their commitment to the principles of international law and justice at this critical time, and uphold their respective legal and moral responsibilities to robustly defend the rights of the Palestinian people.

The UK has repeatedly stated that annexation of part of the West Bank "would be contrary to international law, damaging to peace efforts and could not pass unchallenged." Now is the time for the UK to outline what form such a challenge would take, and how it will work with other states to support the Palestinian people to attain their fundamental right to self-determination. There is a possible path to sustainable peace if we listen, learn, and bring more voices to the table. Peace should be rooted in the recognition of the human rights and dignity of all Palestinians and Israelis, as well as a firm foundation in international law.

Statement endorsed by the following 16 agencies:

ABCD Bethlehem; Care International UK; Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD); Christian Aid; Council for Arab-British Understanding (Caabu); Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel - UK and Ireland (EAPPI UK and Ireland); Embrace the Middle East; Friends of Birzeit University (Fobzu); Friends of Nablus and the Surrounding Areas (FONSA); Interpal; Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights (LPHR); Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP); Sabeel-Kairos UK; War on Want; Welfare Association; Quakers in Britain.

<https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1084-uk-organisations-urge-government-to-challenge-annexation-us-peace-plana>

BALFOUR PROJECT REJECTS TRUMP PROPOSAL ON ISRAEL/PALESTINE

6/2/2020: The Balfour Project has studied President Trump's proposal on Israel/Palestine and states that it does not stand up to scrutiny. Sir Vincent Fean, Chair of trustees, Balfour Project writes: "The proposal is simply not a basis for sensible discussion. It wilfully ignores international law and the rules-based order. It is indefensible and unworkable. Britain should seek neither to defend it nor to work on it. There's a strong parallel between the Balfour Declaration and the Trump Vision. In both of the two historical circumstances - and the Trump plan is historical - a foreign state arrogated to itself the right to bestow to one people territory that belonged, through history and international law, to another. The United States, like Britain in 1917, awards itself the right to make a political disposition to which it is not entitled. Britain must now acknowledge its historic responsibilities and present role, recognise Palestine side by side with Israel and support a settlement in accordance with international law and UN Security Council Resolutions."

The full statement follows: 'The Balfour Project renounces President Trump's proposal which will only perpetuate the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and calls upon the British Government to take immediate remedial action to uphold a genuine two-state solution.

Over a century after the then Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, declared the support of the British Government for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, a foreign power that has no moral or legal right to do so again seeks to dictate the future of the region. If implemented by Israel, the Trump Administration's proposal, unveiled on 28 January, will perpetuate the conflict and doom any hope of a genuine two-state solution. Under international law, Donald Trump's proposed Palestinian state will remain occupied territory, postponing further the Palestinian right to self-determination. This "state" has been accurately described as a series of "disconnected Bantustans" rather than a genuine sovereign state.

In close coordination with this Israeli Government, when it comes to the Palestinian territory which Israel occupied in 1967 Donald Trump has chosen to ignore decades of international law banning the acquisition of territory by force and the transfer by an occupying power of its civilians on to occupied land. In stark contrast was the strong global response, led by the United States, to Russia's 2014 capture and annexation of the Crimea, which led to ostracism and sanctions that remain in force.

Half a century of UN Security Council Resolutions endorsed by previous US administrations, from UNSCR 242 of November 1967 through to 2334 of December 2016, condemning Israeli settlement building in the occupied territories, have now been cast aside by Washington as being of no consequence.

On the eve of Britain's departure from the European Union, Prime Minister Boris Johnson unwisely lent his Government's support to President Donald Trump's proposal, which entails inter alia annexation by Israel of the Jordan Valley and most of the existing settlement blocs. In doing so, the United Kingdom finds itself uncomfortably in a tiny minority of states. Worse, it is at odds with itself - and with logic. Mr Johnson spoke on a Wednesday. But, two days later, his Foreign Secretary was "concerned by reports of possible moves toward annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel". Any such unilateral move, he said, would be "contrary to international law. Any changes to the status quo cannot be taken forward without an agreement negotiated by the parties themselves." The Palestinian leadership and people will not agree to negotiate on the basis of Trump's proposal for annexation by Israel of much of the territory previously designated as part of a future independent Palestinian state. Nor should they. To pretend that they should is just that: pretence.

When he was making the case for Brexit, Boris Johnson repeatedly asserted that as an independent state on the global stage Britain would be a force for good, consistently defending the rules-based international order and upholding core British values such as justice. By publicly backing this indefensible - and unworkable - proposal perpetuating the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, he has stumbled at the first hurdle.

The Balfour Project was formed to raise British public awareness about our country's special responsibility for the injustice that the Palestinian people suffered as a result of British Government actions (and, indeed, inaction on crucial issues) during the Mandate period up to 1948 and subsequently, after the creation of the State of Israel. It calls for peaceful co-existence in the Holy Land based on acceptance of the legitimate rights of Israel and Palestine and of individual Israelis and Palestinians, preferably through the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel. Regardless of the eventual political outcome, the Project insists that the humanity of all the region's inhabitants, irrespective of their ethnicity or creed, demands that they enjoy equal rights.

We call upon the British Government to use its influence to forestall the Israeli Government's next steps, notably its intention to annex swathes of the West Bank, as already announced by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. As a permanent member of the Security Council, Britain has a duty to uphold UN resolutions and promote international law. It also has an additional historic responsibility as the former Mandatory power for Palestine. Here, oft-stated British values and our national interest converge. Britain should now recognise the State of Palestine alongside Israel on the basis of the pre-June 1967 lines enshrined in international law, thus affirming the rights of both peoples - Israeli and Palestinian - to self-determination. In so doing, Britain will signal to the world that any Israeli steps to annex Palestinian territories will be treated as null and void, and it will have lived up to its principles and values. More immediately, Britain faces another test of its principles at the UN Security Council in New York next week, when the Council will debate the merits of the Trump proposal. If the resolution drafted is consistent with established Council policy, Britain must maintain publicly its past support for a two state solution based on UN resolutions and international law - and not hide behind procedural manoeuvring to duck the grave issues at stake.'

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38869>

POPE URGES GLOBAL FINANCE LEADERS TO REDUCE ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

Source: Vatican News 5/2/2020: The 50 richest people in the world could, on their own, finance "medical care and education for every poor child in the world... and save millions of lives every year," Pope Francis told a meeting of financial leaders on Wednesday. Finance ministers from France, Argentina, Mexico, Paraguay, and El Salvador; a Nobel economics laureate and the director of the International Monetary Fund were among those who took part in the event, entitled 'New Forms of Solidarity' - which was held at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. The day provided a forum for key players in the global financial system to discuss rising inequality through "inclusion, integration, and innovation."

In his address, Pope Francis called on participants to reduce rising income inequality by prioritizing the needs of the poor who are left behind by the globalisation of indifference. He outlined several dangers lurking behind prevailing economic models, as well as several ways to build bridges between the rich and the poor. "The world is rich, and yet the number of poor people is swelling all around us," he said.

Hundreds of millions of people, said the Pope, are struggling in extreme poverty, and are lacking food, housing, healthcare, schooling, electricity, and drinkable water. Around five million children will die this year of causes related to poverty, he said. Pope Francis added that rising income inequality has also left millions of people as victims of forced labour, prostitution, and organ trafficking. These facts should impel us to take action, and not to fall into despair. "These are solvable problems," he said. "We are not condemned to global inequality."

Poverty can be overcome, said the Pope, if an economic system is put in place that includes, feeds, cures, and clothes those left behind by society. "We have to choose what and who to prioritise," he said. Our choice will lead either to increased social injustice and violence, or to "humanising socio-economic systems." Pope Francis went on to say how extreme poverty has continued to exist alongside great wealth throughout much of human history. Currently, the 50 richest people possess the equivalent of US\$ 2.2 trillion. The Pope said that, on their own, they could finance "medical care and education for every poor child in the world, either through taxes and/or philanthropy" and save millions of lives every year. And he condemned recurrent tax breaks for wealthy individuals as "structures of sin". "Every year hundreds of millions of dollars - which should be collected as taxes and go to finance healthcare and education - instead end up in offshore accounts," he said.

Turning to solutions, the Pope urged global financial leaders to "co-responsibility" in the pursuit of fraternity and trust. Banks and financial institutions, he said, should help disadvantaged peoples and developing nations to achieve a certain standard of development. "Social protection, a basic income, healthcare for all, and universal education," he said, are "economic rights" that form the basis of human solidarity. Finally, Pope Francis invited participants in the workshop to use their positions of authority to promote development for the disadvantaged, debt relief for struggling nations, and efforts to reduce the effects of climate change. "We celebrate the opportunity to recognise co-participants in the Lord's work, which can change the course of history to benefit the dignity of every person, especially those who are excluded."

<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38864>

COLORADO BISHOPS WELCOME MOVE TO ABOLISH DEATH PENALTY

Source: Archdiocese of Denver 7/2/2020

The Bishops of Colorado have voiced their support for a bill abolishing the death penalty, as the proposal makes its way through the state legislature. After five previously failed attempts, a bill set to repeal the death penalty appears to be moving closer to becoming law. It started on January 31st when 19 lawmakers voted in favour, and 13 against, bill SB20-100 - which, if ratified definitively, could put an end to the death penalty for crimes committed in the State as of 1 July. The local Bishops were amongst the first to show their support for this move, and in a statement, thanked the senators who "supported this important legislation."

"The Catholic Church has long taught that every person, whether unborn, sick or sinful, has a dignity, given by God, that cannot be erased or torn away. It can be defaced, of course, but never erased in the eyes of God," said the auxiliary Bishop of Denver, Jorge Rodrigues. "If we, as a society accept the idea that it is possible for someone to lose their dignity and be executed, then it will be a short step to affirm that certain types of people belong to groups with a lower level of humanity. And history has shown that this is not outside the realm of possibility," he added. Bishop Stephen Berg of Pueblo backed him, saying: "The death penalty seems to offer a sense of justice in the short term, but in reality it does nothing more than add further violence and eliminate any possibility of conversion," not only for the guilty, but also "the victims and their families." Keeping hatred alive against those who hurt us deeply "is tempting," he explained, but in reality, this attitude "consumes the lives of those who let hatred linger in their hearts."

Bill SB20-100 is now due to be examined by the House of Representatives, with a democratic majority; if approved here too, it will then have to be signed by the governor, Jared Polis, who is also a Democrat. Legal since 1859, the date of the first execution, the death penalty in Colorado is currently imposed by lethal injection. There are now three prisoners on death row; however, in recent years, state judges have always chosen to impose life imprisonment without possibility of parole instead of capital punishment.

In August 2018, Pope Francis approved an amendment to the text of the Catechism of the Catholic Church relating precisely to the death penalty. "The Church teaches in the light of the Gospel," reads the document, "the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person," and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide. www.archden.org/colorado-bishops-applaud-progress-of-death-penalty-repeal/#.XjypDVL7Qgg
<https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/38871>

FATHER JACQUES MOURAD, PRIEST HELD HOSTAGE BY ISLAMIC STATE, REFLECTS ON WHAT HE LEARNED

Grégoire de Fombelle 7/2/2020

Father Jacques Mourad is a monk and priest of the community of Mar Moussa in Syria. He is very active in Islamic-Christian dialogue and belongs to the diocese of Homs of the Syriac Catholic Church. In 2015, he was captured and held hostage by the Islamic State, before escaping with the help of Muslims. During Advent, Father Mourad visited the Ecumenical Centre, where he led a special midday prayer for peace in Syria and the Middle East.

Can you tell us about your community and your life before you were captured?

Father Mourad: I am co-founder of our community, together with Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, an Italian Jesuit who has been held hostage by Daesh since 2013 and who has gone missing without a trace. Fr. Paolo came to Syria in 1982, where he discovered the abandoned monastery of Mar Moussa, which dates back to the 6th century. During a retreat, the good Lord placed in his heart the desire to restore his house. Beginning in 1984, he restored it during the summers together with a group of young people from various parishes in Syria. In 1991, we began our monastic life there. Little by little, the good Lord blessed us with new confreres. Currently there are seven of us in the community, scattered between Syria, Iraq and Italy. In 2000, our bishop entrusted us with another abandoned monastery – the 5th century monastery of St Julian in al-Qaryatayn, as well as the local parish. It was a good opportunity for our vocation of conducting dialogue with Muslims. We laboured there for 15 years.

Then everything changed with the arrival of the Islamic State. How were you taken prisoner?

Father Mourad: In 2015, the situation in our region became difficult. In May, a group of jihadists from the Islamic State invaded the monastery and took me hostage. I was held prisoner for four months and 20 days. I had been a hostage for three months when the Islamic State gained control over the entire region of al-Qaryatayn, and they took 250 of my parishioners hostage. They transferred me from Raqqa, where I was being held in a bathroom, to Palmyra, where all of the Christians were in prisons: children, the handicapped, women and the elderly. It was a truly shocking and painful encounter. But for them it was a joy because they thought that I was already dead. It was a sign of hope. After 25 days, a declaration from the caliphate allowed us to return to al-Qaryatayn. But we were almost prisoners in our homes. Every day the city was bombed by Syrian and Russian planes. Thanks to a Muslim friend, I was able to escape on motorcycle; we crossed the desert and I arrived in Homs. There was an entire group of Muslims who helped us during this time. Thanks to them, who risked their lives, we were able to escape. Now the majority of these Christians are in two villages near Homs, and we continue to support them. But they are fine, thank God.

How did this event affect you, and what do you particularly remember?

Father Mourad: I don't want anyone to know what it's like to be a prisoner. It is the most difficult experience you can imagine. But I don't want to remain locked up and shocked by this state. Now I consider this experience a gift which God has given me so that I can experience the importance of dialogue and living together more profoundly. Thanks to this testimony of Christian love, friendship with the Muslim community, and the good we have done together, my life was saved. This is central to my experience. In the years before I was captured, we were able to help many displaced Muslim families, the poor, young university students and the sick. We restored many Muslim homes that were destroyed during the war. All of this bore fruit during my captivity, because these testimonies prevented the jihadists of the Islamist State from killing me. Thanks to this, a Muslim had the courage to risk his life in order to save me.

It was also an opportunity to discover the Islamic State. I did not base my opinion on what I saw on the internet or in the media, but on people. God has given me two gifts - kindness and silence. These helped me a lot to open myself up to the jihadists who came to the prison in order to abuse me. It was an opportunity to speak with them and find out who they were. Ultimately, they are normal people like us. But their insane idea is a reaction against the injustice and evil we experience in this world.

You got to know the people behind the Islamic State. What can we learn from this?

Father Mourad: The Islamic State movement is very interesting to study. We have to understand why it exists and that it can recur in another way. We have to learn from this experience that people have the means of reacting against ongoing evil, violence and injustice. If we do not open up ourselves, if we do not listen to those who are suffering the most, to those who live in affliction, we cannot overcome this crisis. Peace cannot be something that is independent in each country. There is a proverb in Syria which says: "If your neighbour is well, you are well." If Syria is not doing well, all the countries around it cannot be doing well.

After escaping, you did not stay in Homs. What has happened since?

Father Mourad: After a few months, I decided to leave Syria. I went to Sulaymaniya in Iraq to support my confrere, Father Jens Petzold, who also takes care of our mission there and who has received fifty refugee families from Qaraqoch, in the plains of Nineveh, since 2014. <https://www.oikumene.org/en/press-centre/news/father-jacques-mourad-priest-held-hostage-by-islamic-state-reflects-on-what-he-learned>

• Grégoire de Fombelle is a Communications Project Assistant at the World Council of Churches

2020 VISION: ACTION FOR LIFE ON EARTH – NATIONAL JUSTICE & PEACE CONFERENCE

Five years on from *Laudato Si'* we are learning that ecological conversion is a matter of life and death. Decisions at United Nations summits in 2020 on both climate and biodiversity will be critical for salvaging a viable future. Join us in Conference 2020 as we make common cause to face the choices, changes and consequences confronting us. 17-19 July 2020, The Hates Conference Centre, Swanwick.

Book now at: <https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/cms/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PDF-Booking-form-1-1.pdf>

DIARY DATES

FEBRUARY

23 Church Action Poverty Sunday: *Speaking Truth to Power* church-poverty.org.uk/sunday/

24 -8 March Fairtrade Fortnight fairtrade.org.uk 020 7405 5942 Focus on cocoa, the special role women farmers play in the journey to living incomes, and sharing new fairness

26 Ash Wednesday witness/action: **London**, Ministry of Defence, 0208 203 4884. **Liverpool**, City Centre 07746919915 janharper1@yahoo.co.uk **Coventry**, 11.45am, Old Cathedral steps.

MARCH

Christian Aid Lent Lunches

12:00 noon - 1:30 pm Quaker Meeting House, Union Walk, Frodsham Street, Chester, CH1 3LF. Arranged by City Centre Churches Together. Please join us for a simple meal. £5 donations to Christian Aid: "Working to end poverty and injustice worldwide". 01244 375606. [Lent Lunch on Mon 30 March moves to Handbridge, see below]

4 Kate Hennessy speaking about her book and her grandmother, **Dorothy Day**. paxchristi.org.uk

6 Women's World Day of Prayer prepared by women of **Zimbabwe** wwdp.org.uk

6 CAFOD Lent Fast Day cafod.org.uk/News/

7 JPIT Conference: *Renewal and Rebellion: Faith, Economy and Climate* jointpublicissues.org.uk

8 International Women's Day internationalwomensday.com

10 Time Out Quiet Day 10am-4pm at The Convent of Our Lady of the Cenacle, Tithebarn Grove, Lance Lane, Wavertree, Liverpool, L15 6TW. Input and time for individual quiet prayer and reflection. Cost £10. Tea & coffee provided. Bring your own lunch. For more information or to book: Tel 0151 722 2271 email: winniecenacle@mail.com

10 CWDF Forum 6.45-9pm The Unity Centre, Cuppin Street, Chester, CH1 2BN Speakers: Linda & Stewart Shuttleworth, talking of their personal involvement with the charity "Jamie's Fund", supporting the development of mental health care in Uganda. <http://jamiesfund.org.uk>

13 CAFOD Quiz Night Our Lady's Parish Centre Ellesmere Port Town Centre 7.30 pm. Admission: adults £3 children £1 which includes Fairtrade refreshments at the interval. All money raised will go to the CAFOD's new *Hands on Peace* building project in Magdalena Medio, Colombia. Contact Tony Walsh on 0151 355 6419

13-15 Prophets – Opening Unseeing Eyes & Unhearing Ears catholicpeoplesweeks.org

14-29 Pax Christi Icon in Birmingham, details to be finalised a.m.kelly@btinternet.com 07890 066 309

21 Sustainable Chester Fair - Sustainable Fashion. 11am- 5pm, Rowton Hall Hotel and Spa, Rowton Lane, Chester CH3 6AD. Organised by Eco Communities/ Friends of the Earth Chester & District as their fourth Sustainable Fair. Sustainable Fashion theme, working with Cheshire West & Chester Council, with talks and workshops throughout the day.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/eco-communities-friends-of-the-earth-chester-amp-district-20117717104>

21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination un.org/en/events

22 World Water Day unwater.org/worldwaterday

24 40th Anniversary of the murder of St Oscar Romero romerotrust.org.uk romerotrust@gmail.com

27 Chester Q & A Session with Chris Matheson MP. 6.15pm Venue to be confirmed.

28 Time Out Quiet Day 10am-4pm at The Convent of Our Lady of the Cenacle, Tithebarn Grove, Lance Lane, Wavertree, Liverpool, L15 6TW. Input and time for individual quiet prayer and reflection. Cost £10. Tea & coffee provided. Bring your own lunch. For more information or to book: Tel 0151 722 2271 email: winniecenacle@mail.com

28 Earth Hour wwf.org.uk/earthhour

30 Christian Aid Lent Lunch 12:00 noon - 1:30 pm Community Hall, St Mary's Handbridge, Chester, CH4 7HL

APRIL

14 Time Out Quiet Day 10am-4pm at The Convent of Our Lady of the Cenacle, Tithebarn Grove, Lance Lane, Wavertree, Liverpool, L15 6TW. Input and time for individual quiet prayer and reflection. Cost £10. Tea & coffee provided. Bring your own lunch. For more information or to book: Tel 0151 722 2271 email: winniecenacle@mail.com

21 "Is Africa developing? Challenging some popular perspectives?" 4.30-5.30pm, Best Building, University of Chester off Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ. Lecture by Prof Tony Binns, University of Otago, New Zealand, drawing on his long standing interest in African community development and the livelihoods and wellbeing of Africans. Lecture arranged on behalf of the Geographical Association. Visitors welcome. Further info: Gill Miller (GA President 2019-20) 07941 629236

25 Time Out Quiet Day 10am-4pm at The Convent of Our Lady of the Cenacle, Tithebarn Grove, Lance Lane, Wavertree, Liverpool, L15 6TW. Input and time for individual quiet prayer and reflection. Cost £10. Tea & coffee provided. Bring your own lunch. For more information or to book: Tel 0151 722 2271 email: winniecenacle@mail.com

28 Film "On Her Shoulders" 6 -7.30pm Storyhouse, Hunter Street, Chester CH1 2AF. The documentary film "On Her Shoulders" is about Nadia Murad a young Yazidi woman who escaped from ISIS and has helped to publicise the plight of the Yazidi and women and children victimised by genocide and mass atrocities. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018. Further information: www.storyhouse.com or amnesty.chester.wrexham@gmail.com

NJPN continues to have a weekly column in *The Universe*, and some of these are uploaded onto our website.

- Many items taken from the daily e-bulletin Independent Catholic News www.indcatholicnews.com an invaluable free resources for up-to-date J&P news, events and in-depth articles.

- Sign up for regular news and information from NJPN (plus copies of this newsletter & back issues) and resources at www.justice-and-peace.org.uk or contact admin@justice-and-peace.org.uk 020 7901 4864

The views expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily those of NJPN