



Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat of the Society of Jesus

30 September 2011

...to exchange social justice and ecology news, stimulate contacts, share spirituality and promote networking...

Narrative

Xavier Jeyaraj SJ, designated Assistant Secretary at the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat, Rome, Italy



"Will anyone volunteer to go to Bombay to help in an action research study on the eviction of pavement and slum dwellers conducted by a Social Work College?" asked my Rector while I was doing my first year of philosophy in Pune in 1985. As a young scholastic, least interested in any work against eviction during the Puja vacation but rather more interested in seeing Bombay city in its festivity, I volunteered to go along with a few friends. God's ways are strange. He works in and through our human desires.

At this visit I never expected to receive a life time shock of witnessing the shanty houses totally bulldozed and all their utensils and clothes strewn around, children crying and trying to gather whatever they could salvage from the rubbles. When I heard that the demolition squad comes at night, not during the day, a few of us decided to spend the nights on the pavements of Bombay. I could not believe what was happening. Many questions arose from deep within. I received no answers. But that was the beginning of my inner search and a genuine passion for working for justice among the marginalized and victimized. The passion that I felt on that day has not diminished or wavered even today. Since then, this "eviction experience" of mine in Bombay has remained almost like a foundation experience for my insertion into social apostolate, though I have witnessed worse human right violations, human-made calamities, and destruction of human lives after that.

On completing my philosophy studies, I returned to the same College to pursue Masters in Social Work (MSW) to equip myself to continue working with the poor. While in College, I was privileged - rather I chose - to work in Narmada valley with Ms. Medha Patkar, a well known social activist in India against the Narmada dam. I will never forget her simple life and commitment to the cause of the tribals in the valley. It has remained a big challenge to my own religious life and commitment.

After my ordination in November 1993, I was assigned to teach Sociology at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata. While teaching, I continued my passion to work among the underprivileged, especially the slum and pavement dwellers. In order to provide an education to their children, I motivated some of the College students, through the social service wing of the

College, to bring the children together in one of the classrooms of the College and teach them there. This initiative was later christened as "TITLI", meaning butterflies, and was incorporated as a parallel school within St. Xavier's Collegiate School. During these years of teaching, I completed Legal studies in 1998 as an additional tool to advocate the cause of the poor.

In 1998, I requested my Provincial to relieve me from the College, so as to get involved full time in social action. With the support and encouragement of the Provincial, I began the Province Social Action Centre called Udayani Social Action Forum and was in charge until I was appointed the Secretary of the Social Apostolate for South Asia in 2007. Through Udayani, I worked among the most deprived santal tribals and the marginalized dalits and among the slum and pavement dwellers of Kolkata city. We initiated diploma courses and trainings to multiply grass root social workers. It was a difficult and a challenging task to initiate something new, yet it was an immensely enriching and fulfilling experience both spiritually and in my commitment to the call of faith that does justice. This enriched and strengthened my faith in a very special way.

In the last 4 years as Secretary of JESA (JEsuits in Social Action) in South Asia, I gave myself fully to whatever promoted greater bond, unity, collective reflection and action among our men in social action. It was a humbling experience to learn much more from our Jesuit social activists and others than what I could contribute. It is with the similar sense of hope and desire, but not without fear, that I take up the new assignment at SJES sometime in January 2012. Relying on your prayers and support I entrust myself fully to His greater service.

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Flashnews

Society of Jesus: On 16 September, Father General has sent a letter to the whole Society on the question of ecology, which coincides with the publication of the results of the Task Force on Jesuit Mission and Ecology as *Promotio Iustitiae* 106. Under the title "Healing a Broken World", the document reflects on the current state of the environment worldwide from a biblical and Ignatian perspective and invites Jesuits to review personal, communal and institutional lifestyles and practices in accordance with the mission of reconciliation with creation (GC35). <http://goo.gl/4RheX>

SJES: Xavier Jeyaraj SJ of the Calcutta province in India (author of this month's narrative) has been appointed Assistant to the Secretary for Social Justice and Ecology, Patxi Alvarez SJ. Fr Xavier will join us here in Rome in January 2012, after handing over his current job as Social Apostolate Coordinator of South Asia to Stanislaus Jebamalai SJ of the Gujarat Province. Fr Stany is currently the managing trustee of SHAKTI-LAHRC, a Jesuit social centre in South Gujarat.

Kenya: From 8-11 August, the Jesuit Hakimani Centre's team went to Dodoma, Tanzania, to hold a peace building training workshop for justice and peace animators. The objective of the training was to sensitise the animators on socially innovative ways of engaging with their parishioners and other groups in the parish on issues of social justice. <http://goo.gl/biaKZ>

Latin America: The International Federation of Fe y Alegría, the Jesuit-inspired education network, has been granted special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. With this status, Fe y Alegría has - among other things - the possibility to put items of particular interest to the network on the agenda of ECOSOC. <http://goo.gl/4nOKe>

China: Father Luis Ruiz Suarez, who dedicated his life to needy people in Macau and mainland China, died on 26 July at the age of 97. He was the founder of Caritas Macau. Born in 1913 in Spain, Father Ruiz joined the Jesuits in 1930. His missionary work in China began

in 1941. Watch three videos about Fr Ruiz' life and work on YouTube here:
<http://www.youtube.com/user/casariccimo>

World: International Non Violence Day takes place on 2 October every year. The international Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission of religious congregations has published a prayer service, written by John Dear SJ:
http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/EN_2October. The same Commission is also organising a Seminar on 19 November in Rome, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops "Justice in the World" (1971). Information about the seminar and the document in 10 languages: http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/EN_Justice

Brazil: The process for the beatification of Mgr. Luciano Mendes de Almeida SJ, who died in 2006, began in August on behalf of the Archdiocese of Mariana, Brazil. It was announced to the Bishops gathered for the 49th general assembly of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference by its president, Msgr. Geraldo Lyrio Rocha, who asked them to sign the petition to be presented to the Holy See. Msgr. Much loved by the people and the Brazilian episcopate, he became known especially for his love for the poor and marginalized people and his commitment to human rights.

USA: From 12-14 November, the 12th annual Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice takes place in Washington DC under the title "The Gritty Reality: feel it. think it. engage it." For the programme and speakers, see the recently refurbished website of the Ignatian Solidarity Network: <http://ignatiansolidarity.net/>

Amazonia: Service Action, Reflection and Social Education (SARE), the Jesuit Social Center of the Amazon Region, invites to an international seminar in Manaus, Brazil, from 27 to 29 October. The aim of the seminar is to discuss the major infrastructure projects planned for the Amazon region, to link traditional communities and social movements and to create the "Pan-Amazonian Observatory" (Observatorio Panamazónico). Apply here (in Spanish): <http://goo.gl/APCWQ>

USA: The Center of Concern in Washington DC, on the occasion of its 40th anniversary this year, has published a 10-minute video about the "Justice in the World" document, featuring Jim Hug, the center's president, and Dominican Sister Maria Riley, senior adviser to the center's Global Women's Project. <http://www.coc.org/node/6748>

Asia-Pacific: The Jesuits in the Asia Pacific region have initiated a carbon-offset scheme to reduce the impact of air travel on the environment. Flights for Forests was presented and approved at the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP) assembly in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in July. The contributions will go into a fund that will be used for forest renewal activities undertaken by youth groups in rural parts of Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines. Find out how to join here: <http://sjapc.net/what-we-do/ecology/flights-forests>

Jesuit Refugee Service: The Spanish Christian magazine "21" has started to publish narratives by migrants through a blog called "Voces de la movilidad humana" (voices of human mobility): <http://blogs.21rs.es/serviciojesuitarefugiados/> (in Spanish). The "voices" come from Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, Panama, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic and are coordinated by Minerva Vitti, the communication officer of JRS Latin America and the Caribbean.

Africa: Faith leaders from 30 African countries attended an inter-faith consultation on Climate, Justice and sustainable Peace in Africa on 7 and 8 June in Nairobi. The outcome of the consultation will form part of the Church in Africa message to the 17th Climate Change conference (COP17) in Durban, South Africa (29 November to 9 December). Read the communiqué here: <http://goo.gl/CrwmW>

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