



Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat of the Society of Jesus

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

Narrative

A Migrant Accompanying Migrants

Arturo Estrada Acosta, SJ



From the moment I was assigned to study theology in Brazil, I knew that it was going to be a challenge: a new culture, a new language, a new way of being Jesuit. And I wasn't wrong. The first months were difficult and unsettling. Many times I had to ask myself what I was doing here, but at other times I delighted in being immersed in a new and fascinating culture. In the midst of it all I experienced a clear certainty that living with Jesuits from all Latin America was something that set my heart afire. This experience led me into a personal search that I shared with my community. I felt clearly that the Lord was asking more of me. He was inviting me to go beyond my narrowness and let myself be surprised by reality. At the same time, I felt called to envision the Society in companionship with others.

It was in this context that a fellow Jesuit invited me to teach Portuguese classes two hours a week to Haitian immigrants who were arriving in the city. My first reaction was astonishment: a foreigner teaching other foreigners a language that is not his own! What could be more absurd, I thought! Nevertheless, I accepted the challenge because I sensed that I had something to share. Apart from how little I knew about either the Portuguese language or the students' language, I had a valuable experience to transmit. And again, I was not mistaken.

Two hours a week turned into whole weekends. I began to meet new friends who had difficulty with the language or who were disoriented by the new culture. They experienced moments of happiness and moments of sadness; in fact, their experience was similar to my own. That's when I began to **feel like a migrant among migrants**. But I also began to discover the many differences between their stories and mine. I learned about the difficult and dangerous routes they had to travel to reach Brazil. I learned about their sadness at having to live so far from their families. I learned how difficult it was for them to be accepted in a society that was not prepared to receive foreigners. In a word, I felt identified and united with all these companions of diverse nationalities, both Jesuits and non-Jesuits, both men and women. Because of this solidarity our little team was able to offer more effective and studied answers, and we eventually set up an office to help migrants with their problems.

Starting on 15 November 2013, we have begun to give more a organized response to the migrants' problems. Assisted by local and national institutions, our group includes Brazilian Jesuits and Brazilian Daughters of Jesus as well as people from other countries, including many Haitians who collaborate with our work. Our short- and medium-term goals are to offer accompaniment which will help Haitians, and us as well, to become better integrated into Brazilian society and to have the same opportunities as others.

For me personally, two things have stood out in this process. The first is the experience of working with a team to discern the reality of structural injustice that is usually hidden from the eyes of most people. Under the assumption that people are not equal, unjust structures establish barriers based on economic indices, and the consequence is widespread impoverishment in many countries. The second valuable experience for me has been relating to Haitians as friends. We don't distribute food, we don't give out money, we don't offer people work—we simply offer them a path that we ourselves have traveled: learning the language, getting documented with the federal police, developing relations with Brazilians, etc.

At no time have I spoken of Jesus, the Kingdom, or the Gospel because the Haitian immigrants and the team I work with are of different religious beliefs. At every moment, however, I have felt that I am following Jesus, that I'm living fragments of the Kingdom, and that the Gospel is becoming flesh in my accompaniment of the immigrants. We are striving for a world without borders where no human being is illegal. We are striving for an inclusive society where the differences of color and race give rise to joy and not to violence.

My theology studies have taken on new meaning. I realize that it's not merely an intellectual effort but an attempt to see with the eyes of Jesus and to understand reality with the help of theological tools. I feel like a Jesuit in "act" and not just in "potency," not just waiting to be ordained before I can dedicate myself to the service of faith and the promotion of justice. I believe in a Society that is becoming ever more Latin American and ever closer to those who suffer most. We do this not simply as an option but because being with the poor makes us happy. When we love them deeply, we want what is best for them.

Flashnews

Europe - For a 'Just Cause': Campaigning on Conflict Minerals



In the context of European Union raising its concern for a legislation on 'Conflict Minerals', Jesuit European Social Centre (JESC), Alboan (Loyola Province) and Jesuit Missions-UK brought together around 30 people from various networking groups including Global Ignatian Advocacy Network on Governance of Natural and Mineral Resources (GIAN-GNMR), between December 11-13, 2013 in Bilbao, to reaffirm their commitment to work together, to raise awareness and to contribute to the advocacy strategy along with other networks such as EURAC and CIDSE. The group shared testimonies from Democratic Republic of Congo and Colombia, critically reflected on the proposed EU legislation and prepared advocacy strategy for future action. [Read More ...](#)

Spain - GNMR Network meets in Loyola



From 14 - 16 of December, the core group member of the Governance of Natural and Mineral Resources (GNMR) network met together in Loyola, Spain to situate themselves, to share and to plan what the network would like to achieve in the coming 3 years. The group plans to work on 3 levels, namely a) raising awareness, b) building capacity and c) supporting and advocating for people and communities affected by mining. [Listen to the video interview](#) with the leader of the network.

France - Provincial Assembly on Ecology



120 Jesuits and 15 lay partners gathered at Châtelard from 26-30 December for the annual Assembly of the French Province. For three and a half days, they shared about "Ecology: engaged for mission and community life". It was a time for fraternal encounters, rest and deepening in the mission. They focussed their deliberations on the situation of climate and the changes it is experiencing, on possible solutions and on a concrete example, brought by the Dominicans at Tauligman, who are working in the area of eco-agriculture.

India - Police canes Christians demanding equal rights for Dalits



On December 11th 2013, around 3,000 peaceful protesters, including bishops, priests and nuns and lay men and women, who chose to march to the Parliament demanding equal rights for dalit Christians and Muslims were caned and water-cannoned by Delhi Police. Protesters, including women, braved the assault. The Bishops (shepherds) accompanied and stood by their flocks. Bishop of Nellore was even manhandled when he was about to begin a sit-in on the road. One of the protesters said: "We wanted the Central Government to furnish a reply to the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) before the Supreme Court, but they sent the police to beat us on the streets!" [Read more...](#)

USA - Jesuit Scholastic helps in organizing a pilgrimage to highlight need for immigration reform



Rather than wait on the sidelines and simply hope that politicians act on immigration reform, Jesuit scholastic Ben Anderson and 75 clergy, faith leaders and immigrant families hit the streets and made a six-day Pilgrimage for Citizenship in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) last month.

[Read more ...](#)

Latin America - Jesuit Network for Migrants



On the International Migrants Day on December 18, the Jesuit Network for Migrants (RJM - LAC) comprising Latin America and Caribbean, released a public statement, titled "Looking for a more just and hospitable world". The document expresses a special concern about Haitians all over the continent, undocumented Latin Americans in the US and the situation of Colombians, either displaced or refugees. It makes a call to work for justice and hospitality. [Read more...](#)

South Sudan - Call for an immediate Christmas ceasefire



The Churches of Western Equatoria state denounced the events of violence and warfare in South Sudan. The Catholic Bishop of Tombura-Yambio, the Bishop of Episcopal Church of Nzara, the Bishop of Evangelical Lutheran Church and Rev. Pastor Nathan from the Seven Days Adventist Church called for an immediate Christmas ceasefire. They called upon the leaders of the aggrieved parties to utilize the peace and reconciliation abilities of the ecumenical Churches of South Sudan to heal the rifts and wounds of the nation. [Read more...](#) Jesuits have also urged [peaceful resolution to South Sudan crisis](#).

India - SAPI prepares Peoples' Manifesto in view of General Election



Around 65 members of South Asian Peoples' Initiatives (SAPI) from all over the country came together at Indian Social Institute, Bangalore from January 9-12, 2014 to prepare the *Peoples' Manifesto* in view of the forthcoming general election in May 2014. Dividing themselves into six groups, they deliberated on 8 thematic issues, namely, economic, social, political, educational, health, cultural, environmental, governance and security and prepared their demands. They plan to place before various political parties as peoples' agenda for good governance.

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Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES)

Borgo S. Spirito 4 - 00193 Rome, Italy

Tel: +39-06-6986-8393, Email: sjes@sicuria.org

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