



Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat of the Society of Jesus

ENG March 2014

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

Narrative

Reconciliation: The Missing Link in Healing Africa

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I am deeply concerned about the way the International Criminal Court (ICC) has so far handled the Kenya case in which the President, Uhuru Kenyatta, and his Deputy, William Ruto, together with a journalist Joseph Sang, stand accused of bearing the greatest responsibility for the Kenya 2007-08 post-election violence.

For one, the ICC was meant to be an independent, non-partisan actor in determining the perpetrators of the post-election violence. Recent developments at the ICC and statements coming from the former ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo, however, suggest that the process to identify perpetrators of the violence was not solid enough. Either we have wrongly

accused persons at the ICC or there is too much politics in the way Kenya is treated.

In my mind, the victims of the violence are the greatest losers of this travesty of justice if the accused had actually nothing to do with the deadly violence. It is another way of saying that the real culprits of the violence were never investigated. Moreover, at this point, there is no hope or even desire to find out who actually caused the death of over 1600 persons.

Once the cases crumble - as seems likely to happen- Kenyans living in cosmopolitan cities will begin to suspect each other and a whole cycle of inter-tribal hate might begin all over. The tensions that led to the 2007 violence have not yet been addressed and I am concerned that a major component of this - reconciliation -- has not even been thought of.

There is conflict in South Sudan, in Somalia, in Uganda, in Tanzania and in Kenya. Yet we citizens do not seem to worry about the ever present social indicators that point to future escalation of violence. Moreover, and to be specific, what worries me most is the rapidly increasing religious intolerance in Tanzania and Kenya and also in many other parts of Africa. For this reason, let me highlight the emerging religious tensions in Eastern Africa.

Religious Intolerance in Tanzania and Kenya

The 2013 general elections in Kenya were largely peaceful unlike the 2007 election when violence broke out over a disputed presidential result. Nevertheless, whether peaceful or not, the recent presidential election result was challenged in the Supreme Court. The court upheld Uhuru Kenyatta's initial announcement as winner. The 5.1 million people who supported the loser, Raila Odinga, against Uhuru's more than over 6.3 million supporters are struggling to come to terms with the loss. In spite of the Supreme Court ruling, they believe it was unfair to their claims. Undercurrents are palpable.

In the midst of this development, most unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly evident that religious intolerance is taking root amongst communities. Tribal walls and blocks are being formed, albeit quietly. It is no longer a secret. Studies conducted, among other institutions, by Jesuit Hakimani Centre (JHC), suggest that tribalism is eroding the co-existence between various religious faiths. Moreover, the voting pattern from the previous general elections, including the 2013 election, point to a discomfiting alignment of the religious faiths with their tribal lords. Indications for next year's general elections in Tanzania clearly show a divide between Christians and Muslims, each group wanting a president from its own religious faith.

The lay, in these countries, have voiced their concern about the trend through various platforms, including the recorded national forums that JHC has organized in the recent past, but there has been no clear response from the Church authorities. The credibility of the Church continues to slide when trends like this are not addressed before they harden and become chronic. The Rwanda genocide serves as a point of reference on religious ethnicity. The religious were said to have been part of the problem.

In Tanzania, the relationship between Muslims and Christians (specifically Catholics) is at an all-time low. A Catholic priest was recently shot dead in Zanzibar in what seems to have been an act of religious intolerance. Jesuits, in particular, have been targeted by Muslim extremists who released a CD claiming Jesuits are the brains behind Christian expansionism. Parishes in Tanzania have been targeted in the past but tensions remain high as Zanzibar, where mainly Muslims live, calls for secession. A similar pattern is emerging along the Coast with Mombasa Republic Council (MRC) claiming they too want secession so that the coastal region, under what used to be Mombasa Province, can become a country of its own. A few deaths have occurred following confrontation between MRC and the local police in the past year.

All these happenings leave me wondering if reconciliation will ever be achieved. There is a great deal of effort by local governments as well as the international community to support initiatives on ecology, climate change, human rights, poverty eradication and so forth. But is there anyone who cares about reconciliation? Being in the field, I realize that not even the Church has made any significant effort to place reconciliation above all other priorities, though most Church documents talk of reconciliation in such colorful language.

Flashnews

Philippines - Building back after Typhoon



Three months after Typhoon Haiyan struck, thousands of people in the islands of Visayas continue to reel from the devastation it wreaked. Debris from wrecked houses still litters the shores of many islands. Makeshift homes made of the same rubble have mushroomed amidst the chaos despite the numerous tents and bunks provided by both local and international aid. Many people in the largely fishing and farming communities still cannot earn a living because they have not been able to replace the boats, crops and equipment destroyed by the typhoon. [Read more...](#)

India - Shrinking space for freedom of religion in India



"The space for freedom of religion in India, in violation of the basic principles of human rights is shrinking", said Prof. Heiner Bielefeldt, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. During his public lecture on the 26th of February, organized by Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, he expressed apprehension on the lack of State protection and institutional biases within the security apparatus for spread of communal violence as happened in States like Gujarat, Karnataka and Orissa. [Read more...](#)

Europe - Jesuit organizations join European campaign on responsible mineral sourcing



A law proposed by the European Commission on responsible sourcing of minerals is not strong enough to prevent European companies' mineral purchases from financing conflict or human rights abuses, and falls far short of expectations", said the campaigners that included many Alboan, JESC, JRS in Europe and the Governance of Natural and Mineral Resources (GNMR) advocacy network. The Campaigners expressed disappointment that the Commission's proposal is limited only to four conflict minerals, and it calls for voluntary measures not compulsory. They say that the Commission's proposal threatens to lower international standards and start a race to the bottom.

US - Conf. President challenges deportations and the denial of human dignity



Fr. Tom Smolich, President of the U.S. Jesuit Conference recently penned this opinion piece on President Obama's deportation policies: "As President Obama's administration approaches a record-setting two millionth deportation, an immigration enforcement 'accomplishment' never achieved by any other president, many faith leaders are rightly focusing on the hardship that each of these deportations inflicts on families and communities torn apart by our broken immigration system. However, lost in this important debate as to whether Obama should suspend deportations is the dangerous manner in which these deportations are being carried out." [Read the essay here...](#)

Spain - The Oscar host the problem of child soldiers



The Spanish film "*Aquel no era yo*" (That was not me), written and directed by Esteban Crespo, has been nominated for the 2014 Oscar awards in the category of Best Short Fiction. Jesuit social organizations namely *Entreculturas* and *Alboan*, together with Amnesty International, *Fundación Compromiso* and Save the Children, working in Spain against the use of child soldiers, have supported the production of this documentary. Together with the documentary, the organizations met with the representatives of United Nations in New York, with the scope of having an International day against use of child soldiers. [For more information ...](#), [Trailer](#)

France - Confronting fiscal paradises, article by *Projet*

The French Jesuit review *Projet* has published an article speaking about fiscal paradises, expressing the need to fight against them for ethical reasons and also as a way of allowing States get back important incomes that can be used for the common good. The article has been commented at AFP (France-Press Agency) in February. Read the [article...](#)



India - West Zone Jesuit Social Activists prepare for Elections 2014



"Elections 2014: What is at Stake? What needs to be done?" was the theme on which sixteen Jesuits and 4 collaborators from 4 Provinces of the West Zone discussed between 6 - 8 February in Pune. Interacting with the two political leaders from the newly formed *Aam Aadmi Party* (common people's party) they discussed some major concerns and issues of people and planned the course of action to be undertaken by Jesuit Social Centres in view of the General election to be held in April - May this year.

US - "No worker should be forced to raise a family in poverty"



Thus says a new Jesuit Conference Advocacy Alert which supports the Fair Minimum Wage Act to raise the federal minimum wage from the current \$7.25/hour to \$10.10/hour over three years. Currently, a mother of two working a minimum wage job earns \$15,080 annually which is \$4,450 *below* the federal poverty line for a family of three. This alert follows the lead of a recent [US Catholic Bishops Minimum Wage letter](#) to lawmakers which notes that the minimum wage, as a static number, increasingly falls short as family living costs steadily increase. Click [here](#) to learn more or take action on this new Jesuit advocacy opportunity.

Venezuela - Fr Virtuoso speaks about the situation of the country



Fr José Virtuoso SJ, Rector of the University Andrés Bello, spoke about the situation of Venezuela in an interview on TV, on the 14th of February. During the interview he mentions the sources of unrest that are bringing groups of people to protest in the streets and he also explains the difficult economic situation that is affecting the life of the country. Most of the protesters are young people that want to express their expectations and demands for the future. Listen to the [interview in Spanish here...](#)

Canada - Centre justice et foi, on memory of Julien Harvey SJ



As part of the 30th anniversary of the *Centre justice et foi*, from French Canada, the Centre has published a book on the memory of Julien Harvey SJ (1923 - 1998), who was co-founder and first director of the Centre. Fr Julien Harvey was provincial of French Canada at the time of the 32nd General Congregation. He was an enthusiastic promoter of the link between faith and justice in the mission of the Society. The title of the book is "Justice sociale, ouverture et nationalisme. Regards de Julien Harvey", and reflects on several issues of social justice. [For more information...](#)

A Reflection on Ecology and Ignatian spirituality



The project of caring for the earth is so crucial to the future of humankind that all traditions - humanistic, scientific, or spiritual - ought to make a contribution. From this conviction, there arises the question whether Ignatian spirituality has some distinctive inspiration to bring to the service of the environmental movement? I believe it has, says *José Antonio García, SJ*, director of *Revista Manresa*. [Read more...](#)

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Publisher: Patxi Álvarez SJ - Editor: Xavier Jeyaraj SJ

<http://www.sjweb.info/sis>