



OFS Commissions Newsletter June 2013 Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation-JPIC

by Andrew Conradi, ofs, National JPIC Animator

1. Franciscans International

Markus Heinze ofm, Director, FI, recently sent out *Highlights of FI Advocacy Activities, January - April 2013*. It was a very interesting document which included activities in seven countries on issues that range from pro-life to key issues listed in our 2012 National JPIC Action Plan.

Regarding infanticide of so called “witch children” in Benin, FI was asked by UNICEF Benin to contribute to the national Child Code, by proposing key amendments to a law. FI proposed significant changes to the current Draft of the Child Code on the definition of infanticide and on the issue of Birth Registration. (Pro-life).

In Cameroon, FI focused on child kidnapping for trafficking (Issue no 4 in our JPIC Plan: Human Trafficking and Contemporary Forms of Slavery).

The 2nd largest gold mine in the world is planned for the Cajamarca region, northern Peru. The local people and human rights defenders have been protesting against this project. The common themes in the protests are fears of water contamination and other environmental damage, lack of prior consultation with local people, and anger that so few of the economic benefits from the mining operations accrue to local people. FI has helped locals in advocacy work and their defence of their rights and interests. (Issue no 2 in our JPIC Plan: The ethical use of resources: especially water, mining and fair trade).

The issue of Dalits (formerly known as “untouchables”) and Tribal people in India exemplifies the overlapping of JPIC issues. More than 65% of the Christian population in the Indian sub-continent are from Dalit and Tribal backgrounds. And they still face great discrimination and injustice especially in education and employment. FI is working to address abuses and discrimination against Dalit and Tribal groups. (Issue no 1 in our JPIC Plan: Extreme poverty and the excluded; & No 8 Solidarity with, and support for, Christians in countries threatened by hostile cultures).

To the Human Rights Council in March, FI denounced the failure of the Government of Indonesia to guarantee the human rights of indigenous peoples. FI also called for a more consistent human rights-based approach in implementation of development projects i.e. to

combat “land grabbing” by foreign mining companies and their Indonesian partners. (Again these are issues in our JPIC Plan).

2. March against Monsanto

On 25 May 2013 over a million people in 486 cities in over 50 countries marched against the American chemical corporation Monsanto, including me, your JPIC Animator.

Did you hear about the march? Do you know what it was about? It relates to these issues in our JPIC Plan: The ethical use of resources; Food: security and sovereignty and Care of Creation: particularly Pollution.

It is about the monopoly gained with US Government approval and financial support of the patenting of seeds which are genetically modified (GM) so that they need chemical fertilisers, herbicides, insecticides and fungicides also produced by Monsanto. It is about the fact that no proper studies of the safety of GM food were done, yet US authorities permit their sale because they say there are no studies showing they are unsafe. And they refuse to mandate labelling so consumers know if there are GMO's in their food. Now studies are showing some GMO's are toxic and many scientists are calling for a comprehensive proper review. Most of Europe has banned GM organisms (GMO's). Why would they do that unless there is good reason?

To patent seeds is to patent life. How can Franciscans agree to that? A farmer who buys Monsanto's GM seeds and chemicals but decides not to continue using them cannot save seeds to replant next year which has been the traditional way of most poor farmers in the world from the start of agriculture at least ten thousand years ago. In India this situation has led to at least 150 thousand suicides by poor farmers because the Monsanto seeds have not lived up to their promise and have to be paid for every time they are sowed.

Worse still, if an organic farmer's fields are contaminated e.g. by windblown GM seeds Monsanto can and usually does, sue the farmer because the seeds have not been paid for and Monsanto owns the patent so they are their seeds used without payment i.e. theft! If you have not heard of Percy Schmeisser, a Saskatchewan farmer perhaps it is time you learned about his experience at the hands of Monsanto. He was one of many farmers sued or threatened by Monsanto. Farmers cannot afford litigation and have to bend to Monsanto. However that is now changing with class action suits by farmers against Monsanto for contamination of their fields by Monsanto's GMO's.

I urge you to become aware of the problem of GMO's in your food and the fact there is no mandatory labelling of GM food. If it is so safe why does the Monsanto cafeteria and the White House only serve organic food? The US Government gave Monsanto a grant of

\$40M. The almost exact amount Monsanto spent on opposing a California bill to mandate GM labeling which was defeated. That is not all, it gets worse. Mozambique is now obliged to "systematically cease distribution of free and unimproved seeds", while drawing up new laws granting intellectual property rights in seeds that will "promote private sector investment". Similar regulations must also be approved in Ghana, Tanzania and Ivory Coast. Who makes the rules? For whose benefit? Can we change them? How do we change them? Remember Big Tobacco and labelling? Time to tackle Monsanto?

Pope Francis (11 June 2013) said: "To be involved in politics is an obligation for a Christian. We Christians cannot "play Pilate," wash our hands: we can't do this. We must be involved in politics, because politics is one of the highest forms of charity, because it seeks the common good. And lay Christians must labor in politics." How? See, judge, act!

3. Building a New Culture – Central Themes in Recent Church Teaching on the Environment (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops)

Issue No 5 in our JPIC Plan: Creation. The CCCB outlines eight central themes found in recent Church teaching on the environment - or as some prefer to call it - creation. The six-page document illustrates each of eight themes with relevant quotes from Popes Benedict XVI and Blessed John Paul II and includes a short reflection and is available here:

<http://www.cccb.ca/site/eng/media-room/3578-building-a-new-culture-central-themes-in-recent-church-teaching-on-the-environment>

4. Development and Peace Fall Action 2013

Word is out that the ecological justice campaign this Fall will focus on the extractive industry. The mining campaign will focus on the actions of Canadian mining companies in the Global South and the need for the Canadian government to hold them accountable for violations of human and environmental rights and renew the call for an Ombudsman, with postcards directed at MP's to be signed, and sent to the D&P National office. D&P is presently working with the Bishops on the campaign. (Issue no 2 in our JPIC Plan: The ethical use of resources: especially water, mining and fair trade).

5. Syria emergency

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) are launching a joint [campaign to raise emergency aid for Syrian refugees](#). They invite your participation. The revenues collected will assist the extensive work in the Middle East by Catholic charities and development agencies, particularly *Caritas Internationalis*. The special joint emergency

campaign for Syria begins Sunday, 30 June 2013, and will continue throughout the summer. (Issue no 7 in our JPIC Plan: Refugees)