

Washington Memo

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Jeff Kubina/Wikimedia Commons

abundant
life
economic
justice for all

Let Justice Roll Down TRADE FOR THE COMMON GOOD

by **Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach**

On a trip to Puerto Rico in 1946, Edna Ruth Byler noted the lovely handicrafts being made by women artisans. She came home and began selling their products out of the trunk of her car. Her work eventually developed into what is now known as Ten Thousand Villages.

This was the humble beginning of the global fair trade movement. Today, fair trade sales of Ten Thousand Villages and like-minded organizations top \$4 billion each year. The idea is simple: work directly with farmers and artisans to ensure they receive a fair, living wage for their products. This gives producers the added income they need to cover basic costs, such as sending their children to school.

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. has partnered with Equal Exchange to encourage the purchase of fair trade coffee. More than 200 Mennonite congregations have already signed up to make sure that their coffee hour every Sunday morning fairly benefits coffee farmers around the world. For more information, visit washington.mcc.org/advocate/coffee.

The steadily increasing number of fair trade sales is encouraging and makes a real difference in the lives of many people. But it is still a small percentage of all of the trade happening

worldwide. In 2008, nearly \$16 trillion worth of merchandise was traded on the world market, according to the World Trade Organization.

Because of this, it is crucial that while holding a mug of fairly traded coffee in one hand, we use our other hand to write a letter to Congress asking for fairer trade rules for *everyone*.

On Sunday, April 25, we are encouraging congregations across the United States to do just that. This will be the final Sunday of our year-long campaign calling for “Abundant Life: Economic Justice for All.” We hope many churches will choose to pray, reflect and act on that day for trade which prioritizes the common good.

In this issue Theo Sither writes about ways to make U.S. trade, which until now has strongly favored U.S. companies, more just. We also hear about how trade and economic policies made the impact of Haiti’s earthquake even more severe. Tammy Alexander writes about how trade policies have forced some people to leave their homes.

On pages 10–11 you will find a sample letter to policymakers on trade justice, along with an excerpt from the top essay in our high school essay contest.

We hope these resources will be helpful for you. And as always, we welcome your feedback. ✨

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Melissa Engler/MCC

“Trade as if People and Earth Matter”

by Theo Sittler

Trade is one of the most powerful forces that links human beings in the 21st century. The food we eat, the cars we drive, the clothes we wear and countless other products that we consume are easily available because of international trade. These products often travel hundreds, if not thousands, of miles before reaching their destination in our local grocery or department stores.

As corporations and multinational companies get richer, millions of the world’s poorest are being left behind. Thirty thousand children throughout the world die every day from preventable poverty-related illnesses. Global poverty exists in part because of decisions made by the governments of affluent countries. One form of global control by rich nations is through international trade policy.

Free Trade

Trade is not a new phenomenon. The trading of goods and commodities has existed from the earliest of times. In the

Bible, King Solomon expanded his rule and wealth by controlling important trade routes in the Ancient Near East.

Today, trade happens on an international scale with nations trading their goods and commodities in the global marketplace through sometimes ambiguous rules, regulations and free trade agreements.

Free trade refers to the movement of goods across national boundaries without government interference. In theory, free trade creates a “level playing field” so that everyone can compete based on the same rules in a free market system. The current form of international trade, however, combined with the free market system produces clear winners and losers.

Since the 1980s International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have imposed free trade or liberalized economic policies on countries in the global South. These policies translate into corporate consolidation, market control and bal-

looning profits for companies, while devastating rural communities, displacing small farmers and harming the environment.

U.S. Trade Policy

Trade, as it relates to U.S. policy, is governed through two frameworks. On a multilateral level the U.S. is a member of the WTO, which provides rules and regulation for international trade through negotiations by member states. Since the early 1990s the United States has also pursued bilateral or regional trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and other bilateral agreements.

Trade touches almost every aspect of our daily lives and its effects can be devastating to impoverished communities worldwide. While trade policies deal with a wide range of issues, MCC’s analysis of trade policies primarily stem from our work on international debt relief, food/agriculture and

migration. (See page 8 for an article on trade and migration.)

Debt and Structural Adjustment

Unjust trade policy is inextricably linked to international debt and polices imposed by the IMF and the World Bank. The loan programs of the World Bank and the IMF have leveraged and pressured poor countries to implement policies that have a detrimental effect on the poor. Governments from the global South have borrowed from these IFIs to finance domestic programs.

The loans, however, come with harmful conditions, which have often worked to destabilize domestic economies. These conditions are known as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) or so-called “poverty reduction and growth programs.” SAPs force a government to cut domestic spending on education, health care and other social programs and to privatize these sectors instead; cut support to local farmers; open up markets for trade by reducing import tariffs; and reorient the economy for export.

This forces poor countries to compete in a global market dominated by large corporations from the United States and Europe. As a result, many in the global South have been forced

Trade touches almost every aspect of our daily lives and its effects can be devastating to impoverished communities worldwide.

deeper into poverty. (For more information on debt relief see the Fall 2009 issue of the *Washington Memo*.)

Food and Agriculture

Many of the world’s poor depend on agriculture for their livelihood and food security. Access to food and the self-determination of policies that govern food are basic human rights. However, the growth in trade and the inclusion of food commodities in international trade has devastated rural communities around the globe.

According to the report *Trade as if People and Earth Matter* by the Interfaith Working Group on Trade and Investment (IWG), “small farmers have no voice during trade negotiations and policy design. This diminishes their right to food sovereignty, market access, access to good livelihoods and rural development.”

Many small and family farmers have lost their livelihood. When a country opens its market to food imports, small farmers are forced to com-

pete in a market that is dominated by just a few multinational corporations. The farmers ultimately lose out when cheap, subsidized imports from rich nations undercut their farm production.

This also has a detrimental effect on food security for local communities because food prices are at the mercy of global prices rather than local production. In 2008 food prices began to rise, resulting in a global food crisis. People in poor countries were at the mercy of the global market for subsistence. (See pg. 7 for an article on food, hunger and debt in Haiti.)

Trade Justice

International trade policies are so harmful because they fail to take into account the wellbeing of people and their livelihood. The movement for *trade justice* calls for trade policies to work for the common good rather than the interests of a few. Trade should work to promote life and dignity for all people.

According to the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, “trade justice is people-centered, respects human rights, and guarantees food security, livelihoods and sustainable development for the whole of society. It recognizes the right of all people to have a say regarding their own future, and all governments to determine their own economic and trade policies.”

Global trade policies must adhere to the following seven principles:

1. All people—not just elites in the United States and elsewhere—**should have a meaningful voice in determining global economic policies and practices.**

2. Public policy decisions should ensure that the benefits of economic activity flow equitably to all people, not to a privileged few. Economic policies should alleviate poverty and

(continued on page 6)

Damouns/Wikimedia Commons



“It’s Impossible to Make a Profit”

Muracin Claircin sold his plot of land in Haiti, left his wife and two children, and paid \$1,000 for a place on a boat to take him to the United States. “I had to do this because I could no longer support my family by growing rice,” he explains.

After a tortuous week drifting at sea without enough food or water, the captain told them they would have to turn back because the ship’s compass was broken.

Now back with his family, Muracin has neither money nor land and says that, given the opportunity, he would try again. He still cannot make a living from rice farming. “There’s no incentive to grow rice anymore. It’s virtually impossible to make a profit,” he says.

Source: *Christian Aid, Trade Justice Campaign Case Study—Haiti: Rice.*

Let Justice Roll Down

Worship Resources and Reflections

by Ken Nafziger

This spring, the MCC Washington Office invites congregations to pray, reflect and act on the theme “Let justice roll down: Trade for the common good.” The suggested Sunday is April 25.

Living in the presence of a prophet is not necessarily comforting. Reminders and warnings come, not as judgments with which one can argue, but as corrections to the course. The voice of the prophet reminds all who hear that when justice is not done, change is necessary.

Words of the prophet Amos have been selected as the biblical roots for this Sunday designated to focus on trade issues. “Seek me and live,” God says through the prophet. “The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the LORD is his name.”

“Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you . . . hate evil and love good, establish justice in the gate,” Amos said. And, calling the people back from a shallow and hollow perversion of a godly life, he said, “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

With reference to the many issues related to trade, we can find in Amos’ words ample reason to pray for those who suffer for trade-related reasons and those who cause the suffering. Every one of us needs constant reminding that the place where justice rolls down like waters, and where righteousness is an ever-flowing stream is where all of God’s people dwell securely.

Planning for worship on Sunday, April 25

The lectionary readings for this, the Fourth Sunday of the Easter season, include Psalm 23 and verses from Revelation 7 (9–17) that speak of a full table spread, no more hunger, and a state of bliss. In other readings for the Easter season, there are powerful and lavish food images: the reading from Isaiah 25 and the memorable seaside breakfast the post-Easter Jesus serves to his disciples, for example.

Alongside these post-Easter food images, it is good to remember these words from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s 1967 Christmas sermon on peace:

Did you ever stop to think that you can’t leave for your job in the morning without being dependent on most of the world? You get up in the morning and go to the bathroom and reach over for the sponge, and that’s handed to you by

a Pacific islander. You reach for a bar of soap, and that’s given to you at the hands of a Frenchman. And then you go into the kitchen to drink your coffee for the morning, and that’s poured into your cup by a South American. And maybe you want tea: that’s poured into your cup by a Chinese [farmer]. Or maybe you’re desirous of having cocoa for breakfast, and that’s poured into your cup by a West African. And then you reach over for your toast, and that’s given to you at the hands of an English-speaking farmer, not to mention the baker. And before you finish eating breakfast in the morning, you’ve depended on more than half the world.

Call to worship

The service could begin with a breakfast (or brunch) honoring the interdependence with which we begin our day. An extended call to worship would include:

- the aromas of the food being prepared,
- a spoken acknowledgement of the source of each of the foods being served,
- a rousing hymn of thanks, *Be present at our table, Lord* (HWB 457), and maybe
- an additional hymn, the Haitian song *Vin pran, vin pran/Come, take eat* (STS 46).

For some weeks prior to this breakfast, invite homes in the congregation to track the sources of what they have for breakfast. From this information, a menu can be planned. Where things come from, and the fairness with which growers or producers are treated should determine the menu. Local and fair trade items should be considered.



Melissa Engle/MCC



Melissa Engler/MCC

A time of praising

STS 190 People of God . . . (a responsive reading for the congregation)

Singing together (see the website for a list of suggested songs)

Psalm 146 (see the website for a suggested sung refrain to use with this psalm)

A time of confession

With the emphasis on trade issues, one might use this time of confession to explore imbalances that exist. The rubric here might be “making the ephah small and the shekel great,” from Amos 8:5.

With a little direction and imagination, some of the young people of the congregation could turn the web page, “Rigged Rules,” at maketrade.com into an interesting and informative, quasi-dramatic presentation. This interactive page clarifies such issues as dumping, market access, forced liberalization, labor rights and regional trade agreements.

Research into how these rules affect one or several of the countries represented at breakfast this morning would make the information even more accessible. Find stories whenever possible.

STJ 128 God of the weak and the wounded . . .

People should be given time to read these words before they speak them. They are heavy words; they should not be spoken lightly. One might assign the people’s part to four separate readers, allowing silence between each of the confessions. Everyone could then join on the final two lines of the prayer. However it’s used, it should be given plenty of time and space and silence.

STS 33 Let justice roll like a river

A time of thanksgiving

There are stories to be found online, or in the experiences of members of your congregation that can be re-told as expressions of thanksgiving for lives that have been lived comfortably in spite of trade difficulties, or of communities and/or groups that worked together to make lives better and more sustainable for others. To have work with dignity and respect is a shared aim across ages and cultures and livelihoods. I might end this section of story and thanksgivings with Max Coats’ “Litany of Gratitude” (found on the website) or STS 157.

A time of offering

A special offering today might be taken to support an organization that works on behalf of Christians to bring about fair trade practices.

HWB 750 Gracious God, we thank you . . .
(a prayer to be read in unison)

A time of sending

When people leave the worship service today, they should carry with them a thoughtful awareness of the issue, a sense of the inter-connectedness of the human family, the centrality of the work of Jesus and our work with him to bring justice where none is, and our participation in a system that has grown to unbearable proportions for some.

I would lengthen this part of the service to include reading and singing together, sharing silences, and hearing words of hope and promise. There are suggested readings and songs found on the website, along with some words adapted from Amos and Revelation, and a closing hymn, *You are salt for the earth, O people* (HWB 226).

Ken Nafziger is professor of music at Eastern Mennonite University and is on sabbatical this semester in the MCC Washington Office.

Abbreviations HWB *Hymnal: A Worship Book*
STJ *Sing the Journey*
STS *Sing the Story*

“Trade as if People and Earth Matter” (continued from page 3)

advance equitable power relations and fair economic relations among peoples and nations.

3. Global economic policies and practices should **foster ecological sustainability**, not unbridled and wasteful consumption.

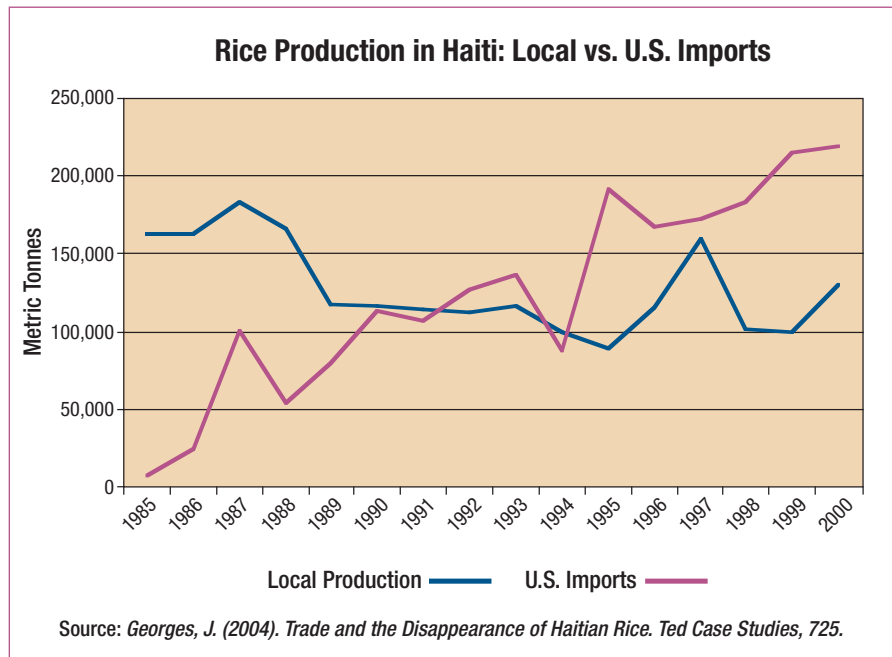
4. Global economic policies should **foster—not undermine—integral human development**, nurturing such human values as the family, local communities, education, physical health, dignified labor, and enjoyment of the fruits of science and culture. Economic activity should produce wholesome, life-giving products and services, not those that degrade and destroy.

5. Global economic policies should **address the imbalance of power** between capital and labor, fostering healthy and safe working conditions, worker participation in business decisions, stock ownership and the creation of worker-owned co-operatives. Economic policies should help transform the nature of the relationships between management, workers, the community and the environment from that of exploitation to mutual respect and a more equitable sharing of power.

Support the TRADE Act

The Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment (TRADE) Act provides a framework for re-evaluating and re-shaping U.S. trade policy so that it serves the common good by providing stable jobs, environmental protections, public health and poverty reduction. The bill sets standards for what must and must not be included in future trade agreements, and requires a comprehensive review of existing trade agreements like NAFTA and CAFTA that are failing to serve the most vulnerable in the U.S. and countries in the global South.

This bill was introduced by Rep. Mike Michaud (Maine) in the House as H.R. 3012 and by Sen. Sherrod Brown (Ohio) in the Senate as S. 2821. As of February 15, 2010, there are 136 cosponsors in the House and six cosponsors in the Senate. See p. 10 for a sample letter to Congress on the TRADE Act.



This chart illustrates that Haiti imports more rice from the United States than it produces. In the 1980s Haiti was self-sufficient in rice production, but due to free trade policies, imports outpaced local production to the detriment of Haitian farmers.

6. Global economic policies should **respect the community, or collective, dimensions of economic life**. Examples include protecting and fostering co-operative businesses, community-based agriculture, the accountability of corporations to the communities

where they operate, and the collective rights of local communities to their biological resources, knowledge and technologies.

7. Economic policies and structures **must not be imposed on the nations and peoples of the world by dominant nations and institutions**. While global links can nurture our common humanity, diverse peoples should be able to adopt a variety of economic models, compatible with their own cultures and consistent with values of freedom and justice. Economic policymakers must be willing to make room for alternative voices and models of finance, commerce and development.

Trade policies have the potential to improve livelihoods and lift communities out of poverty. To do this, policies should focus on people rather than on corporate profits. ✨



Justice for Haiti: For Zion's Sake

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.

—Isaiah 62:1

Jan m' renmen mòn Siyon sa a!
Se pou m' pale. Jan m' renmen lavil Jerizalèm
sa a, mwen p'ap pran kanpo,
jouk delivrans li va parèt tankou limyè solèy k'ap
leve, tankou flanbo k'ap klere nanfènwa.

—Ezayi 62:1

Ben Depp/MCC

Marie Therese Jean Paul participates in an MCC-supported microfinance program in Haiti.

by **Rebecca Bartel**

In order to understand the strategies needed for Haiti's rebuilding, it is appropriate to consider the obstacles this country has historically experienced to the fulfillment of God's shalom. Natural events are beyond our human control, but the vulnerability of Haiti to the horrific consequences that these events have is entirely human-made.

There is nothing "natural" about abject poverty. Haiti has been under the heel of external economic policies which have exacerbated and systematized the violence of poverty in the country. These policies began with the exorbitant debt of 150 million francs (\$21 billion in today's U.S. dollars) forced upon the population after independence from France in 1804 and have continued with more recent structural adjustment policies and conditions on foreign aid.

Until June 2009, Haiti was paying \$56 million—\$70 million a year on service debts to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Nearly 45 percent of that debt was incurred during the U.S.-backed Duvalier dictatorships (1957–1986). To put this into context, up until the forgiveness of \$1.2 billion of Haiti's foreign debt last

year, the government spent \$4 per person on healthcare and \$5 per person on education each year, while paying \$5 per person in debt service.

There is nothing "natural" about hunger. Until 1985, Haiti was self-sufficient in rice production—a main staple in the modern Haitian diet. Under the tutelage of international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF, Haiti liberalized its economic policies, opening the door to foreign imports such as rice.

In 1994 conditions on foreign aid to the country mandated that import tariffs on rice be cut from 35 percent to 3 percent. As a consequence thousands of rice farmers were put out of business. Many of these farmers were displaced to urban centers such as Port-au-Prince, where weak infrastructure and unemployment forced millions of people to live in shanty towns and poorly constructed housing, putting them at particular risk in the case of a natural disaster.

Dependence on foreign food imports puts any country in a position of vulnerability to the waves of change in the global market. It also destroys local agricultural development. An MCC Haitian partner "Local Food Produc-

tion" states: "Liberal trade agreements have crushed Haiti's agriculture sectors and have significantly contributed to unemployment and rural-urban migration." It is not "natural" that millions of people were living in such vulnerable conditions in Port-au-Prince when the earthquake hit.

God's vision of shalom for humanity calls Christians to consider the long-term investment that must be made for Haiti to rise out of its current crisis. It calls us to respond immediately, but also to consider how our governments and institutions make policy decisions which victimize the world's most marginalized people.

Only through investment in Haitian people, communities and society will future natural disasters be more manageable. We cannot control the movements of the earth, but we can control how our voices are heard in the halls of power. The Haitian people call us to share our prophetic voice, as do the words of Scripture: "For Zion's sake, I will not be silent." *"Jan m' renmen mòn Siyon sa a! Se pou m' pale."* ✱

Rebecca Bartel is the MCC Latin America/Caribbean Policy Analyst, based in Bogotá, Colombia.

Immigration and Trade

by Tammy Alexander

A man and his wife leave their home during a famine and settle in a new place where they are regarded as “aliens.” They plant crops, have a good harvest, and enjoy economic prosperity.

A pregnant woman flees conflict and economic hardship in her homeland and, with her husband and several other family members, travel across an ocean to make a new life in a strange land.

Two young men leave their homeland in search of work to support their mother, who is sick and needs medicine.

The first account above is from the story of Isaac and Rebekah in Genesis, chapter 26. In the second story, Elizabeth Buhler, a Russian Mennonite, left the post-revolution turmoil in Ukraine in 1925 to make a new home in Canada. The third story was of two teenage boys who, in 2004, left their family farm in Mexico to find work in the United States.

Throughout history, people have migrated for various reasons, often referred to as “push” and “pull” factors. The factors that “push” people to uproot their families and leave home include violent conflict, natural disasters, and economic distress. The dynamics that “pull” migrants to the U.S. include economic opportunity and safety.

The third story above provides one stark example of how U.S. trade policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) are “pushing” people to the United States. The two teenage boys in the story, ages 14 and 16, grew up in Chiapas State in southern Mexico, expecting to become farmers like their father and grandfather before them. But, like millions of other family farmers in Mexico in the wake of NAFTA, they found themselves unable to compete with cheap and heavily subsidized corn imports from the U.S.

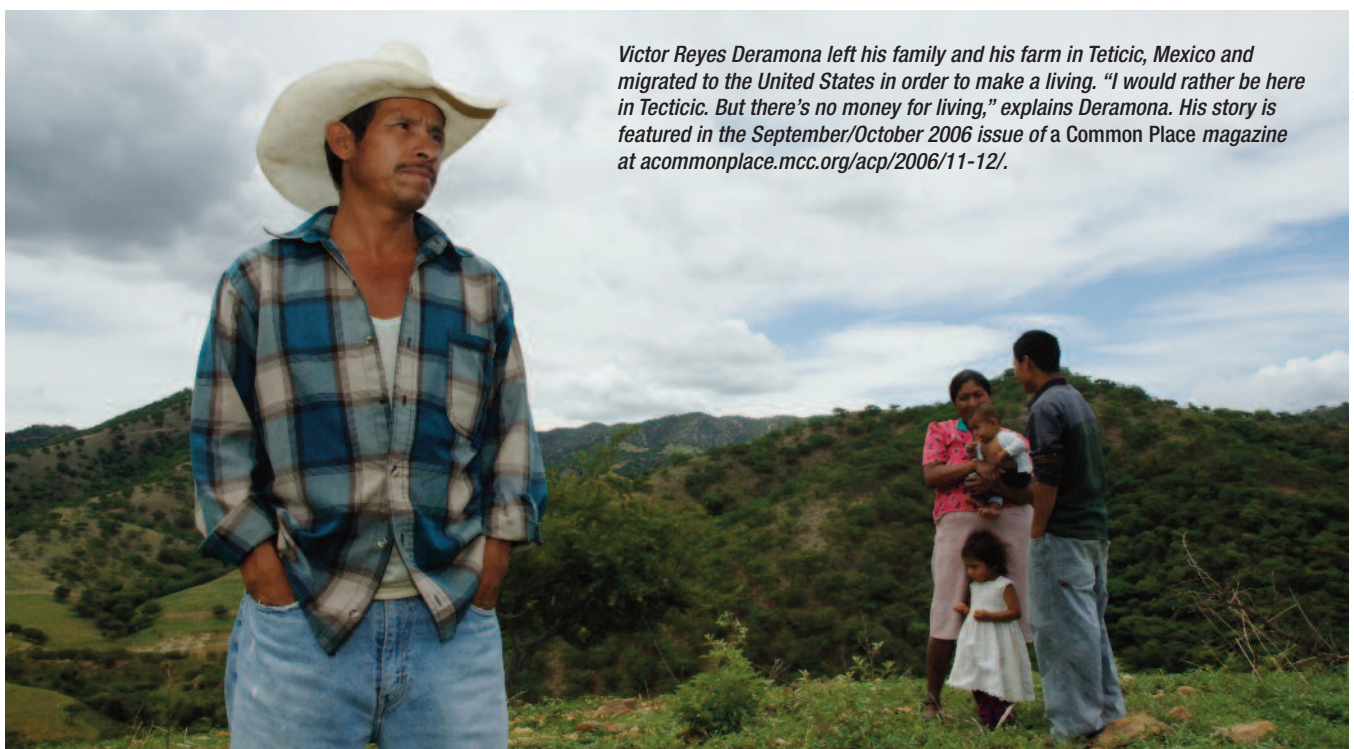
Hoping to find work at a poultry plant in the U.S., the boys left their home and school, risking detention and death to cross the border without

proper documentation. They were doing what young men do to help their mother. They weren’t looking for a handout. They weren’t drug smugglers. They were trying to find honest work to provide for their family.

NAFTA was supposed to reduce undocumented immigration from Mexico. Between 1990 and 2000, however, the number of undocumented Mexican immigrants in the U.S. doubled. While NAFTA allows for the free movement of goods, labor movements are highly restricted (9,247 Mexicans were admitted into the U.S. for temporary employment under NAFTA during the 2006 fiscal year). Meanwhile, debates over immigration policy in the U.S. have continued as if trade agreements have no effect on waves of undocumented immigration.

Call on Congress and the Obama administration to pass sensible, fair trade policies (p. 10) and to consider these root causes part of a comprehensive immigration reform effort.

Visit washington.mcc.org for more information on immigration advocacy. ✪



Victor Reyes Deramona left his family and his farm in Tectic, Mexico and migrated to the United States in order to make a living. “I would rather be here in Tectic. But there’s no money for living,” explains Deramona. His story is featured in the September/October 2006 issue of a Common Place magazine at acommonplace.mcc.org/acp/2006/11-12/.

Washington Memo Blog

The Washington Memo Blog offers quick updates on current issues and news relevant to work here at the MCC Washington Office. Here are some excerpts from recent blog posts:

Melissa Engle/MCC



Obama's National Security Policy Towards Africa January 29, 2010

“The budget of Africom (the U.S. military command for Africa) far exceeds that of the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The

United States must reverse this trend by revitalizing the capacity and resources of these critical agencies, rather than prioritizing military assistance and training programs. In addition to over militarizing underdeveloped African nations with limited infrastructure, investing in military programs diverts scarce resources from efforts to consolidate democracy, uphold human rights, and spur economic growth on the continent.”

National Criminal Justice Act Passes Committee January 22, 2010

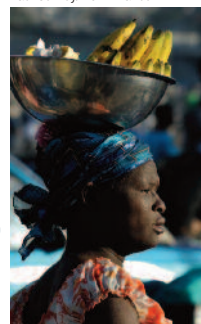
“Yesterday in a business meeting, the Senate Judiciary Committee passed the National Criminal Justice Commission Act. The Act, introduced in March 2009 by Sen. Jim Webb (D-Va.), would form a 14-member, bipartisan commission tasked with reviewing the entire criminal justice system. . . .

“The criminal justice system in the United States has grown tremendously in recent history, with incarceration increasing by 500 percent in the last 30 years. At 5 percent of the world’s population, the United States now houses 25 percent of the world’s inmates. That’s 7.3 million men, women and children and 5 times higher than the international average incarceration rate.”

Website Resource Highlights

The MCC Washington Office website provides information about the office, action alerts, upcoming events, and resources on domestic and international issues. Recent highlights include:

Paul Jeffrey/ACT Alliance



Advocating for Haiti Since the January 12 earthquake in Haiti, MCC has been working to advocate for the needs of Haitians. Through our blog, you can find updates on specific concerns and links to articles:

- “Don’t Point Guns at Haitians” by Rebecca Bartel, MCC policy analyst
- “What We Owe Haiti” by Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach, published in PeaceSigns
- “Haiti’s Un-natural Disaster” by Theo Sittler, published in Third Way Café



Going Social The MCC Washington Office has created accounts on both Facebook and Twitter. Find us on the social networks and “fan” or “friend” us for simple updates about our action on the blog, website, online articles and action alerts.



“Abundant Life: Economic Justice for All” Stay updated on the Washington Office’s *Abundant Life: Economic Justice for All* campaign. Resources on the campaign’s page are on health care, debt relief, housing and trade.

Melissa Engle/MCC



Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia April 18–19. Join other churches in the United States and Canada to pray, worship and act for policies

that promote peace and justice in Colombia. Learn how your church can be involved at washington.mcc.org/days.

Advocates' Corner



The Advocates' Corner highlights current advocacy work by Anabaptist congregations. Please let us know what your congregation is doing, so that we can include it in a future issue.

Casey (Pa.), Byron Dorgan (N.D.), Russell Feingold (Wisc.), Jeff Merkley (Ore.), Bernard Sanders (Vt.), and Sheldon Whitehouse (R.I.). If writing one of these senators, instead of using the following sample letter, please send a thank-you note for supporting the TRADE Act.

Dear Senator _____ :

I am writing in support of the Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment (TRADE) Act S. 2821. Please consider signing on as a co-sponsor.

Decades of U.S. trade policy have erased jobs here in the U.S., displaced farmers abroad, and undermined labor, consumer, and environmental protections. U.S. trade policies and agreements should, instead, contribute to people's livelihoods, sustainable development, and the alleviation of poverty. This serves not only a humanitarian objective, but also the long-term interests of the United States.

I urge you to sign on as a co-sponsor to the TRADE Act to clearly demonstrate your commitment to a trade agenda that actually works for the majority of the world's people.

Sincerely,

[Name and address]

For a more detailed letter, visit washingtonmemo.org/newsletter/spring10.

SAMPLE LETTER ON TRADE

Note: The House version of the TRADE Act has more than 130 co-sponsors while the Senate version has only seven supporters. Please use this sample letter to urge your senators to co-sponsor the TRADE Act, S. 2821.

The seven senators who already support the bill are: Sherrod Brown (Ohio), who is the lead sponsor, Robert

abundant
life
economic
justice for all

Update on Abundant Life: Economic Justice for All Campaign

And many were healed (July 19, 2009)

The first Sunday of the Abundant Life campaign in July 2009 focused on

health care reform, with the expectation that legislation would likely be passed by the end of the summer. Alas, things have not moved as quickly as we had hoped.

Letters and phone calls are needed now more than ever. Let Congress know you want them to take swift action to pass comprehensive health care reform. For weekly updates on reform efforts, visit our blog at washingtonmemo.org. For additional resources, including a link to recent action alerts, visit washington.mcc.org/life/health.

Proclaim Jubilee (October 25, 2009)

In December the Jubilee Act was introduced in the House as a bipartisan bill (H.R. 4405). The bill would expand life-giving debt cancellation to 22 additional impoverished countries left out of previous debt relief deals and calls for an end to harmful economic conditions and an audit of past odious and illegitimate debts. E-mails and phone calls in support of the legislation are needed.

Secure dwelling places (January 31, 2010)

Funding for the National Housing Trust Fund passed through the House of Representatives as part of the Jobs for Main Street Act. As of this writing, however, it is not in the Senate jobs bill.

President Obama's requested budget for 2011 included a proposed 3-year freeze on "non-security discretionary spending," including the budget for housing assistance. Although many programs which focus on alleviating poverty were unaffected, the housing budget suffered from cuts to construction and rehabilitation for subsidized housing for the elderly and disabled. More information is available on our blog.

UPCOMING SUNDAY: APRIL 25, 2010

Let justice roll down: Trade for the common good

Join the MCC Washington Office this spring to pray, reflect, and act for economic justice for those affected by unfair trade policies. The suggested Sunday for action and reflection is April 25. Worship and advocacy resources are available at washington.mcc.org/life or by contacting us at mccwash@mcc.org or 202-544-6564.

Together we can be part of God's vision of abundant life for all.

11TH ANNUAL HIGH SCHOOL ESSAY CONTEST

The annual MCC Washington Office essay contest provides an opportunity for young people to reflect on public policy and Anabaptist faith. The contest is open to Mennonite, Brethren in Christ and other Anabaptist youth of high school age, and to all youth who attend Mennonite high schools.

The two suggested topics this past year were the international debt crisis and the housing crisis. The winning essay was submitted by Corine Alvarez. Excerpts from her essay follow. Carl Lehmann, a student at the Freeman Academy, Freeman, S.D., and Sara Klassen, a student at Bethany Christian High School, Goshen, Ind. both won honorable mention. Excerpts of their essays can be found at washingtonmemo.org.

“WWJDAIDC or What Would Jesus Do About the International Debt Crisis”

Corine Alvarez, Bethany Christian High School, Goshen, Indiana

Throughout history, various global organizations and individuals have tried to help relieve ailing, indebted countries with little or no success. In 1982, the International Monetary Fund decided to help. They worked with the World Bank to reschedule the payments for the poverty-stricken countries with strict conditions, including compound interest. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were also implemented. However, these programs to retrieve the money from countries harmed more than they helped. SAPs increase exports and decrease imports. The poor are hit the hardest when less money is spent on education and health care, jobs are cut, prices of food increase, the national currency's value decreases, and small farms are taken over to grow cash crops . . .

The Jubilee Act for Responsible Lending and Expanded Debt Cancellation . . . is about the need for right relationships between people and among nations. . . . Loosely based on the biblical Year of Jubilee, or the Year of the Lord's Favor, [it is] a holy year that comes every seven years in which all debts are cancelled amongst the people. In Deuteronomy 15:4, God states that there should be no poor (implying that the poor represent failures of the rich). Later, in verse 11, he acknowledges that there will always be poor and that they should be cared for generously. It comes as no surprise that the first thing Jesus preached in Luke 4:18 came from Isaiah 61:1–2 on justice. Luke 4:18 reads,

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

That Jesus made this his first speech is crucial and shows the importance God places on intentionally and diligently caring for the poor in every possible way. Jesus came to help the poor. As followers of Christ, it is our job to perform God's desires by helping the oppressed. God wants shalom to be fully achieved on His earth—a peace with God, oneself, others, and creation. ✱

Staff Transitions

This semester we welcome the contributions of Ken Nafziger, on sabbatical leave from Eastern Mennonite University, who is exploring how arts and worship intersect with social justice. Also in our office this semester is Julie Huffman, a student at George Mason University, and Jenny Dillon, who is helping to organize Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia.

✱ IMPORTANT ADDRESSES

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✱ SIGN UP!

Sign up for our e-mail action alert lists by going to washington.mcc.org or by contacting mccwash@mcc.org.

✱ UPCOMING DATES

April 18–19

Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia
washington.mcc.org/days

April 25

Let justice roll down:
Trade for the common good
washington.mcc.org/life

June 13–15

Churches for Middle East Peace conference
Washington, DC
cmep.org

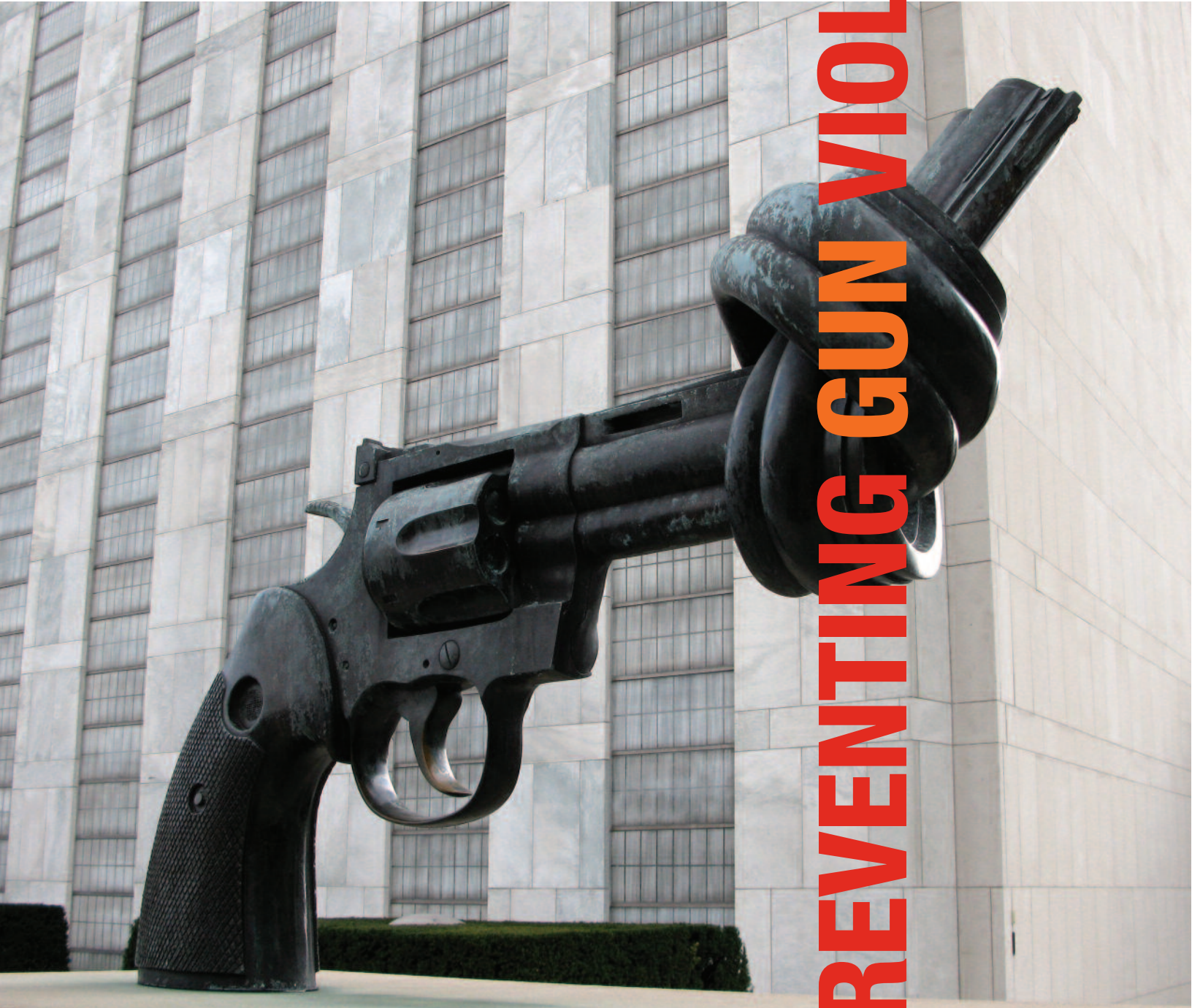
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All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

The MCC Washington Office **Gun Violence Prevention folder** helps to equip individuals, small groups and churches to advocate for the prevention of gun violence. It includes background materials, a faith reflection, policy suggestions and advocacy tips to provide the tools you need to make a difference.

Available for free from the MCC Washington Office at mccwash@mcc.org or 202-544-6564.



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PREVENTING GUN VIOLENCE