

JUSTICE & PEACE

Environmental Refugees

Twenty years ago, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned that an overlooked but significant effect of climate change would be human migration, sometimes referred to today as “environmental migration.” In 2000 it was reported that up to 25 million people had been forced from their homes and land in the decade prior by environmental forces such as drought, land degradation, pollution and other natural disasters including floods, hurricanes and typhoons. The number of people uprooted at this time exceeded all documented refugees from war and persecution put together.

The IPCC noted that in the coming years millions of people would be forced to relocate because of shoreline erosion, coastal flooding, or disruption of normal farming practices. Today, analysts predict that this “crisis in the making” will affect 200 million men, women and children by 2050, or roughly one in every 45 people. This represents a ten-fold increase over the entire documented population of refugees and displaced persons today.

What makes this situation even worse from a moral perspective is that it is the poorest countries, those least responsible for greenhouse emissions, that will bear the greatest burden and be the first to have to deal with forced migration. Moreover, as is the case in most of the poorest countries, those living in rural areas who depend on climate sensitive resources such as local water supplies and farming for their basic livelihoods, are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Future changes in precipitation and temperature will make

certain areas of the world less viable places to live due to unreliable supplies of food and water. An increase in the frequency and severity of floods and storms, drought, and the resulting land degradation will force migration of the world’s most vulnerable people.

There are many forces that drive environmental migration. Two of these forces include climate processes and climate events. Climate processes take place over a period of time and include events such as desertifica-

tion of land, sea-level rise, glacier melting and growing water scarcity. Climate events, on the other hand, are sudden and dramatic occurrences such as floods storms, hurricanes, and typhoons, which force people to leave their land quickly. An example in the United States includes the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 which

forced an estimated 1.2 million people to leave their homes. Non-environmental forces, including government policy and population growth, are also important. Governments can put systems in place to control climate processes and reduce the vulnerability of their citizens to the impacts of climate events. The destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina was also a product of inadequate disaster planning, consistent underinvestment in the protective levees around the city, as well as the destruction of the wetlands in the Mississippi delta over many years.

With the right kind of provisions and disaster planning, countries can reduce the impact of climate events.





One such example is Cuba, a country situated directly in a hurricane path. Because of effective early warning systems and storm preparedness education, Cuba suffers less from hurricanes than neighboring countries. Other examples of nations taking action to reduce the impact of climate change on their citizens includes the Ethiopian government, which between 1984-85 resettled tens of thousands of people from drought-stricken areas, while the Maldives, after the tsunami in 2004, set into place a retreat from their outlying islands. Under the plan, the islands' 290,000 residents will move to slightly higher islands than the 200 main islands where the population currently resides.

As expected, wealthier nations usually do not suffer as much from a climate event as poorer nations. In a report of natural disasters in the 10 year period from 1994-2003, the number of people killed who lived in countries low on the development scale was seven times greater than the number killed in disasters occurring in a country high on the development scale. When a tropical storm with winds up to 72 miles per hour, and an 18 foot high storm surge battered much of Bangladesh in 1992, at least 138,000 people lost their lives and as many as 10 million people were left homeless. The following year a stronger storm, with winds of 78 miles per hour and a 17 foot storm surge hit Florida and Louisiana in the United States (Hurricane Andrew); only 65 people lost their lives.

Human migration due to change in climate is not a new phenomenon. Archaeological studies find that the first large, urban societies were first developed in response

to drought and lack of usable water in certain areas of the world. People first settled in Egypt and Mesopotamia, for example, because they are areas by accessible river beds. Pastoral societies have always migrated with their animals from sources of water to grazing lands in response to drought.

During the 1930s in the United States, years of below average rainfall and above average temperatures, along with farming practices that led to the erosion of soil in the Great Plain states, resulted in what was known as the "Dust Bowl." The environmental conditions coincided with the Great Depression and led to widespread failure of small farms. By the end of the decade, 2.5 million people left the area.

People confronting an environmental disaster have no choice but to leave the affected area. The larger the population forced to migrate, and the shorter the period over which it occurs, the more difficult it is to absorb the migrants, which undermines economic growth and raises the likelihood of conflict. Forced migration hinders development in other ways as well. Besides increasing pressure on the host areas infrastructure and services, it leads to an increase in health problems, undermines vaccination programs and provision of medical care, and impedes educational opportunities for children. Women and children are especially vulnerable during any forced displacement, and they are also at risk for gender based violence and human trafficking. There is concern that forced migration due to climate change will eventually diminish any progress achieved on the Millennium Development Goals.

Unfortunately, unless a population needs to relocate due to a climate event, their displacement does not prompt access to monetary aid, food, shelters, or health care. At this point, the term 'refugee' does not, on the international level, legally encompass those who need to migrate for environmental reasons. It is up to the host country alone to give humanitarian aid and resident status to these refugees. After the tsunami in 2004, Australia gave high priority on processing visas for the victims, while the European Union recommended temporary resettlement in Europe to children who were victims, so as to allow them time to recover from the trauma.

– S Maryann Agnes Mueller

Doctor Zilda Arns Neumann

National Founder and Coordinator of the *Pastoral of a Child and Pastoral of the Elderly*

In her own quiet way, Doctor Zilda promoted justice and peace in much the same spirit as Mahatma Gandhi. He was nominated five times in the 1930s and '40s for the Noble Peace Prize, but never received it. Likewise, Doctor Zilda was nominated twice and never received the award. Just as Mahatma Gandhi lost his life in defense of justice and peace, Doctor Zilda passed on while in Porto Principe, Haiti, on a humanitarian mission. On January 12, 2010 she had just finished giving a talk to roughly 150 religious in a local church, and was speaking with a priest who wanted more information about the *Pastoral of a Child*, when an earthquake occurred. The church was destroyed and the roof caved in, striking her directly on the head. *Doutora* Zilda, as she was fondly called, died as she lived and labored - among the poor. The following quote enlightens us and allows us to understand her greatness - her determination, courage and untiring perseverance - her contribution to justice and peace, her untiring efforts towards building a better world:

“To have peace in the families, in communities, in the world, it is necessary to invest in projects for human promotion, health and education. It is needed to ensure access to food, to invest in farming, environmental sanitation and employment.”

“It is urgent to review the huge bleeding resulting from the external debt of the third world countries. It is a true terror that silently haunts millions of children and entire families, the victims of social differences among nations and social ranks in many countries. It would be much better and economically wiser if the external debt were invested in social projects intended to promote social



inclusion. Exclusion and unfair opportunities generate violence, drug traffic and wars.

“The world shall never be in peace while there is hunger and social exclusion, while we cultivate a culture that stimulates violence, intolerance, hate, competition, and the idea of a nation’s or race’s superiority. Everyone should be aware that education for peace demands investment and generates much better results than wars, which only destroy and generate hate.

“Children are the seed for peace or violence in the future, depending on how they are cared for and stimulated. Thus, their family and community environment should be seen as the greatest potentials for the construction of a fairer and more fraternal world, a world to serve life and hope.”

Zilda Arns was one of 13 children born to devout German-speaking parents in rural southern Brazil. Inspired by the selfless acts of her parents, she decided to take a college course in Pediatrics, concluding her studies



in 1959. She was employed in local hospitals tending infants, and later was in charge of a string of clinics in the impoverished outskirts of Curitiba. She perceived that many common ailments were preventable, and began teaching mothers basic prenatal and post-natal care as well as useful household tasks such as sewing and cooking. This was perfect preparation for the work that would make her famous.

In 1970, the Roman Catholic Church ran a few pastoral organizations to support and provide spiritual guidance to marginalized groups, such as landless peasants, prison inmates and migrant workers. In 1983, Zilda was asked to set up a *Pastoral of a Child*. She delved into the work with great enthusiasm, expanding her work in the clinics. Although it was elementary information, it was new to millions of uneducated mothers. Under her guidance, and with the help of trained volunteers, they were taught the importance of vaccinations and nutrition and shown how to perceive and

prevent potentially deadly ailments such as diarrhea and dehydration. Mothers were taught how to make a sugar, salt and water solution to combat diarrhea and to prepare a nutritive basic food composed of various seeds and herbs.

Today, the *Pastoral* is one of Brazil's best-known organizations, and Zilda Arns is one of the nation's best-known faces. She declared, "I felt like God was calling me to take on my life's mission. I knew if we did it right we could save millions of lives." The organization is present in 40,853 Brazilian communities in 4,000 Brazilian cities with 240,000 trained volunteers attending 1.8 million children under the age of six. The organization has been adapted and expanded to other countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Doutora Zilda, at the age of 75, was too fragile to run the *Pastoral* on a daily basis; however, she continued to visit communities across Brazil, as well as many of the 20 countries into which the *Pastoral* has expand-

ed. In 2004 she organized the *Pastoral for the Elderly*.

At her funeral, *Doutora* Zilda's closed coffin was covered with the Brazilian flag; thousands of people came to pay their respects. Several Bishops co-celebrated the mass at which President Lula and many political and diplomatic dignitaries were present. At the cemetery, before the burial, *Doutora* Zilda received a military salute. The flag was then removed and given to her nephew.

The loss of our dear friend Zilda Arns was felt deeply by the Felician Sisters of Brazil, since our relationship goes back to the beginning of her work with children. Many of our sisters worked side by side with her in this very important pastoral, and sisters still continue the work in quite a few of our mission homes. She was a great help to us in our school in Curitiba, offering her professional service to our children.

— Ir Maria Leona Kutsko

Eliminate Discrimination Against Women



International Women's Day

Since our beginnings as Felician Franciscan Sisters we have had concern for the salvation of all people and responded in compassionate service, especially towards women and children.

In our declaration of a Culture of Life, we state that:

- ◆ We take every possible action to restore the human dignity and rights of all.
- ◆ We work to counteract the elements of a culture of violence and death in today's society, such as human trafficking of women and children.
- ◆ We stand with those who cannot advocate for themselves-- namely exploited women and children.

In the Vatican document, *The Church Today*, we read: "People hounded by hunger call upon those who are better off. Where they have not yet won it, women claim for themselves the same equity with men before the law and in fact" (Par. 9).

The document also states: "For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are not yet being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, to acquire educational or cultural benefits equal to those for men" (par. 29).

For one hundred years, International Women's Day has been celebrated in March, beginning in Copenhagen in 1910 when Clara Zetkin proposed a special day for women to voice their demands. International Women's Day was officially recognized and proclaimed by the United Nations in 1975. Since then many agencies have been advocating for women's rights around the world.

It has been 31 years since the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This could be a powerful tool for change around the world. To be such, however, it must be recognized and embraced by governments and civil society.

Although governments may enact such conventions, change doesn't happen automatically. Effective implementation of these actions toward gender equality demands that the states hold governments accountable.

Though there is a long way to go in this area, some countries have made strides to implement gender equality. In Kenya, for example, a court action asserted

"People hounded by hunger call upon those who are better off. Where they have not yet won it, women claim for themselves the same equity with men before the law and in fact."

- *The Church Today*, par. 9

that gender equality must be respected. Despite the traditional biases in favor of men, women and girls now get their fair share of inheritance. In 2005, Kenya's High Court of Appeals built the African Charter into the Kenyan constitution, a guarantee of gender equality in the case of Rono vs. Rono, where the sons claimed a greater share of the inheritance of their deceased father's property than their sisters or their father's widow, and that customary law supported their claim. But the court found that, where discrimination is at stake, the Constitution and human rights standards must prevail.

Eliminate . . . (cont.)

This same challenge was addressed again in 2008 by the Kenyan High Court in the Ntutu decision, where it was argued that Masai customary law did not recognize a daughter's right to inherit from her father's estate. The Court relied on the Rono vs. Rono decision, noting in particular the need to respect the requirements of the CEDAW and the international law, and recognized the woman's inheritance rights.

This committee consists of 23 experts on women's rights from around the world. Countries who have become party to the treaty (state parties) are obliged to submit regular reports to the committee on how the rights of the convention are implemented. Each state party reports and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the committee in the form of concluding observations.

As of January 1, 2008, responsibility for servicing the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women has been transferred to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva.

In the latest tragedy in Haiti, the relief workers quickly decided to distribute the aid items to women who they knew would get them to those who needed it.

May the day come when the dignity of all human beings is recognized, especially the women and children.

- SM Jeanine Heath



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Members of the Felician Franciscan Sisters
Congregational Central Office for Justice & Peace:

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Editor: S Maryann Agnes Mueller (NA)
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Felician Franciscan Sisters
Office of Communications Technology
14501 Levan Road
Livonia, Michigan 48154 USA

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Abbreviations

Rome, Italy – RO
Kraków, Poland – KR
North America – NA
Przemysł, Poland– PR
Warszawa, Poland– WA
Curitiba PR, Brazil – BR
Embu, Kenya - KE