

# CARMEngo

BULLETIN OF THE CARMELITE NGO

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Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be *the responsibility of everyone*. As I have pointed out, its various aspects demonstrate the need for concerted efforts aimed at establishing the duties and obligations that belong to individuals, peoples, States and the international community.

*Pope John Paul II  
Peace with God the Creator,  
Peace with All Creation  
World Day of Peace, 1990*



**T**he country of Zimbabwe, situated in south central Africa, borders with Zambia, South Africa, Mozambique, and Botswana. With a population of 11.8 million, Zimbabwe covers an area about three times the size of England or nearly as big as California. Since its independence from Britain in 1980, the ruling ZANU party has been at the helm of the country.

For a number of years allegations of human rights violations have been highlighted by the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Both political parties have complained about supporters being kidnapped, raped, tortured, or beaten. Allegations of basic human rights being interfered with or even denied have become common.

*Allegations of basic human rights violations common*

## **The Sufferings of Zimbabwe's People**

The travel documents of certain individuals have been confiscated. A "luxury tax" has been placed on newspapers printed outside the country, restricting access to information. Opposition and civic groups have raised questions about arrests and the unwarranted detention of opposition leaders, journalists, and labor leaders.

Various agencies of the United Nations have called upon the Zimbabwean government to work to improve the human rights situation in the country.

Other abuses of human rights have come in the areas of social, economic, and religious environments. The right to shelter in Zimbabwe is only but a dream for the majority. *'Operation Murambatsvina'* which focused on cleaning out urban areas, led to the heartless destructions of well-built homes as well as shanties. At least 700,000 people were left homeless, according the United Nations. Despite the government's attempts to alleviate the problem, many Zimbabweans remain homeless today.

The government's goal at independence in 1980 of making education a fundamental human right for all has become only a more distant dream. The 1992 Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) which privatized education was a failure. The situation only worsened with the privatization of essential services in the education sector in 1997. Education is becoming accessible only for the elite.

The government's slogan "Health for All by the Year 2000" degraded into empty rhetoric. Many health institutions have collapsed due to the drain of skilled people, a poor infrastructure, and the chronic shortage of drugs and equipment. Although the government is credited with addressing the HIV/AIDS

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## Honoring the Integrity of God's Creation

**A** Native American proverb states: "we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children." The time for "borrowing" is up. Last year the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change which consists of climate experts from over 130 countries concluded that the warming of the climate system is unequivocal and that most of the observed increase in globally averaged temperatures since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century is due to the observed increase in human greenhouse gas concentrations. The Catholic Church is not a newcomer to the climate crisis. In 1991, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) presented the document *Renewing the Earth* as a solid plan to engage the environmental crisis as a serious moral challenge. Ten years later the USCCB made a plea for dialogue, prudence and the common good in its document *Faithful Stewards of God's Creation*. In his first three years, Pope Benedict XVI has provided a powerful "green" voice and taken significant steps to limit the Vatican's carbon footprint.

The Carmelite charism also offers a solid entry point into the climate change crisis. As lay hermits who gathered on Mount Carmel near the fountain of Elijah in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century to devote their lives whole-heartedly to the love of God, sacred space serves as an essential component of Carmel's heritage. According to Fr. Bellarmino Bagatti, OFM, the Wadi "met all the requirements of the eremitical life: solitude, grottoes, water, vegetation for the domestic animals, wood for construction and heating, the proximity of a town and a village for the exchange of goods."<sup>1</sup> This particular environment served as a sacred place for these men. They learned to develop an intimate relationship with the land and its resources. The distinct paradigm of "sacred space" within Carmel's foundation story challenges the Carmelite to live in partnership with whatever environment he or she lives, prays and ministers.

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pandemic, the deterioration of health services has threatened any further developments.

The economy shrunk by 60% in ten years. In May, inflation soared to the one million percent level. It is predicted that inflation will reach five million percent by October. While the government contends that unemployment is holding at 9%, other estimates place it at 70-85%. A tax rate of 60% has failed to provide needed services to the people. The 60% decrease in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) caused the collapse of the road, rail, and aviation infrastructure.

Although the Zimbabwe government is striving to affirm human rights in some areas, there is need for it to reaffirm human rights in political areas where allegations have continued to be raised by the opposition and the civic groups. Human rights on social and economic issues also need to be addressed.

*A Zimbabwean Carmelite*



Victim of a beating in Zimbabwe. Photo courtesy of Sokwanele, a Zimbabwean Civic Action Support Group ([www.sokwanele.com](http://www.sokwanele.com)).

## Dates to Remember

**September 21**  
International Day of Peace

**October 5**  
World Teacher's Day

**October 16**  
World Food Day

**October 17**  
International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

**October 24**  
United Nations Day

**November 20**  
Universal Children's Day

**December 5**  
International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development

**December 10**  
Human Rights Day

**March 8**  
International Women's Day

**March 21**  
International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

**March 22**  
World Water Day

**May 15**  
International Day of Families

**June 4**  
International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression

**June 5**  
World Environment Day

**August 12**  
International Youth Day

## The Right to a Safe and Healthy Environment

Article One of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." The right to a safe and healthy environment is fundamental to our dignity as human beings.

As ecosystems decline, people all over the world are experiencing the effects of environmental degradation. Unfortunately, most victims of environmental degradation belong to the more vulnerable sector of society, i.e. the poor. Basic human rights are threatened; for example, the right to a safe and healthy environment that is not affected by contamination of resources, or the right to property and culture that are often compromised by commercial intrusion into indigenous lands. These issues were the topic of discussion at a meeting, *Human Rights and the Environment* sponsored by the UN Commission on Human Rights, the UN High Commission on Human Rights and the UN Environment Program. Relative to human rights and environment, a growing body of case law from many national jurisdictions is clarifying the linkages between human rights and the environment by 1) recognizing the right to a healthy environment as a fundamental human right; 2) allowing litigation based on this right and facilitating its enforceability in domestic law; 3) acknowledging that other human rights recognized in domestic legal systems can be violated as a result of environmental degradation.

Environmental degradation is a moral issue that challenges us to protect creation. It is necessary that we examine how we use and share the gifts of creation, and what we will pass on to future generations. "The whole human race suffers as a result of environmental blight, and generations yet unborn will bear the cost of our failure to act today." (*Renewing the Earth, U.S. Catholic Conference, 1991*).

The right to a healthy environment is a fundamental human right. Universal and sustainable food security is part and parcel of reaching the social, economic and human development objectives governments agreed upon at numerous world conferences. The right to adequate food includes not only the right to be free from hunger, but also the right to a safe and healthy environment in which food can be produced and consumed.

"At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both the *human environment* and the *natural environment*." (*Faithful Stewards of God's Creation, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007*).

Jane Remson, O. Carm.

## Additional Resources on the United Nations and the Carmelite Family:



### Young Carmelites Go Green and Eat Well

The Carmelite students at Whitefriars Hall in Washington, DC planted a vegetable and herbal garden this spring after clearing out an overgrown area. The benefits were multiple-- the most pleasant being that they (and some of the neighbors) are eating lots of healthy, homegrown vegetables.



### Carmelite NGO Mass Celebrated on July 16

The Eucharist was celebrated for the intentions of the Carmelite NGO at the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, Italy on July 16, 2008.

**CARMELITE NGO**  
A NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION ASSOCIATED WITH  
THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

**Eucharist (P) (R) Conference**  
September 16-18, 2008 - Rome, Italy - 10:00 AM  
**Reaffirming Human Rights:**  
The Universal Declaration of 1948

THE CARMELITE NGO is a group of  
Carmelite Sisters of the Order of  
the Most Holy Virgin Mary, who are  
dedicated to the service of the  
Church and the world through their  
prayer, their work, and their  
witness.

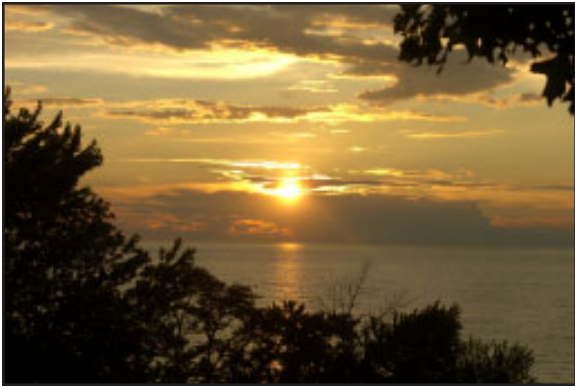
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• Background on the human rights system  
• Introduction to the Declaration of Human Rights in the context of  
the challenges of the 21st century  
• and address issues in light of the Declaration and the  
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FOR MORE INFORMATION  
CONTACT THE CARMELITE NGO  
www.carmelitengo.org

Extended versions of the article on Zimbabwe and Honoring the Integrity of Creation, as well as information on many other topics can be found on the Carmelite NGO website. Follow the DPI/NGO Conference via the internet to learn more about the UN and the Carmelite NGO's initiatives in the area of Human Rights. All this and more is available at [carmelitengo.org](http://carmelitengo.org).





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The Carmelite Rule and the Constitutions underline the centrality of the celebration of the Eucharist. According to theologian Denis Edwards, "Every Eucharist calls us to ecological conversion and action."<sup>2</sup> When we make memory or "anamnesis" in the liturgy we journey through God's immediate presence. We gather up all of creation and pray for its transformation

through, with and in Christ. Edwards continues, "Willfully contributing to the destruction of the species or to pumping more and more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, must be seen as a denial of Christ. It is a denial of the meaning of all that we celebrate when we gather for the Eucharist."<sup>3</sup>

Our contemplative stance as Carmelites compels us to take a more responsible and active role as co-creators of God's creation. Many of our Carmelite saints provide the example of how to honor the integrity of creation. Throughout her life, Thérèse of Lisieux constantly reflected upon the "grandeur" and the "power" of the sea that she witnessed during her first visit there at the age of six. The lavishing images of creation that John uses throughout the Spiritual Canticle to describe the loving exchange between a soul, the Bride, and Christ, the Bridegroom summon us to a profound reverence for all of God's creation. As Teresa of Avila traveled throughout Spain opening new Carmelite communities, she placed a significant value on gardens, trees, flowers and pleasurable landscapes. Her insistence on friendship within the community can also translate into friendship with the environment. Finally, the words of the prophet Titus Brandsma, "He who wants to win the world for Christ, must have the courage to come in conflict with it," challenge us to confront the exploitation of the land, air, water and natural resources and preserve the well being of the earth.

We can no longer afford to acquire more land or resources from the future generation. Our time is up. In the words of Elizabeth Johnson, "Simply put, all of us, women and men alike, need to fall in love with the earth as an inherently valuable, living community in which we participate, and be creatively faithful to it."<sup>4</sup> The daily decision is up to us and according to Carmel, God offers us a path of hope in love. How are we going to respond?

*Tony Mazurkiewicz, O. Carm.*

### Footnotes

1 Elias Friedman, *The Latin Hermits of Mount Carmel* (Roma: Institutum Historicum Teresianum, 1979), 39.

2 Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Creation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 107.

3 Ibid., 104.

4 Johnson, *Women, Earth and Creator Spirit*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 62.

## Meet Another Member of the Carmelite NGO:

### Blaise Fernando, O. Carm.

Sister M. Blaise Fernando holds a M.A. degree in teaching foreign languages from Tulane University. She has taught Spanish for twenty-nine years in secondary education at Mount Carmel Academy New Orleans and ten years at Loyola University New Orleans. Since 1981, Blaise serves as a member of the organizing team for the annual citywide Walk for the Hungry sponsored by Bread for the World. Blaise has been active in the Carmelite NGO since 2001 and currently serves as the manager of the North America Climate Change Project of the Carmelite NGO for secondary schools.

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