

#2 February 2009

# PAX & BONUM

The official magazine of Franciscans International, a non-governmental organization working on behalf of the poor and marginalized at the United Nations

## A Franciscan Response To Anti-Christian Violence in Orissa

Divine Chemistry

So the Poorest  
Can Speak



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# 2 WELCOME



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Dear Readers,

This is our first online edition, a decision prompted by our environmental concerns. The focus of this issue is on the Asia-Pacific, where Franciscans International (FI) has an increasingly dynamic and focused presence through its Bangkok office. Conditions across this vast continent, birthplace of the world's great religions, call upon the inspiration of St. Francis and St. Clare to seek new directions forward. Human rights, the care of creation and peace-building through religious tolerance are key markers on our Franciscan compass. Our cover story addresses a Franciscan response to extreme religious violence in Orissa, India.

We reach out to all of our sisters and brothers in Asia, in the Middle East, and in other places where religious hatred seeks to deny the wide, inclusive embrace of God. As Thomas Merton wrote, "If I affirm myself as Catholic merely by denying all that is Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, Hindu, Buddhist, etc., in the end I will find that there is not much left for me to affirm as a Catholic, and certainly not the breath of the Spirit with which to affirm it."

On a final note, we would like to say a heartfelt "thank you" to Ms Julie Morgan, Regional Director of FI-Bangkok, who will sadly be leaving FI this coming March. Julie and her team did a tremendous job setting up the Bangkok office through the trainings conducted, the communication links they set up for the Region, and the specific country programs initiated in Sri Lanka and the Philippines. We wish Julie every blessing and joy in her 'new beginnings'.

– the Editor

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### MISSION

Franciscans International works at the UN and international organizations to influence decision makers on behalf of the most vulnerable.

### VISION

As St Francis once addressed the social leaders of his time with the challenge of peace, so today we are called to engage policy makers and world leaders at the United Nations for the work of justice, peace, the care of creation, and the promotion of human rights.

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## BANGKOK

In early October 2008, FI's Bangkok office played host to a small group of Franciscan human rights advocates from Sri Lanka, the Philippines and West Papua, Indonesia. At this signal meeting, participants engaged in problem solving and project design in a collaborative way. In so doing, they mutually developed authentic Franciscan responses to the grave and systemic abuses of human dignity that occur in each of their respective countries.

While the Franciscan family in Sri Lanka is small, the Bangkok meeting gave them the substance of hope to further strengthen their presence. "FI-Bangkok and FI-Geneva will each work with the Sri Lankan Franciscans to build their confidence and their capacity not only to work for peace and justice but also to offer comfort to those who are most seriously affected by the protracted conflict," commented Julie Morgan, FI's Regional Director.

The Franciscans from Sri Lanka took home the practical lessons given by Br Budi Hernawan OFM from Papua. He outlined the key steps taken to establish the Office for Justice and Peace in Jayapura. Franciscans from the Philippines and Sri Lanka were encouraged to develop new ideas and strategies for long-term inter-Franciscan collaboration. FI has promised to accompany each group over the coming years, as it develops its own approach to international advocacy.

For Sr Cres Lucero SFIC from the Philippines, "the workshop and especially the input of Br Budi were invaluable experiences. Both gave me new insights into the complex UN human rights system. We have real opportunities to collaborate in the future in order to better advocate on behalf of our people." +

## NEW YORK

A program that took place in June 2008, co-sponsored by the Dominicans, focused on Christians in northern Iraq with the aim of providing a deeper understanding of their situation for religious leaders in New York and at the United Nations.

Sr Mary Theresa Plante FMM participated in a conference (September 2008) hosted by a large association of Catholic NGOs at the UN on

"Global Warming".

During the autumn Fr Elias Mallon SA chaired a meeting and addressed a conference sponsored by the NGO Working Group on Racism.

Sr Kathie Uhler OSF has been working on FI's 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Women's Training Session in preparation for the upcoming meeting of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. +



Eco-System Management training in Bangkok, August 2008

## GENEVA

FI participated in the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, held in September 2008, focusing primarily on the devastating violence taking place in the state of Orissa, India (see pages 4-6). FI also participated in the special sessions of the Human Rights Council on the ongoing crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Dec. 2008) and Gaza (Jan. 2009). During these sessions, FI denounced the violence and called for renewed peace efforts.

FI also engaged in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The UPR is an important mechanism of civil society which seeks to bring forward criticism of the practices and policies of the world's governments. FI submitted reports based on information gained from Franciscans at the grassroots on Burundi, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Slovakia and (in collaboration with the Marist Brothers) Vanuatu, all of which can be viewed on the FI website.

During the second half of 2008, Br Ralph Sequiera CFC became the first Christian Brother to speak at the UN Social Forum, bringing the voices of the most vulnerable from a remote north-eastern corner of India (see page 9).

On a final note, we would like to express our sincerest gratitude to Fr Gervais Taratara CSS who stayed with us for 3 months, supporting our advocacy department by participating in the UPRs and Special Sessions for the Democratic Republic of Congo and Gaza. +



Fr Gervais Taratara (left) taking part in the training session on Contemporary Forms of Slavery in Geneva, November 2008

# Anti-Christian Vi



Tens of thousands of Christians fled into the jungles to escape rampaging mobs. The first to return home were forcibly converted to Hinduism. No wonder few dared to follow them.

The chanting could be heard even before the crowd burst into the village – it was menacing and frightening and it was soon apparent that the hordes were intent on destruction of property and extreme violence against the most vulnerable. The events leading up to this period of intense conflict (August - September 2008) may not be well known in the wider international community but for the Dalits and tribal people of Orissa, India, the climate of extreme intimidation, and the underlying suspicion and division between communities, had been a reality with which they had long lived.

The Franciscans who responded to the tragic violence in Orissa believed that there were both short-term and long-term activities that might bring justice – as the forerunner to peace – to the

people most traumatized by the religious tensions and thus violence that erupted in Orissa and the surrounding districts. The Franciscan strategy has been two pronged: to engage in international advocacy against the human rights violations that occurred and to focus on longer-term peace-building in order to build and strengthen social cohesion.

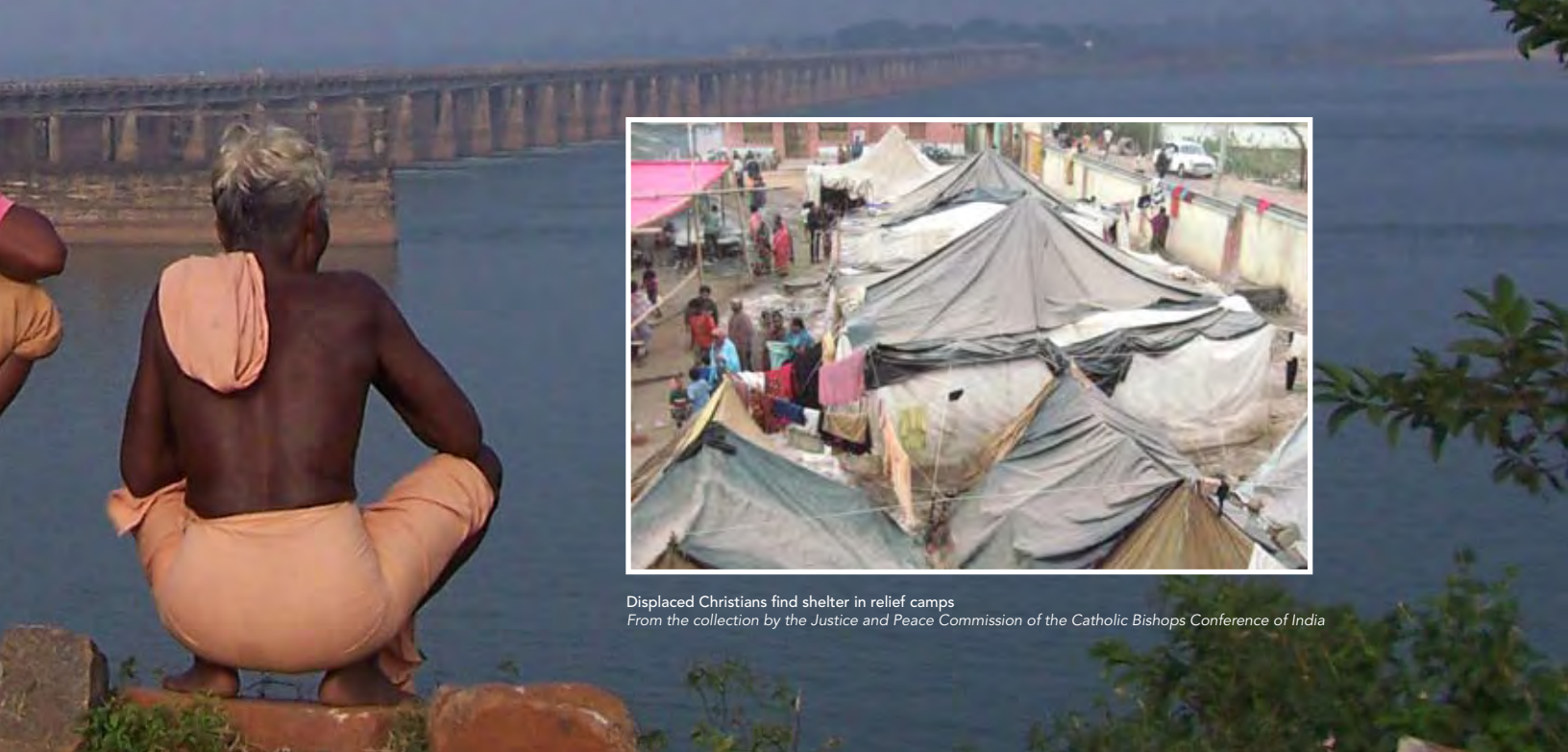
But first, a few of the historical facts might help Franciscan readers beyond India to understand these particular events - and some of their causes. Orissa is a remote and destitute state on the east coast of India where there is great economic hardship. Like the knobby roots of the banyan tree, the deeper causes of communal violence – ethnic, social and economic – are intertwined. Hindu nationalists claim that

Christian missionaries offer social and material rewards to entice converts.

Christianity has truly empowered the Dalit Panas of the region to shake off their outcast status. Education provided in Catholic schools also contributed to ameliorate their condition. Their lives have improved economically as a result, despite the fact that they have been penalized, since their new Christian status prohibits them from applying for jobs for which they were formerly eligible.

Franciscans have helped to weave a stronger social fabric for the poor in the state of Orissa. Yet the improved material circumstances of the Dalits, achieved in good part by the education offered in schools run by Franciscans, have increased long-standing tensions with the tribal

# Violence in Orissa



Displaced Christians find shelter in relief camps  
From the collection by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India

Kandhs. This has also provoked the anger of the middle class, who are thought to have provided fuel to stoke the communal hostilities of late August 2008 as they are deprived of cheap labor.

The violence that broke out in Orissa at that time was triggered by the brutal assassination of Swami Laxamananda Saraswati (85) and four of his disciples, who were struck down by armed gunmen in their ashram in the Kandhamal district during the evening of August 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Swami was leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a hard line party with close ties to its parent organization, the extremist RSS, whose objective is to ‘Hinduise’ the Indian nation, that is, to purge “the country of all non-Hindus by threat of physical violence or coercion.” Dalits, Muslims and Christians were

among their major targets.

During Saraswati’s long campaign to Hinduise Kandhamal, Christians were forced to apply the *tilak* (the Hindu mark on the forehead) and to drink cow dung mixed with water to purify them of the foreign religion. They were subsequently ordered to demolish the churches in which they had worshipped or to place Hindu idols within them. Swami Laxamananda spearheaded the anti-Christian violence during Christmas 2007 that left three people dead and saw thirteen churches torched; he also organized and conducted mass “reconversion” ceremonies.

The “Orissa Freedom of Religion Act” enacted in 1968, was subsequently overturned by a higher court, and finally restored by India’s Supreme Court in 1973.

Freedom of religion is enshrined in the Indian constitution and the “right to profess, practice and propagate religion” (article 25 § 1) is constitutionally authorized. However, the government has failed to adequately protect its religious minorities, especially during the spiral of violence that ensued after Swami Laxamananda’s death. Hindu extremists immediately accused the Christians of the killings and their false accusations spread like hot fire, even though Maoist guerillas had claimed responsibility. “Christians have killed Swami. We will give them a befitting reply,” said Gouri Prasad Rath, state general secretary of the VHP.

The launching of an immediate investigation to ascertain the identity of the killers by the Indian government could have halted the violence.

Catholic leaders immediately urged restraint to calm tensions and avoid bloodshed. Archbishop Raphael Cheenath SVD of the diocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar, issued a statement on August 24<sup>th</sup> strongly condemning the killing of a Hindu religious leader and his associates: “We Christians abhor violence and condemn all acts of violence and terrorism and are against all groups of people taking the law into their own hands,” he said.

A Hindu response echoed through the words of Swami Chinmayananda Maharaj: “All civil societies must resolve their differences through negotiation and they must have respect for human life and human values. The fabric of Indian society is multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic... We once again appeal to all to show tolerance and respect...”

But their voices went unheeded. During a dawn to dusk *bandh* (communal strike) on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, the Swami’s body was carried in procession through the streets of Kandhamal and throughout as many villages as possible. The aim of the VHP was to encourage violence against Christians, a largely defenseless minority that represent merely two percent in the state’s population of 40 million but is a threat to many. To ensure that no one would impede their rampage, the marauders set up roadblocks at the entrances of villages.

At the end of the day, religious intolerance had exacted a terrible toll on the Christian community of Orissa. This was only the beginning of a several week long anti-Christian campaign. At least 40 people were dead. A religious sister was gang-raped. Priests were brutalized. More than 150 churches were set on fire. Prayer halls, convents, schools and hospitals were destroyed or damaged. Over 4,000 homes found to contain Christian pictures or religious objects were ransacked and then burned. Tens of thousands of Christians fled into the jungles to escape rampaging mobs. The



A woman in Kandhamal district sits outside her fire-torn home  
From the collection of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India

first to return home were forcibly converted to Hinduism. No wonder few dared to follow them.

In the near absence of attention by the world media to the tumult in Orissa, the Franciscan Family stepped forward to request that the serious breach of human rights and religious freedom in the state be raised at the level of the United Nations. Based on information gathered by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference in India and the Commission for Justice, Peace and Development (an organ of the CBCI), members of Franciscans International’s (FI) advocacy team took action on a number of fronts.

FI contacted the Special Procedures of the UN, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief and the Independent Expert on Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and requested that they ask the government of India for clarification. FI urged immediate action in order to demonstrate the government’s commitment to abide by their duty to adhere to human rights law. FI also intervened to regularly update United Nations staff during the crisis. In order to draw the attention of the international community to the dramatic situation in

Orissa, FI also delivered a statement to the Human Rights Council on 17 September 2008.

Soon after, Fr Nithiya Sagayam OFM Cap, Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Justice, Peace and Development (JPDC), joined colleagues for a visit to Orissa as a show of solidarity with the victims of violence and a fact-finding mission. Since late September the commission has organized meetings to advance advocacy efforts, to foster a climate of peace, and to assist in the re-settlement of people stranded in relief camps after the violence of late August.

At the very heart of the gospel is the command for mutual tolerance and forbearance: “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” Jesus, (Matthew 7: 12). This golden rule also finds an echo in Hinduism: “This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you.” (Mahabharata 5:1517)

FI continues to closely monitor the tense situation in Orissa, in collaboration with the Franciscan Family, ever mindful of the dictum of St. Francis: “Seek rather to understand than to be understood.” ✚

# A Reflection

## After visiting Gaza and Israel

By Sr Denise Boyle fmdm

Looking straight at me and speaking in very good English, the young woman said: 'Please tell people the truth about our situation when you go back to Europe'. In response I promised the young shopkeeper in the Gaza Strip that I would, whenever I got the opportunity to do so. This article is a means of fulfilling my promise to her, which I made in September when I visited Israel and the Palestine Territories for the first time, with a group of Directors from Catholic Aid Organisations. As I look back over the week, my mind is a kaleidoscope of vivid images and thought-provoking memories.

At the same time I am conscious of a dull weight deep within my being. Perhaps sharing an incident I witnessed is the best way to try to explain why my heart is still heavy. It reflects something of the extraordinary complexity that is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict today. During our visit Rabbi Arik Ascherman,

Executive Director of 'Rabbis for Human Rights', took us to the South Hebron Hills of the West Bank. The purpose was to see the negative impact upon Palestinians, of the illegal invasion of their land by Israeli Settlers.

At our first stop, Rabbi Arik pointed to a cluster of new houses that had been erected by some Settlers on the land of a Palestinian farmer. The first Settler had put up a simple shack. Within a few months ten well-built houses were constructed, all of them linked to the electricity grid and main water supply, thereby permitting long term occupancy.

As we stood listening to Rabbi Arik, several cars filled with Settlers stopped on the road behind us. They got out of their cars noisily and moved towards us in an aggressive and threatening manner. Rabbi Arik was their focus. They heckled him and denounced him as not being a true Israeli because he speaks out against the injustices perpetrated by the Israeli

Government. Moreover, he is challenging Settlers, who have illegally taken possession of Palestinian land, via the courts. Rabbi Arik, who remained calm and courteous despite the taunting and accusations, is a powerful example of a man committed to justice and peaceful negotiation.

Another image that comes to mind occurred the following day in Jerusalem, when I saw a group of small Arab children laughing with some young Israeli soldiers. They were all near the recently constructed wall or 'separation barrier' as it is euphemistically called by the Israeli Government. The wall averages 8 meters (25 feet) in height, and 409kms in length. When fully completed it will cover 723kms. The routing of the wall cuts through villages, local neighbourhoods and around main communication routes; all the detours favour the Israeli community. The position of the wall has had serious, sometimes fatal consequenc-



Sr Denise stands at the entrance of the Church of the Nativity of Bethlehem

es since it prevents Palestinians quick access to hospital in case of emergency.

As I stood, nearly dwarfed by the huge reinforced wall, I thought of Robert Frost's poem:

*"Before I built a wall, I'd ask to know;  
What I was walling in or walling out; And  
to whom I was like to give offence."*

Fear is part of the answer to Frost's question. Extremists of both sides have unleashed unspeakable violence, causing thousands of people to die, leaving many more wounded and others with deep scars. These scars have given rise to paranoia and further reinforced the win-lose mentality, which is preventing the moderates from working towards a compromise solution to the current impasse.

We were fortunate during our visit to meet some magnificent Israeli and Palestinian people, who are working together to redress injustice, the first step towards a peaceful resolution. This is a huge task.

Intimidation is ever present, as I discovered when we passed through the heavily guarded check point, to get into the Gaza Strip. On arrival at the border we handed over our passports and then waited two hours while they were processed. This gave us permission to begin the 'journey' through a series of gates, barriers and corridors, where we were vetted several times by guards concealed behind bullet proof glass. The last leg leads through a long cement walkway, encased in wire and under close surveil-

lance of heavily armed guards. We exited to find a barren wasteland, almost like a 'moonscape' that took about 20 minutes to walk across. Finally we arrived at the point where there were buses and local taxis, which to our great relief were waiting for passengers.

Thus we began the two day visit to Gaza that I remember as a rollercoaster of emotions. It is here that severe injustices, a consequence of 41 years of occupation by Israeli Governments, can be seen most clearly. At times the fear of the people was palpable; at others their determination to rise above the injustice of the moment was dominant.

In Gaza we met John Ging, Director of UNRWA Operations (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine) who warned of an impending humanitarian disaster, due to the severity of the check point system and their frequent closures. These security measures restrict and sometimes prevent all entry into and out of the area for Palestinian workers trying to get to their jobs; and even for essential supplies. Sadly, Mr. Ging's warning was borne out. In an interview with the BBC News (November 14<sup>th</sup> 2008), he reported that, "the United Nations has shut down a

food distribution programme, which feeds 750,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip because our warehouses are empty and cannot be restocked due to an Israeli blockade." Since then the situation has become even more critical, because this same blockade is currently preventing the delivery of essential fuel necessary to run the Gaza power plant, the only source of electricity.

In the face of the long suffering of the Palestinians, it is incredible that the international community, with the exception of a few states, has remained silent in the face of the Israeli blockade and the great humanitarian tragedy it has unleashed. We promote an international moral vacuum whenever we allow the powerful to override the fundamental human rights of the more vulnerable or disempowered

Fortunately there are beacons of hope in the Holy Land. I discovered this on my first day in Jerusalem, when I met with Fr Pierbattista Pizzaballa OFM, the Custos for the Franciscans serving in the region. His wise counsel stayed with me throughout my visit. Just before I left him he said, "Pray for my people, on all sides of this conflict, for integrity, justice and peace. A complex situation like this can only be resolved by good people who pray and seek the guidance of the Spirit."

*"Before I built a wall,  
I'd ask to know;  
What I was walling  
in or walling out;  
And to whom I was  
like to give offence."*

Robert Frost

As my plane took off from Jerusalem airport, I knew that I would never understand the complex reasons underpinning this horrific and unfolding tragedy, in the most important region of the world that is home to the three great monotheistic religions. Yet I returned home, more fully committed, as part of the Franciscans International team, to support our sisters and brothers in Palestine and Israel, in their prayers for peace as well as in their daily work for true justice and reconciliation.... +

## So the poorest can speak

The United Nations grew out of the commitment of 45 member nations in 1945 to seek ways forward to ensure peace, human rights and economic justice. On September 1<sup>st</sup> 2008 Br Ralph Sequiera CFC, a Christian Brother from India, spoke out at the UN on behalf of some of the world's poorest. He addressed the Social Forum held under the auspices of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva.

In the presence of representatives from many nations across the globe and various NGOs, Br Ralph briefly outlined the work of the Christian Brothers Community in the remote north-east corner of India. He had traveled to Geneva from Sangram, a village located on the forested lower slopes of the Himalayas (Arunachal Pradesh).

Life in Sangram is a struggle. The terrain is harsh and the climate often bitterly cold. Electricity is occasional. The village is a seven hour drive to the closest telephone. As populations are growing and forests are becoming increasingly depleted, the poor have to search out alternative sources of food and fuel.

### The Social Forum

...is a platform of communication between the UN's human rights institutions and various groups, including grassroots organizations. The goal of the Forum is to "promote social cohesion based on the principles of social justice, equity and solidarity".

Br Ralph let the voices of the extremely poor be heard at the Social Forum. They are the Nishis, an indigenous community of about 6,000 people who have been excluded by the wider society and systematically oppressed. Ten years ago, the Christian Brothers "adopted" this community and began a three phase program to improve the quality of life: trust building, refining and empowering local people. Not a single policy or decision is taken "about us, without us," they will tell you.

"The driving engine of our local economy has become the 52 women's Self-Help groups (micro-credit societies) that have been organized into a cooperative movement," Br Ralph told the gathering. The on-going commitment of the Christian Brothers aims to develop a community that is "literate, healthy, politically aware, and armed with the powerful 'Indian Right to Information' (RTI)," he said. This vision has been informed by learned experience. As a result, an "impoverished and threatened indigenous community is slowly taking its rightful place in the sun,"

he reported.

A few hours after his address to the Social Forum, Br Ralph reflected upon his experience: "I became aware that I was advocating policy changes and I felt supported by the United Nations. It is highly possible that a very small iota of change might occur in policy at the UN, and it is very satisfying to know that I may have contributed to that."

In addition to Br Ralph, who has served as Mission Coordinator, the commitment to eradicate extreme poverty is shared by the Christian Brothers network, families, friends, pupils, ex-pupils and other donors and the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. All of them have seen the resilience and hope of those at the margins. "Anytime you feel that you are giving more than you are receiving, then you are welcome to withdraw," Br Ralph said as he headed back home. ✚





# Divine Chemistry

**F**ranciscans, Christian Brothers and Church development workers from Timor Leste, West Papua (Indonesia), India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, the Philippines and Kiribati gathered together in Bangkok during the first half of August 2008 to focus on a common passion: love for our Mother Earth. The People Centered Eco-System Management training represented a new step forward in the collaboration between Franciscans International and Edmund Rice International in the Asia-Pacific region. Its overarching aim was to assist the participants to become more effective advocates for creation by learning from grassroots project managers and international experts.

The capacity building training was sponsored by the Irish foundation, Mísean Cara, and coordinated by the Bangkok office of Franciscans International. Br Bernd Beermann OFM Cap designed the course, it was facilitated by Julie Morgan (Regional Director of FI-Bangkok), Br Moy Hitchen CFC (Edmund Rice International), Kristen Genovese (Senior Lawyer, US-based Center for Environmental Law) and three

local Thai environmentalists.

Imagine a three-leafed shamrock. Each leaf represents one of the themes of the course: ecosystems, international law and organic farming.

The group first examined the theological ethics of ecosystem management. They took a deep look at the interconnectedness of all living as well as non-living components of an ecosystem.

Whether in lectures, group work, or practical exercises, the overall aim was to ensure that the local people with whom participants are engaged assume an active role in ecosystem management. The inputs and discussions were enriched by a visit to the Bangkok office of the United National Development Programme and a presentation by a Buddhist NGO working on improving rice varieties.

“In teaching others, we teach ourselves,” goes the proverb. By heeding this wisdom, the participants learned how to transmit their knowledge base and know-how to local people, e.g., farmers and community activists.

During a powerful role play in which everyone took part, a small impoverished village and a new Christian project team run head on against the forces of international agriculture. Step-by-step enactment allowed the group to develop practical steps in order to communicate effectively with a local community. This model holds significant promise for greater food security that will hopefully reduce the vulnerability of communities in extreme poverty.

For most participants the highlight of the training was arguably the opportunity to spend two days up country at the School for Sustainable Agriculture run under the auspices of the Bangkok Diocesan Social Action Center. There, the teachers are farmers themselves – mostly women – whose earthy approaches are very effective. They produce their own natural fertilizers and pesticides that enable them to grow organic produce without chemicals. Participants watched the farmers extract wood vinegar, a natural pesticide, from trees – a process they can now replicate at home.

The course required everyone to create a local project to deal more effectively with environmental challenges. From harvesting monsoon rains to developing markets for organic rice, from a school food programme using organic farming to confronting the mining industry, from reforestation of local sites to child care for agricultural workers, the projects were all aiming to preserve local ecosystems, to grow food sustainably, and to use international law as protection for basic rights, especially the right to food.

Fr Guilherme da Costa Barros OFM from Timor Leste reported that the “Hunger Season” now stretches from two months to six months. The training “helped me to see what I can do, especially for the children, in meeting with the District Administrator,” he said. Other participants aimed to advocate for changes in local policies that directly impact upon the lives of the vulnerable.

A century ago the American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne observed that, “the divine chemistry works in the subsoil.”

And the graduates of the ground breaking People Centered Eco-System Management training left Bangkok with a deep and unwavering commitment to keep it that way. ✚

# A Defender for Human Rights in West Papua

BISHOP EMERITUS HERMAN M. MUNNINGHOFF OFM (B. 1921) ARRIVED IN WEST PAPUA (INDONESIA) FROM THE NETHERLANDS IN 1954 AND REMAINED THERE FOR OVER 50 YEARS. HE WAS AN EYE-WITNESS TO INDONESIA'S GRADUAL ANNEXATION OF WEST PAPUA AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE INDIGENOUS PAPUANS. THIS INSPIRED HIM TO ASSUME A KEY ROLE IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF JAYAPURA DURING HIS TENURE AS BISHOP FROM 1972-1997.

In 1995, the Diocese of Jayapura released an alarming report of violations of human rights in the area of Timika, local headquarters of the American mining company, Freeport McMoran (*Violations of Human Rights in the Timika Area of Irian Jaya, Indonesia: A Report by the Catholic Church in Jayapura*). This was an extremely important turning point in the history of human rights in West Papua. Although not originally intended for widespread distribution, the report informed the international community about the human rights abuses in Papua. In this interview with Franciscans International, Bishop Munninghoff discusses the circumstances surrounding the "Munninghoff Report".

## What motivated the report?

When Theo van den Broek (former director of the Office of Justice and Peace of the Diocese) went to Timika, he continually heard complaints from the local Amungme and Kamoro communities. He documented all the issues that were raised by them and made a report. He then came to see me and told me that the

situation was very bad; that everybody was afraid. [There were] lots of problems because the area was the centre of the protesters against the presence of Freeport and the impact of its mining operation<sup>1</sup>. The protesters were often labeled as rebellions/separatists by the authorities. The people stated that Freeport didn't pay them anything. "They are stealing our [natural] resources," they said. [Some of the victims] were put in a [steel] container which only had one door, with no windows. They were forced to remain there for a number of days and were not allowed to leave. Torture was also carried out. This was definitely a violation of human rights.

## What did you do in response?

Because of complaints from the local people, on August 3rd, 1995, I sent the report about human rights violations committed by members of the Indonesian Army to the Indonesian Bishops Conference. They sent it on to the Indonesian National Commission for Human Rights. I reported that 16 people had been murdered by the soldiers of the Pattimura battalion and that four others had disappeared during October 1994. It was a very good report because it was concrete, very factual, with clear and important details of the names, dates and locations.

## What was the purpose of reporting this to such a wide audience?

[Originally] I hoped that the Cardinal would report it to the government as an internal document. I only wanted the Cardinal and the President to know about this report. So, I was surprised to read

a reaction to my report in the newspaper about two days later. The military was very angry. They couldn't admit that their personnel had done such a thing. That report prompted a lot of reaction from around the world. The reaction was strongest from the United States [where Freeport has their headquarters].

## What was the direct outcome of the report in Indonesia?

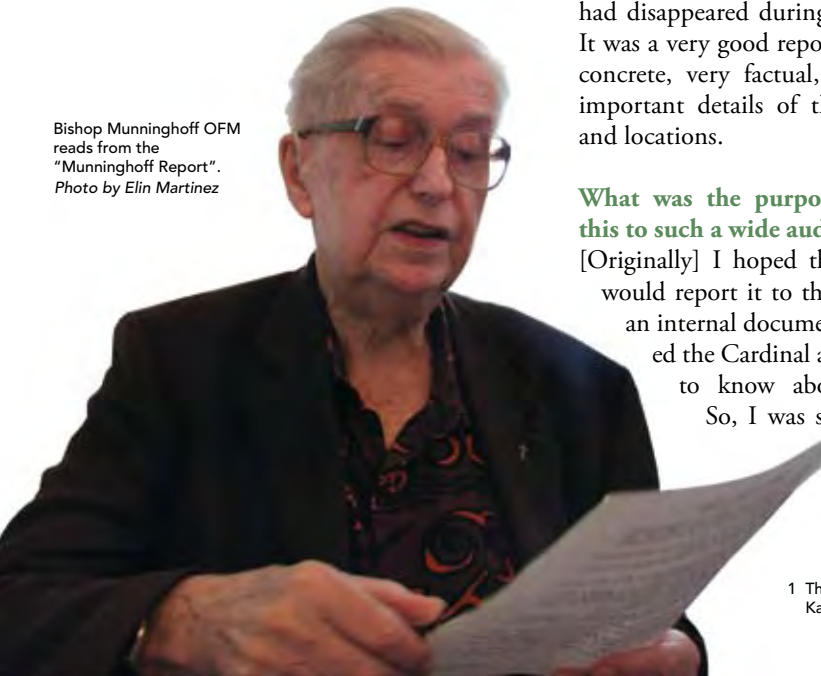
Four soldiers were imprisoned.

## You have been described as someone who helped Papuans heal in the midst of suffering and through your report, you helped raise their consciousness of their own identity.

I've always been a defender for the Papuans, not only because [I was their] Bishop, but really because my heart has always been with them.

*The full interview of Msgr Munninghoff OFM will be included in a collection of interviews of Dutch OFM missionaries in West Papua, which will be published in 2009 by Franciscans International. For enquiries on this publication, please contact [press@fiop.org](mailto:press@fiop.org). More information on Franciscans International's advocacy work for West Papua is available at: [www.franciscansinternational.org](http://www.franciscansinternational.org). ✚*

Bishop Munninghoff OFM reads from the "Munninghoff Report".  
Photo by Elin Martinez



## READ MORE...

The West Papua Factsheet is a useful, up-to-date resource on the human rights situation in West Papua that includes facts & history of the region.



Available for download at: [www.franciscansinternational.org/resources/publications.php](http://www.franciscansinternational.org/resources/publications.php)

<sup>1</sup> Their land was expropriated without compensation. The local Amungme and Kamoro tribes were displaced as a result of Freeport's activities in the Timika area.

## Rose Marie Khoo Foundation Launch

Br Marco Tasca OFM Conv, who launched the Foundation in October 2008, emphasized how “Franciscans International, with its manifold activities, represents a current expression of the Franciscan charism. For eight centuries this charism has characterized the different seasons of humanity, offering to men and women of every age a concrete and radical way of following Christ.”

Br John Paul Tan OFM, who was instrumental in sourcing the funds for the Foundation, highlighted that the “€5 million donation is an endowment fund, aimed at furthering the important works of FI. The interest from the Foundation will be distributed across Franciscans International’s worldwide organizations in Bangkok, Geneva and New York, which serves about 1.2 million Franciscans worldwide.”

For more information about the Rose Marie Khoo Foundation, please visit Franciscans International’s website at: [www.franciscansinternational.org](http://www.franciscansinternational.org).



Franciscans International warmly welcomed Ms. Mavis Khoo to the foundation launch event.