FROM THE HOLY CROSS INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE OFFICE
The mark of all civilizations is the respect and protection they accord human dignity. All religious traditions assert the dignity of the human person and the unity of the human family yet throughout history, groups of people have been singled out, systematically demeaned, and marginalized. Every society has experienced the institutionalized violence of racism, sexism, economic inequity, and cultural imperialism. All regions of the world and all cultures have struggled against prejudice, discrimination, and xenophobia. That struggle continues even now in all countries, both rich and poor.

MIRED IN THE MARGINS

Of all groups suffering discrimination and violence today, four stand out for the severity and universality of their marginalization: women, children, migrating peoples, and indigenous peoples.

Women

Though women have made extraordinary progress in the past thirty years, it is still an unequal world. Their status in the global economy and victimization through violence epitomize their continuing subordination.

- Of the 1.2 billion people worldwide living on less than a dollar a day, the vast majority are women.
- In nearly every country, women work longer hours than men; most of their work is unpaid.
- While women's participation in the labor force has risen in recent years, they most often work in sweatshops or informal jobs under insecure, hostile, and degrading conditions. On average, women's wages are still only 78 percent of men's in comparable positions.
- Women are uniquely strained by globalization's shockwaves. In the wake of “economic adjustments” and financial crises, they are forced to assume new caretaking roles for their families and others as social services disappear.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has called violence against women the most shameful human rights violation—and the most pervasive. Physical violence against women and girls knows no boundaries of geography or culture. It exists in every country of the world and statistics are shocking.

- Throughout the world, one in every three women will suffer violence in her lifetime.
- Globally, four million women and girls are trafficked annually.
- In Peru, 33 percent of all women are abused by their partners; in India, 45 percent; in Bangladesh, 47 percent.
- Since 1993, some 400 women have been abducted, tortured, and brutally murdered in the cities of Juarez and Chihuahua. Mexican authorities have repeatedly failed to investigate the cases or offer protection to women.
- In the United States, 700,000 rapes are reported annually—a mere 37 percent of those which actually occur.

Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of those abandoned by others.

~ Proverbs 31:8
The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most universally accepted human rights treaty in history. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, the Convention spells out the basic rights of children everywhere, sets universal standards for children’s health care and education, and provides protection from discrimination, degrading treatment, and economic exploitation. But despite the Convention’s near-universal ratification (all countries except the United States and Somalia), children around the world still suffer appalling violations of their rights.

- Each year, more than 11 million children die of preventable diseases—about 30,000 a day.
- Some 115 million school-age children receive no primary education; three-fifths of these are girls.
- More than half-a-million children have been coerced into government armed forces and other armed groups worldwide. In Northern Uganda alone, the rebel “Lord’s Resistance Army” has abducted nearly 8,400 children since June 2002.
- Globally, 100-140 million children live on the streets—at least 10 thousand in Haiti and 10 million in Brazil. Throughout the world, street children are routinely rounded up and abused by police even to the point of death in the name of “social cleansing.”
- Children without primary caregivers are deprived of their first source of protection. Today in sub-Saharan Africa, over 11 million children under the age of 15 have lost parents to HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS orphans are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and more likely to be infected themselves.

Mass displacement of peoples is a mark of our times. Currently, 180 million people live outside their native country; by 2050, such “migrants” will total 230 million worldwide. Another 25 million persons are “internally displaced”—still within their native countries, but uprooted from their homes.

Reasons for migration are complex and interconnected, but forced human displacement is typically caused by armed conflict/violence, poverty and social/economic disintegration, environmental devastation, or alleged “development.”

- Worldwide, some 36 million people have fled their homes due to armed conflict, persecution, or other violence. Palestinians, numbering over 4.1 million, are the largest such group.
- Poverty and lack of economic opportunity have forced 80-97 million persons to seek employment outside their country of origin. More than 30 million workers have migrated to Europe alone.
- Natural disasters and ecological devastation have currently created at least 25 million “environmental refugees.” Climate change, dwindling natural resources and continuing environmental degradation are projected to produce 125 million more by 2050.
Globally, the leading cause of displacement is “development”—large-scale projects like dams and roads, mining and logging operations, and conservation parks and reserves. In the past decade, such maldevelopment disrupted the lives of 90-100 million people.

Regardless of reasons for displacement, migrating peoples face similar conditions everywhere: growing intolerance, discrimination, racism, and heightened xenophobia. Frequently, they are targets of suspicion and hostility—scapegoats for all of society’s problems. With scant legal protection, displaced peoples are routinely victimized: physically attacked, sexually abused, and economically exploited.

Indigenous peoples are perhaps the most dispossessed group in today’s society. More than 300 million people living in more than 70 countries on five continents, the indigenous are diverse, yet share common problems. Throughout the world, they suffer grave and widespread violations of civil and political rights: unfair detentions and trials, torture, illegal executions and mass killings. On the frontlines of globalization, indigenous peoples are also systematically exploited by governments and corporations: their ancestral lands and natural resources stolen, their languages and cultures suppressed, their traditional knowledge pirated.

In Bangladesh, 25,000 forest-dwelling Garo and Koch peoples face disruption of their lives and livelihoods due to construction of a recreational “eco-park” inside the ancient Madhupur forest. In January 2004, police opened fire on Garos peacefully protesting the park, killing one man and injuring 25 others.

Once the acknowledged owners of Uganda’s high forest, the Batwa “pygmies” were expelled from their lands to create game parks and nature reserves. Eviction disrupted tribal hunting practices, which undermined tribal health. Used to treating illness with traditional medicines from forest materials, the Batwa are now unable to access their natural medicines or pay for conventional medical treatment.

In Alberta, Canada, logging and large-scale oil and gas extraction are steadily eroding the land, health, and way of life of the Lubicon Cree. The Lubicon never surrendered the rights to their ancestral lands or consented to resource extraction as international human rights instruments require.

Throughout Brazil, there is widespread organized violence against indigenous people motivated by racial prejudice and struggles over land. In 2003, 24 indigenous leaders were brutally murdered, topping levels of the past ten years.
ASSURING HUMAN RIGHTS

Securing the rights of marginalized people and, ultimately, ending marginalization will involve both personal and societal transformation. Diverse, multi-faceted strategies will be necessary, including the following.

:**Enhancing Legal Protections**

Though numerous international Declarations and Conventions defending human rights already exist, there is still a need to amplify legal protection by:

* crafting stronger legal instruments and policies,
* designing mechanisms to ensure implementation of laws and accountability of officials,
* creating independent monitoring bodies to enforce legislation and respond to human rights violations, and
* mustering political will to ensure legal systems work fairly for all.

:**Forming Global Citizens**

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once compared humankind to a widely separated family which has inherited a vast “world house” where they must learn to live together in peace. This challenge can only be met, said King, by expanding loyalties and commitments to humanity as a whole—beyond concern for one’s own race, tribe, class, nation, or religion.

Among the most crucial strategies for assuring all people’s rights is forming such “global citizens”—persons who

* respect the innate dignity of all human beings,
* recognize humanity’s interrelatedness and interdependence,
* embrace multiplicity and difference as sources of growth,
* discover common ground and shared vision, and
* insist on social and political inclusion for all.

Only global citizens, who can affirm the essential oneness of the human family as they honor its many differences, will be prepared to practice the virtue of solidarity.

:**Globalizing Solidarity**

Solidarity is the moral response to human unity and interdependence. As John Paul II asserts, solidarity is no vague compassion or shallow distress at others’ misfortunes. It is a firm, persevering “determination to commit oneself to the common good… to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, #38).

Solidarity gives flesh to human oneness. Building a global culture of solidarity—new societal norms, systems, and structures which embody solidarity’s commitment to the good of all and of each individual—is the ultimate antidote to marginalization and surest guarantor of human rights.
All human beings are born free, equal in dignity and rights.

~ Universal Declaration on Human Rights

What Can We Do?

1) Study international human rights agreements. Start with
   - the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—available in more than 300 languages and dialects: www.unhchr.ch/udhr/index.htm, and

2) Speak out for human rights.
   - Join campaigns of international human rights organizations like Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (see Resources).
   - Research human rights issues in your country. Share what you learn and take action. For a list of country-specific AI offices see http://web.amnesty.org/links.

3) Hone your “global citizen” skills.
   - Cultivate a global perspective:
     - Read news from around the world at www.oneworld.net.
     - Intentionally encounter other cultures, within and outside your current homeland.
     - Attend international meetings like the World Social Forum and United Nations conferences.
   - Seek out stories of people whose rights have been violated:
     - Refugees who fled violence only to have difficulty finding asylum.
     - Indigenous peoples in your native land.
     - Immigrants—legal and illegal—who have encountered rejection and discrimination.

4) Use institutional power to promote human rights.
   - Work to ensure that the policies/practices of our Church, our Congregations, and our sponsored institutions protect human dignity, respect human rights, and promote equality and justice.
   - Use sponsored institutions to give special assistance to marginalized groups: jobs and healthcare, education/training opportunities, and affirmative action.
   - Put Congregational financial resources to work for human rights. Join other socially responsible investors to challenge human rights violations of corporations. (For more information, see www.iccr.org.)
Amnesty International <www.amnesty.org> is a worldwide movement defending human rights. The web site includes information and action suggestions on a variety of human rights issues and contact information for national AI offices throughout the world. (English, French, and Spanish)

Human Rights Watch <www.hrw.org> conducts fact-finding investigations into human rights abuses in all regions of the world. The site contains extensive information on major human rights issues. (Spanish, French, and English with some documents in Portuguese)

Kairos: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives <www.kairos canada.org> is an education/action organization focusing on various issues, including aboriginal rights, rights of refugees and migrants, and corporate responsibility. (French and English)

Rights & Democracy <www.ichrdd.ca> promotes and defends the rights set out in the International Bill of Human Rights. Its work focuses on democratic development, women's rights, the rights of indigenous peoples, and globalization and human rights. (English, French, and Spanish)

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Not a Minute More: Ending Violence Against Women, UNIFEM, 2003, available as a free PDF file at www.unifem.org. This report highlights achievements in combating violence against women, provides examples of good practices, looks at the challenges ahead, and identifies next steps.


The No-Nonsense Guide to International Migration, Peter Stalker, New Internationalist Publications and Between the Lines, Toronto, 2001. This guide lays out the dimensions of today's mass migrations, their effects on sending and receiving countries, and the growing importance of migrants in a globalizing world.

Resources continued ––>

**Uprooted: Refugees of the Global Economy**  
This film presents stories of immigrants who left Bolivia, Haiti, and the Philippines after global economic powers devastated their countries—only to face new challenges in the United States. The stories raise critical questions about U.S. immigration policy in an era when corporations cross borders at will. English with Spanish subtitles; produced by the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, 2001. (28 minutes)

**A Score for Women’s Voices**  
In 2000, millions of people worldwide took to the streets to denounce poverty and violence against women. This historic “World March of Women”—a bold initiative of the Québec Federation of Women—represented a turning point in global solidarity. Set against the backdrop of a song, this film celebrates the March and explores five innovative projects around the world designed to protect and enhance the rights of women. English and French; produced by the National Film Board Of Canada, 2002. (86 minutes)

These videos (available in VHS and PAL) may be borrowed free of charge from the Holy Cross International Justice Office Resource Library  
(e-mail: ksmedley@cscsisters.org; phone: 574-284-5303; fax: 574-284-5596).