MAY ALL HAVE LIFE
IN ITS FULLNESS AND DIGNITY

VIVAT International
2000 - 2015
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INTRODUCTION

THE STORY OF A TREE BEGINS WITH A SEED. Its birthing takes shape in the mind of the sower, who envisions its growth in his/her dreams. Prior to getting to action, the sower sees in the seed a potential for growth. So it is with VIVAT International, a tiny seed sown fifteen years ago, by two Congregations founded by St. Arnold Jansen today has completed 15 years of spreading out its wings and roots in different directions.

To mark the 15th anniversary of VIVAT International, the former VIVAT Executive Team in New York, especially Sr. Zelia Cordeiro, took the initiative to collect stories from members actively engaged in grassroots initiatives on the ground and from those at the national and international levels. The current team of VIVAT International in New York is happy to present these success stories and personal experiences from the ground.

Founded by the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) in November 2000, VIVAT International is a registered network, consisting of twelve religious congregations which can be classified in three categories of membership. The founding member congregations are the SVD and SSpS. The full member congregations are the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (or Spiritans, CSSp) and the Adorers of the Blood of Christ (ASC). The associate member congregations are the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus (MCCJ), Comboni Missionary Sisters (CMS), Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit (Cssp) Little Sisters of Assumption (LSA), Priests of the Sacred Heart (or Dehonians, SCJ), Religious of the Assumption (RA), Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary (MSHR) and Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI).
The main purpose of these stories is to highlight the relevance of VIVAT International, which like a web, starts from the grassroots initiatives of the members, moves towards the regional and international levels, in collaboration with many others influencing policies, and in turn affecting the grassroots again. One without the other is not possible. The booklet covers Africa, Asia, Western Europe, North America and South America, ranging from socio-charitable activities to advocacy works.

We are thankful to everyone who shared their stories. Thanks to Sr. Zelia Cordeiro who initiated this work. Special thanks go to the Board of VIVAT International, for their support. Last but not least, we are grateful to Frs. Thomas Brennan, SDB, and John Converset, MCCJ, for assisting in editing and for their support.

May each story in this booklet inspire VIVAT members and our partners in promoting and working for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. VIVA VIVAT International!

Executive Team
VIVAT International
New York, May 2016
On November 27, 2014, VIVAT International, Argentina was honored with an award and recognition ceremony hosted by the Inspeccion General de Justicia. This represents an important milestone in the growth of VIVAT International, Argentina and acknowledges the hard work of the SVD provincial superiors and the provincial coordinators during the last five years.

The four guiding principles of VIVAT’s commitment to mission--sustainable development, promoting a culture of peace, gender equality, and the eradication of poverty--have generated great enthusiasm and renewal in our Arnoldus family charism. Since its earliest days, VIVAT International, Argentina has addressed these commitments through workshops on awareness creating, capacity building and advocacy. The participation has been high and there is a deepened desire to increase our influence in the international arena.
VIVAT International and its leaders have served as a resource for our mission in the Argentine Province. In Misiones we decided to participate in the discussion of sustainable development by promoting an awareness-raising campaign about the risk involved in allowing the construction of mega-projects in the region. These big projects do not represent a sustainable development alternative because they destroy thousands of hectares of potentially productive land and change the lifestyle and traditions of people in local areas.

Additionally, there appears to be a direct correlation with an increase of tropical diseases and climate deterioration as a result of the mega-projects. It has been observed that the increase in disease is directly related to an increased presence of mosquitoes as well as of several other arthropods that are in the water. The most common diseases mentioned are schistosomiasis, tripanosomiasis, onchocerciasis, malaria, fever, dengue, filariasis (philariasis) and leishmaniasis. The World Health Organization’s (WHO) guidelines strongly advise against building dams in tropical and subtropical locales due to this risk of increased disease. Other health issues are developing due to use of ‘dirty’ energy in these projects.

Due to the negative impacts on the environment and the people, we chose to support any initiative that resisted using mega projects as a development alternative.

In a study of the hydroelectric projects in Garabi and Panambi conducted by professionals from Entes Binacionales Sociedad del Estado (EBISA), it was noted that “the new migration movements that come as a result of cultural or economic changes will incorporate negative aspects, facilitating the increase of yellow fever, dengue, vinchuca, etc., impacting people and domestic animals.”
report, it was noted that the proliferation of favorable environmental conditions for the increase in species that transmit human diseases will have the greatest impact in the area.

During the studies, the presence of certain vectors that are catalogued as potential human pandemic transmitters has been corroborated. Conditions are adequate for the proliferation of anopheles and other breeds of mosquitoes, carrying malaria, dengue and yellow fever. Because of the contaminated water, mollusks are becoming infected with certain planorbides, biomphalaria, tenagophila and limnas columella. All of them are potential transmitters of schitosoma mansoni and hepatic fasciola. Among the diseases expected to increase due to the Garabi Project are: malaria, dengue, yellow fever, encephalitis, leishmaniasis, schistosomiasis, schistosomal dermatitis and another seven diseases that affect cattle and several other animal species.

The document, *Plan de Manejo del Medio Ambiente* (PMMA), was intended for internal use at the Entidad Binacional Yacyretá (EBY) but has become public. It explicitly outlines the negative conditions leading to elevated risk to health such as water diseases, the proliferation of mosquitoes and other diseases.

In the section *Qualitative Comparison of Environmental Impact to Several Levels* on the PMMA of the EBY, it states: “At Level 83, as a consequence of the worsened conditions significant modifications of organisms can occur, and this has not been sufficiently evaluated.”

The EBY’s PMMA recognizes that one of the unforeseen impacts of the dams are the so-called “reservoirs”, vegetation masses and organic material that spreads for several hectares and are several meters thick. They rise to the surface of the water and are driven by the wind and currents. These reservoirs have a measureable impact on water quality.

Maria Onestini, an investigator from the *Centro de Estudios Ambientales* (CEDEA), stated that water quality issues have a direct impact on the population’s health. She noted that a wide variety of diseases are related to water, especially in subtropical humid areas such as the area of Yacyreta. These pathologies include dengue, malaria, yellow fever, paludism, leishmaniasis, schistosomiasis and diarrhea.
Given this situation, the “NO” and the majority of the Missiones’ population addressed the Dams Council and asked the Governor to stop breaking the law and immediately call for a referendum to address the controversies surrounding the Garabi and Panambi Dams.

They made the following demands:

- Respect the popular sovereignty of the Missiones’ population and the affected society, and not the sovereignty of a small group of politicians who are temporarily in charge. The Executive Power administration should be in charge of making decisions on issues substantially affecting the lives of everyone in the province.

- Recognize that Executive Power is mandatory, as stated in Law IV Number 56, titled: “New Economic co-participation for Missions: energy sovereignty, decision process of the natural patrimony of Missiones’ population”. For them to call for a Referendum, as it is clearly stated in Article No. 6 of the above mentioned law. Article 6 states that in order to start hydroelectric projects and dams, a mandatory referendum has to take place, as well as the previous participation of the town. This shall take place as long as the particular and historic reasons to call for a referendum are current. The Representatives chamber establishes the need for referendum by law and the Executive Power calls for the act.

The Provincial Council, supporting the “No to the Dams” Project, marched in September 2014 calling for the referendum for Garabi. The nearly 150 kilometer walk united areas that would be potentially harmed if the construction proceeded. The peoples’ demands included a mandatory and irreversible referendum. “People have already said no to Corpus, and we now have more reasons to say no to Garabi”. The people presented the requested information to several provincial and national entities. Judicial recourse was planned if there was no response to their demands.

Thousands marched the last part of the more than 157 kilometer “Yes to life - No to Dams” walk. Those six days raised public awareness and
made visible the demands of the missionaries to say NO to big dams, and NO to the Garabi-Panambi hydroelectric project.

“It has been a long time since I felt this kind of emotion. It brings me back to October 16, 1995 when we planted a tree in the Corpus Plaza with the Nobel Peace Prize winner who joins us today. This shows how coherent, sensible and amazing a job we have done for the last few years. We are all the same advocates. We have a few more white hairs and wrinkles, but we are still firm in the belief that we want a different country model, another province model, where political parties make decisions in accord with what the population wants and not just protecting the private interests of multinational corporations”. These were the opening words for the continuation of the march, spoken by Rulo Bregagnolo, on one of the central streets in the city.

Exhaustion and fear of rain were forgotten as marchers found neighbors and supporters from other organizations waiting for them on street corners, in alleys and parks to support them in the final sections of the walk. Rapidly the principal entry way to Posadas was filled by supporters, holding signs and flags showing their interest and love for the cause. This confirmed that this was not just another walk. “This is a moving walk that belongs to everyone. It is our way of saying we stand on our own feet and will not allow our homes to be flooded, our families to become sick or for the future of our children and grandchildren to be stolen”. These were the words of Juan Yahdjian an environmental doctor. Citizens from Maúa, Alecrín and other localities that would also be affected by the continuation of the project also showed their support. Mbyas, of our area, speaking in their own language expressed how they are against any more negative consequences from the dams. Citizens from Paraguay, with whom we collaborated previously when fighting consequences in Yacyreta were also present.

“The river doesn’t divide us, it unites us. The struggle is the same, we are all the same children of Mother Nature who are suffering the burden of large enterprises acting in Latin America and all around the world, to steal and control the wealth in the world. They are the enemies. The people will need to face the enemies”, said a partner of Movimiento de Afectados por las Represas from Brazil (MAB). He noted that the
referendum is fundamental for them. “We don’t have access to or even the possibility of a plebiscite in Brazil, as you have here. Many of us are in need. To strengthen democracy popular participation is of extreme importance.”

At the end of the march there were strong criticisms of the government’s support of the hydroelectric projects in spite of its documented negative consequences and the overall rejection of the project during a referendum in 1996. More than 80% of the people voted against all projects.

“You have been chosen by our Missiones’ people to protect what is ours. You were not chosen to destroy what is ours. Be careful, because we stand together and pay attention to the voices of the people” said Maria Alves, a nurse from Puerto Azara. Nearly five years ago she was one of the first voices raised to challenge Garabias when words spread about the mega project construction.

Among the prominent speakers at the closing rally were such luminaries as Adolfo Perez Esquivel, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Jorge Nahuel, director of the Confederation of Mapuche de Neuquen, and Víctor De Gennaro, national representative of Unidad Popular. They promised that they would take the movement to the national level and make the “NO to the Dams” campaign visible to the entire world. “In spite of the distance, we feel completely united to the banners being raised today. We are saying, the same way you are, “Yes to life. Yes to water. No to death brought upon us by these Multinational Corporations invading us. It is one fight. We are fighting for life, for water. ‘NO to Dams, No to Chevron’ will be our motto from now on”, said Nohuel. He called for establishing a strong network of social enterprises, unions, environmental agencies and human rights advocates to fight and “twist the arm” of those who constantly abuse power.

“We cannot allow them to divide us. We need unity to say NO to the death business” added Víctor de Gennaro. He, as well as many other speakers, recalled Bishop Joaquin Pina, one of the founders of the No to Corpus movement and honorary president of the NO to the Dams council.
During October 2014 extraordinary councils of citizen participation took place in the Province of Misiones (Argentina) in response to a Popular Referendum regarding dams. This was an issue that particularly affected coastal societies, the ones that would suffer the most negative impacts if the dams were built over the Uruguay River in the Garabi (Corrientes) and Panambi (Misiones) areas.

From October 20 to 26, 2014, citizens had the opportunity to express their concerns during a consultation organized by the Provincial Council of “No to Dams”. This Council is a collective of more than 45 organizations representing the church, unions, counties, artists, ecologists and many others, all of them active in their communities.

This is not a new issue. For several years people have been aware that large dams have caused widespread social displacements and the flooding of fertile land. The construction of the plant in Yacyreta (Argentina/Paraguay) has been shown to have caused these negative impacts. A mandatory referendum taken in 1996 rejected the construction of the Corpus Christi dam over the Parana River. Today the area faces the imminent threat of complicity by the Argentinian government with the Brazilian government and a few provincial governments to build the Garambi and Panambi dams.

The Council was developed with the strong will of the people. Using more than 1000 barrels, the people of the town marched banging the empty barrels, raising a loud din of noise to make sure that the governing leaders would hear their protests and then force them to listen to their concerns. The people exercised their right to express themselves and made sure that they were heard.

Are millions of dollars needed to force a consultation or a referendum? We have proven that the answer is No. The voluntary participation of every neighbor made this everyone’s effort. They did not get paid by a political party that often spends huge amounts of public funds to achieve their goals. In this case, the only thing we asked of the voters was to say “Yes” or “No”. And this is exactly what they did and are continuing to do. Citizens participate when they feel they are cared for, valued and protected. Tired of the indifference, and that their own laws were not being respected or
followed by those who should lead the way in promoting the laws, the community acted. This effort clearly demonstrates that when there is a will there is a way and money is not always the only way to achieve goals.

More than 120,000 votes were cast during the referendum. In some localities, participation was nearly equal to that in major elections. One instance was in Alba Posse, where more than 4,480 votes were registered, this represented more than 80% participation.

A few critics of the popular council doubt the legitimacy or legality of these councils regarding dams. To support their arguments, they point out that they are non-regulated and have been organized without any government participation.

These are not convincing arguments. It is imperative to pay attention to citizen participation, to hold open discussion with the public about the present and the future of Missiones, the region and Argentina. What is arguable here is that the formal mechanisms for dialog have not facilitated discussion. The informal popular council filled this need. In this sense, I celebrate the initiative. Popular consultation shows the increasing desire of the population to be part of the decision making process and political decisions that affect their lives. This is a legitimate democratic concern, especially if one considers the existence of a plebiscite on provincial legislation.

A Trinational Assembly in the Action against Dams and to support rivers, water and life Day 2015 took place on Saturday, March 14. This will include representatives from Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay all gathering to share experiences and discuss diverse issues concerning the presence of dams in our region.
Preparing the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was a learning experience for us and helped us expand the network of relationships with other organizations that we already have. This collaboration assisted us in the formulation of a thorough and clear report on violence against women and children. Also, regular communication with the VIVAT office in New York was essential in the preparation of the UPR.

This was a personally enriching experience for me. As we prepared the UPR, several groups united to give voice to women, children and young adults living in street situations who suffer from violence in their lives. We were challenged to think deeply about women and children and to work to design tools to assist them in their struggles. As we collaboratively worked with each other, we were able to strengthen the empowerment efforts of all of the participating groups. Having women unite to prepare the UPR on the reality of the experience of women in the country was a source of growth and strength.

The UPR is just the beginning of an ongoing process of advocacy in the empowerment of peoples and the recognition and protection of their rights. Using women and children as lead agents, we will be monitoring adherence to the recommendations we have made.
Lower Piquia is a neighbourhood of about 320 families (1,000 population approximately), located in the municipality of Acailandia, in the state of Maranhão, North East of Brazil. In the mid 1980’s the lives of the residents were radically transformed due to the investments of the Grande Carajas Programme, the greatest project of exploitation, extraction and exportation of steel planned by the Brazilian state and carried out by the then public company Vale do Rio Doce, nowadays privatized with the name Vale S.A.

The Carajas Railway was built up alongside Lower Piquia; it delivers row steel extracted from the neighbouring state of Para. The village was surrounded by five industries of row iron processing which severely impacted the environment and the lives of the people of this village.

Living conditions created by these industries and affecting the human settlements in the area were not viable, due to the heavy pollution of the atmosphere, water and land, as well as the noise levels.

Severe and chronic illnesses were becoming more intense in the region, obliging many families to separate from their relatives, so as to protect the most vulnerable, (children, expectant mothers and the elderly), and leading to the death of several residents. In 2014 in the short period of 12 months, there were 5 deaths which were traced to the effects of pollution. Even today the majority of the families live near the chemical furnaces because they do not have the economic reserves to move to another part of the city.

Since the year 2005, the local community of Lower Piquia has been mobilizing via the Community Association of the Residents of Piquia
(ACMP). In 2007 ACMP allied itself with the Comboni Missionaries, with the Defense of Life Center, and Human Rights ‘Carmen Bascaran’ of Acailandia and the recently created network of Justice on Rails, a coalition of pastoral groups, social movements, academic study groups and other bodies, which are accompanying the communities impacted by the mineral and chemical enterprises along the Carajás Corridor, in the states of Para and Maranhão.

A collective consultation of all the inhabitants of Lower Piquia, which was completed in the year 2008, arrived at the conclusion by a majority vote that the best solution for the community was its removal to an area free of pollution. In parallel with this ACMP and its political/juridical team would continue with actions to guarantee the monitoring, effective control and reduction of emissions, mitigation of damages, and holding those responsible liable for the damages caused.

We do not have sufficient space here to document the rich history of the struggle of the people of Lower Piquia, which is constantly updated and systematized on a website, which collects the history of the complaints, popular demonstrations, judicial actions, strategic alliances and popular communications, videos, photographic expositions, pamphlets, stickers, theatrical plays……) all useful in affirming the rights of these residents, victims of the cycle of mining and chemical industries.

We analyze briefly the importance of international alliances to accompany this case, and among them we focus on the precious role of VIVAT International, in the advocacy process defending these people. VIVAT International is a member of the Mining Working Group at the UN, and has taken advantage of this space to make known the damages caused by mining operations in different parts of the world.

In April 2011 the 10th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues took place under the Theme: “Indigenous Rights, Mining and Development: The Need for ‘Free, Prior and Informed Consent’”. It is
during this session that videos and journalistic materials about Lower Piquia were presented along with information relating to other regions similarly impacted.

In May 2013, VIVAT International presented a Declaration to the 23rd Session of the Council of Human Rights, United Nations, which showed concern regarding the proposals to modify the Legal norms of Mining in Brazil. The Justice on the Rails website has contributed to the drawing up of this Declaration, based on the experience gained in Lower Piquia and the railway Corridor of Carajas, conscious of the fact that an uncontrolled increase of the mining operations would cause new impacts for the hundred or so communities affected in the states of Pará and Maranhão and, in particular, for Lower Piquia. It is important strategically to act in the socio-politico context which determines local impacts, to attack the causes of the violations and not just treat the symptoms.

After two years, the debate relating to the new Legal Norms for Mining still continues in Brazil, with organized civil society taking an active role, against the perspective affirming that the interests of the huge mining companies are above the rights of the communities and territories.

The Catholic Church has always been very involved in the struggle of Lower Piquia. The most visible moment showcasing this alliance was the X1 Pilgrimage of the Land and Water in Maranhão State, realized exactly in Piquia, in September 2011, with the participation of all the bishops and around ten thousand people from the Basic Christian Communities of Maranhão state. The concern and dedication of the Catholic Church in support of the battle of the residents of Lower Piquia was further confirmed when their cause was presented in March 2015, by the Red Eclesial Panamazónica and a delegation from the Consejo Episcopal Latino-Americano, to the Comission Interamericana of Human Rights (CIDH) an Organization of the United States of American States (OAS/OEA), as one of the four examples of the grave impacts which the extraction industries had on the populations of the Continent.

The then UN Special Rapporteur for the Rights of Adequate Living Conditions, Raquel Rolik, published a declaration in January 2014, affirming: The then UN Special Rapporteur for the Rights of Adequate Living Conditions, Raquel Rolik, published a declaration in January
2014, affirming: “I consider that this initiative of the Community Association of Residents in Piquia (ACMP) has the potential to serve as a point of reference to establish political clarity for the Brazilian State regarding the protocol for forced removals, or better yet, for agreements on advanced and more adequate international standards that recognize the right of the community to be relocated collectively, and to plan for themselves the area in which they and future generations will live.”

In January 2014, four United Nations Special Rapporteurs sent a formal request for information to the Brazilian Government, expressing deep concern about the reports received on the contamination and poisoning, which continued to happen in Lower Piquia. The official communication presented ten requirements of specific information, on the impact, methods of mitigation and of reparation for damage done. Ten months later, in November the Brazilian Government responded to the formal request for information in a manner not judged satisfactory by ACMP and their juridical-political assessors. A response of the Government was presented on the 28th Session of the Council of Human Rights United Nation, in Geneva.

VIVAT International, which remains in permanent contact with the Comboni Missionaries and the website of Justice on the Rails related to the case of Lower Piquia, intervened with a public declaration in the same 28th Session (referred to above), expressing dissatisfaction with the Government’s response and demanding immediate relocation of the community, effective methods of pollution control, adequate health care of the local population, reparation and compensation for the victims, in addition to a guarantee that the damages caused would not be repeated and that methods used by steel and mineral companies effectively incorporate into their activities respect for human rights.

The long journey of the Lower Piquia community in the struggle for a life of dignity has not ended yet, but the steps taken until now and the national and international visibility of this cause guarantee that one day these people will attain their victory, and consolidate their testimony and resistance, which is already a symbol and inspiration for other communities affected. The advocacy work, and specifically, the role of VIVAT International is still very important to hasten the day and “force the dawn to arise”
In October 2013 members of our team accompanied the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights as he visited families that had been victims of police abuse and violence related to the enforcement of the Antiterrorism Law. Six months later, in March 2014, the staff of VIVAT-International invited us to prepare a brief statement, of approximately 350 words, about the present status of human rights in Chile to present to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations in Geneva. Our emphasis was to be on our observations on how the fight against terrorism was leading to human rights violations against the Mapuches. The statement concluded with our recommendations on how to prevent the human rights abuses we had observed.

This was a powerful experience for us. The idea that we could bring the victims’ voices, those same voices that we heard each day, to the UN Human Rights Council motivated us to take quick action. A short but concise statement was prepared through the collaborative efforts of the team members, the Pastoral Mapuche, the VIVAT UN Representatives and the legal department.

On the day that our statement was presented to the Human Rights Council, we all gathered to watch the delivery in Geneva that was accessible to us online. This was an extremely important event for us all. Often it seems that the voices of those suffering are diminished, dismissed or silenced. This increases their burden for one can believe that no one cares, or that one’s claims will never be addressed. But now their voices were heard at the governmental and UN level. Having been able to bring the voices of those who are rarely heard to center stage has renewed those of us who work with marginalized people. It strengthened us in our commitment to advance the human rights of all.
San Jose Las Flores:
When A People Comes To Have A Voice
And It Becomes A Song of Hope

By The Community of San Jose las Flores, El Salvador
(Accompanied by the Religious of the Assumption of the Province of Central America-Cuba)

“It is easy to be a good shepherd with this people.
It is a people that spurs to its service those of
us who have been called to defend its rights and to be its voice” (18/11/79).

Blessed Oscar Arnulfo Romero

The municipality of San Jose Las Flores, Chalatenango, was one of those most directly affected by the civil war that took place in El Salvador (1980-1992). Beginning in 1979, the repression and war forced families of survivors and communities to undertake a massive migration to more secure places in the interior of the country or in neighbouring countries, as refugees. A large part of the population, however, remained in the midst of the armed conflict because they had nowhere else to go.

In 1980 the exodus of the population began to increase, as violence escalated against the civilian population and counter-insurgency campaigns were implemented. History has recorded the terrible massacres in villages, with Rio Sumpul, El Zapote, suffering the cruellest ones with the greatest numbers of deaths. Thousands of children, women and elderly perished as they fled the military operations.

In a homily on August 14, 1982, Archbishop Rivera y Damas affirmed: “Many of these people flee because they are identified as guerrilla collaborators and this is enough for something worse to happen to them. Others have to flee from their villages because of the military operations by air and by land, because of the indiscriminate bombings where those who die are not actually guerrilla members but defenceless civilians among whom are women, children and the elderly.”

The large region of Chalatenango in the country’s North-eastern area, bordering Honduras, is one of the poorest and most marginalised of the
country. This region was one of the most organized in its demand for more just working conditions. It had witnessed the flow of the blood of thousands of innocent people whose only crime was to be peasants who wanted to continue cultivating their land with dignity.

The repressive invasions of the army provoked the flight of the peasants, the famous “guindas”. Peasants endured an exodus in their struggle to preserve their lives. They left WITH NOTHING, abandoning their meagre belongings, their domestic animals and their crops. They were unable to foresee the duration of their flight because it depended on how long the invasion or military operation would last. Often they hid in the mountains, eating what nature offered them, for as long as a month. Upon their return, they found everything destroyed and burned. Some of those who fled were not able to return because they did not survive the exile. The people were always on heightened alert ready to continue their flight and defend their lives. The military had been ordered “to destroy everything”, and used specialized aircraft to enact constant aerial bombardments and raids on the people. If the military detected movement, clothes hanging, smoke from a kitchen, the army would attack the place and destroy it while claiming that the peasants were guerrillas. Thousands of innocent lives were lost in this way.

The population, mainly the elderly and women, some of who were pregnant and at times gave birth during their flight, could not endure anymore. They lived in distress, as the military operations came one after another. They then wrote to the Archbishop asking for help from the Church.

1. REPOPULATION OF SAN JOSE LAS FLORES

In January 1986, Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas of San Salvador visited Chalatenango, an area belonging to his diocese. Upon arriving at San Jose Las Flores he met with the people of the area who had resisted the onslaughts, even if they were dispersed into small habitable towns. He advised them to gather in San Jose Las Flores, assured them that the Church would provide them with food, and that as far as possible, he would protect their rights, especially to life and freedom. He also said that he would send them a team of priests and religious women to accompany them.

On June 20, 1986, 26 families (110 persons) began repopulating San Jose Las Flores. The military authorities were asked to accord the civilian
population both respect and recognition. Soon, other families who had been in hiding returned until there were 140 families back in the village.

San Jose Las Flores recovered life. It was not easy. First they had to clear the undergrowth that had covered the village and had even grown inside the houses without roofs. As they could and with what was available they reconstructed roofs and repaired walls. Houses, now shared by three to four families were made habitable once again. It was a new dawn for all of them and the beginning of a new stage. It was an achievement that had to be maintained. However, the war raged on, the military operations continued, the repression against the civilian population continued with frequent attacks by the army. While the situation remained difficult and hard, the solidarity of everyone towards each other, the support of international solidarity groups, and the support and presence of the Catholic Church, made resistance, the recognition and progress of the population possible.

And with the strength of the new day, they began to organise a Board of Directors that would respond to the needs of the community. The families were distributed among the least destroyed houses, and a campaign to gradually reconstruct the village was organised. Work and production were organized in a collective manner both to face the danger of the operations and to help the most vulnerable, especially the elderly and widows. Healthcare was organized by volunteers who had been trained during the war to address needs as they arose. A school was established with those who had limited education but were willing to teach others with none.

In times of military operations, the instruction was to always defend one another. In the light of the Word of God and solidarity, the defense of life became stronger. ALL FOR EVERYONE was their motto. They were to defend themselves in danger, look for the lost, search for the missing, pick up the fallen and bury them. Villagers went to collect food from the trucks and distributed it equitably. What was there was for everyone.

The Religious of the Assumption, responding to the Archbishop’s call, assigned a group of Sisters who immediately accompanied the population ensuring the HUMANIZATION OF THE WAR, according to the instructions of the Church. This meant responding to all the needs at
every level. The celebration of the Word united us. We all worked together to pick up the dead and bury them, to recover and protect the wounded and transfer them to where they could obtain medical assistance, to receive prisoners of war and reunite them with their families and much more. For the people, the presence of the Sisters in the midst of this reality was strength and a security. They said that they felt that “God was made present to them”. This presence was strengthened when Jesuit priests came from a neighbouring village.

Repopulation opened the doors to other refugee populations from Honduras and through successive years, the whole area was repopulated. There had been at least three years of indiscriminate massacres while they were in their cantons, six years of cruel war in which they were fleeing through the hills and six years of repopulation, recognised as a civilian population but living in the midst of the war. Something unique and different – a solidarity that was claiming its voice and its presence – developed in those nearly fifteen years of struggling between life and death.

A Peace Agreement between the opposing forces was signed on January 16, 1992. A new phase of reconstruction and reconciliation began and the laying of a foundation for a stable and lasting peace based on justice was initiated, a process that continues to this day. During this long period of reconstruction, with the assistance of communitarian organisations and international solidarity, several pending challenges were faced. Among these were acquiring legal land titles for property, housing, development projects, water systems, reconstruction of the Church, construction of the primary and secondary schools. From those first years until now, Las Flores has maintained its community spirit intact.

2. HOW THE COMMUNITY ORGANISED ITSELF

We have to appreciate the importance of this organisational process without which the people could not have carried out their resistance against the threats and the repression, without which the people would have been even more defenceless.

The whole population, 1583 inhabitants, is organised as a Communal Association. The Board of Directors looks after all the social needs and looks for solutions and for the organization of an alternative economy. All sectors are represented on the Board of Directors through at least
one of its representatives. All decisions are taken through referendum. **The Communal Board of Directors** and the Municipality periodically inform the population through the General Assemblies during which the community reflects upon and decides through votes—the initiatives which they will undertake as a community. There are various Committees within the community: women, health, education, disability, youth, environment, etc. Family solidarity is an intrinsic value of the settlers from this area. Thanks to this solidarity uncles, aunts and grandparents have taken care of the children who lost their parents during the conflict. This experience has grown in strength and for the last 28 years the community has been managed according to these principles with great determination.

Because of the great needs with which they were confronted during the reconstruction after the Peace Agreement, they saw the importance of unifying their efforts, analysing the needs and establishing priorities all together. They began to work together with the Municipal Council, especially with the Mayor and with the Religious of the Assumption.

The lack of support within the country made us, even before repopulation began, establish contact with external support groups including Support Committees, twinning, the Church, human rights groups, and international cooperation. Throughout the process we counted on multiple expressions of solidarity in the form of medical professionals and educators who provided health care and formation of the people. Journalists who “lent” their eyes and their ears to us and then made known the injustice we had endured. There was also economic aid through projects to improve basic infrastructures and also productive opportunities that provided for the development of the locality. The people managed to create a support network that has given them the tools to consolidate this development on solid foundations. Like many other communities in the country, this one was able to unite organically to achieve legal recognition and have a public voice.

**3. THREAT FROM MINING EXPLORATIONS IN OUR TERRITORY**

In 2004, we learned of the mining operations in Guatemala, and the terrible damage they were causing on the human and ecological level, destroying villages and dividing the people. At first, it seemed to us that this distant problem did not concern us even though these realities had also happened in other parts of our country. For us the first visible fruit
of the Free Trade Agreement was the MINING EXPLOITATION in El Salvador by Canadian Companies.

One day¹, agents of one of these transnational corporations ventured into the farmlands of the community without notice or permission. They were asked to leave the land, but they continued their exploration without listening to the warnings.

The Board decided to conscientize the population. They called in experts from Guatemala and with some information from within the community they got to know about the danger these mining explorations could cause. They presented the experiences of other Latin-American countries, especially from Guatemala, and an inquiry was made to see if they would be willing to defend their lands and not to sell these to anyone. The response was unanimous.

To strengthen this process of struggle and resistance, the community of San José Las Flores, decided to erect an altar to honor the Virgin Mary at a central point—the designated epicentre of the exploration. They all went on pilgrimage to take it there.

Many other actions were done to stop the process of signposting, the first step in the exploration that the company had begun. A commission was created to make a NETWORK OF RESISTANCE IN THE AREA. This commission visited all the communities of the region, explaining and demonstrating the damage done by the extractive industries through films. There were discussions that led to, agreements to organize and insure that the people were well informed about what was happening. A reference person was appointed in each community.

Human Rights organisations conducted formation workshops, as did all the agencies and institutions related to the protection of the environment. They staged mass rallies with the slogan NO TO MINING. We went to the Legislative Assembly and the Ministry of Finances, to dispute the permissions given demanding that the law be modified. A network of local organisations had already been established with the support of the human rights institutions which used all means of communication, soliciting solidarity with other nations.

With all these regional and nationwide protagonists involved a NATIONAL PANEL was formed to analyse the consequences of these projects of death. Everything was done very quickly because the organization created during the war had provided them with needed experience. There was already a national network, knowledge of organisations, agencies, and experts so that massive mobilisations were organized in the areas susceptible to mining. They even negotiated with Canadian solidarity groups, proposing that they buy shares so they may be able to oppose the activities of that transnational from within.

The Bishops’ Conference of Guatemala issued a statement\(^2\), carefully and factually explaining the dangers of mining and requesting that it not be undertaken in the country. In the parishes of the diocese of Chalatenango an Environmental Commission was created for the defence of life. CARITAS joined this same proposal for the defence of life.

In 2009 the FMLN won the elections. President Mauricio Funes was at the forefront of the Government in El Salvador and decreed the PROHIBITION OF ANY MINING OPERATIONS IN THE COUNTRY, despite the complaints of the companies protected by the terms of the Free Trade Agreement. He also froze the penalty that had to be paid. This continues with the present Government.

It is time to carefully study the Hydrocarbon laws so that strong proposals for modification can be made to ensure that the mining explorations will be prohibited and definitively eliminated. Additionally, the unjust sanctions imposed on the country must be eliminated.\(^3\)

Many other complaints have united the community throughout the long history of organizing. We are aware that these tough times are not the best to promote either solidarity or unity for just and common causes. It is a challenge for us to continue forming the new generations who did not experience the paschal experience of a war nor the actions that have affirmed us in the importance and value of this communitarian project. We continue believing that from these small but significant spaces, the seed of the Kingdom grows “day and night without our knowing how”.


\(^3\) [http://vanguardiasv.net/index.php/nacionales/sucesos/item/301-los-municipios-que-se-enfrentan-a-la-mineria](http://vanguardiasv.net/index.php/nacionales/sucesos/item/301-los-municipios-que-se-enfrentan-a-la-mineria)
My involvement in VIVAT is like coming home for me. It brought me back to the work I did before entering the convent and to the research and community involvement that were part of the Social Work Course I completed after I became a Sister. For me, it was, and is, a concrete communion of life with what those living in poverty experience regularly: oppression, exclusion and voicelessness, even in their own land/country. Their anxieties, sorrows, joys, and small victories in the process of education-awareness raising activities, have become mine.

Through VIVAT, it was affirmed that I can be the voice of the voiceless, a witness of hope to the poor and marginalized. I have become a messenger proclaiming that there is something more in life which gives it worth and meaning, not merely only existing for a given moment, not a vicious cycle of non-life giving situations and the perpetuation of the culture of violence. I have experienced the truth of a life journeying with women and children in a post-war country, one experiencing internal conflict because of the power struggle of the leaders and because of the patriarchal structure of family and community.

For me, advocacy, networking and approaching powerful and influential people in governments and leadership, is a way to work to implement laws that ensure the human rights and dignity of all people, helping to free those living in poverty from a life of marginalization and exclusion?

VIVAT is called to help move forward the process of birthing just, peaceful and ecologically sensitive communities and societies -- being with those living in poverty and the marginalized, I am continuously transformed to be courageous, patient, trustful, and humble and nourished in faith.
A powerful Native American expression tells us, “If the last tree dies, the last human being will also die.” These words of wisdom serve as a wake-up call for us, the members of VIVAT International in Ghana.

In a very poor section of the Afram Plains in Southern Ghana, large trucks leave the area every day not with food crops but with bags piled high with charcoal. The indiscriminate felling of trees, burning them to process charcoal, and transporting them to towns and cities throughout Ghana and neighbouring countries is one of the major causes of environmental degradation in the country. The Afram Plains was once a rich farming area. Now the land is desolate and naked. The charcoal makers have destroyed every tree in the area with no concern for future generations. There are no reforestation or soil renewal programs. Environmental
degradation has led to serious health issues among the population, with a high incidence of respiratory diseases and other ailments. The local workers receive very low wages while the owners make huge profits (a 300% markup) selling the charcoal they have purchased cheaply.

Tree cutting has greatly affected the rainfall pattern throughout the whole country. In 2014 there was a marked decrease in the amount of rainfall, and this had a direct impact on the ability of the hydroelectric dams to produce an adequate amount of electricity for the entire country. As a result, we have intense energy/power cuts with electricity being strictly rationed. This affects every sector of industry and business, our educational institutions, the local shops as well as our communities and homes. The frequent power cuts, some lasting twenty four hours, have caused huge economic hardship especially to our industries. This, in turn, means that the work force is reduced as factories are forced to reduce their production and so do not need as many workers.

The VIVAT group in Ghana would like to raise awareness among the people about the dangers of cutting trees and failing to replant. The group will work, in collaboration with the Government and other NGO’s, to inform people about alternate fuels for cooking, including saw dust, LP gas and compressed dried grass.

“Water is the cradle and source of all life on earth, it is a sacred gift. We need to recognize that regardless of its utilitarian or commercial worth, water has a social, cultural, medical, religious and spiritual value. It is also a profound symbol within our scriptural and liturgical traditions.”
Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities by the Institute of Social Ministry in Mission (Tangaza University College Nairobi)

By David Cheboryot – Fr. Francesco Pierli, MCCJ
VIVAT International Kenya

Premise: Disability Advocacy ensures that the human and legal rights of people with disabilities are promoted and protected. This ensures that people with disabilities can fully participate in the community.

The Institute of Social Ministry in Mission (ISMM) has been a strong advocate in ensuring that the rights of people with disabilities in Kenya are upheld and supported. The institute has worked to promote a systemic advocacy through campaigns and public awareness projects calling for an inclusive community that creates social change. ISMM has carried out its advocacy in three areas: at the university; in the community; at the national level.

Institute of Social Ministry in Mission

Tangaza University College (TUC) welcomed its first students on 25 August 1986 and is recognized as a constituent College of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. In November 1995, the Comboni Missionaries founded the Institute of Social Ministry in Mission (ISMM) and with the approval of its statutes by the Board of Governors, it became an integral part of TUC.

The Comboni Missionaries have served as the sponsors of ISMM providing its leadership and inspiration. Under their guidance, the ISMM has focused its mission on training in community development, project management, leadership training, conflict resolution and advocacy for justice. The entire program is firmly rooted in a profound belief in the social dimension of all faiths, and specifically the Christian faith.

The institute educates and trains social workers, project managers, and agents of social transformation in faith based and civil society organizations.
ISMM offers Diplomas and Certificates in Social Transformation, and also has degree programs in Social Transformation leading to a BA, MA, MBA or PhD. The training and degrees offered are focused on ameliorating the social situation of the majority of the population of the continent, most of which lives below the poverty line.

**Advocacy in the Church: Great Jubilee 2000**

Training in advocacy and transformation is an essential component of all the degree and diploma programs. Tangaza collaborates with international NGOs and other agents of advocacy such as Transparency International. Throughout the institution, there is an emphasis on empowering people with disabilities (PWD).

Beginning in 2000, our advocacy program has worked to mobilize local communities, small Christian communities, parishes and then dioceses to openly acknowledge the presence of the disabled in their own communities. Local cultural tradition has hidden away persons living with disabilities who were considered a source of shame for a family. PWDs are perceived of as a curse from God. They were not even taken to church. Through home visits, parish priests and lay ministers have discovered that families are hiding their disabled children in their homes, hoping that their shame will not become widely known.

In the year 2000 we initiated a grassroots level program of mobilization of the faithful which led to ADVOCACY among the leaders at all levels of the diocese, parishes and small Christian communities to assist PWDs. Apostolic outreach at the parish and diocesan levels followed and now there are celebrations throughout the year to honor those with disabilities. Nyahururu has become the epicenter of the sensitization program and new pastoral activities continue to be developed and implemented.

**Advocacy with the Board of Governors at TUC**

Concern for the poor, especially the PWDs who, in this context, are the poorest of the poor has become a top priority for TUC. This represents a major development since the early days when TUC was a Theological Centre for Religious and PWDs were given no consideration.
In 2002 the ISMM insisted with the leadership and Board of Governors that the infrastructure of the college needed to be changed to make the institution more accessible to PWDs. Accommodations for PWDs, such as lifts and ramps, had not been envisioned in the early days of the institutions because it was assumed that all students would be young and mobile. When a student confined to a wheelchair was accepted into ISMM, the need for the accommodations became apparent. In spite of financial constraints, the advocacy campaign for ramps and lift was successful. Imani House, the newest wing, built between 2000 and 2003 has facilities for PWDs. However, much remains to be done.

ISMM has committed itself to accepting more students with disabilities and has been working to ensure that TUC makes its total campus accessible to PWDs. In spite of its strong advocacy for accessibility, ISMM was only able to enroll and graduate five PWD students from 2002 to 2014. While the stated mission and vision of TUC is to promote social transformation, justice and human dignity, PWDs have not thus far fully realized inclusion in the University.

The TUC management became keenly aware of the challenges facing PWDs when ISMM planned for a conference of PWD at the University on September 26, 2014. The one-day conference entitled Persons with disabilities, a special gift to humanity brought together over 500 people with a wide variety of disabilities. Non-Governmental Organizations concerned with issues of disability collaborated in organizing the event, bringing experienced partners into the University. The facilities and environment of the University were not prepared for such a large gathering of PWDs.

This experience led ISMM to increase its advocacy in creating an enabling and welcoming environment for PWDs at the University. An alumnus of ISMM who is on staff at the University and is also a PWD helped develop a strategy to push for change. With the support of ISMM, this alumnus addressed different student forums on issues of PWDs, focusing on accessibility and mobility.

A major breakthrough for this advocacy occurred during Tangaza day (March 25 day of anunciation). The alumnus with disability addressed the entire
TUC community: all the students and staff, the college counsel, the Board of Trustee and the management. After the presentation, TUC formed an Advisory Committee to study the needs of PWDs and present suggestions for addressing them.

PWDs are special members of the “poor and marginalized” we seek to empower. ISMM believes that God’s redeeming initiative invites human participation and commitment, to side with the poor and marginalized in the promotion of human dignity, social justice and the common good. ISMM commits itself to untiring advocacy for PWDs at the college and in the entire country.

**Advocacy with National Council for PWD (NCPWD)**

ISMM has initiated a scholarship program to assist PWDs with furthering their education and independent living. The ISMM team has met with the NCPWD to advocate for access to education for PWDs. While details are still being worked out, there are strong indications that progress will be made to assist PWDs.

**Advocacy with the commission for the Revision of the Kenyan Constitution**

The process to re-write the constitution of Kenya began in 1999. In 2010, the second constitution of the country was formally voted in through referendum. TUC, through ISMM, contributed to this effort through their active participation in the meetings at the university chapel of St. Paul, in Nairobi.

The chairman of the commission, Yash Pal Ghai, listened to those advocating for formal inclusion of the protection of the rights of those living with disabilities in the revised constitution and Article 54 includes their concerns. This Article, Persons with Disabilities, and the Bill of Rights in Chapter 4 of the constitution, promote the rights of PWDs to attend educational institutions with accessible facilities; to have access to information, and; to be treated with dignity and respect by all.

This advocacy to include the protection of the rights and dignity of PWDs in the constitution is one of the most significant achievements of ISMM.
EUROPE

http://www.mappery.com/maps/Europe-Political-Map-2.mediumthumb.jpg
Sometimes, lobbying is like being caught in a vast cobweb, a mesh of people, policies and politics. At other times, it resembles a market place where influence is traded for status and sovereignty is traded for benefits to the common good. In the midst of this public forum there are opportunities to make progress for the promotion and protection of human rights. These welcome small steps help ensure the dignity of marginalized groups and contribute to the work for the common good of all humanity.

I got an early lesson on how to proceed with the task in 2009. I was a new apprentice and was looking for advice. Focus. Focus. Focus was the essence of a conversation I had with an experienced and wise Brother. This clarity has stayed with me over the past five and a half years. There are so many organisations, so many agendas and so many policies struggling for attention in the melting pot of Geneva that keeping one's mind on a single aim is a challenge.

The core of our advocacy effort is to secure space in our world for the voice of those living in poverty so that the dignity for all may flourish. VIVAT’s goal is to promote human rights for people everywhere and to make governments accountable. The principles of non-discrimination and equality are an essential part of any such attempt to improve the lives of people at the margins of today’s indifferent world. Keeping those principles at the forefront of our daily efforts is central to remaining focused.

But we need to turn these principles into a plan of action and ensure that we don’t complicate matters. The general statement needs to be translated into actions for equal rights for all.

Raising awareness among our members about patterns of human rights violations has been an important first step in the development of our advocacy. Reporting on how these abuses are dealt with at the human rights council in Geneva through reports, dialogues and resolutions is
linked to the work of promoting awareness. These monthly reports are sent to a wide international network of VIVAT members and individuals. Sharing information, as it becomes available, on specific countries with our contacts in these countries is another important part of the work.

We collaborate with other NGOs to augment our influence on the implementation of human rights in countries where VIVAT International has members. Two current examples of this collaboration are:

- participating in the inter-governmental working group of NGOs and government representatives to develop a Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, and
- participating in the work of the Committee on Enforced disappearances as it relates to VI member countries, and assisting those who wish to bring appropriate and reliable information about human rights violations to the attention of the ten Treaty Body Committees that monitor the implementation of human rights in countries around the world.

There are many ongoing discussions that take place within the United Nations (UN) at Geneva. Many of these debates are about developing human rights standards on individual topics, such as the right to development, or on the rights of peasants. The participants in these dialogues include representatives from States, NGOs and UN agencies. These meetings offer us an opportunity to make a positive contribution by providing information from our contacts in different regions.

We also share relevant information with colleagues on the ground about human rights. For example, we were able to inform and prepare our people in the Central African Republic for the recent visit of the Special Rapporteur to that country. “The situation in CAR seems to be at a crossroads, with positive initiatives, such as launching of national
consultations to prepare the Bangui forum on national reconciliation. At the same time, the security situation remains precarious and the threats and abuses persist, affecting the human rights of civilians and displaced populations who are awaiting better protection,” said the independent expert. We hope that they were able to link up with him during his visit. In a similar way, I send news and information about the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process and follow up this with individual reports on certain countries.

During sessions of the human rights council VIVAT, International develops joint statements and submissions on specific issues with like-minded groups. For instance, we worked with the Good Shepherd Sisters here in Geneva on the UPR report of El Salvador in 2014. We also submitted information to the country desk officer in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of prisons in Malawi in Jan 2015. The Comboni Missionaries and the Marists joined us in this work.

At the September 2014 session of the Human Rights Council I delivered a Statement on discrimination in West Papua, based on my visit to West Papua in the weeks preceding the September meeting. With participation from Franciscans International we wrote and submitted an urgent appeal about killings in West Papua to the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial and summary executions (Dec 2014).

We also provide support to the Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation contact persons of the founding, member and associate congregations of VIVAT International, many stationed in Rome. This support is extended to specific country offices or VIVAT International members as required, such as in Indonesia, India or the UK.

There are many challenges for those who work in the field of advocacy. Communications with people in the regions and individual countries is vital to our work and needs considerable attention if we want to be more effective. Our most significant contribution to the discussions at the UN is the reliable reporting of events and facts from our people who work closely with local communities, indigenous peoples and minorities.

From time to time we also receive encouragement and support from government representatives. A few years ago a Swiss diplomat reminded us that “You are the voice, the voice that is not usually heard.” He had an encouraging message for civil society, urging us to be active in the Council
Our Advent reflection booklets have been distributed around the world in hard-copy and electronically. The electronic version helped facilitate wider distribution because of the ease in forwarding it to more contacts. This work, which includes a description of the origins of VIVAT, has also helped promote the work of VIVAT at home in Ireland. We have used them especially among the young to raise consciousness and commitment in them. Our goal was to make complicated issues accessible to a wide variety of people, many of whom do not have much time to read and reflect on the issues. We sought to present the issue in an informational, attractive and prayerful manner hoping to inspire the readers to take action.

Preparing the booklet provided a wonderful opportunity for members of different congregations working in Dublin, and who are members of VIVAT, to collaborate on a joint project on behalf of those we serve. Studying and then writing about global issues deepened our understanding of important issues for our ministry. We are pleased to share the fruit of our labors with our collaborators in ministry.

While we have not been able to do a significant amount of grassroots advocacy regarding the specific causes of injustice in Ireland, we have helped raise awareness in ourselves and others regarding issues of injustice around us, including: migration; unemployment; begging on the streets; homelessness; addiction to alcohol and other drugs; the oppression of Christians; Asylum seekers; prisoner’s rights; and the needs of the elderly.

We are pleased that there is a growing commitment to addressing all of these issues by all sectors of society, religious and civil. While in the past it was solely Religious that addressed pressing social issues, it is encouraging to see that many groups in Ireland are now engaging with some or all of these issues.
I am committed as a Christian, as a missionary and as a citizen to have water declared a basic human right and its management a public trust. This pledge is shared by the Comboni Missionaries in Italy. Sadly, this right is being gravely threatened.

—As a Christian: because water is an ethical issue. We must ask ourselves: Is water a source of life or of profit? Is water a human right or simply an economic good and a commodity? For me, and also for Christian tradition, water is the mother and source of life. In *Just Water*, the American theologian Christiana Peppard states that the “Catholic Church resolutely asserts that water is a human right, indeed it says that water is a fundamental *right-to-life issue*”.

—As a missionary: because, if water becomes a source of financial gain, it can lead to the death of millions of people living in poverty. While fifty million people die each year from hunger, the privatization of water could lead to one hundred million people dying of thirst.

—As a citizen, because the commitment to public management of water is a commitment to democracy itself. Water and air are fundamental human rights that must be protected by societies.

The pressure on Italy and on the international community to privatize water is enormous. Multinational water companies like Veolia (formerly Vivendi), Ondeo (formerly Suez), Saur, etc., are seeking ways to control this very precious good to benefit private corporations. The corporations are astutely aware of the ever-increasing scarcity of water. Only 3% of the water on the planet is drinkable and the demand is ever increasing. Agriculture and industry, especially *agribusiness*, is using 2.7% of the available resource and the multinationals want to increase their share of potable water.
The basic human need for water is not being satisfied. Nearly 800 million people lack access to safe drinking water today. Scientists expect this number to grow, especially as global warming continues and we experience a minimum increase in global temperature of two degrees Celsius in the next 15-20 years. The result of this will be the melting of glaciers and snowfields, and less and less available fresh water. Heavily financed multinational corporations are racing to get control of water, the “blue gold” of the future.

Water is crucial to the life of the planet and to humanity. So the commitment to declare and secure the human right to water is a commitment to life in all its forms.

This is why, as missionaries, we are committed locally in Naples, nationally and at the European level on this issue.

A poignant example of the challenges we face is found in Naples, one of our areas of ministry. On 23 October, 2004, the 136 municipalities in the provinces of Naples and Caserta voted for the privatization of water. We created a Water Committee to challenge the resolution. Though we did not have the support of Trade Unions and had limited financial resources, we were able to repeal the resolution a year later. Our efforts were further ratified on 30 January, 2006, when the same municipalities that had voted to privatize water called for a vote to declare water a public good. Unfortunately, this never came to pass.

The Water Movement has become stronger in Naples and in Italy. We have succeeded in organizing at the municipal, provincial and regional level and have created the National Forum with a secretariat in Rome. We were able to write a Law through a popular initiative that had 400.000 signatures (2007). But despite this, on 6 August, 2008, the Italian Parliament approved article 23 bis of the Legislative Decree no. 112 of the then Minister of Economy G. Tremonti, which sanctioned that the management of water services was placed under the rules of the capitalist economy. In this way, the Italian Parliament decided that water was to be a commodity.
Along with the entire Water Movement, which had since grown in Italy, we rebelled against this decree. Together we decided that the only way we had to assert our cause, was that of a Referendum, that is, to appeal to the Italian people so that through the decree would be overruled by popular vote. We knew it would not be easy to bring at least 27 million Italians to vote on the issue of water. (In Italy, the referendum is valid only if the majority of those allowed to vote goes to the polls). It has been a tremendous effort done from the base, without financial backing, without access to the great mass media and with the major political parties opposing it.

On 12-13 June, 2011, twenty-seven million Italians went to the polls and a large majority voted on two referendum items: that water must be excluded from the business market, and that no profit could be made on the sale of water. The result was a true miracle that left everyone amazed. However the positive vote in favour of water rights did not move the Italian political world. The vote of the people did not lead to corresponding parliamentary legislation. This is due in part to the domination of the political parties by strong financial-economic powers who see water as “blue gold”.

We continued to put pressure on the government through grassroots initiatives. After obtaining 400,000 signatures the Parliament felt compelled to respond to the cries of the people and the referendum issues have become Law in Italy.

Buoyed by the success of this initiative, we continued to put pressure on our City of Naples, to force it to comply with the result of the Referendum. The new mayor of Naples, L. De Magistris, has turned ARIN SPA, which previously managed the water services in Naples, into ABC (Acqua-Bene-Comune, that is, Water as a Common Good), a Special Agency. The fundamental shift is having a non-profit oriented company manage the city’s water in place of a market based profit-oriented company. More than two years of intense lobbying and petitioning the mayor brought about this change. On 9 March, 2015, the City Council of Naples voted in the Statute ABC and, by a contract, entrusted the water of Naples to ABC for 30 years.
Naples is the only major city in Italy courageous enough to challenge the economic policies of the current government and adhere to the Referendum. The Mayor appointed M. Montalto, a lawyer who had closely worked with the Water committees, as President of the ABC. The first initiative of ABC was to remove all authority over unpaid bills from Equitalia. Next, they allocated 1% of the profits to provide funding to dig wells in countries of the South to provide water for their needy populations. Finally, President Montalto permitted the Water committees of Naples to participate in the CDA (Board of Directors) of the Special Agency. This process of democratic participation on an issue as vital as water is crucial.

Without financial backing from powerful organizations and without political parties we were able to mobilize people to fight for a right that is so vital for the future of humanity.

We stake everything on water. It is a matter of life and death, especially for people who live in poverty due to systemic injustice.
East Asia

[Map of East Asia showing countries and geographical features]

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Equality, No Castes

VIVAT International India’s Participation in the Struggle in Defense of Human Rights of Dalit Christians in India

Fr. Roy Thomas SVD,
VIVAT International India

Christians in India have been demanding that the Presidential Order of 1950 which denies equal rights to Christians and Muslims of Dalit origin be rescinded. In 1950, the Indian government established a quota system for jobs in education and government in favor of Hindu Dalits. These statutory privileges were later extended to Sikh Dalits in 1956 and Buddhist Dalits in 1990. However, the repeated requests of the Christian Dalits, nearly two thirds of the 27 million Christians in India, have gone unanswered. The continued denial of equal rights for Muslims and Christians simply because of their religious beliefs contradicts the nation’s constitution.

On Wednesday, December 1st, 2013, more than 3,000 Dalit Christians and Muslims from all over the country staged a protest at Jantar Mantar in India’s Capital, New Delhi. They demanded the immediate implementation of the recommendations of the Ranganath Misra Commission granting them Scheduled Caste status. The demonstration was organized by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, the National Council of Churches in India and the National Council of Dalit Christians.

Members of VIVAT International, India participated in the protest rally showing our solidarity with the struggles of Dalit Christians in attaining their constitutional rights. From its first days, VIVAT International has committed itself to...
advocacy for the Constitutional Rights of Dalit Christians. Through our networking efforts in different dioceses we were able to mobilize priests, nuns and lay people to participate in this struggle.

The protest began at 10:00am at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. Many eminent personalities and leaders in the community including bishops, priests, nuns, representatives from various Christian denominations, Muslim Dalit groups, political parties and others spoke about the constitutional rights of Dalit Christians. At 12:00 noon the people marched towards the parliament holding placards and shouting slogans. Hundreds of protesters from across India broke through police barricades and marched to Parliament shouting “We want justice.” On the way the crowd was detained and police began beating up several protesters with batons. Many people were badly injured and some were admitted to the hospital. Undeterred, the protesters, including Catholic priests in cassocks, knelt on the road with crosses in their hands. A police truck armed with water cannons sprayed them with muddy water several times, hoping to disperse them. Later, around 2:00pm, nearly 400 protesters were arrested and taken to the Police station at Parliament Street.

At the police station, the crowd, including Bishops, Priests and Nuns, continued to stage a protest. The protest organizers insisted that they would not leave the place until the Prime Minister gave them an appointment to meet them and hear their demands. At 5:15pm, Prime Minister Mr. Manmohan Singh agreed to meet the leaders at 11:00am the following day, the 12th of December 2013. The people dispersed after spending more than three and half hours in the police station without food.

True to his word, on 12th December 2013 at 11:00am Mr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India, met the ten member delegation led by Delhi Archbishop Anil Couto. He listened to the demands of the Dalit Christians and accepted their memorandum. The Prime Minister apologized to the church leaders for the police beating of the protesters, among them priests and nuns. He assured the delegation that he would present the issue of the rights of Dalit Christians to the Cabinet to get their consent to guarantee the rights of Christian Dalits.

Members of VIVAT International, India, in solidarity with Dalit Christians in India, will continue to support their struggles until they fully attain their Constitutional Rights.
Most labor migrants we are in contact with in India work in construction, domestic service, textile and brick manufacturing, transportation, mining and quarrying, and agriculture. This is consistent with the research findings in many countries that migrants are often forced to work in areas that others do not want to: the dirty, dangerous, demeaning and often deadly jobs.

Children are among the most exploited migrant workers. What follows is the story of two boys from the Kumarpada slum in Rourkela-Odisha. They were promised a good job outside Odisha but found themselves sold to someone - one in Delhi and the other in Punjab.

In 2003, Sanjay, a 15 year old boy had gone with some other boys to Punjab. Once they reached the city they were separated and sent to different places for work. Sanjay never saw his companions again. For 12 years he endured a painful journey in an unknown place, with unfamiliar people and culture. After many struggles and with much difficulty he returned to his home on March 8th 2015.

Surej Bagwar, a 16 years old boy had gone to Delhi on 10th March 2015 and was immediately sold to someone there. He was forced to work day and night with no pay and without adequate or healthy food. He was forbidden to go out or to talk to anyone outside. He knew he had to escape the situation. After careful planning, Surej escaped and returned to his home on 27th March 2015. Though his captivity lasted only 15 days, he felt it was a time of agony and intense pain. During his captivity, Surej’s mother found it enormously difficult to trace her son, even after filing a First Information Report (FIR). The domestic workers FORUM became involved in the search, but they told Surej’s mother that there was little hope of finding her son.

However, Surej escaped his captives by himself, with the help of the police and Train Ticket Examiner (TTE) in Delhi he returned safely home.
Mining exploitation has become a major concern of JPIC-VIVAT members in Indonesia. Our commitment intensified when the villagers of Tumbak in East Manggarai Regency, West Flores had a nightmarish experience caused by a mining conflict 11-13 September 2014. Company cars and excavators from PT. Aditya Bumi Pertambangan entered their collective lands of Lingko Roga to mine manganese. The farmers protested and fought against the company, blocking the access roads to the company cars and excavators. Some 35 villagers of Tumbak, including women, formed a living fence to block the vehicles from entering the land. It was reported that some mothers made a bare-chested symbolic act of protest in the defense of their rights to their own collective lands. Land grabbing by the mining company had to be stopped.

However, the local Manggarai police supported the company. They intimidated the simple people, saying: “If you continue blocking the road, then tomorrow you will be faced with a huge wall.” The “huge wall” meant a large security force of police and national army members would arrive to keep security and protect the vital assets of the mining company.

On September 13, 2014, the chief of the Local Police of Manggarai District deployed nearly 20 police officers to guard company cars and heavy equipment. The police armed themselves with 5 rifles and 8 gas water cannons and two security cars. The villagers once again tried to block the road from the company cars. They were joined by Fr. Simon Suban SVD, JPIC coordinator of SVD Ruteng Province and a member of VIVAT International-Indonesia. He was assaulted by a policeman who...
roughly pulled his arms and pounded his stomach until he fell down and left unconscious for almost an hour. Additionally, some villagers and the SVD JPIC staff were physically and verbally assaulted by security forces. Some were beaten, while others were kicked with boots or pierced with wooden sticks. A policeman chased a seminarian who was videotaping and photographing the tention between the security forces and the villagers.

Mass Rally against Mining Operations

On October 13, 2014, 1,500 people simultaneously led a peaceful protest against mining in the three cities of Ruteng, Borong and Labuan Bajo, in the whole district of Manggarai. “We demand that the local government stop all mining activities, revoke all mining business licenses (IUP), and no longer issue new mining permits in the district,” said Father Simon Suban Tukan SVD.

The simultaneous action was organized by the Catholic Church of Ruteng Diocese in Manggarai. The recent Synod of Ruteng Diocese strongly recommended that mining operations in the whole district of Manggarai be stopped immediately because it did not provide economic benefits to the community in Manggarai. Moreover, mining had destroyed the peoples’ forest, contaminated the drinking water and drained water sources. Additionally, mining corporations triggered social tensions and destroyed many cultural and sacred sites of the local people.
Advocacy and Networking

On September 25, 2014 Fr. Simon Suban SVD wrote to the secretariat of VIVAT Indonesia asking them to lead an advocacy initiative to help settle the mining case in Tumbak. “Based on a petition of the people of Tumbak in 2008 and which, until now has never been revoked, I ask VIVAT Indonesia as a legal entity of which the SVD Ruteng Province has become a member, and I am on its executive board, to jointly undertake a further advocacy nationally and internationally.”

VIVAT Indonesia responded immediately by coordinating meetings and activities with a number of civil society groups working in Jakarta. The civil society organizations (CSOs) established a solidarity group against mining: “the National Solidarity Forum (NSF) for NTT People”. The members are: VIVAT Indonesia, Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), Alliance of Nusantara Indigenous Peoples (PPMAN), Anti-Mining Network (JATAM), The Institute for Ecosoc Rights, AMAN, Huma, Inter-Organizational Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID), PADMA Indonesia, JPIC OFM, PMKRI, FKM Flobamora, KOMMAS Ngada and Formadda NTT.

The first action of the NSF Group was to lobby state agencies, The Indonesian National Commission for Human Rights (KOMNAS HAM) and Ombudsman. The Forum urged the KOMNAS HAM to investigate
the case to discern if the local police were involved in a serious violation of the human rights of the villagers.

Next, the Forum held a peaceful protest in Jakarta on October 13, 2014. This was held in conjunction with the mass rally against mining in the whole district of Manggarai organized by the Catholic Church of Ruteng Diocese. The protest targeted the KOMNAS HAM and the headquarters of the Indonesian National Police.

NSF urged KOMNAS HAM to expose any violations against human rights committed by the local police. In addition, the national CSO Forum asked the Head of the Indonesian National Police to conduct a legal investigation of the alleged involvement of the local police officers in acts of violence and intimidation against the people of Tumbak and the SVD JPIC staff.

Finally, the national CSO groups issued a statement urging the local authorities of Manggarai District to revoke all mining licenses in Manggarai District. The statement was publicly announced through a press conference and disseminated to the print and electronic media through both national and local newspapers. In the meantime, the national secretariat of VIVAT Indonesia is continuing to monitor the situation on the ground through regular communication with Fr. Simon and the contact persons of Tumbak community (village).

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**Prayer**

Loving God, You have created everything we need for life on earth, you water its furrows abundantly, you settle its ridges, you soften it with showers, you bless its growth. (Ps.65:10). Help us to appreciate the gift of water, cleanse our hearts of greed so that all creation, everywhere, may share in this life-giving resource of water. This we ask through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.
NORTH AMERICA

http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_VLS94oj0rVc/TPL2WGCajiI/AAAAAAAAAC4/8RxE95wnbtQ/s1600/of-north-america.jpg
Soon after I arrived in New Jersey and began collaborating with the executive team of VIVAT’s New York Office, I was invited to attend the New York meetings of the Control Arms Coalition that was working to bring about a meaningful Arms Trade Treaty that would save lives. Such a treaty would have to give priority to humanitarian goals.

With other members of the coalition I was privileged to be present at many of the preparatory committees and the official negotiating sessions at the UN as the UN member states were creating the various drafts of the treaty.

I was saddened to see that my country, the USA, consistently tried to make the treaty primarily a commercial one to legitimize trade in weapons. It tried to severely limit the treaty’s scope in a way that would reduce its humanitarian impact, to remove binding language in many of the treaty’s clauses, and required a very large number of states (50) to sign and ratify the treaty before it would go into effect.

I witnessed the power of numerous smaller nations, acting in concert, to offset the political influence of the more powerful and wealthy nations. They moved the proceedings on arms control to the UN General Assembly after the consensus procedure that the USA imposed on the negotiating states failed.

The General Assembly then moved quickly to approve the treaty and the Control Arms Coalition helped to gather the required signatures and ratifications within a year.
In my life, being involved with VIVAT International (VI) has meant a huge change in my JPIC vision. Previously it had been an important missionary activity. Afterwards in Rome, due to my duty of presenting the JPIC issues to my congregation, JPIC became a perspective from which to read the Gospel and human history today. Besides, getting involved in Land Grabbing was going back to my peasant roots. I recovered and re-read many childhood memories. I began to understand better many African conflicts in which I had been personally involved or about which I had written as a journalist. I could relate to what many refugees experience when they are forced to flee their land. But above all, it seemed to me that “land” was becoming the key to understanding all the conflicts that are going on today. Issues around mining, water, forests or fishing all have land as a background. Having lived with the
pygmies for a few years, I have the impression that society is going back
to their outlook: land doesn’t matter at all. What matters are the goods
you find on land? The most important thing is to have the rights to the
land, and it does not matter how this happens. That perception brought
me to initiate a Land Group at the UN. We committed ourselves to
explore, research and prepare a training program on how to counteract
land grabbing. I also reorganized my blog to give primary space and
importance to the issue of land grabbing.

These activities brought me into contact with some NGOs involved in
the same issue, led me to organize a group of volunteer collaborators,
and to give 5 training sessions on the land grabbing issue in Peru, and 2
in Guatemala. The first -contacts with NGOs showed me that even in this
field there are no faith-based NGOs. Unlike FIAN and Via Campesina,
very few NGOs are interested in the Indigenous Peoples’ or peasants’
lives. Their work is just an activity to support themselves. The group of
collaborators showed me how civil society is responsive to JPIC issues
and especially to the land grabbing issue. But I also found that they
were ignorant of the implications of land grabbing for their own lives.
Finally, the training convinced me that the main task we who work on
JPIC issues have is to ensure capacity building and the empowerment of
people, especially youth and women, who are involved in and/or affected
by those problems on which we work.

**VIVAT International** shares a vision of the world and of every
human being as created in goodness and dignity, and believing,
defending and proactively supporting the equality in rights
and in dignity of all individuals, peoples and cultures, VIVAT’s
presence at UN envisages attaining a world of equality, justice,
reconciliation, peace and care of the environment.

*May this Vision be realized… As we move forward…*