



Pax Scotia

Issue 56

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Feeling the Power of Active Nonviolence

Martha Inés Romero was appointed Secretary General of Pax Christi International in 2023, having served the organisation for over 15 years. She is also the regional coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean. Ahead of the events celebrating the 80th anniversary of Pax Christi International in Brussels, she travelled from Columbia at the beginning of March, spent three interesting days with Pax Christi England and Wales, then a packed 13 days with Pax Christi Scotland. Here she reflects on that time with us.

I want to share with you my reflections as a woman, coming from the Global South, with the responsibility and commitment to serve the global Catholic peace movement as Secretary General.

Although the international cooperation arena is full of methodologies for measuring impact, effects or results of those actions related to the social work, I prefer to measure my visit to Scotland through the lens of compassion, political will, and love.

When you find a group of peace builders, guided by the Gospel of Jesus and His experiences in confronting injustices and oppression, and guided by prophetic Catholic teachings on the need to be coherent and act according to the ethical values for the common good, even though it is happening far from their homes, there you feel compassion... in their souls and in their hearts.

I saw this reflected in the event at Glasgow University with the theology department. I saw it in the young students at the parliamentary reception with SCIAF, Justice & Peace and Pax Christi Scotland - and this was put into context to better understand the root causes and the consequences for those in the Global South who are suffering injustices, violence and exclusion.

Confronting decision-makers at political scenarios such as at the Scottish Parliament, I saw our members

working with energy, identifying allies and stakeholders at different levels, trying to change systems with the power of their ethical values, promoting institutions and power structures for policies - and practices - for institutional cooperation with others, based on the respect of human and nature's rights.

Being at Faslane with Catholic Workers, Justice & Peace and Pax Christi Scotland for the Ash Wednesday vigil. there in the heart of UK's nuclear submarine base, I could testify to the profound spirituality of these peace makers who live, working without rest, to advocate for a world free of nuclear and other weapons... there, I could feel their political will, as citizens, pushing for policies based on humanity.

With faith leaders at the Interreligious Dialogue Symposium, listening to each other to understand and identify joint efforts for social cohesion, peace and justice, I understood that nothing happens if we don't understand the intrinsic relationship between *our* lives and *other's* lives, *our* faith and *other* faiths. The strategic way we connect with the other, accompanying people at the peripheries - physically or remotely — then, we can feel the power of active nonviolence, as an expression of love in action.

With gratitude to Pax Christi Scotland members for your special invitation and your dedication for the success of the visit! Thanks to the Xaverian Missionaries, for the hospitality at their house. After our beautiful gathering at the Chapel for Europe for the launch of our Pax Christi International 80th Anniversary, I am ready to continue to serve - and ready to go back to my loved ones in Colombia, a land of beauty and hope! Gracias!!

Martha Inés Romero



Prudent – or Prud - Zihaliirwa is a young Congolese entrepreneur specialising in digital communication and marketing. He's passionate about digital technology, & he's committed to promoting human rights, education, and internet governance. As Youth Ambassador for the Panzi Foundation, he works to promote social justice and amplify the voices of vulnerable communities. Here he reflects on the ever-worsening conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo...

Prud Zihaliirwa



The Conflict the World has Ignored

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been embroiled in a complex and multifaceted conflict for decades, with roots tracing back to colonial times and exacerbated by recent political and economic factors. I want to look at the historical context, the role of natural resources, foreign intervention, and the humanitarian crisis that has engulfed the country, particularly affecting cities like Goma. The DRC's borders were drawn by European colonial powers, grouping diverse ethnic groups together, which has led to ongoing ethnic tensions. The colonial practice of "divide and rule" exacerbated these tensions, creating long-lasting rivalries and grievances. The legacy of colonialism continues to influence the political landscape, with many groups seeking greater autonomy or control over resources.

In the late 1990s, Laurent-Désiré Kabila rose to power with the support of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo AFDL, backed by Rwanda and Uganda. This alliance successfully ousted Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997 but soon found itself at odds with its former allies. The tensions between Kabila and his backers led to the outbreak of the Second Congo War in 1998, drawing in several neighbouring countries and further destabilising the region.

The DRC is rich in valuable minerals such as cobalt, copper, diamonds, gold, coltan, and tin. The exploitation of these resources has been a significant driver of prolonged conflicts between groups. Armed groups, including the M23, have used control over these resources to finance their operations. The desire to exploit these resources has attracted foreign interests, contributing to the instability in the region.

Foreign intervention, particularly from neighbouring countries like

Rwanda and Uganda, has played a significant role in the conflict. Rwanda's involvement is often linked to its desire to secure strategic territory and exploit the DRC's mineral resources. The M23, a Rwanda-backed rebel group, has been instrumental in recent violence, particularly in the eastern DRC. *Goma, a city in the North Kivu province, has been severely affected. The city fell under M23 control, leading to chaos and terror, with significant civilian casualties, destruction of infrastructure, and a severe humanitarian crisis.*

Hospitals are overwhelmed, food is scarce, and essential services like banking and air travel have been disrupted.

There is a severe humanitarian crisis, with millions displaced and widespread human rights abuses reported. Organisations like Médecins Sans Frontières are working to provide aid, but their efforts are insufficient given the scale of the crisis.

Despite the severity of the crisis, the international community has been criticised for its lack of decisive action. The United Nations and regional organisations like the Southern African Development Community SADC have failed to impose a lasting solution. This inaction highlights the fragility of international security systems and the inefficiency of humanitarian interventions.

The situation in Goma and the broader DRC demands urgent attention from the global community. The world must acknowledge the suffering of the Congolese people and takes concrete steps to address the conflict. Only solidarity and consistent support can break the cycle of violence and allow the Congolese to rebuild their future.

The conflict in the DRC is a result of historical political tensions, ethnic divisions, and the exploitation of natural resources. We ask that the international community recognise the gravity of this situation and act decisively to prevent further suffering. Only through collective action can we hope to bring peace and stability to the region.

Key Minerals in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Cobalt; copper, diamonds, gold, coltan, tantalite, tin.

These resources have attracted foreign interests, contributing to the instability in the region.

The Role of the M23 and Rwanda

The M23, supported by Rwanda, has been a major force in the recent violence in the DRC. Rwanda's involvement is driven by a desire to control the DRC's mineral resources and secure strategic territory. This has led to significant human rights abuses and displacement of civilians.

Economic Impact

The conflict has severely impacted the local economy, disrupting trade and investment. Rebuilding economic infrastructure is crucial for long-term stability. This involves investing in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing, which can provide employment opportunities and stimulate growth.

Conclusion

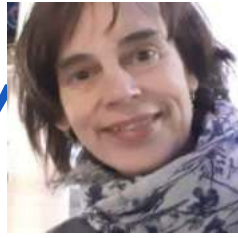
There is need for political reforms, for humanitarian aid, and for international cooperation. The conflict in the DRC is a complex issue requiring a multifaceted approach. By understanding the historical context, addressing the exploitation of natural resources, and supporting political reforms, we can work towards a more stable future for the Congolese people. It is crucial that the international community remains committed to finding a lasting solution to this crisis.

Prud Zihaliirwa



June Graham is a former climate scientist. She has worked at world-leading climate institutes such as Environment & Climate Change Canada and the University of Bern, Switzerland. While in Switzerland, a chance encounter led to the discovery of **The Bern Book** and a friendship with Vincent O. Carter's partner, Liselotte Haas. Returning to Scotland, June has held positions in Gaelic language development. She was awarded a Scottish Book Trust New Writers Award in 2019, leading to the publication of her Gaelic children's book *An Cat Coigreach* in 2024. Since 2020 June has been working on a biography of Vincent O. Carter for which she has received financial support from Creative Scotland and mentoring support through her local arts centre. And she's a Pax Christi Scotland member...

Racism's Legacy - Time for Change



June Graham

You know something has gone badly wrong when the distinguished speaker at a conference is struggling to hold down his emotion as he delivers his keynote address. The conference was 'Unveiling the Legacy: Race, Identity and Social Justice in the works of Vincent O. Carter', the location was Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, where Carter earned an English degree, and the speaker was Jesse McCarthy, a Harvard professor of English and African American studies.

Nothing was wrong with any if this. What was wrong was the context. We were meeting to discuss the work of a black author shortly after many federal institutions cancelled Black History Month. At the conference dinner on the previous evening, Lincoln's President, Brenda A. Allen, read part of a letter she had received from the Department of Education which alleged that *'educational institutions have toxically indoctrinated students with the false premise that the United States is built upon "systemic and structural racism"*. The letter went on to invoke the 1964 Civil Rights act to support its claim that universities and colleges are discriminating against white and Asian students on the basis of race.

After expressing her pleasure that we were able to celebrate the life and work of a black author, while we still could, Dr. Allen left us to reflect on this claim. Although the purpose of the letter was to shut down university DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) schemes, there is a very real threat that programmes of African American study could be targeted. In 2023, Florida's Republican governor, Ron de Santis, removed African American studies from high school classrooms.

When Vincent O. Carter was growing up in Kansas City in the 30's and 40's, Jim Crow attitudes prescribed separate schools for white and black students. Blacks were generally blocked from better paid jobs meaning that his parents worked 45 to 70 hours a week and barely managed to break even. Without reference to racism, how can we explain Carter's experience in the segregated US army during WW2, or his joy when the people of Barfleure in Normandy greeted him and other black soldiers as heroes? His

decision to return to Europe in 1953, eventually settling in Bern, Switzerland, was motivated by a desire to see his home country clearly so that he could write about it, something he felt unable to do when continually confronted with racial injustice.

During the conference at Lincoln, students related events in Vincent O. Carter's autobiographical novel 'Such Sweet Thunder', set in Kansas City in the 20's to 40's, to events in their own lives and communities. Topics which resonated included gun violence, the strength of the black community, black male identity and trauma.

In his keynote speech, Jesse McCarthy described the obliteration of the area in which Vincent O. Carter had grown up to make way for a highway. This motivated Carter to write a vibrant novel, which sings like a jazz tune, describing the daily lives of the black people who once lived there. A professor from Lincoln was in tears afterwards as she spoke about how important it was that black people's stories were recorded in this way.

One of Lincoln's librarians told me that, despite being the oldest historically black university, Lincoln still lags behind historically white colleges in terms of its reputation and the funding it can attract. Racism's legacy is still far from being a level playing field.

I left Lincoln with new insights into how Vincent O. Carter's work speaks to people today and the realisation that I can't just research his life with the impartiality of an outside observer. Writing about his life is teaching me to care deeply about what is currently happening to African Americans and all people of colour worldwide.

June Graham

Our website

Blogs, podcasts, the book project, past and future events – these are all on our Pax Christi Scotland website. All newsletters are archived there. You can pay your annual membership fee on the Membership page and make donations. Please explore and share:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Continued thanks to webmaster Chris Boles of Caledonian Websites:

<https://www.caledonianwebsites.com/>

Membership Reminder

Please pay in **November** on the membership page of our website, or, if you pay by online banking, please give your name to identify your payment.

If you wish to pay by cheque, send to the address below, cheques payable to Pax Christi Scotland.

You can also make regular donations on our 'donate' page or by standing order - thank you.

Membership fees per annum are £10 for waged, £5 for unwaged.

Explore the website for all our activities:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Where to find Pax Christi Scotland:

<http://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

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YouTube Channel

You can find recordings of all our events at:

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Click on the word 'Subscribed' and you will be informed whenever a new recording is posted.

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Martha Inés Romero-Pax Christi International Secretary General's Scottish Visit

Valuable, inspiring, insightful, emotional - and sometimes just plain fun! That was the whirlwind Scottish visit of Martha Inés Romero, Pax Christi International Secretary General at the beginning of March and of Lent.

You can read her own reflection on the visit on Page 1. You can see what happened with Pax Christi England and Wales in the three days before her 12 days in Scotland at <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/51825> and <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/51825>, and of course you can see the diary of her time in Scotland on our website (my sincere thanks to webmaster Chris Boles for adding material every step of the way) at <https://www.paxchristiscotland.org/secretary-generals-visit/> and <https://www.paxchristiscotland.org/secretary-general-in-scotland/>.

As her 'roadie', I was able to enjoy her company every day. Every day brought very special moments. Our Pax Christi Scotland retreat at the Xaverian centre in Coatbridge (home to Martha Inés and I for the duration of the visit - our sincere thanks) was of great value and we will be sharing the plans developed there in the weeks ahead. We hope that you will join us in carrying forward our work for a nonviolent world.

The words 'Thank you' seem very inadequate - our prayers are with

Martha Inés as she returns home to Colombia. *Marian Pallister*



Above left: Glasgow University Theology Department. **Above right:** Ash Wednesday Vigil, Faslane

Below left: Interreligious Dialogue Symposium with Bishop Brian McGee, Bishop President of the Scottish Bishops Interreligious Dialogue Committee. **Below right** with fellow speakers Maureen Sier & Ravinder Kaur Nijjar at the Interreligious Dialogue Symposium. More photos on the website.



The Pax Christ Scotland Book Project - the update

The Catholic Nonviolence initiative published *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace within the Church and the World* in 2020. The text explores how the Church can return to the tradition of Gospel nonviolence and, in doing so, enrich the world.

Pax Christ Scotland launched our online monthly reading group last November to study this inspirational text, led by Anna Blackman. The recording of each meeting can be accessed on our website (<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org/book-project/>). Don't miss our last two sessions in April & May.

Register at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/pax-christi-scotland-tickets-1041817703797?aff=oddtcreator>

Step 2: Eventbrite will send you the link to the Zoom meeting. Sign up for all events or singly. All the information is also on our website (<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>)