

Passionists International: Oral Presentation to 50<sup>th</sup> Session, Commission for Social Development.

**Agenda Item 3 (c) Emerging issues: youth: poverty and unemployment.**

- We are dealing with a truly global crisis
- The neo-liberal consensus has failed to deliver on its promise of economic ‘freedom’. The young, who are always touted as the carriers of our future, are the ones to suffer the most. From los Indignados in Spain, who remind us of the 50% of young Spaniards now without work, to the Occupy movements that have sprouted in New York, London and many cities around the world, and, despite efforts of the law to make them invisible, refuse to go away, to the villagers in Guangdong, China, who protest land-grabs by the government, a multi-national wave of discontented citizens are venting their anger about the ways in which the system has failed them. They all remind us of how the causes of the present crisis are interconnected.
- The Sunday Observer, in its January 29<sup>th</sup> editorial, says: “A growing body of research suggests that yawning inequality isn't just a moral and political question – it's an economic one.” The credit bubble of the past two decades is now being seen for what it really is! It helped consumers in the US and Europe to prop up their high standard of life even as real wages declined relentlessly; The resulting legacy of debt and alienation will now take many years to work off.
- *Youth, jobs and policies aimed at undoing inequality and building greater social inclusion* are the ingredients for a true global recovery and important steps towards a just and fair globalisation. Domestically, new, progressive taxation and adjustment of benefits to favour people living in poverty, will help redress the creeping inequality that destroys the health of any economy. A major step forward will be achieved by endorsing and implementing a social Protection Floor that is adapted to the unique reality of each country.
- It is time to rethink the orthodoxy that assumes government austerity programmes will create more demand in the market and, so, lead us out of the maze. Massive amounts of budgetary resources must

be directed to job creation for young adults. In the absence of opportunity for our young people, we are sowing the seeds of even deeper discontent. A balanced budget seems far less urgent than is the growing of the real economy.

- **Youth, jobs, policies of social inclusion:** A tiny microcosm of how these ingredients can bring about change can be seen in one of our Passionist projects<sup>1</sup> where Father Antonio Rodriguez Lopez Tercero is responding to the gangs in the colonia of "Mejicanos" in San Salvador. Gang violence is a defining feature of life in El Salvador today. During the civil war of the 1980s our Passionist Parish of San Francisco de Asís was the center of resistance in the area: some of our catechists were killed; bombs were lobbed in our vicinity. Today's problems are rooted in gang activity - a product of the return of many Salvadoreños deported from the United States back to El Salvador. They learned gang culture well in the States, and are now living it in all of its violence in El Salvador. So Antonio works among the gang members who are in prison and those now released back into a bleak social outlook. By offering, first of all, friendship, small financial support and the opportunity to learn practical skills, he challenges the hopelessness of lives shaped by gang behaviour in Guatemala and destined for sadness by offering constructive employment training and alternatives. The project is slowly changing the culture by offering young men the chance to find some dignity beyond the false machismo that membership in the violent world of the gangs offers.
- By enabling them to believe in themselves through provision of training for such decent employment as bakers, carpenters etc., and not merely through handouts, a quiet but dramatic change in the culture of the Mejicanos colonia is taking place. A small amount of financial resource, belief in the dignity of each person and a commitment to fairness can transform the bleakest environments.

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<sup>1</sup> Video link: [Witness - Witness: Life in San Salvador](#)