



Peace Advocate News

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Matthew 5:9*

Peace begins when you make your peace with Jesus, accept Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord.

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The Rohingya

The Tale of a Stateless People



The Rohingya are a Muslim minority group in Myanmar (formerly Burma). Myanmar is a predominantly Buddhist country and, despite the fact that Burma has been home to the Rohingya for centuries, Myanmar will not recognize the Rohingya

as an official ethnic group. Myanmar has claimed the Rohingya are really from Bangladesh¹. Since 1982, Myanmar has denied citizenship to the Rohingya and did not even count them in their last census. This makes the Rohingya the largest stateless population in the world.



“Stateless people” are people denied nationality by the countries where they live and where their ancestors have lived, often for centuries. This refusal to grant them citizenship means stateless people are denied basic rights including education, healthcare, freedom of movement, the ability to get a job, have a bank account, buy a house, or even get married. These people are not given birth certificates when they are born or death certificates when they die meaning they have no legal standing at all.

“A significant cause of statelessness is discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language or gender.” (The UN Refugee Agency) In the U.S. and the British Commonwealth, being born in the country makes you a citizen regardless of the citizenship status of your parents. There are also criteria by which someone, not born in the country, may acquire citizenship.

In most other places, citizenship depends on the citizenship of your parents. In some countries, a person can become a citizen by marrying a citizen. In some countries women cannot pass citizenship to their children even if men can.

In addition to discrimination-based government decisions, changes in the borders between countries, the lack of documentation as to one’s parents and birth place (as when governments do not grant birth certificates or official marriage records to excluded people), even a long absence from home, are factors that can cause a person to become stateless. Where place of birth does not determine citizenship, children of stateless people often have no possibility of acquiring citizenship for themselves or their children, which traps them in a kind of limbo. Even migration is difficult because of the lack of papers. Nearly all stateless people are from minority groups, meaning discrimination is often the key factor in statelessness.

As is true for the Rohingya, statelessness denies people basic rights including the basic protections of law generally provided to citizens. This makes them very vulnerable to exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence, and abuse of all kinds. The Rohingya have been the victims of violence, persecution, and discrimination for decades.

In 2017 a major wave of violence against the Rohingya began, forcing the largest number of these vulnerable people ever to flee their homes. Entire



villages were burned to the ground, thousands of families were killed or separated, and massive human rights violations against them have been reported. Since 2017 more than 700,000 Rohingya, half of them children, have crossed the border into Bangladesh to seek refuge with thousands of Rohingya who had already fled. There are now some 980,000 Rohingya refugees and asylum-seekers in neighboring countries – approximately 919,000 in two huge refugee camps (the largest in the world) in Bangladesh, some 92,000 in Thailand, 21,000 in India, and more in Indonesia, Nepal, and other countries. As the violence against the Rohingya continues, more than 1.1 million are displaced within Myanmar as well.

The country of Bangladesh, to which many Rohingya have fled, is itself poor and prone to flooding and food insecurity. The monsoon season, which runs from June through October, has been particularly bad the last couple years causing massive flooding and the dislocation of thousands of people, including some of the Rohingya refugees. Hunger and disease are a constant problem in the refugee camps where living conditions are very poor. Thousands of Rohingya children know no other life than that of living in flimsy temporary shelters in refugee camps. Fire in the camps is a constant threat, destroying what little people have and leaving them with no shelter². Many have no hope of anything better. Even if there was a way for them to leave the camps, there is nowhere for them to go. . . Most are too afraid to return to Myanmar without the protections of citizenship even if they were allowed to. Plus, their villages in Myanmar have been destroyed and their land taken over by the government. The U.N. and humanitarian groups are trying to help, but the problems are daunting.



¹ Myanmar also claims the Rohingya are dangerous insurgents they are fighting. The UN has said the treatment of the Rohingya by Myanmar is genocide.

² Fire in one of the camps in Bangladesh March 5th destroyed some 2,000 makeshift shelters, schools, a food center, and latrines. 12,000 people were displaced.

See [Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained \(unrefugees.org\)](http://RohingyaRefugeeCrisisExplained.unrefugees.org)

Guns and Schools

The rate of gun ownership in the U.S. is higher than in any of the other developed nations in the world. The U.S. also has the highest number of gun deaths, and the highest number of school shootings in the world. In 2021 the U.S. outdid itself with a record number of school shootings in any year since 1970. According to the K-12 School Shooting Database, there were 249 incidents including active shooter cases and times in which a gun was drawn but no shots were fired (The Christian Science Monitor Weekly, 6-13-2022). Research shows there are some common threads in these incidents. Most school shooters were bullied and left warning signs before using a gun in a school.

Learning this, Nicole Hockey and Mark Barden, the parents of two of the children killed in the Sandy Hook school shooting, started Sandy Hook Promise just months after that shooting. As part of their work, they have started two programs, "Start with Hello" for K-12 students and "Say Something" for students, grades six and up. The group's efforts have prevented at least nine school shootings and almost 300 suicides. "Start with Hello" teaches K-12 students how to start conversations with other children, and how to recognize when a classmate may be feeling isolated and need a friend. The "Say Something" program for

students grades 6-12, teaches young people how to recognize possible warning signs peers may show if they are thinking about violence, and tells them how to report their concerns to school staff.

The idea is that when schools are welcoming places where everyone feels included and valued, children are happier and schools are safer. Schools using Sandy Hook Promises programs are hoping they will help achieve this kind of atmosphere. Some schools found these programs did help as children returned to in-person classes following COVID closures. After extended isolation which meant limited social interactions with other children, students needed to relearn or remember the value of community. They needed to be reminded that everyone has a role to play in creating a community of inclusion and caring as they returned to school.

Studies are underway to understand if and how well these programs are working. Some children report feeling empowered and more confident because Sandy Hook Promise programs give them tools that help them know what to do when issues come up. Some students say this has made them less afraid. However, what happens to a student who is identified as 'a potential risk' is not clear.

It is clear, however, that these efforts and other efforts in schools are not all that is needed. Changes in the wider community are also required because gun violence in schools is not a cause, but a symptom of problems in society as a whole. Easy access to weapons, a culture of self-interest and lack of self-control; the prevalence of hate, anger, suspicion, mistrust, and division in our society are also factors. So is the prevalence of accepting violence as a problem-solving strategy. So also, is a lack of empathy and regard for the value of others among both children and adults. Society needs to work on stronger gun violence prevention laws. Society needs to pay attention to mental health concerns too, but it is too easy to say these are the only answers needed. They are not.

Where Child Labor & Migration Intersect

There has been a nearly 70% increase in child labor law violations in the U.S. since 2018. These include cases of children under age working, and many of these same children doing hazardous work in all kinds of industries. In the last year, 835 companies from around the country have been found to be in violation of child labor laws. Nearly 4,000 children are known to have been employed in violation of U.S. labor laws last year. It is not known how many more cases there may be.



Child cleaning with hazardous chemicals at a Nebraska meat-packing plant. Children have suffered chemical burns doing such work.

The sharp uptick in these violations has put many children at risk. There have been injuries and deaths of children on the job. Reports from workers and media investigations into these situations have helped prompt the current administration to create an interagency task force on child labor to investigate the matter; push for steeper penalties for companies that violate the law by employing children, especially in dangerous jobs; and seek more funding for enforcement of child labor laws meant to protect children.



1. Oscar Nambo Dominguez, 16, was crushed under a 35-ton tractor-scraper outside Atlanta
2. Edwin Ajacalon, 14, a food delivery worker, was hit by a car & killed on his delivery bike in Brooklyn
3. Juan Mauricio Ortiz, 15, fell 50 feet off a roof where he was shingling in Alabama on his 1st day of work

Some companies, especially large ones, simply pay the minimal fines imposed for breaking child labor laws and keep the children working because they can get away with it. Doing so keeps their business running, which is important to the company, and to surrounding communities that need jobs.⁴

Federal law prohibits minors from working in positions “particularly hazardous” and detrimental to their health and well-being. The law prohibits people under the age of 16 from working long hours and in most factory settings. Those under 18 are barred from most dangerous jobs in industrial settings. Despite the laws, children as young as 12 have been found working long hours as domestics in hospitality industries, at dangerous jobs in food packaging plants, auto manufacturing, the meat packing industry, and the construction trades to name a few. In some schools, especially those near meat packing and other plants, it is “common knowledge” that children are working night shifts and then going to school tired during the day. Some children work seven days a week. Teachers in much of the country in middle and high school English-language programs, say it is now common for nearly all students to rush off to long shifts of work after class, often 12-hour shifts. Teachers report some will leave school and ‘disappear’ when they cannot physically keep up with both school and jobs.

The tight U.S. labor market is a factor. In fact, some states (including Ohio) are working to relax child labor laws to keep their factories running despite the danger to children. It is possible that in some cases, the immigration status of parents may be a factor. Trump era raids on work places seeking undocumented people may have caused undocumented parents to give up their jobs leaving their documented children to work to support the family. The child labor and immigration situations are inextricably tied together¹. It has been found that the majority of the children in the workforce are migrants from Central America.

Part of the difficulty is that, driven by the political and economic conditions in much of central and south America, there has been a large increase in the number of people seeking to enter the country across the U.S. Mexican border². Children who come unaccompanied (and their numbers have tripled in 5 years) used to be joining parents already here, but now two thirds of them are being “sponsored” by non-family members.

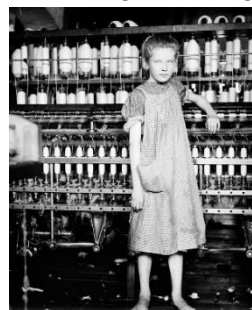
The sheer volume of children coming along with staffing issues in a broken and overwhelmed immigration system contribute to the fact that there has not always been adequate means to process new arrivals, or follow up with migrant children to check on their welfare once they are here. The will to treat them as people in need not criminals is also often lacking. This makes moving migrant children into the workforce under the radar easier if their ‘sponsors’ are actually trafficking in human lives for profit. It is important to remember that “these are not children who have stolen into the country undetected”. They are ‘in the system’. “The federal government knows they are in the United States, and the Department of Health and Human Services is responsible for ensuring sponsors will support them and protect them from trafficking or exploitation.” (Dreier. “Alone and Exploited. . .”) Even so, caseworkers estimate that two-thirds of unaccompanied children end up working full time. Many are trapped by the need to send money home to struggling families who live where there is no work or no access to a living wage; the large debts their sponsors say they owe; and the lack of any support system that actually works in their behalf.

The reality is that the U.S., like many countries, has come to rely on migrant workers to do much necessary work – often unskilled work or work that citizens do not like/want to do³. Migrant workers, especially children, often have little if any say about their working conditions and no recourse if they face abuse or dangerous conditions on the job – for some, not even the right to change jobs, or quit and return home.

Child labor has been an issue for decades. In the U.S., children continue to work on farms (most child labor is farm labor). Compulsory schooling has given



1908 West Virginia child coal miners



12-year-old cotton mill worker, 1912

the majority of children, including farm children (though migrant children may not be included), a chance for an education. The industrial revolution, which put adults and children into many new kinds of dangerous work environments, raised new issues. After several

attempts, it was not until 1938 that comprehensive federal laws to protect children from dangerous non-farm work finally passed. There are also widely varying state laws. Now, however, ignoring laws or, in some states, relaxing laws seems to be a growing reality to the detriment of children. How much of this is due to the desire for profit? Is putting children to work a matter of economic necessity for the poor in a world where the divide between rich and poor is astronomical? Should it be? Is child labor an 'easy fix' to labor shortages? Is it only acceptable because it is not "our children" who are forced into dangerous work? Do not forget the words of Jesus, what you do, or do not do for the least of these, is what you do, or do not do to me. (Matt 25:31-46)

- ¹ In light of this, there are efforts underway to protect workers who report child labor law violations from being deported as punishment for speaking out.
- ² Nearly half of migrant children are coming from Guatemala where poverty is devastating & wide spread.
- ³ This was illustrated by the situation in Qatar last year when it was revealed that the facilities used for the World Cup were built by migrant labor. In fact, 95% of Qatar's work force is migrant labor, a work force with few rights and little say over their working conditions.
- ⁴ There is a lot of passing the buck of responsibility for hiring children that muddies the waters. Who is responsible, the company where they work, the contractor who does the hiring, or both?

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Words



There is an old saying: sticks and stones can break your bones but words can never hurt you. Unfortunately, that is not true. Words are powerful things and can do great

good, like conveying love and forgiveness. However, their power to harm is also clear. Mean-spirited political rhetoric fills the airways and communication networks, destroying trust, dividing people, and too easily, inciting physical violence. Verbal and cyber bullying harm its victims – children and adults – by destroying self-esteem, fermenting isolation, and tearing apart trust in relationships. Words can build trust and community, bridge differences, and promote understanding. Or, they can quietly maintain the status quo, even where it is destructive, racist, discriminatory. . . Words can cause unintended harm, as when cultural

context is not taken into account; their role as code words (e.g., slang racial slurs) is not understood; their changing meaning is not acknowledged; their context is not considered (e.g., making a big fuss over Father's Day around a fatherless child).


When using words, start with the words of Jesus and with prayer to ground yourself in the will of our loving God who desires the best for all people. Keep in the center of your thinking the power of love and the indispensable importance of empathy for others as you chose your words, and always, always listen more than you speak.

Worship Resources

Remember in Prayer:

- **Turkey & Syria** – The recovery is ongoing even as aftershocks continue to bring unstable buildings down.
- **Refugees fleeing political crisis & violence** – At the end of 2021 there were 89.3 million people forcibly displaced (people forced out of their home countries). Of these, 27.1 million were refugees (half were under age 18). There were also 53.2 million internally displaced people, 4.6 million asylum seekers, & millions of people who are stateless (their countries will not grant them citizenship).
- **Ukraine where war continues** – attacks against Ukrainian civilians are ongoing. Russia is using both Russian forces & private troops (many of whom are prisoners) against Ukraine.
- **The continuing COVID Pandemic** – COVID continues to be a serious issue. While vaccines & treatments have reduced COVID death rates, COVID continues to spread. (The number of new cases is increasing in some places while remaining flat in others.) Every time new COVID variants are circulating, there is cause for concern.
- **People living with racism, bigotry, or prejudice.** We are reminded daily that we have not learned Jesus' lessons about how to treat each other, or the lessons from our past about the destructive power of fear & hate. Pray for those who do not understand or acknowledge that they play a role in continuing it.
- **Those consumed by hate & willing to use violence to get their way.**
- **Countries Dealing with Major Political and/or Economic Upheaval** including Sri Lanka, Venezuela, the Philippines, South Africa, Nigeria, South Sudan, Myanmar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Columbia, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iran, Mexico, the country of Georgia, much of Central America
- **People without the freedom to voice their views, raise issues or voice objections when they disagree with their leaders.** Also pray that people remember free speech is not a license to engage in hate speech that promotes discrimination or violence.
- **Victims of gun violence & those willing to commit such senseless acts.** Incidents of gun violence are increasing.
- **All people in this world who live with war.**
- **Girls & Women** facing abuse & violence every day.

Look for Peace & Reconciliation Resources on the Northern Ohio District Website. For access go to: www.nohcob.org



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