



MAKING A DIFFERENCE AT HOME

In order to strengthen our voice as advocates for a transformation of U.S. policies toward Africa, we must take what we learn and use it in our own congregations and communities. Reading the AFJN website is only one step in our work to create change. The United States functions as a representative democracy, meaning our elected officials work for us. However, they must hear from us and our congregations in order to know how to represent us. Becoming a grassroots activist now can set the stage for new policies that promote peace and justice in Africa this year and in the future.

Build a stronger Africa Faith & Justice Network: SPREAD THE WORD! AFRICOM and the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo are two of AFJN's biggest focus areas right now, but we continue to follow other issues and send email blasts to our network when action is needed. If you aren't already registered on our website, log on at www.afjn.org! If you are already registered, help us build a stronger movement by telling your friends, family, and community.

Educate yourself and your community.

It is important to continuously educate yourself and your congregation on how U.S. policies affect the people of Africa. The more you know, the easier it is to speak with family, friends, and neighbors about these critical issues. It is only by education that we can bring Africa to the attention of our policymakers. Visit www.afjn.org for the latest information on AFRICOM, D.R.Congo, and other issues such as restorative justice, northern Uganda, HIV/AIDS, climate change, and farm policy.

Build a church or community advocacy network.

Take the issues you feel passionate about to your home congregation and community. Let your Priest and congregation know about Africa Faith & Justice Network and the need to promote peace and justice on the African continent. Tell them how important it is to uphold the Catholic Social Teachings by working in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Africa. Here are a few suggestions to help you get started in your community:

- Pray with your church members for the strength to continue advocating for peace and justice in Africa, despite the difficulties.
- Host a community or church forum that addresses one or more of the issues you are most passionate about. Be sure to extend your invitations to many different groups and churches. If you are interested in hosting a speaker, feel free to contact AFJN and we will do our best to attend or to recommend someone.
- Encourage all members of your church to vote for those who will make the biggest impact on social justice in Africa.

- Work with your church justice and peace office, Priest, or outreach committee to promote Africa issues and the work AFJN is doing in weekly bulletins, newsletters, and sermons.
- On a university campus, work with the college to hold forums or events pertaining to peace and justice in Africa.

Take action!

Organize members of your congregation, community, or school to contact your elected officials through visits, phone calls, letters, and emails. The larger your advocacy network, the more effective you will be. Remember, it is important to sustain your efforts through repeated contact. Calling your Senator or Representative is important, but it is even more important that you continue to call, write, and/or visit their office if they do not take the action you requested. Also, don't forget to congratulate them when they do something right! Everyone likes a little praise.

Schedule a visit with your elected officials.

The most effective way to get your message across to our policymakers is to schedule a face-to-face visit with them or their staff members in their home district offices. These visits are incredibly important in establishing relationships and ensuring that your voice is heard. Each Senator and Member of Congress has a website where you can find the phone number, fax number, email address, and physical address of their home offices. Be sure to remember the following when planning your visit:

- When making an appointment, indicate that you would like to speak about U.S. policies toward Africa, specifically (the issue you plan to discuss). Prepare yourself and your group by researching the lawmaker's voting record and organizing an effective presentation with facts to back up your argument.
- During the visit, deliver a clear and concise message. Personalize the issue by letting them know why it is so important to you and what your connection is to the issue. Offer solutions that are doable and be specific about the ideal outcome. Be patient and passionate; don't react angrily even if you don't get the response you want to hear. Always remain polite.
- After your visit, continue to build a relationship by sending a thank-you letter or email to the legislator or staffer for spending time with you. Let them know that you will be following the legislator's actions to ensure that your concerns are upheld in Washington.

Call your elected officials.

Each Senator and Member of Congress has a website with contact information for your district as well as Washington, DC. In Washington, your elected officials can be reached through the Capitol Switchboard at 202.224.3121.

When calling:

- Introduce yourself and mention that you are a constituent and a person of faith. You will most likely speak with a desk attendant.
- State your request and supporting reasons. (If applicable, cite the specific bill number.)
- Ask specifically, "Can I count on Senator/Representative_____ to support this bill/issue?"
- Remember to express your thanks and follow up with emails or phone calls for updates.

Write to your elected officials.

Although it takes longer to reach your elected officials, a personal letter will demonstrate devotion to an issue. Organize your congregation, community, or school in a letter writing campaign. Although it is a good idea to develop a sample letter or a list of important points for the group, each letter should be personalized. Form letters do not receive the same amount of attention as individualized letters. You can also email your Senators and Representative – find their email through their website or by visiting www.congress.org.