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“We must be poor with the poor and recapture a tender and kind relationship with Mother Earth. Then we will know how to act.”

Sr. Dorothy Stang, SNDdeN

At the end of January 2009, about 100,000 activists gathered in Belem, Brazil to take part in the ninth World Social Forum. For many the location seemed little appealing but for those who care for the environment it is a place of confrontation of those who finance rain forest devastation and depletion of other natural resources.

In many developing countries throughout the world people are being pushed away from their homes to make possible for massive logging projects that actually deplete forests. One of the vivid examples is Indonesia where about 3.6 million people were relocated for this reason. Another extreme example is Zambia in Africa where 9% of forests disappeared in fifteen years. Looking at the world map we see this happening in many developing countries. One of the major reasons is enhancement of production and country's export. In those countries companies in order to produce more use destructive to the environment slash and burn techniques which not only destroys the forest with its natural beauty but also puts an end to many living species.

Brazil is also one of the countries in which the rain forests shrunk to 57.2% in 2005 from about 62.2% in 1990 according to the United Nations. There, the rain forests of the Amazon, is being destructed for cattle and soy exports. However, their forest destruction slowed down dramatically after two major soya traders signed in July 2006 a two-year moratorium of stopping to grow soya on newly deforested land. This action was initiated in response to the pressure from Greenpeace and others who care for natural resources and it was considered successful toward preserving natural resources in the Amazon despite the pressure from rising soya prices. This moratorium already expired but the Brazilian Association of Vegetable Oil Industries confirmed it for another year believing that it is possible to ensure successful agri-business without destroying forests.

Forests play a crucial role in climate change. science has proven that tropical forest destruction is responsible for nearly one-fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions, second only to the energy sector. Stopping deforestation of the Amazon would bring us much closer to keeping global temperature rise at below 2°C, which most scientists believe is necessary to avoid catastrophic climate change (Greenpeace.org).

According to the United Nations, forests “conserve biodiversity, soil and water resources and, when managed sustainably, can strengthen local and national economies and promote the well-being of present and future generations.” Even though the total forest area has increased by an estimated 96 million hectares, or almost one third, since 1990, deforestation continues to pose serious challenges. When we look at the United Nations map of land covered by forest we see that the percentage of forest has increased enormously in developed countries due to planting, landscape restoration and the natural expansion of forests. In those countries loss of forest is very low and in many instances there is visible expansion of forested areas.

Globalization affects the forests especially in countries where citizens have to strive to produce to ensure survival. At present, the financial instability affects more than ever the poor who in turn exploit their natural resources bringing massive destructions to the environment. Another danger for natural resources like rain forests is the fact that governments of many countries will forfeit it in order to provide some financial stability.

It was not a coincidence in scheduling the World Social Forum to meet in Brazil but it was also a time to commemorate the life and work of Sr. Dorothy Stang, SNDdeN. She was a native from Ohio and worked among the indigenous people of the Amazon for more than 35 years before she was shot to death on February 12, 2005. Her ministry involvement was primarily education of native people about land tenure and the economic and environmental benefits of avoiding deforestation. Sr. Dorothy gave her life for standing up against damaging natural resources in the Amazon and for justice for the indigenous people (According to the Education for Justice Resources).

We as a Congregation also put a special emphasis on the importance of God's creation and the need to care for it during our General Chapter. Thus, as responsible women we are challenged to use our resources in a conscientious manner to preserve them for future generations. We are called to eco-responsibility that promotes sustainable development. We are called to play an active role in systemic change. Plainly, we are called to care for our Mother Earth.

Our goal should be striving and learning how to be true witnesses and guardians of the whole creation that was entrusted to our care by our common Creator. Let us learn how to benefit from our natural resources with respect to preserve them for future generations and ensure environmental sustainability as stated in one of the Millennium Development Goals.

There are three simple words that could help us to make a significant difference:

Reduce!, Reuse!, Recycle!

Let us own these words and truly learn how to be promoters of the integrity of creation.

Loving God, we know the blood of the martyrs are the seeds of the Church.

May Sr. Dorothy Stang's life as well as her death

become seeds of a new and deeper understanding in us of social justice.

May her voice for the poor and for your Creation

continue to be heard,

and may we join in the chorus.

Like Sr. Dorothy, may our love become greater than our fear,

and may we moved to a deeper commitment

to learn about the injustices in this world

so we can become more effective in working

toward the Reign of God.

May Sr. Dorothy Stang rest in peace and may her life's work live on.

(Education for Justice)

Sr. Elwira Dziuk