

# interact

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A photograph of a family of four sitting on a pile of rubble. The father is on the left, wearing a white patterned shirt and dark pants. The mother is on the right, wearing a yellow shirt. Two children are in the front, a boy in a tan shirt and a girl in a white shirt and dark skirt. They are all looking directly at the camera with serious expressions. The background shows the remains of a building with concrete blocks and rebar.

Haiti

Hope amid the ruins



Charity must be underpinned by justice, says Progressio's Executive Director Christine Allen

## Hope amid the ruins

**The recent earthquake in Haiti** was a tragedy of epic proportions. Yet it also showed us the capacity of human beings for generosity. There was an enormous response to our own appeal and for that we thank you.

As the immediate emergency efforts give way to plans and action on longer-term measures, the people of Haiti remind us that our response can never only be a matter of charitable giving. It must also be about justice, and tackling the structures that cause and perpetuate poverty.

Someone who lived out that dual commitment to charity and justice was Oscar Romero: an Archbishop who lived a simple life and who genuinely loved, listened to and spoke out on behalf of the poor of El Salvador. He showed us how the church can truly be a church of the poor, by taking sides, denouncing injustice and being a living witness to a new hope for the people.

That question of justice, of structures, of the need for a policy response to poverty is doubtless in our minds here in the UK as a General Election approaches. As we think about how to cast our votes, we consider carefully the needs and perspective of those who are poor. Aid is important, but so is the question of how the money is used – and the structures, policies and attitudes towards the poor that underpin that assistance.

As Romero's life and death teaches us, we must dig deep, not just into our pockets, but elsewhere: into our opportunities, our voices and our own power. To use it for justice not just charity.

Christine

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Cover: The Vilme family, Sonnel and Marie Rose with their children Walker and Marie Walkine, pictured in the Mariani district of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, five days after the earthquake.  
*Photo: Moises Saman/Panos*

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## focus

A demonstration in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in January 2010, protesting against human rights abuses perpetrated since the coup in June 2009 and calling for people's representation in a new Constituent Assembly. Several months on from the November 2009 elections, repression against social activists continues, and Honduran society remains divided and polarised. For more comment on the situation in Honduras, see Progressio's website [www.progressio.org.uk](http://www.progressio.org.uk)

*Photo: Nuria Zayas/Progressio*

# Hope amid the ruins



A week after the earthquake hit Haiti in January, Progressio development worker José Manuel Moreno wrote: “The situation here is absolutely catastrophic and will need much effort and many years of work to fix.” These eye-witness accounts from Progressio development workers and staff show how Haiti’s people are rising to the challenge.



**We take the road home** as night begins to fall. It’s pretty amazing to see the volume of people we come across as we approach Port-au-Prince, walking with whatever is left of their homes balanced on their heads – suitcases and barrels and any other receptacles that can be used to hold the few items that they have managed to salvage from the rubble.

I wonder where they are going, and my colleagues answer that they must be looking for a camp, a place where they can spend the night accompanied only by the sky and far away from the threat which is still contained within the creaking walls.

*José Manuel Moreno*

**Night falls** and you can sense the tiredness, when Mario, the Director of Centro Bono, the organisation I am working with as a Progressio development worker, calls to say we need to go and speak to the people.

We walk through alleyways and narrow streets and arrive at a passageway where we find lots of people living on the floor, on blankets and mattresses protected only by sticks and sheets.

It's almost 9pm by the time we get there and about 100 people start gathering around us. The people are surprised, angry and still rather shocked.

Mario asks for a bit of quiet and suggests we sit down and talk. It's incredible, an image I will never forget: in the middle of a Port-au-Prince suburb, on a dark night, in a situation of need and emergency, we are sitting in the middle of a road covered in sand and potholes surrounded by an entire community of people who are living in really precarious conditions, with the sole aim of reconciling their needs with ours.

If they help us, we can help them. So we try and explain that we are not a big international organisation, that we don't have a lot of resources, but that what we do have we will share with the people who are living in this area, close to where the trucks filled with aid are arriving. We all agree that we can't close our eyes to what is happening around us, and that solidarity is also about distributing supplies together: everyone – those who need help and those who can give it – working together.

Perhaps the anger is not only generated by the lack of resources but also by the lack of voice, through a sense that nobody is listening to you. But we are making a big effort and we are expecting results.

*José Manuel Moreno*



*"Everywhere you go you see sheets being used as billboards, which people have written on, asking for help."*



**People locally** now know that we are distributing supplies from our base and more and more people are coming to ask for help. It's really hard, but we have to insist on giving supplies through organisations, communities, associations and groups (such as school groups) so that people don't just come individually.

Also, we don't just give out medicine – but instead try to make sure one of our doctors goes to visit

the individual in their community. In this way we are trying to ensure the medicines are being put to the best possible use. Nonetheless, people here are still hungry and thirsty and this is palpable in the work we do each and every day.

In this situation it is hard to think about things in the medium and long term but we have already begun talking about our plans and strategies for after the emergency phase. We are thinking about various projects which might give some sense of continuity to this enormous effort we are making. For this, we are getting in touch with local organisations who work with women and with local citizens groups, to ensure that we make the right proposals and channel the help which is arriving each day in the best possible way – and to ensure that we plant a few seeds of hope for the people of this country.

*José Manuel Moreno*



**The people** who were always traditionally excluded from public life – members of local Haitian communities – have made it clear that the future reconstruction of the country will happen through their efforts, or it won't happen at all. From these grassroots groups, new social and political leaders will emerge, as will new neighbourhoods for those who have been left homeless – and, we hope, a new and more effective state which is closer to the people themselves.

The word you hear most often during these meetings is 'inclusive'. Projects must be run by the people, for the people.

*José Emperador*

**The serious problems** facing [aid agencies] in terms of distributing aid are twofold: security and logistics. These are slowly being resolved thanks to the incredible help and collaboration from Haitians – the locals who live here.

It will always be the Haitians who will be the most effective. There is no-one who knows the terrain like the Haitians, there is no-one who speaks Creole like the Haitians themselves. The aid is here, but we can't do anything without their help.

It's not a graphic image, but in many neighbourhoods Haitians are organising things for themselves, carrying out the most basic tasks of organisation and distribution. It's the people themselves who are doing this.

*José Emperador*



**In Port-au-Prince**, the Haitian head of the Jesuit seminary where we were staying (by necessity, in tents) held an evening meeting for those of us staying in the compound, aid workers, seminarians, and families of Haitian relief workers. As we stood together in the garden, in the dark, he asked us to hold hands, and say the Lord's prayer, each in our own language. What a challenge, in the midst of such meaningless horror, to be asked to pray in this way. And yet, we did.

*Tim Aldred*

**Today, I got into the jeep**, and drove out on to the road followed by the truck we are using to distribute aid from the Help Haiti platform. As we drove, I saw the women, smiling while they performed the daily miracle of navigating the many obstacles in the street without letting the baskets perched on their heads, full of goods, lose balance and fall off.

A kilometre further on, workers were coming out of the textile factories, less rowdy than before but having completed a day's work, almost the same as they did before the earthquake.

It all adds to the growing sense that, amidst the rubble and beneath the canvas of the camps occupied by those who have been made homeless, glimpses of normality are returning to Haiti.

*José Emperador*

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Progressio has been working with the Help Haiti coalition. To donate to our work in Haiti, go to [www.progressio.org.uk](http://www.progressio.org.uk)

## Haitians 'locked out' of talks about own future

More than 26 Haitian NGOs representing tens of thousands of ordinary Haitian people have condemned recent international talks about the future of their earthquake-shattered nation.

They say they have been "totally excluded" from the discussions – and that their calls for a "new model of development" in Haiti are being ignored.

Following a round of talks held in the Dominican Republic in mid-March, the Haitian organisations issued a statement saying: "The ongoing process [which will result in a reconstruction plan for Haiti] has been characterised by an almost total exclusion of Haitian social actors themselves and scant and disorganised participation of representatives from the Haitian state."

They continue: "The Haitian context demands a complete rethink of the model of development." Instead of 'business as usual' following the quake, the Haitian groups say they want to see "a new project for the Haitian nation, which includes serious strategies to overcome exclusion and political and economic dependence."

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Read Progressio's briefing  
*Haiti: Key points for policy makers*  
at [www.progressio.org.uk](http://www.progressio.org.uk)

## Government makes pledge on illegally logged timber

New guidelines issued by the UK government mean that imported wood used by local authorities, schools and hospitals must now meet 'social criteria' such as respect for land tenure and forest workers' employment rights, as well as meeting standards of sustainable forest management.

Lizzette Robleto, Progressio's advocacy officer who has been lobbying for the change, said: "In the UK, 62% of imported tropical wood is illegally logged. If these criteria are followed, the public sector will be setting a good example. We hope this is a step towards eliminating illegal timber from the UK market for good."

Read more about Progressio's work on illegal logging at [www.progressio.org.uk](http://www.progressio.org.uk)

## UK election: make international development a vote-winner

Voters need to remind politicians that their stance on international development is a key issue in deciding who to vote for at the election. The Bond network of development agencies, of which Progressio is a member, has produced an election toolkit with ideas on how to challenge candidates and promote action on global poverty. See [www.progressio.org.uk](http://www.progressio.org.uk) for more info and links to download the toolkit.



*World Water Day (22 March) reminds us that it is the world's poor who suffer first and foremost from lack of access to water. In Marcala in western Honduras, Progressio is working to improve access to water for irrigation for peasant farmers. "Our ultimate goal is to raise our income by growing a variety of vegetables rather than just corn, beans and coffee," says farmer Hilda López. "But to do so we need water for irrigating. Especially now, in the summer, with no rain water at all, there is nothing we can grow. The economy is at rock bottom."*



## Sponsor a development worker

Musa Chibwana is a Progressio 'Local Hero' working with the Mbuya Nhandu Children's Home in Zimbabwe. By helping the children's home to gather resources and funding, and by setting up an improved water supply system, his influence has transformed the way in which the home can provide for children. Musa has also been working with the Zimbabwean National Council for the Welfare of Children to promote the adoption of improved childcare standards in children's homes across the country.

**"How can you** talk to someone about HIV and AIDS if they have not eaten for three days?" says Edson Chiota, National Co-ordinator of the Zimbabwe Association for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of the Offender (ZACRO). "And how can you rehabilitate someone who is at risk of dying?" adds Teclah Ponde, Progressio's development worker with ZACRO.

Despite the challenges of working in Zimbabwe's prisons, "Teclah is one of the best things to have happened to our organisation. She has zeal and the will to succeed, even using her own personal resources to help us," says Edson. "We really respect what you have done for us."

Progressio works through people – development workers like Teclah Ponde. And our work is only possible because of the people who fund us – our members

and supporters.

We hope our members already feel a personal connection to the work we do. But did you know it is now possible for you to directly sponsor a development worker? By sponsoring a Progressio 'Local Hero', your money will go directly to pay for Progressio development workers in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. In return for your support, you will get regular updates from our development worker – so you can see what they are doing, and how they are helping to change people's lives.

### interactnow

See page 13 of this Interact for an idea of the difference that a Progressio 'Local Hero' can make – and to find out more about sponsoring a development worker, please contact [pamela@progressio.org.uk](mailto:pamela@progressio.org.uk) or tel 020 7288 8667.

# The legacy of Oscar Romero

March 24th is the 30th anniversary of the murder of Oscar Romero. *Progreso* development worker Maggie Von Vogt asked the people of El Salvador: if Romero were alive today, what would he be speaking up about? What would he be fighting for?

## **Leonor del Carmen Huevo, age 52**

Romero's family was from the countryside. Because of this, he greatly valued rural people, simple people who were workers. And that is why he denounced the injustices. He saw what the rich were doing to the poor. If he were alive today, he would support the most poor and humble people. He always said, "Onward. Don't give up." He would be giving us the strength to move forward.

## **Luis Gonzalez, age 27**

In the face of poverty and unemployment, in the face of death and repression, Monsignor Romero spoke for the people. But who's saying it now? In the current situation we are in of homicides, poverty, crime, and environmental destruction, who is saying something?

For us today, Romero is an example to follow. He pushes us to say, what are we doing for the poor and the excluded, and for the earth and the environment, which is also excluded and forgotten?

## **José Benjamín Alvarenga, age 75**

I think he would work for a better future for young people. You see things these days where youth of 16, 18 years of age commit crimes that usually only older people commit. So he would have to look at how to prevent crime, more than anything with youth, so that they don't become involved with gangs and those kinds of things.

## **Gladys Argentina Sánchez García, age 15**

Aside from being an extremely good religious person, he left us with democracy and freedom of expression. It took him dying for us as Salvadorans to understand that we need to respect each other's rights as people, and that we have to think and express ourselves about what we feel is wrong.

## **Katya Marina Santos Rosarín, age 33**

In the church, Romero is an icon because there has never been a priest like him that puts himself on the side of the people most in need. If he were alive today, he would continue his struggle because there is a lot of exclusion, inequality, and a lack of opportunities for the people.

## **Denis Wilfredo Chicas Marquez, age 24**

The problem in this country is exploitation. Many companies that have money exploit the resources that people need to survive. The people are against this, but there isn't anyone to organise the people. If Monsignor Romero were alive today, he would be organising everyone. All the people who suffer... always.

## **Fernando Andrés Silieza, age 21**

If he were alive today, I think he would be taking a stance against social injustice – against government actions that threaten the well being of the people and the economic situation of the poorest and most in need.



**Padre Antonio Confesor Carballo Hernández (above, speaking at a demonstration against the Chaparral dam, November 2009)**

Monsignor Romero would speak out for those that need health care, education, nutrition, and for all those who do not have opportunities.

Monsignor Romero would cry out for the children who are working at the traffic

lights and the elderly who have been abandoned. He would cry out for all the anonymous who don't have anything to help them to move forward

Romero's humbleness, his simplicity, his desire for truth, has inspired me in my life as a priest. His desire to find God in the most vulnerable people, and to speak in their name to the powerful of the world, has been an inspiration.

**Ana Maria Umaña, age 60**

The legacy that Romero left us is that we always must work for the people most in need. He always spoke out against the injustices committed in this country and the conditions in which we are living.

He called for us to be Christians, not Christians sitting at a desk, but real Christians. This daily accompaniment and speaking out is what he left us – and this cannot be erased.

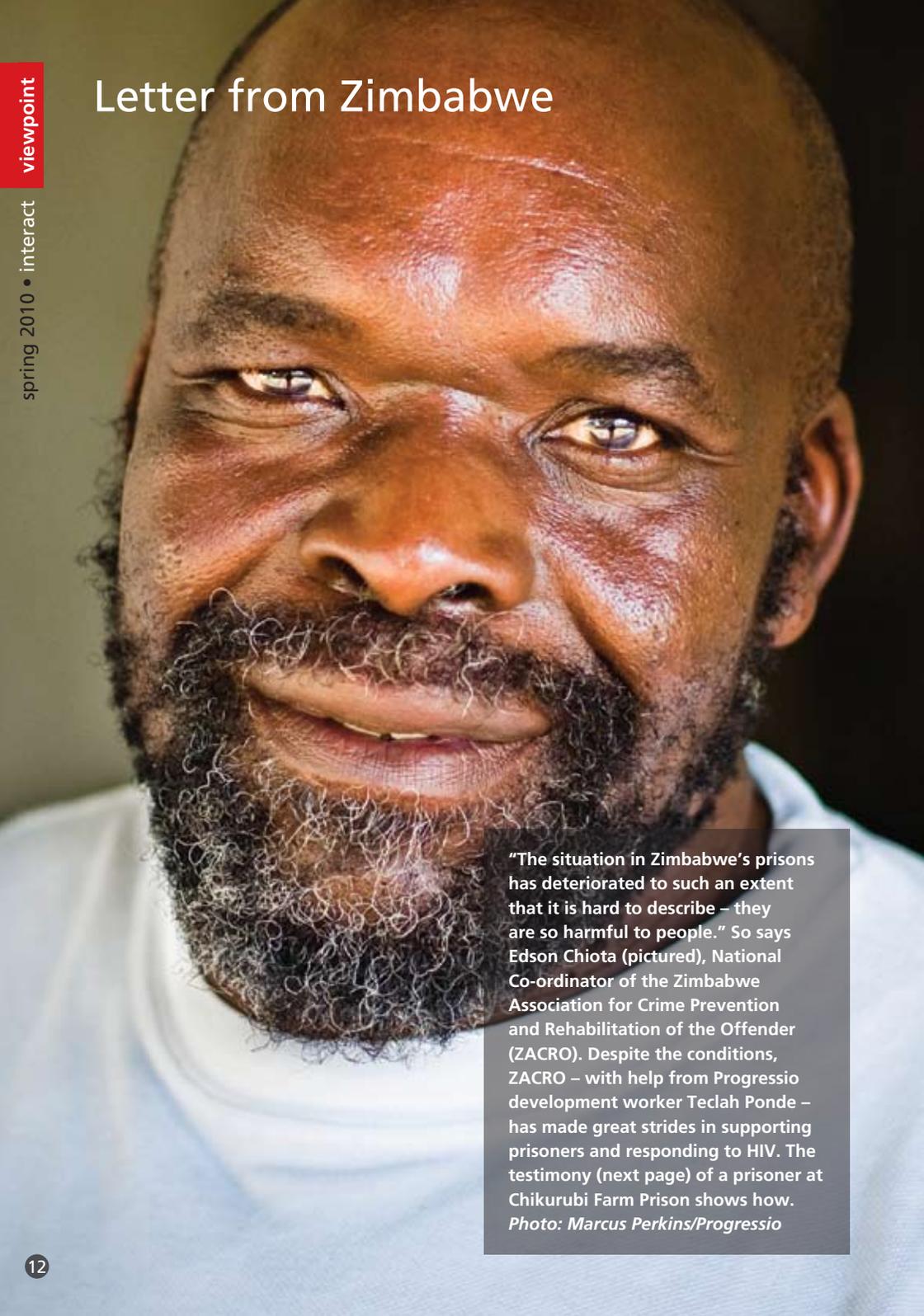
Monsignor is gone but the people are alive. We follow him, us Salvadorans and people from other countries.

One of the things Monsignor spoke out about is that the people didn't have work. It's the same now. Mothers don't have support for their children. Children in the most humble of schools don't have anything.

And this is what he taught us... to go and investigate the conditions the people are living in.

Church leaders have a lot of influence; in the Catholic Church the people follow their leaders. I think the Church needs to be stronger and more outspoken, like Romero was for us.

# Letter from Zimbabwe



“The situation in Zimbabwe’s prisons has deteriorated to such an extent that it is hard to describe – they are so harmful to people.” So says Edson Chiota (pictured), National Co-ordinator of the Zimbabwe Association for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of the Offender (ZACRO). Despite the conditions, ZACRO – with help from Progressio development worker Teclah Ponde – has made great strides in supporting prisoners and responding to HIV. The testimony (next page) of a prisoner at Chikurubi Farm Prison shows how. *Photo: Marcus Perkins/Progressio*

**Life in Chikurubi Farm Prison** is not easy. The food situation when I was imprisoned in February 2009 was quite bad. I was fortunate that I got visitors twice a week who were able to bring food in for me. But for the majority of the inmates, life was a huge challenge. As a result some inmates were forced by circumstances to trade sexual favours for food – a high risk activity as far as HIV transmission is concerned.

In the prison, I worked closely with the Rehabilitation Department and was selected for the HIV and AIDS Peer Education Programme conducted by ZACRO. I welcomed this because it gave me an opportunity to develop myself and equip myself with new knowledge, and at the same time help make a difference in other inmates' lives.

I was selected as a group leader and I was spearheading all the peer education activities of my group. We met once a week during the weekends to discuss each individual's progress, challenges faced and how they could be overcome.

## Achievement

As a group, we managed to establish a support group of seven inmates who were HIV-positive and getting treatment. To us this was a great achievement because it is not easy for someone to disclose their status, especially within a prison environment. One runs the risk of being discriminated against because a prison is a harsh community with its own rules of engagement. Despite this, we still managed to establish the group, helped them to conduct regular meetings and encouraged them to continue despite the challenges.

I am glad to mention that the group is still going strong and helping each other to cope and live within the prison conditions.

During one of my peer education activities at Chikurubi Farm Prison, I came across an inmate whom I began to counsel. During one of the counselling

sessions, I encouraged the inmate to go for an HIV test. He looked at me and asked me a question that I was battling with within myself. He asked me whether I had been tested or not. I told him the truth: that I had not yet done so and that I was equally scared of the outcome of the test.

We began to have a heart-to-heart talk about the advantages of knowing one's status against living in ignorance. At the end of this discussion, we agreed to go together for the HIV test which we did. It was not an easy step to take but I am glad we took the step and now we both know our HIV status.

What I learnt from this experience was that peer education activities are a strong stimulus for self examination, and give one an opportunity to face up to one's own fears. I am glad I was able to overcome my fears and as a result could reach out to another inmate.

## Challenges

I am glad to say that when I left prison, the community where I live welcomed me back. Indeed it has been a source of support to my family during my period of incarceration and I thank God for them.

Now that I am back home, I am faced with the challenges of getting employment and a sustainable livelihood for my family in such a harsh economic environment – one that is different from the prison environment but equally difficult. I am finding this hard to do, but I have not lost hope yet. I still believe that an opportunity will come my way sooner or later.

*Joseph Mangani (not his real name) was sentenced to 8 months in prison for fraud. He was interviewed by Teclah Ponde – a Progressio 'Local Hero' in Zimbabwe.*

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To sponsor a Progressio 'Local Hero', please contact [pamela@progressio.org.uk](mailto:pamela@progressio.org.uk) or tel 020 7288 8667.

**Dahir Korow Issak** is a Progressio development worker with GAVO (the General Assistance and Volunteer Organisation) in Somaliland. Dahir is Kenyan and is working as an HIV Youth Advisor.

**Q: What made the biggest impact on you when you arrived in Somaliland?**

**A:** I never expected it to be so peaceful – I thought it would be like Somalia. The leaders at GAVO made an impact on me too. They were so young and dynamic, I wondered what more I could offer them – but I’ve been able to share a lot of my experience from teaching in Kenya, and being able to speak Somali helps.

**Q: What’s been the most exciting moment so far?**

**A:** When the young people started telling me their personal experiences about HIV. It’s one thing when they understand the issues, but another when they’re willing to talk about them. One of the young people had always been told not to talk to his neighbour – he now realises it was because the neighbour was HIV-positive. Now he knows that you can not only talk to someone who is HIV-positive but you can hold them, eat with them and sleep with them (as long as you do it safely).

**Q: And the biggest lesson?**

**A:** The need to be patient – you can’t force things. You need to realise the hurdles, for example frustrations with the government, and change your plans to achieve your goals.

**Q: What’s the biggest challenge facing HIV work in Somaliland?**

**A:** Denial. People are dying but their families don’t want to talk about it. You can’t talk about condoms – people use the Koran as an excuse and say that condoms encourage intercourse (it’s not in the Islamic teaching for unmarried couples to use condoms). But I’m a Muslim and know that condoms are better than people dying. Common sense dictates that you should save your life if you decide to have sex.

**Q: If you could change one thing what would it be?**

**A:** The perception that HIV is for non-believers – “AIDS is not for Muslims” – and yet many Muslims are dying because of it. For this to change there needs to be a brave move to integrate the basic concepts of HIV and AIDS into both the formal and informal education systems.

# Dahir Korow Issak

## Somaliland

Dahir (left) talking with fellow Progressio development worker Ahmed Mohamed Mohamud, who is working as an Election Monitoring Advisor with the Forum for Peace and Governance (FOPAG) in Somaliland.

*Photo: Caroline Pankhurst/  
Progressio*





# Romero's prophetic message

**Monsignor Romero said** that Jesus Christ is in El Salvador and Central America. And it's true. In his own life and death, Romero showed us how.

Romero saw Jesus Christ as something that must be seen – like a Christ incarnate in his people. Meaning, Christ is not over there... far away. He is here with us, accompanying us.

Monsignor Romero saw Jesus suffering when there was someone who didn't have food to eat. He saw Jesus suffering in someone trying to make a living selling in the market.

According to Catholic belief, everyone who has been baptised forms part of the mystical body of Christ. That is exactly how Monsignor Romero saw things. The

people that suffer are a part of Jesus Christ. They are Jesus Christ. And in the same way, as a part of Jesus Christ, we must do something for the people that are suffering.

In this way, we are questioned, as Christians, what are we doing to construct God's Kingdom? A Kingdom that should be constructed with peace, justice, dignity, equality,

respect. And we are not constructing it if at the same time there are people dying in Africa. We are not constructing it when there are women dying as victims of male violence. We are not constructing it while young people are dying as victims of gangs, drugs, and organised crime.

And when we do not do something to stop this suffering, we are complicit in this violence. That is what Monsignor Romero always said. If we do not do something, we are complicit in the violence. We are guilty of a social sin, a structural sin. And when we do nothing to change that, we are complicit in this sin.

As people of faith, we can't just stay in the church praying, but we need to act. This is Monsignor Romero's message, which challenges us to develop *praxis* – meaning see the reality around us, make judgements based on the word of God in the Bible, but act. Act. What are we doing? What are we doing to change this reality of death and oppression?

As Christians, we are called by the gospel to change this reality, to do what we can to construct the Kingdom of God on Earth.

*Luis Gonzalez works for Progressio partner organisation UNES (the El Salvador environmental movement). He is a member of Juventud Romerista (Youth for Romero). He was interviewed by Progressio development worker Maggie Von Vogt.*



Luis Gonzales