

Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann

(1933-2017)

A veteran statesman, politician, community leader and priest, Father Miguel d'Escoto served for over a decade as the Republic of Nicaragua's Minister for Foreign Affairs, a post he held from July 1979 until April 1990. During his tenure, he played a key role in the Contadora and Esquipulas peace processes to end the internal armed conflicts in Central America during the 1980s. He also spearheaded his Government's decision, in 1984, to bring to the International Court of Justice a claim against the United States for supporting military and paramilitary actions against his country. The ICJ verdict, which favored Nicaragua, constitutes one of the strongest legal decisions in the history of international law.

Father d'Escoto is currently Senior Adviser on Foreign Affairs, with the rank of Minister, to President Daniel Ortega Saavedra, a post which he has held since 2007. He is a member of the Sandinista National Council and the Political Commission, the highest governing body of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN).

A Catholic priest, Father Miguel belongs to the Order of Maryknoll Missionaries, where he was ordained in the early 1960s. His first assignment was to Chile in 1963, where he founded the National Institute of Research and Population Action. Working with the disadvantaged populations, many slum dwellers living along the periphery of Santiago and other cities, INAP mobilized communities in defense of worker's labor rights. Following the earthquake that devastated the capital city of Managua (Nicaragua) in December 1972, Father d'Escoto mobilized reconstruction efforts for quake victims and, in 1973, established the Nicaraguan Foundation for Integral Community Development (FUNDECI).

In 1970, Father d'Escoto became the Director of Maryknoll's Social Communications Department at its headquarters in New York and founded Orbis Books, the publishing arm of Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. Orbis Books quickly became a leader in religious publishing, offering works on spirituality, theology and current affairs from a Third World/social justice perspective.

In June of 2008 Father d'Escoto was elected President of the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly, a post he held from September 2008-September 2009. During his tenure, he broke precedent by exercising bold, decisive leadership in defense of the world's poor, introducing ethics, human rights and international law, and science for common good as important tools for advancing the rights of the world's poor and dispossessed.

Father d'Escoto challenged outright the monopoly and exclusion of the G-8 and the Bretton Woods institutions by opening a global conversation within the UN General Assembly on the World Financial and Economic Crisis, and appointing a Commission of Experts, chaired by Professor Joseph Stiglitz to report its finding at a UN Conference on the crisis in June of 2009. Both the Outcome Document of the June Conference, as well as the Commission's report, rank among the most far-reaching and significant documents produced in recent years by the United Nations.

Father Miguel also spearheaded the Assembly's efforts to put an end to Israel's Operation Cast Lead against Gaza in late December and January 2009. Through his personal leadership, Father Miguel was instrumental in bringing new voices into the world body, including such renowned individuals as Maude Barlow, Leonardo Boff, Noam Chomsky and Joseph Stiglitz, as well as the President of *Via Campesina* and numerous scientists and teachers from around the world. He also vigorously supported the rights of indigenous peoples and universal recognition of the rights of Mother Earth.

Since the end of his tenure as president, Father Miguel d'Escoto has undertaken a bold initiative to reinvent and democratize the United Nations. A fierce advocate of multilateralism to meet the global challenges of the XXI century, Father Miguel is powerful voice not only of the need for, but has practical proposals on *how* to create an international tribunal on climate justice and environmental pollution. Like many of the participants in the People's Summit on Climate Change in Cochabamba, Father Miguel supports the need for a Universal Declaration on the Common Good of Mother and of Humanity.

In June 2010, Father Miguel was elected by unanimous acclamation as a member to the Advisory Committee of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. His work on the Committee includes efforts to further the 'right of peoples to peace' and as well as effort to 'promote a more democratic and equitable international order'.

He is the former chairperson of Nicaragua's National Committee on Water, in which he played a leading role in the efforts to conserve Lake Cocibolca, the largest source of water in Mesoamerica.

Inspired by the lives and works of Leo Tolstoy, M. K. Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dorothy Day, Father d'Escoto is a staunch advocate of multilateralism and respect for international law. He is deeply committed to the spirit of Gandhian Satyagraha or 'active nonviolence', solidarity and social justice, which together with a deep sense of ethics, have formed the basis of his political life.

He has travelled extensively, visiting most of the world's capitals and many remote and less accessible areas across the globe.

Father d'Escoto is the recipient of numerous awards, such as: the Order of Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo (2007), the highest honour awarded by the Catholic University Redemptoris Mater (UNICA), for his work for peace; the Thomas Merton Award (1987), for his commitment to world peace; the Order of Carlos Fonseca Amador (1986), the FSLN's highest honour, for his contributions to international law; the International Lenin Peace Prize (1985/86) awarded by the Soviet Union; the Julio Cortázar Prize for Peace and Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean (1985), awarded by Argentina's Institute of International Relations; and the Alfonso Comín Peace Prize (first recipient, Barcelona, Spain, 1984), which he accepted on behalf of the Nicaraguan people.