

STORIES BY RISHAB REVANKAR  
GRAPHIC BY ALICIA HANCOCK

**The Hague, Netherlands** The Group of 8 (G8), an assembly of the world's eight leading industrialized nations, is now the G7. On March 24, U.S. government officials told CNN that President Barack Obama and other world leaders have suspended Russia's G8 membership in response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea. During a news conference at The Hague, Netherlands, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov downplayed the eviction, insisting that "the G8 is an informal organization" and "being kicked out of G8 would be no big deal," according to CNN.

**Havana, Cuba** Headquartered in the nation's capital, the state-run daily newspaper, Granma, reported that the Cuban government will give pay raises to over 440,000 medical workers, the Associated Press reports. Beneficiaries of the pay hikes include health care professionals: multi-specialty physicians will receive a salary raise to \$67 per month, up from \$26, and beginning nurses will be paid \$25 per month, up from \$13. According to Granma, "the elimination of 109,000 jobs considered to be redundant by the government in the past four years makes the (planned pay raises) possible."

**Southern Indian Ocean** After an 18-day investigation that commenced on March 8, satellite experts led by the U.K.'s Air Accidents Investigation Branch confirmed that the Malaysian Airlines Flight 370 is submerged in the middle of the Indian Ocean, west of Perth, Australia. According to New York Daily News, on March 24, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak announced that none of the 239 people on board survived the incident. A day later, citing "delays and deception," victims' families along with their supporters stormed the Malaysian Embassy in Beijing, China, and shouted, "Tell the truth! Return our relatives!" New York Daily News reports.

**Cairo, Egypt** On March 24, the Upper Egypt court convicted and sentenced to death 529 alleged members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. The charges? Murdering a police commander. According to The Wall Street Journal, the sentence is likely to be appealed but serves as evidence of the military-backed regime's determination to crush the once-powerful organization. "(The mass death sentence) is a grotesque example of the shortcomings and the selective nature of Egypt's justice system," Amnesty International said in a news report.



## Civil Rights groups descend on Florida, protest unjust 'stand your ground' law

BY ROBERT PACHECO  
STAFF WRITER

The verdict in the Trayvon Martin murder case was not the end of a story; it was the beginning of a movement.

Since the jury from that case found defendant George Zimmerman innocent, many have derided Florida's "stand your ground" law as symbolic of prejudice against blacks in the U.S. legal system.

"The law that Zimmerman's defense employed is perhaps the most debated law today," said Jonathan Ross, second-year law student at American University Washington College of Law. "It harkens back to Jim Crow and often vindicates due to how abstractly the law is worded."

"Stand your ground" has been used successfully in the defense of white men accused of killing unarmed black men, most recently in the case against Michael Dunn, who fired 10 bullets at an SUV filled with black teenagers playing loud hip-hop music.

According to The Associated Press, the Florida law states that people who "are not involved in illegal activity have the right to stand their ground and meet force with force, including deadly force, if they reasonably believe it's necessary to avoid death or great bodily harm."

The law has been referenced in the defense for Marissa Alexander, a mother of three, who fired a single bullet into her kitchen ceiling two years ago after being attacked by her estranged husband, Rico Gray.

Gray reacted violently after receiving a restraining order and confronted Alexander, bringing their children to his violent confrontation.

However, unlike cases wherein white defendants killed black victims, Alexander is a black woman who killed no one.

Judge James Daniel's verdict that Alexander should receive a 20-year sentence added more controversy to the "stand your ground" debate.

Upon appeal, the appellate court found Alexander's sentence too harsh and ruled that the judge had ignored that her case fit the "stand your ground" law parameters.

In Alexander's retrial, however, Florida State Attorney General Angela Corey is seeking a sentence of 60 years, a ruling that would keep Alexander in jail until she is in her 90s.

On March 10, civil rights activist Reverend Al Sharpton led a march on the Florida state capital to protest the law.

"To have laws that tell people that they can shoot first and then ask questions later is a violation of our civil rights," said Sharpton, according to The Associated Press. "I believe that the law is inherently wrong."

"The law in effect says that, based on your imagination — if you imagine I'm a threat — you have the right to kill me," Sharpton added.

Also participating in the march were Trayvon Martin's parents and members of a group seeking Alexander's release.

Has the "stand your ground" law proved to be a failure? If so, is the failure rooted in the law's application? Or, does the controversy arise from the State Attorney General's handling of these cases?

"I see the issue as being in the application of these laws," said Aaron Fetrow, lawyer and dean of students and vice president for student affairs. "There is a systemic situation regarding the application of the law towards economic and racial lines within the legal system. But, that goes far beyond 'stand your ground' — it permeates to ... access to a legal team and therefore the application of justice."

According to U.S. Navy veteran and gun advocate Danny Nunez, the issue concerns gun control just as much as racism.

"Responsible gun ownership means that your weapon is a deterrent to criminals," said Nunez in an interview with The Guilfordian. "However, without responsible laws that ensure that criminal behavior is met with proper sentencing, the law becomes merely an avenue for excusable murder."



## POPE FRANCIS AND THE CHURCH: CONFRONTING SEXUAL AND FINANCIAL SCANDAL

Guilford College  
Thursday, April 3 | 7:30 p.m.  
Community Center

Jason Berry is an author and investigative journalist who achieved prominence for his reporting on crises in the Catholic Church. His books include *Render Unto Rome: The Secret Life of Money in the Catholic Church* and *Vows of Silence: The Abuse of Power in the Papacy of John Paul II*. With support from the Pulitzer Center, Berry also reported on the Vatican's investigation of American nuns accused of "radical feminism." He will discuss the future of the Catholic Church and the Papacy as these institutions respond to the changing world.

Pulitzer Center