

Good News Service #7: December, 2008

Friends:

This special Christmas and Hanukkah edition of the Good News Service is fully aware of the bad news surrounding us today. Yet it affirms that, despite the violence, war, worsening climate and endemic global poverty there is much to be hopeful about. On such hopes, and the actions of untold thousands of people, can we face and seek to meet the challenges of the new year. The usual 12 items this month are grouped in three different categories: disarmament, the environment & human rights. Included under each are the headings of previous items sent monthly from June through November. Please keep sending contributions for future issues. And may a greener, more just and peaceful world become everyone's New Year's Wish!

I. Disarmament, conflict resolution items in December/08

1. PEOPLE EVERYWHERE WANT TO BAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS

A World Public Opinion Poll of 21 nations finds that people in every country favour an international agreement to eliminate all nuclear weapons. In 20 of the 21 countries large majorities, ranging from 62 to 93%, favour such an agreement. The only exception is Pakistan, where a plurality of 46% favours the plan while 41% are opposed. All nations known to have nuclear weapons were included in the poll except North Korea where public polling is not available. The poll of 19,142 respondents was conducted between January 10 and August 29, 2008 by WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative research project involving research centres around the world. Strong majority support was shown by Israel, Palestinian territories, Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan for a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in the Middle East, ranging from 83% in Egypt to a low of 65% in Turkey.

2. CLUSTER BOMBS CONVENTION MAJOR TRIUMPH FOR DISARMAMENT

Dec 5/08. Jayantha Dhanapala, President, Pugwash Conference on Science & World Affairs: "The signing of the Cluster Munitions Convention on 3 December in Oslo by over 100 nation states (including Canada) eliminates an entire category of weapons and is another major triumph for disarmament achieved through a unique coalition of civil society groups and nation states. It is an indictment on the established framework for the negotiation of international disarmament treaties and on the major powers whose obstructionism has failed to stop the powerful groundswell of international public opinion. We have more mountains to climb, especially with regard to the elimination of nuclear weapons and this victory, which includes victim assistance as an important element, should be an encouragement."

3. DEATH OF THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION IN THE US?

Dec 9/08. by Alexander Zaitchik, via Straight Goods. for AlterNet: “Last month, ... Despite expending nearly \$7 million in a national fear campaign, NRA-endorsed candidates lost 80% of their races against gun-control candidates. More than 90% of the candidates endorsed by the Brady Campaign to Oppose Gun Violence won their races...The sweeping victory for gun control has been one of the most underreported stories of the US Election.”

4. CENTRAL ASIA BECOMES A NUCLEAR WEAPON FREE ZONE

Dec 11/08. via abolition-l-bounces@list.web.net via Bev Delong. By William C. Potter, Togzhan Kassenova and Anya Loukianova:

Ratification of the Central Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty was completed on December 11/08 after action by the upper house (Senate) of the parliament of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan’s ratification closely follows similar approval by the Tajik parliament on November 12/08. Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan had previously ratified the treaty... .It is a region which previously had nuclear weapons on its territory, continues to live in a nuclear-armed neighborhood and is the first one located entirely in the northern hemisphere. The Central Asian Treaty also contains concrete provisions that strengthen regional and international nonproliferation efforts.

Disarmament, conflict resolution items, from June to Nov/08

- * UN First Committee backs uranium weapons resolution
- * UN Gen. Assembly passes motion to de-alert nukes
- * Czech Mayors oppose Nuclear Missile Defence
- * Pakistan wants a South Asian non-nuclear treaty
- * Obama in campaign endorses NuclearTest Ban Treaty
- * UN urged by 2,000 MPs to back Arms Trade Treaty
- * Campaign to abolish war launched in Japan
- * Arms Expo cancelled in Australia
- * Iraq signs nuclear test ban treaty
- * MPs embrace need for new Afghan peace process
- * Italian politicians call for nuclear abolition
- * End to military “war on terror”?
- * Hiroshima & Nagasaki remembered in 22 Canadian cities
- * US Mayors want all nukes banned by 2020
- * US war resister wins appeal for refugee status
- * China resumes direct flights to Japan
- * Six anti-war protesters freed in Maine
- * North Korea takes further steps to denuclearization
- * Swedish Fund to sell holdings in companies making cluster bombs and nukes
- * Tactical nuclear warheads removed from UK base
- * European Parliament calls for ban on depleted uranium weapons
- * Israel and Syria reveal peace talks in Turkey
- * Burundian government & rebel army sign peace agreement

II. Environment items in December/08:

5. NELSON, BC: CANADA'S FIRST GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FREE ZONE

Dec 7/08. Greenspiration News, from Guy Dauncey of EcoNews, via Phyllis Creighton:

- The BC city of Nelson has become a Genetically Engineered Free Zone. This ensures that local farmers can grow crops and save seeds without fear of GE cross-examination. Other positive changes:
- Los Angeles plans to become the first solar city in the US, generating 10% of its electricity from solar, costing LA residents just \$2 extra a month.
- In the UK, every new house must be zero carbon, starting in 2016.
- In Germany, the new International Renewable Energy Agency will be launched in January. The European Union has pledged to get 20% of its energy needs from renewables by 2020.

6. BORNEO'S MIRACLE: TROPICAL RAIN FOREST RESTORED

From Oct/08 issue of The Ram's Horn: A Monthly Newsletter of Food System Analysis, by Brewster & Cathleen Kneen. <brewster@ramshorn.ca>:

“Six years ago the area around Samboja in Borneo was like much of the world's tropical rainforest: denuded. The trees had been cut for timber, the land burnt, and in place of what should be some of the richest biodiversity on the planet were thousands of hectares of grass. But from this ruined landscape a fresh forest has been grown, teeming with insects, birds and animals, and cooled by the return of moist clouds and rain. It is a feat that has been hailed by scientists and offers hope for rainforests around the world. Dr. Willie Smits, the Indonesian forestry expert who led the replanting, raised money to buy 2,000 hectares and six years ago set about planting seeds collected from more than 1,300 species of tree, more even than would have lived in the original forest. The project has cost more than four million pounds. Smits and his team claim the forest is mature, with trees up to 35 meters high.” -- *Guardian Weekly*, 25/5/08

7. TEN WAYS THAT CHINA IS GOING GREEN

From Corporate Knights Diversity Issue/08, by Guy Dauncey. “We know about the filthy air, the coal-fired power, the polluted rivers and the suppression of protest. China is full of planet-destroying behaviour; it's also full of green, planet-saving ideas. (Here are ten): China's cars are more fuel-efficient; its standard for new vehicles is 40% better than America's. Its bicycles are more electric; Beijing's streets are increasingly full of smart electric bicycles and mopeds that sell for \$200 and have a running cost of one cent per 17 kms. China is developing more renewable energy, and

has the most solar hot water. The city of Rizhao, (pop. 3 million), has 60,000 solar-heated greenhouses. Since 2000 Rizhao has cut its CO2 emissions by almost 50%. China has banned free plastic bags and its buildings are getting greener; it plans to build homes for 400 million over the next 12 to 20 years. A huge tree-planting effort is now part of everyone's life with 42 billion trees being planted since 1982. China aims to reduce its CO2 intensity by 80% by 2050! It has a mandatory energy efficiency labeling for all appliances and is subsidizing 50 million efficient light bulbs, to halve their price. The People's Bank of China plans to evaluate loan eligibility based on

environmental performance. China's state investment fund promises not to invest in companies that damage the environment, waste energy or produce tobacco."

8. OCEAN POWER FARMS ARE CATCHING THE WAVE IN EUROPE AND AUSTRALIA

Nov/08. Calgary, via the Calgary Herald: Imagine that 15% of the world's energy is just waiting to be harnessed from the constant ebb and flow of the ocean. Engineers, entrepreneurs, physicists, oceanographers and now eager investors are getting behind some truly innovative technologies that are powering homes, factories, universities and hospitals. More than 50 wave technology companies around the globe are using almost 60 years' experience with deep-sea oil platforms as they hurry to deploy wave farms. There are currently more than half a dozen such farms generating electricity in Europe and Australia. Another dozen much larger wave farms will be operational within two years. Canada's Department of Energy has not spent a dime on ocean wave technologies, yet has committed over a billion dollars to fund nuclear fusion and space-based power, with no tangible results.

Environment items (from June to Nov/08)

- * New Brunswick protects lakes from mining waste dumps
- * Solar towers will harness sunshine in southern Spain
- * African civil society hits back at uranium mining
- * European Parliament votes to reduce gas guzzlers
- * Turkish nuclear plans powered down
- * Germany bans pesticides killing honey bees
- * Australia maps "hot rocks" energy resources
- * Sackville Council rejects uranium mining
- * Sky farming: one young architect's dream
- * Ontario to protect half of northern boreal forest
- * Aussies go green
- * Alberta town to ban Styrofoam
- * Greenpeace obtains moratorium on cutting down trees in Indonesia

III. Human rights, economic justice, other in December/08)

9. HAVING A VOICE MAKES PEOPLE HAPPY

Dec 10/08 by Frances Moore Lappe, via Straight Goods and the Ont. Secondary Schools Teachers Federation:

People who feel effective feel better than people who just have lots of stuff. So writes Frances Moore Lappe, author of "Diet for a Small Planet", and a "YES!" contributing editor. "I've noticed that most happiness gurus fail to mention power. And why is that a big mistake? Because most human beings are not couch potatoes and whiners. We are doers and creators. In fact, the human need for power is given pride of place in a democracy. "By this I mean that democracy is a living practice that enables us to have a real say in every dimension of our public lives, from school to work place and beyond. For power simply means our capacity, as philosopher Erich Fromm put it, 'to make a dent'".

10. SHINING A LIGHT ON UGANDAN SUCCESS STORY

Oct 27/08. Ottawa Citizen, by Don Butler: “When Montreal-born Lucille Teasdale arrived in St, Mary’s Hospital, Lacor in Northern Uganda in 1961, it was a tiny, 30-bed clinic. Dr. Teasdale, one of Canada’s first female surgeons, and her Italian husband, Piero Corti, spent the rest of their lives there. Dr. Teasdale died in 1996 of AIDS, contracted from a patient during an operation years earlier. Her husband died of cancer in 2003. But the hospital they built, known simply as Lacor, has become one of the largest medical centres in equatorial Africa, providing care to 300,000 patients a year... Over the years, Lacore has had to deal with the AIDS epidemic, an outbreak of deadly Ebola and a notorious insurgency by the Lord’s Resistance Army, which kidnapped children and forced them to fight. But conditions have improved, Dr. Corti says. The incidence of AIDS has declined by two thirds and with the insurgency winding down, people no longer flock to the hospital grounds at night for safety... While health services are improving, Lacor remains the only place in northern Uganda for more advanced medical care.

11. GETTING KIDS TO SCHOOL: A MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL

Nov/08. New York, via The Associated Press. A coalition of government, charities and UN agencies recently pledged \$4.5 billion in an effort to get all the world’s children in school by 2015. The ultimate goal is to eradicate illiteracy and provide universal primary schooling, the second of the UN’s eight Millennium Development Goals. The immediate objective is to get 75 million more children into school, and put an end to discrimination against girls, frequently the last to be sent to school and the first to be pulled out in many countries. As a result, one in four women cannot read or write. “Why aren’t more girls in school? asked Jordan’s Queen Rania, one of the sponsors. “Because they are fetching water from wells that are miles away.” [from the Good News Page, CCPA Monitor, compiled by Elaine Hughes.

12. CONGO FINALLY CONFRONTING ITS RAPE EPIDEMIC

Oct 18/08, Bukavu, Congo. Via International Herald Tribune, By Jeffrey Gettleman. “Congo, it seems, is finally facing its horrific rape problem, which United Nations officials have called the worst sexual violence in the world. Tens of thousands of women, possibly hundreds of thousands, have been raped in the past few years in this hilly, incongruously beautiful land and many of these rapes have been marked by a level of brutality that is shocking even by the twisted standards of a place haunted by warlords and drug-crazed child soldiers. After years of denial and shame, the silence is being broken. Because of stepped-up efforts in the past nine months by international organizations and the Congolese government, rapists are no longer able to count on a culture of impunity. European aid agencies are spending tens of millions of dollars building new courthouses and prisons across eastern Congo, in part to punish rapists. Mobile courts are holding rape trials in villages deep in the forest that have not seen a black-robed magistrate since the Belgians ruled the country decades ago....”For more information, contact Eric Schiller: schiller@uottawa.ca.

Human rights, economic justice, other (June to Nov/08)

- * Congo: glimmer of hope in war without end
- * Palestinians use nonviolence in Gaza
- * New peace education programs in Rwanda & Burundi
- * UN President-elect seeks new initiatives on human rights, disarmament, world hunger and UN reform
- * Peace education expanding in Kenya, S.A and Tanzania
- * Peace educators hailed as heroes in Philippines
- * Muslim cleric walks across Canada against violence
- * West Bank quiet revolution stirring in Jenin
- * Salt River Nation lands claims settlement
- * *Ashita* gives 300 million a voice
- * Six newborn hatchlings stir motherly affections
- * *Civicus* youth assembly in Glasgow
- * Perth man creates 438 cooperative games
- * Good news for international criminal justice
- * Fair Trade sales soar
- * Night lights for millions
- * US Senator for bill to outlaw torture, secret detentions
- * New report says global happiness on the increase
- * UN Security Council urges action on sexual violence in war
- * Teach India campaign launched for underprivileged children
- * Court frees Aboriginal leaders opposing uranium mining

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- The Indian writer Arundhati Roy was well aware of the ominous threat of nuclear war and environmental collapse. In a moment of despair she wrote:

“The atom bomb is the most outright evil thing that mankind has ever made. This world of ours is four and a half billion years old. It could end in an afternoon”.

Later, however, in a more hopeful mood she boldly stated: *“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day I can hear her breathing”.*