

Good news service #8: january 2009

This issue of Good News focuses on the statements and actions to date by President Barack Obama, and on growing expressions around the world for abolishing nuclear weapons. Also included are excerpts from an extraordinary letter by Pat Mooney, globally recognized protector of seeds and genetic diversity. We are delighted with the response to this newsletter from several different parts of North America and encourage readers to send in items for future issues. As Pat Mooney ends his letter: *“Remember, all the good tipping points I’ve mentioned happened within the span of a single human life. So we have no right to condemn the future, or to believe that the struggle forward won’t bear success. Nothing in history gives us the right to stop hoping.”*(see item 10, below).

1. OBAMA OFFERS INTERNATIONALIST VISION

Jan. 20/09, Inter Press Service. By Jim Lobe.

Washington: “Speaking before a record crowd at his inauguration, US President Barack Obama promised a foreign policy of “humility and restraint” and “greater cooperation and understanding between nations”... Surprisingly, Obama devoted more attention to foreign affairs in a series of implicit rebukes to the unilateralists and militarist tendencies of the Bush administration... He pledged to “all other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born: know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and that we are ready to lead once more.”

“To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect”, he declared. Obama’s advisers have said he plans to deliver a major address in the capital of a major islamic nation within the first 100 days of his term.

2.OBAMA SUSPENDS GUANTANAMO MILITARY COMMISSIONS

Jan. 21/09. ACLU News Release. Contact: Laurie Beacham.

New York: “President Barack Obama has ordered the prosecution to seek a 120-day suspension of the ongoing Guantanamo military commissions. Within the next 120 days, we trust that the President’s team will be studying and finalizing plans and a timeline for permanently closing Guantanamo, shuttering the military commissions and ensuring justice is served in the best of American traditions.”

3. NOBEL LAUREATES SEEK NUCLEAR WEAPONS CONVENTION

Jan 20/09. Regina Hagen, International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility:” “Twelve Nobel Prize laureates and a former Under Secretary-General of the UN, in an open letter, reminded President Obama of his

promise to seek a world in which there are no nuclear weapons. Pointing to the shortfalls of the existing international regime for nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, Sir Harold Kroto (Nobel Prize for chemistry) and his co-signers also reminded Obama of the recent suggestion by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to use the existing Model Nuclear Weapons Convention as a starting point for the path into a nuclear weapons free world.

4. OBAMA SEEKS SPACE WEAPONS BAN

Jan 25/09. Reuters. Analysis by Andrea Shalal-Esa.

Washington: “President Barack Obama’s pledge to seek a world-wide ban on weapons in space marks a dramatic shift in US policy while posing the tricky issue of defining whether a satellite can be a weapon. Moments after Obama’s inauguration, the White House website was updated to include policy statements on a range of issues, including a pledge to restore US leadership on space issues and seek a worldwide ban on weapons that interfere with military and commercial satellites. It also promised to look at threats to US satellites, contingency plans to keep information flowing from them, and what steps are needed to protect spacecraft against attack.

Watchdog groups and even some defense officials welcomed the statement, which echoed Obama’s campaign promises, but said it would take time to hammer out a comprehensive new strategy.”

5. WAY OPENS FOR NUCLEAR WEAPON FREE ZONE IN NORTHERN EUROPE

Jan 20/09. by John Avery, University of Copenhagen, in a letter to Eric Ferguson of Pugwash Netherlands:

“There is a rapidly growing consensus that a nuclear weapon free world can and must be achieved in the very near future.

One of the first indications of the change was the famous Wall Street Journal article by Schultz, Perry, Kissinger and Nunn, advocating complete abolition of nuclear arms. This was followed quickly by Mikhail Gorbachev’s supporting article, and a statement by distinguished Italian statesmen... In Britain, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, Lord Hurd and Lord Owen joined the former NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson, in an article in The Times, advocating complete abolition...

“In February 2008, the Government of Norway hosted an international conference on “Achieving the Vision of a World Free of Nuclear Weapons.” A week later, Norway’s Foreign Minister reported the results to a disarmament meeting in Geneva... Other highly-placed statesmen added their voices to the growing consensus: New Zealand’s Prime Minister visited the Peace Museum at Hiroshima where he made a strong speech advocating nuclear abolition. Later he set up an International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament co-sponsored with Japan.

“On Jan 9/09 four leading German statesmen recommended, among others, that all short-range nuclear weapons must be destroyed, the ABM Treaty restored and that Space should only be used for peaceful purposes... both public opinion and official declarations support the removal of US tactical nuclear weapons from Europe. NATO’s present nuclear weapon policies also violate the NPT and correcting this violation would help to save the 2010 Review Conference from failure.

6. GLOBAL ZERO

Dec. 15/09, abolition-l-bounces@lists.web.net via Bev Delong.

Comment by Gwynne Dyer: “There’s a new initiative, launched in Paris under the title Global Zero, in which more than 100 world leaders endorse the goal of abolishing nuclear weapons completely... What makes Global Zero more than the usual empty talk is the fact that this time all the leaders of the major powers seem to be on the same page. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has called for the elimination of all nuclear weapons and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said in March that the United Kingdom is ready to work for “a world free from nuclear weapons”. On Dec. 8 French President Nicolas Sarkozy also gave his support to the goal of general nuclear disarmament. Last June Prime Minister Manmohan Singh backed the same goal... Pakistan and China have said explicitly that they support Global Zero. The only countries that actually own nuclear weapons that have stayed silent are North Korea and Israel...

“It would take at least a decade to get to zero from here. First, ratify the test ban treaty. Then, renew or replace the START treaty between the US and Russia. Then bring in the rest of the world for the final negotiations. It still sounds like a pipe dream, but in fact the conditions have never been as promising as they are now. If Obama takes the lead, it could actually happen – and even in the depths of a recession, it wouldn’t cost anything.”

7. FORMER PRIME MINISTERS CALL FOR GREEN STIMULUS

Jan. 21/09. PowerUP Canada News Release: Former Prime Ministers and Finance Ministers are calling for Canada to ensure the federal budget focuses on green stimulus. Signatories including the Rt. Hon. Kim Campbell, Joe Clark, John Turner and Paul Martin released a statement titled “Time for the Green Economy” which reads:

“It is time to vault Canada into the green economy. Green Stimulus creates jobs and will jumpstart Canada’s role in the new global economy. Retrofitting Canada’s buildings will provide immediate employment. Incentivizing clean energy and building green infrastructure will stimulate the economy of the future...Green stimulus will provide jobs quickly through a program to retrofit government, real estate and low income housing. (Also), through low cost loans

and spending which dramatically accelerate production of renewable energy and deploy stimulus into transit, buildings, green grid and other low carbon infrastructure.

The call for green stimulus follows an announcement of detailed recommendations for a Green Economy Action Fund supported by diverse groups representing over 850,000 Canadians.

For more information: Tzeporah Berman, Exec. Director, PowerUP Canada
www.powerupcanada.ca

8. THREE MILLION CUSTOMERS FOR THE BANK OF THE POOR

Jan. 3/09. from The Hindu, by Xan Rice: In just a few years Equity has gone from being a quirky, fringe player to the third most profitable bank in Kenya. James Mwangi is the CEO of Equity Bank, a home-grown company that has turned the financial services industry on its head. For decades multinationals such as Barclays and Standard Chartered dominated Kenya's banking sector by focusing almost solely on the middle and upper classes. Equity went the opposite way. It targeted the unbanked poor – the watchmen, tomato sellers and small-scale farmers whom Mwangi lists as typical customers – with cheap savings accounts and micro-loans backed by unusual guarantees.

Within a year Equity had 600,000 account holders, and the growth trend has since continued. Most had never held a savings account – Equity's competition is the mattress, Mwangi said. The typical savings account is about \$150... Equity has started operations in Uganda, and has plans to target Rwanda and South Sudan.

9. A POSITIVE PREDICTION FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY

January/07. Report of the EREC and Greenpeace International.

In a Report entitled "energy [r]evolution", issued two years ago, the European Renewable Energy Council and Greenpeace International concluded that the reserves of renewable energy that are technically accessible globally are large enough to provide about six times more energy than the world currently consumes – forever!

The sources of energy studied were solar, thermal, geothermal, ocean, biomass, hydro and wind. To make the energy [r]evolution real and to avoid dangerous climate change, said the report, the following assumptions need to be implemented:

* The phasing out of all subsidies for fossil fuels and nuclear energy and the internalization of external costs; * The setting out of legally binding targets for renewable energy; * The provision of defined and stable returns for investors; * Guaranteed priority access to the grid for renewable generators; * Strict efficiency standards for all energy consuming appliances, buildings and vehicles.

10. MOONEY CITES VICTORIES SINCE CARSON'S 'SILENT SPRING'

Pat Mooney, a champion of biodiversity, in a letter to his family, told of being chided after giving his "world is coming to an end" speech in the Philippines. "So here", he wrote, "is my best shot at hopefulness today:

- "In Davao I learned that the city has banned not only smoking but pesticides as well. In 2008 its smoking ban was joined by a similar ban for all of Kenya, and by earlier bans in Ireland and Italy.
- In 1962 Rachel Carson wrote "Silent Spring". Ten years on the world held the Stockholm Conference. Three decades later the Rio Earth Summit adopted agreements on climate change, biodiversity, forests and deserts.
- We have recorded the growing power of agribusiness but have forgotten the defeats of the tobacco industry, the infant formula industry and the huge constraints now on pesticides. Organic farming threatens the chemical industry.
- The Terminator seed has been terminated, ocean fertilization has been defeated and the credibility of the Green Revolution challenged anew,
- 85% of the world's food is grown and consumed outside the multinational system. Three quarters of the world's farmers are 'beyond BP'. They save their seeds and never, or rarely, buy Monsanto's inputs or sell to Wal-Mart.
- *In the last few years I have heard the word "peasant" rise from derision to anthem. There are more peasants, stronger and prouder and more numerous than ever. In a world of financial collapse and climate chaos it is the resiliency – the survival strategies of peasants - that could save us all."*

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-- A service of the Peace & Social Concerns Committee, Ottawa Monthly Meeting of Friends, 91A Fourth Avenue, Ottawa K1S 2L1
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