

GOOD NEWS SERVICE #9: February 2009

Is the global glass half empty or half full? Those who work for peace and a clean environment would find plenty of reasons for concluding it is half empty. Yet there are plenty of other signs that are more optimistic. The World Council of Churches, in a Media Advisory, has told readers to prepare for some good news in 2009 (see item #9, below). And the New York Times has published an equally optimistic view for a climate pact this year (see item #10). How do readers see the glass today?

1. UN REACHES LANDMARK AGREEMENT TO REDUCE GLOBAL MERCURY POLLUTION

National Resources Defense Council, via Straight Goods.

Feb 20/09. Washington: “Representatives from more than 140 countries today committed to reduce global mercury pollution, which will help protect the world’s citizens from the dangerous neurotoxin. This agreement was propelled by the United States’ reversal in policy which also influenced policies of other countries, including China and India. “This is great news for reducing mercury pollution around the world and shows a commitment from the Obama administration to international environmental issues’, said Susan Keane, policy analyst for the NRDC.”

2. OBAMA CUTS ALL FUNDS FOR NEW NUCLEAR WARHEADS

Feb 26/09. Council for a Livable World, via Michael Wallace: The Obama administration has cut out all funding for The Reliable Replacement Warhead program, a favourite of the Bush government. Moreover, Congress is in the process of approving the Fiscal Year 2009 Department of Energy budget – and again, no money for new nuclear weapons. “Just two weeks ago”, reports John Isaacs and Guy Stevens of the Council, “Congress removed a billion dollars for nuclear weapons infrastructure from the huge stimulus package.”

3. CHAMPION OF THE LANDLESS RECOGNIZED IN INDIA

Sept 20/08. The Hindu. Nagapattinam, South India, via skye faris Krishnammal Jagannathan, 82 year old Secretary of the Land for Tillers’ Freedom, received the prestigious Opus Prize of a million dollars for her tireless work with landless peasants. “My mission is to provide livelihood by abolishing landlessness among the poor and bring humanness and dignity to their lives.. I am planning a housing program for the poor and oppressed in (her district) and have already helped more than 12,000 dalits (landless) women get one acre of land each since 1992, with subsidy”.

Krishnammal, a member of a Harijan family, married fellow Gandhian Jagannathan, now 96 and still active, in the Bhoodan and Gramdan (land gift) movement of Vinoba Bhave, Gandhi’s principal disciple.

4. JAPANESE CO-OP PURSUES NON-GM FOOD FOR MEMBERS

14 Oct/08. Gristmill, USA via The Ram's Horn: "The Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative is dedicated to offering wholesome, non-genetically-modified foods at reasonable prices to its million strong membership. A delegation comprised of pig, chicken, cattle and dairy producers traveled to the US in search of staple supplies of non-GM corn to feed their animals.

They met agronomists at the University of Missouri developing new, non-GM, conventional varieties of soybeans for livestock feed. Their newly developed Jake and Stoddard soybeans not only exhibit an adaptability to different soil types, but they also resist cyst and root knot nematodes, pests that have become problematic for farmers ever since Monsanto's Roundup Ready GM seed became the dominant soybean planted.

For further information: the Ram's Horn: Brewster@ramshorn.ca

5. MEXICO CUTS POLLUTION IN CAPITAL CITY

From Associated Press, via the CCPA Monitor, Feb/09:

Mexico City: Ranked the world's most polluted metropolis in a 1992 United Nations report, Mexico City has since slashed its worst emissions by more than 70% and has become a model for improving urban air quality. When Latin American leaders met in the city last fall to discuss the environment, many looked to Mexico as an outstanding example of progress.

Date from the city's 36 air-quality monitoring stations show levels of lead down 95% since 1990, sulphur dioxide down 86%, carbon monoxide 74% and peak ozone 57%.

6. OBAMA SEEKS DEAL WITH RUSSIA TO SLASH NUKES

Feb 4/09, by Tim Reid, The Times, UK. Via Patti Willis

Washington: A spokesman has stated that President Obama will seek an agreement with Russia to significantly reduce the two countries' nuclear weapon stockpiles. His aim is to slash each country's stockpiles by 80%.

Key to the initiative is a review of the Bush Administration's plan for a missile defence shield in Eastern Europe, a project fiercely opposed by Moscow. Mr. Obama is to establish a non-proliferation office at the White House to oversee the talks, to be driven by Hillary Clinton's State Department.

7. QUEBEC TOWN BALKS AT URANIUM MINING

Feb 7/09, by Mark Cardwell, The Montreal Gazette, via Bill Curry

Montreal: Ghislain Levesque has dealt with many contentious issues during the 12 years he's been mayor of Sept Iles. But nothing has stirred emotions in the regional

hub, 650 kilometers northeast of Quebec City, like the proposal to mine uranium on the outskirts of the city.

“I’ve never seen people here get so worried and upset over a single subject,” Levesque said about the groundswell of public opposition to the project in recent weeks, including petitions, a demonstration and a threat by most of the city’s doctors to leave the region if it goes ahead..

That’s why, he added, city councillors voted unanimously in favour of a resolution asking the province to declare a permanent moratorium on uranium mining in its territory. By so doing, Sept Iles became the seventh municipality in Quebec to make a similar request to government in recent years. And it likely won’t be the last.

Although Canada is the world’s biggest producer of uranium, accounting for roughly a third of the 100 million pounds that are sold on the global market each year, all of our production comes from the three mines in Saskatchewan’s Athabasca Basin, which contains the biggest and richest known deposits of uranium on Earth.

8. GLOBAL WALK FOR NONVIOLENCE TO START IN NEW ZEALAND

Feb 4/09. Contact Alyn Ware, via Mike Abkin, Global Peace Alliance: New Zealand has been chosen as the start for a global walk for peace and nonviolence which will include all seven continents including Antarctica. The walk which will start in October on Gandhi’s birthday, hopes to inspire people of all walks of life to promote the abolition of nuclear weapons, end war, and reject violence in their homes, communities, nations and around the world.

“New Zealand is one of the first countries to see the light of the new day,” said Montserrat Prieto, a coordinator of the global March for Peace & Nonviolence. “And maybe this light has helped inspire New Zealand to lead the world on many issues including granting women the vote, banning nuclear weapons, making peace studies part of the school curriculum, mediating peace in Bougainville and the Solomon Islands and establishing the position of Minister of Disarmament – so far the only one in the world”.

A number of well known figures overseas have endorsed the march or will be joining parts of it including Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, Gandhi’s grandson Arun Gandhi, Vice President of the European Parliament Luisa Morgantini, political analyst Noam Chomsky, musical director Zubin Mehta, the Inter Milan football team and Nobel laureates Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama and Jose Saramago.

9. CHURCHES SEE A SAFER WORLD IN 2009

Jan 27/09, WCC press release, by Jonathan Frerichs via Bev Delong:

“Prepare for some good news in 2009. Despite the terrible start in Gaza and other endemic conflicts, governments committed to security are set to reach an historic milestone this year. Specifically, the number of countries protected by nuclear weapon free zones is set to jump to 110 countries from 56 at present.

The change will come from an African capital, like Windhoek or Bujumbura, as soon as two more countries ratify the NWFZ treaty.

Churches are promoting the step, and linking Africa’s action to the need for similar progress in the Middle East. The focus on collective international security has been growing for months. “The commitment of world religions to shared security means bringing governments to make good on their promise to free the world of nuclear weapons”, World Council of Churches’ president for Asia, Soritua Nababan, told a summit of world religious leaders in Japan.

10. OBAMA’S BACKING RAISES HOPES FOR CLIMATE PACT

Feb 28/09, The New York Times, by Elisabeth Rosenthal:

Until recently, the idea that the world’s most powerful nations might come together to tackle global warming seemed an environmentalist’s pipe dream. The Kyoto Protocol, signed in 1997, was widely viewed as badly flawed. Many countries lagged far behind their targets in curbing carbon dioxide emissions. The United States refused even to ratify it. And the treaty gave a pass to major emitters like China and India.

But within weeks of taking office, President Obama has radically shifted the global equation, placing the United States at the forefront of the international climate effort and raising hopes that an effective international accord might be possible. Mr. Obama’s chief negotiator, Todd Stern, said last week that the United States would be involved in the negotiation of a new treaty – to be signed in Copenhagen in December – “in a robust way”. The perception that the United States is now serious has set off a flurry of diplomacy around the globe. Teams from Britain and Denmark have visited the White House to discuss climate issues. In China, Secretary of State Clinton made climate a central focus of her visit and proposed a partnership between the US and China. And a special envoy from China is coming to the US soon.

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