

Good News Service #6 November 2008

This is the sixth batch of news items pertaining to global and regional peace, efforts to create a clean environment and local initiatives which help to counter the many destructive events all too familiar to us. Send along your comments and suggested items for the special December issue.

1. HOPES HIGH FOR NEW PROGRESSIVE REGIME IN USA

The hopes of peace advocates that an Obama presidency will change US military policies (and thereby NATO's), are based on his election-campaign statements that he would end the war in Iraq, would not develop new nuclear weapons or weaponize space, call for a global ban on the production of fissile materials, negotiate with Russia to take warheads off hair-trigger alert and achieve deep cuts in nuclear arsenals. Unfortunately, he has also proclaimed "absolute belief" in the War on Terror, has said he supports Ballistic Missile Defense and plans a large increase of military personnel to Afghanistan. Hopefully, he will be assisted in his call for positive change by those who seek a return to cooperative relationships with the United Nations (see below).

2. NEW THINKING FROM FORMER COLD WAR WARRIORS

20 Nov/08. A full page ad in the *New York Times*, under the banner "We Agree: Renew the US-UN Relationship" suggests "An Opportunity and Priority for the New Administration" and is signed by 37 former high level US government administrators, Congressional leaders and retired military generals. "We must recognize", it says, "that the United Nations is a critical platform and partner for advancing international cooperation on today's global threats and challenges, such as poverty and disease, nuclear proliferation, terrorism and climate change..."

"We believe that the incoming Obama Administration should make an early and visible statement on the United Nations that expresses American commitment to international cooperation through the UN; a lead on UN efforts on nuclear proliferation, counterterrorism, climate change and the Millennium Development Goals;... pay our debts on time;... underscore our

commitment to the system of international agreements and treaties by seeking Senate consent for key treaties signed but not ratified...”

3. UN FIRST (DISARMAMENT) COMMITTEE STRONGLY BACKS NEW URANIUM WEAPONS RESOLUTION

31 Oct/08, an ICBUW press release. A large majority of states has backed a second resolution highlighting health concerns over the use of uranium in conventional weapons. They call for the International Atomic Energy Agency, the World Health Organization and the UN Environment Program to complete their research into the possible health and environmental impact on their use by 2010.. The resolution was opposed by the UK, US and France, all users and producers of uranium weapons. “We are extremely pleased”, said an ICBUW spokesperson, “that Norway and Finland have voted in favour, and are over the moon on the Netherlands’ about face. All three decisions were the result of some determined campaigning by NGOs and politicians in those countries.”

4. CONGO: A GLIMMER OF HOPE IN THE WAR WITHOUT END

21 Nov/08 *The Independent*, UK, via CommonDreams.org.
With armed men in all directions, few refugee camps left standing and a handful of UN peacekeepers hemmed into their bases, far away from the fighting, there is at least a sliver of hope for the people who live in the midst of this never ending war. The UN has voted to send 3,100 more peacekeepers there, while British charities have joined forces to launch an emergency appeal for medicine and supplies. The current UN peacekeeping mission of 17,000 is already the largest in the world. But it covers an area equivalent to much of Europe and amounts to only 6,000 in the warring zone between the lakes of North and South Kivu.

5. PALESTINIANS USE NONVIOLENCE IN STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

1 Nov/08. Journey to Gaza, by Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate. The Free Gaza Movement set sail from Cyprus with 27 Internationals from 13 countries, including five physicians and human rights lawyers. Gaza is like an open air prison”, said Maguire, “but worse; at least in prison the inmates are fed and taken care of. The people of Gaza are drinking polluted

water, don't have enough food and medicines for existence.... Yet in leaving Gaza I felt great hope... In my journeys to Israel and Palestine, and in Gaza, I found many hearts of love. One Palestinian man asked me to carry his message. 'We love our Israeli brothers; we have lived with them and want to but we do not believe the Israeli government wants peace''. Maguire ends with: "We recognize the State of Israel and its need for security... but must realize our best hope for human security...is to make our enemy our friend."

6. DE-ALERTING MOTION PASSES UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The vote was 132 yes, 3 no (US, UK, France) and 32 abstaining, including Canada. Three of the Yes votes came from Germany, Italy and Belgium, all of which have NATO nuclear warheads stored in their territory.

(see www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1_com/1_com08/votes/L5.pdf)

Yet there is no evidence whatsoever that the US has de-alerted its nuclear weapon arsenal. Gordon Edwards (ccnr@web.ca) has written: "Nuclear weapons are still the greatest threat to the survival of human civilization and the global ecosystem. For Canada to sell uranium and nuclear reactors around the world under the peaceful umbrella of the NPT, without insisting that all countries abide by the legal responsibilities under the Treaty (to eliminate all nuclear arsenals is a recipe for global disaster.)"

7. 30 CZECH MAYORS OPPOSE HAVING NMDs IN EUROPE

22 Nov/08 via Global Network List Serve. In a letter to President-elect Obama, 30 mayors in the Czech Republic have called for the US government "to put a stop to the very dangerous and unstable project" of placing Nuclear Missile Defence elements in their country. "The plan to place (them) in the heart of Europe is causing tensions between the US and "Russia...and will lead to an expansion of the arms race". The message from the mayors was sent via Jan Tamas, spokesperson for the Nonviolence Movement.

8. NEW BRUNSWICK PROTECTS LAKES FROM BECOMING MINING WASTE DUMPS

23 Oct/08. Fredericton, NB.cfsc-uranium-bounces@lists.quaker.ca via Bill Curry. Environmental groups have welcomed confirmation from the NB government that lakes in the province are protected from becoming mine

waste disposal sites. Currently, eleven natural water bodies across Canada, all of them fish bearing, are slated for imminent destruction. New Brunswick, as well as Quebec and the US, have regulations that effectively prohibits the practice. But the Canadian federal government in 2002 amended the Metals and Mines Effluent Regulations under the Fisheries Act to allow natural bodies of water to be reclassified as “tailings impoundment areas”.

“Canada should not be providing the mining industry with unaccounted subsidies by sacrificing our precious lakes and rivers for mine waste disposal”, says Catherine Coumans, Research Coordinator with MiningWatch Canada. For more information: Tracy Glynn, Conservation Council of New Brunswick. (506) 458.8747. Or, Catherine Coumans, Research Coordinator, MiningWatch Canada, (613) 569.3439.

9. POWER IN THE DESERT; SOLAR TOWERS WILL HARNESS SUNSHINE OF SOUTHERN SPAIN

24 Nov/08, The Guardian, UK. Via CommonDreams. By Alok Jha. Seville, Spain. In the desert, 20 miles outside Seville, more than 1,000 mirrors are being carefully positioned. Each is about half the size of a tennis court. When they are complete in a few weeks, it will mark a major moment in the quest for renewable energy. The mirrors are part of the world’s biggest solar tower plant, a technology that reflects sunlight to superheat water at a central tower. It is expected to generate enough electricity to power 11,000 Spanish homes.

Concentrated solar power (CSP) technology is seen by many as a simpler, cheaper and more efficient way to harness the sun’s energy than other methods such as photovoltaic panels. But CSP works only in places with clear skies and strong sunshine.

10. SHALOM: A NEW PEACE EDUCATION PROGRAM IN RWANDA AND BURUNDI

“Shalom Educating for Peace” is a new NGO, based in Rwanda and Burundi, which works for building and sustaining positive peace through education. It seeks to cultivate a culture of peace in two countries ravaged not long ago by civil wars. A weekly peace program is broadcast on a community radio station in Rwanda, where the message of nonviolent means

to resolving conflict has reached a wide audience and solicited high levels of debate.

Shalom's projects in 2008-2009 include a Young Peacemakers Project, aiming to reach 250 youth leaders in 50 local churches through its training sessions and manual. On the weekly radio program members of Shalom discuss and debate, with people calling in, the application of peace principles to their communities. Other projects planned include a Bepeace Project in partnership with the Peace Academy of Costa Rica, peace education through Literacy, and also through Theatre, Song and Sport.

Readers wanting more information; or wishing to contribute to these activities can contact Jean de Basabose, Kigali, Rwanda. basajd@yahoo.fr, or Jean Harerimana, Bujumbura, Burundi. <hareprime@yahoo.fr>

11. PAKISTAN WANTS SOUTH ASIAN NON-NUCLEAR TREATY

22 Nov/08 New Delhi, from the Hindu, via Bev Delong.

Signalling a radical departure from Pakistan's nuclear doctrine, President Ali Zardari Saturday said his country will never be the first to use nuclear weapons and expressed readiness to accept a South Asian Non-Nuclear Treaty. "I am against nuclear warfare altogether", Zardari replied, when asked if Pakistan would adopt the policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons.

He also said that Pakistan does not feel threatened by India and New Delhi should also not feel threatened by Islamabad. "I am for a South Asian Non-Nuclear Treaty", he said.

12. AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY HITS BACK AT URANIUM MINING

28 Oct/08. The Namibian, by Brigitte Weidlich. African communities are taking up the fight against international companies which are mining uranium on their land. They suffer exposure to radiation and toxic waste at mining sites, a seminar on uranium mining was informed. "We have formed a civil society organization and taken the Australian mining company Paladin to court," Reinford Mwangobe of Citizens for Justice told the seminar, organized by Earthlife Namibia and the Labour Resource & Research Institute. The matter was then settled out-of-court and Paladin, which also has a uranium mine in **Namibia**, made some concessions like

agreeing to pay US\$ 10 million for social development projects and clean water to the rural communities in the mining area.

Mwangobe said that 12 Australian companies would start mining uranium in **Malawi** soon, with Paladin starting in January 2009. Malawi had no laws in place for handling and transporting radioactive materials, Mwangobe added.

“Rural people who had lived for decades on their ancestral land were kicked off and were only paid US \$70 as compensation. The best way to act against such companies was to take the case to their own countries and alert shareholders who do not want bad publicity and their share prices to drop.”

A representative from **Tanzania**, Anthony Lyamunda, said that 20 international companies were lined up for uranium mining in his country. His people recently started the civil society Foundation for Environmental Management and Campaign Against Poverty (Femapo) to help 450,000 people living in 786 villages in rural Tanzania.

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"Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing". – Arundhati Roy