

GOOD NEWS SERVICE NO. 20: NOV- DEC 2010

Readers of the Good News Service tend to have, and to pursue, causes which often involve rights for humans and for animals, for equitable development, peace and the environment. For those, in these final days of 2010, who conclude they are chasing a lost cause, take heart. “**Lost causes**” said Clarence Darrow, a famous country lawyer and leader in the struggles for human rights in the US, “**are the only causes worth fighting for!**”

Mentioned in this issue are two or three such causes, described by many as lost or next-to-lost: ridding the world of nukes, land mines and cluster bombs, and saving endangered species and the planet from irreversible climate change. However, it is likely that many of those working on these and other causes would go beyond Darrow and claim that these causes can be, indeed will be, won. Just come and join us, they would say!

1. US SENATE RATIFIES ‘NEW START’ TREATY WITH RUSSIA

Waterloo, ON. Dec. 26/10. from Disarming Conflict, by Ernie Regehr: “It was genuinely a landmark moment (on December 22) when the US Senate voted 71 to 26 to ratify the New START Treaty. Of course, in the ponderously slow path toward nuclear disarmament no single success is ever enough, - and the same goes for this one. But without this ratification there would have been little hope for further progress, at least in the near term, in taking up the other key measures awaiting attention on the long and onerous disarmament agenda.

“The New START Treaty...will reduce deployed strategic nuclear warheads down to 1,550 on each side. And the next big challenge? Among the many is the need to get working on that bigger nuclear number – 22,000, roughly the total number of nuclear warheads worldwide...The first is the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban, agreed to since 1996 and signed by all the major nuclear weapon states. The United States and China still have to ratify it, and President Obama has said ratification is a priority...Israel has signed but not ratified it. India, Pakistan and North Korea have yet to sign it.

“The second major treaty is yet to be negotiated – a global agreement to halt all further production of fissile materials for weapon purposes.. It’s been held hostage to a dysfunctional Conference on Disarmament, the Geneva-based disarmament forum mandated to host the negotiations.”
<<http://disarmingconflict.ca>>

2. CANADA’S PARLIAMENT UNANIMOUSLY ENDORSES NEGOTIATIONS FOR A NUCLEAR WEAPONS CONVENTION

Ottawa, December 7: Excerpts from “Disarming Conflict, by Ernie Regehr: “In an extraordinary show of unity in support of nuclear disarmament the House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution (which had already gone through the Senate) encouraging the government of Canada to join

“Negotiations for a nuclear weapons convention” and to “deploy a major world-wide Canadian diplomatic initiative in support of preventing nuclear proliferation and increasing the rate of nuclear disarmament”...

“The same ambivalence (whether such a move was premature) was present at the NPT Review Conference earlier this year, but most states concluded that a clear roadmap is needed. There needs to be an agreed legal framework for disarmament and a clear time line. Those are, after all, two missing ingredients that a nuclear weapons convention would bring to the disarmament effort.

“The fact that the Parliament of Canada now clearly agrees that such a convention should be pursued does not mean that the global ambivalence will be swept aside and that negotiations will begin...(It does) mean that the idea has enough international support, and in Canada a strong Parliamentary mandate to prompt the arms control community, including expert and civil society policy groupings, to redouble its efforts in exploring the wide range of conditions and agreements essential to achieving a nuclear weapons convention...Given Parliament’s strong statement, we can now hope, and even expect, that the current Government of Canada

will also mandate the Dept. of Foreign Affairs to redouble its diplomatic and technical work in pursuit of conditions conducive to nuclear disarmament.” <<http://disarmingconflict.ca>>

3. NOBEL PEACE SUMMIT CALLS FOR UNIVERSAL TREATY TO ABOLISH NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Nov. 15/10: via abolition-l-bounces@list.web.net on behalf of Bev Delong:

Nobel Peace Laureates meeting in Hiroshima from 12-14 November released a declaration yesterday paying tribute to the atomic bomb survivors who have dedicated their lives to the campaign for nuclear disarmament, and calling for a universal treaty to abolish nuclear weapons.

The Summit established an action group of Nobel Peace laureates to follow-up on the issues and proposals in the Final Declaration. A Round Table at the Summit organized by Parliamentarians for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament following the release of the declaration considered ways in which the action group could collaborate with parliamentarians and civil society to ensure success.

The Summit also celebrated the release from house arrest of Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi on 13 November, and called on the Government of China to release 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo.

4. CONTINUED PROGRESS MADE IN RIDDING THE WORLD OF LAND MINES AND CLUSTER BOMBS

On Nov. 25/10. Ottawa, via Robin Collins: The “Landmine Monitor’ identified only one government now laying antipersonnel mines: Burma (Myanmar). Anti-personnel mines use by non-state armed groups was confirmed in six countries – Afghanistan, Colombia, India, Burma (Myanmar), Pakistan and Yemen. This is the lowest level of recorded use since the Monitor began reporting in 1999. For the first time, Russia was not identified as an active user.

The Monitor identified 12 producers of anti-personnel mines, again the smallest total ever, and of these as few as three were actively manufacturing mines: India, Burma (Myanmar) and Pakistan. Nepal was removed from the list of producers following official declarations from it of non-production. A total of 3,956 new casualties to landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) were recorded in 2009, the lowest annual total since monitoring began in 1999, and 28% lower than in 2008.

Nov.1/10 Ottawa. Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, via Mines Action Canada:

The new Ottawa *Cluster Munition Monitor* shows that the Convention on Cluster Munition – a legally binding treaty banning the weapon which entered into force on 1 August 2010 – is effective in saving children’s lives. Seven states that have joined the convention have already completed destruction of their stockpiles of cluster munitions, well before their deadlines.

Of the 108 signatories to the Convention Munitions, 43 have now ratified the Convention, and 10 have already enacted national legislation to implement the convention.

The Convention obliges States Parties to end use, production and transfer of cluster munitions immediately, destroy stockpiled cluster munitions within eight years of joining, and 10 have already enacted national legislation to implement the convention. *The Monitor* estimates that prior to the start of the global effort 86 countries stockpiled millions of cluster munitions containing more than one billion sub-munitions, Currently, 74 countries have stockpiles.”

Central America now landmine free. According to the December/10 issue of the CCPA Monitor, Central America became a landmine-free region this past summer when Nicaragua completed its mine-clearing activities. This means that all North and Central America are now free from the threat of landmines... Much work, however, still remains to be done. “Landmine survivors, their families and communities require lifelong assistance”, said Jesus Martinez, director of the ICBL member in El Salvador. “Government funding that previously supported landmine clearance should now be channelled to victim aid initiatives,” - www.icbl.org

5. A MAJOR VICTORY CLAIMED FOR BC’S ORCA WHALES

Dec. 15/10: Greenpeace Canada: Last week, a federal court judge passed down a precedent-setting ruling that gives real hope for BC’s at-risk resident orcas. Past government failures to protect orca habitat led to BC’s southern resident orcas being listed as endangered, and the northern resident orcas as being threatened. On behalf of Greenpeace and eight other environmental organizations, our colleagues at Ecojustice filed a lawsuit charging Canada’s Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)

with having “acted unlawfully” by failing to safeguard the critical habitat of these majestic killer whales.

The court agreed with us. Now we must ensure that DFO turns this ruling into real action to protect the coastal waters that are home to the orcas.

More info: <secure.greenpeace.ca/orca>

6. TINY PALAU DEFIES JAPAN: ANNOUNCES MASSIVE MARINE SANCTUARY IN PACIFIC

Nagoya, Japan, Oct 25/10 (IPS) by Stephen Leahy for Inter Press Service, via Straight Goods:

One of Japan’s closest allies declared over the weekend that all of its oceans – more than 600,000 square kilometres – would be a sanctuary for whales, dolphins, dugongs, sharks and other species. “There will be no hunting or harassment of marine mammals and other species in our waters,” said the Honourable Harry Fritz, minister of the environment, natural resources and tourism of the Republic of Palau.

One of the world’s smallest nations, with 22,000 people, Palau is an island in the Pacific Ocean, some 880 kms east of the Philippines. Palau is also home to at least 211 whale species including sperm whales that can dive more than 3 kms. deep in search of prey.

7. RICH GERMANS DEMAND HIGHER TAXES

Oct. 23/10 from BBC News, via Linnéa Rowlett: A group of rich Germans has launched a petition calling for the government to make wealthy people pay higher taxes. The group says they have more money than they need, and the extra revenue could fund economic and social programs to aid Germany’s economic recovery. Germany could raise 100 billion euros if the richest people paid a 5% wealth tax for two years, they say.

The petition has 44 signatories so far, and will be presented to newly re-elected Chancellor Angela Merkel. The group says the financial crisis is leading to an increase in unemployment, poverty and social inequality. “The path out of the crisis must be paved with massive investment in ecology, education and social justice,” they say in the petition.

8 BELGRADE COMES IN FROM THE COLD, ALMOST

Oct. 30/10 Toronto Star. The New Serbia, by Doug Saunders:

“As he approaches the midterm mark, the Democratic Party president is struggling against challenges that would paralyze any leader: an angrily divided nation, a fractious congress, a devastated economy, a culture war, flagging polls. Despite the challenges, he is working quietly to turn his country back into a normal place, to restore its position in the community of nations, to end its violent conflicts.

No, I am not talking about Barack Obama despite the similarities. To see real change you can believe in, it's worth travelling to Serbia, where President Boris Tadic is stealthily turning around a country that was Europe's most dangerous rogue state just a few years ago. Mr. Tadic may be the Western world's most successful leader precisely because you rarely hear from him. In a land known for the explosive politics of rage, he has brought calm reconciliation.

Mr. Tadic issued a state apology for his country's role in the 1995 Srebrenica massacre. He organized the capture and arrest of Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian-Serb leader most responsible for the massacre. And, most extraordinarily, he permitted the breakaway Muslim-majority province of Kosovo to become an independent nation. At Mr. Tadic's bidding, Europe is slowly ending its long punishment of the Serbs. It has taken far too long...”

9. WHY BOLIVIA STOOD ALONE IN OPPOSING CANCUN CLIMATE AGREEMENT

Dec. 22/10. The Guardian. By Pablo Solon, Bolivian Ambassador to the UN, via Brian Murphy: “In the early hours of 11 December, Bolivia found itself alone against the world: the only nation to oppose the outcome of the UN climate change summit in Cancun. We were accused of being obstructionist, obstinate and unrealistic. Yet in strength we did not feel alone, nor are we offended by the attacks. Instead, we feel an enormous obligation to set aside diplomacy and tell the truth.

“Many commentators have called the Cancun Accord “a step in the right direction”. We disagree: it is a giant step backward. The text replaces binding mechanisms for reducing greenhouse gas emissions with voluntary pledges that are wholly insufficient. These pledges contradict the stated goal of capping the rise in temperature at 2C, instead guiding us to 4C or more. The text is full of loopholes for polluters, opportunities for expanding carbon markets and similar mechanisms... Bolivia may have been the only country to speak out against these failures, but several negotiators told us privately that they support us. Anyone who has seen the science on climate change knows that the Cancun Agreement was irresponsible...”

“Bolivia is a small country, among the nations most vulnerable to climate change, but with least responsibility for causing the problem. Studies indicate that our capital city of La Paz could become a desert within 30 years. What we do have is the privilege of being able to stand by our ideals, of not letting partisan agendas obscure our principal aim: defending life and Earth... We face an unprecedented crisis, and false victories won't save the planet, (nor will they) guarantee a future for our children. We all must stand up and demand a climate agreement strong enough to match the crisis we confront”. See <<http://www.commondreams.org/view/2010/12/22-3>>

10. LATIN AMERICAN MAYORS UNANIMOUS IN SUPPORTING GLOBAL NUCLEAR

WEAPONS BAN BY 2020

Buenos Aires, Oct 17/10. abolition-1-bounces@list.web.net, via Bev DeLong: The Mayor of Hiroshima received unanimous support from Latin American Mayors during his visit to the Latin American 'Semana de Municipalismo' in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Involved was FLACMA, the Latin American branch of UCLG, the United Cities and Local Governments, the world wide organization of local governments. This historic agreement was signed between Dr. Tadatoshi Akiba, Mayor of Hiroshima and President of Mayors for Peace and FLACMA's president, Mr. Julio Pereyra and the Executive Secretary Mr. Guillermo Tapia. In the agreement they affirm their determination to work together to free cities from the scourge of war and mass destruction. (see #10, below, for further news of the mayors.

11. OVER HALF OF WORLD'S CAPITAL CITIES JOIN CAMPAIGN TO ELIMINATE NUCLEAR ARMS BY 2020

Hiroshima, Nov.1/10 . abolition-1-bounces@list.web.net via Gordon Edwards:

Mayors for Peace announced today that 94 new member cities have joined during the month of October. With Guatemala City, Reykjavik and Yerevan, Mayors for Peace welcomes three capital cities in its global network campaigning for the immediate commencement of negotiations for the establishment of a nuclear weapon free world by 2020. Mayors for Peace now count 4,301 member cities in 149 countries.

With the capitals of Guatemala, Iceland and Armenia, the network now counts 98 of the world's capital cities, having secured the support of 51% of the 192 capital cities in the member states of the UN. The support includes the cities of Paris, Beijing, Delhi, London and Moscow in the Nuclear Weapon States; and Amsterdam, Ankara, Berlin, Brussels and Rome in the five countries where the US deploys nuclear weapons outside its territory.

12. UGANDA TO PLANT A MILLION MORE TREES

From CCPA Monitor, Dec./10-Jan./11 from The Good News Page. Compiled by Elaine Hughes:

Mbale, Uganda. A three year project has been launched to increase forest cover and help communities in Eastern Uganda adapt to climate change. "The planting of one million trees has started to sustain an area of tropical forest in Africa the size of Wales:", said John Griffith, counsel-general of the Welsh Assembly, which is supporting the project. "These trees will not only absorb carbon, but also provide shade for crops".

Lebogang Motlana, Uganda director for UNDP, said his country is highly vulnerable to climate change. Earlier this year, a landslide near Mbale that killed over 300 people was attributed to deforestation. –
<www.allafrica.com>

13. RETURN OF THE BICYCLE: SEVEN MILES PER POTATO ON A 22 POUND BIKE!

Aug 11/10. From StraightGoods.ca. By Lester Brown, President of the Earth Policy Institute: The bicycle has many attractions as a form of personal transportation. It alleviates congestion, lowers air pollution, reduces obesity, increases physical fitness, doesn't emit carbon dioxide and is priced within the reach of billions of people who cannot afford a car. Six bicycles can typically fit into the road space used by one car, and 20 bicycles can occupy the space required to park a car. "On my bike", said the writer, "I get easily 7 miles [of energy] per potato". An automobile, requiring a ton of material to transport one person, is extraordinarily inefficient by comparison. By 2007, Amsterdam had become the first western industrial city where the number of trips taken by bicycle exceeded those taken by car. China, with 430 million bikes, has the world's largest fleet, but ownership rates are higher in Europe.

Among the industrial-country leaders in designing bicycle-friendly transport systems are the Netherlands, where 27% of all trips are by bike, Denmark with 18%, Germany 10%; the US and the UK are each at 1%.

14. NETHERLANDS TO CLOSE PRISONS FOR LACK OF CRIMINALS

Dec. 27/10. NRC Handelsblad, Netherlands, via Linnéa Rowlatt: The Dutch Justice Ministry has announced it will close eight prisons and cut 1,200 jobs in the prison system. A decline in crime has left many cells empty.

During the 1990s the Netherlands faced a shortage of prison cells, but a decline in crime has since led to overcapacity in the prison system. The country now has capacity for 14,000 prisoners but only 12,000 detainees. The ministry's research department expects the decline of the crime rate to continue for some time.

Some reprieve might come from a deal with Belgium, which is facing overpopulation in its prisons. The two countries are working out an agreement to house Belgian prisoners in Dutch prisons. Some five hundred Belgian prisoners could be transferred to the Tiburg prison by (the end of) 2010. The Netherlands would get 30 million euros in the deal and it will allow the closing of the prisons in Rotterdam and Veenhuizen to be postponed until 2012.

* * * * *

The Peace & Social Concerns Committee, Ottawa Monthly Meeting of Friends.

Send items to: Murray Thomson, Editor