



## GOOD NEWS SERVICE #29: LATE FALL 2013

*“Evil is not the norm. Injustice is not the norm. Poverty is not the norm. War is not the norm. The norm is goodness. The norm is gentleness.” – Desmond Tutu, Nobel Prize for Peace, 1984*

**Editorial:** This 29th edition of the Good News Service features two tiny countries - Costa Rica and Bhutan - with small resources but large visions.

. Their records contrast sharply with the performances of the large powers, particularly Russia and the United States, seemingly incapable of shaking Cold War fears and making the major changes required in their foreign policies. Thanks to the persistence of UN agencies their agreements in the Security Council have at least moved the world back from the brink and towards resolving the crisis over Syria’s use of chemical weapons. And the six month “reprieve” of Iran’s nuclear program has given both sides time to reconsider

options for a more peaceful resolution of the dangerous standoff between them.- The larger questions, however, involving the urgency for a Middle East zone of peace remain unsolved and continue to threaten us all. Dare we then extend a plea for peace and good will to all men and women, as we slip and slide towards a new year? Yes, we do, with the same hope and determination that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, seven Nobel peace laureates, 600 religious leaders and more than 5,000 mayors have expressed in their calls to build a nuclear weapon free world. (see items #3, 5 and 9).

### **1. NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNING UN AGENCY SUCCEEDS IN OBTAINING SYRIAN AGREEMENT TO SCRAP ITS CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

November 1, 2013. Looking back two months, early in September, one had good reason to believe that this, finally, was not going to end well. “Two weeks ago, reported the Globe and Mail in its September 20<sup>th</sup> edition, “the US and Iran seemed on the brink of a region-wide proxy war, with Obama advocating military strikes to punish the regime (of Assad).... However, everyone has since stepped back from the edge.”

Mark MacKinnon’s report from London went on to sketch the larger piece of the puzzle that is the Middle East today. “Iran, via its alliances with Mr. al-Assad and Hezbollah – as well as Shia Muslim groups in Iraq and Bahrein, as well as the Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad – is in conflict with Washington and its allies across the Middle East.”

Is there a way out? “Some believe that a handshake between Mr. Obama and Mr. Rowhani could begin a conversation about how to stop the fighting. Ending Iran’s nuclear program could encourage Israel to move towards détente and an agreement reached to scrap all chemical weapons in Syria. Then , if the US President were to succeed in lifting the Congressional sanctions on Iran, prospects for attaining a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East could finally take shape.

## **2. NUCLEAR DEAL REACHED WITH IRAN: “BREAKTHROUGH BASED ON SHARED LEADERSHIP, HARD-FOUGHT DIPLOMACY & RELENTLESS SANCTIONS”**

*Globe&Mail*, Nov.26/13, by Paul Koring from Washington: “The breakthrough on Iran – albeit only a first step – is emblematic of Mr. Obama’s cautious, patient, multilateral approach to international relations and signals a marked change in superpower leadership that may better suit a multipolar 21<sup>st</sup> century.

“The skeptics who said that “tough cases” can never be disarmed of weapons of mass destruction are being proven wrong – from Syria to Iran”, said Thomas Pickering, one of America’s most seasoned diplomats. “Verifiable disarmament is happening based on multilateral leadership, hard-fought diplomacy and international pressure.” Those three elements have featured prominently in Mr. Obama’s approach – and not just with Iran. He has enlisted Chinese help on North Korea and Russian intervention with ways not much explored by his predecessors. The President, who picked up a Nobel Peace Prize only weeks after moving into the Oval Office, may, nearly five years later, finally be earning it – not with high profile, high stakes showdowns but with difficult and incremental diplomacy given credibility by concerned international action in the form of relentless and tightening sanctions, not threats of war....”

## **3. INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS MOVEMENT CALLS FOR NUCLEAR ABOLITION; ADOPTS A FOUR YEAR ACTION PLAN**

November 20, 2013. On 17 November/13 the Council of Delegates of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement adopted a resolution and Four Year Action Plan on nuclear abolition during their assembly in Sydney, Australia. The resolution reaffirms the principal call of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement in 2011 urging all governments to take concrete steps leading to the negotiation of a legally-binding international agreement to prohibit the use of, and completely eliminate, nuclear weapons...and to conclude such negotiations with urgency and determination.

The Four-Year action plan calls on its membership – the 189 national societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement – to take a number of actions,

including to: 1. transmit this Resolution to relevant government officials, parliamentarians, departments and committees and to brief them accordingly; 2. host public events for parliamentarians, health assistance professionals and other relevant actors within civil society; 3. encourage their governments to participate actively in multilateral meetings discussing the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

The resolution also reaffirms the role of the ICRC to represent the movement in international deliberating and negotiating forums for nuclear disarmament, and to monitor programs in these forums to guide the work of the national societies.

#### **4. ONTARIO GOVERNMENT POISED TO MAKE COAL-FIRED ELECTRICITY GENERATION ILLEGAL: LARGEST COAL PLANT IN NORTH AMERICA TO CLOSE**

Nov. 22/13. From Tim Gray, *Environmental Defence*, via Sergei Plekhanov:

Ten years ago, coal power stations generated a whopping 25 per cent of our energy. Yesterday, *Environmental Defence* hosted a public event where the Premier of Ontario announced that the province will move to make coal-fired electricity generation illegal forever. The announcement was attended by former US Vice President Al Gore, who had this to say: “Today’s event is a sure sign we are going to prevail. Part of the reason you found the moral courage to act is because the Ontario (Government) led the way.”

This is a huge victory for the environment, our health and for our planet. Cutting our coal in Ontario means we’re cutting out greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to taking 7 million cars off the road!

#### **5. RELIGIONS FOR PEACE DECLARE USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IMMORAL; LAUNCH NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT RESOURCE GUIDE**

Vienna, Nov. 26/13: 600 religious leaders, at the annual assembly in Vienna, have declared all weapons of mass destruction, including nukes, immoral and have launched a Nuclear Disarmament Resource Guide. The Guide focuses on the special role of religious leaders, including women and youth, and the positive actions they can take to break down the walls of nuclear terror and

build cooperative human security required for a nuclear weapon free world. It includes sections on the growing nuclear threat, the economic and environmental costs of nukes, diplomatic opportunities to achieve a nuclear weapon free world, roles of youth and women, examples of action by religious communities, useful resources including inspiring videos and contacts for nuclear abolition organizations. The Resource Guide was given to every one of the 600 participants to take back to key constituents.

## **6. BHUTAN'S MODEL OF GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS "A GLORIOUS GOAL FOR MODERN SOCIETY"**

The Independent News Source. July 25/13, by Joan Chittister: "The first road sign I saw in Bhutan read: *Start early/Drive slowly/Arrive safely*. I knew instantly this place and this trip was going to be different. Bhutan is a country so small – fewer than one million people live here – that, tucked between China to the north and India to the south, it is very easy to miss. But this little country is having more and more impact on the rest of the world every day... What is astounding is that one of the smallest countries on the planet may very well be developing a great deal of international influence.

Bhutan's capital city, Thimphu, has a population of barely 100,000. The country is nestled in forests and rice paddies at the bottom of the Himalayas. Scattered villages run up and down the mountainsides of 14 districts. The last village in the country, their newspaper reported the week we came, will finally be electrified by the end of the month. And yet in so many ways, Bhutan... is far beyond anything the world has to offer.

The concept of Gross National Happiness in a people formed in Buddhist values rests on four major principles: 1. sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development; 2. Conservation of a fragile ecology; 3. Promotion of culture and the purpose of a human civilization; and 4. Good governance that looks beyond greed to human development. A romantic model, of course, but impossible. Except that here, it isn't.... They are deciding together in the midst of a world built on money, military might and unlimited consumption to simply reject all of those things. In Bhutan, the national emphasis is on sustainable

development, the preservation of cultural values, the conservation of the natural environment and the establishment of good governance that puts human well being and happiness before business, productivity or rugged individualism.

## **7. COSTA RICA SEEKS TO BECOME WORLD'S FIRST CARBON-NEUTRAL NATION BY 2021: SMALL FARMERS SHOWING THE WAY**

Four years ago its leaders declared that it would become the world's first carbon-neutral nation by 2021 – in transportation, energy, in fact everything – including agriculture, which contributes a whopping 37% of Costa Rica's emissions.

Agricultural emissions can be the toughest to reduce. But you wouldn't know it talking with farmers like Maria Luisa Jiminez, one of hundreds of small farmers who are replacing conventional agricultural practices with cheap, low-carbon technologies.

Jiminez says that while her farm is small (just a quarter acre), it's incredibly productive. Every month she harvests about 2,000 heads of lettuce, hundreds of cabbages, celery, cauliflower, cucumber – the list goes on and it's all organic. Instead of conventional fertilizer, she uses a mixture of dried rice husks, coconut fibre and composted cow manure and biochar that traps carbon in the soil and helps hold water and nutrients. Jiminez learned these "green" techniques through a government training program. Now she's a trainer herself. She says more than 550 Costa Rican families use the same process over the past 5 years.

The impacts of climate change are already being felt in Costa Rica. That's given an urgency to meeting its 2021 deadline for making not just its agriculture, but its entire economy carbon-neutral by then. [www.theworld.org](http://www.theworld.org)

## **8. GIANT UNDERGROUND RESERVOIRS DISCOVERED IN KENYA: ESTIMATED TO CONTAIN 250 BILLION CUBIC METRES OF WATER**

Nairobi, Kenya. *CCPA Good News Page*, via Elaine Hughes: October/13:  
Scientists have discovered giant reservoirs of underground water hundreds of

meters beneath the surface of Kenya's drought-prone north that could irrigate crops and prevent tribal conflict over water shortages. Using satellite imagery, seismic technology used in the hunt for oil and gas, UNESCO and the Kenyan government have detected five new aquifers. They hold an estimated total of 250 billion cubic meters of water in underground lakes that are replenished annually by 3.4 billion cubic meters, about the same as Kenya's current use.

"If we use this vast new source of water sustainably," said Cabinet Secretary Judi Wakhungu, "Kenya will become very secure in its water resources." "The potential is great in terms of alleviating the possibility of water-based conflict", said UNESCO's Gretchen Kalonji, and "equally importantly, in terms of economic development and livelihoods."

## **9. NOBEL PEACE LAUREATES CALL ON WORLD LEADERS TO NEGOTIATE AN END TO NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

Warsaw, Poland. Oct. 22/13. Seven Nobel Peace laureates called on world leaders to bring about the "universal, legal and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons". The statement which came at the end of a three day annual gathering of peace prize winners, also called for peaceful solutions to armed conflicts in Syria and elsewhere. Included in the seven were Lech Walesa, the Dalai Lama, and former South African President F.W. de Klerk.

## **10. SAY "YES" TO YES! MAGAZINE": THREE STORIES IT TELLS OF INITIATIVES BENT ON BUILDING A BETTER WORLD**

From Randy Weekes, Lanark, On. November 28/13: Focusing on success nourishes hope, creativity and empowerment. Dwelling solely on problems feeds despair. Yes! Magazine exists to share the stories of individuals and groups who are finding ways to create a better world. It is cheaper than valium and perhaps a better investment in nourishing a healthier one. Just \$29 a year for Canadians. [www.yesmagazine.org](http://www.yesmagazine.org) . The following three stories are from the Winter 2014 edition.

**\*From Military Contracts to Civilian Markets:** The State of Connecticut has established a “Futures Commission” to explore how companies can transition from military contracts to civilian markets, with an emphasis on environmentally friendly products. This was first proposed by peace groups in 2009, who have been working closely with labour unions since, to promote the change. The idea is spreading to neighbouring states.

**\*A Healthier Diet for the Planet (and its people):** Frances Moore Lappé published *Diet for a Small Planet* in 1971, examining how food scarcity is created by a food industry and economic marketplace that nourishes wealth inequality, environmental damage and poor health for everyone, from the poor to the elite. Since then the movement to eat delicious, nutritious foods from lower down the food chain, grown close to home instead of the other side of the planet, has grown globally. As one indicator, the number of local farmers’ markets has grown in the US more than four-fold in the past 20 years.

**\*Seeds of change, seeds for sustainability:** Vandana Shiva promotes the preservation and sharing of seeds, describing them as a “convergence of human intelligence [the best selected by farmers for the next crop, in their unique climate and soil,] and nature’s intelligence.” She observes that “life is expressed in diversity: diversity of culture, diversity of humans, diversity of seeds. ... Monoculture [including chemical-dependant seeds] can only be held together through external coercive control. ... Seed saving is an important political act.” Her seed-saving and organic farming movement, Navdanya, now has more than 70,000 farmer-members.

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