



GOOD NEWS SERVICE #24; WINTER 2012-2013

“It is (past) time to turn our backs on the unilateral search for security...We must persist in the quest for united action to counter both global warming and a weaponized world.”

Many of the stories told in this issue of the Good News Service are about the various ways citizens are heeding this statement made 10 years ago by 100 Nobel laureates. The statement was initiated by John Polanyi, C.C, himself a Nobel laureate in Chemistry, who persuaded the *Globe & Mail* to publish the statement in 2002 free of charge, as part of a full page advertisement. It was endorsed by 158 Companions and Officers of the Order of Canada, leading to a similar statement endorsed ten years later by more than 600 recipients of the Order.

1. PRESIDENT OBAMA PLANS TOUGH GUN CONTROL LAWS

Jan 6, 2013. *Ottawa Citizen*, by Alexandra Freean, via *The Times of London*: President Barack Obama is close to taking a political gamble that may define his second term in office by pushing for tough gun control measures that go far beyond the reintroduction of a ban on assault weapons. After last month’s school shooting in Newtown, Conn., the White House is understood to be considering a national gun

ownership registry that could track the sale of weapons. Other measures being looked at include universal background checks for firearm buyers, stronger mental health checks on gun owners, and tougher penalties for carrying arms near schools or giving them to minors.

Obama said after the murders that he would use all the powers of his office to prevent another tragedy and has asked Vice President Joe Biden to come up with “real reforms” by the end of January. The president’s determination to push forward with tougher gun laws, in the face of fierce opposition from the National Rifle Association (NRA) and other gun owner groups, is part of an ambitious political agenda he has set for his final term after his re-election victory in November.

2. HERE COMES THE SUN; FROM DAWSON CREEK, BC TO HALIFAX, NS HUNDREDS OF CITIES ARE COMMITTING TO SOLAR POWER

Dec. 27/12, *The Globe & Mail*. By Dave McGinn: “Look on the roof of any city building in Dawson Creek, BC and you will see the power of the sun. Almost every municipal building that we now have in the city is covered in solar panels,” says Mayor Michael Bernier. “That includes solar hot water as well as photovoltaic panels, which are used to generate electricity: our fire hall, police station, library, City Hall, everything down to the crosswalk lights.”

To help pay for its solar initiatives, the city imposed a \$100 per tonne levy on its greenhouse gas emissions. Last year, the city emitted 3,600 tonnes, so \$360,000 went to its carbon fund... Meanwhile, more than 4,000 kilometres to the East, another large sun-powered project is underway, with Halifax undertaking its own solar city project.

As part of a new program approved by the Halifax Regional Council earlier this month, solar hot-water panels will be installed on up to 1,000 city homes. Residents who participate will pay for the systems through a surcharge on their property tax bill over 10 years, while saving on their hot water costs and earning a greater sense of environmental responsibility.

Around the world, a combination of smart economics and concern for the environment is fuelling the push for solar power. **Australia**, for instance, currently has seven solar cities – Adelaide, Alice Springs, Blacktown, Central Victoria, Moreland, Perth and Townsville – in different stages of development and operation. In September, **Denmark** reached its 2020 goal of having the capacity to generate 200 megawatts of

solar power eight years early... And **India** announced it is ready to invest \$84 million to fund the first of 60 solar cities, which will see solar hot water systems in all hospitals, temples, hotels and other buildings, with street lights also running on solar power,

In 2008, **Marburg, Germany**, passed a 'solar code' requiring anyone who builds or renovates a building to include solar collectors on the roof. **Freiburg**, also in Germany, is another proud solar city, thanks to its many projects, including a photovoltaic installation to power its soccer stadium.

3. NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT; THE HARD SLOG TO GET BEYOND RHETORIC

Nov 15, 2012. *The Embassy Magazine*, Ottawa. By Paul Meyer. The annual session of the UN General Assembly's First (Disarmament) Committee recently wrapped up its work. Over 50 resolutions and decisions that addressed a wide spectrum of non-proliferation and disarmament issues were adopted by the committee. The theme of nuclear weapons continued to be dominant, with many of the resolutions consisting of hardy perennials that set out in a formal manner various aims and principles of the international community in the nuclear realm.

This year, three of these resolutions attempted to go beyond pious rhetoric and actually take some action in addressing the challenges in a world still awash with nuclear weapons and the fissile material from which they are made. The first and most modest of these action resolutions was one sponsored by the Non-Aligned Movement which called for the convening of a high level meeting of the General Assembly on Sept. 26, 2013 to address the impasse in multilateral disarmament activity. Yet four of the five nuclear disarmament states, China being the exception, abstained on the resolution, one that was adopted with 165 "yes" votes.

The second action resolution, led by Canada, was concerned with a treaty for banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. It called for establishing an expanded Group of Governmental Experts with 25 states that would meet for two sessions of two weeks each in both 2014 and 2015 and report back to the General Assembly at the end of this period. Though even this weak resolution had to be watered down to get support, it was finally adopted.

4. WHAT IF MOTHER NATURE HAD RIGHTS? WELL, SHE DOES IN ECUADOR AND BOLIVIA

Jan 9, 2013. *Toronto Globe & Mail*, by David Suzuki: “In some of the poorest countries of Latin America, one can find a refreshing departure from the conventional economic thinking entrenched in Canada and around the world. It’s not often that people look to countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia as examples that might have something to teach Canada. And yet, when it comes to finding new forms of economic development that pay serious attention to the environment, this is exactly the case. And at a time when Canada’s oil sands production continues to grow despite climate science predicting even more alarming consequences, it’s high time we had a look at what’s going on in the Andes.”

Both Ecuador and Bolivia are embarking on new paths of social and economic development to what they call *sumac kawsay*, or *living well*. It is about developing in harmony with nature, meeting human rights and satisfying basic needs for all, and living in balance. Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa has said that his country’s constitution is the first in the world to give rights to nature. In other words, trees, animals, rivers – entire ecosystems – have the constitutional right to exist and flourish.

In 2010, two American residents of Ecuador were the first to go to court on behalf of nature, over damages to a river caused by a provincial government road construction crew. The case was a first, both for Ecuador and the world, establishing a legal precedent. Ecuador’s attempt to marry ecology and economy has led to a radical proposal to not exploit 20% of the country’s untapped oil reserves. Those reserves happen to lie under Yasuni National Park – a jewel of the Amazon rain forest thought to harbour the highest level of biodiversity on Earth. Scientists have found more species of trees in one hectare of this forest than there are in all of North America, from Alaska to Mexico.

Another lesson Canada could learn takes place high in the Andes mountains, in Bolivia’s Uyuni salt flats. The flats are the fossil remnant of an ancient seabed containing more than half of the world’s lithium deposits. Lithium is much in demand and electric cars using lithium batteries are expected to play an increasing role in reducing our carbon footprint. Instead of exporting raw lithium to the industrial countries Bolivia plans to make the batteries itself, thus realizing the economic benefits of such value-added products.

5. CIRQUE DU SOLEIL BRINGS BOTH JOBS AND POETRY TO ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD IN MONTREAL

Jan. 1, 2013 *The Globe & Mail*. by Anne McIlroy. The Cirque du Soleil had plenty of options when it considered where to build its corporate head-quarters, but it chose to invest \$100 million in a barren site on the edge of a giant garbage dump in the Montréal neighbourhood of Saint-Michel.

“We really chose the worst compared to the others”, says Gaetan Morency, vice president of citizenship. “We wanted to help a community grow and be proud again”, he says.

In the 15 years since it moved in, Cirque du Soleil has created jobs for young people in a neighbourhood with a history of gang violence and where many families live in poverty. It has launched a program in the local schools and is one of the partners in TOHU, a neighbourhood cultural centre with a circular stage that offers regular performances. Thousands of people attend its regular shows and events The headquarters, where 2,000 people now work, has expanded twice with new additions in 2001 and 2007.

Cirque du Soleil helped to push the municipal government to stop dumping in the quarry in 2000 and to adopt an ambitious plan to turn the dump into a park with an artificial lake and bike paths. Now officially called the Saint-Michel Environmental Complex, the two square kilometre park is slowly being transformed. Grass grows on what used to be mounds of refuse. Gas from the decomposing garbage that once leaked into local basements is now collected by a network of pipes sunk into the garbage and burned by a biothermica power plant to produce electricity.

Mr. Morency is proud of the social and cultural contributions Cirque du Soleil makes to Saint-Michel. All the original landscaping was done by young people as part of a project with the Montréal police department. Cirque du Soleil has offered programming in local schools for seven years, which has helped it become rooted in the community. “We never had graffiti on any of our buildings because the residents feel part of it. Instead of being the landfill neighbourhood, it is the Cirque du Soleil neighbourhood. That’s a very big difference.”

6. GOOD OIL: AN ALTERNATIVE TO DESTRUCTIVE INDUSTRIAL-SCALE OIL PALM PLANTATIONS

Greenpeace Magazine, Winter, 2012/13. Oil palm plantations have expanded rapidly over the past two decades in Indonesia, clearing large swathes of natural forest and critical peatland areas. However, there is an alternative to unsustainable, large-scale plantations: small holder operations. One of Greenpeace's aims in targeting environmentally destructive companies is to support global markets for these local approaches to producing sustainable forests like palm oil.

These solutions provide lasting benefits to communities while protecting the remaining rain forest. The Dosan community, for example, manages their own palm oil plantation and has committed to protecting its forests, improving environmental management and maintaining the peatland water system. With full employment and a thriving economy, they are the guardians and beneficiaries of their forest.

7. SOLELY SOLAR IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC...

Tokelau, South Pacific. From the December 2012. *CCPA Monitor*, via Elaine Hughes: A string of atolls, situated between New Zealand and Hawaii, recently became the first territory able to meet all of its electricity needs with solar power instead of the dirty, inefficient diesel generators it had relied on for decades.

Tokelau, which is made up of the Atafu, Nukunonu, and Fakaofu atolls – is administered by New Zealand, and it was New Zealand that made the \$7 million investment in the territory's energy future. With solar stations on all three atolls (the last of which was completed last month), the three atolls now have the renewable energy capacity to meet the electricity needs of all of Tokelau's 1,500 inhabitants.

This investment in solar power will not only pay environmental/ecological benefits, but will also free up economic resources for social and economic development on Tokelau. – *The BBC.*

8.... AND PEE POWER IN NIGERIA

Lagos, Nigeria. December 2012-Jan. 2013. *CCPA Monitor* via Elaine Hughes. In a spectacular breakthrough, four teenage schoolgirls in Nigeria have invented a "pee-powered" generator that converts one litre of urine into six hours of electricity. Fourteen-year olds Duro-Aina Ade-bola, Akindele Abiola, Faleke Oluwatoyin, and 15

year old Bello Eniola presented their invention at the recent Maker Faire Africa event in Lagos, using a resource that is free, unlimited and easily obtainable.

Urine is first put into a electrolytic cell, which separates the urea into nitrogen, water and hydrogen. The hydrogen goes into a water filter for purification, which then gets pushed into a gas cylinder. Next, it pushes the hydrogen into a cylinder of liquid borax where moisture is removed from the gas. This purified hydrogen gas drives the generator, with one litre of urine providing six hours of electricity.

The girls' invention needs stronger safety valves, but is expected to be ready for mass production by the end of 2013. It should be a great boost for the economy of Nigeria, where more than half the country's 162 million citizens now have no access to electric power.

9. ABBAS AND HAMAS LEADERS MEET AT EGYPT'S INVITATION

January 10, 2013. Jerusalem, *The New York Times*, by Jodi Rudoren:
President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority met last Wednesday in Cairo with Khaled Meshal, the political chief of Mr. Abbas's rival, Hamas, but it was unclear if they were able to overcome any of the differences that have fuelled a bitter five-year feud.

The two were invited to Cairo by President Mohamed Morsi of Egypt, who first met each separately as he tried to broker a reconciliation. Since their 2007 split, Mr. Abbas's Fatah faction, which dominates in the West Bank, and Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, have signed four reconciliation agreements which have failed to come to fruition. The Egyptian peace-brokering efforts came after a huge turnout on Friday for a Fatah rally in Gaza that many saw as a signal of improved relations between the parties. Cairo's involvement is seen as critical, because of its role as a regional powerhouse and its alliance with both the United States and Israel.

The three main issues on the table are the formation of a national union government (and who would lead it); the scheduling of presidential and parliamentary elections; and the reconstitution of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which Mr. Abbas leads, to include Hamas and other militant factions.

10. SMALL STEPS FORWARD FOR WOMEN IN SAUDI ARABIA

January 11, 2013. a World Media Report via Randy Weekes: Saudi Arabia has decided to appoint 30 women to its 150 member Advisory Council, a break in practice with the ultraconservative, male-dominated policies and practices of the country. This is seen as a step towards reform in women's rights, albeit one taken carefully in order to avoid anger in powerful religious circles. King Abdullah has also decreed that women may run for office and may vote in the 2015 municipal elections, without a male guardian's permission.

This progress is in the context of a country where women's movements, including admission to a hospital, are controlled by males in their family, Women aren't allowed to drive, and unrelated couples can be prosecuted for having coffee together in public. The women in the Advisory Council will be required to wear a veil, to sit in a reserved area (some reports suggesting that it will be screened from the view of men), and of course to be taxed to and from the Council by males in their family.

Although the progress is limited, the 20% representation in the Advisory Council gives women there a slightly higher representation than women in the US Congress, where they form 18.3 percent of the membership. For comparison purposes, the Inter-Parliamentary Union reports that as of October, 2012, women sat in 56% of legislation seats in Rwanda, 44% in Sweden, 40% in Nicaragua, 25% in Canada (giving Canada a ranking of 48th in the world), 8% in Botswana and 2% in Egypt.

* * * *

The Good News Service is published periodically by **Murray Thomson, O.C.** at 358- 43 Aylmer Ave., Ottawa, ON K1S 5R4, in cooperation with **Randy Weekes** of 599 South Laurent Road, Lanark, ON K0G 1K0

Correspondence and suggestions for items in future issues are welcome, via mothom@rogers.com. or via raw@superaje.com

