

GOOD NEWS SERVICE #30: MID WINTER 2014



Editorial: Jan. 15, 2014: Two articles are included in this issue of the newsletter which are decidedly good news. First are the following excerpts from “Stubborn Peace,” a talk given by Dr. Mary-Wynne Ashford, *former Associate Director, International Physicians to Prevent Nuclear War*: Her statements are based on research carried out by the Centre for Human Security in Vancouver.

The second is one written by Zack Beauchamp, via Alyn Ware, Global Coordinator of Parliamentarians for NonProliferation & Nuclear Disarmament (PNND), entitled “Five Reasons why 2013 was the best year in human history”. Each of these articles can be criticized by those of us who face, and seek to remove,

the triple threats of drastic climate warming, over population and nuclear war. Each of these potential catastrophes could overturn the bright futures and dash the hopes suggested by the following stories and events. Nevertheless, it is heartening to know that so many people in so many places today, while “acting locally are thinking globally”, in tune with the Golden Rule, “*Do unto Others...*,” a Rule which is common to all faiths today. May this trend continue in 2014.

1. FIVE REASONS FOR THE DECLINE OF WARS AND DICTATORSHIPS

Victoria, BC, by Mary-Wynne Ashford: “Did you know that since 1991, one hundred wars have quietly ended, and more than 60 dictators have been toppled in velvet revolutions? A war is defined as 1,000 deaths in battle zones in a twelve month period. But why is this happening, and why now?”

“I have been preoccupied by war for the past 30 years. In 1982 I began my medical practice as a family doctor, and joined the fledgling organization, *International Physicians to Prevent Nuclear War*. It was very small then, but today there are now more than 250,000 doctor members around the world. In 1985 we were awarded the Nobel peace prize by bringing together Soviet and American doctors to jointly raise the alarm; in the event of nuclear war we have nothing meaningful to offer; our only rational course today is prevention.

“Researchers give three contributing factors they see as important in the decline of war, and I have added two more:

- 1) The increasing success of the United Nations in nation-building, with a success rate of 67%;
- 2) The growing influence of international law, in particular, the founding of the International Criminal Court. For the first time in history, brutal leaders who incite genocide or commit crimes against humanity can be held personally responsible;
- 3) The increasing power of civil society; it is the conscience brought to bear on government and the business sector, to hold them accountable to the common good;
- 4) The increasing role that women play in decision-making and the economy. Countries where women have no right to vote, or hold office, or to determine how many children they will have, or whether they can be employed outside their home have thirty times the likelihood of having a civil war compared to countries where women have those rights;
- 5) The increasing engagement of youth in demanding a better world. It’s reported that the majority of activists in the anti-nuclear weapons movement are under 25.

2. STUBBORN PEACE: HOW A CATHOLIC CARDINAL AND 2 MILLION PEOPLE TOPPLED A DICTATOR IN THE PHILIPPINES

Mary-Wynne Ashford described how *Stubborn Peace*, the subject of her talk, won out in three different parts of the world. In the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos held his country in the grip of a brutal dictatorship for more than 20 years. Meanwhile, the people opposed to his regime were meeting in church basements studying and practicing nonviolent resistance, as practiced by Gandhi and Martin Luther King. The time came when a handful of army officers refused to obey Marcos and barricaded themselves inside a building. Marcos ordered the army to go in with tanks and take them out.

Cardinal Jaime Sin, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, went on the radio and called the people of Manila to block the streets to keep the tanks from getting into downtown. More than 2 million people did so and stayed in the streets for four days and nights until finally Marcos fled.

3. STUBBORN PEACE: HOW A PANTOMIME ACTOR USED LAUGHTER TO RESTORE CIVILITY IN COLOMBIA

“A young Math professor, Antanus Mockus, on becoming Mayor of Bogota decided to clean up one of the most dangerous cities on earth . Traffic, for instance, was in constant gridlock so he fired the corrupt traffic police, replacing them with pantomime artists. First, the people laughed at their antics. Then they slowed down driving their cars and traffic deaths dropped dramatically.

There was also a terrible drought so the Mayor went on television, took a public shower, got wet, turned off the water, soaped down, rinsed with water then immediately turned off the water again. People got the message; consumption of water in Bogota dropped by 40%.

Another action he took was to help women go safely downtown. He declared there would be three nights for women only downtown; the men were to stay home. The jazz and dance clubs and coffee houses would be open, and they were. As a result, 300,000 women went downtown, reclaiming the city for themselves.

4. STUBBORN PEACE: HOW TRIBESMEN HELPED END NUCLEAR TESTS IN THE DESERT OF KAZAKHSTAN

“The Soviet Union used to test their nuclear weapons on a test range near Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan. The local tribesmen decided they would try to end

the testing because of the health consequences: the stillbirths and miscarriages, the deformed children and early cancers. So they contacted the Shosone Indians in Nevada who suffered the same problems and said: "Come to the desert; we're going to stop these nuclear tests." 600 people came: 300 locals, 150 doctors, 150 others. It was like no protest I'd ever known., said Mary-Wynne.

The impact of that protest was that Mikhail Gorbachev put an immediate moratorium on Soviet nuclear testing and they never tested again. But the most wonderful part was afterwards, in the yurts (collapsible skin-covered tents). We sat in circles of twenty, each with a feast of dried fruits and fresh vegetables, horse and goat meat and we toasted with vodka. About midnight the host said:

"You know, I was raised to believe there is an enemy hiding out there waiting to attack our country. That's why we had to allow the Soviets to test their nuclear weapons here. Now you are in my yurt, and you are not my enemy. Who, then, is? The whole world is my family." Then suddenly he said, "Now you are going to sing for me. We'll sing, in our own languages, *We Shall Overcome*." And so we did!"

5. FIVE REASONS WHY 2013 WAS THE BEST YEAR IN HUMAN HISTORY

Dec. 11/13, by Zak Beauchamp of: <http://thinkprogress.org/security/2013/12/11/>:

"Between the brutal civil war in Syria, and other human disasters it would be easy to enter 2014 thinking the last year has been an awful one. But you'd be wrong. We have every reason to believe that 2013 was, in fact, the best year on the planet for human kind. Five reasons why:

5.1. *Fewer people are dying young, and more are living longer than ever before.*

There is not a single country in the world where infant or child mortality is not lower than it was in 1950. See Angus Deaton, Princeton University Economist. This was confirmed by the World Health Organization Report in 2013.

5.2. *Fewer people suffer from extreme poverty.*

There are fewer people in abject poverty than at any other time in human history. 80% of the improvements have taken place in China, with a smaller percent improvement in India.

5.3. *War is becoming rarer and less deadly than it was before;*

This is disputable; the Korean, the Vietnamese and several wars in Africa: the Congo, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Sudan; the ten year war between Iraq and Iran; the three wars involving Israel and its neighbours; similarly three short wars between India and Pakistan and numerous civil wars

involving surrogates, especially American and Russian. And over everyone hangs the threat of global nuclear destruction. Yet what seems correct is the positive impact of democratic institutions and their adoption by increasing the number of countries reducing the odds of such countries warring on each other.

5.4. *The rates of murder and other violent crimes are in free-fall.*

Slavery, once commonly sanctioned by governments, is illegal everywhere on earth. The use of torture as legal punishment has gone down dramatically. The European murder rate fell 35- fold from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the 20th Century. Homicide crime rates have collapsed in this 21st Century. Violent crimes are on the decline. G7 countries as a whole show huge declines in homicide, robbery and vehicle theft.

5.5 *There is less racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination in the world today.*

Racism, sexism, etc. remain powerful forces, and racism is not dead. Yet, go back 150 years: African-Americans were in chains. European Jews were routinely massacred in the ghettos; women around the world were denied opportunity to work outside the home and made subordinates to their husbands. Gays and Lesbians were invisible. In 2003, zero Americans enjoyed marriage equality; by 2013, 38% did. Article 13 of the European Community Treaty bans discrimination re sexual orientation. And now the public opinion trends are positive world-wide.

6. GIANT PALM OIL TRADER COMMITS TO END ITS DEFORESTATION BUSINESS IN INDONESIA

Dec 28/13 via Richard George, Greenpeace Team in the UK: “I want to tell you of an amazing victory involving the world’s largest Trader in palm oil. Making palm oil shouldn’t involve destroying Indonesia’s rainforests. But dangerous and greedy companies are trashing them to grow palms. It’s pushing orangutans and Sumatran tigers ever closer to extinction. My colleagues and I have spent months investigating the palm oil industry.

Everywhere we went, whether investigating oil palm illegally inside a national park, speaking with families trying to protect their livelihood, or working with charities that rescue animals from palm oil company bulldozers, we came across the same name – Wilmar International. 45% of the world’s palm oil passes through their hands. Throughout the autumn we exposed how Wilmar was

laundering this dirty palm oil and selling it to major brands, like Gillette, Ferrero, Cadbury, L'Oreal, and Clearasil.

Our evidence linked Wilmar and its customers to the destruction of orangutan and tiger habitat. Then something interesting happened. First, Ferrero announced a detailed plan to buy only forest friendly palm oil. Then Mondelez and L'Oreal made individual commitments to no deforestation. And when customers started moving Wilmar had no choice but to follow suit. On 5 December Wilmar announced that it would stop clearing forests and stop buying oil from companies it knew were engaged in forest destruction. "We know from our customers," said Wilmar's CEO, "there is a strong and rapidly growing demand for traceable, deforestation-free palm oil, and we intend to meet it."

7. BOREAL INITIATIVE SEEKS MORE GOVERNMENT PROTECTION OF CANADA'S VAST FORESTS, FROM NEWFOUNDLAND TO THE YUKON

Jan. 6/14. Ottawa Citizen, by Bob Weber: Canada has made significant strides in protecting the vast boreal forest that stretches across most of its provinces and territories, but the world's largest intact forest ecosystem still faces threats, says an environmental group. The amount of boreal forest under some form of government protection has doubled since 2007, to about 12% of the total area, biologist Jeff Wells of the Canadian Boreal Initiative said recently.

"That's a big rate of increase in a short time and we are hoping that's going to continue," he said. The boreal forest is the huge swath of green that stretches from Newfoundland to the Yukon. It's home to millions of migratory birds; it also harbours endangered wildlife such as caribou, and shelters hundreds of wetlands that clean water and store carbon.

Wells has high praise for provinces such as Manitoba, which teamed with aboriginal groups in 2013 to try to get the Pimachiowin Aki region – a 33,400 square kilometer area almost half the size of New Brunswick – declared a World Heritage Site. While the attempt failed the province has promised to try again in the coming year.

8. "YOUR FATWA DOESN'T APPLY HERE": STORIES FROM THE STRUGGLES AGAINST MUSLIM FUNDAMENTALISM

In many conflicts, whatever their true roots, things like access to resources, popular support is maintained by simplistic labeling of 'enemies' who threaten us. "Muslim Fundamentalists" are the bogeymen of our era. These two words are seen as inseparable by many, despite the communities of Moslems around the

world who are engaged not only in peaceful lives but in the work of building peace.

Karima Bennoune is a Muslim International human rights lawyer. Her recent book *“Your Fatwa Does not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the fight against Muslim Fundamentalism”* is based on her interviews with 300 people in 30 countries, working within their own communities to resist extremism. Here’s one such story:

Dec. 20/13, The Guardian: The 132 year old synagogue in Bradford, UK was deteriorating and the small Jewish congregation, unable to finance the repairs, faced losing the building. Some words circulated, a city mosque got involved and the Muslim community in Bradford is helping to raise more than 100,000 pounds to restore the structure.

A friendship has formed between the Chairman of the synagogue and the Secretary of the Council of Mosques. When the Jewish chairman goes on holiday he gives the keys and the security codes to his Muslim neighbour. New traditions are emerging. The Jewish community invites local Muslims and Christians to an oneg Shabbat (Friday night dinner), and Muslims return the invitation for a Ramadan feast. When the Christian harvest festival came around, halal meat was contributed so that everyone could enjoy the shepherd’s pie.

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