

**GOOD NEWS SERVICE #33: EARLY**

**SUMMER 2014**

**Editorial:** June 2014: Bad news? Good news? Take your pick. Gross violence and preparations for it; arbitrary arrests at midnight, husbands “going missing”, their wives and daughters raped; ongoing civil wars in Syria, Iraq, Congo, Central African Republic sicken and appall us. Nine million refugees in Syria, a majority of them leading desperate lives in camps inside their own country! The games of deadly chicken being played today by Russian and American military forces carrying nuclear weapons infuriate us. How dare they play so casually with our beautiful world and our children’s future!

Side by side, in that same world of ours, are hundreds of events taking place we characterize as good news. This newsletter is an ongoing effort to describe some of them, in cooperation with the *Good News Agency* from Rome, (see Item #10, below) with *Yes! Magazine* from Washington State, the *CCPA’s Good News Page* from Ottawa, *Ploughshares Monitor* from Waterloo, ON, *Corporate Knights* from Toronto, and other sources, such as our limited but expanding readership. For if there is to be a future at all it will grow out of the thousands of actions, policies and practices designed to build and nurture a culture of peace, not one designed to vanquish and destroy.

## **1. IMPORTANCE OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS NUCLEAR LAWSUIT**

May 6/14. Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, by Avner Cohen and Lily Vaccaro. The tiny Republic of the Marshall Islands recently filed an extraordinary lawsuit at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, suing all nine nuclear weapons possessors for failing to eliminate their nuclear arsenals. The legal basis of the case is derived from Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which obligates the five nuclear weapons states under the Treaty (the United States, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, France and the People’s Republic of China) “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament.”

The lawsuit also charges the four nuclear weapons states outside of the NPT – including one, Israel, which has never even acknowledged possessing nuclear weapons – with violating international customary law... The lawsuit reflects a growing belief among international legal and policy experts (as well as some diplomats) that the time has come for the NPT to be treated – due to its near universal adherence – as part of customary international law by which all states must abide, regardless of whether or not they actually signed the treaty... The lawsuit accentuates the rise of a new kind of politics of nuclear disarmament, one that ties nuclear disarmament to humanitarian issues...In 2010 the linkage became explicit when humanitarian consequences were addressed in the NPT Review Conference final document. In 2013, the Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Oslo, Norway, started a series of international meetings on this theme. These conferences press the issue of nuclear disarmament through the lens of the unique characteristics of nuclear weapons – their capability for unleashing destruction not just on vast numbers of humans, but also on the environment, the economy and the well-being of future generations. Notably, all five nuclear nations under the NPT and Israel refused to attend the first two humanitarian conferences and are not likely to attend the next, calling them a distraction from the legitimate fora for disarmament negotiations...

## **2. ONE BRAVE AYATOLLAH SPARKS A LIGHT IN IRAN**

April 29, 2014. Embassy Weekly, Ottawa. By Geoffrey Cameron & Robert Joustra. The Office of Religious Freedom marked its first anniversary in February. At a forum organized for this occasion, Religious Freedom Ambassador Andrew Bennett remarked that in the Middle East, the world has witnessed “a worrying inverse trend of persecution and human rights” in the wake of the Arab Spring. A similar trend has extended to Iran under President Hassan Rouhani. Religious minorities have been among the worst affected by this rising tide of extremism. Plenty of bad theology persists around the world, theology that sustains domination and dehumanizing atrocities against

minorities. But the flower of good theology, of generous and civil religious communities, flourishes in many of these same places, at the same time. The Islamic Republic of Iran is one such place.

Just as the UN's Human Rights Council was renewing the mandate of the special rapporteur on human rights in Iran – Ayatollah Abdol-Hamid Masoumi-Tehrani made an astonishing gift of reconciliation to that country's Bahá'is, a religious minority that has endured decades of persecution. In 2001, the Muslim cleric decided to prepare calligraphic renderings of the Torah, Psalms and Quran as a means of fostering dialogue among religions. However, he was forced to abandon the project under threat from Iran's Ministry of Intelligence... Now he has gifted to the Bahais of the world a work of calligraphy in the traditional Persian "illumination" style from the writings of Baha, the prophet-founder of the Bahai faith. His actions can only be described as shockingly courageous.

### **3. MARCHING FOR EDUCATION: MILLIONS RECOGNIZED *DAY OF THE AFRICA CHILD* IN OVER 50 COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE**

**JUNE 24, 2014. World at School <info@aworldatschool.org> Day of the African Child on 16 June was marked by more than 130 education-themed events in 53 countries. They included Plan International's delegation of youth from across the world in a Youth Takeover of the African Union in Addis Ababa. A number of other happenings took place, both positive and negative, including 1) UNESCO revealing that aid to basic education was cut by almost 10% between 2010 and 2012 – much higher than the 1% in overall aid levels; 2) World Cup host nation Brazil approved a plan to increase its spending on education from 6.4 of gross national product to 10%; 3) Africa launched an historic campaign to end child marriage and Pope Francis called for a global end to child labour; 4) Jeffrey Sachs wrote about how universal education is the Millennium Development Goal that everyone forgot. 5) Global leaders signalled strong support for bringing quality education to all children ahead of the Global Partnership for Education's Second Replenishment Pledging Conference in Brussels on June 26. GPE Chair Julia Gillard said: "Our partners understand the**

seriousness of the situation.” 6) USAID launched its Let Girls Learn campaign and announced more than \$230 million for new programmes to support education around the world.

#### **4. PROVIDING CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES FOR SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN IN TURKEY**

**MARCH 4/14 VIA CARITAS & THE GOOD NEWS AGENCY.** More than one million children have fled Syria as refugees. Children who used to feel safe in their homes and schools have lost everything. Some have been injured; others have seen their parents killed or arrested. Young children cope with difficult situations very differently from adults. They rarely talk about the way they feel or tell stories. They show their feelings through the way they act. Caritas has been supporting partners build child-friendly spaces on the Turkish side of the border. These spaces allow children much-needed structure and routine, as well as a chance to play, relax and behave like children again. They provide a safe, supportive environment in which children can tell their own stories, express their feelings and start the long process of recovering a sense of normalcy. Even if the war ended tomorrow, it would take years for communities in Syria to recover, to rebuild and to achieve any sort of reconciliation. We can help children to play, to be happy, and to find alternatives to violence – which gives refugees of all ages hope for the future.

<http://www.caritas.org/2014/03/providing-child-friendly-spaces-syrian-refugee-children-turkey/>

#### **5. SHARP DECLINE IN MATERNAL AND CHILD DEATHS**

June 2014. Seattle, WA. from The *CCPA Good News Page*, via Elaine Hughes: Since the start of an international effort to address maternal and child mortality, millions of lives have been saved globally, a new study shows. In 2000, the Millennium Goals were established by the United Nations to drive

maternal and child deaths down by 2015, and indeed the pace of improvement accelerated, resulting in child deaths falling 48% globally between 1990 and 2013. Maternal deaths fell significantly over the same period.

The vast majority of countries saw accelerated reductions on maternal and child deaths. Key drivers of progress in reducing child deaths at the global level include maternal education, medical and public health innovations, and rising income. For each additional year of school mothers complete, child deaths drop by more than eight percent. New drugs, vaccines and other health innovations led to 4.2 million fewer child deaths in 2013 compared to 1990, and rising per capita income led to more than 900,000 fewer child deaths. -- *The Good News Network*

## **6. GREEN CONCRETE AND “BORN AGAIN WOOD”: KEY ELEMENTS IN THE BETTER BUILDINGS BOOM:**

Spring 2014. *Corporate Knights*, by Tyler Hamilton: More buildings than ever carry the label green, intelligent, sustainable or smart. Whatever adjective one uses to describe these shelters of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is the pursuit of efficiency – both during construction and over the course of operation – that is common to them all. From an environmental perspective, the opportunities have long been understood. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that buildings represent 39 per cent of total energy use, 12 per cent of total water consumption, 68 per cent of total electricity consumption and 38 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions in the US.

Increasingly, however, the decision to build green is being driven by economics. More tenants are demanding “green” work spaces to boost employee productivity and bolster their brands...It’s why 94 per cent of architects, engineers, contractors and other building consultants are now involved in some level of green building...Of this group, more than half are expected to get the majority of their business from certifiably green projects by 2015...The bar on efficiency, of course, will continue to rise alongside the demand for smaller

environmental footprints. Innovation will play a key role, both around the technologies embraced and the creative ways to finance greener building construction... Many companies have emerged with processes and products that lower the environmental footprint of the concrete used in buildings. This includes concrete formulas and manufacturing processes that reduce water and energy use and overall emissions.

Some companies, such as Barnwood Industries of Bend, Oregon, reclaim wood from abandoned barns and other old wooden structures. Viridian Wood Products of Portland, Oregon, reclaims and upcycles wood from shipping pallets and crates discarded at local shipyards. It takes in all sorts of scrap lumber and turns it into high-value flooring, decking and paneling products. Triton Logging of Saanichton, BC estimates there are 300 million trees worldwide that have been submerged in areas flooded by hydro dams. It has developed machines that harvest these water-trapped trees, which are then sold and processed into lumber products.

## **7. FRIENDS OF THE EARTH FINALIZE REPORT FOR REGIONAL NGO MASTER PLAN FOR THE LOWER JORDAN RIVER VALLEY**

March 14/14. *Good News Agency*. The now completed Baseline Report describes the current situation in the Lower Jordan River Basin and presents the major challenges in the Basin and for each of the three riparian countries (Jordan, Palestine and Israel) towards creating sustainable development conditions, including environmental flows provided through its natural resources; a healthy eco-system; equitable sharing of water resources; free public accessibility for all nationalities within an appropriate security framework; and a healthy economic development perspective.

The baseline report will be used as a starting point for the remainder of this study: the development of national and regional NGO Master Plans. The Baseline Report marks a critical, first-ever integrated inventory of the Lower Jordan River's current situation, including up-to-date data from Israel, Jordan

and Palestine, and will provide the cooperating teams from the three countries the information needed to plan scenarios for development in the Jordan Valley. This publication is supported by the European Union's Sustainable Water Integrated Management (SWIM) Programme.

[http://foeme.org/www/?module=projects&record\\_id=205](http://foeme.org/www/?module=projects&record_id=205)

## **8 . CAN PHOTOSYNTHESIS AND THE HUMAN ABILITY FOR RAPID CHANGE SAVE US FROM CATASTROPHE?**

June 24/14. Via John Dougherty, Portland Oregon. Jeffrey Goebel is a leading expert in helping individuals and communities attain their goals. His website is: <http://www.aboutlistening.com/> Jeff 's recent talk was about two critical elements overlooked in most discussions about climate change: 1. The role of photosynthesis(\*) on the earth's carbon cycle, and 2. the opportunity for human core belief and behaviour to be changed quickly and effectively on a global scale. These two elements, he says, could potentially soften the blow, or even reverse the effects of climate change, while increasing the wellbeing of individuals and communities across the globe. [\* Photosynthesis is the process by which green plants use sunlight to convert carbon dioxide, taken from the air, and water, into complex substances].

For further information on Jeff Goebel's talk contact:

[jdoughertyor@earthlink.net](mailto:jdoughertyor@earthlink.net)

## **9. ADRA ROMANIA LAUNCHES A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

March 4/14 Bucharest, Romania by Natalia Lopez-Thismon, via the *Good News Agency*:

*The Adventist Development & Relief Agency* in Romania has launched a new national campaign against domestic violence. It was first brought to international attention in 1999 as a result of a survey, which found that domestic violence against Romanian women was higher than in any other

European country. Fifteen years later, the social issue is still a concern among families in that country.

In 2009, ADRA Romania opened the Emergency Shelter for Victims of Domestic Violence, also known as the ADRA House. It is one of only two safe houses for women and children in Bucharest, which has a population of more than 2 million people. The safe house acts as a shelter for women who have reported incidents of domestic violence to the authorities.

[http://www.adra.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=12601&news\\_iv\\_ctrl=114](http://www.adra.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=12601&news_iv_ctrl=114)

## **10. GOOD NEWS AGENCY CLAIMS CULTURE OF PEACE IS EMERGING IN ALL FIELDS OF HUMAN ENDEAVOUR**

Good News Agency carries positive and constructive news from all over the world relating to voluntary work, the work of the United Nations, non governmental organizations and institutions engaged in improving the quality of life – news that doesn't burn out in the space of a day. It is published monthly (except August) in English, Italian and Portuguese. Managing Editor: Sergio Tripi has a research staff of five. Good News Agency is distributed free of charge through the internet to 10,000 media and editorial journalists of the daily newspapers, periodical magazines and radio and television stations in 54 countries, to 3,000 NGOs, 1500 high schools, colleges and universities, as well as over 24,000 Rotarians in the world.

*It is an all-volunteer service of **Associazione Culturale dei Triangoli e della Buona Volonta Mondiale**, a registered, not-for-profit educational charity associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information, chartered in Italy in 1979. The Association operates for the development of consciousness and promotes a culture of peace in the "global village" perspective based on unity in diversity and on sharing.*

The contents of a typical month's bulletin includes news on International legislation, Human rights, Economy and Development, Solidarity, Peace and

Security, Health, Energy and Safety, Environment and Wildlife, Religion and Spirituality, Culture and Education. Persons wishing to receive free monthly copies of the Good News Agency directly should write them directly to:

[info@goodnewsagency.org](mailto:info@goodnewsagency.org)

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