



## **GOOD NEWS SERVICE #38: AUTUMN 2015**

**Editorial:** Several days of great importance occur In September and October for different faiths in the world community. For those of the Hebrew faith, on the 14<sup>th</sup> September is celebrated Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, followed nine days later by Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This in turn is followed by the Muslim fast-breaking day of Eid.

For those who uphold the UN and its never-ending efforts for a more just and peaceful world the 14<sup>th</sup> September is the International Day of Peace. This is followed on 26<sup>th</sup> by the Intl Day for Eliminating Nuclear Weapons, then the annual opening of the UN General Assembly. A month later is celebrated United Nations Day. Also for those seeking a less violent world is marked, on 2nd October, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. With such a concentration of organized peaceful celebrations should we not expect, even enjoy, a reduction of the enmities which fill our media outlets today? Are the answers to these global dilemmas we read about to be forever blowin' in the wind?

## **1. United Nations urges all States to sign and ratify a Nuclear Test Ban**

28 August/15 – For the fifth International Day against Nuclear Tests, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed voluntary moratoria on testing imposed by nuclear-armed states. But he stressed that these cannot substitute for a legally-binding treaty.

“The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is essential for the elimination of nuclear weapons,” Mr. Ban said in a message. “It is a legally binding, verifiable means by which to constrain the quantitative and qualitative development of nuclear weapons: a critical step on the road to a nuclear-free world”.

The UN General Assembly declared 29 August the International Day against Nuclear Tests, adopting a unanimous resolution that calls for increasing awareness and education “about the effects of nuclear weapon test explosions. Or, in fact, any other nuclear explosions and the need for their cessation, as one of the means of achieving the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.”

[http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsId=51744#.VeFOG\\_bt mko](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsId=51744#.VeFOG_bt mko)

## **2. Vatican to officially recognize Palestinian Statehood**

By Daniel Burke, CNN Religion Editor 13 May (CNN)

The Vatican announced Wednesday that it had brokered a treaty with the "state of Palestine," upsetting Israeli advocates and propelling Pope Francis into the heart of yet another geopolitical fray.

The treaty is expected to be signed "in the near future," the Vatican said. Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority, is scheduled to visit Pope Francis on Saturday, the day before the church canonizes two Palestinian nuns.

The treaty is thought to mark the first time the Holy See has formally recognized Palestinian statehood in a legal document. Vatican policy, however, has long held that a two-state solution is the best road to peace in the Holy Land. The Vatican has referred to Palestine as a state since November 2012, when the United Nations voted to recognize it as a nonmember observer state, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, a Vatican

spokesman, told CNN. At the time, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI led the Catholic Church.

"Therefore there is a coherent continuity," Lombardi continued in an email. "Obviously this is an international agreement with the State of Palestine and this reaffirms the recognition." According to Palestinian officials, as many as 135 states now recognize Palestine as a state. Few political leaders, though, have the moral authority and popular appeal of Pope Francis. (...)  
<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/13/world/vatican-palestinian-statehood>

### **3. The power of collective action in Bangladesh**

**From the Inter Pares Bulletin, September 2015. Vol.37. Number 3. The Meghna River in Bangladesh is a big, fast-moving river in the south of the country. Along its banks, in the communities of Charbata, thousands of poor families make their living from farming the rich alluvial soil, and from fishing. Many are members of landless groups organized by Inter Pares' counterpart *Nijera Kori*. Wealthy businessmen have been trying to take control of this area, and last year they claimed they had leased a large area of the river. They planned to build embankments enclosing the area for intensive agricultural production and fishing, depriving people of the riverside land and access to the river. The businessmen signed a secret agreement with labourers from another village to begin the work.**

**When *Nijera Kori* landless groups found out, they organized a series of public meetings, and using street theatre and songs, members brought the situation to their neighbours' attention. They collected signatures, made banners, staged marches and demanded a meeting with the local government and water development board. The government engineer investigated and pronounced: "As per the law, the river belongs to the people, and this river has not been leased by the government. To occupy the river or construct embankments on the river is a punishable offence"**

**A few days later, the hired labourers, protected by an armed gang, began construction. Shortly after, more than 2,000 landless group members surrounded the armed gang and workers. After a three hour standoff, the gang and labourers gave in, saying: "We are Just doing this job to try to earn our**

living. We give you our word that in the future, we will not come to occupy the river. We are also poor people and we support your movement.” It was a victory of the poor over the powerful, of collective action over greed and violence.

#### **4. Iceland becomes the 95<sup>th</sup> State Party to ban cluster bombs**

On 31 August, Iceland deposited its instrument of ratification of the Convention on Cluster Munitions at the United Nations’ headquarters in New York. Congratulations on becoming the 95th State Party! A signatory of the Convention on Cluster Munitions since 2008, Iceland has never stockpiled, used, produced, or transferred cluster munitions.(...) “Iceland made a big effort this year to prioritise ratification of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

As use of the weapon continues in Syria and Yemen, and cluster munition remnants continue to take lives and limbs worldwide, “it's important that other nations join Iceland in putting the protection of civilians first”, said Amy Little of Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), a member of the Cluster Munition Coalition. The Convention will enter into force for Iceland on 1 Feb 2016.

<http://www.stopclustermunitions.org/en-gb/media/news/2015/iceland-bans-cluster-bombs.aspx>

The UN General Assembly declared 29 August the International Day against Nuclear Tests in December 2009, adopting a unanimous resolution that calls for increasing awareness and education “about the effects of nuclear weapon test explosions. Or, in fact, any other nuclear explosions and the need for their cessation as one of the means of achieving the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.”

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#### **5. Recognizing neurodiversity: turning autism into a badge of pride**

**Toronto Star, July 26/15: By Sandha Somashekhar. A growing number of adults are re-discovering a sense of community, identity and purpose by viewing their ‘neurodiversity’ as a positive difference, not a disorder. Alanna Whitney, for one, is part of a growing movement of ‘neurodiversity’ activists. They contend that autism and other brain afflictions such as dyslexia and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) – ought to be treated, not as a scourge to be eradicated, but rather as a difference to be understood and accepted.**

**The movement is not new. But it has gained a foothold in the cultural mainstream as the discredited debate over autism-causing vaccines has subsided and the voices of autistic adults have emerged, amplified by the social media and the blogosphere.**

**“It’s like an emerging civil rights movement”, said John Elder Robison, an autistic writer whose memoir, *Look Me In The Eye* was a best seller. “Neurodiversity is the recognition that autism, dyslexia, ADHD are just inborn neurological differences,” he said. “Those differences carry with them both gift and disability. Society needs the exceptional thinkers that the neurodiversity world produces.”**

## **6. Charges in Maher Arar case an historic step toward ending torture.**

**Sept. 2/15, the Globe & Mail, By Alex Neve: The news that the RCMP have laid criminal charges against Col. George Salloum, a military-intelligence officer accused of torturing Canadian citizen Maher Arar in a Syrian jail cell 13 years ago, is a historic human rights**

**breakthrough. Mr. Arar was a victim of rendition by US officials back in 2002, sent illegally to Jordan and then Syria. He languished in a Syrian jail for one year where he was brutally tortured.**

**After his return to Canada, a commission of enquiry was conducted by Justice Dennis O'Connor. And the truth emerged. US officials had acted on the basis of inflammatory and false allegations from Canadian sources that Mr. Arar was linked to terrorist groups. The federal government apologized and compensated Mr. Arar for the role Canadian officials played in his torture, and other violations.**

## **7. Connecticut's top court bans death penalty in state.**

**13 Aug/15, via The Good News Agency: Connecticut's top court ruled that the state could no longer impose the death penalty, calling it unconstitutionally cruel and unusual punishment. The New England state is the latest to back away from the death penalty, following Nebraska earlier this year and Maryland in 2013.**

**The decision followed a 2012 state law that abolished capital punishment for crimes committed after that date but allowed it to be imposed for crimes previously committed. The decision comes weeks after liberal U.S. Supreme Court Justices Stephen Breyer and Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote that they believe capital punishment as currently practiced in the United States may be unconstitutional. "The Connecticut court followed suit in not finding just one problem with the death penalty but many," said Boston College law professor Kari Hong. "I suspect this will be the first of many state courts reconsidering whether the death penalty is cruel."**

**<http://www.reuters.com/article/>**

## **8. Human rights activists honoured from four States: Malaysia, Syria, Uganda and Azerbaijan**

New York, August 10 – Four courageous and tireless advocates for human rights are the 2015 recipients of the prestigious Alison Des Forges Award for Extraordinary Activism, *Human Rights Watch* said today.

The winners, leading voices for justice in their countries, are [Nisha Ayub](#), a leading human rights defender on transgender rights in Malaysia; [Yara Bader](#), a journalist and human rights activist who works to expose the detention and torture of journalists in war-torn Syria; [Khadija Ismayilova](#), a prominent investigative journalist who has dedicated her life to fighting for human rights in the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, and Nicholas Obiyo, a leading human rights lawyer and founder of *Chapter Four Uganda*. Ismayilova is currently behind bars and on trial on bogus tax and other charges brought in retribution for her reporting.

The four 2015 honorees will be honored at the [Voices for Justice Human Rights Watch Annual Dinners](#) held in more than 20 cities worldwide in November 2015 and March-April 2016.

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/08/10/rights-activists-honored>

## **9. Why the recent UN-Vatican conference is such a big deal**

by Earth Island Journal-May 2/15 - Written by Bill Patenaude. **A recent visit to the Vatican by the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has demonstrated the growing relationship between the Catholic Church and the global environmental movement. The timing of the visit called attention to Pope Francis's upcoming statement on ecology, while bolstering preparations for important international climate talks in Paris this December.**

**“We have a profound responsibility to the fragile web of life on this Earth, and to this generation and those that will follow,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said at the day-long Vatican conference on climate change and sustainability. “That is why it is so important that the world’s faith groups are clear on this issue—and in harmony with science. Science and religion are not at odds on climate change. Indeed, they are fully aligned.”**

**This is a huge deal. Tuesday’s events in Rome promise to fundamentally reshape global environmental advocacy by giving new moral force to the efforts to**

**protect the planet. At the same time, the Church's heightened involvement with environmental issues will enlist hundreds of millions of new people into the movement for environmental protection. (...)**

<http://www.care2.com/causes/why-the-un-vatican-conference-this-week-was-such-a-bigdeal.html#ixzz3ZFFAMxh6>

## **10. FAO and Norway to help developing countries monitor forest resources; new software ensures fast processing of satellite data.**

April 13, Rome - Norway and FAO have signed an approx. \$4.5m partnership agreement to improve the capacity of developing countries to monitor and report on their forest resources and changes in forest area. The project will use satellite imagery, and develop an easy-to-use platform for processing and interpreting this data.

Gaining access to satellite imagery can be difficult for users with poor internet connections, posing a serious challenge for natural resource managers in developing countries. Additionally, old, outdated computers process large-scale data very slowly.

FAO's new software aims to overcome these problems by avoiding the need to download images locally and by using a scalable, "cloud-based" supercomputer instead. All downloading and processing takes place elsewhere, in locations where connections are good and large amounts of computing power is available.

At the initial stage FAO will start implementing the new system in 13 countries over the next 3 years in support of activities under the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries ([UN-REDD](#)).

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**THE GOOD NEWS SERVICE** IS PUBLISHED PERIODICALLY BY MURRAY THOMSON IN COOPERATION WITH RANDY WEEKS, OF LANARK, ON. WE WELCOME HEARING FROM OUR READERS, C/O 43 AYLMEYER AVE. #358, OTTAWA, ON <[MOTHOM@ROGERS.COM](mailto:MOTHOM@ROGERS.COM)> 613.224.8155. OR RANDY WEEKES, 599 SOUTH LAVANT RD., LANARK, ON <[RAW@SUPERAJE.COM](mailto:RAW@SUPERAJE.COM)> 613.259.2072.



