



GOOD NEWS SERVICE #36: EARLY WINTER 2015

Editorial: January 1, 2015: The Year of the Ram, according to an ancient Chinese horoscope, advises we should be prepared to respond to major challenges which face us, and to overcome them. Well, we have certainly got them this year! Though meant for individuals, the advice most assuredly applies equally to all who struggle against the myriad of challenges facing us today, not least global warming and the threat of nuclear holocaust. So this New Year's issue of the GNS focuses on several hopeful developments on both fronts, while recognizing some of the many obstacles to be overcome.....

Douglas Roche, who last year published his 20th book, tells of the Pope's call for nuclear abolition and for a global dialogue "to ensure that nuclear weapons are banned once and for all". And in the Winter Edition of the *Greenpeace Magazine*, Mike Hudema, a Tar Sands Campaigner in Alberta, writes that "Over the past few months, something has changed; resistance to the tar sands has not only been growing in leaps and bounds; it is changing the dynamics of the entire fight". See item 2, below)

1. POPE FRANCIS CALLS FOR THE ABOLITION OF ALL NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Dec. 29, 2014, Edmonton, by Douglas Roche, OC: Pope Francis, who has already broken new ground in his outreach to a suffering humanity, has put the weight of the Catholic Church behind a new humanitarian movement to rid the world of nuclear weapons.



The pope sent a message to the recent conference in Vienna, attended by more than 150 governments, to advance public understanding of what is now called the "catastrophic humanitarian consequences" of any use of the 16,300 nuclear weapons possessed by nine countries.

In his message, Pope Francis stripped away any lingering moral acceptance of the military doctrine of nuclear deterrence: "Nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutually assured destruction cannot be the basis for an ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence."

He called for a worldwide dialogue, including both the nuclear and non-nuclear states and the burgeoning organizations that make up civil society, "to ensure that nuclear weapons are banned once and for all to the benefit of our common home."

Pope Francis has now put his firm stamp on the Church's rejection of nuclear weapons, to the enormous satisfaction of the delegates crowding the Vienna conference. No longer can the major powers, still defending their right to keep possessing nuclear weapons, claim the slightest shred of morality for their actions.

The pope's stand was supported by a remarkable Vatican document, *Nuclear Disarmament: Time for Abolition*, also put before the Vienna conference. The document did not mince words: "*Now is the time to affirm not only the immorality of the use of nuclear weapons, but the immorality of their possession thereby clearing the road to abolition.*"

The Church has now put behind it the limited acceptance of nuclear deterrence it gave at the height of the Cold War. That acceptance was given only on the condition that nuclear deterrence lead progressively to disarmament.

Washington, London and Paris, the three Western nuclear capitals where the Church's words influence, to some degree, government policy, used this limited acceptance to justify their continued nuclear buildup.

When the Cold War ended, they continued modernizing their arsenals and refused demands, reiterated at the UN many times, to join in comprehensive negotiations with Moscow and Beijing. The Holy See has repeatedly called for the abolition of nuclear weapons, but the public and even Church leaders around the world paid little attention.

Now the powerful personality of Pope Francis has put a world spotlight on the Church's rejection of not only the use of nuclear weapons but their very possession. The pope gave full support to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Five-Point Plan for Nuclear Disarmament, starting with a nuclear weapons convention or a legal framework to eliminate the weapons. And he repeated the Holy See's call for a worldwide conference to start negotiations.

Pope Francis' document is a direct attack on the military-industrial complex, which keeps trying to justify nuclear weapons as an aid to peace: "The human family will have to become united in order to overcome powerful institutionalized interests that are invested in nuclear armaments," he said.



Pope Francis

2. "THE BEAUTIFUL BATTLE AGAINST THE TAR SANDS"

From the Greenpeace Magazine, Winter 2015, by Mike Hudema. "Something has changed. The resistance to the Tar Sands has not only grown in leaps and bounds, it is changing the dynamics of the entire fight. And we are really starting to win! Here are a few examples:

*Last May, the huge Oil Corporation, Total, had to mothball its \$11 billion Joslyn tar sands mine project.

*Statoil cancelled their multi-billion dollar Corner tar sands project in September, citing “pipeline constraints”.

*Sunshine oil has had to put its tar sands project on hold because of a drop in investment.

*Sinopec is also thinking of backing out of its Northern Lights tar sands project. “Sinopec is having trouble with Northern Lights like everyone else. You can’t throw money into a black hole forever.”

*“CNRL is also having problems, as the recent review into its four ongoing spills showed that the method of extraction was the culprit. This means at minimum that CNRL will have far fewer barrels of tar sands oil coming out of its operations this year and could have much broader implications for the future of in-situ if we can ramp things up.”

3. WHILE PIPELINES ARE BEING PLUGGED, REAL SOLUTIONS ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED ALL OVER THE WORLD

On May 11, Germany announced that 74% of its power needs were being generated from renewables. That fact alone shows just what’s possible. The 250,000 people Germany employs in its solar PV sector also shows the employment benefits that come from renewable investments. Germany is not alone. Spain generates over 20 percent of its energy from wind turbines.

While China led global investment in renewables in 2013(1), India’s newly elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced an incredible plan to use solar to supply electricity to over 400 million Indians who currently don’t have it. Internationally, renewables (excluding large hydro) account for nearly half of 2013’s newly-installed generating capacity. In the US, California and Texas already set solar power records. As the price of solar continues to drop, coal-fired power plants are being closed.

In Canada, solutions are also starting to take root even without any federal government support. Ontario has emerged as a real solar champion. Ontario’s feed-in tariff has spurred solar investment and propelled the province to be one of North America’s leaders. Despite the Alberta government’s tar sands blinders, things are also starting to change in Alberta. Fort Chipewyan, one of the communities most heavily hurt by the tar sands, has started investing in solar. Panels are scheduled to start going up next year, and it’s not alone.

(1) Global Trends in Renewable Energy investment 2014 report produced by the Frankfurt School-UNEP Collaborating Centre for Climate & Sustainable Energy Finance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Bloomberg New Energy Finance.

4. SAVING THE FORESTS IN COSTA RICA, BRAZIL AND INDONESIA: ENVIRONMENTALISTS SHOW IT CAN BE DONE

By Adriana Zehbrauskas for *The New York Times*. La Virgen, Costa Rica — Over just a few decades in the mid-20th century, this small country chopped down a majority of its ancient forests. But after a huge conservation push and a wave of forest regrowth, trees now blanket more than half of Costa Rica.

Far to the south, the Amazon forest was once being quickly cleared to make way for farming, but Brazil has slowed the loss so much that it has done more than any other country to limit the emissions leading to global warming. And on the other side of the world, in Indonesia, bold new promises have been made in the past few months to halt the rampant cutting of that country's forests, backed by business interests with the clout to make it happen.

In the battle to limit the risks of climate change, it has been clear for decades that focusing on the world's immense tropical forests — saving the ones that are left, and perhaps letting new ones grow — is the single most promising near-term strategy.

That is because of the large role that forests play in what is called the carbon cycle of the planet. Trees pull the main greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, out of the air and lock the carbon away in their wood and in the soil beneath them. Destroying the trees, typically by burning, pumps much of the carbon back into the air, contributing to climate change.

Over time, humans have cut down or damaged at least three-quarters of the world's forests, and that destruction has accounted for much of the excess carbon that is warming the planet. But now, driven by a growing environmental movement in countries that are home to tropical forests, and by mounting pressure from Western consumers who care about sustainable practices, corporate and government leaders are making a fresh push to slow the cutting — and eventually to halt it. In addition, plans are being made by some of those same leaders to encourage forest regrowth on such a giant scale that it might actually pull a sizable fraction of human-released carbon dioxide out of the air and lock it into long-term storage.

With the recent signs of progress, long-wary environmental groups are permitting themselves a burst of optimism about the world's forests. "The public should take heart," said Rolf Skar, who helps lead forest conservation work for the environmental group Greenpeace. "We are at a potentially historic moment where the world is starting to wake up to this issue, and to apply real solutions."

Still, Greenpeace and other groups expect years of hard work as they try to hold business leaders and politicians accountable for the torrent of promises they have made lately. The momentum to slow or halt deforestation is fragile, for many reasons. And even though rich Western governments have hinted for years that they might be willing to spend tens of billions of dollars to help poor countries save their forests, they have allocated only a few billion dollars.

Around the world, trees are often cut down to make room for farming, and so the single biggest threat to forests remains the need to feed growing populations, particularly an expanding global middle class with the means to eat better. Saving forests, if it can be done, will require producing food much more intensively, on less land.

5. LESSONS IN ECOLOGY AND GEOLOGY FROM CENTRAL AMERICA: COSTA RICA'S REMARKABLE COMEBACK

Sources: Matthew Hansen and Peter Potapov, University of Maryland; Google; U.S.G.S; NASA; Global Forest Watch, World Resources Institute . *The New York Times*

Deep inside a Costa Rican rain forest, white-faced capuchin monkeys leapt through the tree tops. Nunbirds and toucans flew overhead, and a huge butterfly, flashing wings of an iridescent blue, fluttered through the air.

Ignoring the profusion of life around him, Bernal Paniagua Guerrero focused his gaze on a single 20-foot tree, placing a tape measure around the spindly trunk and calling a number out to his sister, Jeanette Paniagua Guerrero, who recorded it on a clipboard. With that, the tree, a black manú just over two inches in diameter, entered the database of the world's scientific knowledge. Its growth will be tracked year by year until it dies a natural death — or somebody decides to chop it down for the valuable, rot-resistant wood. The Paniaguas and their co-worker, Enrique Salicette Nelson, work for an American scientist, Robin Chazdon, helping her chronicle a remarkable comeback. Costa Rica is considered a forest success. Much of the country's old-growth forest was lost from the 1940s to the 1980s, but then new policies stemmed the loss, and forests have regrown to cover more than half the country. Serious threats persist, however, including a boom in pineapple farming that gives landowners an incentive to cut down recovering forest plots.

A large, intact forest area still exists in Costa Rica, extending to the south and east into Panama. The dense, natural forest remains unfragmented by roads and has not been used for timber production. The Cuatro Rios forest they were standing in looked, to a casual eye, as if it must have been there forever. Trees stretched as high as 100 feet, and a closed canopy of leaves cast the understory into deep shade, - hallmark of a healthy tropical rain forest.

In fact, the land was a cattle pasture only 45 years ago. When the market for beef fell, the owners let the forest reclaim it. Now the Cuatro Rios forest, near the tiny village of La Virgen, is a study plot for Dr. Chazdon, an ecologist from the University of Connecticut, who has become a leading voice in arguing that large-scale forest regrowth can help to solve some of the world's problems.

Indeed, forests are already playing an outsize role in limiting the damage humans are doing to the planet. For the entire geologic history of the earth, carbon in various forms has flowed between the ground, the air and the ocean. A large body of scientific evidence shows that the amount of carbon in the air at any given time, in the form of carbon dioxide, largely determines the planet's temperature.

The burning of coal, oil and natural gas effectively moves carbon out of the ground and into the active carbon cycle operating at the earth's surface, causing a warming of the globe that scientists believe is more rapid now than in any similar period of geologic history.

Though the higher temperatures are causing extensive problems, including [heat waves](#) and [rising seas](#), the increasing carbon dioxide also acts as a sort of plant fertilizer. The gas is the primary source of the carbon that plants, using the energy of sunlight, turn into sugars and woody tissue.

Scientific reports suggest that 20 percent to 25 percent of the carbon dioxide that people are pumping into the air is being absorbed by trees and other plants, which keep taking up more and more even as human emissions keep rising.

But when people damage or destroy forests, that puts carbon dioxide into the air, worsening the warming problem. Historically, forests have been chopped down all over the planet. Now they are actually regrowing across large stretches of the Northern Hemisphere, and the most worrisome destruction is occurring in relatively poor countries in the tropics. Scientists concluded decades ago that deforestation must be stopped, both to limit climate change and to conserve the world's biological diversity. These days, they are also coming to understand the huge potential of new or recovering forests to help pull dangerous emissions out of the air.

“Every time I hear about a government program that is going to spend billions of dollars on some carbon capture and storage program, I just laugh and think, what is wrong with a tree?” said Nigel Sizer, director of forest programs at the [World Resources Institute](#), a think tank in Washington. “All you have to do is look out the window, and the answer is there.”

6. CITIES ARE THE FUTURE NOW: URBAN INNOVATIONS ARE LEADING US TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Winter 2015, *Yes! Magazine*, by Sarah Van Gelder: “If you’ve been looking for the (US) federal government for action on big challenges such as poverty, climate change and immigration, this has been a devastating decade. Big money’s dominance of elections, obstructionism by the Tea Party and climate denial have brought action in Washington to a near standstill. But while the media focuses on the gridlock, a more helpful story is unfolding. Cities are taking action.

Climate change is a case in point. Cities are already experiencing the damage caused by an increasingly chaotic climate. Many are located along coast lines, where rising sea levels coupled with giant storms bring flooding and coastal erosion. Some low lying areas are being abandoned. Others face protracted water shortages due to diminishing rainfall and shrinking snowpack. And cities are subject to the urban heat island effect that can raise temperatures to lethal levels.

Cities can’t afford to wait for the ideological wars to play out. Cities are responsible for a new surge in bicycling, not just on the West Coast but in old industrial cities. In September, *Bicycling Magazine* named New York, the number one US city for bicycling, noting its hundreds of miles of bike lanes, ambitious bike-share program, and long term commitment to cycling. Chicago, named number two, is set to meet its goal of creating 100 miles of protected 100 miles of bike lanes by 2015, and will soon have the largest bike-share program. Cities are getting more bike friendly in large part because of persistent pressure by activists. A citizens’ group in Minneapolis made the point about bike safety by building pop-up bicycle only lanes, using plywood planters to separate the bike riders from automobile traffic. Advocates in Atlanta, Denver, Oakland, California, Fargo, N.D. and Lawrence, Kansas followed suit.

Cities are leading in other realms, too; where the federal government has failed to aid migration, reform is stalled. But L.A., San Francisco, New Haven, Conn. and NYC are issuing identification cards to undocumented residents, allowing them to open bank accounts, sign leases and access city services.

7. ECOWATCH: A NEW KID ON THE BLOCK OF CLIMATE CHANGE [ecowatch.com]

- 1)** The new CIA (Cowboy-Indian Alliance): The Vermont Yankee atomic reactor went permanently off-line at the end of December/14. Citizen activists brought this about. The number of licensed US commercial reactors is now under 100; once it was planned to be 1,000 or more.
- 2)** The Keystone XL debate will take center stage in the new Congress. When Senate approval of the pipeline was defeated by one vote in November, incoming Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell vowed to make approving the pipeline his first order of business when the

new Senate with its Republican majority opened its session. Lisa Murkowski followed through and announced that Keystone XL will be her committee's first item of business when it meets next week. President Obama has made statements he would most likely veto legislation approving the Keystone XL pipeline.

- 3) The Top Climate Movement Victories of 2014, by Ted Glick: First is the People's Climate March on Sept 21/14. Hundreds of thousands demonstrated in NYC to act on Climate Change, with many tens of thousands more around the US and world doing so in solidarity.

Second is the growth in Renewable Energy. Wind and solar energy in particular just keep growing and growing. And while wind generating electrical power increased, new capacity for natural gas fell, as did coal.

Third is the ban on fracking in New York State. Close to 200 local town, city and county resolutions and ordinances were passed against fracking, reflected in the Democratic Party Primary ballot box!

8. ITEMS FROM THE CCPA'S "GOOD NEWS PAGE"

Dec.14 & Jan.15. CCPA Monitor. Items compiled by Elaine Hughes. Every month, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) includes a page describing items of good news. Here are four items from the December issue:

- 8a. Salted spuds.** Here on one of the Netherlands' northernmost islands, windswept Texel, surrounded by encroaching ocean and salt marshes that seep sea water under its dykes and into ditches and canals, an enterprising farmer has taken the radical step of embracing salt water instead of fighting to keep it out. And now he thinks he just might help feed the world. Inspired by sea cabbage, 59 year old Mark van Rijsselberghe set up Salt Farm Texel and teamed up with the Free University in Amsterdam. They are exploring the possibility of growing food using non-fresh water. They have help from an elderly Dutch farmer whom has a geekish knowledge of thousands of different potato varieties.
– *London Observer*

- 8b. Regreening program in Ethiopia.** Fifteen years ago the villages around Abrha Weatsbha in northern Ethiopia were on the point of being abandoned. The hillsides were barren, the communities plagued by floods and droughts, needed constant food aid and the soil was being washed away. Today, Abrha Weatsbha in the Tigray region is unrecognizable; an environmental catastrophe has been averted following the planting of many millions of

trees and bush seedlings. Wells that were dry have been recharged, the soil is in better shape, fruit trees grow in the valleys and the hillsides are green again. The country plans to restore a further 15 million hectares by 2030. – *The Guardian*

8c Dutch boy seeks to de-plastics ocean Boyan Slat is a 20-year-old on a mission: to rid the world's oceans of floating plastic. He has dedicated his teenage years to finding a way of collecting it. Rather than chase plastic, why not harness the currents and wait for it to come to you, he argued? But can the system really work, and is there any point when so much new plastic waste is still flowing into the sea every day? He is undaunted, however, and the high school science project was awarded Best Technical Design at Delft University of Technology. -- *BBC*

8d. Malala's prize money to Gaza. The UN Agency that assists Palestinian refugees says Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai has donated \$50,000 to rebuild a UN school in Gaza damaged during this summer's Israel-Hamas war. UNRWA says Malala is donating all of the proceeds of the \$50,000 World Children's Prize which she collected in Stockholm. The agency quoted Malala as saying that Palestinian children deserve a quality education, and that without education there will never be peace. -- *CTV News*

9. HOW NORDIC COUNTRIES SUPPORT FAMILIES RAISING CHILDREN...

By Christopher Walmsley & Lise Tessier, CCPA Monitor, December/14: "...Free hot school lunches, a 'baby box' with all you need as a new parent, a monthly child allowance cheque, paternity leave for a newborn child, a mentoring family and a right to housing and childcare services - how (some) Nordic countries support families raising children."

10.TEN CLIMATE-COOL CITIES

From *Yes! Winter 2015* There is no time to waste when it comes to acting on climate change. The world's most forward thinking cities are curbing carbon and building for a sustainable future – now. - *Natasha Donovan*.

1.New York City. PlaNYC2030, New York's renowned climate change response plan, aims to simultaneously accommodate a quickly growing population and reduce emissions by focusing on infrastructure. By updating building codes, retrofitting older buildings, and encouraging sustainable design and architecture, it is well on its way to meeting its goal of 30 percent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030.

2. Bogota, Colombia. Bogota's bus rapid transit system offers an alternative to traffic-snarled highways. Exclusive lanes allow Bogota buses to travel rapidly throughout the city, mimicking the efficiency of rail systems at a fraction of the cost. With a 32 percent reduction in transit travel time, bus rapid transit is making the city cleaner and more accessible.

3. Portland, Oregon. Portland is creating "20 minute neighbourhoods" to address climate change on a city-wide scale. By increasing urban density and improving pedestrian infrastructure the city is building resilient, low carbon communities where basic needs are within a 20 minute walk or bike ride. The city aims to have 90 percent of its residents living in 20 minute neighbourhoods by 2030.

4. Seoul, South Korea. Seoul's array of nuclear technology programs is breaking the city's dependence on nonrenewable energy resources. Rooftop photovoltaic installations –

more than 20,000 of them – will raise energy capacity by 290 megawatts per roof. With one energy self-sufficient village in each district, the “Sunshine city” is pushing forward into a cleaner energy future for post-Fukushima Asia.”

5. Chicago, USA In 1995, a five day heat wave in Chicago caused about 750 deaths. Global warming threatens to raise the annual number of extremely hot days (over 100 degrees) from just two to 31, making future heat waves nearly certain. In recent years, the city has focused on reducing its temperature by increasing the spread of urban forest and installing 4 million sq. feet of green roofs, both of which soak up carbon and reduce heat-island effects.

6. Melbourne, Australia. Melbourne is transforming its urban landscape. Stormwater harvesting, permeable pavements and cool roofs are helping to protect the city from the effects of climate change, and an increased urban tree canopy will provide crucial ecosystem services like carbon sequestration. The adaptation program is projected to reduce the city’s temperature by 7 degrees Fahrenheit.

7. Amsterdam, Netherlands. Drawing on its long history of financial acumen, Amsterdam has created a sustainability fund of \$103 million that allows businesses, residents and communities to invest in green projects. The fund is available to everyone in the city, from individuals and start-ups to large commercial ventures. Participants are required to recover the initial investment making the fund a smart, long term option.

8. Barcelona, Spain. Barcelona is improving the way the city makes decisions by gathering more accurate real-time information on the relationship between the environment and urban infrastructure. A comprehensive Urban Platform uses environmental sensors that detect everything from air pollution and humidity to use of parking spaces. The project provides insight into effective management of city resources, enabling it to address climate change.

9. Boulder, Colorado. Instead of waiting for the federal government to implement a nation-wide carbon tax, citizens of Boulder took matters into their own hands. In 2007, the city enacted the country’s first municipal carbon tax, which funds Boulder’s climate action plan. The tax generates \$1.8 million a year. In 2010, the tax prevented nearly 85,000 metric tons of CO2 emissions. The last coal unit at the Valmont power plant outside Boulder is scheduled to be retired in 2017.

10. Oslo, Norway. Oslo is leading the charge toward making electric vehicles a realistic option for the average citizen. The city has built 500 free recharging stations, with 400 or more in the works. Oslo has also declared that all city-owned vehicles will be emission-free by 2015.

* * * * *

The **Good News Service** is produced and written by **Murray Thomson, OC**, of Ste.358, 43 Aylmer Avenue, Ottawa, ON (613.224.8155), in cooperation with **Randy Weekes**, of 599 South Lavant Rd. Lanark, ON (613) 259. 2072. Comments on any of these articles are welcome, as are new proposals. mothom@rogers.com