

GOOD NEWS SERVICE #31: LATE WINTER 2014



Sunrise on the back forty of an old Ontario farm

Editorial, March 6/14: The sunnier political weather described in the last issue has changed, following the events in the Ukraine. Dark clouds have appeared over Europe and old antagonisms threaten the hopes for peaceful resolution of current conflicts.

Nevertheless, this issue describes the significant progress made by Mines Action Canada in destroying land mines under the leadership of Paul Hannon. It also portrays those welcome developments in the Middle East involving Iran, where the diplomacy of win-win seems to have gained precedence over that of lose-lose. However, a nuclear weapon free zone for the region, which would capitalize and underline Win-Win for everyone, seems unlikely in the foreseeable future. Nor can we ignore the several million Syrian refugees still scattered throughout the countries of the region, including Syria itself. Following is an abbreviated report from Mines Action Canada on progress made and work still to be done.

1. THOUGH GREAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN CLEARING LAND MINES GLOBALLY CANADA'S DONATIONS DROP TO 15TH PLACE

Feb. 12/14, Ottawa, Paul Hannon. Exec. Dir & Erin Hunt, Mines Action Canada: "This week, we're excited to share with you all the progress made in 2012 and 2013 towards a world without landmines. As we are approaching the 3rd Review Conference of the Ottawa Treaty, it is great to have an opportunity to update

you, our supporters. [Landmine Monitor 2013](#) reported record lows in terms of new casualties and a record high in terms of contaminated land cleared or released. Opened for signatures on 03 December 1997 the Ottawa Treaty banning landmines has 161 States Parties and one signatory... Today, all 28 European Union member states are States Parties...

Use: Government forces in Syria and Myanmar used antipersonnel mines in 2012 and 2013. Both states remain outside the Ottawa Treaty. Forces in the internationally unrecognized breakaway area of Nagorno-Karabakh emplaced new antipersonnel mines in 2013. Non-state armed groups used antipersonnel mines or victim-activated improvised explosive devices in Afghanistan, Colombia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, and Yemen.

Production: Down from a total of more than 50 states before the Ottawa Treaty's existence, currently only 12 states are identified as potential producers of antipersonnel mines: China, Cuba, India, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, the United States, and Vietnam. This list has not changed in recent years.

Canada: Not all of the news was good. Canadian funding for mine action decreased \$10.2 million which resulted in the lowest contribution Canada has made since the Ottawa Treaty became international law in 1999. Canada has dropped to 15th place among major donors, well below our usual top five levels. Canadian funding has dropped in four of the last five years which raises the question whether the Ottawa Treaty remains a top priority for the federal government. At Mines Action Canada, we are preparing for the Review Conference by counting down the Dirty 3 Dozen states who haven't joined the Ottawa Treaty, calling on them to do so quickly." (Write for updates to Paul Hannon, E/D, Mines Action Canada: mhph@magma.ca)

2. CAN THE IRAN BREAKTHROUGH BE SEEN AS A TRIUMPH FOR PRAGMATISTS?

Jan, 22/14 via *Truthdig.com*: by Juan Cole: The implementation of the Iran Accord has signaled a modest but still important sea change in that country's relationship with the world. As with all good diplomacy, the deal is a win-win for Iran and the UN Security Council Permanent Members. The breakthrough is seen as a setback for Saudi Arabia and Israel, and also for the Jewish Lobby on Capitol Hill, which fear it announces an end to attempts to contain Iran as a revolutionary force in the region.

But in most world capitals the agreement is being celebrated as a vindication of pragmatism and transparency, and European companies are lining up to get back into the Iranian market. Two pragmatists are at the centre of the negotiations: Hasan Rohani and Barack Obama. Iran negotiated the deal with the UN Security Council Permanent Members plus Germany. It provides for frequent and transparent inspections of the Natanz and Fordo enrichment facilities. In addition, Iran has ceased enriching uranium for its medical reactor, which

produces isotopes for treating cancer. It can, however, continue to enrich to 5 per cent for its nuclear reactors which produce electricity. The measures are confidence-building steps intended to reassure the West that Iran has no intention of producing a nuclear weapon.

3. EUROPEAN SCIENTISTS CHEER AS DORMANT COMET- CHASER AWAKES; ITS NAME, “67P/CHURYUMOV-GERASIMENKO” NEARLY AS LONG AS ITS TAIL

Jan. 21/14, Berlin: Waking up after almost three years of hibernation, a comet-chasing spacecraft sent its first signal back to earth on Monday, prompting cheers from scientists who hope to use it to land the first space-lander onto a comet. The European Space Agency received the all-clear message from its Rosetta spacecraft – a message that had to travel some 800 million kilometers.

In keeping with the Agency’s effort to turn the tense wait for a signal into a social-media event, the probe triggered a series of “Hello World!” tweets in different languages. Dormant systems on the unmanned spacecraft were switched back on in preparation for the final stage of its decade-long mission to rendezvous with the comet named 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko. Systems had been powered down in 2011 to conserve energy, leaving scientists in the dark about the probe’s fate until now. — *Associated Press*

4. FRACKING MORATORIUM IN NEWFOUNDLAND; A BAN ON TRANS-FATS LAUNCHED IN WASHINGTON; MAJOR GROWTH IN ORGANIC FOOD SALES

Dec/13-Jan/14, *CCPA Monitor*, via Elaine Hughes: The government of Newfoundland and Labrador has imposed a moratorium on hydraulic fracking. The ban was announced by the province’s minister of natural resources, Derrick Dalley. “Our vision for economic development is balanced with environmental protection and the health and safety of our citizens”, he declared. He said the moratorium gives the government time to review pertinent regulations and guidelines, ensure that people are fully informed and give them the opportunity to present their views before any decision is made.

Meanwhile, the US Food & Drug Administration in Washington has begun a process to ultimately ban the use of artificial trans-fat in processed foods, saying that the fats “are no longer generally recognized as safe” for consumption. The agency is taking steps to require the food industry to phase out the use of partially hydrogenated oils, which are the main source of trans-fats in processed foods. FDA Commissioner Dr. Margaret Hamburg said that eliminating artificial trans-fat could prevent as many as 20,000 heart attacks as well as 7,000 deaths from heart disease each year in the U.S.

In Canada, however, Health Canada has no plans for a similar ban in this country, where very high trans-fat levels are still found in many processed foods. This inaction continues despite a report by the Institute of Medicine, which advises both the FDA and Health Canada that there is no safe level of consumption of artificial trans-fat. The Heart & Stroke Foundation said it was very disappointed with Health Canada, and very disturbed that so many processed foods in Canada continue to contain “disturbingly high amounts of trans-fat”.

-- *CTV News*

The New York Times (Jan 25/14) reported on a California gathering of Canadian and American organic farmers that sales of organic food grew in the US from \$1 billion in 1990 to 31.5 billion in 2012. In 2011, Statistics Canada reported that the number of certified organic farms grew by 66% over ten years to more than 3,700. The challenges, however, remain significant, as those Canadian organic operations represent fewer than 2 percent of all our farms.

5. BRIGHT SPOTS ON MAIN STREET: INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORES AND THE “BUY LOCAL” ETHIC CONTINUE TO GAIN MOMENTUM

Yes! Magazine, Fall 2013, by Fran Korten, Publisher: Despite the increasing presence of Wal-Mart, Target and Amazon there are some surprising bright spots on Main Street.

One surprising comeback, she was told by Stacy Mitchell of the Institute for Local Self Reliance, is the comeback by independent book-stores. For the last four years their numbers and total sales have grown, despite the recession. In 2009 there were 1651 independent bookstores in the U.S. Today there are more than 1,900. Also, local coffee shops have grown faster than Starbucks. Bakers and specialty food stores are thriving. Independent pharmacies and pet, fabric and stationery stores are growing, too.

So don't think Main Street is down for the count. As the `buy local` ethic continues to gain momentum, as stores get creative in using their local advantage, and as on-line sales lose their tax advantage, the lights may again shine brightly on Main Street.

6. FOSSIL FUELS STILL DOMINATE, YET AUSSIE SCIENTIST SEES SEVERAL REASONS FOR GLOBAL OPTIMISM

Winter 2014, *Corporate Knights*, by Editor-in-Chief Tyler Hamilton:

“If we stay on the current path, we won't come close to the internationally agreed goal of limiting the rise in global temperatures to 2 degrees C”, said Maria van der Hooven, the International Energy Agency's executive director. “Carbon dioxide emissions are likely to rise by 20% by 2035, leaving the world on course to an average warming of 3.6 degrees C.”

Why, then, have we reasons for optimism? This question was asked of Tim Flannery, former head of Australia's Climate Commission. In the following interview, Tim, just back from two months in China, noted that China decided to reduce coal-burning in its major population areas by 5% in the next 4 years. Flannery also felt that the fossil fuel industry there is in serious trouble. "The transition to a clean energy future is going to happen a lot faster, and is a lot closer than we imagined," he commented. What was thought to be impossible just a few short years ago is now seen as the common sense thing to do. We don't know what's going to happen with natural gas. But for oil and for coal, you can see what the future is going to look like."

"Your book on climate change, *The Weather Makers*, made a huge impact in 2006 and continues to be one of the most influential books on the subject", remarked the interviewer. "Are you now more or less positive about our ability to effectively tackle the climate problem?"

"I am far more positive. Things have come together with the speed I couldn't have imagined when I wrote *The Weather Makers*. I couldn't see then how we could conquer the vested interests or the oil industry and others....We were in a world where petroleum politics were paramount. That is no longer the case. Investment in clean energy now outweighs that going into fossil fuel infrastructure. It's a different world."

"Yet energy transitions, historically, have taken a long time in the past. Do you think this time is different? Are we making a break from the past?"

"Absolutely. Energy transitions may have taken a long time in the past, but with this one, fossil fuels are facing a perfect storm. I think the energy transition is going to be quite swift. If you look at global emission figures up to 2012, which have just been published, for the first time we've turned the rate of increase down at a time when economies are growing. And that's prior to China really getting serious about this stuff. The chances of a peak in global emissions this decade is now very real. It's incredible and absolutely unanticipated!"

7. COW POWER: THE HIDDEN SOURCE AND POTENTIAL OF METHANE: TRANSFORMING GREENHOUSE GASES INTO RENEWABLE ENERGY

Feb 8/14, *Sustainable Conservation*: Converting cow manure into renewable energy prevents harmful methane from reaching the atmosphere. This is important because methane on dairy farms accounts for the majority of agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions. If methane digesters were installed on most California dairies, they would protect the climate as much as taking more than one million cars off the road – about 5% of the state's total.

The good news is that methane gas from dairy manure can be captured and converted into energy using existing technologies. The resulting biogas can be used to create: renewable electricity; renewable vehicle fuel (biomethane); or renewable natural gas that can be injected into existing pipelines for a wide range of uses, such as heating and power plants.

Sustainable Conservation has been promoting methane digesters on California dairies for more than ten years as a way to reduce harmful greenhouse gases, generate renewable energy to power farms and the state's economy, and promote a healthy climate. *Sustainable Conservation* was also a catalyst and guide for putting the first "cow-powered truck" on the road in California's Central Valley. For more info: <http://suscon.org/cowpower/index.php>

8. HEADS OF 31 LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN NATIONS DECLARE A ZONE OF PEACE; COMMIT TO UPROOT THE THREAT OR USE OF FORCE

Jan. 31/14 from kate@chch.planet.org.nz The Heads of 31 Nations of Latin America and the Caribbean have declared the entire region as a zone of peace. Moreover, they have committed themselves to uproot the threat or use of force in the region on behalf of the peoples they represent. Here is an abridged version of their Statement: "Reaffirming the commitment of member countries with the Purposes and Principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and International Law, and aware of the fact that prosperity and stability in the region contribute to international peace and security,

Declare: 1. Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace based on respect for the principles and rules of International Law, including the international instruments to which Member States are a party, the Principles and Purposes of the United Nations Charter;

2. Our permanent commitment to solve disputes through peaceful means with the aim of uprooting forever the use of force in our region;

3. The commitment of the States of the region with their strict obligation not to intervene, directly or indirectly in the internal affairs of any other State, and observe the principles of national sovereignty, equal rights and self-determination of peoples.....

We urge all Member States of the International Community to fully respect this Declaration in their relations with CELAC Member States.

For further information: www.disarmamentactivist.org

9. PARLIAMENT'NS SEEK NUCLEAR SECURITY SUMMIT PROCESS FOR NUCLEAR ABOLITION

<http://pnnd.org/article/parliament'ns-call-nuclear-security-summit-process-nuclear-abolitn>

March 2/14, from Alyn Ware: Legislators and disarmament experts from around the world meeting in Washington last week called on the leaders of the nuclear-weapon states and other States participating in the forthcoming Nuclear Security Summit to commence a similar high level process to achieve the global abolition of nuclear weapons...

The legislators were meeting in Washington for the Annual Assembly of Parliamentarians for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament (PNND), a global network of legislators working cooperatively to reduce the risks of nuclear weapons, prevent proliferation and achieve a safe and secure nuclear-weapons-free world. PNND Global Coordinator Alyn Ware, in an interview in Inter-Press Service, noted that "The problem with the Nuclear Security Summit is that it only focuses on one-third of the picture: non-state actors who don't even have nuclear weapons. It does not address the bigger picture: the current and real threats of the stockpiles of weapons and materials of nuclear-armed states, and the risks of proliferation to additional states."

Renée Jones-Bos, Secy-General of the Hague Nuclear Security Summit has stated that the Summit is not about nuclear disarmament....but only about "rogue nuclear material falling into the wrong hands". Ware replies that, "With regard to nuclear weapons, there are no right hands. The International Court of Justice in The Hague has long confirmed that the threat or use of nuclear weapons is generally illegal, regardless of who would possess or use such weapons... "It's ironic that this Summit is happening in The Hague, but appears to ignore the conclusion of, and legal imperative from, the highest court in the world situated in the same city (the World Court).

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