

The Upstream Journal

EXCLUSION

THE DALITS OF BANGLADESH
DOMESTIC WORKERS IN HONG KONG
LAND EVICTIONS IN CAMBODIA
GARIFUNA PEOPLE OF HONDURAS





Dalit people are “untouchable” by birth, subject to segregation, restrictions on livelihood and access to services, land grabbing, destruction of their houses, intimidation, violence and sometimes rape and murder.

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The cover, and all other photos for the Dalit story, are by Ryan Higgett, the author.

Our thanks to intern Erina Morgan for her work on the design and layout of this issue, to our volunteer and intern writers, and to the photographers who contributed their work.

The Upstream Journal is printed on 100% recycled paper with a high post-consumer content.



Dear readers,

I demanded a lot of patience from the author of the story on the Dalit people, Ryan Higgett, after he approached us wanting to write about what he was seeing in the slums of Bangladesh. His writing was good, he responded quickly to suggested changes, had some terrific photos - and had to wait months for us to publish it. He wanted it included in an Upstream as soon as possible, I wanted to wait and feature it as a cover story.

Now at last it is here, in your hands, along with a really good group of stories from our volunteer writers.

No one gets paid for their articles in the magazine. We don't pay the photographers either, yet somehow we are privileged to be able to include some dynamic professional images.

The Upstream has got to be one of the lowest-cost magazines there is. We've shopped around and work with a print shop that gives great service at an unbeatable price, and the postage is Canada Post publications mail, which is much lower than first class letter mail. I get a salary I'll describe as modest, for which I also am also the Executive Director of the Social Justice Committee.

But the main reason we survive, and get better as a magazine, is because of the volunteer power that fuels all of the SJC work. And I think you'll agree that they have come through again in this issue.

Together, the volunteer writers and I work through what stories will be written, and how they'll be approached. They do the background research, and then interview the most relevant people they can. Using Skype, long-distance cards, or email - any free or cheap way they can, they speak with individuals around the world to put together fair, balanced and credible stories that you generally won't find elsewhere.

Even though the Upstream is low cost, it isn't free. Our next step is to see if we should pursue advertisers. What do you think? Below, you'll see some examples of the kinds of ads we'd pursue (we gave these ads away for free).

Derek MacCuish 1-514-933-6797 editor@upstreamjournal.org

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The term “Dalit” is a Sanskrit word that means “those who have been broken and ground down deliberately by those above them in the social hierarchy.” Dalits live at risk of discrimination, dehumanization, violence, and enslavement through human trafficking every day. Dalits constitute the largest number of people categorized as victims of modern-day slavery. - *Dalit Freedom Network*

The Dalits of Bangladesh

The lowest of the Hindu castes, these “untouchables” fight for a voice

BY RYAN HIGGETT

The Pongue Sweeper Colony, a dense network of one-room shanty houses built from scavenged bamboo, wood, and corrugated metal, sits on what is essentially an oversized ditch between the Dhaka Orthopedic Hospital and the World Bank in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The ground in the slum is wet and stagnant, the homes built on bamboo poles two or three feet off the ground. Often, more than one family lives in a single house, without electricity or sanitation.

They share latrines dug into the earth and get their drinking water from a small pipe that winds its way through the reeking debris.

Most of the one hundred and ten families there are “sweepers” - cleaners of the city’s roads and sewer systems. They are Dalits, the lowest of the Hindu castes, for centuries “untouchable.”

N. Sree Ramu, the twenty-eight year old Joint Secretary of the Bangladesh Dalits Human Rights (BDHR) organization, lives here with his wife and three year old daughter. While showing me around he told me that his family and most of the others in the colony have been there since the government of Bangladesh plowed over their old shanty houses

and relocated them from another part of the city in 1993 – their fourth relocation since 1979.

The government had again given an eviction notice to all the families of the colony, but Ramu said that they have nowhere else to go and each family has been paying two taka (about three Canadian cents) everyday to local police so they can stay.

They have few options, and by birth are subject to numerous forms of discrimination – segregation, restrictions on livelihood and access to services, land grabbing, destruction of their houses, intimidation, violence and sometimes rape and murder. Local musclemen sell drugs around the main entrance to the colony and collect “tolls” from colony members for access to their own homes.

A LIFE OF HUMILIATION

Talking in a group at BDHR’s office, Ramu’s friend James described when he was made to buy a teapot he was using in a teashop when the owner realized that he was Dalit. James had tainted the pot by touching it, and the owner said that he “could no longer, in good conscience, allow his other patrons to use it.”

“I didn’t know what would happen to me if I

refused to pay for the teapot,” James said. “I submitted and bought the pot because I was aware of the kinds of things, violent things, often done to Dalit people like me.”

The discrimination faced by Dalits in Bangladesh was described in a recent study by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies in association with the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN).

“Since they are considered unclean, Dalits live segregated from other groups in their own neighborhoods. This includes regular denial of access to Muslim public spaces, including temples, restaurants and shops, and the risking of sanctions, often vicious, if they handle ordinary domestic items used by non-Dalits in these spaces.”

More than 60 per cent of Dalits are deprived of education, trapping them in poverty.

“When Dalits do find their way into Bangladesh’s education system, they often face discriminatory behaviour from school administrators and other students.”

Walking with Ramu through the rain-sodden Pongue Sweeper Colony, it was evident that an immediate and pressing problem that the Dalits face is finding shelter. Social, economic and religious pressures combine with shortcomings in law

enforcement to push urban Dalits like Ramu and his family to the sides of railroads or into the reeking, garbage-filled public housing “colonies” set up by the government. The cramped living conditions and lack of hygiene in slums like the Pongue Sweeper Colony make disease rampant among the Dalit.

“Inability to afford medical treatment means that many Dalits in Bangladesh die from malnutrition, diarrhea, typhoid, cholera, tuberculosis, and pneumonia,” Ramu said.

THE MOVEMENT TO EMANCIPATE BANGLADESH’S DALITS

There have been various campaigns for reform to the caste-system, especially in India, but Dalit activism has only started to gain any significant momentum in Bangladesh in recent years.

B.G. Murthy, the late Bangladesh Dalit activist, attended the Global



“Our children are not getting government and other jobs, even if they are highly educated. So we demand that the government allocate quotas in educational institutions and government jobs for our children. We are the citizens of this country but we are deprived in all stages. We want the deprivation to go. We want to live like all other citizens.”

- Babulal Sardar, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement



Dalit Conference in New Delhi in 2001 and was inspired by the growing force of India's Dalit movement. He returned to Bangladesh and, with the help of other local human rights advocates, established BDHR, an organization and a movement that fights untouchability, casteism and economic exploitation, supports the development of Dalit communities, and pushes for reform of national laws.

"In addition to our new monthly newspaper, we have held several conferences and meetings with interested civil society organizations featuring Dalit people," James said. "These have helped put a human face on caste-based discrimination in this country."

The BDHR has also connected with other human rights movements internationally, including the IDSN, the South Asia Dalit Rights Forum, the Dalit South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Assembly, and the World Dignity Forum. The primary objective of these alliances is to bring caste-based discrimination into the consciousness of the world's political leaders and reestablish the Dalit people's lost humanity. The IDSN in particular works to ensure global recognition of Dalit rights, which they see as overlooked by the UN and other international and intergovernmental institutions like the European Union.

Dalits in Bangladesh are neglected by mainstream international development initiatives, reflecting the lack of awareness of the Dalit situation beyond South Asia, the lack of power of the Dalits politically, and a Bangladeshi elite at best indifferent to the Dalit plight.

Bangladesh's formal Poverty Reduction Strat-

egy, adopted in 2005 as part of the country's obligations to the World Bank and IMF, makes no reference to Dalits (despite the fact that the Pongue Sweeper Colony itself is just meters away from the Bangladesh office of the World Bank). It does acknowledge that caste-based discrimination exists in the country, but official development programs don't have specific measures to support Dalits and place their dignity and inclusion on par with the rest of society.

THE WAY FORWARD

Without political pressure from outside, the government remains apathetic to implementing legislative provisions to protect the poor and disadvantaged. Even so, the movement to end discrimination against Dalits is gaining momentum.

In Dhaka an increasing number of Dalit youth are being admitted to public schools, and major newspapers, including the Daily Star, occasionally print stories about Dalits.

The IDSN is calling for the repeal of Bangladesh's Vested Property Act of 1974, which Professor Abul Barakat of Dhaka University said gave the state the right to confiscate land from 925,050 Hindu households. The land ended up in the hands of 0.4% of the population, mostly powerful politicians among the



ruling Muslims.

In collaboration with Nagorik Uddyog - "The Citizen's Initiative" - BDHR is now working to build its capacity to support the Dalit people and protect their rights. In April 2008, the two organizations held a consultation meeting with over 25 other groups representing Dalit interests, and established the Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded-Peoples Rights Movement (BDERM), a national platform intended to raise awareness, transform policy and end discrimination against Dalits.

The future of the people living in the Pongue Sweeper Colony is uncertain, but Ramu hopes to save enough money to send his daughter to school when she is of age. "My hope is that one day she will be able to break free of the cycle of discrimination and poverty that for so long has trapped the people of my community."

Ryan Higgitt holds a MA in sociology from Concordia University, Montréal. He is leading a research project at Nagorik Uddyog on the treatment of gender issues in Bangladesh's PRSP. He can be contacted at nu@bdmail.net.

All the photos were taken by Ryan Higgitt at the Pongue Sweeper Colony.

For more information on Dalits and caste-based discrimination, visit www.idsn.org, www.nuhr.org and www.dalitstudies.org.in.



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"We don't want outsiders to come and exploit us or remove us from our ancestral lands.

We want to develop an eco-tourism industry which is ours and which will sustain our Garifuna cosmovision and respect the natural environment."

Photos by
James Rodriguez

Oppression or opportunity?

Tourism project in Honduras sparks conflict

BY SANDRA KRAL AND BRENDAN BROCK

Garifuna people have lived in Tela Bay, on the north coast of Honduras, for more than 200 years. The community has high levels of poverty and unemployment and relies on fishing and land cultivation. It suffers from the lack of economic prospects, discrimination, migration and lack of government support. Basic infrastruc-

ture and sanitary conditions are poor.

UNESCO has identified Garifuna culture as an "outstanding but endangered heritage." There are only 11,000 Garifuna people, descended from African and Amerindian origins, living in ten communities along the coast of Belize, Honduras and Nicaragua. Their language is largely undocumented and not formally taught except in one village.

Now Tela Bay is changing. The Los Micos Beach and Golf Resort has begun construction

in the area, supported by the Honduran Ministry of Tourism and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which is funding the project.

“With funding and training, we expect the Garifuna people to have opportunities to develop new businesses, to become entrepreneurs and profit from the arrival of tourism,” Ricardo Martinez, the Honduras Minister of Tourism, said in an interview for this article.

Even so, the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH), whose stated aim is to protect the Garifuna’s culture and territory, fears that the resort will lead to the destruction of these local communities. OFRANEH points to recent episodes of violence as examples of repression Garifuna communities face.

For example, one evening in September, 2008, a group of armed men stopped eight local fishermen on a beach in Honduras. There was shooting, and then the fishermen were left to attend to their friend, Guillermo Norales Herrera, as he lay dying, hit by a bullet from an M16, the firearm used by the Honduran Armed Forces. This murder followed the June 5 abduction and beat-

ing of Garifuna activist Santos Feliciano Aguilar Alvares by security guards employed by a real estate company.

Two years ago, Garifuna youths Epson Andrés Castillo and Yino Eligio López, were killed. Though military personnel were tried and sentenced for these killings, their superior officer remains unpunished.

OFRANEH argues that these actions are just a few examples of repression and a pattern of impunity for Honduran authorities and armed forces personnel. The General Coordinator of OFRANEH, Miriam Miranda, has claimed that “there are people in the justice system who are partisan and take the side of those who wish to see us abandon the coast where we live.”

In addition to this violence, the Garifunas are denied access to fishing grounds while commercial trawling fleets from the Islas de la Bahia over-fish the area. They have seen their catch plummet, and have been forced to travel further to find food for their families.

Tensions escalated to new levels when the Los Micos Beach and Golf Resort began construction in Tela Bay in 2008. The people who are most affected by the project live in the five surrounding Garifuna communities of Barra Vieja, Miami, San Juan, Tornabe and Triunfo de la Cruz.

The Honduran Ministry of Tourism sees many advantages to the resort development. Tela Bay’s miles of undeveloped Caribbean beach is naturally of interest to the tourism industry, which the government sees as a key sector for development. The idea of making the Tela Bay region into a tourist area first came up in 1969, but the realization of the project started with the current government.

“Most important, of course, is the generation of over 10,000 jobs,” the Minister of Tourism said. As for criticism of the project, he said that “we have studied the consultations of environmentalists, local communities, the government and private

78% of Garifuna children are malnourished. Three out of ten children die before the age of two.



Garifuna rights activist and community leader Alfredo Lopez and his family. Lopez was accused of drug trafficking and jailed for seven years before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled in his favour and he was released.

Investigation of Garifuna case concludes that World Bank has human rights obligations but lacks clear policies

In 2006 OFRANEH filed a complaint with the World Bank's Inspection Panel, which completed a review of World Bank projects affecting Garifuna people the following year. The Panel summarized the investigation, and its implications for World Bank policy, this way:

In its investigation into the Honduras Land Administration Project, the Panel once again was confronted with issues involving the relationship between Bank policies and human rights. Specifically, the indigenous Garifuna people in Honduras challenged Bank actions that supported a land titling and regularization project, which the Requesters claimed would harm land rights of the Garifuna people, undermining their long-standing struggle to assert collective title over lands lived on and traditionally used by the Garifuna people. As part of their Request, the Requesters claimed that the project would lead to a violation of the government's commitments under International Labor Organization Convention No. 169, an international agreement on the rights of indigenous peoples to which Honduras was a party.

The Panel determined that Bank Policy on Project Appraisal, Operational Manual Statement (OMS) 2.20, put a responsibility on the Bank to ensure that the project plan was consistent with the terms of this international convention. Specifically, the Panel referred to OMS 2.20, which states that a "...project's possible effects on the country's environment and on the health and wellbeing of its people must be considered at an early stage. ...Should international agreements exist that are applicable to the project and area, such as those involving the use of international waters, the Bank should be satisfied that the project plan is consistent with the terms of the agreements."

The Panel explained its concern that the Bank, as required by OMS 2.20, "did not adequately consider whether the proposed Project plan and its implementation would be consistent with ILO Convention No. 169." The Panel found that Bank policies (specifically OMS 2.20) include requirements that Bank-financed projects respect international agreements addressed to human rights and indigenous peoples when the project country is a signatory, as in this case. (emphasis added)

sector."

Ownership of the project is shared, Martinez said, with the Ministry of Tourism owning forty-nine percent and five local communities owning seven percent, with local community groups as partners and members of the project's board of the directors. He argued that the living standard of locals will be raised by hard currency inflows and economic growth, along with paved roads and improvements to drinking water, electrical power and waste disposal.

The Honduran government has invested in training programs and provided funds to create micro-businesses in the area. According to a survey carried out by the Ministry of Tourism, seventy percent of the affected population is in favour of the project.

“Most people are jobless. There is an incredible amount of poverty. They die of starvation and curable illnesses. It’s a complete disaster.”

A large amount of the financing comes from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), of which Canada is a member. In 2005 the IDB provided a “National Sustainable Tourism Program” loan of US\$ 4.85 million in support of improving basic infrastructure in Tela Bay.

“The project includes financing to improve conservation of the parks in the Tela Area and to make them sustainable for visits by tourists,” said Sergio Ardial, who was the IDB project officer. “There was also money put into strengthening the administration of the park.”

Both the Honduran government and the IDB say that while planning the project they negotiated with the local Garifuna communities, and the IDB did an environmental and social management assessment as part of the

funding process.

“We met with the representatives of each one of the communities in the vicinity of the project at least twice to get from them their concerns, their feelings about the project, what were they expecting to get from the project,” Ardila said. “I think we took as much as possible of all of those concerns into consideration in the design of the project.”

The office of Vinita Watson, the Canadian Executive Director of the IDB (vinitaw@iadb.org) was unable to comment on this project.

OFRANEH claims that the majority of locals are against the project, and that the government took over the Garifuna’s land with little or no compensation.

“The Garifuna community of Cayos Cochinos has had a bitter experience of repression ever since management plans for the region have been put in place,” Miranda said. “The north coast of Honduras has been systematically robbed of its fish stocks by the commercial trawling fleet. Traditional fishers, most of whom are Garifuna, have seen their catch plummet. These protected areas, created without any form of consultation with local communities, have generated tension over resource management. No respect has been shown for traditional Garifuna knowledge, despite the fact that it is this knowledge that has made it possible to conserve most of the lands we live on.”

OFRANEH is also concerned that the project will be harmful to the local ecological system and the three national parks in the area, containing the Micos freshwater lake.

“This is very much our problem in the north

because this is a project that Canadians, Americans and Europeans are going to go to,” Graham Russell of Rights Action, a northern NGO, said. “We need to know a lot more about how large scale tourism harms and violates the right of local communities.”

What OFRANEH wants for the region is development controlled by the local communities. They wish to practice small-scale eco-tourism for individuals with small hotels that don’t damage the local communities. OFRANEH is appealing to the government of Honduras to carry out a comprehensive investigation of the incidents described above and for the individuals involved in the assaults and killing be brought to justice. They want Garifuna people to be allowed to fish the area and commercial trawling ended. Finally, they want the land rights of the Garifuna people be respected.

Despite opposition to “Los Micos Beach and Golf Resort,” the construction of the infrastructure began in 2008. Part of Phase one is expected to be completed by the end of 2011.

Sandra Kral, a student in sociology at the University of Vienne, Austria, was an intern with the Upstream Journal in 2008, while in Montreal to study French and English.

Brendan Brock, a political science major at Concordia University, was a volunteer who previously worked in disaster relief in post-tsunami Thailand and as a volunteer English teacher in a poor drug-affected community in Mexico.



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HIV-positive in Egypt = prison

Since October 2007 police in Cairo have arrested at least a dozen men on suspicion of being HIV-positive and charged them with the “habitual practice of debauchery” – interpreted in Egyptian law to include consensual sex between adult men; nine were convicted of this charge. Initially, the men who tested HIV-positive were chained to their hospital beds, and were unchained only after a domestic and international outcry. In 2008 Egypt blocked the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, an NGO that was instrumental in calling international attention to the arrests of HIV-positive men, from attending a UN high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS.

State-sponsored homophobia in Africa *fueling the HIV/AIDS epidemic*



The names and images of gay and lesbian people interviewed cannot be disclosed because of fear of violence. This image is of Mpho Thaele, 19, an orphan who sells her body on the streets of Maseru, Lesotho. Photo © Eva-Lotta Jansson/UN-OCHA IRIN and Red Cross

BY NATASHA VIAU-SKRESLET

“Gug” - short for “GayUganda” - maintains an internet blog where he writes about his life, giving personal anecdotes along with scathing commentaries about Uganda’s homophobic leadership. But he keeps his identity secret.

“Being with the man I love, I risk a life sentence, to make sure that the morals of the country are not destroyed by my “immorality,”

In Uganda, “carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature” is a crime punishable by life imprisonment. Authorities in many African nations would prefer to deny the existence of people like gug. Of 53 African countries, 38 have repressive government policies and sodomy laws that legitimize and encourage social discrimination, including unequal access to medical treatment.

This condemnation drives behavior underground, away from prevention and treatment services, thus increasing the risk of HIV transmission. It is fueling the epidemic on a continent that is already home to over 60 percent of those living with HIV/AIDS.

In Africa, men who have sex with men (MSM) are nine times more vulnerable to contracting HIV than the general population, yet programs of prevention, testing, treatment and care targeting same-sex-practicing people are still severely limited, if they exist at all.

The illegality of homosexuality discourages mainstream HIV/AIDS and human rights organization from publicly addressing the lesbian, gay, transgendered, and bisexual (LGTB) community and makes it impossible to collect crucial data on the prevalence of the

Dakar, Senegal – January 9, 2009

Nine men were sentenced to eight years in prison after being convicted of conspiracy and “unnatural acts,” a term used to criminalize homosexuality.

Gambian President Yahya Jammeh

“The Gambia is a country of believers... sinful and immoral practices [such] as homosexuality will not be tolerated in this country.” Promising “stricter laws than Iran” on homosexuality, he said he would cut off the head of any gay person found in The Gambia.

ANC President Jacob Zuma

Same-sex marriage is “a disgrace to the nation and to God... When I was growing up, an *ungqingili* (a homosexual) would not have stood in front of me. I would knock him out.” He later apologized for the remark.

Former Nigerian President Obasanjo
Homosexuality "is clearly un- Biblical, un-natural, and definitely un-African."

Sam Nujoma, the first president of Namibia

"The Republic of Namibia does not allow homosexuality or lesbianism here... Police are ordered to arrest you, and deport you and imprison you, too."

"Homosexuals must be condemned and rejected in our society."

Uganda president Yoweri Museveni
Told the Criminal Investigations Department "to look for homosexuals, lock them up and charge them."

President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe
Saying that gays and lesbians are unnatural, subhuman and "behave worse than dogs and pigs," he called on Zimbabweans to "let the Americans keep their sodomy, bestiality -- stupid and foolish ways."

Former Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi

"It is not right that a man should go with another man or a woman with another woman. It is against African tradition and Biblical teachings. I will not shy away from warning Kenyans against the dangers of the scourge."

Former Namibian Minister of Home Affairs Jerry Ekandjo

"It is my considered opinion that so-called gay rights can never qualify as human rights. They are wrongly claimed because it is inimical to true Namibian culture, African culture and religion. They should be classified as human wrongs which must rank as sin against society and God."

disease and the social pathways by which it spreads.

"Research is the cornerstone of everything we do. It advances our knowledge, it advances our programming, and it is crucial to advancing our constitution," Senkhu Maimane, a research project officer with OUT Africa, said. "If you have research, you have knowledge."

The lack of research on the impact of AIDS in the African MSM community was, until recently, caught in a self-reinforcing cycle. Without the basic data needed to petition international donors for funding, the research didn't take place. Of 561 studies of HIV in MSM communities in 2005, only 8 addressed same-sex transmission in Africa.

The US government's PEPFAR - the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief - is one of the largest funders of HIV programs in Africa. Most of its \$15 billion authorization was directed towards prevention programs in Africa; less than 0.004% of it for programs addressing MSM.

The limited research that has been conducted, however, revealed some consistent findings crucial to understanding and responding to the epidemic.

Many MSM do not identify themselves as gay, and engage in heterosexual relationships. Many have misconceptions about same-sex transmission that significantly increases HIV vulnerability. These include a false belief that HIV and other sexually transmitted infections cannot be transmitted through sex between men, or that only the receptive partner is at risk of infection.

In addition to inconsistent condom use between both heterosexual and homosexual couples, these practices and misconceptions drastically increase the risk of HIV transmission.

LAWS, SOCIAL NORMS AND HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

"The denial of a set of basic human rights as a result of sexual orientation may well be the most significant social risk factor for same-sex practicing Africans."

- International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC)

Anti-homosexuality legislation is a crucial facilitator of sexually based discrimination. It serves as a platform for the punishment of homosexual identity, often with language substantially vague so as to allow authorities broad leeway in policing unpopular sexual or social behavior.

In countries that do not criminalize homosexuality per se, other laws are often used to police sexual behavior and put gays and lesbians in jail. In Egypt and Kenya, for example, laws against vagrancy and loitering are used to round up suspected homosexuals. The majority of arrests of men and women on charges related to homosexuality are based on the presumed identity of the individual, not on the witness-

The Aids policies of former president Thabo Mbeki's government were directly responsible for the avoidable deaths of a third of a million people in South Africa, which has one of the most severe HIV/Aids epidemics in the world. About 5.5-million people, or 18.8% of the adult population, have HIV, according to the United Nations. (Harvard University study, 2008)



Lineo Makojoa, 15, at her home in Ha Majoro Village, Lesotho, holds the Memory Book that talks about her family. Her father died of Aids.

ing or reporting of illegal activity.

Despite the pervasiveness of these laws across Africa, long-term detentions are rare. More common are short-term arrests and extortion - usually the threat of exposure to police, family, or employers if payment of one kind or another is not made.

Gug, like many Ugandans, holds multiple jobs. While his sexual orientation is known to a few - members of his immediate family and very close friends - he is careful to keep his sexual orientation secret from his employers, saying that they would "not be very happy" to know that one of their employees is a gay rights activist and a gay man himself.

Verbal and physical abuse on the grounds of sexual orientation are common, and law enforcement authorities and government representatives have gone so far as to encourage citizens to abuse suspected homosexuals, who have little or no legal recourse. Police and law enforcement officials rarely intervene when suspected homosexuals are abused, discriminated against or verbally assaulted, while the vagueness of homosexuality laws has led to the

dozens of arbitrary arrests across the continent.

"We are trapped in a lack of freedom," gug says. "We cannot be self-assertive. Our sexuality makes us pariahs. Being open about it is simply not an option. Blackmail, extortion, loss of status, loss of clan, loss of self-respect - we risk all these things when we gay identify. Some of us have been cast out of our clan, and the clan is our identity. When it is taken away we have nowhere to go."

The right to be free from unfair discrimination is protected by a number of treaties and charters to which all African countries are signatories, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As signatories to these treaties, governments commit to uphold the rights of minority groups so that they will not face oppression.

"When three countries maintain the death penalty for consensual homosexual acts, they violate their commitment to international human rights norms," IGLHRC Executive Director Cary Johnson said.

State-sanctioned homophobia is both served



"Arresting people, killing people, firing people from their jobs, kicking young people out of their homes - that's what is un-African. Not homosexuality."

- IGLHRC Executive Director Cary Johnson

Gays and lesbians face increasing persecution in Burundi, where a new law "criminalizes homosexual behaviour, and threatens to exacerbate the deplorable treatment of gays and lesbians."

(Human Rights Watch, April 2009)

by, and feeds into, the belief that homosexuality is un-natural, not normal and, perhaps most critically, un-African.

The list of African leaders and officials that have used their platform to incite hatred against homosexuals is not short. Public statements by heads of state and high-ranking officials condemning homosexuality and inciting hatred and anti-gay violence have become common.

The most often quoted example is that of Zimbabwean President Mugabe, who in 1995 proclaimed that gays and lesbians were unnatural, subhuman and “behave worse than dogs and pigs.” In 1995 Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, upon accepting an award honoring his government's efforts to fight HIV, said that male-male HIV transmission wasn't a problem because “we

don't have homosexuals in Uganda.”

Last year, Gambian President Yahya Jammeh declared that The Gambia is a country of “believers” in which “sinful and immoral practices [such] as homosexuality will not be tolerated.” He promised “stricter laws than Iran” on homosexuality and said he would “cut off the head” of any gay person found in the country.

In his book, *Off the Map – How HIV/AIDS programming is failing same-sex practicing people in Africa*, Cary Johnson notes that such comments seem designed to inspire what he calls “a conspicuously xenophobic and nationalistic brand of homophobia.”

He points out that often the most vile and pointed attacks by African leaders have coincided with times of difficulty, and shift the focus away

LGTB in Kenya

BY SIENA ANSTIS

Last year in Mombasa, Kenya's most socially conservative city, a new lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) group was formed to provide psycho-social and health support to their often repressed community. It calls itself PEMA, which means “place of solace” in kiSwahili, the national language.

From HIV/AIDS awareness to feeding programmes, PEMA is determined to gain acceptance and tolerance for Kenya's LGBT community. Through their monthly “gay parties,” they help the LGBT community network and, as Erica, a PEMA member, says, “let loose.”

In a society where homosexuality is punishable by a jail sentence (and informally by death or stoning), PEMA is making a daring move against the status quo. “Erica” has begun speaking on the radio about her experiences as a lesbian in Kenya. She does not dare reveal her identity, however. She described returning to her office after one radio show to find coworkers talking about the audacity of speaking out on a taboo subject. However, she believes that only by telling people publicly about homosexuality can she help dismantle the many barriers her community faces.

Hatred towards the LGBT community in Kenya has been fostered primarily by strict Christian and Muslim views of homosexuality as an abomination. There are also claim that it was introduced by Westerners and is therefore something that one adopts culturally in cities like Mombasa and Nairobi, where there is a high concentration of Westerners.

Few in Kenya understand the biological complexity of homosexuality, and that is something Erica is trying to change through radio shows and PEMA. By increasing Kenyans' exposure to LGBT individuals, she is hoping that people will realize that homosexuality is a fact of life. Furthermore, by assisting new LGBT groups in more remote areas like Kisumu and Eldoret, PEMA and the national LGBT network is hoping to educate Kenyans on the fact that homosexuality is not a foreign doctrine.

“The moment you show that the gay person on the radio could be that favorite niece of yours, people become more tolerant,” she said. During her last radio show, a man called in - among all the negative commentary - and told her that he was fine with homosexuality provided that she “respected his space” and vice-versa. She views that mild show of tolerance as a step in the right direction for Kenya's LGBT community.

from social problems and economic distress.

Johnson believes that while decriminalization is a priority, what is more important is a basic shift in social attitudes and the behavior of authorities. He envisions this transformation resulting from individuals and organizations working within their own communities, at the family level, in schools, churches and mosques.

African LGTB groups are not remaining silent. Despite a lack of resources, many have launched HIV prevention, care and treatment programs with little, if any, external assistance.

“We are present,” gug said, “despite the best efforts of African leaders who insist on denying us our humanity.”

Natasha Viau-Skreslet is a McGill University graduate pursuing her MA in Human Rights at University College London. She interned at the SJC during her last semester at McGill.

UN health officials estimate about 4 million people who need AIDS drugs worldwide are now getting them - a major increase in rolling out the drugs to patients across Africa, where the AIDS epidemic is focused. In sub-Saharan Africa 3 million people were on antiretroviral drugs to keep the infection at bay at the end of 2008. 45% of pregnant women with HIV received drugs to protect their baby from infection, up from 35% last year.

Despite the progress in treatment and care for people with HIV infection in the world's poorest countries, an estimated 5 million or more across the globe are still waiting for the drugs.

President of The Gambia threatens rights defenders with death

In September, lawyers and rights activists called on the African Union's human rights body to move its headquarters out of The Gambia after President Yahya Jammeh on national television threatened human rights defenders and said he would kill anyone collaborating with them.

“African leaders must stand up and draw a line and say this is unacceptable,” Chidi Odinkalu, legal adviser with the Africa Open Society Justice Initiative, said. “We cannot defend human rights internationally if our leaders are going around threatening people with death.”

In a speech televised on 21 September President Jammeh said: “If you think you can collaborate with so-called human rights defenders and get away with it, you must be living in a dream world. I will kill you and nothing will come of it.”

He continued: “We are not going to condone people posing as human rights defenders to the detriment of our country. If you are affiliated with any human rights group, rest assured your security and personal safety will not be guaranteed by my government. We are ready to kill saboteurs.”

The Gambia hosts the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, which hears cases brought by human rights defenders from across the continent.

“It is extraordinary,” Odinkalu told IRIN. “When presidents begin to threaten death and killing on people who defend human life and human rights it reflects a system with a total absence of accountability.”

“This is not the first, second or third time he has issued threats, but there is a chilling dimension to this threat. It is indiscriminate and it is directed at the whole world. The human rights situation in Gambia is intolerable.”

The Commission, charged with promoting and protecting human rights throughout the continent, was established in 1986 by the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and set up its headquarters in The Gambia in 1989.

Source: IRIN

The Gambia not get significant development assistance from Canada, the US or the World Bank. There is no embassy for The Gambia in Canada; representation is through the embassy in Washington. The ambassador is Neneh Macdouall-Gaye.

Contact info:

Embassy of The Gambia
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info@gambiaembassy.us

FINANCIAL VULTURES



BY ROSHI VEERAPEN

In 1979, Romania loaned Zambia \$15 million to put toward agricultural machinery and vehicles. By the 1990s due to widespread poverty and devastating health conditions, Zambia was unable to repay its external debt and started to negotiate for debt cancellation.

During this negotiation, in 1999, a company named Donegal International bought up Zambia's debt, then valued at \$30 million, for \$3.3 million. Donegal then sued Zambia for the full amount of the debt, plus interest - a total of \$55 million.

Donegal has been called a "vulture fund," which designates a company that buys up "bad" debt at a discount and then sues for the full amount plus interest. These funds carry out most of their activities through legal action in national courts and usually win.

Donegal International was started in 1997 with the sole purpose of holding and managing the debt purchased by Romania and owned by Zambia. Companies like Donegal International are often set up to pursue a single debt and then are shut

At least 54 companies are known to have taken legal action against 12 of the world's poorest countries in recent years, for claims amounting to over US\$1.8bn. Examples:

Greylock Global Opportunity
Based in the British Virgin Islands
Parent: Greylock Capital Management
Sued Nicaragua Won \$50.9 million judgment

FG Hemisphere Based in the U.S.
Parent: FG Capital Management
Sued Congo Republic Won \$151.9 million judgment
Sued Dem. Rep. Congo Won \$81.7 million judgment

Kensington International Based in the Cayman Islands
Parent: Elliott Management
Sued Congo Republic Won \$118.6 million judgment
Donegal International Based in the British Virgin Islands
Parent: Debt Advisory International
Sued Zambia Won \$15.4 million judgment
Grace Church Capital Based in the Cayman Islands
Parent: Not Available
Sued Cameroon Still in court, seeking \$39.7 million

down as soon as they win their lawsuit. This technique allows them to be as secretive about their actions as possible, often going unnoticed due to their lack of publicity.

Donegal International's director is Michael Sheehan, a partner in Debt Advisory International (DAI). DAI is a Washington D.C.-based limited liability company that provides debt related advisory services to private and sovereign creditors and debtors. When intercepted by a BBC Newsnight TV crew outside his home in 2007, Sheehan refused to answer any questions about the lawsuit his company had filed against Zambia. "No comment," he said. "I'm in litigation. It's not my debt."

In 2007, the Zambian case was settled at London's High Court. Donegal International was awarded \$15.5 million, which was lower than the \$55 million demanded by the fund, but still brought substantial profit to the firm.

Little information is available about the Donegal International operation. Its website contains limited information about the people behind the process, and the only means of contact provided is a single email address. Several documents are linked to the website to justify or "put into perspective" the Zambian debt crisis, blaming Zambia's slow response to carrying out transactions for the case against them.

Michael Sheehan is one actor behind the funds, but it was Paul Singer, the reclusive billionaire, that really invented vulture funds. Singer is the founder of the hedge fund Elliot Associates, a convertible arbitrage trader that moved into investing in distressed debt. In 1996, Singer's company paid

\$11 million for discounted Peruvian debt and threatened to bankrupt the country unless they paid \$58 million. The court awarded Singer the full amount. Singer then pursued a \$400 million case against Congo-Brazzaville.

Both Singer and Sheehan are major contributors to the US Republican party. Singer contributed millions toward George W. Bush's campaigns in 2000 and 2004 and was a major financial backer of Rudy Giuliani's presidential bid.

Despite criticism of vulture funds, some financial journals have come to their defense, blaming the corruption of the leadership of the countries under attack for the money lost to vulture funds.

In an article published at Portfolio.com, Joshua Hammer said that "it is hard to see how Zambia's increased financial burden is going to make things worse for the average Zambian." He claims that the \$15 million won by Donegal International in its lawsuit against Zambia would "hardly make a difference" since in 2006 Zambia's president Levy Mwanawasa leased a helicopter for more than half that amount. As of 2007, the external debt of Zambia represented more than 16% of its GDP. Taking into account the losses incurred by corrupt government officials, the country cannot afford to lose anymore.

The Jubilee Debt Campaign's effort to Stop Vulture Funds: www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk.

Donegal International: donegal@donegal.com

Roshni Veerapen, an intern at the SJC, is going into her third year at McGill University majoring in International Development Studies.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is being fined \$5,000 a week, eventually rising to \$80,000, in a case brought by a New York-based vulture fund over a US\$30 million debt incurred from Tito's Yugoslavia in the 1980s.

A Washington Court assigned the fine in March, for failure to comply with a demand for information about DRC assets. The fine is part of efforts by the FG Hemisphere fund to collect a debt first incurred 20 years ago by the brutal regime of dictator Mobutu Sese Seko. With interest and penalties for non-payment over the years of conflict, the court ordered the DRC to pay more than US\$100 million to settle the debt,

"Eight million people have died in the Congo for lack of healthcare... and the last thing they can do is find \$100 million for a vulture fund," Stephen Cundra of Roetzel and Andress, the law firm representing the DRC, said.

FG Hemisphere has also taken action against the DRC in Hong Kong and South Africa.

There are legislative efforts to reign in vulture funds. The Stop Vultures Act is on its way through the US House of Representatives. Britain announced last month that it would also consult on bringing in a law to cap the amounts an institution could claim against a poor country.

FG Hemisphere is owned by Keith R Fogerty and Peter J Grossman, both formerly of Morgan Stanley. In 1993, they formed Centaur International Corporation, and then FG Management Company and FG Hemisphere in 2000. Grossman received his B.A. from McGill University; both are now residents of New York and contributors to various Republican Party campaigns (eg. Giuliani, McCain).

Second class in Hong Kong



Roxanne Solas, one of 250,000 foreign domestic helpers living in Hong Kong

BY JILLIAN KESTLER-D'AMOURS

Roxanne Solas had hopes of a bed during her stay with the family that employed her, but she slept on the floor. Her employer promised her that a bed would arrive when they changed apartments.

“On the day we moved in, they had IKEA deliver a cabinet,” the 33-year-old Filipino domestic helper said, her eyes filling with tears. “It was horrible.”

Solas slept on top of the cabinet, without a pillow or blanket, in the living room of her employer’s home in Hong Kong’s trendy Causeway Bay neighborhood for five months, while she worked up to 22 hours a day, six days a week.

“Luckily it was summer so it wasn’t cold,” Solas said. “I was very afraid. I was always crying.” After an arduous process involving the police and the Hong Kong labor department, she was eventually able to quit.

There are laws to protect foreign domestic help-

ers living in Hong Kong, most originally from the Philippines, but enforcement is not easy. Helpers that have signed contracts dating after July 2008 must be paid at least \$3,850 HKD (\$545 CAD) per month.

They are also entitled to one rest day per week, to be fed or receive a food allowance, and depending on their years of service, and receive between seven and 14 days of vacation time annually.

Despite the laws, at least 15 percent of foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong are underpaid. Approximately 27 percent are verbally and physically abused and 22 percent do not receive weekly days off.

Helpers for Domestic Helpers (HDH) is an organization that provides free paralegal advice and counseling to domestic helpers in Hong Kong. The workers come from several countries, the majority from the Philippines but increasingly from Indonesia. 95 percent of Indonesian domestic helpers

that come to HDH for advice report being underpaid, with only one or two days off per month.

In addition, when a contract is terminated, foreign domestic helpers have only two weeks to find other arrangements or they must leave Hong Kong. This leaves little time to deal with grievances or collect owed wages, and deters abused workers from leaving their jobs.

Many workers are placed by an agency. The maximum commission an employment agency may collect from a foreign domestic helper is no more than ten percent of the helper's first month's wages. In reality, however, many employment agencies impose substantial placement fees on helpers for months after they have arrived in Hong Kong.

Sonas, for instance, paid nearly 90 percent of her monthly wages to an employment agency for three months, keeping only \$500 HKD (\$70 CAD) for herself each month.

"If you pay or not, you still lose your job. So I stopped paying," says Sonas, who eventually got back her money after three long meetings with the agency.

Mhel Beagan, a domestic helper from the Philippines who has lived in Hong Kong since 1983, counts herself lucky to have "not just an employer-employee relationship" with the family she works for.

"The government doesn't know what's going on inside the employer's house. The helpers tolerate it or keep quiet because they're afraid of being sacked. It's really a day-to-day contract because the employer can terminate it at any time."

Still, not being considered a true Hong Kong

resident after over 25 years here weighs on her. Most persons living in Hong Kong for seven consecutive years are eligible for permanent residency, but not domestic helpers.

"The Hong Kong government doesn't take into consideration our cases, which is very sad indeed," Beagan said, sitting with a dozen other Filipino domestic helpers over a lunch of steamed rice, pork and vegetables. "It's very important to have the support of friends. We support one another morally and spiritually. We help each other."

Eventually, with the help of other domestic helpers and local volunteers, Roxanne Sonas was able to get out of her abusive work environment once. She now works for a Canadian family living in Hong Kong, and volunteers her time to help other domestic helpers that are struggling.

"Experience is my best teacher," she says. "I comfort them and advise them according to my experience. They are afraid, and I've been there."

Sonas now earns \$4,100 HKD (\$581 CAD) per month, works eight-hour days, has access to a computer and television set and, perhaps most importantly, has her own bed.

"It's very comfortable," she says, smiling widely. "I'm happy."

Jillian Kestler-D'Amours is a journalism student and freelancer based in Montreal. Aside from writing, her major passions include Middle Eastern politics, human rights and indigenous communities.

*For more information:
www.helpersfordomestichelpers.org.*



On Sundays, many domestic helpers have the day off. The downtown area of Hong Kong island is closed, which lets helpers meet each other, talk and play games right on the streets. This photo was taken during the 111th Philippines Independence Day festivities on Sunday, June 14.

Photos: Jillian Kestler-D'Amours

Landgrabbing and forced evictions

“Development that impoverishes”?

Cambodia is a post-conflict country struggling to get back on its feet since 1993. Badly afflicted by endemic corruption, a judicial system dominated by money and politics, and the absence of rule of law, the issue of forced evictions, or landgrabbing as it is commonly called, affects tens of thousands of Cambodians every year.

BY GENEVIÈVE KING RUEL

For some, June 6th 2006 (6-6-6) was believed to announce the apocalypse. And although humanity did not indeed come to an end that morning, the world did collapse for more than a thousand families of the Sambok Chap community, in Phnom Penh. Their houses were destroyed, and the villagers crowded into trucks and relocated to Andung, almost 30 kilometres outside the capital.

This was the start of the largest displacement of people since the Khmer Rouge, in the north-western end of the city around Boeung Kak lake.

Sambok Chap residents previously enjoyed a life in the city, running small businesses and shops close to adequate resources and local markets. Now, more than three years since the eviction, most of them live in deplorable conditions, without access to clean water and sanitation.

Dr. Rapho, formerly a medical officer in refu-

gee camps following the Khmer Rouge period, is part of a medical team of the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) that visits Andung twice a week. Asked if Andung could be compared to a refugee camp, he said that, lacking UN and other international support, it was worse.

“There is no water, no rice, no medical support, no school, nothing. Conditions are impossible for human life.”

DEY KRAHORM

In January 2009, another community nearby in Phnom Penh, Dey Krahorm, lost a four-year struggle despite gaining worldwide media attention. Hundreds of armed military police and company workers came one morning and demolished it.

Lee Robinson, the director of LICADHO Canada, was there. “I really couldn’t believe that anything really bad could happen with so many witnesses and so many cameras, right in the middle of the capital city. There was still a part of me that thought someone would stop it before ‘it’ happened. Hope in humanity said some miracle was coming our way. It wasn’t true. The only miracle is that no one was killed.”

Despite national and international criticism, landgrabs continue to increase in frequency and incidents of violence. More than 16,462 families were affected by landgrabbing across Cambodia in 2008, according to LICADHO’s Myth of Development report. Amnesty International estimated that 150,000 more Cambodians were living under the threat of forced eviction, calling this “fast becoming



Confrontation at Dey Krahorm community. Photos by Geneviève King Ruel.

one of the most widespread and systematic human rights violations affecting Cambodians.”

A HERITAGE OF THE KHMER ROUGE

Land conflicts take roots in the country’s recent past, and appear as one of the multiple sequels of the brief yet murderous Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979). During that period, over 2 million Cambodians died or were killed. The regime carried out a radical collectivisation of land countrywide, suppressing the whole notion of private property. Phnom Penh was emptied of its people, who were sent into the rice fields to bring their workforce to agriculture, perceived to be the motor of the regime.

The Khmer Rouge era resulted in confusion about land property, and now there is a slow land redistribution process to provide Cambodians with land rights. But the road is full of obstacles.

The 2001 Cambodian Land Law provides that a person who has been living on a land in good faith for more than 5 years is vested with “possession rights.” These include the right to apply for land title, and until such time implies the “possessor” has same rights as an “owner”. The implementation of the law remains weak, however, and most Cambodians do not yet hold any land title and therefore remain vulnerable to forced evictions.

A 2004 World Bank report estimated that 20-30% of landowners held 70% of the country’s land. In the countryside, 45% of families were landless or near landless. The last five years haven’t seen much improvement; indeed, many consider the situation to be worsening at a rapid rate.

Cambodia has experienced impressive economic growth (8.6% in 2006), mainly benefiting a fortunate minority. The resulting sharp rise of land values in urban centres is concurrent with the increase in landgrabbing. This appears to be stimulated by the growth of the tourism sector, the rising demand for land, and a new devotion to “city beautification.”

In Phnom Penh, the authorities consider massive evictions as a necessary evil. Government

representatives systematically refer to villagers as “squatters” describe the zones where they live as “anarchic.” This rhetoric, repeated in the local pro-government media, serves to justify the dismantling of these communities and their relocation, often to the far outskirts of the capital where there are few job opportunities.

FEAR, CORRUPTION AND INJUSTICE

Community representatives and villagers often face groundless criminal charges. Accusation of infringement of private property is a new trend in this land crisis, increasingly used to intimidate and divide communities. There is a lack of lawyers, and few of these are willing to defend land cases. Most cases of landgrabbing involve people close to political power, and threats to human rights defenders



appear to have increased.

Because of dynamics of political power, endemic corruption and an inefficient judiciary system, the courts are ineffective regarding legitimate claims. Threatened communities are forced to concentrate their efforts on seeking sufficient compensation rather than enforcement of their legitimate right to their land. The constant intimidation and threats, along with the transformation of some communities into real war zones, discourage many from advancing their claims.

Seeking government intervention, communities from throughout Cambodia have protested at the Prime Minister’s residence and written letters to all levels of government and to various ministries.

Meanwhile, the inhabitants of the former Sambok Chap and other evicted and displaced communities across Cambodia are trying to rebuild their lost lives in inhumane conditions. Many, including former residents of Dey Krahorm, have lost hope. During his December 2007 mission to Cambodia, former UN Special Representative Yash Ghai visited threatened communities in Phnom Penh and was very critical of the government's policies.

"The type of development that is lauded here, not only by the government but by international

various forms of interactions between the state and private interests."

One Boeung Kak resident asked a LICADHO Canada monitor about the role of foreign governments in that approach to development. "If your governments are giving development money to my government, doesn't that mean your government is responsible for what happens to us?"

As Chan Vichet, a Dey Krahorm resident recently in Geneva to testify at UN hearings, told a LICADHO Canada representative, "In Cambodia, when a poor man like me hears about development, [he] becomes worried and afraid. It's like having a dream about ghosts."

Development aid to Cambodia provides a substantial part of the country's budget, climbing to almost \$1 billion dollars a year. Canada provides about \$16 million a year in aid, including support of land reform and property rights.

Geneviève King-Ruel is a graduate student in international law at UQAM, and LICADHO Canada's representative in Montreal. She worked in Cambodia as a legal intern with LICADHO from January - December

2007, as a consultant with Oxfam in 2008 and as volunteer legal consultant with LICADHO Canada in the Dey Krahorm community. She thanks Lee Robinson for her input and comments.

For more information about LICADHO Canada see www.licadhocanada.com.



Children of the Dey Krahorm community, nervous about the hired men with demolition bars.

agencies, is the type of development that impoverishes people, that deprives them of their resources, that adds further to the marginalization, increasing enormously the number of people who then can barely make a living. And on the other side, you have these huge accumulations of wealth, which are collected not through honest work but through

Support the SJC this holiday season and give the gift of justice!

As you may already know, the Social Justice Committee is in funding crunch. To keep our doors open we need membership support like never before. Our goal is to gain 100 new members this holiday season and we need your help to spread the word.

Here are some ways to give to your friends and family, and to social justice.

- Make a donation in the name of a loved one and we'll mail you a personalized card acknowledging the gift along with our 2009 Annual Report - and the tax receipt! Or better yet...
- Combine a (tax deductible) donation in the name of a loved one with a gift subscription to the Upstream Journal - just \$5 a year - and we'll send you a personalized card and the latest Upstream edition.

For details on SJC gift ideas, call the SJC at 514 933 6797 or visit www.sjc-cjs.org.



Talking the talk...

In this issue, readers are invited to join me as I visit Washington. I've dipped into my notes to give you a sense of what it's like for a Canadian activist in the corridors of the World Bank and IMF.

These meetings took place over three days in April, during one of the semi-annual sets of meetings the institutions hold to decide future policy directions.

Notes from the corridors

BY DEREK MACCUISH

WEDNESDAY

I arrive in Washington at noon, depressed as I consider the financial crisis and what it will mean for people in impoverished countries.

It's time for the main policy meetings of the World Bank and IMF, and NGOs like me take part in some of the dozens of meetings that are planned.

I take the metro from the airport to the guest-house to drop off my bag, and within an hour I'm at my first session, on **gender and income**. It's not a hopeful start. Money from production goes increasingly to corporate profit, and less to wages, and the financial bailouts are reinforcing inequalities.

Next up is a session on "**Broad Community Support**" at the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank division that funds private sector projects. The talk about community support comes down to the tension between "consultation" (required by IFC) and "consent" (not required). There is a gradual shift by companies and the IFC to seeking "consent" of people affected by a project, but there are problems. Most countries don't have adequate standards of consultation let alone consent, the IFC staff determine how a community is to be consulted rather than the community itself, the IFC doesn't know how to gauge consent, and communities are usually divided on support or opposition to a project.

Despite all the rationalizing about why the World Bank doesn't do better, the talk is all about rights and empowerment and it's lifted my mood

considerably. Until recently the World Bank didn't engage in this kind of talk at all.

On my way back to my room that night, I buy a copy of Street Sense from a gregarious guy who asks for a bit extra for it "since it's my last copy." Street Sense is the local newspaper sold by the homeless, and it is everywhere. I give the vendor an extra dollar and start to cross the street. Before I get to the other side, I hear him calling out again, "Street Sense, get your Street Sense, my last copy." On the other side there is another vendor, a quiet, older guy in a wheelchair. I buy another copy.

THURSDAY

The day starts early with a session on **accountability** in World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) projects. An NGO study showed that IDB projects scored much worse than World Bank projects in terms of good practice. Weak quality control practices were identified as the probable reason.

Then I join a discussion at the World Bank's **Inspection Panel**, which investigates for social and environmental impacts. "There is a new emphasis on accountability driven from below... We don't mention human rights; should we?" Even without an explicit mandate to examine rights issues, the Panel has taken on has taken them on in terms of indigenous peoples, livelihood and water, inclusion and participation, and security of the person.

Walking to the Inter-American Development Bank, I stop to chat with Conchita Piccioto. She's been living on the sidewalk in front of the White House since 1981, day and night, in her permanent protest

against nuclear arms and an array of other issues. Today she is entertaining a group of Japanese tourists, who seem delighted. American tour groups tend to get nervous and avoid her. as usual, she gives an energetic and scornful analysis of US policy, her dark eyes glinting below the safety helmet she always wears (she has been assaulted several times).

Vinita Watson is the **IDB Executive Director** for Canada. I knew her from meetings in Ottawa, when she was with the Department of Finance, but this is my first meeting with her as Canada's representative to the IDB. She is personable and it's just the two of us so our talk is pretty informal and open. She takes an optimistic approach, applauding recent increases in our government's financial support of the IDB. She recognizes that sometimes dealing with borrowing member governments can be difficult, but thinks it's best for the Bank to stay engaged. She sees the IDB as moving to more inclusiveness and considerations of social impacts in its projects, and says that having the IDB fund a project helps because its processes and mechanisms provide social and financial safeguards.

IMF session on the **G20 and the financial crisis**. The room is big, and filled with perhaps 80 NGOs. The IMF is eager to lend after a period of declining relevance. Lending is up by half, to US\$2.2 billion, and they want to get it up to \$3 billion a year. The IMF says conditions are fewer and less onerous, NGOs say the reality is different, and countries like Turkey, Hungary and the Ukraine were told to tighten their belts.

In the evening there is a **reception for NGOs** hosted by World Bank president Robert Zoellick and Dominique Strauss-Kahn (DSK), the head of



At a session on the role of the IMF in the financial crisis. At the table are NGOs from Europe, the US and Africa. Fraser Reilly-King of the Halifax Initiative (Canada) is at the centre. Photo: World Bank

the IMF.

DSK says the IMF is now in "Version 2.0," with streamlined processes and less conditionality, although he also said that "economic adjustment during the current crisis will be painful, adjustment is always painful."

He reminds us that the IMF has launched a "Fourth Pillar" in its governance reform process, which will allow for NGOs to have some input into the process. The SJC was actually key in this. The IMF announced the Fourth Pillar in its response to a letter I wrote to DSK pointing out that the reform process entirely excluded civil society participation (see <http://thefourthpillar.ning.com>).

DSK was asked about using some of the IMF's gold stockpile for debt cancellation for the poorest countries. He said it's too complicated, and they can't commit it for that use. Then he told the 100 or so NGOs that he had met for an hour with Bob Geldof earlier that day, but now was running late and had to leave.

Zoellick stays longer, comments that water is the emerging crisis for the world, and he wishes that was the global priority rather than the financial crisis.

FRIDAY

First up is a panel discussion on **people with disabilities**. The speakers focus mainly on access to services, and don't have an international policy perspective, so I am getting restless. Then the discussion turns to HIV/AIDS and dynamics of sexual activity of people with disabilities. Ahead of me are two older fellows, one blind and the other in a wheelchair. The blind guy nudges the other and they quietly laugh together, huddled over a copy of Playboy - in Braille.

I talk a bit with Mary Ennis, Executive Director of Disabled Peoples International, about World Bank policies and how much needs to be done. Then I take part in a session on World Bank **information disclosure** policy, which is being updated, and the need for better monitoring and evaluation of projects. It's one of the main subjects for these meetings; this session is one of several.

At lunch I speak a bit with a person from the IMF's External Relations. "The Social Justice Committee? Ohh... the letter!" She means the letter that sparked the Fourth Pillar process. She

seemed impressed.

Outside the IMF a guy with a bullhorn is rapping about being black in America as people stroll by amused. The police nearby ignore him.

In the afternoon I have a meeting at the Canadian office at the World Bank, with **Samy Watson, Canada's Executive Director (ED) at the World Bank, and Michael Horgan, our ED at the IMF.** They represent constituencies that include Canada, Ireland and some Caribbean countries. I expect to be the only NGO there, but Watson's office has scheduled an American NGO for the same meeting. That NGO sends a contingent of some 10 people that, along with the EDs and their staff of about 6 people, completely fill the meeting room. I'm the only one that provided an agenda of what I want to discuss, and that's pretty much toast now. But the discussion eventually gets going and is pretty helpful. Changes to the World Bank's disclosure policy is a main topic, and the need for a new approach that assumes transparency.

On debt cancellation, Watson agrees "in principle" on the need to cancel odious or illegitimate debt; for him the question is what mechanism to use, since none exists now.

Horgan admits that IMF warnings about problems in the US economy weren't loud enough, and showed the need for better early warning systems for global finance. He says Canada is one of the countries most in favour of greater transparency.

Both Horgan and Watson say they are in favour of strengthening the "voice" of small and poor countries, by reforming the voting process at the World Bank and IMF and changing how decisions are made.

I stay a while after the meeting for some informal chatting and information gathering, then go downstairs to a **workshop on the financial crisis.** There will be an increase in the debts of poor countries, and aid funds are shrinking. I say that IMF assistance is costly to the borrowers, that the G20 commitments were mostly loans, not grants, and included over-optimistic trade finance projections. Part of the difficulty for poor countries is that the debt relief they've gotten so far did not provide the "robust exit" from financial problems

that was originally promised.

Another session on the **financial crisis, and the role of the IMF.** On grants versus loans, the IMF argument is that with grants fewer countries benefit and the amount available is limited, and grants from the World Bank are slow in arriving, so it's better for poor countries to borrow from the IMF.

Time for a coffee break, and an interview for community radio with the only other Canadian NGO in town, from Ottawa. Jim Flaherty, the Minister of Finance, walks by and waves hello.

The next session, on **disclosure policy,** is not in the World Bank's main building, but in another nearby. I'm surprised to see a photo exhibit featured in the lobby, of Nigerian militants in oil-producing areas of Nigeria, along with an impressive display of African art and carvings from the World Bank's collection. There is a large turnout – perhaps 50 NGOs. The World Bank official heading the review agrees that the current requirement for government permission before anything is public "should disappear."

Then it's my last session, on **Africa and the financial crisis.** Twenty people, mostly African, and the mood is not happy. They worry about the future - how can Africa compete? In America the tractors are air conditioned, in Africa farming is by hand. They are frustrated by the setbacks Africans are facing – they have had other crises, but this one



World Bank President Robert Zoellick and IMF Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn speak with NGOs. The reception hall featured a display of mannequins in fashion from around the world. Photo: World Bank



IMF Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn with Bob Geldoff at the IMF's Headquarters, April 2009. Photo: IMF Photograph/Stephen Jaffe

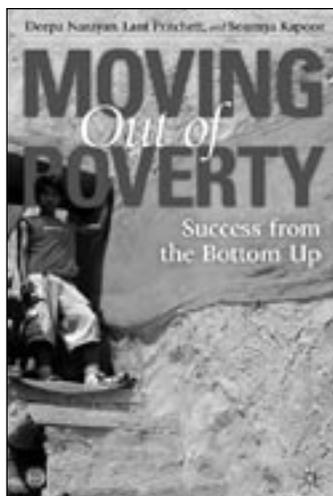
especially was not their doing. There is a lot of money flying around, but how much will be for Africa?

As for the other crisis, climate change, for Africans the discussion it is not about reducing carbon emissions. Their concern is that, whatever the promises to reduce emissions, there will be strong impacts for which they are not prepared.

In the main rooms upstairs, finance ministers from around the world take turns making speeches, and main policy directions are summarized in communiqués. The IMF plans to double lending to low income countries. The World Bank plans to triple its lending, to US\$100 billion over the next three years. The financial crisis has given the institutions new strength, and they are raring to go.

The meetings come to an end.

Book review



Moving Out of Poverty: Success from the Bottom Up

Authors: Deepa Narayan, Lant Pritchett & Soumya Kapoor. 428 pages. A co-publication of the World Bank and Pelgrave MacMillan, 2009.

BY CAL MACWILLIAM

Moving Out of Poverty is an engaging read and will be of interest to the academic, the development practitioner, the policy maker and indeed anyone who has an interest in the poverty eradication and economic development effort. The book's observations and findings are based on first hand narratives and life stories as told by more than 60,000 people, from 500 communities across 21 regions in 15 countries – a truly massive undertaking. It provides an inside look at the lives of the poor, the near poor and even the not so poor. It identifies, from their varied perspectives, the challenges, constraints and obstacles to moving out of poverty and the sometimes more challenging task of staying out of poverty. It effectively consolidates these stories into discussions

around the determinants of poverty and what is important at the individual and household level in the fight to reduce poverty.

Regardless of one's experience in economics, development, sociology or other social science, the book is certain to change one's views about the nature of poverty. By starting at the ground floor, in talking to thousands and thousands of people, a level of clarity and insight into the condition of poverty is achieved that has rarely been attained elsewhere. And the authors emphasize that poverty is a condition. Throughout the book, the poor themselves are clear in describing poverty as a condition that they

temporarily find themselves in; it is not perceived as permanent, or something that defines them. One is not a “poor person”, one is simply presently experiencing poverty.

One of the first characteristics of poverty that becomes clearly evident is that it is anything but static. In constantly dealing with aggregate poverty statistics that remain frustratingly stubborn, as in the failure of poverty rates in many African countries to budge downward, we easily fall into the trap of thinking that things are stagnant on the poverty front, that no one is escaping poverty, that there is no movement.

The authors dispel this notion. In reality, even in those economies with little or no change in aggregate poverty indicators, people are frequently and routinely escaping poverty. Unfortunately, in these environments just as many people are sliding into poverty. The authors provide insight in highlighting the factors that contribute to this continual movement out of poverty, and those that can lead others into poverty. While each story is unique, there are threads of commonality.

Another factor that becomes evident is that community matters. “Local” is more important than “national.” Again, as development practitioners and policy makers we have a tendency to think nationally. The poor far more frequently identify local factors as major determinants of their condition - and their ability to change their condition - than national policies, regulations or services.

The authors find that there is far more variation between communities in those moving out of poverty than at the national level. 75% of the variation in upward movement depends on the community, while 25% is attributed to the region or country. As such, local context matters, and solutions need to go far below the national level, targeting local prosperity and expanding local opportunity, through local roads, local infrastructure, local markets, local government attentiveness and capacity, and the identification of local change agents.

In the end, the authors remain non-prescriptive, recognizing the amazing diversity inherent in the thousands of stories. Nonetheless, they effectively relate their findings to four current approaches to poverty and to three broad principles that they believe should inform poverty reduction efforts, summarized as follows:

1) Actions should seek to expand the scope for people in poverty to use their agency. We need

to change our view from looking at the poor as people with “needs” to be filled, to recognizing that the poor, like all of us, have dreams, ambitions, plans, skills, ideas and preferences. We need to help the poor exercise their agency, individually and collectively.

2) Actions should seek to transform markets into ones that poor people can access and participate in fairly. The poor see market-based initiative as a means to advancement, but often do not enjoy equal opportunities in free markets.

3) Well functioning local democracies can help people move out of poverty. Governance at the local level is often corrupt, unaccountable and creates opportunities for some, the favoured, while erecting barriers for others. Fair, accountable local democracies and local leaders can do much to liberalize economies and provide opportunities from below.

There is far more to this book than can be conveyed here. Suffice it to say that the authors provide a valuable window into the factors and determinants that enable people to escape from poverty. One cannot help but be moved by the numerous personal battles with poverty and survival that are conveyed throughout the book. It is a clear and poignant reminder of the real people behind the statistics and their determined and at times valiant efforts to build better lives for themselves and their children. In highlighting the obstacles they confront and the platforms that help them in their individual struggles, may we find more effective ways to help. A highly recommended read.

Cal MacWilliam, formerly an economist with the Canadian International Development Agency, is a senior advisor in the office of the Executive Director for Canada, Ireland and the Caribbean at the World Bank.

“The problem is us, not poor people. We have to change. If only we can make the world look like what poor people think it really is - a place where hard work pays off, where there is equality of opportunity - we will see mass poverty reduction in our time. Imagine a world in which we listen to poor women, men, and young people, and fix what they think isn’t right.”

- Moving Out of Poverty, p.85



eye on Ottawa

The Better Aid Bill - Has it Changed Anything?

BY SARAH BABBAGE

In an effort to ensure that Canada's foreign aid will be well spent, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) Accountability Act was introduced to Parliament in May 2006. In 2008 it passed the third reading and became law, but John MacKay, the Liberal MP who introduced the bill, is not convinced it is being implemented effectively.

"The government has made it clear that it is going to pay lip service to this bill. This puts the government in confrontation with the unanimous will of parliament," he said.

The Act lays out three criteria for ODA: that it contribute to poverty reduction, take into account the perspectives of the poor, and be consistent with Canada's human rights obligations.

10% of ODA goes directly to the World Bank, and there are questions about whether this funding meets the human rights obligations of the new law. The World Bank has no formal human rights standards, and has been criticized for not taking potential rights abuse into account in project planning.

These offenses include:

- a state-led massacre of indigenous residents in rural Guatemala who refused to abandon their land to allow for the construction of a World-Bank funded dam in 1978;

- the funding of a pipeline project in Chad and Cameroon in 1997 and 1998 where governments routinely violated human rights; and most

recently, and

- the funding of Glamis Gold's Marlin Mine in Guatemala in 2002, which local groups say harmed the community through lack of consultation, sparking conflict and violence.

The World Bank says it informally supports human rights, but that rights are political issues beyond its economic mandate.

To ensure its projects comply with the Bank's standards, the Bank created an Inspection Panel in 1994 to provide a forum for people who believe they will be or are currently being adversely affected by a Bank project. Some people have used it to address human rights issues but it has been criticized by NGOs for lacking authority, as it can only make recommendations to Bank management.

There have been cases in the past where an Inspection Panel recommendation has resulted in the cancellation of a project. This occurred at the Arun III Hydroelectric Project in Nepal in 1994 over concerns of environmental degradation and resettlement of local residents.

Nonetheless, the Panel lacks the authority to conduct human right impact assessments prior to the start of projects, which could prevent rights from being violated in the first place. The Panel also lacks the authority to ensure follow-up to the recommendations.

"Ultimately the Panel doesn't have any teeth,"

said Fraser Reilly-King of the Halifax Initiative, a coalition of Canadian NGOs. “They can make recommendations to the president but usually the Bank management argues against the recommendations.”

He doesn't think it would be appropriate for the Bank to act as an arbiter of human rights. “The World Bank should not violate human rights standards where its funding is active,” he said, “The Bank should help countries respect, protect and fulfill their obligations, but it's up to the state to ensure that rights aren't violated.”

Government officials believe the World Bank does in fact uphold human rights standards. “While the World Bank Group does not have formal human rights standards, it works extensively with shareholders and partners to support the foundations of fundamental human rights principles in developing countries,” a Department of Finance official said. Examples of this include the World Bank's support for the Millennium Development Goals, for transparency in government and media, and locally-led programs as proof of its commitment to human rights, thus putting Canada's World Bank

The Official Development Assistance Accountability Act

(Excerpts)

The purpose of this Act is to ensure that all Canadian official development assistance abroad is provided with a central focus on poverty reduction and in a manner that is consistent with Canadian values, Canadian foreign policy, the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of March 2, 2005, sustainable development and democracy promotion and that promotes international human rights standards.

Canadian official development assistance abroad shall be defined exclusively with regard to these values.

Official development assistance may be provided only if the competent minister is of the opinion that it

- (a) contributes to poverty reduction;
- (b) takes into account the perspectives of the poor; and
- (c) is consistent with international human rights standards.

The Minister or the competent minister shall cause to be submitted to each House of Parliament, within six months after the termination of each fiscal year or, if that House is not then sitting, on any of the first five days next thereafter that the House is sitting, a report containing

- (a) the total amount spent by the Government of Canada on official development assistance in the previous fiscal year;
- (b) a summary of any activity or initiative taken under this Act;
- (c) a summary of the annual report submitted under the Bretton Woods and Related Agreements Act;
- (d) a summary of any representation made by Canadian representatives with respect to priorities and policies of the Bretton Woods Institutions;* and
- (e) a summary of the Departmental Performance Report of the Canadian International Development Agency.

The Minister of Finance shall... contribute the following to the report submitted to Parliament:

- (a) the position taken by Canada on any resolution that is adopted by the Board of Governors of the Bretton Woods Institutions; and
- (b) a summary of the manner in which Canada's activities under the Bretton Woods and Related Agreements Act have contributed to carrying out the purpose of this Act.

*The Bretton Woods Institutions are the World Bank and IMF.

funding in compliance with the ODA Accountability Act.

Although MacKay isn't sure World Bank activities threaten human rights, he admitted that it was beyond Canada's control. "We lose out characterization and we lose our control over these issues when we send our aid off to these multilateral organizations," he said.

He agrees that human rights still aren't seen as a priority by the government, citing the recent shift in focus away from African countries. "There was not one scintilla of reference of this aid redistribution being aligned with international human rights standards," he said.

NGOs have also objected to a consultation process that was held in December 2008 to evaluate the Department of Finance's compliance with the Act. Organizations were invited to provide feedback, but were given little notice, and a short window to respond that included the December holiday season. Five organizations prepared feedback, including the Social Justice Committee, which focused on the lack of human rights

accountability in World Bank funding. The Canadian Council for International Cooperation and the Halifax Initiative Coalition focused their joint report on the flawed consultation process itself.

Reilly-King called the consultation process disappointing. "They gave us no lead time, which often happens when the government decides it wants to consult NGOs." He conceded that this was a pilot process, but also acknowledged that the government had a legal obligation to hold a consultation on the Act.

Despite the flaws in its consultation process, the Ministry of Finance is the only government department which the Act affects which has held a consultation (the others being CIDA and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade). CIDA is expected to release a report about its compliance with the Act in the fall. Until that report is issued, along with those of the other departments, there are few indications that the ODA Accountability Act has changed much about the distribution of Canadian aid.

US NGO slams Canada for inaction on Honduras

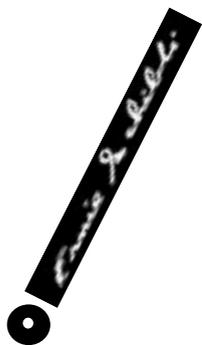
An opinion by the staff of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA), Washington

Repeatedly, COHA specialists have called upon Canadian authorities to use their nation's positive image throughout this hemisphere to help build authentic democratic institutions and condemn human rights violations wherever they might occur in the region. Regrettably, innovation and a creative marque have rarely characterized Ottawa's regional policy, but Canada's role toward Latin America has seldom been as inert and shallow as it has been under its present minority government and Minister Kent. On his just-concluded trip to Honduras, Kent almost seemed to go out of his way to buy into a formula on Honduras that would all but guarantee that Manuel Zelaya, the constitutional president of the country who was ousted at gunpoint by a military coup on June 28, would remain in exile. New elections will be held at the end of this November.

Under Kent's laconic leadership, Ottawa even managed to drag its feet over canceling the golpista Honduran government's diplomatic visas, a step that every government in the EU and in this hemisphere, even including the U.S., has managed to take.

In effect, what Kent has done is to go beyond his government's usual minimal level of activity when it came to regional affairs. He also has, in effect, sanctioned, by going along with U.S. State Department mythology, that somehow the murky line that the two countries are advocating will get Zelaya restored to office.

Kent has provided no leadership whatsoever during his trip to Honduras, and he does neither his country nor the hemisphere much credit in confirming, once again, that when it comes to Latin American issues, Ottawa is bereft of an ability to come forth with an independent and innovative policy.



“We are asking for an international solidarity movement to be active alongside us and accompany us. Any action from this movement is just as important as these marches we have here every day. The international movement needs to pressure the OAS and governments to sanction the coup regime, to support the OAS and UN resolutions, and to help us get the word out through autonomous, independent media. We are living with the manipulation of the media in our country. Any action - sending a letter, sending a delegation - is helpful.”

- Berta Caceres, Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organization of Honduras and the National Front Against the Coup d'etat.

Months have passed since an alliance of the Honduran oligarchy and military deposed president Emanuel Zelaya and literally flew him, clothed in his pajamas, to Costa Rica. With the exception of a few articles in the Canadian news media during the first week of the coup, there has been an almost total lack of information in our mainstream press on what has happened since. Thanks to repressive measures, the “de facto government” headed by Roberto Micheletti remains in power. Moreover, it is now embarked on a process of ensuring that the oligarchy will remain in power well into the future.

While there have been “democratic” elections for the past twenty years, the oligarchy maintained control of government until Zelaya betrayed it by plotting a new course. He dared to do such things as raising the minimum wage, confronting the IMF over teachers’ salaries and calling a halt to new mining projects - policies despised by the upper classes.

Since Zelaya’s overthrow, the “government” has engaged in extensive human rights violations. It has restricted freedom of the press by closing down news outlets that it does not like and arresting journalists. It has attacked peaceful demonstrators with guns, tear gas and clubs. It has illegally jailed thousands, and assassinated several protest leaders. It has contemptuously ignored the demand of the Organization of American States (OAS) to restore Emmanuel Zelaya as president. It has even rejected the American-brokered Arias peace proposal that would have forced Zelaya to share power with it.

The Canadian press is largely ignoring the widespread resistance to the coup by the Honduran women’s, indigenous and campesino organizations, students and unions. Protestors have taken to the streets in frequent peaceful demonstrations and engaged in strikes. They bravely refuse to cooperate with those who have seized power and say that they will continue to do so until Zelaya returns.

Their resistance is not based on a love for Zelaya—after all he was part of the oligarchy and some of his earlier policies were detrimental to the poor—but rather because they see an opportunity to build a much more democratic Honduras. They are fighting for freedom and justice.

It is against this background that we should consider Berta Caceres’ appeal. Honduras, one of the Americas’ most impoverished countries, is engaged in a struggle between the majority poor and the minority rich and powerful. It is a struggle that has important consequences not just for Honduras but also for much of Latin America. During the past decade the Latin American Left has resurfaced and been elected into power in a number of countries. Honduras under Zelaya seemed to be heading in that direction. This coup can be interpreted as the first act of the Right, Latin American and American, striking back. El Salvador has recently elected an FMLN (leftist) government. If the Honduran military-oligarchy coup succeeds, will that encourage the Salvadoran Right to attempt a coup as well? The same question might be asked of Guatemala. And others?

The US and Canadian governments have both denounced the coup along with the rest of the OAS members but have been slow in doing much else. They seem to have put all their eggs in the Arias peace plan that, while allowing Zelaya to return as president, would at the same time grant an amnesty to all who participated in the coup and form a coalition government. The US has canceled some foreign aid and is denying visas to those involved in the coup. Canada’s position is much more tepid—a few words chiding the coup, a call to accept the Arias plan, but not much else.

I believe that Canadians by and large do want justice in the world and we want our government to further its cause not only at home but also in other parts of the world. Unfortunately, the cause of justice and peace in Honduras has been terribly let down by both our government and media.

Ernie Schibli is a founding member of the SJC, and one of our most popular workshop animators. Contact: ernie@s-j-c.net

The Social Justice Committee

The *Upstream Journal* is a publication of the Social Justice Committee of Montreal. It is one of several educational materials we offer on human rights and development.

Donations to the SJC are welcome, and go to support a range of human rights & development education activities.

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*Editor's note: Some articles are produced in the SJC office by volunteers and interns who are in training in journalism, with guidance and content input from the editor.

Printed on recycled paper with a high level of post-consumer content.

The Upstream Journal is published by the Social Justice Committee of Montreal. Among other recent SJC activities, we were privileged to host human rights defender Dr. Yuri Melini at a series of public events in Montreal, Quebec City and Ottawa.

Shot repeatedly in an assassination attempt last year, Dr. Melini is recovering and once again active in forcing the application of law in Guatemala to combat environmental destruction, control extractive industries like mining, and fight corruption and drug trafficking.

The public events drew full and overflow audiences. Dr. Melini also met with Members of Parliament Francis Scarpalleggia, Bernard Patry and John McKay and with the Americas Policy Group network of NGOs and labour groups. Our purpose was to raise public awareness of the efforts to promote environmental and human rights protection in Guatemala, and the dangers faced by those engaged in these struggles.

The tour was made possible by a grant from the Congregation of Notre Dame and donations from our members.



Yuri Melini speaks with audience at St. Edmund's Church, Beaconsfield. Still recovering from gunshot wounds, he began a fever that evening, but after a night's rest felt well enough to travel to Ottawa for workshops and a meeting with Members of Parliament.

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Views expressed in the *Upstream Journal* are the writers' own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Social Justice Committee. We welcome the submission of illustrations and articles on aspects of international development and human rights.

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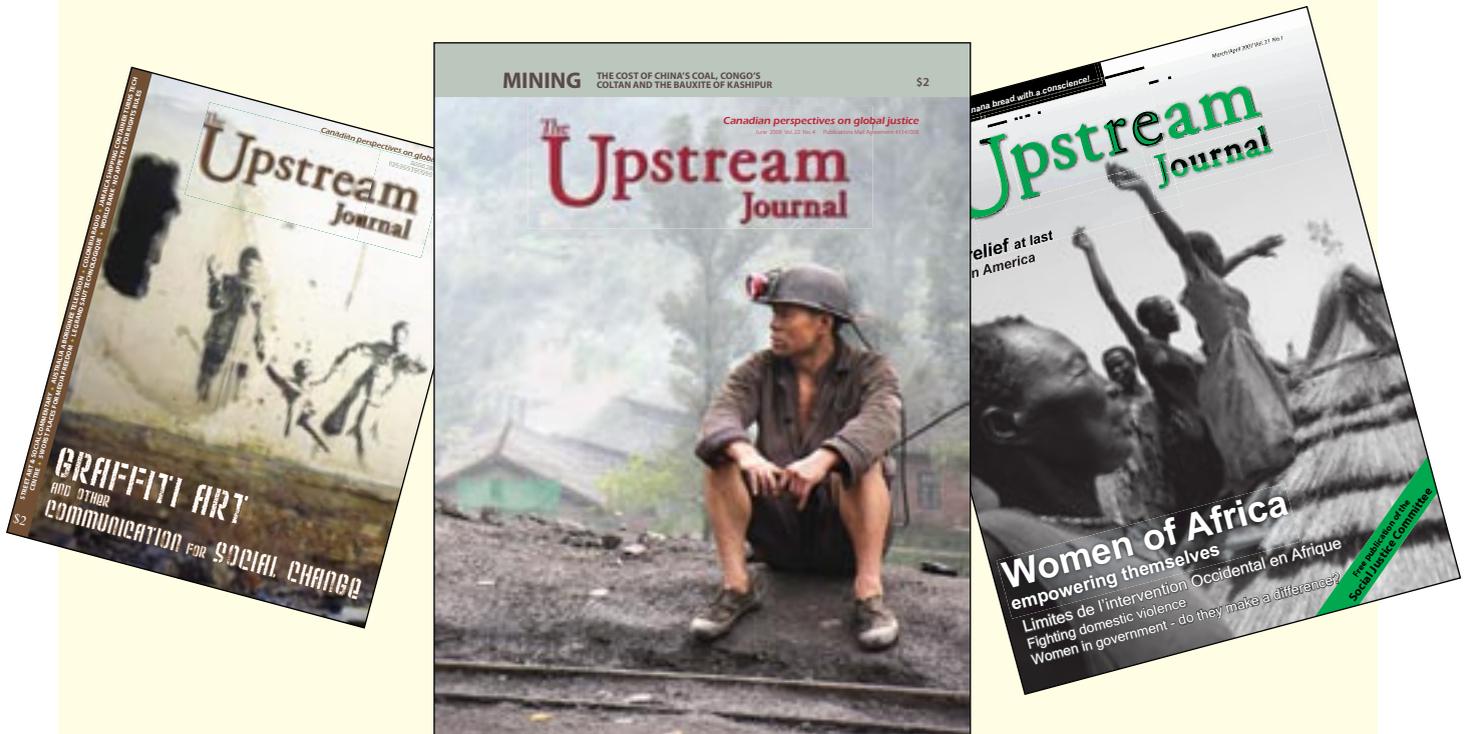
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