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THE WAR ON TERROR

A Five-Year Retrospective

Living with Hope

BY RACHELLE LYNDAKER SCHLABACH

Although suffering and death seem to hold sway today, we live in hope and faith that this is not the ultimate reality.

“O come, O come, Immanuel,” begins the Advent chant dating back to the Middle Ages. The words capture the feelings of a people, caught in difficult circumstances, who long for an Anointed One to deliver them.

This past year the *Washington Memo* has marked the changes in the five years since Sept. 11, 2001. A declared war on terror, tighter immigration policies, a shift in priorities for the federal budget, increased reliance on militarism, and greater restrictions on civil liberties—all of these reflect the sobering reality in which we live.

Surrounded by such realities, it is easy to give in to despair and cynicism, to a sense of resignation that things will not change. It seems as though violence and destruction are all-powerful.

Like the Jewish people 2000 years ago, we long for God to break into our world and set things right.

But the season of Advent reminds us that God often acts in ways that we do not expect. No one expected Jesus’ humble birth in a cave. If we are to notice God’s actions around us, we must learn to look in small, unexpected places.

Advent also reminds us that God does, in fact, fulfill the promise to come and dwell with us. Because of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, we have “a living hope” (1 Peter 1:3). Although suffering and death seem to hold sway today, we live in hope and faith that this is not the ultimate reality.

And so, looking toward Advent, in this issue we report on creative, hopeful policies being considered by policymakers in Washington and around the world. Daryl Byler looks for a way forward with Iran (p. 2); Theo Sittler writes about hope in the midst of crisis in Colombia (p. 3); Krista Zimmerman highlights new recommendations on health care (p. 4); Justin Shenk tells of legislation pertaining to Native Americans (p. 5); Angong Acuil calls for support for the Congolese people (p. 6); and Mrs. Awut Deng Acuil, a Sudanese leader, shares about her work for peace and reconciliation (p. 7).

The hymn’s refrain proclaims in hope: “Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.” May signs of God’s workings surprise all of us this Advent season. ■

Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach is interim editor of the Washington Memo.

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BY J. DARYL BYLER

Choices made in the next six months will have ripple effects for good or harm that will span multiple decades.

Fork in the Road

The day before Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad met in New York with a group of U.S. religious leaders hastily assembled by Mennonite Central Committee, a senior U.S. official began prepping U.S. Senators for a major confrontation with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

“Iran’s regime poses a complex . . . threat to an array of fundamental American interests in the Middle East and across the world,” Nicholas Burns, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sept. 19.

“The United States has no higher priority than facing and overcoming this threat,” Burns—considered a moderate voice in the administration—testified. He insisted that Iran refuses “to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons.”

In his hour-long exchange with nearly 45 Christian and Muslim leaders, Ahmadinejad confirmed that Iran is pursuing a nuclear energy program, but flatly denied that it is seeking to build a nuclear weapon. He said that principles of the Islamic faith are fundamentally opposed to the production and use of nuclear weapons.

“Our nation does not need a nuclear weapon,” he continued. “They cannot bring strength to nations. Otherwise the former Soviet Union would have used them to prevent its demise.”

Ahmadinejad said that all nations should work toward nuclear disarmament and called for a uniform standard of inspections

for all countries with nuclear energy programs. He said Iranians are tired of what they see as double standards and domination in U.S. practices and policies.

Fear is driving the current U.S. response to Iran. Some lawmakers are even calling for U.S. military strikes against Iran’s suspected nuclear sites. They recognize that the consequences of bombing Iran could be devastating, but believe the consequences of Iran having a nuclear weapon are even worse.

The situation is eerily similar to events before the United States invaded Iraq. A senior Iraqi government official told our MCC delegation in May 2002, “We do not have weapons of mass destruction. Tell your members of Congress to come and see for themselves.”

At the time, the Bush administration was convinced otherwise. It is now clear that their fear was founded on faulty intelligence.

Will it happen again? Will the United States go to war against Iran on the pretext of nuclear weapons? When pressed, U.S. officials admit that the intelligence on Iran’s nuclear program is not compelling.

But the United States and Iran have not had diplomatic relationship for the past 27 years, and the trust level is extremely low.

We are at a fork in the road. On the one hand, Ahmadinejad and Bush seem to be grasping for a hopeful way forward. In May, Ahmadinejad sent a letter to U.S. President George W. Bush, calling for direct talks. And in a recent White House interview, Bush sounded unusually conciliatory towards Iran. These are hopeful signs.

But on the other hand, these two proud leaders seem to be repelling each other. Both gave fiery speeches at the United Nations in late September.

Choices made in the next six months will have ripple effects for good or harm that will span multiple decades.

There’s a fork in the road. The impulses for peace and for destruction reside side by side. My hope and prayer is that Bush’s and Ahmadinejad’s better impulses will win out. ■

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To contact the MCC U.S. Washington Office, please see our address on the back page. See our weekly commentary at www.thirdway.com and visit our web site at www.mcc.org/us/washington.

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Colombia: Hope in Crisis

The conflict in Colombia may not seem very hopeful for those of us who are watching from outside the crossfire. But in the midst of turmoil and pain, the Colombian churches hold on to their faith and their hope that peace will one day prevail in their land.

Earlier this year Alvaro Uribe was reelected as president. He has taken a tough military stance, which he sees as a way to end the conflict. The Uribe administration has also overseen the paramilitary demobilization process, which on the outset appears hopeful, but has so far yielded little sign of progress. Many demobilized units are causing violence in the communities where they settle, and much of the land that was taken during the fighting is not being returned to the people who remain internally displaced.

Many communities currently live under the threat of violence or displacement. Intimidation tactics such as assassination of community and church leaders, death threats and bombings overshadow the daily lives of Colombians.

Justapaz, a peace and justice organization of the Colombian Mennonite Church and an MCC partner, has undertaken documenting the human rights violations of the different armed factions by paying special attention to the abuses against the Protestant evangelical community. In 47 documented cases in 2006, Justapaz found that the guerrillas were responsible for 22 percent of the abuses, the paramilitaries 35 percent, and the Colombian military 14 percent (with 29 percent unidentified). All of the armed groups, including the

Colombian government (largely funded by the U.S. government), commit violence against innocent civilians.

Justapaz reports that, even in the midst of this pain, the churches of Colombia see hope for a peaceful solution and they are taking an active role in ushering peace into their communities. A representative of the New Life church reported: "At the beginning of this year we began to awaken to the commitment that we have towards the society as a church . . . the living conditions and situation with which we are confronted are difficult. But we see how the Bible . . . shows us a social alternative. The training and the tools which we have been given enable us to understand the social function which the church should perform: that of non-violence, of being salt and light on our earth."

Justapaz also reports that the churches are taking an active role in providing food, a peaceful presence in the paramilitary concentration zone, income generation by war victims and protection of conscientious objectors forced into the military.

The churches in Colombia are also depending on their faith family in the United States to stand with them. They are depending on us to call on our government to use its money and influence to end the violence. We must answer this call and speak to our elected representatives to *reduce* military aid and *increase* social aid to Colombia. A recent report by the U.S. Institute of Peace states, "Few believe that the armed conflict in Colombia can be won militarily."

If we advocate for peace and justice in Colombia, we will also live with hope. ■

BY THEO SITTHER

"But in keeping with [God's] promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

—2 PETER 3:13

Resources for this article and further reading include "Longing for Home: Return of Land to Colombia's Internally Displaced Population," by the Latin American Working Group, "Harbingers of Hope: Peace Initiatives in Colombia," by the U.S. Institute of Peace and "A Prophetic Call: Colombian Protestant Churches Document Their Suffering and Their Hope," produced by Justapaz. Justapaz recently received the 2006 Prize for Nonviolence from the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation. See the full report of their documentation project on our website, www.mcc.org/us/washington.

Pontius' Puddle



Hope, Advocacy and Healthcare

BY KRISTA ZIMMERMAN

Without government efforts many more Americans would live in poverty and have less access to health-care than they do now.

Old Testament prophets frequently advocated to kings and other powerful people on behalf of the suffering. When they prophesied, they often delivered messages of hope, even in the midst of trouble.

Advocacy and hope are ways many Christians attempt to love their neighbors. They frequently choose to advocate for the poor and oppressed in response to the love shown them by God through Jesus Christ.

Many times, their advocacy rightfully takes the form of opposing government policies that would destroy peace, human dignity and creation. In fact, it can be easy to advocate *against* government action. To do so exclusively, however, would be to lose sight of the fact that governments can and do create hope and solve entrenched social problems. Without government efforts, for example, many more Americans would live in poverty and have less access to health-care than they do now.

Every year 80 million Americans receive health insurance through government programs such as Medicaid, Medicare or the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Medicare, in particular, is one of the most popular and successful public programs in history. Its administrative costs are low and patient satisfaction remains high. Medicare, along with Social Security, has drastically reduced poverty rates among the elderly in the United States.

Despite the relative successes of Medicare, Medicaid and SCHIP, the United States still faces a healthcare crisis. After spending two trillion dollars a year on healthcare, it has more uninsured individuals than any other industrialized country. Furthermore, its citizens are perplexed by the sheer complexity of navigating the system. More than 75 percent of respondents to a recent survey said they wanted to see fundamental change in this area.

As part of the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003, Congress created the Citizens' Health Care Working Group. The Working Group was charged with creating an action plan for Congress and the president to reform the nation's healthcare system. Last month, the Group adopted their final recommendations.

The Working Group recommended broad-based change to American healthcare that: 1) provides all Americans with affordable healthcare; 2) guarantees financial protection against very high costs; 3) fosters innovation; 4) defines core benefits for all Americans; 5) improves quality of care and efficiency; and 6) fundamentally restructures the way end-of-life services are financed and provided.

Far from a simple wish list, the Working Group's Recommendations must be treated seriously by Congress and the president. The president is required to follow up by submitting a report to Congress containing additional views and comments on the Recommendations, as well as his own recommendations for legislative and administrative action. After receiving the president's report, five congressional committees must hold at least one hearing on the Working Group Recommendations and the president's report.

To read the Recommendations in full, visit the Working Group's website at www.citizenshealthcare.gov/index.php. Then, advocate *for* positive change by urging the president and Congress to seriously consider and honestly implement the Working Group's Recommendations. ■

CAPITAL QUOTES

"And it is getting hotter, and the ice caps are melting, and there is a buildup of carbon dioxide in the air. And I think we really need to address the burning of fossil fuels. If we are contributing to the destruction of this planet, we need to do something about it."

—Pat Robertson, on his television show, "The 700 Club," saying that recent heat waves have convinced him of the reality of global warming

"If you are not electing Christians, then in essence you are going to legislate sin."

—Rep. Katherine Harris (R-Fla.)

"I will not withdraw, even if Laura and Barney [the president's dog] are the only ones supporting me."

—President George W. Bush, explaining to key Republicans that he will not withdraw from Iraq under any circumstances, as quoted by Bob Woodward

A Plea for Remembrance, Justice, and Healing

In 1763, a small vigilante group, dubbed “the Paxton Boys,” raided a peaceful enclave of Conestoga Indians, killing all but 14 people who escaped for protection to Governor John Penn in Lancaster. The rural Paxton men claimed that the Conestoga, or Susquehannock, Indians were providing aid and intelligence to the enemy: Ottawa leader, Pontiac, nearly 200 miles to the west. While the Paxton Boys’ claim may have lacked validity, the fear and bigotry that led to the scapegoating of the Susquehannocks was very real. The Paxton Boys marched to Lancaster, where they broke into the safe house, brutally murdering the remaining innocents.

This anecdote is indicative of the Native American experience during the expansion era of the 18th and 19th centuries, though it is not fully encompassing of all factors. Disease, settler relations, government policy, and military action all played a part in the decimation of Native peoples.

In the genocide of the American Indian—as with any commensurate injustice—dominant society has developed powerful rituals of forgetfulness and justification of mass murder, coalescing in a morally purifying process of collective amnesia in order to maintain moral and social superiority in the face of uncomfortable truth.

Currently in the House and Senate there are three bills that attempt to ameliorate the historical and continued injustice toward Native peoples, lift our prevailing social amnesia, and provide hope for reconciliation and healing.

The first, Senate Joint Resolution 15, was introduced by Senators Sam Brownback (R-Kans.), Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), and Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), and has 10 cosponsors. The bill seeks to “acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the United States Government regarding Indian tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States.” The bill is just that: an apology. If the Senate can take this initial step, it could help pave the way for more meaningful and substantial reform in upcoming sessions of Congress. Does

S.J. Res. 15 give any recompense for historical and current injustice? No. But it would mark a hopeful first step toward justice and healing for all nations involved.

Secondly, Native Americans have a shorter life expectancy due to the relative inaccessibility of basic health care, mental health and rehabilitation facilities. The Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA), S. 1057, seeks to reconcile this disparity in health status and health care services between Native Americans and the broader society. To do so, the IHCIA proposes an array of reforms with the goal of raising the health status of Indians by 2010, and supporting Native communities in establishing their own priorities to reflect specific unmet needs. S. 1057, introduced by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and a companion bill, H.R. 5312, sponsored by Rep. Don Young (D-Alaska) in the House, have 11 and 27 cosponsors respectively.

Third, the Indian Trust Settlement, S. 1439, introduced by Sen. McCain and cosponsored by Sen. Dorgan, attempts to correct more than a century of government mismanagement of Indian trust funds. The debacle stems from the Dawes Act of 1887, where the government played banker for the revenues of individual land trusts. Through a host of negligent accounting practices, much of this money was never paid out, effectively amounting to billions of dollars stolen from Native Americans. McCain’s bill gives hope for some degree of justice in this matter.

In the hope of healing, collective remembering—not collective forgetting—must take place. Because of this, and in conjunction with the legislation mentioned above, it is integral that we model—both socially and organizationally—perpetual, humble solidarity with historically and currently oppressed peoples.

Advocates are encouraged to contact their senators and representative about this valuable legislation. ■

BY JUSTIN SHENK

Currently in the House and Senate there are three bills that attempt to ameliorate the injustice toward Native peoples and provide hope for reconciliation and healing.

Is There a Home for Hope in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

BY ANGONG ACUIL

“Therefore since we are justified by faith, we have peace . . . and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us . . .”

—ROMANS 5:1–5

How do you find hope in a world that is increasingly turbulent? How do you find hope when 31,000 people die every month? How do you find hope in one of the deadliest conflicts since World War II? How do you find hope when your country’s wealth is plundered for the benefit of the “technological revolution” in other countries? How do you find hope when politicians refuse to accept election results? How do you find hope when multinational corporations, in cooperation with your leaders, act with impunity? How do you find hope when you do not even know whose side is safe to be on? Where is *hope* in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)?

The Congolese have suffered tremendously at the hands of a dictatorial regime and civil wars. DRC’s immense mineral wealth has been a blessing and curse. Few benefit from these resources. If anything, many die because of the skirmishes to attain this wealth.

An end to the civil war in DRC resulted in a fragile peace, which has prevailed since 2003 when a transitional government was formed. Joseph Kabila has been the president but he also shares power with four vice presidents from different parties. Much of the eastern part of the country remains insecure mainly because of conflict in the Ituri area.

It is difficult to comprehend a conflict that is thousands of miles away. And even more difficult to see hope in this situation. It is then surprising to find that instead of despair, hope abides. It is in those moments of utmost evil that you find the utmost good. It is then not surprising to find that the people of DRC have risen up to the occasion and proven that they are strong, determined and instrumental in changing their lives for the better.

The international community has helped DRC transition from war to peace and have been instrumental in organizing the constitutional referendum and presidential elections. Despite many obstacles the elections were a success. Presidential elections were held on July 30, 2006 but a clear winner was not determined. A runoff election will be held in October for the remaining two presidential contenders. This election was no ordinary election; it carries the hopes and aspirations of the Congolese.

It was the voices of the Congolese people, the churches and the international community that prompted the U.S. Congress to introduce a bipartisan bill that would help ease the suffering. Senate bill 2125, “To promote relief, security, and democracy in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” was introduced by Senators Barack Obama (D-Ill.), Sam Brownback (R-Kans.), Mike DeWine (R-Ohio) and Richard Durbin (D-Ill.). The bill is to establish core principles of policy for the United States that would help save lives and rebuild this war torn country.

S. 2125 was passed unanimously in the Senate on June 29, 2006 and referred to the House of Representatives. On Aug. 10, the bill was referred to the House Committee on International Relations, where the committee unanimously passed the bill for a vote on the House floor. It is heartening to see legislators pay attention to DRC. It is consistent with Christ’s teachings that those with a voice must speak for the voiceless. As the Congolese persistently and joyfully begin to find voice, let us use our voices here to preserve a sense of importance about S. 2125. ■

Finding Hope in Sudan

The country of Sudan is recovering from a lengthy civil war that displaced more than 4 million people, severely damaged the nation's economy and led to food shortages. Lack of investment during war years meant that an entire generation lost access to basic health services, education and jobs.

In 2005, peace was consolidated under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and Southern Sudan was granted autonomy for six years, to be followed by a referendum about independence.

The Washington Memo recently sat down with Mrs. Awut Deng Acuil, a Member of the Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly and a Presidential Advisor on Gender and Human Rights for the government of Southern Sudan to talk with her about the topic of "living with hope."

Washington Memo: What motivated you to become involved in the political process in Sudan?

Mrs. Awut Deng Acuil: In 1994, my son asked me, "How long is this war going to take and when are we going to go back home?" [My family was living in Kenya as a result of the civil war in Sudan.] I could not answer his questions. I had no idea when they could go home. The only way to answer was to take action, to contribute to ending the war, to create peace and to bring hope.

I started to work at peace and reconciliation among the Sudanese people in Kenya. I tried to bring to light the plight of the Sudanese people before governments, churches and civil society. It all started at the grass roots level and we just talked to people at all levels of society and took their voices to the world. Later on, I participated in the peace negotiations and then in the government that was created afterwards.

WM: Having witnessed the war and violence in Sudan, what gives you hope as you look into the future?

ADA: The situation is not hopeless because the land of Southern Sudan exists as an entity. I have children I need to bring back. It is not the end, even if I have lost so much. I still have people, this land and those God-given rights of freedom and dignity. My hope is that I still see Southern Sudan as home.

WM: What are some of the positive changes that you see taking place in Sudan?

ADA: The big achievement is the Comprehensive Peace Agreement—that they took the courage to find a peaceful solution. The fact is there is still a war in Darfur and there is much suffering, but there is relative peace in the South. People are doing business, selling vegetables, traveling and finding each other again. Small, small activities of opening up roads, clearing land mines and cleaning water are taking place. These are all great signs because people can come back to live as families. They are creating what they want Southern Sudan to look like.

WM: What role, if any, can the United States play in securing a better future for Sudan?

ADA: Well, first I'd like to say thanks to the United States. It played an effective role in helping to bring peace to Southern Sudan. It put a lot of pressure on the two parties to dialogue. Also, churches in the United States covered us with prayer.

WM: What role can churches play in bringing about positive change in war-torn countries like Sudan?

ADA: Churches have a tremendous role to play. Where there is injustice, the church stands for justice. In Sudan, the church can especially help in the area of dealing with trauma. We will not have a peaceful society without healing, forgiveness and open communication. Some people have no one left and they have no hope left. We have to help people find hope. ■

IN OTHER'S WORDS

Mrs. Awut Deng Acuil is a Member of the Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly.

Churches have a tremendous role to play. Where there is injustice, the church stands for justice.

To see more of the interview with Mrs. Awut Deng Acuil, visit the Washington Office on the web at www.mcc.org/us/washington.



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SOUND THE TRUMPET!

ISSUE	SUMMARY	ADVOCACY NEEDED
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO	In December 2005, a bipartisan group of U.S. Senators introduced S. 2125, a bill that would establish core principles of U.S. policy to save lives and rebuild this war torn country (see article on p. 6). The Senate passed S. 2125 unanimously on June 29, 2006 and referred it to the House of Representatives. Subsequently, the House International Relations Committee unanimously passed the bill. It should come up for a House floor vote before the end of the 109th Congress.	Urge your Representative to support S. 2125.
U.S.-IRAN RELATIONS	On Sept. 29, 2006, a bipartisan group House members sent a letter to President Bush, urging him to engage in direct talks with Iran. "No diplomatic approach that rejects direct talks with Iran can be regarded as a serious effort to seek a peaceful solution," said the letter signed by 12 Republicans and seven Democrats. "We believe America's diplomats are the best in the world, and should be allowed to apply their talents to our conflict with Iran," the signers concluded.	Urge President Bush to hold direct talks with Iran, without preconditions.

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