

Peacemaker

Afri NEWSLETTER

2010 Edition

Afri
ACTION FROM IRELAND



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Editorial

This newsletter reflects on another busy and productive year in Afri, where we reached the milestone of 35 years working for justice, peace and human rights. We were happy to celebrate '35 years of solidarity, education and activism for global justice' with our friends and colleagues in Comhlámh and Kimmage Development Studies Centre in mid-May 2010. Whilst happily and gratefully recording the past year's activities, we are ever more keenly aware of the urgent need for such work to continue. Our beautiful world remains divided, unequal and exploited. We cannot accept a world of such grave inequalities and injustices.

We Cannot Accept

- a world in which 1 billion people are hungry while over \$1500 billion is spent annually on war and weapons.
- the continuing exploitation of the planet, including the loss of biodiversity and the earth's ability to sustain itself with the loss of 150 acres of rainforest every minute.
- corporations ruling and ruining our world, a world in which three transnational corporations control 90% of the world's grain supply.
- that small communities should be sacrificed on the altars of corporate greed, whether in the Niger Delta or in the Erris peninsula

- a value system under which billions are instantly found to bail out banks and financial institutions while the incomes of the most vulnerable in society are further reduced, and Overseas Development Assistance is cut.
- a society where one individual can receive a pension of €27 million while another is homeless or thrown out of her home because of an inability to repay a loan - one of many tossed around like confetti during the Celtic Tiger madness.
- the giveaway of Ireland's natural resources estimated at €540 billion while social welfare and minimum wages are cut and citizens are condemned to debt for generations.

It is time for us to wake up, to take responsibility for our lives, our communities, our country and our world. This newsletter highlights examples of how and where that responsibility was shouldered in struggle during 2010: struggle against war and hunger, struggle against environmental destruction and corporate power, struggle against economic injustice.

These struggles will become ever more urgent in the year ahead and in the years to come.

Joe Murray (Afri Coordinator)



Phil O'Shea, Charles Innes, Richard Moore and Mary Minehan with the flame at Féile Bríde



Photo: Susan Hensel

Fionnuala Gill performs during Féile Bríde

Awakenings

A celebration of the wonder of the Universe and also of the marvel of the human spirit

Spring is a time of hope, new beginnings and new life. Each year Afri marks this season with our Féile Bríde celebration, which in 2010 took place on 6 February in the Derby House Hotel in Kildare. The event celebrated the wonder of our Universe, captured remarkably in the film 'The Awakening Universe', and through the reflections of Nellie McLaughlin whose book *Out of Wonder* is also a celebration of the incomprehensible beauty, intricacy and vastness of the Universe.

It was a celebration also of the human spirit, which can often confound us in its power and ability to inspire, as is the case of Richard Moore who, amazingly, despite being blinded by a rubber bullet at the age of ten, has never wallowed in hatred or resentment. 'I learned to see life in a different way' is how he describes his remarkable acceptance of circumstances that would plunge many people into understandable despair, bitterness and desire for revenge.

Not only did Richard accept his blindness, however, but he also retained an abiding resolve to meet the soldier responsible for firing that rubber bullet on that fateful day. He persevered in his quest until he succeeded –and Charles,

the soldier, joined Richard on stage during a very moving and inspiring session entitled: 'Transcending Conflict: Freedom in Forgiveness'.

“Not only did Richard accept his blindness, however, but he also retained an abiding resolve to meet the soldier responsible for firing that rubber bullet on that fateful day.”

Richard and Charles told their inter-twining story highlighting the consequences of war and conflict. Richard also went on to talk about his work in development in Tanzania and Ethiopia and the importance of achieving the UN Millennium Development Goal of reducing by half the number of people suffering from hunger by 2015.

As every year, the discussions were interwoven with music through the wonderful performances of Fionnuala Gill and Liz Madden and her band.



Damien Dempsey



Jo Newton plants Lumper Potatoes during the Famine Walk while walk leader Justin Kilcullen watches on

Famine Walk 2010

Hunger in a World of Plenty: Sowing Seeds of Hope

Hundreds of people joined us on a wonderful sunny day for our 22nd Annual Famine Walk from Doolough to Louisburgh on Saturday, 22 May.

The walk leaders Justin Kilcullen of Trócaire, Felicity Lawrence, writer and journalist for the Guardian, and Jo Newton of the Irish Seed Savers Association opened the event with short reflections on the walk theme: Hunger in a World of Plenty: Sowing Seeds of Hope.

The speakers outlined how the injustices that led to the Great Irish Famine continue today in terms of unequal global food distribution and the multinational companies' increasing stranglehold on agriculture and the food processing system, while small farmers and food producers struggle merely to survive. A linking thread was that food insecurity will continue and intensify today unless we tackle issues such as loss of biodiversity, global warming, corporate control of food production, and the patenting and

aggressive marketing of genetically modified seeds.

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The opening ceremony began with the hauntingly beautiful music of Emer Mayock and Donal Siggins, and the speeches were followed by a musical performance by Damien Dempsey before the crowd embarked on the 10 mile walk from Doolough to Louisburgh.



Justine Nantale singing at the Hedge School Clare O'Grady Walshe launching her booklet

Food Sovereignty

Tackling the Causes of Hunger

Afri's 2010 Hedge School, in partnership with Kimmage Development Studies Centre, took place on Saturday, 23 October in Kimmage DSC.

The focus was on the fundamental right to food and the importance of food sovereignty as a precondition for food security and tackling world hunger. Introductory talks were given by Alan Matthews, from the Economics Department at Trinity College Dublin, Former UN Assistant Secretary General Denis Halliday, and Clare O'Grady Walsh, who launched her new booklet, entitled *Seeds of Hope in a World of Insecurity*. The pamphlet deals with issues of food insecurity and loss of biodiversity and was edited by the renowned author and travel legend Dervla Murphy.

Following the morning session participants planted a hedge in keeping with the ethos of the event and alluding to the original Hedge Schools, often located in the shelter of hedges.

In the afternoon participants engaged in a variety of workshops that explored in greater depth the theme of the day. Fergal Anderson from Via Campesina facilitated a workshop entitled *Food Sovereignty: A Response to*

the Increasing Privatisation of the Commons, Fleachta Phelan from Comhlámh engaged participants on the issue of The Global Trade System and Hunger, and in Nessa Ni Chasaide's workshop people learned about The Roots of the Problem: Debt, Tax and Financial Injustice.

“Clare O'Grady Walshe launched her new booklet, entitled *Seeds of Hope in a World of Insecurity*, dealing with issues of food insecurity and loss of biodiversity”

In between the lively and thought-provoking debates throughout the day, the wonderful music of Justine Nantale and Sabor Cubano provided entertainment and inspiration as well as space for thought and reflection.

*The booklet *Seeds of Hope in a World of Insecurity* by Clare O'Grady Walshe was sold out on the day of the launch! However, copies are now available from the Afri office. Please contact admin@afri.ie to place your order.*

TOXIC SHOCK -and-AWE



Photo: Michael Gallagher

Jimmy Massey, Susan Hensel and Doug Weir at the Depleted Uranium meeting in Dublin.

Landmines have been banned as have Cluster Munitions, can we now achieve a ban on the use of Depleted Uranium Weapons?

In 2010, Afri organised a public meeting on the issue of Depleted Uranium Weapons. Former Staff Sergeant Jimmy Massey, who entered Iraq as part of the initial invasion force in March 2003, and Doug Weir of the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons addressed the meeting in early May.

Many years after Depleted Uranium weapons were first used in Iraq their affects continue to be felt as many areas remain radioactive toxic wastelands. Incidences of cancer and birth defects have dramatically increased in Iraq and in other regions where these weapons have been used. The need for an effective ban on their use and to clean up the mess they've left in many parts of the world is ever more urgent.

Afri is a member organisation of the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons and has been urging the Irish Government to support the Belgian Government's lead and to work towards completion of legislation to ban these devastating weapons. Progress towards this goal was made when, in November of this year, the 'Prohibition of Depleted Uranium Weapons' Bill passed through its final stage in the

Seanad with cross-party support. Afri is pleased with the progress of the Bill thus far, and would like to commend all Senators involved in pushing the bill forward. The Bill must now go to the Dáil, and Afri urges all involved to ensure that this legislation is passed into law without delay.

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Support for a world-wide ban is growing. In 2007 Belgium became the first country in the world to ban all conventional weapons containing uranium. In May 2008, 94% of MEPs in the European Parliament, in a wide ranging resolution, strengthened previous calls for a moratorium by demanding a DU ban.

Education for Liberation

Afri believes in tackling the causes of hunger rather than merely responding to the symptoms

Afri's 'Education for Liberation' events, on the theme of 'Hunger in a World of Plenty – Sowing Seeds of Hope' took place in Kildare town and in Derry in March 2010. About 200 students aged 15-16 years old from different schools attended these events.

Food and hunger have been issues of central concern for Afri since its inception 35 years ago. Afri was founded to respond to the scandal of hunger in a world of plenty, a situation which, unfortunately, has worsened rather than improved in the intervening period.

Afri believes in tackling the causes of hunger rather than merely responding to the symptoms. These causes include the arms trade (costing a staggering \$1500 billion annually); the neo-liberal economic system, which concentrates large amounts of resources, including food, in the hands of a small number of people; climate change

and global warming; and the corporate takeover of food production, resulting in food being treated as a purely commercial product, denying access to the people who are most vulnerable.

“The Corporate takeover of food means that food is treated as a purely commercial product”

The participants in the Education for Liberation events explored these issues through a wide range of participative, challenging and creative workshops. We wish to say a special word of thanks to all those who contributed to the success of the days, especially the students, teachers and workshop animators involved.



Felicity Lawrence speaking at the Famine Walk

Corrib Gas Conflict

The Great Gas Giveaway

Afri has continued to be involved in supporting the community under siege in the Erris peninsula as a result of the Consortium working on the Corrib Gas Project. Our involvement has changed with each passing year. In 2009 it was mainly at the level of monitoring human rights, training human rights monitors, examining possible legal avenues towards protecting the community's rights and organising part of the 'Ken Saro-Wiwa Memorial Seminar' as well as publishing two booklets: *The Great Gas Giveaway: How the Elites Have Gambled with our Health and Wealth*, and *The Corrib Gas Dispute: Background and Current Status*.

In 2010, Afri issued an international call to action requesting recipients to contact Minister for the Environment John Gormley, asking him not to grant consent for a foreshore licence in relation to the project. We also launched a petition asking for the suspension of all works on the Corrib Gas project pending an independent

investigation. In addition, the human rights organisation Front Line launched a report 'Breakdown in Trust' into the policing of the Corrib Gas Project, and called for an independent inquiry in regard to the attack on Willie Corduff by masked men in April 2010.

“We also launched a petition asking for the suspension of all works on the Corrib Gas project pending an independent investigation”

Joe Murray, Andy Storey and Benny McCabe also visited Pat O'Donnell in Castlerea prison and Andy wrote a riposte in the Irish Times Opinion section to allegations made by Gerry Gregg that local people in Erris were not open to compromise.

No You Can't

Why Shannon Airport should be Open to Business but Closed to War

Afri also organised a public meeting in Shannon entitled: 'Why Shannon Airport should be Open to Business but Closed to War' at which Jimmy Massey was among the speakers. John Lannon of Shannonwatch also spoke and the event included a film presentation by Afri board member and film maker Muireann de Barra.



Photo: Susan Hensel

Joe Murray, Susan Hensel, Muireann de Barra, Jimmy Massey and Iain Atack at Shannon Airport

Israeli Attack on Aid Ship Condemned

Firm Action Demanded Following Israeli War - Crime

In June, Afri strongly condemned the latest Israeli war crime, the attack by commandos on an unarmed aid vessel resulting in the deaths of at least nine people and the wounding of many more. Afri called on the international community to ensure that those responsible and their political masters are held accountable for these murders of innocent civilians, which were executed in international waters. Afri expressed its strong solidarity with the peace activists on board the Rachel Corrie, including Denis Halliday, one of our patrons.

"Afri called on the international community to ensure that those responsible and their political masters are held accountable for these murders of innocent civilians, which were executed in international water"



The Rachel Corrie

In addition, Afri called for:

- an independent investigation of the deaths and injuries at sea, and the punishment of those responsible;
- the lifting of the siege of Gaza;
- the dismantling of the so-called 'security wall', which further advances Israel's apartheid policies, and the cessation and reversal of all Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories;
- the recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to a free and independent State;
- all countries, particularly the US, to stop arming Israel; all countries, starting with Ireland, to boycott all Israeli goods and to sever all other linkages with Israel (including investment, academic and cultural links);
- the EU to terminate its special trade relationship with Israel, and the OECD to revoke Israel's membership

Celebrating Historic Disarmament Treaty

On 2 August Afri and the Bloom Movement for Global Justice 'beat the drums' outside Croke Park to celebrate the entry into force of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. This Convention is the most significant disarmament and humanitarian treaty in more than a decade and it was negotiated and adopted by 107 countries at Croke Park in May 2008.

The drumming event was part of the coordinated global campaign action "Beat the Drums to Ban Cluster Bombs" and campaigners in more than 70 countries worldwide were holding similar drumming actions to

celebrate the fact that cluster bombs are now banned.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions prohibits the use, production, stockpiling, and transfer of cluster munitions. On 1 August the Convention entered into force and all its provisions became legally binding for the countries that have joined.

Governments now have an obligation to assist victims and the clock starts ticking on the deadlines to clear cluster-bomb-contaminated land within 10 years and to destroy all stockpiles of the weapon within 8 years.



Beating the drums to mark the entry into force of the Cluster Munitions Treaty

This Convention is the most significant disarmament and humanitarian treaty in more than a decade and it was negotiated and adopted by 107 countries at Croke Park in May 2008

Arrivals, Departures and Changing Stations

We want to say a special word of thanks to Clare O' Grady Walshe, who has ended her term, after around ten years, as Afri's Development Education Coordinator. Clare brought her unique brand of enthusiasm, passion and creativity to all her work with Afri and organized many memorable 'Education for Liberation' Days, the benefits and memories of which students will take with them for many years. Clare also contributed many wonderful ideas

to other Afri events and was also a great advocate of music and art as mediums for development education.

Lisa Patten has been working with Afri in a voluntary capacity in 2010. Lisa has been very involved and has brought her legal expertise to bear especially in relation to the Corrib Gas Project. We welcome and thank her, and hope she will be with us for many months to come.

We thank Benny McCabe who has

represented Afri in relation to the Corrib Gas conflict. Benny brings a unique and highly relevant expertise to bear on the conflict, and his contribution to this situation has been very significant and very much appreciated by all in Afri.

Donal O'Brien and Larry McGrane have stepped down from the Afri Board. We thank them for their wisdom and insight, and we especially thank Larry for the high standard he has set and for his continuing work on the Afri accounts.



Afri gratefully acknowledges the support of Trócaire and Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

Afri is a member organisation of the the International Peace Bureau.

Afri has signed the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages.

UPCOMING EVENTS

**Saturday, 5 February
2011 - Féile Bríde**

**Saturday, 21 May
2011 - Famine Walk**