



## Annual Report 2017

### **1. Introduction**

Welcome to Afri's annual report for 2017, outlining the wide range of activities carried out in yet another busy year. Before detailing these activities, it is appropriate to note how many of the campaigns we have supported came to fruition during 2017; such gains sometimes go unnoticed in a world that continues to face many trials and challenges.

Who would have thought, for example, that we would be celebrating the release of the brave anti-war whistle-blower, Chelsea Manning? We were reluctantly convinced that that campaign would have to continue for many years, in the context of the 35-year sentence meted out to Chelsea. But now we look back at a successful campaign with a positive outcome.

A legal ban on nuclear weapons was achieved through a campaign led by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), of which Afri is a member. After a decade-long effort by ICAN, and 72 years after their invention, on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2017 the United Nations formally adopted a treaty (The "Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons") which categorically prohibits nuclear weapons.

On a smaller but still significant scale, our solar lights campaign continued and was taken up by a second partner in Kenya – Development Pamoja. We released our Famine Walk CD, 'Music from a Dark Lake', fulfilling an ambition we had held for many years. As we said in last year's report, our ability to collaborate with others is nowhere more in evidence than in the context of the artists and musicians with which we worked over the years, many of whom are included in this CD.

There were many other highlights in the course of our work in 2017 – among them the powerful words spoken by charismatic Walk-leader Donnah Vuma: *"I am proud and inspired to be an Afri Famine co-walker with you all today; let us all continue to carry the torch for the whole world to see. Margaret Mead once said: 'never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.'"*

With these heartening words we begin our detailed reflections on the year.

### **2. Development Education**

#### **2.1 International Peace Conference**

The theme of Féile Bríde 2017, 'Darkness to Light', was chosen because we can sometimes feel overwhelmed by the problems confronting our world, thinking that things are worse than ever and that little progress has been made towards creating a more just and compassionate world. But it is important that we keep in mind the progress made, as well as the challenges that continue to face us.

When we held our first Féile Bríde in 1988, apartheid was still in place in South Africa, the conflict in the North of Ireland was still raging with nightly reports of deaths and injuries, and East Timor was under the jackboot of Indonesian occupation. All of these problems at the time seemed intractable and almost insoluble. Yet, now we've seen major change come about through the ending of apartheid, freedom for the people of East Timor and the signing of the Good Friday agreement in the North.

Alastair McIntosh, one of our speakers this year, took up this theme and appealed for "a recommitment to non-violence... not as a tactic but as a deep commitment to the spirituality of peace". He praised people like Mairéad Maguire and the Peace People, who he said "helped to lay the groundwork out of which the politicians could forge the fragile peace that we have today."

Alastair was followed by Kathy Kelly, founder-member of Voices for Creative Non-Violence. Kathy's extraordinary, life-long commitment to peace and non-violence and opposition to war has seen her arrested more than sixty times and imprisoned almost as often. Her sheer commitment to confronting militarism has led her friends to say that "jail is the only place where Kathy rests".

Referring to the first days of the Trump administration, Kathy said: "With a punishing, disorienting barrage of executive orders, President Trump is reversing hard-fought gains made in environmental protection, health care, women's rights, immigration policy, and nuclear weapons reduction. In his inaugural speech, Trump proclaimed "America First". The U.S. does rank first in weapon sales, in mass incarceration and in producing waste material. Pope Francis urged President Trump to be first in protecting the poorest in society. But instead, President Trump has surrounded himself with generals and billionaires in cabinet-level positions."

Dave Donnellan, currently before the Courts because of his anti-war activity in Shannon Airport, took up this theme and talked about how the state intervenes only on behalf of property. The State allows war planes and war criminals to pass through Shannon on a daily basis but when someone, like Dave and Colm Roddy, takes action on behalf of peace the judiciary intervenes and attempts to criminalise the peace-maker. Likewise, Dave continued, when homeless people sleep rough summer and winter, state bureaucracy shrugs it off, but when people take over Apollo House, the judiciary intervenes, not on behalf of the homeless but on behalf of the property. There is no doubt about the priorities of officialdom: property before people.

Colm Roddy explained that his anti-war plane action in Shannon was faith-based, taking seriously the command of Jesus to "love your neighbour. I see my neighbour as Iraqis, Afghans, Yemenis and all people everywhere."

Finally, Patricia, who is currently in the Direct Provision system, spoke about its dehumanising effect: "You cannot decide what you eat; you can't cook; you can't easily have friends over; conditions are overcrowded and you receive €19.10 per week to live on." Based on experiences such as these, Afri advocates ending the scandal of Direct Provision, now!

The event drew a large audience of about 150, and it was an energising day. As in previous years it was organised by Afri in partnership with Cáirde Bríde and St. Patrick's Missionary Society Kiltegan.

## **2.2 Famine Walk in I.T. Carlow**

Afri held its annual Famine Walk in I.T. Carlow on the 9th February. The Institute is built on the site of a Famine Workhouse and is adjacent to the Famine Graveyard. Walk leaders included Choctaw Gary (Waylon) White Deer, Chaplain to ITC Fr. Martin Smith, and I.T. Carlow Assistant registrar, Dr David

Ryan, with music from Justine Nantale and Afri's ITB intern, Abimbola Owoeye-Wise. A good number of students participated in the walk.

Along with the walk a seminar was held, where the students explored the causes and effects of hunger and how campaigns work, in particular looking at the Dunnes Stores Strike and the East Timor campaign. One of the students reported as a result of the seminar: "Interesting to address climate change as a means of reducing famine – I hadn't actually tied them together before. I had presumed that famine due to climate conditions had always been an issue."

### **2.3 Creating Alternative Food Futures: Food Sovereignty event in Maynooth**

A number of years ago Joe was invited to NUI Maynooth (now Maynooth University) to speak about food and hunger by Rory Aherne and Alistair Fraser of the Geography Department. Since Afri's visit, Alistair Fraser has taken up food sovereignty as an issue. In April he organised a Food Sovereignty event in Maynooth, having been introduced to Fergal Anderson, Manu Russo and Davie Philip by Afri. The event was a good one, with a strong academic perspective. The keynote speaker was Dr Chiara Tornaghi, an Italian academic with expertise in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).

Other speakers and facilitators included Davie Philip (Cultivate/Cloughjordan EcoVillage), Fergal Anderson (Food Sovereignty Ireland), Rachel Dempsey (Lourdes Youth & Community Centre), Andrew Douglas (Urban Farm), Louise Fitzgerald (Young Friends of the Earth), Thais Montovani (Latin American Solidarity Centre) Michael O'Brien (Policy Officer, Trócaire) and Joe Murray.

As Afri has been trying to create a network of food-sovereignty practitioners and food producers in Ireland, this was a very significant occasion for us. Our chairperson Nessa attended with some of her Development Studies students. At the end of the event Alistair stated that he would like to organise a festival of food, over several days, in the future.

A short film of the event is available on the Afri YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/aBMbUy7qXj8>

### **2.4 Famine Walk: 'From Hunger and War... to Home and a Welcome?'**

The 30<sup>th</sup> Famine Walk linked the experience of Irish people fleeing on coffin ships or being condemned to workhouses during *An Gorta Mór* in the nineteenth century with the situation of those crossing the Mediterranean in flimsy, rickety boats today – some of whom, if they survive, might end up in Direct Provision Centres for asylum-seekers here in Ireland.

The walk was a call for Ireland to take a leading role in addressing the situation of refugees – one of the most urgent and critical issues facing our world today. According to the UN's refugee agency, the number of people currently in situations of displacement is over 65 million; as many as 55% of these come from war-torn countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Syria and Sudan.

Sadly, Ireland's welcome for the stranger today has been appallingly poor, despite our own tragic history of displacement, scattering to the four corners of the world in the desperate search for a safe refuge, a secure home, and an escape from poverty, fear and exploitation.

Walk Leader Donnah Vuma, herself caught in the direct provision system since 2014, spoke about the asylum process:-

*I feel humbled and yet honoured to be here today. I have found it a challenge to say a few words, I actually wanted to say no without giving this a thought, but remembered those that have walked this path before, the people that sacrificed their lives to seek relief for the masses of their area, they did not second guess themselves they took the challenge with swiftness, in the worst of weather and on empty stomachs with nothing but the will to survive.*

*Thank you to Afri for finding a way of awakening the world at large, to spare time and resources to commemorate this event. In whatever part of the world we may be, we need to remember those that are treated with injustice and inequality for the sake of their political opinions, religion, race and gender. We also need to remember the thousands of families — including infants and the elderly fleeing war and violence in Syria who have to walk more than 1,400 miles to get to Serbia's border with Hungary in hope of finding peace and a future. Above all, we need to remember those that sacrificed their lives fleeing on coffin ships or those who were condemned to workhouses during An Gorta Mór.*

*People fleeing their homes, whether during the famine in Ireland or the war in Syria have brought to mind the words of poet Warson Shire "No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark". Indeed, amongst us are those that I am here to represent, they have travelled from countries afar to seek refuge among us. No one puts their children on a boat unless the water is safer than the land. I stand in deep solidarity and respect with those that have made such courageous journeys in the past, present and unfortunately in the future, in the hope of finding safety.*

*I am proud and inspired to be an Afri Famine co-walker with you all today; let us all continue to carry the torch for the whole world to see. Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." This walk you are ready to embark on will someday change the world.*

*Last, but by no means least, I would like you to remember what H. E. Luccock said, "No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole Orchestra to play it". It will take each one of us and each step we take to make this happen, to make the world see the need. Thank you Afri for making this day happen each year. I wish you strength and motivation as we walk this journey.*

Dr Danny Cusack also spoke about the causes of the Irish Famine and the connection with hunger in the world today. Unfortunately, Abjata Khalif of the Kenya Pastoralist Journalist Network was unable to attend as planned. Joe Black provided wonderful music. Following this a tree-planting ceremony was held in Delphi Lodge and a couple of hundred people set out to walk the 11-mile road back to Louisburgh. In November 2016 Afri was the subject of a BBC Radio 'Ramblings' documentary. As a result there were quite a few people from the UK in the 2017 walk.

RoJ made a short film of the day which is available on the Afri YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/TB0YESsf47U>. Later in the year he made a longer documentary (approximately 30 minutes) on 'The Great Starvation', viewable on the Afri homepage and here: [https://youtu.be/NF-je\\_JYhPc](https://youtu.be/NF-je_JYhPc). This film reflects on the issues at the core of the Famine Walk.

The walk was generally very successful, though we received a couple of negative comments. Most of the criticism was in relation to one shuttle bus which failed to bring walkers to Delphi Lodge but dropped them off instead at Doolough lake. As a result of this we set about improving this aspect for future years.

## 2.5 Music from A Dark Lake: Famine Walk CD

An 18-track CD by some of Ireland's greatest artists – all of whom have performed at the Famine Walk – was produced to mark the 30th Walk. This is an extraordinary collection of songs, music and spoken word accompanied by a 32-page booklet brimming with interesting facts, quotes and information as well as some of Derek Speirs' extraordinary photos from past walks.

Pat Pidgeon, Joe and RoJ made up the 'production team' for this CD ably assisted by Andy Storey, especially at the proofing stage. Special thanks to Pat, in particular, who was a driving force behind the CD – as he has been behind the Famine Walk over the years – and he deserves a special mention.

1,000 CDs were produced and a copy has been sent to each of the musicians involved. Joe has been bringing the CD to shops wherever he has travelled in Ireland – for example Mayo, Wexford and Derry. A short trailer about the CD is available on the Afri YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/FyIICTP6jBg>

## 2.6 'Just A Second!'

The waste of \$1,700 billion annually on war and weapons is an ongoing obscenity. The war industry, by its nature, is about death and destruction. We see the consequences on our TV screens nightly as wars destroy lives and wreak havoc around the world.

In addition, this industry has a devastating impact on climate change. For example, a *Guardian* article stated that the emissions from the first four years of the Iraq war were 'equivalent to more than the emissions from 139 countries in this period, or about the same as putting an extra 25 million cars on roads for a year'. Furthermore, it fuels the refugee crisis which has now reached levels rarely seen before.

The world's annual military budget, \$1700 billion, is a vast sum, almost beyond our ability to comprehend. Afri have therefore come up with a creative way of presenting such information to students and adults alike: 'Just a Second' is an invitation to stop and think about the choices and priorities that result in such a vastly inflated military budget. These choices, promoted by corporations and adopted by governments, result in immense suffering and deprivation for millions of people. Afri has been running the 'Just A Second!' project in secondary schools since 2013.

This year's project, running from September 2016 to May 2017, included a number of elements, in addition to the workshops held in 8 schools around the country. Firstly, there was a Networking day held in Meath on the eve of Féile Bríde, with peace activist Kathy Kelly as the keynote speaker. The event started with an outdoor classroom at the Dunshaughlin Famine graveyard. Both Joe and Danny Cusack spoke. Danny spoke about the history of the site and Joe brought in many themes, such as food insecurity, forced migration, power issues and loss of biodiversity. It was a fascinating way of learning about these themes. Afterwards there was a seminar in the Dunboyne Castle hotel where Kathy Kelly spoke and Pete Mullineaux led a workshop.

Lydia McCarthy, who worked in Our Lady of Mercy as the Development Education Co-ordinator on behalf of Afri, was able to participate and outline the work she had been doing and the methodology she adopted with their students. It was a very successful event.

RoJ made a very good film of the day, which is available on our YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/omrSOC42rC4>.

A similar 'networking day' was held in Galway on the 28<sup>th</sup> March. As in previous years it started with a walk to Celia Griffin Park, named for a young girl who died during the famine as a result of "lack of the basic necessities of life". A local Galway man – Mark Kennedy – pursued the idea of this memorial park and a commemoration stone to Celia. Sadly Mark has recently passed away, and we extend our sincere sympathy to his family. They can be proud that one of his legacies is the Celia Griffin Memorial Park.

Following the walk Afri adjourned to the Galway Bay hotel for a seminar with the schools involved in the networking day. Donal O'Kelly performed his direct-provision piece, which was about 15 minutes long. The students were engrossed and responded well to this theatrical piece and its striking message. Pete led a workshop enabling a creative response to the issues raised. As well as the students a number of teachers were present and they also benefitted from the event, as was reflected in the evaluations.

An increasingly important part of the 'Just A Second!' project are the teacher-training events. This year's event was held on the 13<sup>th</sup> February in the Irish Writer's Centre, led by Gráinne O'Neill and Pete Mullineaux with input from Donal O'Kelly and Joe. There was a strong development-education message along with Afri's overall perspective and with a focus on theatre as a methodology.

Lastly, Joe, Lisa and Abi (the ITB intern) attended the WorldWide Global Schools annual conference on the 27<sup>th</sup> April in Croke Park. Joe co-facilitated a workshop for teachers, and Lisa and Abi provided information to teachers at a lunchtime information stand. Approximately 500 students attended the day, so it was a good opportunity to meet teachers and inform them about 'Just A Second!'.

## **2.7 Hedge School**

The 2017 Hedge School, with its theme of 'The Right to Food and Shelter', looked at some of the causes of hunger, homelessness and displacement. The event was organised in partnership with third-year students from the Community and Youth Development course in I.T. Blanchardstown.

During the Hedge School an amazing coincidence occurred in the context of Michael Doorly's explanation of the origins of Concern. Concern was founded in response to the Biafran War in 1967, following a series of meetings in the kitchen of John and Kay O'Loughlin Kennedy. The new organisation's first act was to send three ships loaded with food to the beleaguered people, caught up in the war and the poverty and hunger which it exacerbated. When Michael had finished his presentation, ITB student Philip Uzomo stood up and identified himself as a survivor of the Biafran war and said that he had been a recipient of the food sent on those very ships!

This was but one of many memorable moments during Hedge School 2017, many of which were created by the students themselves, who embraced the Hedge School idea with great gusto and creativity: we had music, drama, film-making and some great singing with an Irish, African and international flavour. Michael Doorly's contribution was followed by Claire Devlin from Christian Aid who spoke on the links between climate change and violent conflict. Claire explored how violence and war affect climate change by weakening societal structures, diverting humanitarian responses away from the basic needs of people and accelerating deforestation and environmental destruction.

Among the most moving presentations was a drama on homelessness acted out by a group of students. The dramatic piece was based on the real-life experience of a homeless person in Dublin.

In a deeply personal and political presentation, Ciaran O'Reilly talked about the urgent need to put a spoke in the wheels of the spiralling war machine: The masters of war, he said, know that if you want to maintain an empire of global exploitation you must prepare for and be prepared to go to war.

Donal O Kelly's powerful rendition of his Direct Provision poem linked the issue of homelessness in Ireland with the situation of today's migrants and with Irish history:

*I'm Jiminy Sliothar, your conscience you see  
Your greed is overcoming your sense of memory  
Your ancestors went way off working wherever they were let  
The Irish...world champion economic migrants...  
Don't you forget...*

The success of the day was captured by one of the students who took part: "Today, I was really inspired to be an activist", he said.

RoJ made a short film of the Hedge School – the first time it has been filmed – which is available on the Afri YouTube channel here: <https://youtu.be/Cj8RClas5U>

### **3. Links Project**

#### **3.1 Solar Lights Campaign**

Following a successful fundraising campaign at the end of 2016 the €917 raised was provided to purchase solar lights for families in Kenya. While it was initially anticipated that this would be disbursed via the Kenya Pastoralist Journalist Network it was decided, due to logistical difficulties, to investigate an additional partner. Joe became aware of an organisation, Development Pamoja, which works with disadvantaged communities in rural Kenya. They encourage and help them to achieve a level of self-sufficiency where outside assistance is no longer required. Development Pamoja focuses on basic issues – food, water, health, education – with the aim of ultimately helping to build a self-sustaining local economy in the area.

It was thus decided to transfer the money to Development Pamoja, who later sent a report with photos of some of the beneficiaries. Afri also held a second Solar Light gift card campaign at the end of 2017 to raise money both for our partners and our own climate-justice work.

### **4. Campaigns**

#### **4.1 Anti-war Activism**

##### **4.1.1 PESCO**

In the midst of the ongoing controversy regarding Brexit and the fate of the Irish border, a very significant move by the Cabinet, taken towards the end of 2017, almost went unnoticed. This was the decision to give the go-ahead for Ireland to take part in EU plans for closer cooperation on 'security and defence' matters, which the Dáil ratified on the basis of limited information and after a disgracefully short debate.

This plan, known as PESCO, is justified under the catch-all excuse of combating the growing problem of terrorism, and comes with the ritual assurance that this poses no threat to our traditional and highly-regarded policy of neutrality. One of the consequences of our joining PESCO is that we will be

asked to increase spending on weapons and military affairs, requiring a leap in defence spending from the currently planned €946 million for 2018 to an estimated €3 billion+ annually by 2020, constituting a further abandonment of our traditional non-aggressive foreign policy.

Afri continues to argue that the single greatest step that Ireland can take to combat terrorism is to withdraw the facilities of Shannon airport from the US military for use in their wars of aggression, wars which have played a major part in increasing the global terrorist threat in the first place. Rather than joining military structures which proclaim the efficacy of military 'solutions' to complex political problems we should be using the experience of our own history to offer solutions to such problems through dialogue and negotiation, with genuine peacekeeping where appropriate.

With the ever-increasing numbers of homeless people on our streets – and unprecedented numbers of refugees seeking safety on European shores, many forced from shattered homes as a result of Western-backed wars and weaponry – Afri expressed outrage at government plans to spend more money on militarism, further destabilising an already impoverished and war-weary world.

RoJ produced a short film about PESCO, containing an interview with John Maguire which is viewable on our YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/dNHycdRCB6A>. We also took part in a conference PANA (Peace and Neutrality Alliance) organised in December to raise awareness about PESCO with T.Ds. A letter written by Joe about Ireland's joining PESCO was published in the *Irish Times*.

#### **4.1.2 Peace Trails**

The Peace Trails are an initiative of Rob Fairmichael's a number of years ago, comprising a series of walks or 'peace trails' in locations associated with peace and solidarity. Afri created one such trail in Mayo, and Rob has been involved in creating one in Belfast. Joe, Rob Fairmichael and Helen Henderson of St. Columb's Park House in Derry met to discuss the possibility of bringing the peace trails and the Famine Walks together.

#### **4.1.3 Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons**

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) – of which Afri is a member - is a global coalition working to mobilise people in all countries to inspire, persuade and pressure their governments to prohibit nuclear weapons. Until now, nuclear weapons were the only weapons of mass destruction without a prohibition treaty, despite the widespread and catastrophic humanitarian consequences of their intentional or accidental detonation. Biological weapons were banned in 1972 and chemical weapons in 1992.

After a decade-long effort by ICAN, and 72 years after their invention, on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the United Nations formally adopted a treaty (The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons) which categorically prohibits nuclear weapons. This treaty is a clear indication that the majority of the world no longer accepts nuclear weapons and does not consider them legitimate tools of war. It also creates obligations to support the victims of nuclear-weapons use and testing, and to remediate the environmental damage caused by nuclear weapons.

From the beginning, the effort to ban nuclear weapons has benefited from the broad support of international humanitarian, environmental, non-proliferation, and disarmament organizations in more than 100 states. Significant political and grassroots organising has taken place around the world,

and many thousands have signed petitions, joined protests, contacted representatives, and pressured governments.

## **4.2 Solidarity with Chelsea Manning**

Afri became involved in the 'Free Chelsea Manning' campaign when peace activist Ciaran O'Reilly arranged for Chelsea's family, who have strong Irish connections in Kerry and Dublin, to make a visit to Ireland. We organised a programme of events including a public meeting in Trinity College attended by Chelsea's mother, aunts and uncle and addressed by Chelsea's aunt Sharon as well as by the former Guildford 4 member, Gerry Conlon. This was an evening of deep emotion: Gerry Conlon praised the courage of Chelsea Manning and lamented the fact that there was no similarly brave whistle-blower in the British system when he and his father and their Maguire relations were incarcerated on completely spurious charges.

As a result of that visit to Ireland, Donal O'Kelly was inspired to initiate the Manning Truthfest, consisting of artists, musicians and activists who crossed the Irish sea three times between 2014 and 2016 to sing songs and play music in solidarity with Chelsea and her Welsh-based family and to protest the inhumanity of the 35-year sentence imposed upon her. Afri was proud to play a central part in this extraordinary seaborne solidarity!

In January 2017 President Obama commuted Chelsea's sentence before leaving office. Her family released this brief statement:

*We are all overjoyed that Chelsea will soon be free.*

*Chelsea exposed wrongdoing and was punished for being a whistle-blower. We regret that it has taken so long for President Obama to commute the sentence and are outraged that Chelsea has been forced to endure such abusive treatment in prison. We agree with the UN Special Rapporteur Juan Mendez that some of this abuse amounted to torture.*

*We sincerely hope that Chelsea will now be able to get on with the rest of her life and that she finds happiness and fulfilment in whatever she chooses to do. There will always be a welcome for her here in Wales.*

The day after the Famine Walk an event entitled 'Remembering, Celebrating, Solidarity' was held in Dublin to celebrate the release of Chelsea Manning which had happened on 17th May, to remember Chelsea's uncle Kevin who had recently died and to offer solidarity to Colm Roddy and Dave Donnellan. There was music from the 'Manning Street Preachers' and speeches from Harry Browne, Ed Horgan of Shannonwatch and Donal O'Kelly. Chelsea's mother, Susan, attended both the Famine Walk and this celebration.

## **4.3 Natural Resources Campaigns**

### **4.3.1 Fracking**

Afri welcomed the completion of the legislation to ban fracking which passed all stages in the Dáil on the 31st May, which we saw as a victory for people power and for community resistance. Afri offered special congratulations to Love Leitrim, the group that led this persistent, determined and successful campaign.

Afri also paid tribute to the community in Rosspport for the part they played in this success, as it was John Monaghan who first alerted the community in Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim, to the dangers of fracking and who urged the community to organise and resist.

#### **4.3.2 Water Protectors: Standing Rock Campaign**

Chas Jewett of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, a Standing Rock Water protector, visited Ireland in June 2017. Chas is a tribal organiser who lives in Rapid City, South Dakota, and aims to encourage people to engage and mobilise. She was in Ireland courtesy of Dr Mark Garavan of Feasta, to speak at “A Thinkery on Water, Anti-Privatisation Struggles and the Commons” in University College Cork. This was part of a tour around Ireland which included Cork, Galway, Cloughjordan, Leitrim and Dublin. She spoke in the Teacher’s Club in Dublin at an event supported by Afri, Comhlámh, Feasta and Friends of the Earth.

Since 2016 the Standing Rock Reservation has been the scene of a protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline which aims to bring oil from Canada into the US through Native American lands regardless of fears about contamination of drinking water supplies. The existing Keystone 1 pipeline has leaked 26 times.

Chas spoke about the legacy issues of the 19th century treaties between the U.S. government and the First Nations people. In 1873 General Custer found gold in the Black Hills which led to people being moved – without compensation – and separated into various different reservations, one of which is the Standing rock reservation.

The treatment of First Nations People by the US government has had a very detrimental effect on their culture, language and health. Some of the poorest people in the US live in South Dakota. Yet despite this they have been able to hear the earth’s cries and have been aware that the ‘soul sickness’ of consumerism is not what will make us happy – the earth has all that we need.

The Standing Rock campaign has allowed Chas’ people to re-imagine the future and have pride in their culture. Recently it was found out that the protesters were legally correct in objecting to the Keystone XL pipeline. They would like to move from being a “dependent sovereign nation” to an “independent sovereign nation”. Chas stated she appreciated the work that others have been doing which helped make the Standing Rock campaign such a success, such as divestment and so on. She concluded that if you want to know the health of an environment you should look at the indigenous people

RoJ made a short film about her visit which is available on the Afri YouTube channel: [https://youtu.be/Wz8kDZ\\_a-8I](https://youtu.be/Wz8kDZ_a-8I)

#### **4.3.3 Climate Change**

Afri responded to a request from a group of DCU students doing their final year thesis on the subject of climate change. They were looking for support in creating an interactive installation on climate change. Their installation was exhibited in St. Patrick’s College Drumcondra. The interactive dimension related to a map – when people stood on certain parts it responded with information, while they watched a film about the consequences of climate change. Afri was happy to support these 6 enthusiastic students in their project. They have expressed a desire to bring the exhibition around the country.

#### **4.4 Direct Provision and Migrants' Rights**

The refugee crisis is a direct consequence of war and climate change. Afri has previously worked on the issue of the Irish response to refugees, having published a booklet calling for the end of the scandal of direct provision.

Donal O'Kelly, who has been working with refugees in the direct provision system, has been actively campaigning on this issue. Early in the year a new application-form was brought in for those in direct provision to complete. It is 60 pages long, some of the translation done by Google Translate (and therefore incomprehensible) and asylum-seekers were informed that they had only 20 days to return it. There were only a limited number of lawyers working in the area of refugee rights – and approximately 3,000 people to whom this new application would apply. Each application takes approximately 1½ hours to fill out, so that there was a chronic shortage of qualified professionals to assist with the forms. This caused panic; some people even experienced suicidal thoughts and depression as a result.

A meeting was then organised by the Movement for Asylum Seekers in the Dáil, hosted by Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh, inviting politicians to attend. It was a powerful meeting. The Department of Justice subsequently announced that the forms need not be completed in 20 days.

This was the context in which Afri invited Donnah Vuma, who is in the direct provision system herself, to be one of the leaders of the Famine Walk, to help raise awareness of this issue.

Later in 2017 the Supreme Court found the ban on asylum seekers' working to be unconstitutional, although the government have yet to 'get their house in order' in this regard. Ireland is one of the worst in the EU in relation to rights of asylum seekers. A number of groups in Ireland are working on the issue of direct provision including the Movement for Asylum Seekers (MASI), Refugee and Migrant Solidarity Ireland (RAMSI) Comhlámh, and Uplift.

##### **4.4.1 Story-telling for migrants**

Nadette Foley invited Joe to speak about Féile Bríde and related themes at the Welcome café in Smithfield in February. Joe met with Dr. Peter Skeehey at this event. Peter is based in Summerhill and is teaching language to migrants. He has initiated a story-telling project which invites migrants to tell their stories to someone from the local community. The listener then writes up the story and reads it back the following week and then they exchange roles. Peter has published the material generated in book form. The project brings many benefits to the participants, and helps to break down the divide between migrants and the local community. In 2017 Joe participated in story-telling every Friday morning in the Centre in Summerhill.

#### **4.5 CETA**

Afri's focus on *An Gorta Mór* is about looking at causes and consequences, and especially at its relevance for today. The 'Great Hunger' had many causes, including colonialism, blind allegiance to laissez-faire economics and loss of biodiversity leading to over-dependence on one variety of potato. These issues remain totally relevant today as, for example, ten large profit-driven corporations control the vast majority of the food we eat. It is in this context that Afri campaigned to highlight serious concerns around the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA).

In July a protest, organised by Comhlámh and supported by Afri, took place outside Government Buildings to coincide with the visit of Canadian Premier Trudeau. The protest was held to oppose CETA and to call for the rejection of the deal by the Irish Government. Participants expressed concerns as to how CETA would compromise measures which protect health, the environment, and the rule of law in the EU.

Participants also urged the Government to hold off on any vote to ratify the deal until the European Court of Justice had examined the legality of CETA under EU law. Protestors were particularly alarmed by the notorious Investment Arbitration System, included in the deal, which allows foreign big business to sue Governments when their actions impinge on their profitability as well as the further promotion of intensive agriculture.

A short film is available on the Afri YouTube channel which highlights the issues involved: <https://youtu.be/VnK5KzfQRzc>

#### **4.6 Dunnes Stores Strike – Launch of Mary Manning’s book**

The Dunnes Stores anti-apartheid strike of 1984 has become iconic in the pantheon of great acts of resistance around the world – but it wasn’t always so. The young strikers at the time had to endure hardship, rejection, demonisation and more in the course of their extraordinary act of solidarity.

Mary Manning was the first to refuse to handle ‘the fruits of apartheid’ and her book *Striking Back*, written with Sinéad O’Brien, not only provides a first-hand account of the strike from start to finish but also interweaves her own story at a personal and a political level. The book, which exemplifies her great courage and integrity, was launched in the Gutter bookshop by Joe Higgins in November.

Afri are proud to have supported the Dunnes Stores Strikers and now to promote this excellent book by Mary Manning.

### **5. Corporate Governance**

#### **5.1 The Governance Code**

Afri continued to work towards the achievement of the Governance Code for Community, Voluntary and Charitable organisations throughout 2017. Corporate governance was an item of the agenda of all meetings and by September (at the AGM) the Board confirmed our having met the terms of the Code, having had it reviewed by both Nessa Ní Chinnéide and Rob Fairmichael.

Afri is now listed as having achieved this status on the Governance Code website: <https://www.governancecode.ie/registry.html>

We were deemed to be meeting the terms of the code as of 27<sup>th</sup> September 2017. As part of the terms of the code each year we are required to self-assess our practices against those recommended in the Code and for this review to be approved by the Board. At the end of three years (i.e. by 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020) Afri is required to declare in writing (by a form available on their website) that the Board still considers that we are meeting the terms of the Code.

#### **5.2 The Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages**

Afri is one of the signatories of the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images and Messages. The Code was developed by the members of Dóchas, the Irish association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations, and adopted in 2007. It provides a framework for sound and fair communications across the NGO sector in Ireland and beyond. By signing the Code, Afri commits to a set of principles, ensuring that we will avoid stereotypical or sensational images, respect the dignity and equality of all people portrayed and promote fairness, solidarity and justice throughout all our communications. Lisa Patten is Afri's code 'champion'.

### **5.3 Charity Regulatory Authority and Lobbying Regulation**

A Charities Regulator was appointed in 2015 and Afri was automatically registered as a charity as it has charitable exemption from the Revenue Commissioners. Afri submitted its third annual report to the Charity Regulatory Authority as of Autumn 2017.

In addition, Afri is required under legislation to submit a report every 4 months on any lobbying or advocacy work which involves either high-level civil servants or elected representatives. Afri continued to submit quarterly reports throughout 2017.

### **5.4 Companies Act 2014: Company Conversion and Updated Afri Constitution**

In 2016 Afri received notification that Afri would become a default 'Company Limited by Guarantee' as a result of changes to Company law. Following advice from Jillian O'Sullivan who works in Grant Thornton, Afri took the opportunity to update our constitution. A new primary object was proposed: "The provision of assistance and support towards people in need in the Global South and Ireland, especially those affected by poverty, war or climate change". This reflects Afri's work more appropriately.

A draft constitution was submitted to the Revenue Commissioners for approval. After some correspondence with them a special resolution was passed at an EGM and the constitution then lodged with the Companies Registration Office and the Revenue Commissioners, who accepted it. This was followed by lodging the new constitution with the Charities Regulatory Authority. We sought the approval of the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation as specified in our original Memorandum and Articles of Association. This was deemed unnecessary by the Minister's office, and accordingly the constitution was fully accepted.

In January 2018 Afri sought and received permission from the Companies Registration Office to drop the requirement to use 'Company Limited by Guarantee' after our name.

### **5.5 Funding**

Though our Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust funding terminated as foreseen in 2016, by the end of 2017 our funding situation was in a more secure place. Afri managed to secure funding from Porticus, an international organisation which supports charitable groups. This helped to provide a much-needed measure of stability.

Nonetheless, a considerable amount of time continued to be devoted to funding applications (10 applications made, 7 of which were successful) and fundraising work, including approaching 6 religious groups. Afri secured funding from Christian Aid, and the Irish Quakers Faith in Action group confirmed that they will provide funding over five years. In 2017 Trócaire reviewed their 'Mobilising for Justice' grants scheme and informed Afri that we have been chosen as one of their partners; they will grant Afri funding for 2 years. Multi-annual funding provides some welcome stability for planning ahead.

Towards the end of 2017 Irish Aid launched their new strategic plan. This has increased reporting requirements for Afri, as we will need to report annually in line with the new indicators. It is hoped, however, that in the future Irish Aid might re-introduce multi-annual funding.

The funding sub-committee formed at board level in 2016 continued to monitor Afri's funding situation throughout 2017.

## **5.6 Strategic Plan**

In October Afri held a meeting to discuss updating the strategic plan, which was facilitated by Andy Storey. Some changes to the current plan were agreed, such as expanding the 'Values and Ways of Working' section to include reference to sustainability, justice, corporate globalisation and our planetary home.

4 key areas or themes were identified:

- *Militarisation;*
- *Food Sovereignty;*
- *Climate change/justice*
- *Direct provision, refugees, homelessness.*

## **5.7 Other Governance Matters**

It was noted that our constitution states that terms of office for board members are three years, and that each year three of the longest-standing board members should resign in accordance with best practice. They are, however, allowed to stand for re-election should they wish.

## **6. Acknowledgments**

Board:

- Grainne O'Neill joined the Board at the 11th February meeting (she was welcomed in our 2016 report).
- Emer Lynam also joined our Board recently.
- Congratulations to Andy Storey and Miriam Barragry on the birth of their son Daniel, who was born in January.
- Thanks to all Board members for their availability, when called upon. Thanks to our chair, Nessa in particular for all the help this year.

Staff:

- Thanks to Lisa who continues to make an enormous contribution to Afri despite reducing her working hours to two days.

- Larysa was recruited to job-share with Lisa in 2018.
- Thanks to RoJ for filming so many of our events and activities so excellently, and helping in many other ways.
- To Ruairi McKiernan for social-media work.
- Thanks to Sean Boland for website/computer support.
- Joe was presented with an award in recognition of 20 years' membership of the 'Children in Crossfire' board.

Accounts:

- Laura Geraty for doing the accounts – and Boylan & Dodd our auditors.

Other:

- Jillian O'Sullivan for company law advice free of charge.
- Special thanks to Marie Patten for tremendous work – together with Lisa – on the Afri archives. Much of this work was completed in 2017.

We thank our funders: Irish Aid, WorldWide Global Schools, Trócaire, Concern, The Community Foundation for Ireland, Irish Quakers Faith in Action, Christian Aid, and Porticus. Also special thanks to St. Patrick's Kiltegan and the Spiritans for their generous support in recent years and to the Augustinians and Jesuits for their support in 2017.

***Joe Murray***  
***Afri Co-ordinator***