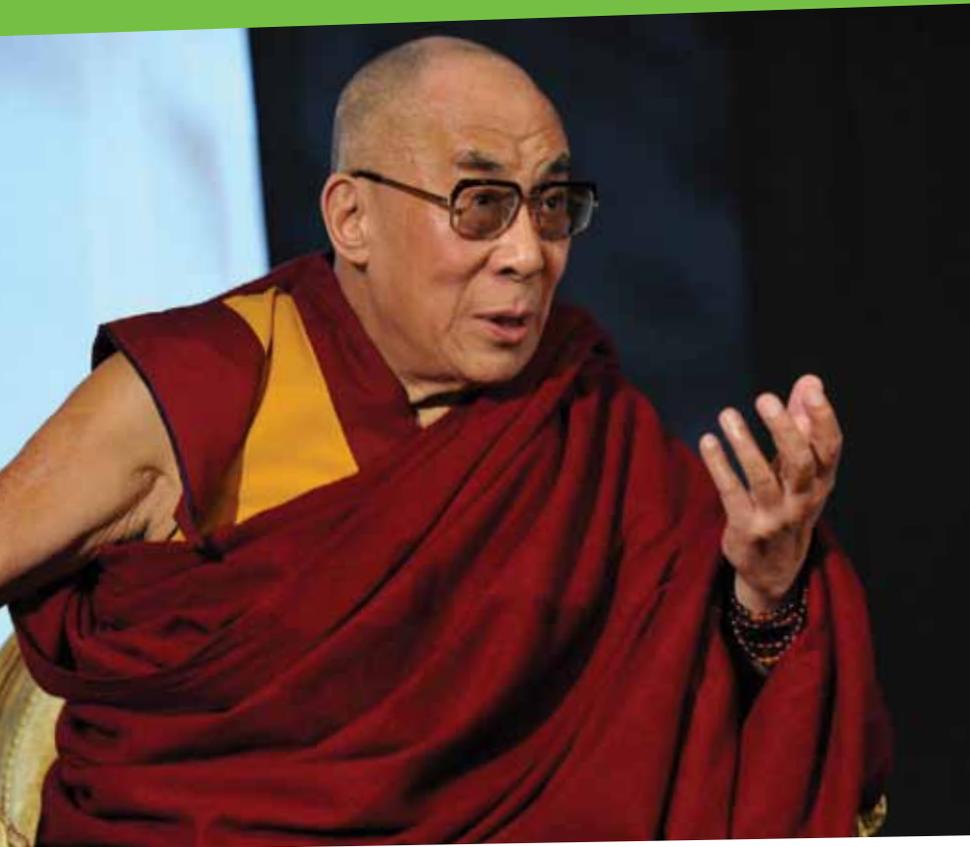


Peacemaker

Afri NEWSLETTER

2011 Edition

Afri
ACTION FROM IRELAND



The Dalai Lama at the POSSIBILITIES Social Forum Photo: Maura Hickey

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Editorial

Welcome to the latest edition of Peacemaker, which captures some memorable moments from last year as well as reflecting the wide array of activities, events and campaigns in which Afri is involved.

In April we had the 'Possibilities Civic Summit' which featured the exiled Tibetan leader the Dalai Lama, John Monaghan from Rosspoint, Richard Moore of Children in Crossfire, and many more. This was an inspiring event which raised many important issues such as the plight of the people of Tibet who continue to suffer as a result of Chinese oppression and, of course, the struggle of the people of Erris against the brutality of corporate power supported by all the forces of the state.

There is also information on the new 'Proclamation' read at Arbour Hill on Easter Monday which satirised the surrender of Irish democracy, through the imposition of debt and austerity, to bondholders, bankers and the EU-IMF.

And speaking of bondholders, Afri, together with the Debt and Development Coalition Ireland and the trade union UNITE, supported a 'debt audit', an aim of which was to find out who these bondholders, to whom we allegedly owe all this money, really are. However, despite the best efforts of three leading academics they were unable to establish the bondholders' identities. So, amazingly, austerity measures that create incredible hardship for hundreds of thousands of people have been introduced, and will continue to be introduced, in order to repay anonymous creditors! How can this be seen as in any way defensible?

We also have coverage of our usual events such as Féile Bríde, the Famine Walk and our 'Education for Liberation' seminars. We hope you enjoy Peacemaker and we thank you for your continuing support!

Joe Murray



Joe Murray is introduced to the Dalai Lama by Richard Moore Photo: Derek Speirs

Possibilities

Dalai Lama and John Monaghan Address 'POSSIBILITIES Civic Summit'

On Wednesday, April 13th, two thousand people gathered in Dublin's Citywest Hotel for the sold-out POSSIBILITIES 2011 civic summit. POSSIBILITIES was organised by Afri, Children in Crossfire and SpunOut.ie to inspire people, young and old, to become vocal and active in transforming our country and our planet for the better.

The event was attended by the exiled and soon-to-retire Tibetan leader, the 14th Dalai Lama, who accepted a personal invitation to come to Ireland from his close friend, Richard Moore, the founder of Children in Crossfire. Richard was blinded by a rubber bullet at the age of 10, and went on to seek out and befriend the British soldier who shot him.

The Dalai Lama spoke on the subject of 'Universal Responsibility' and how taking action for change is something we all have a duty to do. The Dalai Lama also spoke at events in Kildare and Limerick as part of his third visit to the Republic.

The event featured a line-up of inspirational speakers, music, poetry and theatre. Former President and ex UN Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson spoke, in addition to performances by renowned Irish music act Kila;

Glenstal Abbey based singer Noirín Ní Riain; poet Colm Keegan; theatre from the school children of Scoil Eoghan in Moville, Co. Donegal and the Derry based Bag-a-trix group; more music and song from the Naked Voice Choir, Majella Murphy, and the Discovery Gospel Choir; and talks by broadcaster Shalini Sinha and a range of youth and community activists including John Monaghan from the Pobal Chill Chomáin community group in Rossport, Co. Mayo.

"The Dalai Lama spoke on the subject of 'Universal Responsibility' and how taking action for change is something we all have a duty to do"

Over 1,200 tickets for the event sold-out within 5 days of going on sale on February 1st and the remaining 800 tickets were distributed at low or no cost to excluded, youth, community and campaigning groups throughout the island of Ireland to ensure social inclusion.



Michael Kelly of Grow It Yourself
Photos: Fred Reilly



Students of Coláiste Éinde, Galway, performing their theatre piece

Feile Bríde

Seeds of Change

The theme of Féile Bríde this year was food and it addressed some of the key concerns linked to food security: globalization, sustainable development and what we can do to address these concerns. As one participant concluded: “if we can overcome the frustration of doing little, we can do a lot”.

Ugandan singer Justine Nantale sang some beautiful African music to open the day. This was followed by a short theatre piece called “More” which was devised by Pete Mullineaux and performed by students from Coláiste Éinde in Galway. This wonderfully creative piece was set in a far away galaxy, at an Intergalactic Food Conference where the “Aliens” are looking down at earth as a possible new home and are baffled by the fact that, despite so many resources, half the people in the world go hungry every day!

Dr Stephen Onakuse of the Centre for Sustainable Livelihoods, UCC, opened the discussion by raising questions about how the food prices and key decisions relating to food are often taken by those who are not actually involved in agricultural production themselves. Grow It Yourself’s Michael Kelly spoke of his journey from realizing the absurdity of the fact that the garlic he was buying in his local supermarket in Waterford was sourced from China, to actually “taking control of the garlic situation” and growing his own!

“Michael Kelly spoke of his journey from realizing the absurdity of the fact that the garlic he was buying in his local supermarket in Waterford was sourced from China.”

Finally, in the evening we had a “Saturday Miscellany”, hosted by local writer Maria Murphy, which comprised of diverse readings from writers from the locality on the theme of food. This was interspersed with traditional Irish music and bluegrass played by the talented group Cathú.



Public meeting held in April 2011



Walkers contend with rain and wind during the 2011 Famine Walk
Photos: Andy Storey



Gemma Hensley of Grow It Yourself, Westport, plants a potato near Doolough as Juan Carlos Contreras looks on

Famine Walk

From Louisburgh to Bhopal and Back!

The annual Famine Walk from Delphi to Louisburgh, on Saturday 21st focused especially on the question of food sovereignty, including the threats to it from increasing corporate control of the food chain and the treatment of food as just another commodity to be bought and sold. Among the walk leaders was Juan Carlos who wrote the following:

“Undoubtedly, May 21, 2011, despite the rain and storm blowing, could not compare with the day of the original Famine Walk in 1849. That was a day of great hardship and tears as we also have in Guatemala today even though Guatemala has a wonderful climate as well as great natural and cultural wealth!

It is difficult for anyone to believe then, that Guatemala, with such wealth, should be the second on the scale for hunger in Latin America. Not only that but it is the very natural wealth that is the reason for the poverty and hunger, because big companies such as Monsanto, Coca Cola, Perenco, Texaco, Shell, Gold Corp, Hidrila, Union Fenosa, among others, extract oil, gold, water, biofuels! Worst of all is the fact that this story is repeated in Ethiopia, Somalia, Mozambique, Ghana, Sahara, and many countries worldwide.

The recipe for living in today’s world is contained,

perhaps, in ancient forms of life, less consumerist, closer to and respecting nature; respecting ancient cultures like the Maya and the Choctaw, where the spirit of solidarity and community is first and foremost, where greed for money and power are seen as social ills! We need each other, walking together and learning step by step! We need each other, to work in solidarity and in this way humanity can overcome great adversity in spite of economic and environmental crises.

“It is difficult for anyone to believe then, that Guatemala, with such wealth, should be the second on the scale for hunger in Latin America”.

We must continue to fight for the most valuable assets, such as human rights, solidarity, community, and respect for our Planet. We must go on learning these lessons and in turn teaching them to our children”.

(Juan Carlos Contreras Leiva, Guatemala. August 2011).

Meeting in Rossport

Meanwhile, the theme of corporate power dominated at a public meeting in Erris on Sunday 22nd, where activists from India exchanged their stories of oppression by multinational companies (especially Union Carbide and its devastation of Bhopal) with local campaigners' tales of their struggle against Shell's unwanted and dangerous Corrib Gas pipeline.

To be in Mayo on Saturday 21st and Sunday, 22nd of May, meant to be on the side of justice, peace, people's right to food and to freedom from corporate abuse.



*Glenamoy Community Centre
Photos: Andy Storey*

Policing the Corrib Gas Project



Rachna Dhingra (Bhopal group) Satinath Sarangi (Bhopal group)

Calls for Independent Inquiry into Policing of the Corrib Gas Dispute and the Universal Periodic Review Submission

Afri backed a call for an independent international inquiry into policing of protests around the Corrib Gas project in the wake of the revelation that Gardaí joked and laughed about raping a protestor in their custody, and had previously engaged in verbal sexual abuse of a local woman.

This dispute has long been characterised by heavy handed and inappropriate policing. The Gardaí have regularly attacked and abused peaceful protestors without being held to account by their superiors or by the Garda Ombudsman. Neither have the attacks on Willie Corduff and Pat O'Donnell in 2009 been properly investigated by the Gardaí. A human rights monitor deployed by Afri in the area himself witnessed and experienced Garda abuses and his complaints were not properly acted upon.

Afri believes that the behavior of some Gardaí involved in the Corrib Gas dispute is out of control in a manner reminiscent of Garda behaviour in Donegal as documented by the Morris Tribunal. Accountability urgently needs to be reasserted and Gardaí who abuse their powers need to be seriously disciplined; this can only be done through an independent, international inquiry.

To draw attention to this issue, Afri made a submission to the Universal Periodic Review currently taking place in Ireland concerning the policing of the Corrib Gas Project and the role of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman. Afri is deeply concerned with the manner in which complaints submitted to the Ombudsman have been dealt with. Afri contends that there is a lack of consistency and impartiality, a delay in dealing with the complaints, that there is a lack of independence and impartiality in the investigations, and fears that the correspondence between the Ombudsman's office and the individual complainants shows that there was pre-determination of the outcome. Afri recommended that both a "policies and practices" review of the policing of the project is promptly conducted as recommended by the Front Line Report 2010, written by barrister Brian Barrington. Furthermore, it argues that legal measures must be enacted to ensure that the Ombudsman's office functions independently of the Gardaí. This document was also submitted to the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs in June.

A copy of the submission is available for download at:
http://www.rightsnow.ie/go/civil_society_submissions.



Donal O'Kelly (left) reads the alternative Proclamation of the Republic at Arbour Hill. Photo: Derek Speirs

Easter Monday Proclamation

Looking to the Global South for lessons in dealing with the economic crisis

Afri, along with other global justice NGOs, has long highlighted issues surrounding 'Third World' (Global South) debt and IMF/World Bank structural adjustment – including erosion of sovereignty in the Global South and devastating socio-economic consequences. Those issues have come home now. And we can look to the experience of the Global South for lessons in both understanding our crisis and how we might tackle it.

The usurpation of democracy was satirised in an alternative 'Proclamation' which was read at Arbour Hill on Easter Monday. The alternative proclamation declares that "We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God of the Financial

Markets" and consigns "the right of senior bondholders to the ownership of Ireland." The proclamation aimed to highlight that the Government's current regime of austerity measures can be resisted if we learn from those who have already successfully done so.

"We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God of the Financial Markets"

To see video footage of the Proclamation being read out please go to the Afri website: www.afri.ie



Clodagh McKenna, Clare O'Grady Walshe and Ruairi Quinn T.D. at the GM Free Ireland meeting Photo: Derek Speirs

GM Free Ireland

GM lobby is the 'Anglo Irish Bank' of the Food sector

The decision by the outgoing Fianna Fáil government to reverse Ireland's policy on genetically modified (GM) food has been described as both dangerous and foolhardy by a leading Irish environmentalist. Clare O'Grady Walshe, who has lectured on food politics in Trinity College and is a Board member of the Irish Seed Savers Association, said the government decision to no longer abstain in EU debates on GM food would have enormous implications for Irish people and the environment.

Speaking on behalf of the justice and human rights group Afri, Ms. O'Grady Walshe claimed that Ireland could take the lead in promoting GM-free agriculture, which would provide EU consumers with the food they want. She argues that such an approach, steeped in Irish culture and Irish uniqueness as a 'green' island on the edge of Europe, would be the best way of defending a sector that is worth €16.6 billion to our economy, 8% of GDP, and employs 150,000 people supporting some 128,000 family farms.

Afri locates the decision in the context of the huge issues facing agriculture on a planet running out of oil and experiencing the ravages of climatic change. The recent Review of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development

(IAASTD), specifically states that "questionable technological fixes such as transgenic crops/GM should be avoided".

"Afri locates the decision in the context of the huge issues facing agriculture on a planet running out of oil and experiencing the ravages of climatic change".

It is reported that Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour agree on this policy of relaxing laws and allowing GM varieties to enter our food chain. Ms O'Grady Walshe describes the issue as fundamentally about democracy and transparency. "The GM lobby is the Anglo-Irish Bank of the agriculture and food sector and the people who are shouting stop in this area can be derided in the same way as those who called it correctly on the banking crisis; but this is much more important than money – because you can't eat money – it's about the food we eat and feed our children, which links us to people everywhere and to the earth we are so mindlessly destroying", she concluded.

Irish Debt audit

Independent audit report quantifies Irish sovereign debt

A team of researchers from University of Limerick were recently commissioned by Afri, Debt and Development Coalition Ireland (DDCI) and the trade union UNITE to carry out an audit of Ireland's debt. Dr Sheila Killian, head of the Department of Accounting and Finance at the University of Limerick and lead researcher on the audit project said, "The audit report seeks to quantify and explain Ireland's sovereign debt, both real and contingent, for which the Irish people have become responsible."

The report collates and cross-references data from the Central Bank, the ECB, the CSO and NTMA as well as other sources to map out the many facets of Ireland's

debt - including government bonds, NAMA debt, the bank guarantee, and the limited information on ownership that was available for the first half of 2011. It also outlines the cash-flow and guarantees currently between the Irish government and people, the guaranteed financial institutions, the ECB and the bondholders.

Nessa Ní Chasaide of Debt and Development Coalition Ireland commented, "Independent debt audits have been carried out in many heavily indebted countries around the world, such as in Ecuador, and are a crucial citizens' tool in supporting greater transparency regarding decision-making on sovereign debt issues." This report is available to download on the Afri website.

Depleted Uranium Campaign

Publication of Afri's DU booklet

Afri published a booklet on Depleted Uranium and sent it to every member of the new Dáil, asking them to ensure that the Prohibition of Depleted Uranium Weapons Bill, which passed all stages in the Seanad last Autumn will now be brought through all stages in the Dáil.

Arms control campaigners across the world watched the

progression of the legislation through the Seanad, with all party support last year. This important legislation is now half-way there but the next step is to ensure that it is brought through the Dáil. If this were achieved, it would make Ireland the third country in the world after Belgium and Costa Rica to have banned weapons that contain depleted uranium. New Zealand is also pursuing similar legislation.

Thanks and Welcome

We wish to extend our sincere thanks and good wishes to Susan Hensel who has returned to Germany after spending a number of years in Ireland. During her time in Ireland she worked for Children in Crossfire and the Cluster Munitions Coalition before taking up the position of

Office manager and Events organizer with Afri. Not only was her work exemplary but she also carried it out with care, enthusiasm and good humour. Susan is sadly missed.

Susan's place was taken up temporarily by Larysa Karankovich who also brought a high level of

professionalism and competence to the job. We wish her well in all her future endeavours.

Lisa Patten has now taken over this position and we welcome Lisa who is very familiar with Afri, having worked with us as a volunteer for many months.



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

Féile Bríde –
Saturday 4th February
2012

Famine Walk –
Saturday 19th May 2012