

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM

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His Excellency President Barack Obama,
President of the United States of America.

June 3rd 2009

Dear Mr. President,

We welcome your visit to the Arab world and your administration's initiative to bridge differences with the Arab-Muslim world.

One long-standing source of tension between the United States and this part of the world has been the failure to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict.

It is therefore unfortunate that you will not visit Gaza during your trip to the Middle East and that neither your Secretary of State nor George Mitchell have come to hear our point of view.

We have received numerous visits recently from people of widely varied backgrounds: U.S. Congressional representatives, European parliamentarians, the U.N.-appointed Goldstone commission, and grassroots delegations such as those organized by the U.S. peace group CODEPINK.

It is essential for you to visit Gaza. We have recently passed through a brutal 22-day Israeli attack.

Amnesty International observed that the death and destruction Gaza suffered during the invasion could not have happened without U.S.-supplied weapons and U.S.-taxpayers' money.

Human Rights Watch has documented that the white phosphorus Israel dropped on a school, hospital, United Nations warehouse and civilian neighborhoods in Gaza was manufactured in the United States. Human Rights Watch concluded that Israel's use of this white phosphorus was a war crime.

Shouldn't you see first-hand how Israel used your arms and spent your money?

Before becoming president you were a distinguished professor of law. The U.S. government has

also said that it wants to foster the rule of law in the Arab-Muslim world.

The International Court of Justice stated in July 2004 that the whole of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem are occupied Palestinian territories designated for Palestinian self-determination, and that the Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal.

Not one of the 15 judges sitting on the highest judicial body in the world dissented from these principles.

The main human rights organizations in the world, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have issued position papers supporting the right of the Palestinian refugees to return and compensation.

Each year in the United Nations General Assembly nearly every country in the world has supported these principles for resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict. Every year the Arab League puts forth a peace proposal based on these principles for resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Leading human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch have also stated that Israel's siege of Gaza is a form of collective punishment and therefore illegal under international law.

We in the Hamas Government are committed to pursuing a just resolution to the conflict not in contradiction with the international community and enlightened opinion as expressed in the International Court of Justice, the United Nations General Assembly, and leading human rights organizations. We are prepared to engage all parties on the basis of mutual respect and without preconditions.

However, our constituency needs to see a comprehensive paradigm shift that not only commences with lifting the siege on Gaza and halts all settlement building and expansion but develops into a policy of evenhandedness based on the very international law and norms

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LETTER, *continued from page 1*

we are prodded into adhering to.

Again, we welcome you to Gaza which would allow you to see firsthand our ground zero. Furthermore, it would enhance the US position; enabling you to speak with new credibility and authority in dealing with all the parties.

Very Truly Yours,
 Dr. Ahmed Yousef
 Deputy of the Foreign Affairs
 Ministry
 Former Senior Political Advisor
 to Prime Minister Ismael Hanniya

The above letter was hand-delivered by Dr. Yousef to Medea Benjamin, who was in Gaza with a 66-person delegation representing 10 nations. Benjamin and representatives of CODEPINK then delivered the letter to the U.S. Embassy in Cairo the following day, June 4, during President Obama's visit to Egypt.

"This is a people who have just been subjected to a vicious attack that left over 1,300 dead and thousands wounded, and there is not a word here about armed resistance or Zionism. They are reaching out and actively seeking a resolution to the conflict based on the findings of the world's leading international legal bodies and human rights organizations from the United Nations and the International Court of Justice to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. This is a major breakthrough and the U.S. government should take advantage to begin a dialogue with Hamas."

Medea Benjamin

TRIP TO GAZA

When Regina Birchem, immediate past president of International WILPF, visited in St. Louis in April, she met with WILPFers and friends at Bici's Restaurant in University City to tell them about her trip to Gaza in March for International Women's Day.

Regina joined an international delegation that went to Gaza to show solidarity with the women of Gaza and their families, to challenge border closings, and to see with their own eyes the devastation caused by the siege of the 22-day war.

The group of 60 people from seven countries included Alice Walker, author of "The Color Purple"; Cindy and Craig Corrie, parents of Rachel Corrie, killed by a Caterpillar as she tried to stop a house demolition in Gaza six years ago; CodePink members; students studying in Cairo; journalists and photographers.

They met at a Cairo hostel March 6 and signed affidavits at the U. S. Embassy absolving the U.S. of any responsibility for their safety ("Contact the UN or Red Cross in case of trouble"). On March 7 they headed for the border, trailed by 110 vehicles loaded with supplies which had been organized by a former British parliamentarian. The Red Crescent, headed in Egypt by President Mubarak's wife, assisted in Egypt and Gaza with a bus, van and a truck for the baskets the delegation was bringing to the women of Gaza. They crossed into Gaza at the town of Rafah and were welcomed by the mayor and other political figures. Regina said they could hear a bomb exploding over tunnels and saw five bombed tunnels where food, toys and auto parts had been destroyed. (The Corries reported that bomb blasts from the border area were heard

throughout the time they were in Gaza.)

Regina said the group considered it crucially important that borders be opened so more reconstruction supplies could be brought in. They were told a stadium in Egypt was overflowing with supplies, including medical and surgical, that were kept out by the closed borders.

They saw hospitals with windows blown out and were told by a Norwegian doctor who stayed through a 24-hour bombing that he had never before seen anything like the wounds that resulted. Because parts of hospitals were destroyed, ambulances hit and emergency rooms scarce, many injured people had to be turned away, he reported.

Most factories and industries and 16,000 homes, they were told, had been destroyed, and 90,000 people were sleeping in relief tents. The stress of war has been devastating to children, who were said to wet their beds and wake crying from nightmares.

On International Women's Day Regina's group visited 15 women's centers with gift baskets and were warmly welcomed. The women cooked food which they shared as they told of the problems of war and closed borders. "We want the right to grow our own food," they said.

Regina spoke of seeing an old man with a cane who was living in a hole with rubble covered by a rug, near a little garden he had made with mint and a petunia.

Regina urged us to help make the reminder clear in the U.S. and Europe that it is weapons made in our countries, especially the U.S., that have been used to kill, burn and destroy.

Dorothy Poor



More on Gaza

ISRAEL/PALESTINE: ONE- OR TWO-STATE SOLUTION?

After hearing Anna Baltzer at the Annual Meeting and Regina Birchem at the following Tuesday evening dinner, St. Louis WILPF was encouraged to re-activate the Middle East Committee with Suzanne Reinhold agreeing to chair and to convene a meeting. During the meeting on June 3, Gloria Gordon explained the position of Brit Tzedek, a group in which she participates. The ME Committee decided to have a panel in early September to hear various positions on a solution to the current unsettled situation. They will meet again on June 11 to finalize date, location, and panelists.

Rep. Russ Carnahan of St. Louis was one of three U.S. Representatives originating a letter to President Obama on May 13, applauding Obama's intention "to provide strong American leadership to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian and broader Arab-Israeli conflicts." The letter continues: "Resolving these conflicts, and in particular, finally implementing a two-state solution, is essential for American interests in the Middle East and around the world."

As of May 29, Rep. Lacy Clay had added his name as one of an additional 66 signatures.

Regina Birchem left June 2 for Tel Aviv for the "10 Days Action against the Siege and Occupation," co-organized by the Israeli Coalition of Women for Peace (WILPF-Israel is a member) and CodePink. They will meet with Israeli peace groups in Tel Aviv, try to get into Gaza, tour Jerusalem and the West Bank, with workshops and protests filling in any open time.

Hedy Epstein plans to leave St. Louis for Qatar June 16, on her way to Cyprus, from which she will sail on one of two boats to Gaza on June 25 with members of the free Gaza movement.



ACTION UPDATE



Final approval is expected in Congress soon on funding that will enable the U.S. to pay its full share of UN peacekeeping missions that help restore stability and protect civilian in conflict zones around the world.

The Senate has approved \$721 million for peacekeeping, along with transfer authority for an additional \$156 million, should it be needed for a potential new UN operation in Somalia.

Call your Senators and urge them to OPPOSE an amendment to attach IMF funding to the wartime supplemental bills. Instead, Congress should hold hearings on IMF reform and support gold sales for debt relief, not loans. It is especially **important** to contact Senators who sit on the **Appropriations Committee**. For Missouri, this means **Senator Bond**.



MISSOURIANS FOR SINGLE PAYER

At a brief business meeting at the Ethical Society May 21, members agreed that this year's health care speaker, Rep. Eric Massa (D-N.Y.) was the very best. He was chosen by Rep. John Conyers (D-MI) to head the House Caucus on H.R. 676, the single payer bill perennially introduced by Conyers, and co-sponsored by Rep. Lacy Clay (D-MO).

The feature presentation was Mimi Signor impersonating Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont) at his hearings on health care reform. During the DC hearings, proponents of single payer were not invited to testify, and those who showed up and commented from the floor were removed by capitol police and arrested, on orders from Baucus. Even some doctors were arrested when they dared to speak out. Mimi freely shouted "Arrest that man" when anyone at the MOSP meeting raised a hand, asked a question, or made a comment, a la Baucus.

Subsequently, the Huffington Post (June 3, 2009) reported that Baucus took a statewide beating the previous week for dismissing the possibility of a single-payer system early in the health care debate — leading to

a meeting with health care professionals and Sen. Bernie Sanders, the Vermont independent who is the sponsor of the Senate's only single-payer bill.

Following a morning closed-door meeting with Baucus, Sanders said, "I think in retrospect he thinks there probably should have been hearings [on single payer], it should have been part of the process, and then it would have been rejected." Baucus did agree to use the power of his office to fight for leniency on behalf of the dozen or so doctors and nurses who had been arrested during committee hearings on health care for speaking out for a single-payer program. Since he had ordered the arrests, it's the least he could do!

The struggle now is to keep at least a publicly financed health care assurance in the federal legislation, even though health care insurers and some health care providers are fighting the idea. Sen. McCaskill has voted for the public financing; Sen. Bond voted against.

Mary Jane Schutzius

WILPFers AROUND AND ABOUT

Congratulations to **Amy Smoucha** on receiving the MASW Community Advocate Award at their annual dinner on May 27 — well deserved recognition!

Agnes Wilcox is directing *Twelfth Night*, Acts II & III, and "Spoken Words" at the Vandalia Women's Theatre July 13, and *The Tempest*, Acts III, IV & V, starring the men of The Theatre Project at the Northeast Correctional Center on July 23. Seating is limited and reservations must be made by June 26 and July 6, respectively (314 289 4190).

As we are sending this Bulletin out, **Bob and Mary Jane Schutzius** are flying to Odessa, Ukraine for a river cruise north to Kiev.

MORE WORK AHEAD ON PREVENTION

The 2009 session of the Missouri Legislature ended without the passage of any additional restrictions on reproductive health care in Missouri. Thanks to the vigilance of pro-choice legislators and lobbying of pro-choice activists, the state was stopped from wrenching a sensitive reproductive health decision out of the hands of women and doctors.

The legislature spent "way too much time on the wrong priorities", according to Planned Parenthood, which listed 11 prevention bills that died while "prolifers" focused on abortion restrictions:

SB104 Cervical Cancer Immunization

SB260/HB520 Compassionate Assistance for Rape Emergencies

HB413 Cancer Screening Coverage

SB316 Comprehensive Sex Education

SB329 Prevention First Act

HB342 Prostate Research Development

HB370 Expedited Partner Therapy

HB430 Uterine Fibroids Information

SB203/HB584 Patient Protection at Pharmacies.



REPORT ON THE 2009 MO LEGISLATURE

(WILPF and the MO progressive community appreciate the difficult task our progressive state senators and representatives have every session in Jefferson City. WILPF is especially appreciative and grateful for Jeanette Mott Oxford, and all that she does and endures for the community's sake. — editors)

The major issue of the 2009 Legislative Session was the state budget. With many Missouri jobs lost and sales tax receipts also down, finding a way to adequately fund our state's essential needs was a huge challenge. The House budget process, largely controlled by Budget Chair Allen Ieet, resulted in deep cuts to health, mental health, and social services. (For more on this, see my blog at: <http://www.showmeprogress.com/showDiary.do?diaryId=2662>.) Fortunately the Senate saw things differently and used about \$785 million from the federal economic stimulus package to fund most items in Gov. Jay Nixon's proposed \$23 billion budget.

In addition, a \$381 million of federal stimulus money was approved for various special projects, including a \$112 million radio system for emergency responders and \$12 million for Metro buses. Nixon has said he will veto some items in the bill, which is a good idea given next year's economic forecast. We need to save some of these funds for another projected budget shortfall.

A showdown over a massive tax credits package framed by both Democrats and Republicans as "economic development" was another prominent issue. It passed on the final day of Session, and I was one of only two no votes. Most tax credits

have failed to prove themselves as job creators in the past, and they also operate without adequate transparency and accountability. I much preferred Rep. Chris Kelly's \$700 million bond package for priority construction needs at public colleges and universities as a job development bill, but that died on the Senate side.

Among other measures that passed:

Child support: Men would have two years to challenge paternity rulings with DNA tests and also could be referred to job-training or drug-treatment programs rather than to prison if in arrears for child support payments.

DNA testing expansion: Missourians who are at least 17 years old would have to give a DNA sample upon being arrested on suspicion of most felonies. The sample would be discarded if the person is acquitted or the charges are dismissed.

Protection for purchasers of pre-need funeral packages: Following a scandal at St. Louis-based National Prearranged Services and its affiliates, tougher monitoring and new rules were set up to offer protections.

Motorecycle helmets: I hope Jay Nixon will veto a bill allowing riders who are at least 21 years old to skip wearing a helmet when riding a mo-

toresize on an interstate highway.

Text messages: Motorists 21 and younger could not send or read a text message while driving, except in emergencies. (I don't see why people of any age should text while driving.)

A lot of bad ideas did not pass this year (abortion restrictions; at least three very flawed tax reform measures that concentrated tax reductions to our wealthiest households; freezing the minimum wage increase for tipped employees; drug testing welfare recipients; tinkering with the non-partisan court plan; overturning "Construction Work in Progress" — a 1976 law that makes utilities wait until power plants are online before charging customers; allowing conceal and carry on college campuses; etc.). Many of these cleared the House, but got stopped in the Senate. I am thankful to justice advocates like Sen. Joan Bray, Sen. Jolie Justus, and Sen. Rita Days who helped block so many of these ill-conceived notions.

Unfortunately quite a few good ideas died as well: my tax reform plan, expansion of health coverage to 35,000 low-wage working adults, health coverage for children with autism, etc. We must keep organizing and fighting the good fight so that we are able to make progress on these issues next year.

Jeanette Mott Oxford



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EL SALVADOR

The election of Mauricio Funes as president of El Salvador in March was a grassroots victory that could represent a sea change in the politics of that small country. On June 1 members of the St. Louis Interfaith Committee on Latin America (IFCLA) celebrated his inauguration with Salvadoran music and pupusas at Fritanga's in South St. Louis.

Marilyn Lorenz, program coordinator of IFCLA, went to El Salvador as an unofficial observer of the elections, and described her experience at a recent Brown Bag meeting with WILPFers.

To emphasize the magnitude of Funes' victory, Marilyn reviewed the history of El Salvador, starting with the Spanish invasion in 1521 and independence from Spain in the 1820s, after which the oligarchs ran the country with indigenous people downtrodden and powerless despite sporadic uprisings.

In the late 1970s leftist politics and liberation theology helped bring about a grassroots army, the Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), named for the hero of the 1932 uprising. Marilyn reminded us of the killing in 1980 of Archbishop Oscar Romero and the four churchwomen that set off a civil war lasting 12 years. The FMLN was pitted against the ruling party, ARENA, led by Roberto D'Aubuisson, a School of the Americas graduate and death squad organizer. During the 1992 UN-brokered peace accords the FMLN reconstituted itself as a political party. ARENA continued in power, leaving a legacy of deaths, economic deprivation and emigration of millions of Salvadorans.

Under ARENA rule, Marilyn explained, CAFTA went into effect, business interests ignored agricultural needs, services were privatized, and violence in cities kept the rightwing death squads active. "But the FMLN used smart organizing at the grassroots to grow stronger," she said, "and prevailed by a 51.32% to 48.68% vote in the March presidential election, despite intimidation, misinformation and other ruses by ARENA."

(According to ¡Presente!, School Of the Americas Watch publication, Republican members of the US Congress threatened before the election that if the FMLN won, the US would cut off remittances – money from Salvadorans living in the US sent to relatives in El Salvador – and foreign assistance, and would review the immigration status of Salvadorans in the US.)

On election day, Marilyn said, buses ran to take voters to the polls and the people voted in alphabetical order. Despite a rainstorm people stayed with the ballots all night to make sure they weren't stolen, and officials from both parties counted the votes. Funes supporters wore red, and after the election they poured into the streets and danced all night, and again the next night.

Funes, whose brother was killed in the civil war, was host of a Salvadoran news magazine show and a former CNN Español reporter. In his acceptance speech he said his presidency will be dedicated to Archbishop Romero. He pledged to reform the electoral system, root out corruption and improve conditions for women.

Dorothy Poor



WORTH REPEATING...

"Here's the thing. Suddenly these hideously pompous and self-righteous white males of the right are all concerned about racism. They're so concerned that they're fully capable of finding it in places where it doesn't exist. Not just finding it, but being outraged by it to the point of apoplexy. Oh, they tell us, this racism is a bad thing!" Bob Herbert: "The howls of a fading species" published in the June 3 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, column regarding the nomination of the Honorable Sonia Sotomayor.

After quoting President Obama's words at Notre Dame on "fight for what we consider right, without demonizing" those who disagree, Ellen Goodman concludes her June 5 *P-D* column "Can rhetoric justify a crime in the mind of a fanatic?" with "One way is for those who truly

'denounce the murder' to take on the chorus, the back-up singers, who still provide the doo-wop for the next de-ranked soloist. You see, this suspect [Scott Roeder, arrested for the murder of Dr. George Tiller] was not such a lone gunman. And no, I am afraid, this was not an isolated incident."

From the June 5 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* editorial, "Planes, pork and preparedness": "Is the nation supposed to keep building unneeded airplanes *ad infinitum*, stacking them in the basement like a survivalist stockpiling beans and bullets? Isn't this billion-dollar make-work, paying a guy to lean on a shovel in case you need him later? Shouldn't Boeing and the nation's pork-loving leaders find other profitable uses for America's high-tech manufacturing infrastructure and workforce?"

BOOK AWARDS

The 2009 Jane Addams Children's Book Award winners were announced on WILPF's birthday, April 28, at the Hull House Museum in Chicago.

Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai, written and illustrated by Claire A. Nivola. Frances Foster Books/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, an imprint of Macmillan Children's Publishing Group, is the winner in Books for Younger Children.

The Surrender Tree: Poems of Cuba's Struggle for Freedom by Margarita Engle, published by Henry Holt Books for Young Readers, is the winner in the Books for Older Children Category.

SUBJECT: . . . and the year was 1904

The Year is 1904 . . . one hundred five years ago. What a difference a century makes!

Here are some of the U.S. statistics for 1904:

The average life expectancy in the U.S. was 47 years.

Only 14% of the homes in the U.S. had a bathtub.

Only 8% of the homes had a telephone.

There were only 8,000 cars in the U.S., and only 144 miles of paved roads. The maximum speed was 10 mph.

Alabama, Mississippi, Iowa, and Tennessee were each more heavily populated than California.

The average wage in the U.S. was 22 cents an hour.

The average U.S. worker made between \$200 and \$400 per year.

More than 95% of all births took place at home.

Sugar cost four cents a pound; eggs were 14 cents a dozen; coffee was 15 cents a pound.

WILPF Bulletin

Articles, reports, and information for the Calendar are due on the day of the Board meetings. The next Board meeting will be Sept. 1. Bring or mail articles for the Sept. bulletin to the World Community Center, 438 No. Skinker, St. Louis, MO 63130. Or fax to 862-8155, Attn: WILPF. Contributions are welcome.

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CALENDAR

Fri., June 19, 7:00 p.m. MOSP free movie night, Ethical Society, 9001 Clayton Rd., Assembly Hall

Tue., July 14, 11:30 a.m., Women in Black vigil, Delmar Loop, near the Bread Company

Sun., Aug. 9, 6:00 p.m., Lewis Park, annual Hiroshima/Nagasaki Observation (details in the mid-summer mini-Bulletin)

Tue., Aug. 11, 11:30 a.m., Women in Black vigil, Delmar Loop, near the Bread Company

Fri., Aug. 21, 7:00 p.m.: MOSP free movie night, Ethical Society, Assembly Hall

Sat., Aug. 22, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.: Women's Equality Day Brunch, MO Women's Network, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Clayton.

Tue., Aug. 25, 1:30 p.m., WILPF Executive Committee meeting, WCC

Tue., Sept. 1, 1:45 p.m., WILPF Board meeting, WCC

Sat., Sept. 5, 10:00 a.m., Annual Planning Meeting (details in the mid-summer mini-Bulletin)

Thu., Sept. 10, St. Louis Middle East Committee panel: "One-State/Two State Solution?"

Thu., Oct. 22, United Nations Day program, UM St. Louis

Sat., Oct. 24, 2:00 - 5:30 p.m., United Nations Day program, Ethical Society, 9001 Clayton Rd., initiated by Citizens for Global Solutions, co-sponsored by St. Louis WILPF

