

autumn 2004

# interact

## Towards a new world

Social Forums show the way  
to a world run by its people



Also in this issue:

Crisis in Haiti

Democracy in Papua

Agroecology in El Salvador

# CIIR Christmas Cards

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Message: 'With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year'. 11 x 12cm.

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Message: 'With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year'. 11 x 12cm.

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# Contents



- 4 **diary:** laying the ground work
- 5 **comment:** the desire for change
- 6 **news:** supporting independent voices

## insight: towards a new world

- 8 A diary of hope  
Barbara Ortiz
- 9 Power relations
- 10 We are creditors, not debtors
- 11 The right to communicate
- 12 Another world is possible

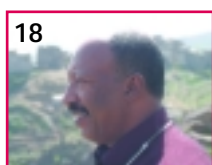


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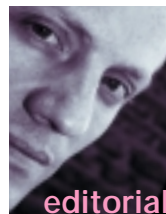
- 13 Development or devastation  
Haiti urgently needs international support
- 14 Finding a balance  
Environmental education in Honduras

## viewpoint

- 15 The democratic way  
Papuan people's understanding of democracy
- 16 The humanisation of life  
Communities that live and learn together



- 17 **country profile:** Namibia
- 18 **interview:** Abdulla Al Syari
- 19 **reflection:** sharing the dream
- 20 **review:** globalisation



## Towards a new world

Ordinary people have always been excluded from the closed circle of politicians and businessmen who run the world. It is easy to be cynical, pessimistic and defeatist, and to step back from it all.

But increasingly, people are not just washing their hands of responsibility, or wringing their hands about how terrible things are. Instead, they are raising their hands and saying: yes, I am concerned about what is happening in the world; yes, I want to find out more about alternatives to the way the world is being run; yes, I want to get involved in bringing about changes.

The social forums movement is one example of this new-found energy and conviction. In this issue of Interact, we get an insight into how social forums bring people together to question and challenge the way things are.

The majority of the contributors to this Interact are once again CIIR/ICD staff or development workers. They show time and again that they are not people who are prepared to sit back and let things take their course. They have great respect for the people and partners they work with; they are questioning, committed, involved.

With people like this raising their voices, maybe another world really is possible.

Editor

Clarification: The photo illustrating the 'reflection' column in the last Interact (summer 2004) was from Vie de Jésus Mafa, a collection of 61 African pictures illustrating scenes from the New Testament. See [www.jesumafa.com](http://www.jesumafa.com) for more details.

Cover picture: Ecuadorean women at a march for indigenous peoples held a few days before the Americas Social Forum in Quito in July. Photo: Mauricio Ushiña

**Carmen Medina** visits a project in El Salvador that is working for an environmentally sustainable future

# Laying the ground work

**U**NDER A HOT, INTENSE JUNE SUN, we arrived at the barely accessible and extremely poor hillside being farmed by the Los Patios community in the municipality of San Agustín in Usulután, eastern El Salvador.

Our group was 14 women and 24 men of eight different nationalities, united by a common interest: to get to know the agroecology work of CIIR/ICD partner COMUS (United Communities of Usulután). The work is part of a project funded by CIIR and the Big Lottery Fund aiming to reduce environmental vulnerability in Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Los Patios has a history marked by war and the unjust distribution of resources, like most poor communities in El Salvador. Community leader Don Carlos told us of the difficulties with land ownership and access to water that the people have faced for years. Through their tenacity and support from COMUS they have avoided being thrown out by the former landowner, and they are trying to improve the water situation.

## Raising awareness

After a reception in the church of San Agustín we went to an agroecological plot where we bombarded the man in charge of the plot, Alejandro Turcios, and

Marta Alicia, a Salvadorean agronomist, with questions. Alejandro responded from his wealth of practical experience and deep enthusiasm for organic agriculture. Many members of the group share his belief that organic agriculture is the right option for peasants – and they are trying, at home in their communities in Honduras and Nicaragua, to change harmful practices inherited from the green revolution of chemical agriculture.

On leaving the plot, we visited the water sources. We went up and down the hillsides to find, at the bottom of a ravine, an unprotected pool in which women and children were washing clothes, the soap flowing downriver. Saying ‘river’ does not imply abundance: it was a small current lost among the stones. The river is, however, called *La Pozona* to indicate that it is among the biggest (*La poza* means puddle, so *la pozona* can be taken to mean ‘big puddle’), and we were told that the women came from higher up the hill where water is even scarcer.

During the walk back I was impressed by a comment from one of our Honduran colleagues who said: ‘In Honduras we have water in abundance. Let’s hope that this situation helps us to value what we have.’

## Tackling discrimination

After enjoying a simple but delicious lunch in the house of one of the families of the Community Los Patios, we returned to the church, where a theatre group from Jiquilisco, Santos, performed a play called

‘The river of death’. The play fitted in very well with our theme: environmental problems and their effects on poor communities. River contamination could lead to mortal consequences in communities, especially among children, and caring for the rivers is the responsibility of all those who live in the vicinity, such as the municipal authorities and those responsible for health and education.

The play also contained messages about discrimination against women and young girls in rural areas – highlighting a key area for the CIIR/ICD environmental vulnerability project itself. Some questions we ask ourselves are: Can we ensure that caring for the earth in harmony with natural resources will also ensure the elimination of every form of violence and discrimination against women, children, the old and the disabled? How can we guarantee that other women will gain access to technical knowledge, and to the opportunity to manage their own projects, communities and institutions?

I have seen the work of COMUS for more than a decade. During this time CIIR/ICD has provided COMUS with development workers with an environmental conscience to support its unstinting efforts to improve the conditions of life for these poor communities. Despite the heat and sun, this was an unforgettable day for me: I am convinced that the most effective way for us to make an impact with our work is to have our feet always firmly on the ground.

*Carmen Medina is CIIR/ICD’s country representative for El Salvador.*

*Getting water – a scarce resource in Los Patios.*



Rebeca Huezo

# The desire for change

The social forum movement can draw on a groundswell of energy and commitment, writes **Lucy Cathcart**

**T**HE UK IS A NATION where more people vote in Big Brother than in local or European elections, and where Che Guevara's image adorns t-shirts worn by people who don't even know his name. It is a nation lost in its own individualism, where community spirit is a relic of bygone days and where people have forgotten how to come together to fight for a common cause. Or have they?

Perhaps the same discontent fuelling voter apathy is also causing many people to seek different channels to express their desire for change. The growing British movement for global justice is becoming ever more visible, as much in last year's largest ever anti-war demonstration as in the 46 per cent increase in sales of products with the 'Fairtrade' mark.

In this context, the UK was the perfect choice to play host to the

**the sheer energy generated by bringing together 20,000 passionate people cannot fail to inspire and motivate activists and onlookers alike**

third European Social Forum (ESF) in October. Twenty thousand people arrived in London from over 60 countries and other parts of the UK, all believing that 'Another World is Possible'.

After some logistical difficulties, with lengthy registration queues and hundreds left out in the rain outside the official opening event in Southwark Cathedral, London's first ESF gradually found its feet and got into full swing. Over the course of the weekend 500 events took place with more than 250 speakers participating.

Talks, debates and seminars covered a breadth of topics including climate change, gender, refugees and asylum seekers, the EU constitution, civil liberties and privatisation. Cultural events ran alongside the talks and seminars, bringing together Kurdish fabric art, Brazilian samba bands, Greek performance poetry and French comedy sketches into one vibrant programme.

One surprising oversight was the complete lack of provision of ethical food at the Alexandra Palace venue. Considering that the majority of people attending would favour organic, fairly traded and/or vegetarian options, thousands were disappointed by the diet of chips, bacon rolls and Nescafé on offer from the catering vans.

As expected, the weekend saw one or two skirmishes, with the behaviour of a small minority of delegates grabbing the headlines. Yet behind the headlines, a new sense of solidarity was being formed. At the close of the event, a spokesperson for the ESF said: 'These last three days have been a truly remarkable time. It has rejuvenated those of us in the UK and those from around the world that, together, we have the strength of argument and the passion of purpose to make "another world possible".'

However, some of those attending felt that the sheer breadth of the issues tackled, from 'sustainable fishing' to 'campaigning against the death penalty in China and Uzbekistan', made it extremely difficult to communicate any in-depth information. One teacher who travelled down from Leeds to attend the forum said: 'I've been a bit disappointed, to be honest. I don't feel I've learned anything

new. The same old messages are being preached to the converted – we're hearing the same slogans again without the education we need to move forward.'

Susan George, academic and globalisation commentator, had recognised this danger in an article published in *The Guardian* on the forum's opening day: 'At the ESF, as in every other social forum, we should cease ritual, repetitive complaining about the ills of the world and, rather, take the time to examine power coldly, determine its strategic weaknesses and decide, together, how to push our neoliberal adversaries back until at

**the discontent fuelling voter apathy is causing many people to seek different channels to express their desire for change**

last they fall over the edge of the political cliff.'

The third European Social Forum will have its critics and its advocates. Such a broad and diverse event can hardly fail to attract both. But what is certain about the forum is that the sheer energy generated by bringing together 20,000 passionate people cannot fail to inspire and motivate activists and onlookers alike towards that 'other world' of justice, peace and freedom for all. Everyone is agreed on the destination – the challenge now is to agree on the route.

*Lucy Cathcart is CIIR's membership coordinator. Christine Allen's agenda column will return in the next issue of Interact.*

## interact now

See the 'insight' section (page 8) for a view of the Americas Social Forum held in Quito, Ecuador, in July.

## CIIR launches revamped website



Anuradha Vittachi speaking at the launch of CIIR's new website.

CIIR HAS RELAUNCHED its new look website with the aim of communicating our messages more effectively and strengthening our advocacy work. The website will also give a platform for the voices of our partners and the communities they work with by enabling partner organisations to set up their own sites.

Speaking at the launch on 15 October, Anuradha Vittachi, co-founder of the OneWorld Online network, said that the Internet has the capacity to give a voice to people who would otherwise not

have one. 'The ability of partners to upload their own material is a really important concept – it changes the ownership of the material that is out there,' she said.

She spoke of the immense frustration felt by people who can't speak for themselves about what really matters to them. It was this that inspired her to set up the One World network as a 'route around the damage of the mass media'. She said the Internet offers people a powerful tool to promote change, based on the belief that 'information that's not for transformation is just gossip'.

This view was echoed by Tim Large, deputy editor of Reuters AlertNet, who also spoke at the launch. He described how AlertNet uses an interactive approach to share information and expertise and 'bring the forgotten crises of the world to the mainstream news agenda'.

## Campaign seeks to make poverty history

THE MAKE POVERTY HISTORY CAMPAIGN was officially launched in September, with support from CIIR and a wide variety of other NGOs, including charities, faith groups and campaign networks across the UK and internationally, *writes Lucy Cathcart*.

2005 looks set to be a crucial year for the British government: the UK will hold the presidency of both the G8 and the EU, the International Commission for Africa will report, and there will

almost certainly be a general election. Make Poverty History aims to make the most of these opportunities to push the struggle against poverty and injustice to the top of the international political agenda.

The campaign aims to mobilise the UK public to take action to influence government on an unprecedented scale, with traditional letter-writing campaigns running alongside new media campaigns using web-based technology and text messaging. The key issues to be tackled are debt, aid and trade justice.

CIIR is a member of the Make Poverty History assembly and will keep its members informed of the many ways to get involved in this exciting initiative. For more information, see [www.makepovertyhistory.org](http://www.makepovertyhistory.org).

## Haiti plunges deeper into crisis

VIOLENCE ERUPTED across storm-ravaged Haiti in October killing at least 45 people in the capital city Port-au-Prince alone in a series of fierce gun-battles and beheadings, *writes Finola Robinson*.

In the northern town of Gonaïves, violent attacks disrupted efforts to distribute emergency relief following the floods in September. Aid workers reported that they were increasingly becoming the target of attacks.

The country is still struggling to deal with the aftermath of the recent floods and mudslides. Thousands were left dead and many more homeless when two days of heavy rain sent torrents down the mountains in the Artibonite region, causing the Laquinte river to burst its banks.

The 200,000-strong city of Gonaïves was submerged: homes were washed away, cars were caught in the rising water and the telephone service was cut off, making it difficult to communicate with emergency personnel. Desperate residents climbed onto the rooftops to escape the floodwaters, only to find themselves stranded with no avenue for escape.

Interim prime minister Gerard Latortue called for international help and declared a state of emergency. The crisis follows hard on the heels of severe flooding in May which left an estimated 2,000 dead, and a small earthquake that hit the country in June, disrupting emergency relief operations.

International action is now urgently needed to help the country turn the tide after this year of crises and devastation.



CIIR has launched a postcard campaign calling on the British government to open a long term bilateral aid programme in Haiti. See page 13 for more details.

## interact now

CIIR is joining with churches and faith-based organisations as part of Make Poverty History to encourage the faith sector to endorse and participate in this unprecedented movement. We are planning an event in January, bringing together faith leaders, activists and politicians, to launch a year of action. Put 29 January in your diary, and keep an eye on the CIIR website for more information!

## Zimbabwe government moves to silence independent voices

**T**HE ZIMBABWE GOVERNMENT IS attempting to push through a controversial bill to restrict the work of NGOs in the country, writes *Finola Robinson*.

The bill proposes that no foreign funding should be allowed for political governance, human rights and social justice work; that foreign NGOs should effectively be banned from carrying out such work; and that all NGOs should be registered with the Zimbabwean government, failing which their staff may be arrested and tried. It is believed the bill would cripple the ability of Zimbabwean NGOs to carry out their work.

In September, CIIR co-hosted a meeting to discuss the bill's wider implications on freedom and its direct impact on CIIR/ICD partners. The meeting was chaired by Dr Steve Kibble, CIIR advocacy coordinator for Africa, and

attended by British and Zimbabwean partners. Speakers included Janah Ncube, director of the Women in Politics Support Unit, and Brian Kagoro, chair of the Crisis Coalition which comprises around 400 NGOs in Zimbabwe.

Eileen Sawyer, executive director of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Group, told the meeting that the bill is the latest in a series of moves by the government to silence all independent voices and close down all democratic spaces. The Public Order and Safety Act of 2002 aimed to limit freedom of assembly and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act of 2002 sought to limit operations of the free press. The latter succeeded in shutting down the only independent daily newspaper, *The Daily News*, and has already had a devastating impact on freedom of information.

According to the speakers at the meeting, many of the provisions of the bill run contrary not just to the Zimbabwean constitution, but also to several regional and international rights conventions that Robert Mugabe's government signed up to in August this year, including the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) electoral protocol. Ms Sawyer said that this provides SADC with a challenge, especially as South African president Thabo Mbeki has said that action should be taken against non-implementing SADC governments.

The participants agreed to take immediate action by writing letters of objection to the bill to president Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, president Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria (chair of the African Union and Commonwealth), and Paul Bérenger, chair of SADC and Prime Minister of Mauritius.

The meeting was sponsored by the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit and organised by CIIR and Action for Southern Africa.

## Namibia passes new disability bill

**D**ISABLED PEOPLE IN NAMIBIA WON a landmark victory when a new disability bill was passed in September, writes *Lucy Cathcart*.

The bill was introduced following pressure from CIIR

partner, the National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia. CIIR/ICD development worker Forward Mlotshwa worked closely with the government on the bill, which aims to improve access to services for the thousands of disabled people in the country.

Outside the capital, Windhoek, infrastructure is not well developed, and the result is profound isolation for rural communities. The new bill will establish regional disability offices, which will greatly increase access to essential services for people with disabilities.

The bill will not only help those in isolated rural areas, but also those in poorer areas of Windhoek, such as Katutura, where thousands of people live in extremely poor housing with minimal sanitation and very limited access to healthcare and education.

## People vote for trade justice

**M**ORE THAN 6,000 CAMPAIGNERS descended upon Brighton on the first day of the Labour Party conference in September to speak out for trade justice at the UK launch of the 'Vote for Trade Justice' campaign, writes *Lucy Cathcart*.

Labour delegates watched as campaigners in colourful costumes from all over the world marched along the Brighton seafront and assembled in front of the conference centre. After casting their 'votes for trade justice', protestors held a two-minute silence to remember the millions whose lives are destroyed by current trade rules.

Over 60,000 people have already cast their votes for trade justice. The campaign will be running throughout 2005 and aiming to get over one million votes.

**See the 'interact now' box on page 9 for details of how to cast your vote.**

Lucy Cathcart/CIIR



*The bill aims to improve the quality of life for disabled people like this child in Windhoek.*

Over 10,000 people from 44 countries came together at the first Americas Social Forum to debate issues like globalisation, trade, debt, the environment, gender and indigenous rights – and come up with alternatives based on the belief that ‘a different world is possible’. In this special report, CIIR/ICD staff, development workers and partners share their experiences at the forum held in Quito, Ecuador, in July, and voice their opinions and hopes for the future.

# Towards a new world

## A diary of hope

Pic of Bárbara Ortiz by Angelique Orr



**Attending the Americas Social Forum was an inspirational experience, writes CIIR/ICD development worker Bárbara Ortiz**

### Sunday 25 July

The views on the plane journey from my hometown in Ecuador, Cuenca, to the country’s capital, Quito, are simply stunning. The spectacular snow-capped summit of Cotopaxi volcano makes me think that such a beautiful land deserves a better destiny.

I take a taxi to the forum’s opening ceremony in the colonial heart of Quito, but the traffic is soon at a standstill. I decide to walk and immediately join some people from CONAIE (the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), a group that promotes indigenous rights. One of them tells me that this forum is critical for Latin Americans: ‘Since colonial times we have been oppressed and exploited. Now is the time for us to come together and come up with our own alternatives and solutions, for the benefit of all our people.’

The atmosphere at Plaza San Francisco is one of *fiesta*: it’s full of flags and banners, proudly held up by participants who have travelled

to Ecuador from across the hemisphere. I watch a blessing ceremony led by various shamans that calls on ‘Father Pichincha’ (the magnificent volcano that overlooks Quito) to ensure a successful forum and to protect the people who are attending. As I watch the music and dancing on the main stage, I can’t help feeling a buzz of excitement about the week ahead.

### Monday 26 July

After an early breakfast, I go to a plenary session about Plan Colombia/*Plan Patriota*. Plan Colombia is a US policy with the objective of eradicating coca plantations and offering farmers alternative crop options, as part of the war against cocaine and drugs. One of the US’s principal

Showing their colours: marchers take to the streets during the Americas Social Forum.





## Power relations

Nowhere are unbalanced power relations with the United States in trade negotiations more stark than in Latin America and the Caribbean, writes Angelique Orr.

DESPITE THE COLLAPSE of World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks in Cancun last year, the US attempted to push forward with the implementation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) which would apply to all Latin American and Caribbean countries except Cuba. However, in Miami in November 2003, the US suffered a setback at a meeting of trade ministers from across the hemisphere, when Latin American countries came together to reject the FTAA as it stood, recognising that it was likely to push marginalised people further into poverty.

The US has responded by pressing ahead with extensive and rapid bilateral and regional bloc trade agreements with a range of

countries, thereby fragmenting the collective strength of Latin American states. For example, the US has initiated negotiations with Colombia, Peru and Ecuador for an Andean agreement, while Central American governments are at the point of ratifying the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

Civil society in the region is therefore fighting a two-pronged battle – against the overarching FTAA as well as against the regional and bilateral agreements that are being negotiated simultaneously.

*Angelique Orr is an advocacy consultant who worked with CIIR/ICD in Ecuador on the Americas Social Forum. Angelique is British.*



A woman with a 'No FTAA' flag at the forum's march (ALCA = Area de Libre Comercio de las Américas).

Mauricio Ushina

methodologies as part of this policy is the fumigation of plantations with pesticides. During the plenary I am shocked to learn that these pesticides poison the air and the water of all the innocent people who happen to live nearby; as a result more and more people have been displaced from their homes across Colombia and the border region of Ecuador.

Then I hear about *Plan Patriota*, the military element of Plan Colombia which has installed US military bases across the region in countries like Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. These bases act as training camps for national militia, and therefore they increase internal repression.

I leave the plenary feeling

despondent about the US's intervention in the region, supposedly as part of the 'war against drugs' but in reality as a way of exerting control. To cheer myself up, I decide to visit the Fair Trade fair. I wander around the stalls and admire the colourful jumpers, the detailed work of the silver jewellery and the straw hats. I start to think about what the future will hold for these small producers, if the free trade agreement between the US and Andean countries goes ahead...

### Tuesday 27 July

I wake up to glorious weather, which gives me fresh optimism for the day ahead. I love Ecuador's sunshine – to feel its heat and positive energy. I travel through heavy traffic to arrive at the university; when I enter the

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CIIR is a member of the Trade Justice Movement, and Vote for Trade Justice is the movement's current campaign. If you haven't voted for trade justice yet, go to [www.tjm.org.uk](http://www.tjm.org.uk) and click on 'take action' or text JUSTICE to 84118 (service provided by Christian Aid, charged at your operator's standard rate).

Mauricio Ushina



A ceremony using the sacred gift of fire to thank the Gods and ask for a successful meeting.

packed lecture theatre the event about trade agreements has already started.

If anyone has any doubt about what exactly the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is, the US Secretary of State Colin Powell can explain: 'Our objective with the FTAA is to guarantee control for north American businesses over a territory which stretches from the Arctic to the Antarctic, free access, over the entire hemisphere, without any difficulty or obstacle, for our products, services, technology and capital.' If this is so, I ask myself, why would governments in the South enter into these negotiations? One of the event's speakers explains: 'It's important not to forget that strong links exist between the national elite of various countries and big business – they are allies.'

During the workshop there's a rich debate, with contributions from people of many different

backgrounds. Representatives of the indigenous movement passionately emphasise that their population will be hugely disadvantaged by any trade agreement; they are mainly small farmers who will find it difficult to compete with big agri-business. Indigenous peoples also face the threat of having their ancestral knowledge stolen from them through patenting laws. It could mean, for example, that it would be illegal for communities to use a medicinal plant extract as they have done for thousands of years, because it will suddenly be 'owned' by a transnational company.

What's more, any trade agreement will only apply to goods and capital, not to individuals. Unlike the European Union, Latin Americans living in a 'free market' will remain victims of illegal immigration networks if they want to make the most of the better opportunities offered in another country.

When I leave, I meet up with a group of friends and decide to wind down after a long day at one of the forum's cultural events; we thoroughly enjoy watching Latin American dance and theatre, before entering into a bit of *caliente* (hot) salsa ourselves...

### Wednesday 28 July

Today's the big day – the Americas Social Forum march takes place this afternoon and the organisers are expecting lots of people to take part. I decide to wear trainers – you never know if you might have to run away from a march like this: the police can be brutal.

This morning I'm going to an event about the free trade agreement between Andean countries and the US – I think it will clear up lots of doubts I have about the issue. I'm inspired by a north American speaker who explains that: 'A significant part of north American society does not support the Bush administration and looks ahead to the forthcoming presidential elections with hope and uncertainty.' She goes on to emphasise the fact that it's absolutely necessary to build alliances between social movements in the North and civil society in the South. I totally agree with her and reflect on the fact that CIIR/ICD is already building these links through its skill-share and advocacy work.

Before lunch I have some free time, so I take the opportunity to visit a traditional medicine festival, where I meet Josefina Lema, an indigenous community leader. She performs a health-assessment ceremony on me, using a guinea pig (an animal that has a great deal of spiritual value in Andean countries).

## 'We are creditors, not debtors'

Pic of Nathalia Novillo by Angelique Orr



**If there was ever any doubt, the Americas Social Forum proves that the issue of international debt has not gone away: it remains a huge problem for many Latin American states, writes Nathalia Novillo.**

**C**ONSIDER THE CASE OF ECUADOR, which is forced to commit 44 per cent of government expenditure to debt servicing, to the huge detriment of health care, education and all other public services. Debt repayments are 'priority' – they must be made every month, even though doctors

and teachers frequently have to wait for their overdue salaries. What's more, since the 1970s Ecuador has paid back its debt six times over. The deep irony is that Ecuador is 'not poor enough' to qualify for debt relief under the World Bank's programme.

At the forum, it was clear that international debt is an issue that civil society in Latin America is really shouting about: bus loads of *Jubileo 2000 Sur* activists arriving from across the region; the huge presence of the debt movement at the forum's march; a standing ovation for Sandra, a Brazilian activist making an impassioned contribution during a workshop – 'We owe nothing to anybody. We are the creditors of a social, ecological and moral debt. Who is going to pay us that back?'

But the forum was also a space for activists to come up with alternatives: one interesting suggestion is that civil society should take a case to the international courts in order to halt the repayment of this debt, on the grounds that it is harmful to communities, it violates human rights and was loaned at an excessive rate of interest.

*Nathalia Novillo is CIIR/ICD's project officer for Ecuador, based in the Quito office. Nathalia is from Ecuador.*

## interactnow

Following sustained pressure from the Jubilee Debt Campaign (JDC), UK Chancellor Gordon Brown announced in September that the UK will commit up to £100 million per year to write off the UK's share of debts owed to the World Bank by the world's poorest countries. He has also called for IMF gold to be revalued to enable debts owed to the IMF to be fully written off. JDC is urging people to continue campaigning to ensure these promises are implemented: see [www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk](http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk) for more information and action suggestions.

## The right to communicate

Pic of Wauthier Debousies by Angelique Orr



**The Americas Social Forum offered an important opportunity to broaden my knowledge and learn about themes that I don't tackle in my day to day work, writes Wauthier Debousies.**

WORK AS AN AGRO-ECONOMIST, but I was really interested to find out more about the debate on communication rights – after all, it's through the internet, radio, newspapers and television that we learn about the world and are able to form our own beliefs and values.

As I attended various seminars, I grew to understand that if communications tools like newspapers and the internet are run by business, they will necessarily promote the consumerist ideology that big business requires. Their aim will be to make money and, for example, it's rarely profitable to provide information about the world to a remote Amazonian community.

Participants in the forum suggested that communication should be a public service. At the end of the day, communication isn't a product to sell, it's a process that should be freely available to everybody.

*Wauthier Debousies is a CIIR/ICD development worker with Servicios para el Desarrollo Alternativo (services for alternative development). Wauthier is from Belgium.*

## interactnow

CIIR partner Latin America Press strives to communicate independent news on development issues. For more information and to subscribe online (in English or Spanish), see [www.latinamericapress.org](http://www.latinamericapress.org)

women, indigenous peoples, gays and lesbians, small-scale farmers – in total there are 10,000 of us, in turn representing millions of Latin America's citizens. At first I'm alone, but I soon meet up with friends from Quito and Cuenca and I march with them. After almost three hours of shouting, walking and even dancing, we complete the loop and approach the *Arbolito* once more.

It's at that point that the teargas starts. It's the first time I've been in this kind of situation and I admit that I'm a little afraid. There's a lady with a baby next to me and I help her to run away quickly – we really don't know whether the police are reloading pellets of teargas behind us. The march ends in chaos even though it was totally peaceful and I'm confused about what happened. Over dinner, I meet with fellow development workers and they tell me that the authorities decided that the march was too close to the US embassy – for that reason alone they used teargas. I feel emotionally and physically exhausted – I'm in bed and fast asleep by 9.00pm.

I chat with her about what the FTAA would mean for women and she tells me: 'For us as women, particularly indigenous women, it would be fatal. It would mean the loss of everything we have achieved after a great deal of effort and years of struggle.'

The hour of the march is upon us and people are gathering together

under the radiant sun in the *Arbolito* park. The atmosphere is upbeat and celebratory, with music and songs. Different organisations and social movements are grouping around their banners, while community leaders start shouting slogans for everyone to repeat. As the march starts, there are various groups –

## Spreading the word

**'The Americas Social Forum was a crucial event for our partners,' says CIIR/ICD country representative in Ecuador, Luis Camacho, writes Angelique Orr.**

THE OPPORTUNITY for our partners to meet people from across the region who are working in similar fields and to share experiences has been invaluable. They have returned to their communities with fresh ideas and they now feel part of an important movement that stretches across the whole hemisphere.'

CIIR/ICD supported the participation of partner organisations in the forum, for example by organising workshops ahead of the forum to explain its purpose and

themes, and by offering financial assistance for travel and accommodation costs. Benjamin Macas, from partner FEPP Loja (Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio), an organisation that supports rural development, attended the workshop that CIIR/ICD organised in the town of Loja in June, and as a result decided to attend the forum. 'Being there was a completely fantastic experience,' he said. 'When I got back to Loja I was able to do a radio interview to tell the people of my province about the forum's important conclusions. I also wrote an article for *La Hora*, our local

paper. I am planning to organise more activities so that I can share the experience of the forum with people in my community.'

Other CIIR/ICD partners were also inspired to spread the word about the forum. 'When I got back home, I wanted to call all my friends and tell them about what's going on,' said Teresa Loyola from the Paletillas community credit scheme group. 'I've found out about concrete things that I can do, that I wouldn't otherwise have known about.' Gumercindo Vicente, a rural community leader, said: 'It would be good to tell people about these issues on the radio, so that we can spread the word about what's happening – the mainstream media hide these things.'

## Thursday 29 July

Today begins with a meeting for development workers at the CIIR/ICD office, where we share our impressions of the forum over a coffee. We take some photos of the team on the terrace and then each one of us rushes off to our activities of the day.

I decide to attend a lecture on the militarisation of Latin America by its 'northern neighbour'. The room isn't too full and I find a good spot to sit down. One of the north American speakers underlines that US political, commercial and military interests in Latin America have become so heavily interlinked that they often become muddled.

I reflect on what I've learned over the past few days in terms of the US's multifaceted influence on the region – military control through *Plan Patriota*, control of business and

livelihoods through trade agreements, heavy influence and bullying tactics over political decisions. Even down to the fact that a peaceful march which 'got too close to the US embassy' meant that I was showered with tear gas.

With this at the forefront of my mind, I go to see the Michael Moore film *Fahrenheit 9/11*. My friend Fernando and I have to wait in a long queue and eventually enter a packed cinema. I really enjoy the film and at the end I enthusiastically take part in the spontaneous standing ovation.

## Friday 30 July

Today's the final day. I'm a bit disappointed that this critical event is finishing so soon especially having met so many people who share my values and belief in an alternative path. I meet up with CIIR/ICD colleagues to attend some of the



Mauricio Ushina

Blanca Chancoso, coordinator of the forum's secretariat, makes her point at the closing ceremony.

round table meetings that are planned, in order to share conclusions and next steps on each of the forum's major themes.

One of the most significant decisions is that 12 October will be a 'day of action against trade agreements'. I feel totally inspired: in the face of mega-domination by the US, it would be understandable for people to react with feelings of hopelessness. Instead, civil society in Latin America is responding with masses of positive energy and coming up with fresh ideas and alternatives to stand up to the superpower.

At 4.30pm the closing ceremony begins. The event is full of music, colour and a great deal of hope for a better future. We are invited to sing together as a way of illustrating our solidarity with one another, our hope for justice and our belief that 'Another America is possible'. I sing as loudly as I can, as an expression of how privileged I feel to have taken part in this event, met so many amazing people and witnessed Latin American society in the process of building their alternative America.

*Bárbara Ortiz is a CIIR/ICD development worker with the organisation Mujer: Imágenes y Testimonios (Woman: Images and Testimonies) in Ecuador. Bárbara is from Spain.*

## interactnow

For more information on the Americas Social Forum visit [www.forosocialamericas.org](http://www.forosocialamericas.org)

## Another world is possible, urgent and necessary

Pic of Isabelle Robles by Angelique Orr



**Alternatives DO exist – as showcased in the thousands of ideas and initiatives discussed during the ASF's workshops, writes Isabelle Robles.**

**T**HE ALTERNATIVES are also alive in the thousands of comments and reflections about a new economic model. What's needed then? The political will to implement them and the social strength to demand them.

It's important for organisations that are fighting for alternatives to define clear aims and above all a general objective or agreed starting point. This convergence represents the type of society that we want to build.

As a result of the forum, we already have the principals that form the basis of this new economy and society. They are complementarity, equity, solidarity, diversity, tolerance. There's also an agreement that the economy should work to the benefit of people; that development doesn't necessarily imply economic growth; that there must be harmony between the economy and the environment; that society should be pluralist in nature and differences between people should be respected; and that the people should have collective power.

We want 'a world that all worlds fit into', including cultural worlds and personal worlds. Happiness is to feel that you're doing well as a person, as a group – living according to the way you feel. It's not about 'having more than the rest'. Max Neef, the Nobel Prize winner for alternative economics in 2003, says: 'No economic interest can be placed above reverence for life.'

In the short term, we must not forget to seek solutions to the current reality. Nor must we forget that the changes we are hoping for are inside each one of us, in each part of the world that we construct every day.

*Isabelle Robles is a CIIR/ICD development worker with Fundación Ecológica Mazan in Cuenca, Ecuador. Isabelle is from France.*

**H**URRICANE JEANNE which devastated parts of Haiti in September is the latest in a series of disasters to have hit the country in its 200th anniversary year.

In February the ousting of president Jean-Bertrand Aristide heralded a period of instability and repression. Gang warfare compounded the precarious economic situation of the majority of Haitians, 80 per cent of whom live beneath the poverty line.

In May flooding in the south-east brought widespread devastation, with several villages washed away and thousands made homeless. Then in September hurricane Jeanne destroyed Haiti's second city Gonaïves, killing an estimated 3,066 people and leaving 175,000 in need of food, water and electricity.

Writing in early October, Benito Jasmine, from one of CIIR's partner organisations in Haiti, expressed his reaction to the situation in Gonaïves:

'I saw things I never thought I would see: I saw people dying with their eyes begging for life, people looking without seeing, crying in pain. What I saw and heard has given me strength to carry on struggling for this country, for my people, my heart. Thank you for sharing the pain of my country. God bless you. I hope that the people will help you to pray for this poor country which can't wait a minute longer for help. Words fail us now, and all we can say is that more than ever Haiti needs help.'

## Precarious existence

Behind these headline-catching events is a deeper and more fundamental crisis in Haiti, for which the international community as well as the country's ruling elite must take responsibility. Devastating as the storms of 2004 have been, their impact has been made far greater by the poverty and precarious existence of many of Haiti's poor.

Successive governments have done little to address the needs of the poor, proving unable or unwilling to put in place policies that might break the seemingly endless cycle of violence, poverty and disaster. Meanwhile, foreign aid solutions have concentrated on prioritising the interests of international trade and the nation's tiny private sector rather than sustainable livelihoods for the poor majority.

The international community has attempted to address such issues as good governance, security and elections,

# Development or devastation

**Haiti urgently needs long term international support, writes Anne Street**

Leah Gordon/CIIR



*Digging the ground on a hillside at Vallue in Haiti.*

rather than concentrating on environmental issues and the agricultural sector from which over 60 per cent of the population derive their living. During the second half of the 1990s only 0.2 per cent of the US\$560 million in foreign assistance to Haiti was allocated to environmental protection.

## Lack of investment

Investment in agriculture has long been neglected, with little money allocated for rural development or invested in developing irrigation systems, or providing subsidies for small farmer credit; government technical assistance is virtually nonexistent. Deforestation is also a major issue in Haiti, with all but two per cent of the tree cover felled. Without trees to hold the topsoil, flooding causes serious erosion which not only decreases soil fertility and the country's ability to produce sufficient crop yields to feed its population, but also makes the country more vulnerable to the kind of flash floods and mudslides which have caused so much devastation this year.

CIIR, along with other British agencies, has been spearheading a campaign to get the British government to commit more resources and support

to Haiti. We believe that in the long term Britain should open a bilateral programme in Haiti, the poorest country in the western Hemisphere, and one of only two low income countries in the region. This would be in keeping with the Department for International Development's (DFID's) stated aim of placing 90 per cent of its bilateral funds in the 10 per cent lowest income countries. By doing this, DFID could apply its internationally renowned expertise in social development to support the construction of a more just society in Haiti.

*Anne Street is CIIR's advocacy coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean.*

## interactnow

Support CIIR's postcard campaign on Haiti. A postcard to DFID calling on the British government to open a bilateral aid programme in Haiti is included with this issue of Interact. Please support the people of Haiti by signing and sending this card. If you can, please consider distributing cards to local groups, churches, etc: more copies can be obtained free of charge by contacting CIIR.

# Finding a balance

**A proposed tourist development in Honduras is forcing people to raise their level of environmental awareness, write **Nelbin Bustamante** and **Ruth Escribano****

**Y**OU ONLY HAVE TO TAKE A WALK round the Tela Bay to become aware of the mixture and diversity of living cultures on the north Caribbean coast of Honduras – not just the people and their way of life, but also the natural beauty and exuberant biodiversity.

Much of this can be seen in the protected areas of the botanical garden and research centre Lancetilla, and the two national parks, Jeannette Kawas and Punto Izopo, both managed by the Prolansate foundation.

The potential of the area as a tourist attraction was first mooted more than three decades ago. Now, plans for developing the Tela Bay area as a tourist project, for so long on standby, are being revived.

The project includes the construction of seven three-storey hotels, a residential zone, another destined for a casino and business centre, a marina, and a 27-hole golf course. The project area is within the buffer zone of the Jeannette Kawas national park, specifically on an environmentally vulnerable wetland area between the sea and the Quemada lake.

## Concern and uncertainty

The area is poised between two *garifuna* (local indigenous peoples) communities, Tornabé and Miami, and the plans have aroused much anxiety, questioning, uncertainty – and hopes – in the local population.

Although there have been some meetings with the communities near the project, there is a lack of clear and transparent information on the real intentions of Tela Bay Tourist Development, which is leading the project.

There is also concern and uncertainty about the potential socio-environmental consequences. The Prolansate foundation therefore faces a great challenge over the next months to ensure that the Tela Bay project is truly

participatory and equitable, reduces to a minimum the socio-environmental impact, and – ideally – can fit into the category of ecotourism.

The project developers must also address the questions and anxieties of the local population. One example of how to do this is the participatory and training processes being implemented under Prolansate's environmental education programme, such as one current initiative in Triunfo de la Cruz.

## Building awareness

Triunfo de la Cruz, within the buffer zone of the Punta Izopo national park, has a problem with rubbish – not just the rubbish piled up in the streets, beaches, the sea, the lakes, rivers and waste lands, but also the damage caused by bad management of rubbish which is buried or burnt anywhere in the community.

Some people of energetic character and personality like Damasia Ramírez, chairperson of the *Damuri lagani ifey* (Enemies of Rubbish Organisation), have set about solving the problem. They asked for support from Prolansate's environmental education programme, and other local institutions such as the

municipal tourism unit and the municipal environmental unit have also become involved.

The initiative includes the selective separation of rubbish, the sale of some residues for recycling, the setting-up of collection points in each neighbourhood, and so on. It is hoped that the initiative might be extended to the rest of the *garifuna* communities of the Bay, and in a not too distant future to the city of Tela.

If this pilot experience – of work coordinated among several local institutions and the local community (under the legend 'Rubbish is worth money') – goes on working as it has done, the community will become much more aware of the harmful effects of the mismanagement of solid waste on their health, the environment, their image and the economy – and in general, much more environmentally aware.

It is through such initiatives that we can hope to change the habits and mentalities of people in the South. But we also need to change the mentalities of people in the North. The financial capital behind the Tela Bay tourist project will come from countries of the North which seem determined to introduce a type of tourism that has proved elsewhere to be unsustainable.

There is a long and arduous road for us to travel to persuade institutions in the South and the North that such alternatives as ecotourism, cultural tourism, or agrotourism will help us rediscover the lost balance with nature and the longed-for social equity.

*Nelbin Bustamante is coordinator of Prolansate's environmental education programme. Ruth Escribano is a CIIR/ICD development worker at Prolansate.*



*A woman clearing rubbish from the beach front.*

The Indonesian government must learn from the Papuan people's understanding of democracy, writes **Neles Tebay**

# The democratic way

**A** CRUCIAL STEP towards resolving the situation in Papua would be for the Indonesian government to heed the Papuan people's calls for a peaceful dialogue – and to understand that these calls are based on a Papuan concept of democracy that is embedded in the people's way of life.

One example of this concept of democracy is that lived by the people of the Mee tribe in the central highlands of Papua.

The core essence of democracy in the Mee tribe is expressed by the phrase *okaina mee*, which literally means 'he/she is also a human being'. It implies that everybody, regardless of opinion, status, profession, gender, religion or citizenship is considered to be a human being, and therefore must be treated as a human being.

From this core grow four fundamental elements of democracy.

Since all human beings share the same human dignity, all are also equals. Equality, then, is the first element.

As human beings, everyone also acts in an egalitarian manner, which is the second element. One does not find in the culture of the Mee equivalent terms to Mr or Mrs, as relationships among people are characterised by the concept of *ani-aki* or 'I-you', rather than 'I-it'.

Social status, profession or gender do not determine one's human dignity. People may have different roles in the community, but this does not define their dignity as people. Nobody is considered to be higher than others in terms of human dignity.

## Involving the community

The third element is the value of participation. An activity involving all members of the community in a village is decided not only by one person, or a few members of the community. It is and must be discussed by all members of the community, including women and children.

The discussion of a commonplace activity or problem usually takes one or two days, for every opinion must be taken into consideration. Any decision taken by the community is the decision

of all, for all community members are involved in the process of decision-taking and decision-making.

The fourth element is the value of independence. In the Mee culture, it is believed that everybody is gifted by the Creator with the capacity to think, reflect and judge. These gifts are collectively referred to as the *dimi* (mind). Using these gifts, one can think, analyse and make judgements on things and events, and make personal decisions independently.

Imposing one's will or interests upon others is not accepted as it goes against the other person's independence. While one may propose something, or challenge another person to ponder an issue more deeply, the final decision will always be a personal decision made independently.

## Peaceful dialogue

Other Papuan tribes share the same concept of democracy as the Mee people. It is a concept, typical of Melanesian cultures, grounded on respect for human dignity, and therefore contains the values of equality, egalitarianism, participation, dialogue and independence.

Democracy, for the Papuans, is therefore clearly not only the end of a process. It is also the way. A democratic society in Papua or in Indonesia can be developed only through the democratic way.

Democratic society cannot be created through military operations, intimidation, terror and other forms of oppression. Such attempted solutions to the Papua issue attack the very dignity of human beings – which is why they will always be unacceptable to Papuans. For the Papuans, peaceful dialogue is the democratic way to settle problems and to create a democratic society.

In this light, it is clear why Papuans

Rob Huibers/Panos



Participants in the *Mushawara Papua Besar 2000 (Great Papua Deliberation)* at which Papuans gathered to discuss the future of their people.

have been so insistently calling upon the government of Indonesia to engage in a peaceful dialogue, through the mediation of a neutral, third party, to settle the Papua issue in a democratic way and to establish a democratic society. These calls are grounded on the cultural concept of democracy. The Indonesian government would do well to recognise this, and move forward by welcoming the Papuans' calls for peaceful dialogue.

*Neles Tebay is a Papuan priest from the diocese of Jayapura in Papua. A version of this article was first published in the Jakarta Post on 10 August 2004.*

## interactnow

Fr Neles Tebay is working with CIIR in London until the end of the year, helping us raise awareness of the situation in Papua. He is available to speak at events or meetings throughout the UK. For further information about CIIR in Papua and our current campaigns, please contact Cathy Scott on [Cathy@ciir.org](mailto:Cathy@ciir.org). For more information on hosting a talk with Fr Neles, please contact Lucy Cathcart on 020 7288 8601 or [lucy@ciir.org](mailto:lucy@ciir.org).

# The humanisation of life

Communities that live and learn together demonstrate a true respect for life, writes **Rocio Sotelo**

**'E** DUCATION STARTS when you're born and finishes when you die.' With these words in mind (from José Martí, hero of Cuba's independence struggle), I invite you to leave behind traditional views of what constitutes 'education', and rediscover the everyday thoughts, reactions, feelings and expressions that make us human beings.

I, the person writing this article, am a human being. I'm a teacher by profession and I'm Peruvian. I work in Ecuador at the Centro de Estudios Pluriculturales (CEPCU – the centre for multicultural studies). Every day I share my work with colleagues from different backgrounds – the indigenous cultures of Otavalo, *mestizos* (people of European descent) and individuals from other Latin American countries.

As a development worker focusing on the theme of environmental education, I have the opportunity to promote the 'human' side of education. Often we wrongly believe that education only takes place in schools, universities or at work. Living alongside individuals from my local community I can clearly see that people educate by example, fighting on each day with the simple tools of a smile and hope for a better life in the community. In these people I find respect for dignity, communal living, solidarity – the very respect for life that I learned in theory at university.

## Community life

This attitude is embodied in the *minga* – when, first thing in the morning, at four or five o'clock, people go out together to take part in unpaid community work on the *paramos* (highland scrub-land). Small children, women carrying their babies on their backs, old people carrying heavy trunks, men and women carrying picks and hoes, all go out together to reforest and protect the *paramos*, which are an important water source.

Don Cipriano, president of the regional water committee, says: 'We get up early, before dawn. In doing so we are looking after our future children, our mother earth. In the past, many years ago, I used to burn the *paramo* – now

Rainer Stöckelmann



*A scene from the 'paramos': the Mojanda lagoons near Otavalo.*

all of us know that this is a bad thing and we are all working to look after our land.'

María Sandoval, president of the community of Imbaburita, tells me: 'It's important to get up early to persuade people that a union is possible and that in that way – living without fighting, laughing with happiness – things are better.'

Mamá Francisca, secretary of the community organisation of Puerto Alegre, adds: 'In my opinion your community is like your own house – the place where you live until you die. We have our own land and we are here. When there are problems we have to solve them, and the solution brings happiness again.'

As Sebastián Caiza, president of the Inca Tocagón nursery, explains: 'Our community is our own culture, our own tradition which we keep alive... I value my community and wherever I go I represent my community.'

## Communal wisdom

Hearing these testimonies and seeing these people taking part in the *minga* makes me question the concept of 'development' that fails to recognise this type of effort and the value of communities organising themselves to improve their lives.

In our language, we often use terms or concepts that are fashionable,

repeating them without knowing what they hide and are trying to impose. 'Development', 'quality of life', 'sustainable', 'poverty': concepts like these can humiliate and undervalue communal wisdom. They are a western focus that attempts to give the same label to the thoughts and lives of all people.

The great irony is that this type of community work is exactly what is needed: the humanisation of life, not the globalisation and consumerism that ignores and wipes out the culture and history of indigenous peoples. These people illustrate that having self-esteem and the courage to continue living with dignity will surely be the key to surviving this wave of supposed 'development'.

I want to finish this article by dedicating it to the people of the communities that I have met and will go on working with through CEPCU; and to my friends from the project *Muyuyay* (the seed that germinates) for giving me the right to use their words – those people who from day to day quietly go on constructing a more human and just world for their families, communities and countries.

*Rocio Sotelo is a CIIR/ICD development worker.*



# country profile: Namibia

## Facts and Figures

<b>Population</b>	1,927,447
<b>GDP per capita</b>	\$1,730
<b>External debt</b>	\$517 million
<b>Population living below \$1/day</b>	35%
<b>Maternal mortality</b>	270/100,000 live births
<b>Infant mortality</b>	55/1,000 live births
<b>Under 5 child mortality</b>	67/1,000 live births
<b>Literacy rate</b>	male – 84%; female – 84%



**N**AMIBIA IS THREE TIMES the size of the United Kingdom but has a population of only 1.9 million. The population is diverse and includes nine indigenous ethnic communities with their own language and culture. The economy is dependent on a few sectors, including mining, ranching, fishing and tourism.

### History

Namibia has a long history of foreign rule. It was colonised by Germany in the late 19th century. In 1904 Namibia suffered the first genocide of the 20th century when more than 60 per cent of the Herero and Nama population were killed.

The territory was seized by South Africa in 1915 and an apartheid system was imposed. This revolved around the creation of 'homelands', a system of contract labour, marginalisation of the majority of the population and the denial of their human rights.

In 1966 the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) launched an armed struggle for independence. In 1971 the international Court of Justice declared South Africa's continued occupation illegal. Namibia declared independence in 1990 after 25 years of armed struggle.

### Politics and development

SWAPO, with Sam Nujoma at its head, has governed since independence. There are a number of other political parties but SWAPO continues to dominate Namibian politics. The next elections are due to be held in November 2004.

President Nujoma has encouraged

inter-racial reconciliation and the country's white population have stayed and still play a major role in farming and other economic sectors.

Namibia is often classified as a lower-middle income country. However, this disguises gross inequalities: five per cent

of the population control most of the country's resources, while the remaining 95 per cent have incomes below the average for sub-Saharan Africa.

The level of HIV infection within Namibia has increased rapidly over the past six years and prevalence rates now stand at 22.5 per cent. HIV/AIDS presents a major challenge to development in Namibia. President Nujoma has made the fight against the disease a national priority.

### CIIR/ICD in Namibia

CIIR/ICD has been working in Namibia since the 1970s and currently has four development workers in post. Areas of work include: capacity building with civil society organisations; support to projects working to strengthen the rights of the San people; and HIV and AIDS prevention and response. Partner organisations include the National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia, the Working Group for Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa and the Omaheke San Trust.



Young San people outside the crafts shop run by CIIR/ICD partner the Omaheke San Trust.

Lucy Cathcart/CIIR



*Abdulla Al Syari looks out over the hills at Jebin, Raymah.*

# Inside knowledge

**Abdulla Al Syari** knows what needs to be done to promote development in Yemen, writes Alastair Whitson

**T**HE VIEW FROM THE VILLAGE OF JEBIN in the mountainous Raymah region of Yemen is breathtaking. The eye plunges thousands of feet to the valley below, while all around terraced hillsides and mountain peaks surge upwards to the sky. The whole landscape treads a vertiginous line between earth and the heavens.

Suddenly, on the sheer cliff face opposite, a movement catches the eye. Two tiny figures are picking their way along a path snaking perilously down into the gorge below.

This was the path that children used to tread every day, down to the waterhole, then back up, laden with heavy cans of water for the villagers of Jebin to drink. It was the children's task, so they did it, *mashallah* (leaving their lives in the hands of Allah), even if every year one or two children would fall to their deaths.

Abdulla Al Syari, CIIR/ICD's country representative in Yemen, says simply: 'It was tragic: children were dying for

water.' So he decided to do something about it. Working with the local district health council, he wrote a funding proposal for a system to pump water up from the waterhole to a tank at the edge of the village. The project, initiated and designed by a CIIR/ICD project administrator, Adnan Abdul Fatah, was subsequently funded and built by the International Fund for Agricultural Development. As a result, children in Jebin no longer have to die for water.

## Home truths

The story, one of many quiet achievements of CIIR/ICD's Yemen programme, illustrates perfectly the way that Abdulla Al Syari works: he knows the country, he knows what needs to be done, and he knows how to get it done.

Abdulla, who was appointed as CIIR/ICD country representative in 1996, is the first Yemeni to be in charge of the Yemen programme. 'The advantages are that I know the language and the culture and the way of thinking at all

levels in this country,' he says. He also knows the problems that the country faces: 'The people are very good people, but the administration, red tape, inefficiency and nepotism is what's bad about the whole system.'

A major focus of CIIR/ICD's programme in Yemen is supporting the development of a primary health care service through training health workers. The aim is to ensure that health services get to the people: but the training changes the lives of the health workers too. Since the early 1990s, when Yemen was internationally ostracised for its stance on the Gulf War, the country has faced huge economic difficulties. People appreciate that after training 'they can work and feed their families and live decent lives' – something brought home to Abdulla when a former trainee named their first son ICD, and their second Abdulla Syari!

## Promoting people's rights

CIIR/ICD also focuses on promoting women's rights – a gradual process in a conservative Islamic country like Yemen – and building up civil society. Yemen was the first country in the Gulf area to democratise, and the country is still feeling its way. 'Yemen is moving in its development approach towards more civil society involvement. I believe Yemen will democratise in the true sense, and that Yemenis will be watchful of the rights of people,' says Abdulla.

'The rights of people' is very much a watchword for Abdulla, both in what he does and the way he does it. 'I have learned so much about myself in this job,' he says. 'I have learned how to be patient and tolerate wider responses; I've learned that people do their best when they know you are not pushing them around.'

'This is also the culture of CIIR/ICD itself,' says Abdulla. 'The spirit that we maintain, the friendship and trust in people and what they are capable of doing, produces better results.'

*Alastair Whitson is CIIR's senior editor.*

CIIR/ICD has been working in Yemen since 1974. Read more about CIIR/ICD's work in Yemen in the next issue of *Interact* (winter 04/05).

**A**FTER COMPLETING A WORKSHOP in the diocese of Barahona in the southwest of the Dominican Republic, I was invited to accompany some of the local people from Tamayo parish in their weekend evaluation and planning meeting for their base ecclesial communities (communities where people gather to study the Bible and discuss its implications for their everyday lives). To help me understand a little of their situation they took me to visit one of the many *bateyes* in the community. These are small villages in the sugar-cane plantations where the mostly Haitian migrant worker populations live with their families.

I thought I had seen almost everything there was to see among the poor of Latin America, but this was the worst yet. Housing conditions were atrocious with the exception of some new properties recently constructed through the agency of Caritas – a small glimmer of hope and concern amid the misery of these people's lives. At the edge of the *bateye* a group of women and children were bathing at the side of the road: covered in soapsuds, they were trying to get clean at the end of an exceptionally hot August day. There was almost no water in this filthy ditch, just a tiny trickle of dark stagnant liquid, the only source of water for this community of more than 100 people.

I felt physically sick and could not imagine having to live like this. Yet such situations are not uncommon in our world, where poverty is increasing at an alarming rate. Once again I heard the cry rise within me, another world has got to be possible.

In June of this year I was able to spend time in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the city in which the World Social Forum (WSF) was born. Meeting with city officials and local activists I was struck by their vision and energy to make of this unequal world a better place. The WSF process is awakening in every continent the hope that together we can build a society whose priority is the improvement of the living conditions of the poorest members of the human family.

Not content with getting the theory right, the WSF is much more about entering into a process that will deliver the alliances necessary if we are ever to create this new world. Catholic social teaching gives us a framework in which we can work alongside all people of

# Sharing the dream

To change the world, we must first see it from the perspective of the poorest people, writes **Gerry Proctor**

goodwill who are striving to eliminate war and poverty, corruption and disease, ignorance and oppression. I sense in the WSF the breath of the Spirit of God moving across the face of the earth. It is profoundly energising.

That same Spirit continues to illuminate the church through the power of the gospel message. At the start of the base ecclesial communities meeting in Tamayo the story of Zacheus was read. One of the participants, a poor man who couldn't read or write, amazed me by his insight when he said that Zacheus, being rich, and having gained his wealth through corruption, exploitation and oppression, was on another level. Being up in the tree symbolised this, and Jesus was inviting him to come down to the level where he was, with the poor, exploited, and oppressed people and see the world from their perspective. The result was an immediate change of attitude on the part of Zacheus.

This insight surfaced again in the nearby parish of Galvan when we read

at Sunday Mass Luke's gospel (14:7-14) of Jesus challenging the Pharisees to choose the lowest place at banquets. Perhaps one of the strongest intuitions in the gospel, still not properly grasped or understood in the church, is that salvation is only truly worked out from

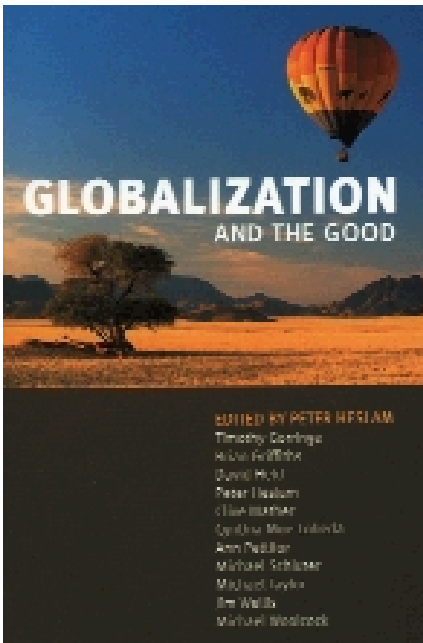
**Salvation is only truly worked out from the position of the lowest in society**

the last place, from the perspective of the least, from the position of the lowest in society. This is where Jesus is and where an awful lot of other people are gathering too, all sharing the dream that another world is possible.

*Fr Gerry Proctor is a priest of the Archdiocese of Liverpool. He is working as a member of the Marins Team delivering workshops on base ecclesial communities to many countries of Latin America, the Caribbean and the United States.*



*La Isabela, a 'bateye' in Barahona in the Dominican Republic.*



**Globalization and the good**  
edited by Peter Heslam

In the introduction to *Globalization and the good*, editor Peter Heslam outlines the purpose of the book: 'I call for greater understanding between the communities of business and of ... NGOs ... they do not generally take sufficient time and effort to listen carefully to one another.... The current volume is therefore a contribution to a listening process.'

*Globalization and the good* is a compilation of articles originating from the editor Peter Heslam's role in directing

the Capitalism Project of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC), convening Just Share which organises events in London's financial quarters, and representing the Archbishop of Canterbury in the current ecumenical process on alternatives to economic globalisation. The volume includes contributions of first class writers who bring their distinct perspectives as business leaders, academics, representatives of NGOs and theologians.

However, as the authors do not relate their arguments directly to each other, because the articles are taken from different events and contexts, the book itself does not fulfil its task of being part of a 'listening process'. The two contributions of the business leaders with their positive view on globalisation, mitigated by some minor proposals for reform, stand simply in direct contradiction to nearly all other contributions. Is this kind of contradiction really a question of understanding and listening?

Another contributor, Michael Taylor, seems to have another perspective when he points to the self-interest behind the different opinions and clearly states that the key issue is power. If this is true, the 'listening process' would have needed a balance of power right from the first part of the book, in which an economist and two business leaders look at the 'contours and potential of globalisation'. But these are only the voices of winners. What would, for example, an

Argentinian author have said?

Argentina was considered by the IMF, the World Bank and transnational capital to be a showpiece for the blessings of liberalisation, privatisation, deregulation – the gospel of globalised neoliberal capitalism. The result, instead, was a society of 60 per cent middle class transformed into a society of 60 per cent below the poverty line.

How can a 'listening process' be serious if it does not include listening to the cries of the poor? Maybe the next book of the Capitalism Project of LICC could be a worldwide debate within the ecumenical process on alternatives to neoliberal globalisation. In August, the general council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches passed a 'confession of faith in the face of economic injustice and ecological destruction', formulated in the style of the Barmen Theological Declaration of 1934 against the support of National Socialism. What about listening to this voice, where the global South could speak up clearly as a part of the body of Christ?

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Reviewed by Ulrich Duchrow, co-author with Franz J Hinkelammert of *Property for people, not for profit: Alternatives to the global tyranny of capital*, published by CIIR and Zed Books and available from CIIR price £14.95.

**Globalization: Tame it or scrap it?**  
by Greg Buckman

This book provides a sound understanding of the background to, development of and dangers inherent in the modern phenomenon of economic globalisation.

By tracing the history of economic development, Greg Buckman argues that economic globalisation is neither beneficial nor inevitable. In its place he offers a programme for reform based on developing a common ground where fair trade and localisation strategies contribute to sustainable worldwide activity.

This common ground would

require wholesale debt reduction or cancellation, 'cessation of IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programmes', reform or replacement of the World Trade Organisation, World Bank and IMF, and curtailment of the present massive power of transnational corporations. It is a tall order, but Buckman makes a powerful case.

Was it not Adam Smith himself who said that 'free trade could bring prosperity to all, provided that business was conducted with fairness and honesty'? When will they ever learn?

ISBN 1 84277 381 X, published by Zed Books, £9.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Canon John McNamara.

