

The Peace Press – February / March 2007

Getting Centered The Resistance Movement, Past & Present

by Elizabeth Stinson, Director

There is no “before” that I can refer to in the social justice movement for myself and for most of the human rights advocates I have worked with over the past 30 years. I was eleven when I first blocked a recruitment center in Phoenix, Arizona. My older brother and his friends were being drafted to go to Vietnam. I grew up watching these boys struggle with bullies on the playground, ducking nuns and teachers in the hallways, struggle with girls and sisters and parents and some of them, as alter boys. I remember thinking: These guys are kids, they are too young to go to Vietnam, wherever that is.

This is the same thought that resonates through my heart now, with almost every separation we work on and process, every interview taken. These boys and girls are kids, young adults and they are being abused by this administration and by congress, if congress and the senate do not move to put an end to this “human” sacrifice.

Years ago, there was an underground. It worked tirelessly to move draft-dodgers across borders, toward safe houses and out of harms way. The most significant “sameness” in the movement of long ago and the movement of today are the ideals. The “ideal” that we can recognize and value our differences rather than try and exterminate them. The “ideal” that we can evolve past war and violence as a recourse, and the ideal that we can elect people to represent us who insist on the diplomatic process. And finally, the most precious “ideal” that governs all others: that “all life has value.”

These ideals awakened many of us during the 60’s and 70’s and guided us through the issues of Central America and Asia in the 80’s and pushed us to organize and mobilize during the 90’s. These issues are now expedited by the most significant change impacting global, national and regional communication: the internet. With the help of the internet, the fax I would wake up to receive at 4 am from the Hague (at the end of their day and the beginning of mine) is now simply e-mailed to me and thousands, if not millions of others upon completion. The time spent trying to navigate through and facilitate long distance conference calls has been almost completely eliminated by the internet list-serve. The speed and accuracy of the movement is determined by many organizers and their access to and use of our most powerful tool to further our ideals – the internet. Use it. Keep it ours! Corporate owned media denies us the truth we seek and find on the internet.

We have to continue to educate, organize and mobilize more quickly and effectively than ever before. We also have more restorative work than ever before. Join us as part of the resistance to the escalation of violence. Join us at the Center.

This Center wants to congratulate Rialto Lakeside Cinema owner, Ky Boyd for his much deserved Human Rights Award given to him by the Sonoma County Human Rights Commission for his ongoing work to support community efforts to address social justice needs. We admire and honor the work of our friend, community activist, Ky Boyd.

The Women's Suffrage Movement

by Susan Lamont

“We can thoroughly sympathize with the impatience of a clever woman at seeing herself excluded from an arena of public life in which some masculine fools and many masculine mediocrities succeed. We are fully prepared to admit that here and there may arise a woman of such brilliant abilities that she would be fully capable of governing an empire or maneuvering an army. But such women come once in five centuries; and this question [of suffrage] is not of exceptional, but of all, women. The equality demanded is not for the few, but for the many. It is of the admission of the many to its rights and exercises that we have to treat; not of the admission of the two or three great women who may adorn a century, and who, be it noted, generally contrive to do well for themselves and rarely are participants in the cry of which we have heard so much in late years. Where real genius appears it levels sex; but this is at all times rare, in women rarest, and it is of the vast mass of ‘the general’ that we speak... the plea now raised is for the admission of all women – on the simple score of womanhood – to the possession of the paths and thrones of men.” from *Lippincott's* magazine, May 6, 1909

“Masculine fools” and “masculine mediocrities” could have access to the vote “on the simple score of” manhood. Never mind that they were all incapable of “governing an empire or maneuvering an army.” One can just imagine some early Karl Rove implying that women were asking for “special privileges.”

My great-great grandmother, Rachel Campbell, was a great admirer of Henry Ward Beecher, an abolitionist and temperance movement leader, who believed in women's suffrage and evolution. The suffrage movement had much of its beginnings in the temperance movement, which was, in part, about reducing domestic violence and improving women's lives.

In 1872, Rachel took my great-grandmother, Isabelle, to hear Beecher. Though she was only 14 years old, Rachel became a true believer in women's suffrage. I have a treasured picture of her marching with friends for suffrage.

In 1848, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and others had called for voting rights. From the Seneca Falls convention, they issued a list of “indictments:”

° He [man] has never permitted her [woman] to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

° He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she has no voice.

° He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men – both natives and foreigners.

° Now, in view of this entire disenfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation – in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States.

Their request met with considerable ridicule, not least of all from women. Cady Stanton viewed this in the context of all people and their civil liberties. She wrote,

° The history of the world shows that the vast majority, in every generation, passively accept the conditions into which they are born, while those who demand larger liberties are ever a small, ostracized minority, whose claims are ridiculed and ignored... That a majority of the women of the United States accept, without protest, the disabilities which grow out of their disenfranchisement is simply an evidence of their ignorance and cowardice, while the minority who demand a higher political status clearly prove their superior intelligence and wisdom.

In 1872, Susan B. Anthony was arrested and fined for voting in the presidential election. Mott, Cady Stanton, and Anthony did not live to see women get the vote. Beginning in 1878, a constitutional amendment was introduced to Congress. It was voted on – and failed – for forty years.

After years of protest, in which women were ridiculed, beaten, and jailed, women gained the vote in 1920. My great-grandmother, at age 62, was finally able to vote.

The Labor Struggle

by Victor Chechanover and Susan Lamont

"The copper bosses killed you, Joe,
They shot you, Joe," says I.
"Takes more than guns to kill a man,"
Says Joe, "I didn't die,"
Says Joe, "I didn't die."

And standing there as big as life
And smiling with his eyes,
Joe says, "What they forgot to kill
Went on to organize,
Went on to organize."

"From San Diego up to Main.
In every mine and mill,
Where workers strike and organize,"
Says he, "You'll find Joe Hill,"
Says he, "You'll find Joe Hill."

The labor movement has a long, and often bloody, history. Around the world, the job of a union organizer continues to be a very dangerous one. Employers are often blind to the advantages of a satisfied workforce, preferring short-term profit.

The first permanent union in North America was formed in 1794. Philadelphia shoemakers organized as the Federal Society of Journeyman Cordwainers. The labor movement was and still is a way for working people to protect themselves from unfair treatment. It also stands for social equality and the dignity of honest labor.

The Great Depression gave increased impetus to the labor movement. Strikes and New Deal legislation, including collective bargaining, swelled the ranks of the unions to include one-third of wage earners. But beginning in the 1980's, deregulation and the strong-arm tactics of the Reagan administration brought labor's gains to a halt. Union membership

and power have been severely eroded. Globalization and outsourcing of jobs have resulted in stagnant wages and decreased benefits for workers.

It has become all too rare to hear of a newly unionized business. Recently, after a long struggle – first for union recognition and then to get a signed contract – the Sheraton Marina in Petaluma became the first and only hotel north of San Francisco to be unionized. Connected to the hotel is a restaurant, Tolay, which also employs union workers. The hotel housekeeping staff gained wage benefits and the restaurant employees gained job security and seniority benefits.

It is important that we, in the peace and justice movement, recognize businesses that are unionized or that pay their employees a living wage. Though there are large corporations which are unionized, some – such as Safeway – have forced their employees to accept cuts in benefits and a two-tier wage system. Others which are non-union – such as Wal-Mart – bring down the wages and benefits of all workers. We need to be concerned about the working conditions, wages, and benefits in the places where we spend our money. Think globally, act locally!

The Movement Challenging Nuclear Power

Saga of SONOMore Atomics – building a living movement

by Rebel Fagin

In the late 70's P G & E announced that they were going to build a nuclear power plant in Diablo Canyon. In response activists in nearby San Luis Obispo organized themselves into the Abalone Alliance and invited others to participate with them in non-violent resistance to this plan. We in Sonoma County organized ourselves into SONOMore Atomics and joined in.

To participate in the blockade at Diablo, one had to take non-violent training and be in an affinity group. In order to teach non-violent resistance to police violence, trainers conducted six to eight hour non-violent training sessions. On a subtle level we learned about both feminist processing and consensus decision-making. Both of these experiences changed culture. We were introduced to the non-violent code and the very useful Diablo Canyon handbook throughout the training. The people we trained with often became our affinity group.

Affinity Groups are decentralized groups of 8 - 20 people who want to work together politically. Meetings begin by agreeing on an agenda and setting a time limit for each item. Someone acts as the timekeeper during the meeting. A facilitator conducts the meeting, but is not the boss. A vibe watcher makes sure that no one dominates the meeting. Initially this was hard for many men who were used to swiftly solving problems and not processing them. It took time and patience to learn new, more inclusive ways to maximize our strength by including everyone. Decisions are made by consensus. Not everyone has to like the idea, but all need to be able to live with it. If you really can't live with the idea then it needs to be changed so that you can. This is not about persuading, but listening – not about winning, but cooperating. Consensus saves us from the tyranny of majority rule and helps create the body collective of an affinity group.

Each affinity group sent a delegate to the general meetings to get the low-down on the actions at Diablo. Each group then decided on its own action within the guidelines of the non-

violent code. These decentralized collective actions made police infiltration difficult. In Sonoma County some of those affinity groups included the Grapes of Wrath, the Cazadero Hill People (CHP), and the Radical Ions. I'm one of the Ions and here's a case study of how that system worked.

We'd meet at someone's house and hear a report back from our representative at the central meeting. We would then brainstorm possible actions. Over time some of us became good at inventing actions, others at refining them, some at making props, others with supplying food, some provided support in the field, others support at home. As a collective we divided ourselves into three sub-groups; those risking arrest, on site-support, and at home support.

At the action some of us would get arrested. The support people would witness the action, follow those arrested to lock up, be in contact with legal, and be in court when people were released. At home support people were feeding the animals and watering the plants. All this support made risking arrest more do-able.

Direct action campaigns, when combined with pending legislation, can pressure Congress to act. This is what the 1963 March on Washington was all about. They also inevitably empower individuals not to fear the state. One goes to jail as a novice and emerges as an organizer.

SONOMore Atomics was successful. Although Diablo Canyon went on line in 1984, no new nuclear power plants have been ordered since. We've chilled the beast for the last 23 years, but we haven't killed it. As a community we've developed into people who value feminist process and non-violent transformation utilizing consensus decision-making. This requires an internalization of the value of homo-gestalt: the power of the body collective. The power of my hand is more than five times greater than the power of each of my fingers. Collective actions can achieve that which the individual cannot. This is one of the transformational lessons available to us from the affinity group actions modeled by SONOMore Atomics and many others in our struggle to make a world that we can live in.

Remembering Zion – consensus

by Jack Wikse

Zion, Illinois is a small town on Lake Michigan near the Wisconsin border. It was founded in the 19th Century as a Christian Catholic utopian community, and when I moved nearby in the early 1980's it was the site of the Zion nuclear reactor – and the scene of my first act of civil disobedience. I want to remember this action at Zion both because of what I learned then, but also because increasingly we are being prepared for another generation of corporate welfare nuclear power plants – in the name of "energy independence" and as a "solution" to global warming. Nukes, we are told are "green." The movement for humane energy sources is still alive and needed.

The Chi-Waukeee Alliance was an anti-nuke organization that developed after Three Mile Island, bringing together activists from Chicago, Madison and Milwaukee to protest the safety and sanity of the Zion facility. Constant safety violations and Nuclear Power Regulatory Commission rulings allowing an increase in the storage capacity of radioactive fuel rods on the site had brought us together with the intent to take the plant to court. Local officials had distributed impossible evacuation plans and placed radiation sensors around the

area. I dreamed of people escaping Chicago by boat, and wrote a song ("The Waukegan Blues" named for the city where I lived) some of which goes:

They turn on the gas and send you to the showers
at the end of the day just to while away the hours
'til you go home to play and sell 'em all your powers –
We're just living in an ozone haze.

The pastel nuke up at Zion
is spreading its waste through the town
where the coho salmon glow like Mammon
when the whistle blows there ain't nowhere to run...

To prepare for our action we trained for several months in forms of consensus decision-making. I think the anti-nuke movement first established consensus decision-making – the process of deep democratic action – as a practical norm that continues to inform peace and justice movements today. We contacted the Zion police and the head of security for Commonwealth Edison at the plant, and informed the local press that we would block a shift change on a specific date and wanted to be arrested.

About 50 people participated in the action, split in half at the front and back entrances to the plant. We set up some tents, played music and waited. And waited. The time for the scheduled shift change passed. As it became dark, we watched as the police and a reporter from the local paper drove away, and out of the back of the plant where I was, the Commonwealth Edison security force jumped into jeeps and sped around to the front of the plant. We ran to the front entrance where the shift change was happening and found our compatriots in total disarray. They had been beaten, swept aside, pinned down while the shift changed.

As we sat together commiserating our strategic naiveté and loss, the head of security walked out of the plant toward the parking lot, and as he passed by he put his thumb to his nose, and wiggled his fingers at us ("na, na, na, na, na") and walked toward his car. Someone said, "Let's get him." All at once we were on our feet, chasing after him. Someone, following our non-violence training, called out "Does anyone block consensus?" And I, suddenly aware that I was a part of a mob about to do who knew what, shouted: "Yes!"

All at once 50 people stopped in our tracks. There was anger, shock and embarrassment among us as we walked back to sit again together and contemplate what had happened, cry and wonder at our own temptation to retaliation. For me, Zion was a lesson in the importance of consensus, and an example of how deeply we are conditioned to patterns of violence. The Zion plant has been "decommissioned" for years, though contamination still exists all along the lakeshore. The promises Commonwealth Edison made to the people of Zion, about the thriving of their town, are long forgotten. But I remember Zion.

Questions

The following poem resonated with me. During the winter of 2001/2, I stood in front of stores and passed out flyers asking people to consider examples of US terrorism in the light of September 11th. One well-dressed woman told me that she didn't know anything about our complicity in the horrors in Nicaragua, but it didn't really matter because "Nicaraguans are worth less as human beings than Americans." – Susan Lamont

by Laure Reichel, December 11, 2006-International Human Rights Day

How much is an eye worth?
A leg? An arm?
Are two arms more than one multiplied by two?
Who will feed you, bathe you, dress you?
How about a life, what is it worth?
A child's?
Well, it depends.
Our lives are always worth more than theirs.
If they spoke our language,
worshipped in our churches or synagogues
their lives might be worth half of ours,
a child a quarter, perhaps.
But if they do not?
We call their bodies collateral damage
and who can relate to that?

Walking as Peace

by Michele Bottaro

When I visited with the women at the Women's Encampment in Romulus, NY they gave me several books about nonviolence. One of the books they gave me was about Peace Pilgrim, a woman who walked over 25,000 miles for peace. Going by only the name Peace Pilgrim, she walked every day as a living sign of peace and simplicity. She carried nothing but a comb, a toothbrush, and some letters she was answering. "I realized in 1952 that it was the proper time for a pilgrim to step forth. A pilgrim's job is to rouse people from apathy and make them think." (*Peace Pilgrim*, p. 24) I would say this is also the work of an artist, the work of art. Peace Pilgrim did not consider herself an artist however. She walked with intention, but not the intention of the walking as art. Her life was art, if she had chosen to call it such.

When Peace Pilgrim started walking she was diligent about counting the miles. With a sewn tunic bearing her name and "10,000 miles on foot for peace," she quickly needed to change her tunic. She stopped counting the miles after 25,000. I think this is significant because Peace Pilgrim's walking was not about travel, not about making it to her next destination, not about overcoming some record. Peace Pilgrim walked to form connection. Her walking is a prayer.

Peace Pilgrim said her walking was "praying without ceasing." She was quite principled, always walked every mile. I think this distinguishes her from many political peace walks, where frequently walkers "cheat" to make up for lost time, to keep with a schedule. Although I had a set and rigorous schedule, I walked every mile. This intentionality was necessary for me because without it I could not have considered The Walk an artistic performance... (and) it was easy to walk every mile because every mile added to the process of "discovering the unimaginable."

"A few really dedicated people can offset the ill effects of masses of out-of-harmony people, so we who work for peace must not falter. We must continue to pray for peace and to act for peace in whatever way we can, we must continue to speak for peace and to live the

way of peace; to inspire others, we must continue to think of peace and to know that peace is possible." (*Peace Pilgrim*, p. 99) Every home I went to, every church I spoke with, told me they were inspired by our living memorial, our living peacefully. Art can be a profound way of inspiring others to greatness.

"I think one way we can dramatize peace could be through the use of a mobile theatre. For a long time I have thought that the arts should be used for the cause of peace. Only a limited number of people will listen to a lecture. More will read all or part of a simple and interesting pamphlet if it is handed to them. Many will listen to the peace people if they can get on radio or television with their peace message. However, just about everybody will look at a drama or puppet show if it comes right where they are." (*Peace Pilgrim*, p. 160)

The Great Peace March

In 1986 The Great Peace March crossed the United States, from Los Angeles to New York City. There were 300 people who walked the entire route. They were walking to help raise awareness of nuclear weapons. They created community with their walking. It became known as "Peace City" which even elected a Mayor. They had their own newspaper and mobile school. This was a community that came together around a big idea, and remains somewhat connected today; they celebrated their ten-year reunion during The Walk... None of those walkers considered what they did to be art.

Ashes and Light Walk

A peace walk in 1995 traveled over 4,000 miles on foot from Auschwitz to Hiroshima, remembering the dropping of the atomic bomb and the end of the war.

"A pilgrimage starts out as a walk and ends up as a journey deep into the soul – of oneself, of other peoples, of lands walked through. To hold in your heart that you are walking the long, arduous miles as a pilgrim is to surround yourself from the beginning with the possibility of profound transformation. This is a spiritual experience. We of the Interfaith Pilgrimage for Peace and Life, 1995 also discovered another aspect of the Pilgrimage: It stays with you. It doesn't end with the last mile walked. You say good-bye to the people who have become close through the miles covered, but you don't say good-bye to the pilgrimage experience. It whispers a profound, new insight: you are a spiritual being on a human journey. This is what all the great faiths have always taught." (*Ashes and Light*, p. 53)

Peace Without Justice and Justice Without Peace!

by Ben Terry

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. devoted his life to working for peace and justice. Though this was his goal, he was aware of the imperfection of mankind. His Christian faith gave him much of his strength. The NAACP continues Dr. King's work.

People of all faiths pray and believe that one day there will be peace with justice. I don't feel that it will ever come from man in the condition that we are in now. Some pray that it will; others look to a divine healer. Hindus believe that God is reincarnated in Avatar as Vishnu and Shiva. Buddhists have been looking for the coming of the Maya and Buddha. The Jews have been expecting the coming of the Messiah. The Christians have been expecting the coming of Jesus. The Muslims are looking to the Allah to fulfill the teaching of the prophet Muhammad.

Many scholars from the beginning of time have tried to develop a plan by which the people of the world could peacefully coexist. Under this form of Government – Peace without Justice and Justice without Peace, history has demonstrated that this has never happened in this world. Not only has this not happened with mankind, it has not happened in the animal world. Also, where peace and justice have existed, they may have been experienced by some, but at the expense of others.

In order for us to understand what this concept is saying, we must know what Peace is. Peace is seen by many as being in harmony – peace of mind and serenity. It is an internalized state of mind. What is Justice? A state of being equal. I have personally not known peace or justice to exist in my lifetime and I don't expect it to ever exist in my lifetime. As a Black person born in the south, peace and justice have been far from my reality. Many have left the South going north, east, and west in search of peace with justice, but have not found it.

Maybe we need to try to figure out what justice is not. When we look at Peace without Justice and Justice without Peace, we must look at it through the entire process of mankind, starting first in your own household. In order for this to be a reality in your household, everyone must agree that your peace was justice and your justice was peace. And that is hard to achieve since we all are different.

Cities, counties, states and the nation have failed to produce governments where both peace and justice exist. The United Nations has a day of peace, but even that day is overshadowed by all of the injustices in the world. So this is not really a day of peace, but a wish for it. Those who observe it might be in a state of transformation and peace, but those who are being prayed for are continuing to experience a lot of injustice and no peace. That is why we Christians are waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ, because we believe that the Lion, Lamb and the little child will be able to lie down together in peace and play with each other – until that day there can never be Peace without Justice and Justice without Peace.

Ben Terry is the President of the Sonoma County NAACP

The Modern Face of Slavery: Human Trafficking

by Susan Lamont

"As unimaginable as it seems, slavery and bondage still persist in the early 21st century. Millions of people around the world still suffer in silence in slave-like situations of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation from which they cannot free themselves. Trafficking in persons is one of the greatest human rights challenges of our time." US State Dept. Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2003

According to the Washington, DC based Polaris Project "human trafficking... is the third largest [after drugs and weapons] and fastest growing criminal industry in the world, victimizing millions of people and reaping billions in profits. Traffickers subject their victims to slave-like conditions and horrific violence, leaving them with physical and mental scars and trauma that can last a lifetime. Trafficking and slavery can occur in the sex industry, in industrial or agricultural work, in domestic servitude as a housekeeper or nanny, or through forced marriage. Almost every country faces trafficking..."

For as long as I can remember, I have been aware of the scourge of human trafficking, but I always believed it to be limited primarily to other countries. But recently I read an article in my college alumni magazine featuring two recent graduates who had founded the Polaris Project mentioned above. The Polaris Project claims that, far from being a problem of poor and developing countries, “some of the most severe trafficking occurs in the United States, Japan and other wealthy destination countries.”

Katherine Chon and Derek Ellerman met while living in the same building while attending Brown University. Awareness of the problem of human trafficking in Providence, RI led them to a desire to solve the problem. They created a business plan for a non-profit agency and entered the plan in the university’s annual student entrepreneurship competition in 2002. Although it was unusual for a non-profit plan to be entered, Chon and Ellerman won second prize. With the \$12,5000 prize money in hand, the day after graduation they moved to Washington, DC to establish the Polaris Project. They are now a \$300,000 a year program.

Chon and Ellerman provide many horrifying statistics:

- 27 million: Number of people in modern-day slavery across the world
- 800,000: Number of persons trafficked across international borders each year
- 17,500: Number of foreign nationals who are trafficked in the US each year
- 91: Number of cities in the US with reported cases of trafficking
- 50: Percent of all victims who are children
- 13: Average age of first being prostituted
- \$50 million: US Government budget for efforts against human trafficking
- \$19 billion: US Government budget for efforts against drug trafficking

The Polaris Project takes a comprehensive approach to problem-solving which is both top-down/systems-based and bottom-up/community-based. They provide direct intervention for “victim outreach using a multicultural and survivor-led approach”, survivor support in the form of social services and economic opportunities, policy advocacy for stronger Federal and State laws, and movement building to empower survivors, organizations, leaders, and law enforcement.

Progress has been slow, in part because enforcement is best handled at a local level and only 12 states have criminalized trafficking. Chon and Ellerman put in 15-hour days working to change that situation. Asked if they worry about burnout, Ellerman replied “Kat and I work ninety to a hundred hours a week... but you have to understand: if we had free time, this is what we’d be doing.”

Members of the peace and justice movement often ask me “where are the young people?” Check out the grassroots social justice organizations around this country. You’ll find them doing the work to change the world!

For more human trafficking information: www.polarisproject.org,
www.unodc.org/trafficking_human_beings.html, www.humantrafficking.org,
www.gvnet.com/humantrafficking/
www.usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/human_trafficking.html

Servas: Building Peace, One Friendship at a Time

by Michele Bottaro

“Mahatma Ghandi once said that “with every true friendship we build more firmly the foundation on which the peace of the whole world rests.” People of diverse cultures around the world can help realize Ghandi’s vision by working together to find common ground and build personal relationships. Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, has said “Perhaps more than ever, international understanding is essential to world peace – understanding between faiths, between nations, between cultures.”

Servas is an international home-stay organization, a non-profit comprised of a worldwide network of hosts and travelers who meet in each other’s homes to share their cultural traditions, political perspectives and daily lives with one another. The word “Servas” means “we serve” in the international language, Esperanto, characterizing the network’s spirit of mutual respect and service.

The organization was established in the hopeful era after World War II, just a few years after the United Nations came into existence. It was a time when people on both a grassroots and governmental level were seeing the limitations of a world order in which so many distinct borders and national identities around the globe were creating barriers instead of fostering a global community.

Travelers are met with open doors in more than 15,000 homes throughout the world. As a Servas host or traveler, each member serves as an “ambassador of peace.” Through mutually arranged individual visits, participants share their backgrounds, interests and concerns. These encounters serve to create the building blocks for peace by breaking down stereotypes and combating racism and discrimination.” (from the US Servas website)

As longtime Servas members, my husband and I have enjoyed hosting many visitors, both international and domestic. With the fear of terrorism in mind, people often ask if we aren’t putting ourselves in harm’s way by opening our home to strangers. To the best of my knowledge, no hosts have been robbed or in any way damaged by Servas visitors. To the contrary, every guest we have ever had in our home has been delightful and eager to share information about their home country and thoughts on world peace, as well as to participate with cooking and household tasks. We have hosted guests from California, Oregon and Canada, Italy, Japan, Spain, Holland and Australia and through them have learned about their country’s challenges and political issues. Recently we have heard that Mexico and other countries south of the US border are becoming more active with Servas. Every experience we’ve had has been positive and enriching. It has also been a great opportunity to introduce our son to cultural diversity.

With each visitor’s brief stay in our home we have received the wonderful gift of friendship. We won’t forget the Christmas Eve when we received a phone call from a young man with a Dutch accent. He and his traveling companion had made plans that had fallen through for Christmas day. We made a quick decision to set two more places at our holiday table. As it turned out, these two were remarkable music students from Amsterdam. They sat at the piano and harmonized together next to our Christmas tree. By the time Peter and Francine left we felt we were saying goodbye to young family members. The thought of their having once been strangers was far from our minds.

Traveling with Servas or offering to open your door to travelers will leave the world a better place, whether you make a friend, learn something new about a different culture, help further peace and social justice or all of the above. The friendships you form will make a difference.

For more information: US SERVAS, Inc., 1125 16th Street, Suite 201, Arcata, CA 95521-5585. Phone (707) 825-1714; Fax (707) 825-1714; Email info@usservas.org

Next Steps for US on Darfur from africaaction.org

On December 14, 2006 Africa Action today released a major new report entitled "Leveraging New International Action on Darfur", laying out how the US can use strategic diplomacy to engage key actors on Darfur and break the deadlock over the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force to protect civilians. Also today, Africa Action released an open letter to US Special Envoy to Sudan Andrew Natsios, signed by hundreds of leaders of religious congregations and denominations from around the country, demanding that the US redouble its efforts to achieve an international peacekeeping force that can stop the violence and protect civilians in Darfur.

The report and the open letter are now available on Africa Action's website at <http://www.africaaction.org/>

Nii Akuetteh, Executive Director of Africa Action, said today, "Africa Action's new report and sign-on letter lay out the next steps on Darfur and urge new action from the US to stop the ongoing genocide. The report reveals what US foreign policy would look like if Darfur were a top priority, and calls on the Bush Administration to mobilize its international relationships to achieve new action on this crisis. The letter shows the breadth of support across the US for greater engagement in stopping this crime against humanity, as religious leaders representing millions of Americans demand protection for Darfur now."

Africa Action's new report analyzes the role of key governments, such as Sudan, China and Russia, and key international bodies, such as the African Union and the Arab League, in the Darfur crisis, and it explores how the US can effectively engage them in the pursuit of the authorized UN peacekeeping force for Darfur. It urges strategic diplomacy from the US to break the current deadlock and internationalize the response to the growing crisis in western Sudan.

The international community is running out of options on Darfur. As the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate, it is time for a new US foreign policy strategy, which leverages US relationships with key actors to advance the established goal of a UN peacekeeping force for Darfur. With millions of lives on the line, the Bush Administration must marshal all of its diplomatic resources now to press for a resolution to the ongoing genocide and to achieve protection for civilians and humanitarian operations in Darfur.

Africa Action's religious leader letter to Special Envoy Natsios, also sent to the White House, calls for a "comprehensive diplomatic offensive on Darfur from the US to ensure the deployment of a peacekeeping force that can protect the people of Darfur." The letter urges the implementation of Security Council resolution 1706, authorizing a UN peacekeeping mission for Darfur, and states that the credibility of the US on Darfur will be judged by the attainment of this goal.

The letter attracted many hundreds of signatures from prominent religious leaders across the country, including Bishop Charles E. Blake, Rabbi David Saperstein, Rev. Dr. James Forbes, Rabbi Marla Feldman, Rabbi Brant Rosen, Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Rabbi Dan Ehrenkrantz, Rabbi Jerome Epstein, Rev. Tim McDonald and Rabbi Tzvi Hersh.

In this holiday season, many are putting faith into practice, calling on the US to take new action to stop the genocide in Darfur. By signing this letter to Natsios, hundreds of religious leaders across the country are asserting that nothing short of a UN peacekeeping intervention will stop the growing violence in Darfur. They are demanding that the Bush Administration put the people of Darfur above its "war on terror" ties with Khartoum, and that the US use its power to protect Darfur now.