



Inter Pares

BULLETIN

VOLUME 32, NUMBER 1, FEBRUARY 2010

Learning and Acting Together

Last September, Inter Pares colleague Charm Tong testified before Canada's Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Charm Tong told the members of the committee that she was a refugee from Shan State in Burma, and that she had grown up in an orphanage on the Thai-Burma border. She explained how hundreds of thousands of people like her had become refugees as a result of the war conducted by the Burmese military junta. She described how the Burmese military had destroyed more than 3,000 villages in Burma's ethnic states over the past decade. She spoke of torture and extrajudicial executions of civilians, forcible displacement, and the use of rape of ethnic women as a strategy of war. These are crimes, Charm Tong told the assembled parliamentarians, and requested that Canada play a role in calling for a UN Security Council Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma.

Charm Tong was part of a delegation of democracy and human rights activists from Burma who spent several weeks in Canada last September. The delegation met human rights groups, refugee resettlement agencies, students, health organizations and community groups in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa, and Toronto. In Ottawa, they also met parliamentarians, cabinet ministers, senators, and government officials. Their visit was organized by Inter Pares and groups across the country involved in promoting democracy in Burma.

An important part of Inter Pares' mission is to provide opportunities for Canadians to learn about the social justice work in which we are engaged. The most effective strategy for doing so is facilitating the building of relationships between Canadian and Southern organizations involved in similar activities. Inter Pares has a long and rich history in organizing learning exchanges between Canadian and international women's rights activists. We have facilitated dialogues among Canadian farmers and farmers in Asia and the Caribbean. We have brought together Canadian environmental activists with those from other countries. We have introduced First Nations organizations in Canada to indigenous peoples from Asia and Latin America. In all of these activities we have found that people are eager to share their stories, to learn about change strategies in different places, and develop new relationships based on a profound sense of solidarity and common cause.



Burma delegation on Parliament Hill.

Mika Lévesque (behind) from Rights and Democracy. From left to right Sein Htay and Prime Minister Sein Win from the National Coalition Government of Burma; Aung Than Wai and Dr. Cynthia Maung from the Mae Tao clinic; Charm Tong from the Shan Women's Action Network; K'nyaw Paw from the Karen Women's Organization and Rebecca Wolsak from Inter Pares.

We have also sought to encourage the Canadian government to play a progressive international role on issues such as civil and human rights, corporate social responsibility, and environmental sustainability. Over the years, we have brought overseas colleagues to Ottawa to meet with government officials and political leaders, to testify before parliamentary committees, and to participate in important debates about Canada's role in the world. For the most part, we have found that officials and politicians appreciate having access to perspectives and voices that otherwise they would not have heard.

By the time Charm Tong and her colleagues departed from Canada, they were assured that many Canadians across the country support them in their struggle for peace and justice in Burma. This *Bulletin* describes some recent examples of Inter Pares initiatives aimed to engage Canadians in thinking about Canada's role in the world. By bringing international activists to Canada to share their experiences, Canadians can see parallels with dilemmas in their own communities. These activities help us learn from each other, and deepen our collective work for social change, at home and abroad. ✂

Collaborating on Health Across Borders



Dr. Cynthia Maung at the Mae Tao Clinic on the Thailand/Burma border.

There was reverence in her voice when Dr. Hillary Lawson introduced Dr. Cynthia Maung and medic Aung Than Wai to her Ottawa colleagues. Six years had passed since Hillary volunteered at the Mae Tao Clinic in Thailand, working alongside Dr. Cynthia and Aung Than Wai. She could not have known that six years later she would be working with Burmese refugees in Ottawa, people who had left the refugee camps in Thailand to begin new lives in Canada.

Hillary, a physician at Ottawa's Centretown Community Health Centre, works with recently arrived Karen refugees, many of whom had received health services through Dr. Cynthia's Mae Tao Clinic in Thailand. The Clinic was established by Dr. Cynthia, herself a refugee, and operated by a number of committed people who have fled to Thailand to escape the scorched-earth campaigns conducted by the Burmese military junta. Aware of the impact on local social service organizations of the resettlement of thousands of refugees from Burma, Inter Pares organized a gathering last September between our colleagues from Burma and the Community Health Centre. There was much to share about

Educating and Engaging Through Stories

Over the years, Inter Pares has sought out opportunities to bring to Canada the stories and experiences of our colleagues who work on the issue of sexual violence against women in armed conflict. We have brought colleagues to participate in community dialogues with local women's shelters and service providers, and to meet with policy makers and academics working on sexual violence in Canada. Recently, we produced a documentary film, entitled *Rising from the Ashes*, about the courageous struggles of women in Peru seeking justice for crimes of violence, including sexual violence, committed against them during the civil war. The film, available in English, French, and Spanish, traces the lives of five women and their organizations as they break the silence and challenge impunity around horrific violations of human rights, searching for healing, justice, and truth.

Rising from the Ashes was accepted at the One World Film Festival in October 2009 in Ottawa. For the occasion, we were fortunate to have Diana Ávila visiting from Peru. Diana knows Inter Pares well. She was Executive Director of Project Counselling Service (PCS) – Inter Pares' primary counterpart in Latin America – for 14 years, and played a central role in building the work of PCS and Inter Pares across Latin America on sexual violence. At the film festival,

more than 150 people had the opportunity to watch the film and participate in a discussion afterwards with Diana, Inter Pares staff Nadia Faucher, and film director Steven Hunt. Participants asked questions about the making of the film, the current political context in Peru, and progress on key legal cases involving sexual violence making their way through the Peruvian courts.

The film has provided an opportunity to engage with our supporters across the country. Inter Pares staff member Samantha McGavin facilitated a screening in Nanaimo, BC, in September 2009, in collaboration with local supporters and Haven House, a women's shelter. After the screening we had a rich discussion about the challenges shared by women survivors of violence around the world and in Canada, and learned more about the local context in Nanaimo as well as Peru. Educational tools such as this film allow Canadians to become more knowledgeable and involved on issues of social justice in their own communities and at the global level. ✎

*We invite you to take advantage of *Rising from the Ashes* and organize screenings in your home or community. For more information and assistance on how to do this, please visit: www.interpares.ca/risingfromtheashes.*

the intersections of poverty, conflict, and the conditions that affect the health of people that both the Mae Tao Clinic and the Community Health Centre serve.

Leaders from the Karen community, who knew Dr. Cynthia, were also there. They had supported the Community Health Centre to re-envision and restructure its model of primary health care so that it could better serve immigrant and refugee families. The Community Health Centre struck a committee in an effort to develop a holistic program that would address the many determinants of health in an interdisciplinary manner, while supporting people to improve the health of their community.

Inter Pares also arranged for members of the Burma delegation to meet with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to discuss how, in contexts of profound inequality and conflict, community-based health systems can be developed and supported. The experience of the Mae Tao Clinic provided IDRC staff with a concrete model. Dr. Cynthia Maung and Aung Than Wai, along with Dr. Chris Beyrer, Director of the Center for Public Health and Human Rights at Johns Hopkins University, shared some of

the challenges and successes in providing health care in conflict situations. IDRC staff found the presentation to be an especially relevant example of how community health workers can collect and analyze data that directly informs the development of health services. As Sue Godt from IDRC noted, “Dr. Maung and her colleagues have built an impressive integrated health service that not only responds to immediate needs of people caught up in a war setting. By building social capital and designing and implementing information and delivery systems, the foundation is being laid for a comprehensive national health service that can be scaled up once peace is achieved.”

Through these exchanges with IDRC and the Centretown Community Health Centre, our counterparts were able to share their years of experience and their insights with their peers. Inter Pares acted as a convener – connecting people who are developing and strengthening community-led health care systems. ☞

Inter Pares gratefully acknowledges the support of CIDA as well as Canadians across the country for their financial support of the Mae Tao Clinic in Thailand.

Building Movements, One Conversation at a Time

“Food is life.” Augusta Henriques was speaking passionately about agriculture and culture in her country of Guinea-Bissau. A few dozen heads were tilted forward, listening attentively. In the back of the room, one person listened as a neighbour whispered a translation of the West African French being spoken. This scene did not take place in a lecture hall, but in a neighbourhood restaurant in Montreal.

Since 2003, the University of the Streets Café creates gathering places for citizens to pursue lifelong learning and engage in public conversations. The Café is based on the belief that public exchange of ideas is integral to social change and building healthy and sustainable communities. Inspired by popular education, the program is an opportunity for people of diverse backgrounds to meet, learn together, and share ideas and experiences in a respectful environment.

As a long-time collaborator of the Café’s parent institution, Concordia University’s Institute for Community Development, Inter Pares contributes to making learning spaces accessible. Over the years, Inter Pares has helped subsidize the participation of those who would otherwise not be able to join in the Institute’s Summer Program, an event for civil society practitioners to learn, engage, and reflect on their work. On several occasions, Inter Pares has brought international colleagues to public conversations at the

University of the Streets Café to share with Canadians their thoughts on pressing social issues. This evening was one such occasion.

Augusta is the secretary-general of Tiniguena, a Bissau-Guinean organization that promotes environmental conservation and citizen engagement. She was in Montreal to discuss community responses in her country to the food crisis that has affected people across the global South. But that evening, she shared her thoughts on the centrality of food to culture, and how Bissau-Guineans are defending both. There was a palpable energy as Augusta’s ideas led people to share their own experiences and thoughts about the role of healthy food in their community and culture.

Towards the end, there was so much interest that one person asked – “But what can we do to keep this conversation going?” Several people lingered afterwards to discuss how they could connect with national food advocacy efforts. The Café’s role is to start these conversations – it is up to each of us to carry them out into our communities, like seeds to be planted and nurtured. ☞

To learn more about the University of the Streets Café and obtain its calendar of conversations, visit <http://univcafe.org>.

Ensuring Corporate Social Responsibility

In 1997, Inter Pares brought activists from Nicaragua and the Philippines to Canada to discuss the environmental and social impacts of Canadian mining companies operating in their countries. They traveled together across Canada, meeting with human rights organizations, environmental and labour groups and First Nations communities. As a result of these discussions, Canadian groups realized they shared common concerns about mining activities in Canada. In 1999, some of these groups, along with Inter Pares, came together to form MiningWatch Canada.

The mission of MiningWatch is to support communities, both overseas and in Canada, with technical skills to ensure that mining activities are carried out responsibly and to advocate policies that reduce the environmental and social risks of mineral development. In the last several years, MiningWatch, Inter Pares, churches and other Canadian social justice groups have been involved in promoting the development of legislation that would require Canadian mining companies operating overseas to comply with standards of corporate social responsibility.

“Overseas development assistance totaled \$50 to \$80 billion a year. But for every dollar delivered, developing countries lose ten through illicit capital flight. This is the shadowy underside of the global economy that conspires to keep poor countries in their place.”

Recently, Inter Pares has raised another aspect of corporate social responsibility – the impact of tax evasion and avoidance on the economies of developing countries. Somewhere between \$850 billion and \$1 trillion of illicit money flows out of developing countries every year. Some of this illicit money is due to criminal activity such as drug trafficking and corruption. But the largest amount of illicit capital flight is from the commercial activities of multinational corporations, particularly mining and oil companies. Aided by tax havens, dummy corporations, profit-laundering techniques, and loopholes intentionally left in the laws of Western countries, multinational corporations avoid paying taxes in the countries where they are operating. Developing countries lose tax revenues that could have been invested in schools, healthcare and other public services. The damage caused by these losses is incalculable; one recent report estimated that if a portion of these lost revenues were invested in Southern country health programs, it would save the lives of 350,000 children annually.

Last October, Inter Pares, in cooperation with the Halifax Initiative and the Canadian Council for International



KAREN KEEWAN

Raymond Baker speaking at the Halifax Initiative Conference in Ottawa last October.

Cooperation, brought Raymond Baker of the Washington-based Global Financial Integrity program to Canada. Mr. Baker, an international expert on this aspect of corporate responsibility, spoke with Canadian NGOs as well as government officials to highlight the problem. Baker pointed out that throughout the 1990s and in the current period, overseas development assistance to poor

countries has totaled about \$50 to \$80 billion a year. But for every dollar delivered in the form of aid, developing countries lose ten through illicit capital flight. This is the shadowy underside of the global economy, Baker said, that conspires to keep poor countries in their place.

Western governments have been well aware of the implications of this problem for Southern countries but have ignored it. The current economic crisis, however, has demonstrated that corporate tax avoidance and evasion are also major problems for Western countries, including Canada, and the issue is now on the agenda of the G20. To date, however, proposals to reduce harmful tax practices are woefully inadequate and, in the absence of public pressure, the situation is unlikely to change.

In June of this year, the G20 will meet in Canada. Inter Pares and our colleagues in the social justice movement will continue to press for international standards of corporate social responsibility. After all, the private wealth of corporations is generated through access to the environmental commons, public subsidies, infrastructure, a trained workforce, and our publicly funded social systems. We must ensure that corporations make a fair contribution back to the public good and to the protection of the environment. ☞

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ISSN 0715-4267

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With the support of thousands of Canadians, Inter Pares works in Canada and around the world with social change organizations who share the analysis that poverty and injustice are caused by inequities within and among nations, and who are working to promote peace, and social and economic justice in their communities and societies.

Charitable registration number (BN) 11897 1100 RR000 1.
Financial support for the *Bulletin* is provided by the Canadian International Development Agency.

