



Inter Pares

BULLETIN

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The Gradual Instant – Change from the Ground Up

“Nothing is sudden...Just as the Earth invisibly prepares its cataclysms, so history is the gradual instant.”

– Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*

This was a year of revolution. The media were splashed with gripping images and stories of popular uprisings toppling brutal dictatorships. Starting with Tunisia and Egypt, popular revolt spread like wildfire all over Africa and the Middle East. The ‘Arab Spring’ brought down dictators that had been entrenched for decades. Risking everything, people took to the streets by the millions, refusing to relent even in the face of horrible repression. They denounced authoritarianism, corruption, and wrenching poverty. They demanded freedom, democracy, and justice. Across Europe as well, popular protest against crushing economic austerity spread quickly, in a massive display of discontent and a willingness for people to take their destinies into their own hands.

For many of us watching these historic events unfold, it may have seemed unpredictable, out of nowhere. But these events were flames that erupted from long and slow burning embers. In the majority of countries in Africa and the Middle East, people have suffered decades of authoritarian rule, the curtailment of political freedoms, and economies that siphon wealth to a small elite. All of this has been sustained by Western powers who purchased political ‘stability’ in the region at the price of people’s dignity and freedom. From the grinding poverty and the political suffocation erupted protest, drawing on histories of strong labour movements, civil societies, feminist movements, and progressive intellectuals who once thrived in these countries.

This wave of unrest spread into Sudan, ruled by fierce authoritarianism. Still, students dared take to the streets, drawing courage from the uprisings. Although these protests were not sustained, the work of brave activists and their organizations in Sudan – including Inter Pares counterparts – continues. This work is sustained by the legacy of a once-strong progressive civil society, and an especially strong women’s movement.

These events showed us that even under the most difficult conditions, the desire for freedom and justice, and the will to control our own destinies, is alive in people all over the world; that sometimes the most intransigent governments can be held to account or even be brought down. The past year proved that in trying times, the collective will of people can be asserted and can bring about change.



Protest in Khartoum, Sudan for women’s rights and political participation.

Yet the journey ahead is long. The advances in Africa and the Middle East have been uneven and costly – responses from governments have ranged from limited democratic concessions to all-out war on their peoples. But we’ve seen that people will organize to realize their dreams for a better world, and that moments of revolution arise out of the slow and patient work of building community and organizing ourselves around shared goals.

This is the work of Inter Pares and our counterparts. We educate, facilitate, mobilize, and galvanize, working in and with communities to build skills and ideas to bring about change. The dream of social change guides us, and together we nurture this hope with the daily work of social mobilization, organizing communities and building skills to build alternatives. Together we raise awareness about human rights; promote leadership in marginalized communities, especially the leadership of women; build the capacity of people to get organized; defend the rights of people to be treated with dignity; and challenge the economic and political systems that have for so long entrenched inequality and exclusion.

We believe that our best hope for change comes from everyday people and our ability to come together, to develop ideas about the world we want to build, and to start building it now. We do not wait for change to come – we make change every day. In this *Bulletin*, we share stories of individuals and organizations mobilizing for the change they want to see. Inter Pares is proud to conspire with so many inspiring organizations and movements around the world and in Canada, as we make our own “gradual instants” of history. ✂

Agustín Jiménez: Constructing Peace in Colombia



PCS COLOMBIA

Agustín Jiménez is adamant that the path to peace must include human rights. In the late 1980s, he witnessed the deterioration of human rights in Colombia as the internal armed conflict escalated. He vividly remembers how local community leaders, union organizers, and others who stood up for their rights were the targets of illegal detention, torture, forced disappearance, and murder.

Fresh out of law school in the early 1990s, Agustín became an advocate for human rights defenders with the local chapter of the Political Prisoners Solidarity Committee (CSPP) in Barranquilla, on the Atlantic coast of Colombia. Agustín assisted peasant communities with legal advice, supporting their efforts to remain on their land despite the violence directed against civilians by all the factions in the armed conflict. He took on legal cases of grassroots leaders detained arbitrarily, and advocated for prison conditions that met basic international humanitarian standards. At that time, these were risky activities and led to threats against Agustín, his colleagues, and their families.

In the mid-1990s, severe threats led Agustín to seek refuge in Bogotá, Colombia's capital city, where he was elected National President of the CSPP. He took on the high-profile role of a national human rights spokesperson – engaging in dialogue with the Colombian government, embassies, international organizations, and the United Nations. He collaborated with various organizations to build a national movement mobilizing communities who had suffered human rights violations at the hands of the military and the paramilitaries during the ongoing armed conflict.

This movement (MOVICE) now has chapters in 18 regions of Colombia and more than 350 member organizations – a remarkable achievement. MOVICE is a driving force behind policies and programmes that brings victims' voices to the construction of a peaceful Colombia.

Today Agustín collaborates closely with Inter Pares as a program officer with Project Counselling Service (PCS), our counterpart of over 30 years. Through PCS, Agustín continues to support CSPP and MOVICE to advance their dream of a peaceful Colombia, where the human rights of all are respected and authentic democracy is the avenue for change. Inter Pares is a proud supporter and contributor to this vision. ✎

give something **BIG**

Social Justice

It's big this year.

Inter Pares Holiday Tribute Card Campaign

This holiday season, give those on your list a chance to create a better world and send cards with meaning. Giving is good, but giving good is better.

How It Works

Make a gift and send an e-card to up to 10 recipients, or print your e-card to deliver by hand. Or make a gift by December 1st and have us mail a paper card on your behalf.

Choose from 5 Give Something Big designs or our general holiday design.

www.interpares.ca/GiveSomethingBig

Yao Graham: Imagining the Unimaginable

In 1982, as a young Ph.D. student, Yao Graham made a radical decision – he left a full scholarship in England to return to his native Ghana and join the struggle for social justice.

It was a pivotal period in Ghana's history. For the next seven years Yao worked amidst political upheaval defending workers' rights. He endured imprisonment and violence. Those years cemented Yao's deep conviction that the imbalance of power between the marginalized and elite in all societies needs to fundamentally change.

Eventually Yao completed his studies and co-founded Third World Network-Africa (TWN-Africa), an organization that Inter Pares has supported since its creation in 1994. Through Yao's leadership and the expertise of its staff, TWN-Africa has become one of the continent's leading policy and campaigning organizations on economic justice and the environment. TWN-Africa conducts research on issues such as resource extraction, climate change, and the economy. It critiques national and international policies, and proposes solutions that address local, national, and pan-African concerns.

TWN-Africa has successfully led the movement to transform the debate on mining in Africa. In the late 1990s, the organization was accused of compromising economic stability due to its critique of structural adjustment, foreign

investment, and resource extraction. Today, governments have realized the very limited benefits of their relationship with foreign corporations and have enlisted the expertise of organizations like TWN-Africa to help change that relationship. According to Yao, just a few years ago, this was unimaginable.

TWN-Africa analyzes mining projects for their impact on community well-being, human rights, the environment, and the economy. Through the establishment of the National Commission on Mining, they have helped mining-affected communities in Ghana hold government and corporations accountable to local concerns. And TWN-Africa has broadened its impact across the continent through founding a pan-African network called the African Initiative on Mining, Environment and Society.

Yao's life's work is evidence that persistent, informed advocacy, coupled with strong social organizing and mobilization, can create change. Inter Pares will continue to collaborate with TWN-Africa in its quest for greater transparency, accountability, and justice in Africa and around the world. ☞



RITA MORBIA

Junice Melgar: Filipino Women Speaking for Themselves

Junice Melgar traces her days as an activist in the Philippines to her time in high school under the cloud of the Marcos dictatorship. She remembers barbed wire around her school and the military rummaging through students' personal effects. Later, as a medical student, she joined the national liberation struggle.

It was a difficult time, one of secrecy, fear and violence. Junice was involved in providing free medical services to rural communities, particularly women. Listening to them, she realized the depth of entrenched patriarchal attitudes and the suffering they caused countless women. It awakened the feminist in her.

Junice was also inspired by the agency of women in the communities in which she worked. The women did their own political analyses and proposed solutions. "My job," says Junice, "was to ensure that these women could speak and act on their own behalf. And that is still what I and Likhaan do today."

In the post-Marcos period, Junice and other health activists formed Likhaan, one of the country's leading women's health organizations. Through organizing and training women in slum areas as community health workers and advocates, Likhaan has created innovative and effective community-based women's health programs. Inter Pares has supported these programs since their inception in 1995.

Currently, in collaboration with other organizations, Likhaan is advocating for the passage of the Philippines Reproductive Health Bill (RHB). This bill would reduce maternal deaths through the provision of quality health services for pregnant women, emergency obstetric care, family planning and contraception, and health education for youth. According to a recent study by Likhaan and the Guttmacher Institute, increasing access to contraception for all women at risk of unintended pregnancy in the Philippines would prevent an astounding 2,100 maternal deaths annually.

As part of their advocacy campaign, Likhaan and the communities with whom they work have raised their voices in support of the RHB – on the streets, in the media, and in the Philippines Congress – with some success. Though progress has been slow, many believe the bill will become law.

Inter Pares proudly supports the work of Junice, Likhaan and their community partners, inspired by their perseverance and courage. ☞



LIKHAAN

A Not-So-MINI Campaign for Change



Millet, a traditional food crop consumed all over the world.

In 2009, when Inter Pares staff member David Bruer was in India to visit our counterpart the Deccan Development Society (DDS), they gave him a T-shirt that proclaimed him an advocate for the “miracle of millets.” David was a bit skeptical. Sure, millet is good – the traditional food crop for many people in dry climates – but miraculous?

Farmers throughout large areas of Asia and Africa were once major producers of millet, but as governments adopted Green Revolution technologies, the emphasis was shifted to rice and wheat production. Millet was relegated to the status of the crop for the poor, one that “civilized” people did not eat. Yet millet is far more nutritious than rice or wheat and doesn’t require such high levels of chemical fertilizers or irrigation. Growing millet also has other benefits, serving as animal fodder, fencing and roofing, and improving soil fertility and carbon sequestration.

In 2008, at the height of the global food price crisis, Inter Pares was able to respond to DDS’ request for start-up money to convene farmers, environmentalists, academics, and policy makers in India for a national consultation on millet. This led to the creation of the Millet Network of India (MINI), which now has membership from 18 states and local chapters in five regions.

With Inter Pares’ support, MINI advocates for practical measures to promote millet. It has convinced some local governments to introduce millet in the public daycare and primary school meal programs. It has reached out to the media and the public through food festivals, films, radio shows, and recipe books. A key strategy was to ask that millet be included in the state food security system, known as the Public Distribution System (PDS), in order to guarantee stable prices and markets for millet producers. MINI also insisted on local sourcing to ensure that millet production not be taken over by industrial farmers, but rather that small-scale farmers across the country continue to have a market for their crops.

In response to the food crisis, India’s National Advisory Committee on Food Security, chaired by Sonia Gandhi, was tasked with looking at how the government should address food security. MINI was thrilled by the committee’s 2011 report, which recommended that millet should be included in the PDS and that the government establish a system for local sourcing of millet for the fair-price stores of the PDS.

Of course the recommendations must be put into law and implemented, but enthusiasm is high and MINI is optimistic. The experience has shown that people coming together to advocate for change can make a difference – in fact, it can be miraculous. ☘

Advocacy for Food Sovereignty in Canada – the People’s Food Policy

The result of two years of hard work, 350 kitchen table discussions, three cross-country conferences and hundreds of online submissions, the People’s Food Policy was launched on April 18, 2011 during the federal election campaign. Inter Pares was one of the leaders of this initiative, which engaged over 3,500 farmers, indigenous peoples, fishers, urban activists and others.

The launch of the policy received extensive media coverage, in Canada and internationally, and won the endorsement of two political parties, as well as of influential Canadians such as respected environmentalists David Suzuki and Laure Waridel. Food Secure Canada is now leading the efforts to turn its recommendations into concrete policies, laws, and regulations.

Check out the policy and its recommendations for changing Canada’s food system at: <http://peoplesfoodpolicy.ca/home>.

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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.

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