

# Inter Pares

**Highlights 2011** *Inter Pares contributed more than \$4.1 million in financial support, as well as political and organizational assistance, to our counterparts in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Canada. The following are highlights of our activities in 2011 promoting peace and social and economic justice. For more information, photos, and stories, visit [www.interpares.ca](http://www.interpares.ca).*



Anna Paskal (left), Cathleen Kneen (centre) and Amanda Sheedy (right) at the press conference for the launch of the People's Food Policy Project.

## Canada

dedicated team. The People's Food Policy is both a vision and a path towards food sovereignty in Canada: food localism; a shift to ecological food production and harvesting; the enactment of a federal program to eliminate and prevent poverty; the creation of a nationally funded strategy on children and food; and greater democratic decision-making over the food system. **Food Secure Canada**, a national alliance, has adopted the People's Food Policy and is planning to promote its implementation.

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In support of our international colleagues' efforts to prevent human rights abuses and environmental damage from Canadian mining companies operating in their countries, Inter Pares collaborated closely with **MiningWatch Canada** and the **Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability** to promote binding accountability measures for both

Canadian mining companies and for government subsidies for overseas mining. Bill C-300, a private member's bill, would have obliged the Canadian government to investigate allegations of abuse by Canadian mining companies operating outside the country, and if wrongdoing were confirmed, to withdraw its support. During its review in Parliament, thousands of Canadians wrote in support; it was praised by government officials where Canadian mining companies operate; and the bill was welcomed by UN officials, as well as villagers and organizations from hundreds of communities worldwide. In the end, it was defeated by only six votes. Bill C-300 demonstrated however that the Canadian public and our elected representatives recognize that voluntary guidelines aren't working, and take seriously the need for tougher regulation.

Thirty years ago, Inter Pares was deeply involved in a landmark civic inquiry into the Canadian food system – the People's Food Commission. Building on its legacy, Inter Pares helped initiate a massive grassroots policy-making process that was called the **People's Food Policy Project**. Launched on April 18th 2011, *Resetting the Table: a People's Food Policy for Canada* is the fruit of the past three years of work by a



Mural inside the Casa del Migrante Tecun Uman safehouse.

## Latin America

these meetings due to lack of travel funds. ONIC and Inter Pares collaborated this year to overcome this simple logistical detail. In addition to offering a fund specifically dedicated to the participation of women in governance meetings, Inter Pares also supported them in planning for their participation and input, which they had developed earlier with other indigenous women during the National Assembly of Indigenous Women in Colombia. As a result of this support, indigenous people in Colombia have better governance systems which reflect and address the issues and perspectives of women.

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In July 2011, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Migrants of the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights traveled to Mexico. His objective was to observe the conditions Central American migrants face as they journey through Mexico on their way to the

United States. On that occasion, **Project Counselling Service (PCS)** organized a delegation from Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, representing organizations of migrants' families, to meet with the Rapporteur. Delegates testified to the terror and insecurity their family members faced while undertaking this journey. In recent years, threats to migrants' security have significantly increased, including disappearance, trafficking, sexual abuse, kidnapping, and murder. Following this meeting, the Rapporteur issued a series of recommendations, highlighting several issues raised by the PCS delegation. The report called for measures to protect migrants and those who defend their rights, including the establishment of migrant service centres along migration routes. His report was a sharp reminder to the Mexican government of its responsibility to ensure migrants' safety and security while in Mexico.

In Colombia, Inter Pares supported the **National Organization of Indigenous People of Colombia (ONIC)** in their efforts to foster women's participation in indigenous governance. Since 2008, ONIC has been developing a unique system of governance where members of each community and indigenous nation can delegate a representative to decision-making bodies at the regional and national level. Indigenous women are often prevented from participating in

# Asia



REBECCA WOLSKAK

Tham Hin camp is in Thailand and hosts just over 7,500 refugees from Burma.

In the Philippines, **Likhaan**, a women's health organization, works in some of the poorest slum areas of Manila. Likhaan's trained community health workers served over 7,500 patients this past year, providing a range of services, particularly related to reproductive health. In 2011, Likhaan also worked closely with grassroots women's and youth organizations to push for the enactment of the Philippine Reproductive Health Bill, which would mandate a comprehensive array of national and municipal initiatives to reduce maternal and infant mortality, provide emergency obstetric care, and ensure access to family planning.

The November 2010 national elections in Burma resulted in many of the military regime's officers assuming civilian office. The establishment of a "new government" opened the door to cautious optimism for political change; however, a simultaneous escalation of violence in eastern Burma is largely being ignored. In this context, the **Thailand Burma Border Consortium** has continued to supply basic food requirements to over 140,000 refugees in camps in Thailand, and almost 20,000 internally displaced people in Burma. As well, the new regime continues the massive exploitation of natural resources, and it is often near these development projects that conflicts have broken out. The Myitstone Dam would flood an area sacred to the Kachin people about the size of Toronto, displace tens of thousands of people, and, irreversibly damage one of the world's most biodiverse areas. The **Burma Relief Centre** has supported groups like Burma Rivers Network and the Kachin Development Network Group to educate communities about the expected impacts of the dam. Their

efforts paid off – on September 30th, 2011 the regime caved to public pressure and agreed to suspend further construction.

Over the past year, Bangladeshi civil society organization **Nijera Kori** continued to expand its work with "watch committees" to enable the poorest members of society to monitor the actions of local and national authorities, demanding transparency and accountability. Four local governance watch committees monitored the process for granting agricultural subsidy cards to farmers. Their actions resulted in wealthy landowners' names being removed from the list, which ensured that 2,720 poor farmers obtained subsidy cards. Education watch committees identified and pushed for correction of irregularities in the granting of scholarships in seven primary schools, ensuring that the poorest children received the support to which they were entitled. Inspired by this success, Nijera Kori watch committees will launch even more activities to keep local authorities accountable.

# Africa



PIERRE CAMPREDON

Harvesting rice on the island of Formosa, Guinea-Bissau.

**Tinguena**, an organization in Guinea-Bissau which Inter Pares helped found, works on issues such as food sovereignty, control over local resources, youth leadership, and biodiversity conservation. In March, Tinguena convened a forum on land grabs which led to significant mobilizations in the countryside and in the capital city of Bissau, pressuring the government to ensure that Guinea-Bissau's lands are not taken over by foreign corporations. During the course of the year, which marked its 20th anniversary, Tinguena organized

a country-wide event entitled "Eat National – Eat Natural," celebrating the wealth of local foods, and fostering greater appreciation for buying local rather than imported foods.

In Ghana, with the help of **Third World Network Africa** (TWN-Africa), local communities succeeded in securing an agreed framework for fair compensation from Canadian-owned Chirano Gold for the contamination caused by its open-pit mine. While TWN-Africa advises many mining-affected communities, it also works on the prevention of harmful effects. As the Economic Commission for Africa undertakes its reform of Africa's mining policies, TWN-Africa has been ensuring that the Commission receives direct input from people most affected by mining. TWN-Africa is also working with communities to promote national policies that support farming and other land uses that benefit local economies and preserve a healthy and safe environment.

In July 2011, while the world's attention focused on the creation of a new state, the Republic of South Sudan, Sudanese women were facing violence daily in both the North and the South. The **Sudanese Organization for Research and Development** (SORD), based in Khartoum, North Sudan, advocates for changes in family law that would enshrine the full rights of women and girls and outlaw discriminatory practices. To this end, SORD produced a documentary film this year to denounce unjust laws and practices that endanger women's and girls' rights and well-being, such as marriage of girls who are but ten years old. The film powerfully illustrates the direct and devastating consequences these practices have on women and girls. Inter Pares is working with SORD and other women's groups in North Sudan to ensure that gender equality remains a priority in the country's political agenda during this period of transformation.

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