

Building Bridges

Building a Culture of Peace

by Toh Swee-Hin (S.H.Toh)

As the world moves towards the beginning of a new century, much public attention and fear has centred on the potential Y2K "crisis". However, considering the major problems and suffering that have been afflicting billions of human beings over the past century, the hype about Y2K and its possible negative consequences seems overdone. It is much more meaningful to reflect on the UN Declaration of 2000 as the International Year for the "Culture of Peace", and grasp this as an opportunity for all peoples, communities, institutions, nations and movements to join hands, minds, hearts and spirit in moving towards a nonviolent, just, compassionate and sustainable world.

In this declaration, the United Nations is not only reminding the world community of the scourge of war, the continuing nuclear threat, and other manifestations of direct physical violence. We are also being called on to acknowledge and to overcome violence in all its multiple physical and non-physical forms and levels. As UNESCO has emphasized in its pioneering transdisciplinary program established in 1992:



Youth in Nicaragua • photo: Erin Kelly

"A culture of peace is a growing body of shared values, attitudes, behaviors and ways of life based on non-violence and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, on understanding, tolerance and solidarity, on the sharing and free flow of information and on the full participation and empowerment of women. While it does not deny the conflicts that arise

from diversity, it demands non-violent solutions and promotes the transformation of violent competition into co-operation for shared goals. It is both a vision and a process, a vast project, multi-dimensional and global, which is linked to the development of positive alternatives to the functions previously served by war and militarism."

Besides the numerous UNESCO-initiated conferences and forums and efforts by some governments to implement national Culture of Peace programs, a very recent and inspiring demonstration of how a culture of peace is being weaved slowly but surely all over the world occurred at the Hague Appeal for Peace in May this year. At this historic event, over 8000 people representing groups, movements, communities, institutions and agencies, including the UN Secretary-General, several Nobel Peace laureates, and NGOs from every sector, shared ideas, strategies, lessons, hopes and dreams for building a more peaceful, just, sustainable and compassionate world. Building a culture of peace, as reflected in these ever-expanding circles of transformation, is like weaving a tapestry from multiple threads.

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Salvadoran Campesinos Launch Campaign to Prevent Further Flooding

by Ricardo Acuña

This past month, members of the Change for Children staff had the opportunity to meet with a representative of the Zonacosta Pastoral Team from the Department of Usulután in El Salvador. As many readers already know, Change for Children has partnered with the Pastoral Team to support a number of rural development initiatives with the agrarian reform cooperatives in that region of El Salvador. Most recently, we have received conditional approval from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for an irrigation project in the cooperative of La Maroma (please see September 1999 issue of Building Bridges).

Many of the cooperatives in the area border on the Lempa river. We were saddened to hear that the river has overrun its banks twice in the last year – not including the devastating flooding caused by Hurricane Mitch last year. The floods have caused substantial damage in terms of crop and housing losses. The government of El Salvador has received international funding for the building up of dikes along the riverbanks, but only one side has been done to date, and the rest of the money has disappeared. In addition, the government has been unwilling to offer any support to the cooperatives in the area in terms of compensating for crop losses and damages resulting from the flooding.

As a result, the 26 communities in the area that border on the Lempa river have decided to take matters into their own hands. They have organized themselves into a group calling itself the United Communities of the Lower Lempa. Together, they began looking at

possible methods of taking action to stop the constant flooding. After substantial consultation and research, they decided their plan of action would be to purchase heavy duty nylon bags, fill them with sand, and build up dikes along the river banks themselves. The communities have chipped in their own resources and volunteer labour, and have already begun building. The river has already risen a number of times since they began, and the retaining walls they are building have held.

Unfortunately, the financial resources of the communities in the area are minimal. In order to complete the entire length of dike they need to purchase and fill approximately one million nylon bags. At a cost of one *colon* (approximately \$0.17 Canadian) per bag, the cost will be substantial. In our meeting, we were asked if Change for Children

would be able to support this task in any way. Unfortunately, the government agencies we receive funding from would not likely fund this type of initiative. We did, however, suggest that we would publicise their appeal here in the newsletter and hope that our members and supporters would respond. It is our hope that, through the generosity of our supporters, we would be able to fund a large portion of the one million bags required.

If you would like to make a contribution to this project, please fill out the donation form on the back page and mark that you would like it directed to the "Lower Lempa Project." If you would like more information about this project, the current conditions in the region, or any of the projects that Change for Children supports, please contact Ricardo at the Change for Children office, 448-1505.



Children swim in the Lempa River near Nueva Esperanza, El Salvador

Project Accompaniment Guatemala Committee Joins with CFCA

by Randy Kohan

For many years, **Project Accompaniment** was a nation-wide solidarity network that supported the return of Guatemalan refugees to their homeland from United Nations camps in southern Mexico. The return process ended in December of 1998. Over 48,000 refugees returned home and another 22,000 refugees chose to remain in Mexico and become Mexican citizens. From 1992 - 1998, Project Accompaniment sent over 150 Canadians to Guatemala to provide "physical accompaniment" for the refugees. During those same years, our Edmonton group of "Project A" sent 10 volunteers and conducted countless educational and fundraising events.

While the return process has ended and Peace Accords have been signed, the people of Guatemala continue to suffer from human rights abuses and poverty. The assassination of Bishop Juan Gerardi in April of 1998 is a primary example. Bishop Gerardi was killed two days after he presented a three year study indicating that the vast majority of massacres and human rights abuses committed during the 36 year civil war were committed by the Guatemalan military.

For these reasons, in the summer of 1999, we as "Project A" in Edmonton joined Change for Children in order to continue working in solidarity with Guatemala. As the **Project Accompaniment Guatemala Committee of Change for Children Association**, we are uniting our energies, resources and experience, in order to continue supporting those struggling for true peace and justice in Guatemala. This means sending out Urgent Action requests (where volunteers write letters

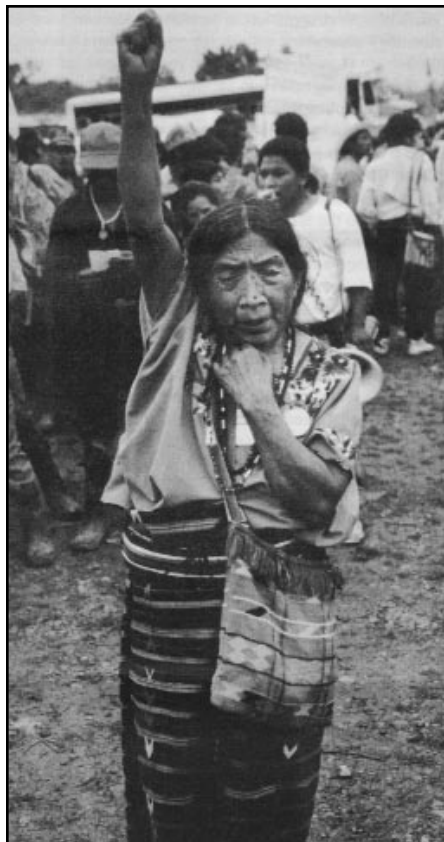


photo: Louise Sevigny

advocating on behalf of people at risk in Guatemala), participating in delegations to and from Guatemala, and continuing to do educational work. It also means having fun with events like Guatemalan cultural evenings of music and fantastic, traditional foods!

Our group is also a member of the **Guatemala Canada Solidarity Network**, formed in April 1999 at a gathering in Montreal of 30 Canada-Guatemala local and regional solidarity groups. Participants were very concerned that a Canadian presence in the struggle for peace and justice in Guatemala be maintained despite the completion of Project Accompaniment's formal activities. The resulting **Guatemala Canada Solidarity Network (GCSN)** is intended to main-

tain the flow of information and analysis between Guatemalan friends and the network across Canada. We will also share resources across the country when there is agreement on common programs and strategies.

CUSO, a Canadian over-seas development agency, is supporting our network by providing us with a staff person working out of Guatemala City. Her name is Samantha Sams. She has a two-year contract which began in late 1999.

Samantha's primary functions will be to maintain connections with Guatemalan partners, to keep up to date on the current situation in Guatemala and to share that analysis with the Network. The Guatemalan partners and the **GCSN** will work together to identify priorities for solidarity work.

The Project Accompaniment Guatemala Committee of Change for Children is planning events around the arrival to Edmonton of Samantha Sams on a speaking tour from Guatemala this January. There are also tentative plans to bring a delegation of Guatemalan human rights workers to Canada in the spring of this coming year.

If you are interested in Guatemala and would like to be on an Urgent Action list and/or work with the committee, please contact the Change for Children office, 448-1505, or Randy Kohan at 471 - 6512.

Randy Kohan worked in Guatemala with Project Accompaniment for two years. He is currently on the Steering Committee of the Guatemala-Canada Solidarity Network and the Board of Directors of Change for Children as well as the local Project Accompaniment Guatemala Committee of Change for Children.

THANK YOU to Volunteers & Donors

In a time in North America, when consumerism, the "me" generation and a seeming lack of concern for our earth or our fellow citizens, why is it that volunteering is flourishing? At Change for Children, we have experienced first-hand, the generous giving of hundreds of volunteers in the past year.

Volunteering has been a part of human kind since the beginning. It is part of our nature for people to help people. When people are asked why they volunteer, almost all individual's respond that it is the self-satisfaction of helping others. There is something very special about volunteering. As our lives become more complicated, volunteering moves us beyond the "dominant" attitudes as described above, to one of selflessness and hope. People who help other people seem to get helped themselves at least as much as the people they help. And, thus we personally benefit and society benefits when we give of our time, enthusiasm, and creativity.

Volunteering brings us joy and a sense of oneness with others with similar values. At Change for Children, this means that we feel connected with our compañeros in the South as we unite to work together. Just as our friends in the South give so generously of themselves to help others, by volunteering we are able to walk beside them in some small way.

Many of us volunteer, motivated by our commitment and knowledge that, by working together, we can create changes in this world. At Change for Children, volunteers help us to accomplish our work and without them, it would be impossible to accomplish all of the things that we do. So, it is with very loud accolades that we say thank-you to everyone who has helped, in such a large variety of ways, to enable Change for Children to continue to work for justice and peace.



Bill Bourne & Lester Quitzau performing at the 3rd Annual Instruments of Change

THANK-YOU to the following volunteers who helped with our Casino, Just Christmas and Instruments of Change, and thus touched the lives of other people:

Alison Roberts
Alyssa Fraser
Andrea Schiiler
Arturo Avila
Belle Bertrand
Bette Illich
Brenda Allan
Brenda Roberts
Cam Nelson
Carol Salisny
Carrie McEwan
Catherine Tenn
Charles Garvey
Chris Peters
Christine Perram
Cody Anderson
Colleen Duffy
Dana Rayment
Danielle Peers
David Fath
David Gledhow
Dawn Dextrase
Diane Jeffrey
Dinorah Garcia
Doug McIvor
Ed Buchinski
Elyshia Korobko
Erin Kelly
Erin Park
Eugene Ulmer

Frank Wingrove
Ginette Lachance
Glen Newell
Heloisa Modesto
Jania Teare
Jeanine Sears
Jennifer Blair
Jennifer Blair
Jordan Altmiks
Joseph Lee Son
Karina Houle
Katharine Guerin
Katie Berezan
Ken Johnstone
Kristin Smith
Laura Roberts
Lea Zaltserman
Linda Chipeniuk
Linda Laliberte
Lucy Acuna
Lyle Sweenie
Malena Alvarado
Marguerite Watson
Mario Acuna
Mark Halpert
Mark Hildebrand
Matt Berezan
Melanie Cheek
Melle Huizinga
Michael Hoyt

Mike Ross
Morna Fraser
Nana Hashimoto
Nasser Tahbaz
Nicole Smith
Noj McAllister
Pat Sears
Paul Pucylo
Pemi Gill
Percy Yap
Randy Kohan
Richard MacDonald
Richard Reimer
Rita Klassen
Rod Handelsman
Roger Garcia
Ruby Linton
Sally Hogg
Sandy Myers
Sharon Strong
Sheila Blair
Sheila Jain
Steve Lowe
Tamara Leigh
Teresa Paslawski
Trevor King
Tual Dinner
Walter Klassen
Yamit More
Zelma Wasserman

Thanks to Lark Clark (CKUA's *Radio Mondo*) and Peter Brown (CBC Radio One's *Radio Active*) for once again hosting *Instruments of Change*; and to The Joel Kroeker Collective, Bill Bourne, Lester Quitzau, Sonora Tropical, and Feast for performing.

Thanks to the following for their donations to the Silent Auction:

Against the Grain Productions
Albert's Restaurants Ltd.
Alhambra Books
Rebecca Andrews
Apples & Dandelions,
Lisa Anderson,
Ramona Cook,
Dawn Dextrase,
Theresa Dextrase,
Karl Faes,
Jeannie Flint
Arden Theatre
Art by Larisa Cheladyn
Artifacts
Arthur Murray Studios
Ascendant Books
Asociacion Bilingue Hispanica
de Edmonton
Aurora Holistic Center,
Adrienne Bouchard,
Dave King
Bag Lady Originals
Jeanna Baty
Bedrock Seed Bank
Dee Beler
Brenda Berezan
Terry Berezan
Jennifer Berezan
Vic & Jennie Berezan
Shelly Blair
The Blair Group
Blu's
The Blue Door Gift Shop
Busy "B" Tofield

Captain Tractor
Cheesecake Café
Chianti's Café & Restaurant
Citadel Theatre
Coffee Tyme Restaurant
Coupe Studio & Pottery
Fran Cross
Delvin Designs
Divine Decadence
Earth Element
Earth's General Store
Edmonton Drillers Soccer Club
Edmonton Eskimos
Edmonton First Night Festival
Assoc.
Edmonton Folk Music Society
Edmonton Oilers
Edmonton Space & Sciences Centre
Edmonton Symphony Orchestra
EnviroTech Marilyn Nelson
Eyot Creek Farm
Facing the Sun Garden Sculpture
Flowers by Farmer's Daughters
Fort Edmonton Park
Francesco's, Dorothy VeldKamp
Fringe Theatre
Guy Genreux, St. Paul Studios
Genesis Body Care Studio
GHLL Custom Framing
Grant McEwan College
Hair 4U
Hair Razors
Scott Harris
High Level Diner
John Hogg
Hole's Greenhouses & Gardens Ltd.
Home Depot

Hosanna Lutheran Church
Melle & Dolores Huizinga
IGA
Inner City Youth Dev. Assoc.
Iron Bridge
Betty Irvine
Alison Irwin
Diane Jeffrey
Curtis Johnson
The Junque Cellar
Trevor King
King's College Bookstore
Kinsmen Sports Centre
Knott's Therapeutic Massage,
Erin Perrault
Randy Kohan
Akiko Kohana
La Boheme Restaurant
La Favorite Bakery
Yock Loc
Manpower Services
McEvoy Turnings
Maryon McClary
Margie McCrea
Max's Light Cuisine
Meadowsweet Honey
Cecily Mills
Gladis Molina
Nina's Restaurant
North City Hair
Northern Light Theatre
Notables
Ocean Sports
Papillion Hairstylists,
Sandra Samson
"Pretty Stinkin Good"
Sherri Prodaniuk

Quatrefoil Designs
RedBike
Relic's Café, Tofield
Riverbend Gardens, Jenny Visser
Ross Men's Wear
Jeannie Sears
Pat Sears
Second Cup at MEC
Sidetrack Café
Edith Sinnema
Soulminder's Steel & Art Studio
Staples
Steeps - The Urban Tea House
Ken Steers (of Vue)
Sharon Strong
Sugarbowl
Sunterra Colonial Market
The Sweet Spot
Sweetwater Café
Lorraine Swift
Swizzlesticks
Terra Cota
Theatre Network
The Travel Shop
Treasure Barrel
Valley Zoo
Vaughn Myers, Barrister &
Solicitor Corp.
Vegetarian Assoc. of Alberta
Clarence Visser
Vriend's Organic Farm
Whimsy's
Willow Lane Country Crafts
Windscape Clothing
Workshop West Theatre
Yardbird Suite
Zoryana

Building a Culture of Peace *continued from page 1*

Clearly, one major theme in building a culture of peace lies in the dismantling of a culture of war. Continuing work is needed to abolish nuclear weapons despite some steps forward in the post-Cold War era. Much more must be done to promote negotiated nonviolent resolution of increasing numbers of internal armed conflicts, albeit the fragility of several peace accords illustrates the challenges of building sustainable peace. Equally essential are the campaigns to abolish the arms trade that fuels the engines of wars while diverting scarce national resources into weapons instead into meeting basic human needs. The historic treaty banning land mines also crystallizes how ordinary citizens can mobilize together with state agencies to enhance the safety of people worldwide. Furthermore, the "culture of

war" in more "micro" spheres of life in all societies must be overcome, including the problems of domestic violence, gun proliferation, media violence, and war toys. In response to a deepening culture of violence within school communities, many programs have emerged to build values, skills and practices of conflict resolution and violence, such as the Alberta Teachers' Association Safe and Caring Schools Project.

A culture of peace also focuses centrally on abolishing the root causes of structural violence, whereby unjust social and economic systems deprive some members of society and indeed the majority of the world's population of their basic needs. As development NGOs like Change for Children and OXFAM and educational agencies like

Ten Days for Global Justice, as well as grassroots movements in the South have advocated, the dominant modernization paradigm of "development" has over-emphasized economic growth policies that largely benefit North and South elites, and the industrialized world while marginalizing rural and urban poor majorities.

In recent years, structural injustices have been boosted by the forces of globalization and liberalization controlled by the powerful nation-states, transnational corporations and international agencies or regimes (e.g. IMF, World Bank, WTO, APEC, NAFTA). A culture of peace hence works for local, national and international policies based on social justice and a more equitable

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Building a Culture of Peace *continued from page 5*

world (e.g. Jubilee campaign for debt cancellation; fair trade; simpler northern lifestyles; corporate responsibility and accountability; people-centred aid).

Thirdly, a culture of peace must sustain the enormous challenges of promoting and respecting human rights as embodied in the Universal Declaration and successive covenants, conventions and charters. However, the power-entrenched in structures of state, private interests, socio-cultural systems and global agencies still blow strong winds trying to snuff out the light of human rights and dignity. The risk-taking and dedicated work of human rights campaigners to educate and mobilize citizens and institutions to resist violations and to assert rights in all spheres and levels of life is surely a vital dimension of building a culture of peace. The campaigns on the human rights of specific sectors (e.g. women, children, indigenous peoples) bear witness to the ongoing, courageous struggle to universalize human rights as part of a culture of peace.

Living in non-violence with planet Earth is also a vital theme of a culture of peace. As indigenous wisdom teaches us, we need to live in ways that care for the seven generations. Unless human beings relate to the natural environment with an ethic of inter-generational responsibility, future generations will not be able to survive. Citizens in virtually all regions and countries have been empowered to speak out and act to live in peace with mother earth, by following more sustainable lifestyles and lobbying governments and business to change practices that cause environmental destruction and unsustainable development.

A further theme in building a culture of peace focuses on the age old and continuing conflicts between peoples of different cultures and ethnic/"racial" identities. These cause not only tensions in

societies, but increasingly are leading to tragic violence and even ethnic cleansing, genocide and wars. Through critical dialogue and collaborative activities, conflicting or divided cultural /ethnic/racial groups, communities and nations are able to understand the root causes of their divisions, to cultivate respect of each other's beliefs and traditions, and to seek reconciliation or healing of differences.

Finally, there is a growing consensus that the "inner" dimensions and sources of peaceful values and practices must never be ignored. In cultivating inner peace, peoples from diverse traditions, faiths and cultures are better prepared ethically, emotionally and spiritually to work for outer or societal peace. The growing movement of inter-faith or inter-religious dialogue and reconciliation also positively contributes to a sharing of mutual wisdom and strategies for strengthening inner peace.

The well-known Buddhist teacher Thich Nat Hanh aptly reminds us that we are each never just a "being". Rather we are always "inter-being", which is a very appropriate metaphor for the complex challenge of moving from a culture of violence towards a culture of peace. Let us, in the spirit of "inter-being", pledge our commitment to Manifesto 2000.

Toh Swee-Hin is Director, Centre for International Education & Development and a professor in Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. He has been a consultant for various international, regional and national activities under UNESCO's Culture of Peace programme, and has been especially involved in the development of peace education programs in the Philippines since 1986.



MANIFESTO — 2000 —

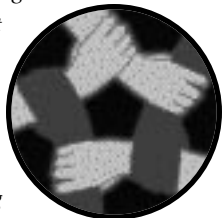
The inter-relatedness of different forms of violence and conflicts call on all of us who seek to build a culture of peace to join hands, minds, hearts and spirit for both individual and societal transformation. UNESCO's MANIFESTO 2000 (Internet: www.unesco.org/manifesto2000) expresses such a spirit of interdependence and global solidarity, that reads in part:

"Recognizing my share of responsibility for the future of humanity, I pledge - in my daily life, in my family, my work, my community, my country and my region - to:

1. Respect the life and dignity of every person.....
2. Practice active non-violence.....
3. Share my time and material resources.....
4. Defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity giving preference always to dialogue and listening.....
5. Promote consumer behaviour that is responsible... and preserve the balance of nature on the planet.....
6. Contribute to the development of my community....."

Sharing Earth's Abundance – The Jubilee Campaign Calls for Redistribution of Wealth

In 1999-2000, the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative focuses on the theme "Redistribution of Wealth," recognizing the presence of both great abundance and gross inequality in our world. Throughout this year, people across Canada are invited to join in the campaign for a fairer sharing of wealth in Canada and globally. The following is an excerpt from the CEJI fact sheet on the global maldistribution of wealth.



We hear about a Gap between rich and poor. What is it?

The gap in incomes has been steadily growing around the world. In 1960 the income gap between the richest 20% and the poorest 20% was 30 to 1. By 1997 the income gap had widened to 74 to 1.

Now let's look at the distribution of wealth around the world. Wealth refers to the assets and property that a person or country owns in addition to annual income. There are 225 billionaires in the world today who have a combined wealth of more than a trillion dollars. That's more than the annual income of half of the poorest of the world's population (about 2.5 billion people).

While wealth for a select few of the world's population increases at lightning pace, global poverty still persists. According to the 1999 Human Development Report, an estimated 1.3 billion people live on incomes of less than \$1 a day; nearly 1.3 billion people do not have access to clean water; 1 in 7 children of primary school age is out of school; and about 840 million are malnourished.

The global economy has essentially created two classes of people worldwide.

Those that have been able to reap the benefits of globalisation represent our world's "consumer class." This group comprises 20% of the population, but consumes well over 80% of the world's resources. Members of this 20% belong to the middle to upper classes of North America, Europe, and parts of South Asia and the Pacific. Specifically, OECD countries with 19% of the global population have 71% of global trade in goods and services, 58% of foreign direct investment and 91% of all Internet users.

The remaining 80% generally live in Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia and the Pacific. This group includes a disproportionate number of women, uprooted peoples, refugees of war, indigenous people without land rights, and people required to migrate in order to work for the top 20% because they need to support their families.

Why is the gap growing?

Aid, debt, and interest payments:

Poor countries receive aid and loans from rich countries. And yet the injustice of our economic system is such that poor countries are now paying \$8 in interest payments on debt for every \$1 received in aid. Until the debt crisis is definitely addressed the gap will continue to grow.

Structural Adjustment Programs:

In order to receive new loans to service their debt, poor countries are required to put in place Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). SAPs are designed so that poor countries can service their debts as much as possible. In short order poor countries can be required to cut government spending (i.e. in health and education); export as much as possible; devalue their currency; raise interest

rates; adopt free trade; and privatise government enterprises. These measures also ensure a country's economy is fully open to investment from outside. History reveals that the result of many of these strategies is greater poverty.

Falling export prices: Prices for coffee, tea, cocoa, sugar, minerals and other commodities that are the main exports of poor countries have fallen in comparison to the prices of the things they have to import. Under SAPs poor countries are told to grow (or make) more and more products for export, often taking land out of producing food for their own people. This has two consequences. First, as a result large farmers and manufacturers push out smaller enterprises because they are more "efficient." Many small farmers have lost their land due to this drive towards "efficiency." This has been a major cause of poverty. Second, because so many other countries are being told to grow or make the same thing, there is a glut on the market and prices fall, often leaving commodity exporting countries no better off than before.

Devaluation of labour: Workers in Southern countries who make much of the clothing, shoes, toys, and other manufactured goods we in the North enjoy are paid wages that do not cover the basic needs of themselves and their families. At the same time the cost of imported essential goods to their countries have consistently risen. Even if the workers could afford these goods, they work under constant threat of corporations moving to other countries where wages are lower.

Canadians are encouraged to become actively involved in this world-wide movement. To find out more about specific actions in Canada, please visit the CEJI web-site at www.net/~jubilee, call the CEJI office at (416) 922-1592 or call Change for Children at 448-1505.

Desde la Calle – From the Street: Change for Children CIDA Interns Help Marginalized Nicaraguan Youth Find a Voice

by Lorraine Swift and Susan Spronk

Many children in Nicaragua grow up in silence. Oppressed by poverty and exploitation, they never get a chance to express themselves to the world. Computer classes in Barrio Las Torres, involving participants from all five Institute of Human Promotion (INPRHU) projects in Managua, are giving children in Nicaragua the opportunity to tell their own stories and the stories of their communities.

We would like to share with you the story of Yadira, one of the many bright students in our computer classes. When you meet this beautiful, charming woman with open, smiling eyes and a constant laugh, you would never believe the hardship that she has suffered.

As with many of the children that we work with, Yadira was sent by her father onto the streets to support the family and her father's drinking habit. As soon as Yadira could walk and talk she was sent by her father to work for her uncle who owned a vegetable stand in Managua's largest market. Every morning she was loaded up with bags of vegetables and sent out to spend the day wandering the streets selling her wares. At the end of the day, she would give all the money to her father who would drink it away.

Yadira would continually ask her father if she could go to school. Her father refused, saying that it would cost the family money and that she had to spend her days working. Although the state supposedly provides free primary education, students must buy uniforms, supplies, exams, photocopies and even their own desk. Despite all this, Yadira's spir-



Yadira, left, with friends at the beach, Nicaragua

it was greater than her father's harsh words. Unable to pay for school, Yadira started to sit in on classes. When her father discovered that she was going to school on the sly, he went to the school and hauled her out of the classroom yelling that she was good for nothing except selling vegetables and this was all she could expect from her life.

Her dad physically and psychologically abused her and her younger brother and used to beat up her mother in front of the kids. One night when she was nine years old, she witnessed a violent fight between her parents where her father stabbed her mother. Terrified, she left her house in the middle of the night. Lost, desperate, and confused, she wandered around looking for help. Having

no where to go, she slept in the street for three days by herself. She finally ended up in Barrio Las Torres at her grandmother's house who offered her a place to live. This house too turned out to be an un-safe refuge because there, her cousin sexually abused her.

In Barrio Las Torres, Yadira met Vicenta, a social worker with INPRHU who counseled her and sought the involvement of an aunt's family in Yadira's struggle. Vicenta also encouraged Yadira to get involved with the programs of INPRHU, including theatre and music classes. Now Yadira is a success story. She traveled to Canada to attend a conference on violence against girls in 1996, she plays in the girl's band, *Amistad*, and she is a sexual health promoter in INPRHU's projects. Yadira is also one of the key members of the recently formed youth newsletter team.

You can find Yadira's and others' stories in an upcoming edition of "Desde la Calle: con los niños y las niñas", (From the Street: standing with the boys and girls) a newsletter that is being planned, researched, written, designed and edited by an incredible team of young people who are participating in the newsletter program of INPRHU, initiated and coordinated by Change for Children CIDA-funded Youth Interns Lorraine Swift and Susan Spronk.

This team of 12 kids is conducting research in various NGOs about themes such as violence, drug abuse, gender, children's rights and sexual health. We have been on field trips to interview people in difficult situations such as the people who live close to lake Managua and are losing their land and their homes to the rising waters. We have also visited

INPRHU's project in the Mayoreo market where the situation for children is dire. The newsletter team has also been introduced to the Internet and has learned how to conduct research discovering a whole new world of solidarity there.

This month we will produce a 12 page newsletter full of articles, information, stories, games, poems and photos. Look for Edicion Uno de "Desde la Calle: con los niños y las niñas" at the Change for Children office for a better idea of our work.

Recently, INPRHU also initiated a radio program entitled "Desde la Calle: con los niños y las niñas." The long term plan is to develop a comprehensive communication program which would give the kids an opportunity to express themselves, other kids an opportunity to receive valuable information and INPRHU an opportunity to raise the profile of its work in the community. The dream is to transfer the information from the newsletter and from the radio program to the Internet to be included on INPRHU's new web site due out this spring.

As CIDA-funded Change for Children Interns, we are using tools and knowledge from the Western world to provide access to technology that cannot be found in a barrio. Although it may be true that these kids will never have computers in their homes, the participants are also learning much more than how to use a computer. The communication program gives poor kids the opportunity to create and articulate their own histories. It is exciting for all of us to help this program to begin and to be part of the movement to break the silence.

Lorraine Swift and Susan Spronk have been working with INPRHU in Nicaragua since June of 1999. Special thanks to the Canadian International Development Agency's Youth Internship program for this excellent opportunity.

Youth Arts Caravan Project Still Alive

by Ron Berezan

Although we recently received the disappointing news that our application for funding from the Millennium Bureau was turned down, our dreams to mark the millennium with an artistic collaboration between Canadian and Central American youth are still alive.

Along with our partners in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, we are continuing to fashion plans for the creation of an international youth mural focusing on justice, peace and environmental sustainability in the new millennium. A team of Canadian and Central American youth leaders will work together for six weeks this summer in Central America and six weeks in the fall in Western Canada. Together they will facilitate the creative expression of hundreds of youth and will foster dialogue on key issues

facing all peoples of the Americas. They will also document the realities faced by young people both in Central America and Canada and the work that they are doing to create positive change.

The project will conclude with a two week "Youth Solidarity Arts Festival" in Edmonton in November 2000. A comprehensive web-site will be developed enabling thousands more youth to participate in this creative and thoughtful project.

Thank you to the Clifford E. Lee Foundation for their financial support of this project. Funding applications to CIDA's Public Engagement Program and other provincial and federal sources are pending. Please call the CFCA office (448-1505) if you would like more information or to join the planning committee for this project.



Nicaraguan youth play in front of a mural in Estelí, Nicaragua • Photo: Ron Berezan

Who is a Street Kid?

A Canadian Playwright Travels to Brazil

by Padma Viswanathan

"... no father, no mother, no master. All they had for themselves was the freedom to run in the streets... A hundred children, spread out in the doorways of the tall buildings, on the docks, in the overturned boats on the sands..."

– Jorge Amado, *Captains of the Sands*

In some ways, this 1937 novel presents a glamorous image of Salvador da Bahia's street children. The children are smart, even heroic. On the street, danger and material insecurity are compensated by freedom and excitement, by power and status not afforded children in homes or institutions. Still, how could it ever be right or desirable for children to live in the streets uncared for and without protection?

More than sixty years after these words were penned, street kids are still a hot button. I was in Salvador, a city in northeast Brazil, for nine weeks this

spring to try to investigate the image and reality of "street children." I am writing a play based on the stories and perspectives I unearthed.

I had long been obsessed with the music, history, religion, and race politics of Brazil, and went with a head full of competing theories. One revelation, from anthropologist Tobias Hecht's *At Home on the Street* (1997), coloured my initial ponderings: the commonly circulated figure for "number of street kids in Brazil" is 6, 000, 000, but Hecht's multi-source findings suggest between 13, 000 and 39, 000 kids actually living on the street.

This is a huge number of vulnerable children, certainly no reason to be complacent, but it reminded me to keep asking: who is a street kid? Why is it that the term "street kid" is used so casually, and raises such alarm, whereas "poor kid" is less likely to elicit indignation? The Brazilian "Organization for street

kids" actually represents very few kids who live on the street, but as its one-time head told Hecht, "If we called ourselves 'The organization of children,' no-one would pay any attention." I wanted to make sure I found something out about the kids' point of view.

A child like eleven year old Adriano, for example, is probably best described as "on the street but not of the street." He lives with his mother, but I met him in the city centre, where he sells peanuts until 2 am. He gets home at 3 a.m., and is at school by 7:30 a.m to play soccer before class. He was passionate and articulate on his interests, ambitions, and difficulties, such as police who capriciously confiscate his wares.

I also talked with kids "of the street," like Vanessa, a live wire crackling with bravado. She sleeps on streets overlooking the bay, and swung between confiding in me about her tattoos, mafia connections and pregnancy, and threatening me for



A young Manguiera resident shows his neighbourhood to a Canadian visitor • Photo: Padma Viswanathan

money. Through my friend Washington, a police officer I met when he was in Edmonton for an Amnesty International-sponsored training program, I met and heard stories of kids with tremendous intelligence and vivacity which they used for crime. I also heard about the violence and humiliations they have suffered, from the police, jail administrators, drug dealers, and other kids.

While in Brazil, I spent time with some organizations putting tremendous thought and energy into work with vulnerable youth. One was Projecto Axé, an outreach organization based in the city centre, which offers street kids arts and skills training, showers, and meals, if they will agree to live in a family and community of their own choosing. Another, supported by Change for Children, is the Residents' Association of Manguiera. Physically, the organization is transforming this community of shacks, built on stilts and ladders above an immense sewage backwash, into a safe and sanitary habitat. Their work for young people includes a progressive school, a visual arts, drama, and music program, a soccer league for youth, and a very active capoeira club (the martial arts/dance discipline which is also a symbol of Brazilian black strength and liberation). Both Projecto Axé and the Manguiera project are informed by a strong critical-historical perspective.

Undoubtedly, most "street kids" come from backgrounds of grinding poverty and, usually, violence. What is it that causes some to choose the perils of the street over the perils of home? By "paying attention" to kids, I think, it may be possible to decrease the perils and increase the choice.

Padma Viswanathan is a writer who moved from Edmonton to Montreal two years ago. One of her plays, House of Sacred Cows, was recently published by NeWest Press. She can be reached at ianpadma@microtec.net

Class Action Project Is On the Move!

Thanks to the hard work of several of the Youth Tour to Nicaragua members, our Class Action program is off to an excellent start. The project aims to connect Alberta youth with Nicaraguan youth for mutual learning and cross-cultural sharing while helping to develop badly needed schools in rural Nicaragua.


To date, three Edmonton area schools have confirmed their participation: Archbishop MacDonald High School, Victoria High School and Keheewin Elementary School. Several other schools are also set to become involved in the near future.

Change for Children Intern, Susan Spronk has recently returned from Nicaragua with several letters from students at our partner school (Enmanuel Mongalo) in the Somotillo region of Northwestern Nicaragua. These letter


will be shared with participating students here, who will in-turn be invited to send letters and pictures of their own to Nicaragua. Schools in Edmonton are also raising funds and gathering much needed school supplies for the Enmanuel Mongalo school in Nicaragua.

To top it off, six students from Archbishop McDonald high school will be invited to travel to Nicaragua over spring break to meet directly with youth in our partner community in Nicaragua. In turn, four youth from that community will travel back to Alberta for a visit to partner schools here in early April. Special thanks to youth tour participant Erin Kelly for taking on such a big project within her school!

For more information on this project, please contact Ron at the CFCA office, 448-1505, or e-mail cfca@web.net.



Join us at the next
CFCA Board Meeting
 9:30 a.m. Saturday,
January 29th
 at the CFCA Office
 10545 - 92 Street
 Edmonton



Jubilee 2000
 A Call for a New Beginning
First Night Celebrations

DECEMBER 31, 1999

McDougall United Church
 10025 - 101 Street, Edmonton
 6:00 - 9:00 pm Programs of Music, Dance & Drama
 10:00 pm Multifaith Prayer Service

All Saints Anglican Cathedral
 10035 - 103 Street, Edmonton
 6:00 - 9:00 pm Programs of Music, Dance & Drama
 10:00 pm Ecumenical Prayer Service

Both Prayer Services will join for a **Candle Light Procession** into Churchill Square for the Finale
 (First Night Buttons available at all 7-11 stores)

Membership matters!

Annual memberships expire as of December 31, 1999. Please consider renewing your membership or becoming a member if you have not been over the past year. Membership cost is \$15.00 which helps us to cover the expense of producing and mailing out this newsletter. As a member, you receive voting rights at General Meetings, special rates for fundraisers and other events, borrowing privileges at our resource library and the knowledge that you are an integral part of an organization working hard for social change. If you are unsure about the status of your memberships, please call the office at 448-1505.

Did You Know?

A "Pre-Authorized Payment Plan" is a convenient way of planning your annual contributions. By providing the information requested below, and a voided cheque, you can have your contribution automatically withdrawn from your account. This program also makes it easier for us to anticipate the revenues we will have for the year and to plan accordingly. Please call the office at 448-1505 if you would like more information.

PRE-AUTHORIZED PAYMENT PLAN

I/we authorize Change for Children Association to begin automatic monthly withdrawals from my/our bank account as specified on the enclosed cheque marked "VOID". This authority is to remain in effect until further notification from myself/ourselves or Change for Children.

Withdrawal in the amount of \$ _____
on the _____th of each month.

_____/_____
_____/_____

Signature(s) of Account Holders / Date Signed

IDENTITY *By Adrienne Therese Thurston*

"Poverty sucks" it says on the wall.
How real, I think as I pass by the alley,
The broken bottles and empty hairspray
containers.

And I think of the girl on the corner who
used to try to sell me chicklets,
Coca cola in plastic bags with a straw,
And maps of a city that no Nicaraguan
can read.

Instead they would say, "Go about ten
blocks up from the Cine Dorado,
Take the 109 and get off at the Estatu
Lemcano.
Then go five blocks toward the volcano.
But the cinema is now a casino and the
statue was destroyed in the earthquake '72."

Oh.

I tell her that I don't want to buy a
map,
Because, you see, I just bought one
from her yesterday.
We chat for a bit and then she asks me
with a glint in her eye,
"How much did your plane ticket
cost?"

I mentally convert dollars into
Cordobas.

Poverty sucks.

*Adrienne lives in Edmonton and trav-
eled to Nicaragua twice in the 1990's.*

CHARITABLE DONATION

Please find enclosed a tax-creditable donation to be used in the following areas:

- \$ 15.00 To purchase a 2000 Change for Children membership (non tax receiptable)
- \$ _____ Undesignated - to be used as needed by Change for Children Association
- \$ _____ Your general project account (supporting a variety of projects as required)
- \$ _____ Your projects in the country of _____
(current projects are in Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Peru, Brazil)
- \$ _____ Your Social Justice Education Program here in Canada
- \$ _____ **Total amount enclosed.**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Change for Children Association (CFCA), 10545 - 92 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5H 1V1
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Registered Charitable Organization No. 11884 9496 RR0001

While CHANGE FOR CHILDREN ASSOCIATION (CFCA) highly values its partnership with communities of various religious and political persuasions, we are a non-sectarian, non-partisan society. Our development projects are located primarily in Central and South America, Mexico and the Philippines. Types of projects, their cost and priority are determined by the indigenous co-operants living in these countries, according to their current needs.

Building Bridges is published three times annually by Change for Children as part of its education program. The views expressed by the publication are not necessarily those of Change for Children Association.

Editor: Ron Berezan • Layout: Chris Peters