

THE ADVOCATE

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Special points of interest

- Canadians visit Kenya and Uganda, learn about refugee issues
- How you and your church can go beyond charity to enact change
- Living the Good Life on God's Good Earth, a new book on environmental stewardship
- The CRC goes to Washington to meet on conscientious objection

REFUGEE LEARNING TOUR TO KENYA BY ROSE DEKKER, CRWRC CANADA

A group of eight Canadians, members of Christian Reformed churches, all of whom have a deep interest in refugee issues went on a Refugee Learning Tour to Kenya and Uganda from March 11 to March 24, 2007.

We saw and learned firsthand much we had only read or heard about previously. We were deeply moved by the people we saw living in the camps, as well as UNHCR staffers and their partner agencies who make huge sacrifices to live and work in these camps.

Led by Moses Moini and Rose Dekker, CRWRC Canada staff members who coordinate private sponsorship of refugees with the Christian Reformed Church in Canada, the group attended meetings with national ministers of refugee affairs in both Uganda and Kenya, met with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) staff, and visited refugee camps.

We were surprised at the willingness of high-ranking government ministers to speak openly with us and answer our questions.

In both countries it became abundantly clear



that while there is concern for the well-being of the refugees living within their borders, neither country will allow local integration into their society.

Visits to Kakuma Refugee Camp in northern Kenya and Kyangwali Resettlement Camp in western Uganda reinforced the lack of possible solutions available to refugees. Seventy thousand people live in Kakuma Camp. Most are Sudanese and Somalis who have been there since the early 1990s.

Story continued on page 3.

ADVOCATE CALENDAR

As you can see from the next few items, Washington is the place to be this June! Start your visit by attending the Sojourners/Call to Renewal gathering: Pentecost 2007: Taking the Vision to the Streets from June 3-6.

The goal of Pentecost 2007: Taking Vision to the Streets is to call individuals, churches, and most importantly, our political leaders to commit to putting poverty at the top of our national agenda. We believe that the conversation about moral values in America has been widening and deepening, building into a movement for real change.

As if that weren't exciting enough, Pentecost 2007 has just announced that the Leading Democratic presidential contenders **Hillary Clinton**, **Barack Obama**, and **John Edwards** will appear at Pentecost 2007, as part of their presidential candidates forum on Monday, June 4, where they'll be answering questions on faith, moral values, and poverty. Seating will be limited, so be sure to [register today](#) to be guaranteed a spot at the event. Visit www.sojo.net to learn more and register.

Calendar continued on page 3.

BEYOND CHARITY: HOW TO MAKE A REAL IMPACT

As North American Christians, we know that most of the world doesn't live in such comfort and advantage – two-thirds of the world lives in economic poverty, government insecurity, under-employment, and violence.

The **CRC Justice Seekers Assembly** is a place where you can safely explore what could be a "holy discontent," and meet others who also share a growing sense of God's heart for justice. You'll find how you can make an eternal difference in the world. You'll be challenged to encounter God in new ways. And you'll make friends from around the world who will sustain a lifetime of shalom-seeking.



Get the **resources** and **relationships** you need to make a real impact at the
CRC Justice Seekers Assembly – June 9, 2007
Sowing Seeds Conference – June 10-13, 2007

- Want to go beyond food kitchens and mission trips?
- Wonder how to get others to see the reasons people are in poverty?
- Afraid you're the only one who thinks this way?

Change all that! Meet others in the CRC who are working to impact the systems that perpetuate poverty. Learn from the mistakes and successes of justice groups working to educate and empower this denomination beyond charity to advocacy and justice. And be encouraged that you're not alone—and you're not without resources and support.

The CRC Justice Seekers Assembly will help you:

- Identify your passion and make a plan for impacting it.
- Meet Christians from around the world – make connections, put faces with names, and learn what kind of impact your church could make from the people themselves.
- Communicate to others how to move from charity to justice.
- Start a justice movement in your church.

For more information, www.crcjustice.org

To register, bread.org/gathering2007

With questions, kooymank@crcna.org

WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

Looking for new Canadian facts

on hunger and food bank use for Hunger Awareness Day? New statistics and ideas for involvement are available at

www.hungerawarenessday.ca.

To explore how you can live out your calling as a caretaker of God's creation, check out Living the Good Life on God's Good Earth (<http://list.crcna.net/1/180729/43171/62/0/>).

This important book discusses the impact of environmental stewardship on the way we live, the food we eat, the energy we use, the plants we grow, and the work we are called to do. Chapters include questions for reflection and discussion and resources for those who want to learn more.

Written by a team of Christian environmentalists, Living the Good Life on God's Good Earth is a thought-provoking read for anyone who cares about how the choices they make affect the earth.

Network with other justice seekers

online! The Christian peace and justice organization, Sojourners, is now on MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube!

Click below to connect with like-minded folks:

MySpace: go.sojo.net/ct/Opz7eyE1GRRr/

Facebook (Jim Wallis' personal profile and Sojourners group page): go.sojo.net/ct/O7z7eyE1GRR4/

YouTube: go.sojo.net/ct/W1z7eyE1GRRf/

Happy networking!

The Advocate has a new look!

Love it? Hate it? Suggestions? Email osjha@crcna.org

JUSTICE AND WORSHIP

To mark the 200th anniversary of the Act to Abolish the Slave Trade in the British Empire, the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network (CEARN) has published a resource kit to be used by churches, study groups and social justice groups. The kit includes worship resources, biblical reflection, children's resources, educational material on the slave trade and the practice of slavery in Canada and much more. Download the kit free at: <http://www.ccc-cce.ca/english/justice/racism.htm>.

LEARNING TOUR, CONT'D

Kyangwali has fewer people, about 20,000, but again, the majority are Sudanese who have been there for many years.

While UNHCR plans to facilitate repatriation to Sudan in the coming year, neither Kenya nor Uganda will force repatriation if the people don't feel they can safely go back. In fact, about 4,000 did voluntarily return to Sudan from Kenya, but 5,000 (!) returned to the camp because they considered the conditions in south Sudan unlivable, if not dangerous. In Kakuma only about 4,500 of the refugees have "incentive" jobs, working for the different UNHCR partners in the camp. Some of the others, notably the Somalis, have begun businesses within the camp. However, while there are training programs and other activities available to adults, most live without fruitful activity.



In Kyangwali, on the other hand, each refugee family receives a small plot of ground, enough to allow them to become self-sustaining within twelve months of arrival. Sudanese, and until recently, Rwandans, have farmed these small plots for many years. They are allowed to sell excess produce, but they are far from markets and transportation costs are very high. The UNHCR and the Sudanese government are facilitating voluntary repatriation of Sudanese refugees, but camp officials in Kenya and in Uganda do not expect this to be accomplished in the near future.

Sponsorship to Canada and other countries that accept refugees is a solution for less than one percent of the world's refugees. Repatriation is tenuous at best; local integration is impossible. Amazingly, though, many refugees we met and spoke with hold undying hope deep in their hearts. We wonder what realistic solutions can be found for the millions of refugees not only in Kenya and Uganda, but in many countries around the world.

ACTION OPPORTUNITIES

Take action during National Fair Trade weeks (May 1-15), in cooperation with **Make Poverty History**.

Trade justice and fair trade are complementary; fair trade provides an alternative for marginalized producers and workers by allowing them to sell their product at a fair and stable price, while trade justice aims at changing the rules of international trade so that all benefit.

For more information check out [Make Poverty History](#) (trade justice) and [TransFair Canada](#) (National Fair Trade weeks). You don't have to work for Fair Trade just at the beginning of May – you can support Fair Trade all year long!

Purchase fair trade goods through stores like Ten Thousand Villages, look for the fair trade logo when you buy coffee and tea, and learn more about what fair trade means at websites like www.transfair.org and www.transfair.ca.

The UN World Food Program (WFP) is encouraging action to help achieve the first MDG: Halve the number of hungry people by 2015. Through their program "Fight Hunger: Walk the World" they are encouraging participants to organize walks, get pledges and raise money to fight hunger. Check out www.fighthunger.org for more information.

Bread for the World's annual Offering of Letters is now available for churches! Visit www.bread.org to order copies of Seeds of Change, this year's Offering of Letters.

The Offering educates congregations on a particular issue (this year it looks at how farm policy can better serve hungry people), and provides guidance and examples of how to advocate for poor and hungry people to government leaders.

Bread for the World is a national Christian citizen's movement that advocates on behalf of the poor and hungry at home and around the world. A number of CRC churches and members are deeply involved with Bread for the World.

CALENDAR, CONT'D

The CRC Justice Seekers Assembly is a place where you'll find how you can make a difference in the world. You'll be challenged to encounter God in new ways. And you'll make friends from around the world who will sustain a lifetime of shalom-seeking. Make sure you join us, June 9, 2007. Visit www.crcjustice.org or check out the article above to learn more. The Assembly precedes the Sowing Seeds Conference in Washington D.C.

Register for Bread for the World's annual Washington gathering, the Sowing Seeds Conference – June 9-12, 2007! Thousands of people of faith will gather in Washington, DC to launch a renewed movement to end hunger and poverty in the United States and around the world.

Activists with decades of experience will join with young people just beginning their public life and political involvement. Rural leaders—newly energized with a heart to help hungry people—will meet longtime urban anti-poverty workers. Parents will bring their children to show them that anyone has the chance—and the responsibility—to speak to their representatives in Congress. Don't miss it! Learn more and register at www.bread.org.

It's never too early to get your churches prepared – this October will see another Micah Sunday! The Micah Challenge, in which the CRC is heavily involved, is a worldwide Christian movement that seeks to deepen Christian engagement in issues of justice and poverty, and to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by advocating world governments.

The MDGs are eight poverty fighting goals that aim to cut extreme poverty and hunger in half by 2015. Nearly every country in the world, including the US and Canada, have committed to meeting those goals, but it takes the voices of regular citizens like you to make these great changes happen.

NEWS BRIEFS

The CRC goes to Washington to meet on conscientious objection

Peter Vander Meulen, coordinator of the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action of the CRC and Rev. Herman Keizer, director of Chaplaincy Ministries of the CRC, visited several agencies regarding changing the law on Conscientious Objection.

Herm visited with the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy and the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. Peter and Herm visited with Senator Carl Levin's (MI) Senior Staff on military affairs, Justin Harlem. They also visited the Center on Conscience and War, The Mennonite Central Committee, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

These conversations were very informative and useful, with each agency

welcoming an additional voice to the national discussions. In these conversations we were urged to take the initiative in drafting a resolution regarding conscientious objection for Congress. Such a resolution would authorize and fund research aimed at studying the feasibility of instituting a policy that would allow military personnel to object, on the basis of conscience, to particular wars they deem to be unjust. This moves forward a recommendation of the Peace and War report approved by the CRC synod last June.

—Report from Rev. Herm Keizer

The Advocate

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Canada's new environment plan bans incandescent bulbs

As part of their newly released environmental plan the Canadian government is planning on following the lead of Australia and the province of Ontario in banning inefficient incandescent light bulbs by 2012.

More efficient lighting would include compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs), which use about 75 percent less electricity than incandescent bulbs. Estimates are that if each of the 12 million households across Canada were to replace 16 incandescent bulbs with CFLs, the annual cut in greenhouse gas emissions could be as much as 6.3 million tonnes (about the equivalent of removing 1 million cars from the road).

This element of the new plan was well received by critics, who had less good to say about other components of the plan, which include: cutting emissions (but not within Kyoto protocol limits), a domestic carbon trading program and a fund to find ways to reduce greenhouse gases created through electricity generation and oil sands development.

The CRC heads to the Middle East

How might the CRCNA contribute to the cause of peace and justice in the Middle East? In order to find the answer to that question, the CRC is going to the source. A small volunteer study group that includes pastors, students and denominational representatives will travel to Israel and Palestine for about ten days in July.

While there the group hopes to form relationships with Palestinian Christian leaders, their institutions and churches; better understand the reality of life for Palestinians living in the occupied territories, for citizens of Israel, and for settlers; and find out what is being done by other denominations and US/Canadian based institutions in promoting justice, peace, human welfare, and the involvement of their own constituency in this work.

In 2006 the CRC synod received a study report on "War and Peace" that highlighted the role of the Christian and the Church as "Bringers of Shalom". Among the recommendations endorsed by synod were those mandating denominational agencies and staff to develop more resources and methods for raising awareness of our peace building calling, educating ourselves, doing programs that build peace and justice, and engaging in public witness for peace and justice. It is in that light that the study group will travel to Israel and Palestine. Please pray that the group will have an engaging, eye-opening, and safe trip.

Canadian aid performance declines in 2006

Despite government commitments to increased foreign aid, as well as a commitment made through the Millennium Development Goals, the Canadian government's official international aid fell in 2006. At 0.3% of Gross National Income (as opposed to the 0.7% committed in the MDGs), Canadian aid has been affected by the inclusion of debt cancellation for Iraq and several African countries. While these are important efforts, including them in aid masks the actual amount of money being provided to developing countries.

International aid worldwide has also fallen in the past year by almost \$3 billion. Experts are warning that many countries will not meet their MDG commitments if their aid does not increase substantially in coming years.

Church of the Servant CRC receives grant to assist prisoners

Christians for Prisoners and Prisoners for Christ, a ministry arm of the Church of the Servant Christian Reformed Church, has recently received the good news that a worship renewal grant, submitted on behalf of the CRC Home Missions with support from the Reformed Church in America Great Lakes Synod, was approved by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. The goal of the worship renewal program CONTACT (Calling Offenders to Network Together for Adoration, Confession and Thanksgiving) is to expand the Christian Reformed and Reformed Church in America presence in western Michigan prisons.

The grant resources will partially cover program costs of transportation to prisons for visits and worship, attendance at a Prison Congregations of America colloquium to be held in a South Dakota penitentiary, and the creation of worship resources and a program manual outlining the process and outcomes of this program.

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