



ST. OLAF COLLEGE

Peace and Justice News

Visit to Bangladesh inspires hope

Student sees labor rights progress in South Asian country

By Sarah Burrridge '04

As part of the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs "Development and Community in Bangladesh" program, I spent the majority of January in a village in rural Bangladesh.

Before leaving for my Interim in Bangladesh, I learned a lot about the country's reputation. My mother's friends informed me that Bangladesh was overcrowded, underfed, and poverty stricken, with thousands of people being killed each time the country was hit by one of its frequent natural disasters. One man who had actually spent time there told me, "It was so polluted that I'd try to will myself to stop breathing every time I stepped outside."

While I did find evidence of these things in Bangladesh, I somehow failed to assimilate it all into the bleak picture everyone had been so eager to paint for me. No one had mentioned the astoundingly beautiful scenery, the palm trees and exotic flowers, nor had they mentioned the equally beautiful people who ex-

ceeded every expectation we'd had with their kindness and generosity, despite their poverty.

Yes, Bangladesh has its problems, but as we moved around the country, visiting slums, non-profits working for poverty alleviation, ruins of ancient monasteries and, of course, our adopted village, I found I was much more compelled by the country's potential than by its faults.

One of the places we visited was a factory that manufactured garments for export to Belgium. The first time I heard the words "garment factory," I pictured malnourished, emaciated women with gnarled fingers hunched over sewing machines for upwards of 12 hours each day. I imagined horrible sanitation, disease and managers denying workers' requests for a drink of water or a bathroom break.

However, what we found was hardly the sweatshop I had been expecting. Talking with the managers and workers, we learned that employees at this factory work eight hour

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shifts six days a week, for which they are paid 2,000 taka a month – roughly \$34, or \$0.17 an hour.

While these are certainly not ideal conditions, the hours are at least acceptable and the pay livable by Bangladesh's economic standards.

There were none of the gross and blatant human rights violations we've always heard are rife in such factories. Workers are allowed to unionize, and they do. Also, the company is domestically-owned, which means that the profits made by producing

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Animal rights watch

A look inside the PETA headquarters

By Emily Dahl '06

The basic philosophy of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the world's largest animal rights organization, states that "animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, or use for entertainment." PETA focuses attention in four key problem areas: factory farms, labs, the fur trade and entertainment, all places where

animals "suffer the most intensely for the longest periods of time."

During Interim Break, I had the opportunity to visit the PETA Headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia. The diverse crowd of people that work there astounded me: Christians, active Marines, valley girls, punk rockers, conservatives, liberals and everything in between. The only unifying

characteristic between them all was the deep-seated desire to be alive for the moment of "total animal liberation."

One subject of discussion during my visit to the PETA's headquarters was the violent, extremist animal rights group called the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and its relation to the overall animal rights movement. Not everyone at

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Peace and Justice News is a monthly publication of the **Peace and Justice Resource Network**, an official student organization at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota.

The views expressed in this newsletter do not implicitly or explicitly represent official positions and policies of St. Olaf College.

Putting down 'Roots' for a better tomorrow

Highlights from the Nobel Peace Prize Forum

By Carolyn Albert '05

A varied and enthusiastic crowd of nearly 3,000 gathered at St. Olaf College on February 20-21 for the 16th Annual Nobel Peace Prize Forum.

While plenary speaker former President Jimmy Carter drew the largest audience, the forum also included a wide range of other presentations. Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland issued the opening plenary address with an "urgent call" to rally in our "common struggle to refocus goals and discover unity."

As a political environmentalist, former prime minister of Norway, and former director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), Brundtland drew attention to the necessity of investing in the planet and the health of the people on it as a prerequisite to creating a peaceful world. "There is no common future unless we invest in people...unless we invest in *all* people," she said.

Other plenary sessions seemed to challenge the oft uttered criticism that the peace movement is full of idealists who never really effect change.

For instance, the Friday evening plenary panel from the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) presented a concrete means of peace-making through village banking, wherein people without access to credit are given small, short term loans to jump start their self-propelled escape from the cycle of poverty. The system seems to be effective, with an on-time payback rate of about 97%. FINCA's founder, John Hatch, explained that village banking lets "people come together for economic interests and become a community of friends on a path to peace."

Dr. Eboo Patel presented a Friday Peace Skills Workshop entitled "Louder than a Bomb: Institution-Building as a Pathway to Social Change" in addition to the closing plenary address "Notes for a New American Song." A founder of the Interfaith Youth Core in Chicago, Dr. Patel is as realistic as he is idealistic. A self-proclaimed "progressive," he challenged forum attendees to follow criticism with action, noting that "we don't always want to win, [sometimes] we just want to bitch."

Patel said that activism is about building institutions that support important values and ideas. "If the people you disagree with are building the institutions, then it's their values that will be built into society."

For many, the highlight of the weekend was former President Jimmy Carter's Saturday afternoon address on "Peace and Change," during which he urged a change of attitude and action on the part of both the government and citizens of the

United States. Carter's speech drew attention to the growing chasm between rich and poor and the general apathy of citizens of the U.S. to the suffering of others in the world. "There is no sense of shame in our country, or desire to improve...to be more benevolent, more caring, more knowledgeable," he said.

Carter stressed a need for "partnership" across the class and wealth divide, so that resources can be mobilized to prevent unnecessary suffering, such as the preventable pain caused by the parasitic Guinea worm in countries with contaminated water supplies. Though critical of the current U.S. administration's actions and policies, Carter stressed that this is a "great country, with great potential."

A powerful symbolic element of the weekend conference was Professor Emeritus Mac Gimse's bronze sculpture "Roots and Wings." On display throughout the forum, "Roots and Wings" images the many phases of an individual's life in relation to others.

Throughout its creation, Professor Gimse was intent upon making his artwork much more than just his own. During the ecumenical worship service on Saturday, individual sections of "Roots and Wings" were passed through the congregation, the metal soon warm to the touch as each person gave something of him or herself to the otherwise cold metal while its weight rested in their hands. Gentle smiles were exchanged as the piece was passed on, expressions of surprise at its weight and the detail of its design.

Gimse's attitude towards this piece of art highlights how many members of the Nobel Peace Prize Forum community there really were, and how essential each one was to the whole. Credit for the forum's success can be shared by the student presenters from each of the five participant colleges who taught about fair trade coffee, global economics, and the FTAA; Veselica, St. Olaf's International Dance ensemble, which brought energy and spirit through movement; the St. Olaf Gospel Choir, which President Carter said reminded him of home in the South; the Executive and Student Planning Committees, whose tireless commitment made the forum run so smoothly; professors and Northfield community members; artists, volunteers, and the thousands of participants.

Everyone who gathered together for those few days last month helped make St. Olaf College a place where a fledging peace can begin to take to the sky.



Photograph by Carolyn Albert

Former President Jimmy Carter speaks at the 16th annual Nobel Peace Prize Forum at St. Olaf College on February 21, 2004.

Recommended Reading

March 2004

* Scott A. Hunt, *The Future of Peace: On the Front Lines with Today's Great Peacemakers*. Excerpts from interviews with the Dalai Lama, Burmese dissident Aung San Suu Kyi and other contemporary peacemakers.

* Bryan Lindsley '03, *St. Olaf Activist Manual*. Ideas and resources for action from a St. Olaf alumnus. Online at www.stolaf.edu/depts/cis/wp/lindsley/.

* Colman McCarthy, *I'd Rather Teach Peace*. A Washington Post columnist and educator offers strategies for motivating people to think about creative peacemaking.

* Paul Wellstone, *Conscience of a Liberal*. In his final book, the late Minnesota Senator and former Carleton College professor calls for political reforms that will "enable people to dream again."



A look inside the PETA Headquarters

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PETA agrees with the aggressive tactics that the ALF often employs, such as the sabotage of labs that experiment on animals. Loring Harkness '03, PETA's new College Campaign Coordinator, likened the animal rights movement to the 1960's civil rights movement, saying that equal rights were acquired both through the peaceful resistance of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the more aggressive tactics of Malcolm X. Harkness contended that animal liberation could never be actualized unless both forces were at work.

I asked several PETA interns what they thought about people who call themselves vegetarians but still eat fish, asserting that it's okay for because fish don't feel pain. One intern immediately pointed to conclusive evidence that fish have nerves, so they do in fact feel pain. Another intern explained that for him, it was not whether the fish felt pain; it was more of the fact that fish are self-aware. Fish are creatures that do not want to die (ever seen one flopping wildly to get back into the water?), so it is not about the pain they feel, but rather about the consciousness that dies when the fish does.

As Bruce, the shark in *Finding Nemo*, reminds us, "Fish are FRIENDS, not food."

Finally I asked the million-dollar question: Why animal rights? One PETA employee said that she worked in animal rights because she feels she must speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Another said he worked at PETA to educate the masses and save animals from being senselessly and brutally murdered

just so that America can get fatter. He believed that if people knew how they got the meat sitting on their plate, they wouldn't be eating it.

If you attended the St. Olaf Political Awareness Committee dinner on February 17, you will remember the horrifying images from PETA's "Meet Your Meat" video of workers abusing animals; pigs having their throats slit open while still conscious; chickens being de-beaked with a hot iron and much, much more. Many people still believe that animals live on idyllic farms, grazing on large pastures with the sun shining. Unfortunately, factory farms are taking over the meat industry, confining animals in small pens, living forever without having the ground under their feet or the sun on their backs.

Growing up, I was a vegetarian (mostly just to piss off my parents), but I began eating meat again during high school. After my visit to PETA headquarters, I've rededicated to the cause. If you could spend a week there, I know you would be converted, too.



Bruce, the vegan shark in *Finding Nemo*, reminds us that "Fish are FRIENDS, not food."

ANIMAL RIGHTS ONLINE

To learn more about PETA and the campaign for animal rights, visit these websites:

- www.peta.org
- www.goveg.com
- www.jesusveg.com
- www.themeatrix.com
- www.nofishing.net/pain.html
- www.animalliberationfront.com



Reflections from Abroad: Bangladesh

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cheap t-shirts stay within Bangladesh to bolster its economy rather than being exported to shareholders in affluent nations.

There are, of course, many factories in Bangladesh and around the world where you would find all of the terrible things we'd been expecting to find in this factory. In countries across the globe, people are being exploited and abused, having their fundamental human rights violated, and all for such little pay that they can't meet their basic needs. These people will never even be able to dream of saving enough money to break the economic chains that bind them to their situations.

The scenario that we witnessed wasn't great, and none of us would have wanted to work there;

however, it wasn't terrible. We were left with a sense that the possibilities for improvement in such places are not as remote as they sometimes seem.

While it's easy for individuals who lack political and economic clout to feel overwhelmed by the world's problems, we can work together towards solutions. This garment factory was one example of a solution – maybe not an ideal situation, but better than the situations in many factories. If we take things one step at a time, determining what works and what doesn't, gradually we can change the world for the better. My experiences in Bangladesh were a powerful reaffirmation for me as a seeker of peace and justice. Bangladesh may not be a country full of prosperity and abundance, but it is not devoid of hope.

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Photograph by Jeff Brubaker

Two young Bangladeshi girls work in a t-shirt sewing room at a garment factory near Dhaka, Bangladesh's capitol city.

Peace and Justice News

March 2004

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Peace and Justice News welcomes peace and justice-related articles, article ideas, news items, book reviews, commentaries and other contributions. Contact the P&J News team at PJNews@stolaf.edu.

VISIT THE PEACE AND
JUSTICE WEBSITE AT
WWW.STOLAF.EDU/ORGS/PJRN

The St. Olaf Peace & Justice Resource Network is an awareness-raising organization whose goal is to educate ourselves and others about issues of peace and justice. Through monthly newsletters, speakers, and campus-wide events, we explore both global and local topics of concern. The Peace & Justice Resource Network also helps integrate the efforts of other campus and community groups to promote peace and justice through co-sponsorships, advertising, and participation in local events. It is affiliated with Student Peace Action Network, a national network of campus peace and justice groups.

We meet each Tuesday during the school year at 8:00 p.m. in Buntrock Commons room 142 (on the way to the library). New members and curious bystanders are always welcome! Our office is located in the Student Organization Resource Center. Contact Peace and Justice Coordinator Elizabeth Henke at henke@stolaf.edu for more information or to be added to the St. Olaf Peace and Justice e-mail alias.

Upcoming Peace and Justice events In Northfield and the Twin Cities

Events in **boldface type** take place at St. Olaf College.

March

Tues., Mar. 2, 7pm — Precinct caucuses, various locations. Visit www.sos.state.mn.us.
Thurs., Mar. 4, 5:30-6:30pm — **World Issues Dialogue: Women in South Africa, Trollhaugen**
Thurs., Mar. 4, 7pm — People for Peace and Goodwill meeting: 313 ½ Division St., Northfield
Thurs., Mar. 4, 7pm — **The Vagina Monologues, The Pause**
Sat., Mar. 6, 3pm — **The Vagina Monologues, The Pause**
Sun., Mar. 7, 3pm — **The Vagina Monologues, The Pause**
Tues., Mar. 9, 8-9pm — **Peace and Justice meeting: Buntrock Commons, Room 142**
Thurs., Mar. 11, 7pm — People for Peace and Goodwill meeting: 313 ½ Division St., Northfield
Tues., Mar. 16, 8-9pm — **Peace and Justice meeting: Buntrock Commons, Room 142**
Tues., Mar. 16, 8-10pm — **2nd Annual Pause for Peace Concert, The Pause**
Thurs., Mar. 18, 7pm — People for Peace and Goodwill meeting: 313 ½ Division St., Northfield
Sat., Mar. 20 — International Day of Action: First Anniversary of the Iraq War
Thurs., Mar. 25, 7pm — People for Peace and Goodwill meeting: 313 ½ Division St., Northfield
Tues., Mar. 30, 8-9pm — **Peace and Justice meeting: Buntrock Commons, Room 142**

April

Thurs., Apr. 1, 7pm — People for Peace and Goodwill meeting: 313 ½ Division St., Northfield
Fri., Apr. 2, 10:50-11:50am — Lakota Chief Arvol Looking Horse addresses Carleton College
Tues., Apr. 6, 8-9pm — **Peace and Justice meeting: Buntrock Commons, Room 142**
Thurs., Apr. 8, 7pm — People for Peace and Goodwill meeting: 313 ½ Division St., Northfield
Tues., Apr. 13, 8-9pm — **Peace and Justice meeting: Buntrock Commons, Room 142**
Thurs., Apr. 15, 7pm — People for Peace and Goodwill meeting: 313 ½ Division St., Northfield
Tues., Apr. 20, 8-9pm — **Peace and Justice meeting: Buntrock Commons, Room 142**
Thurs., Apr. 22, 7pm — People for Peace and Goodwill meeting: 313 ½ Division St., Northfield
Tues., Apr. 27, 8-9pm — **Peace and Justice meeting: Buntrock Commons, Room 142**
Thurs., Apr. 29, 7pm — People for Peace and Goodwill meeting: 313 ½ Division St., Northfield

2nd Annual Pause for Peace Concert



**Tuesday, March 16
8:00-10:00 pm
The Pause**

**Watch for our next issue
around April 4, 2004**