

# Hunger News & Hope

...a Seeds of Hope publication

## Proposed Tax Cuts Will Benefit Only the Wealthiest

by Sarah MacIlvaine

Just before this issue went to press, the U.S. Congress passed a \$350 billion tax-cut plan. The House of Representatives and the Senate both approved the 10-year plan earlier in the week, which the White House says is aimed at stimulating the dragging U.S. economy.

Not surprisingly, the tax cut plan has been highly controversial. Many economists argue that the plan will increase the U.S. deficit—destabilizing the dollar—without necessarily benefiting many Americans. On the other hand,

tax cuts will help create jobs. “It is a huge victory for the American people. It is a huge victory for those individuals who do not have a job and are looking for a job,” he said on NBC’s *Today* show. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-TX, said that financial markets will reflect confidence in the plan by making more investments and therefore creating more jobs.

This information all sounds good at first, but many question who these tax cuts will really benefit, and if they are really going to be good for the economy in the long run. The stipulations of the bill provide major tax cuts initially that will again taper off in a four-year time span. Therefore, many jobs that are created through the tax cuts may have to be terminated once the tax requirements are raised and businesses have to refigure their budgets.

The bill also cuts deeply into the national deficit. The latest government figures show that this year’s deficit could top \$500 billion dollars, the largest in history, partly because the tax revenue will run \$100 billion lower than expected.

The biggest concern of most skeptics is the bill’s effect on the poor. Many members of Congress opposed the bill because they believe it will only benefit wealthy businessmen—who will merely pocket the profits—while the poor receive very little money back. “This tax bill is one of the most dangerous and destructive and dishonorable acts of government that I have ever seen,” said Senator Mark Dayton D-MN. “It is a

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**“This tax bill is one of the most dangerous and destructive and dishonorable acts of government that I have ever seen.”**

**—Senator Mark Dayton**

backers of the bill praise the plan, declaring that it will boost the economy and stock prices.

The bill will lower the top tax rate to only 15 percent through 2008 and speed up scheduled income tax cuts. It also includes tax breaks for businesses—hoping to encourage investment in new equipment. The idea is that the current recession has been caused by weakness in business investment, not consumer spending, so tax cuts should seek to benefit businesses, rather than consumers.

Commerce Secretary Don Evans says that, as a result of the plan’s business slant, the new



## The Taco Bell

### Boycott:

*Using Our  
Consumer Power  
in the Struggle  
for Fair Food*

by Noelle Damico

Would you be willing to pay a cent more a *chalupa* if doing so could help stop the exploitation of farm workers? Most fast food lovers are quick to say “yes” and are surprised to learn that the tomatoes on their Taco Bell tacos have been picked by exploited or enslaved workers. They are further alarmed to learn that the company has not only refused to pay a penny more a pound per tomato (which would immediately double the earnings of farm workers if it were passed along), but has refused to convene talks with its tomato suppliers.

In the 21st century, it is difficult to believe that slavery and exploitation still continue in the United States. But they do. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), a community-based farm workers’ group in southwest Florida, has helped the U.S. Justice Department prosecute five cases of debt-bondage slavery in the last five years. The Justice Department reports that 125 cases in human trafficking are currently under investigation. And these are the tip of the iceberg.

While estimates of the percentage of enslaved farm workers hover around 10 percent, those farm workers who are not enslaved are earning sub-poverty wages and living in dismal conditions.

Farm workers who pick tomatoes that go into Taco Bell products earn between 40 and 50 cents for each 32-pound bucket

they pick and haul. At 40 cents, workers must pick two tons of tomatoes to earn \$50. According to the Department of Labor, farm workers earn around \$7500 a year and their average wage has not changed in more than twenty years. A University of Florida survey found that the average income for Immokalee farm workers was even lower; it was \$6,574 in 1998.

Florida’s tomato growers are multi-state corporations with tens of thousands of acres up and down the east coast. Their owners have millions of dollars of assets. Further, they are insulated from public pressure because the companies are privately held and, for the most part, do not retail their produce directly to the consumer. There is virtually no “brand awareness” of the companies that grow Florida tomatoes outside of the wholesale level of the produce industry.

There are five major growers ranging from Six L’s Corporation—which pays the lowest rate at 40 cents per 32-pound bucket—to Gargiulio, which pays the highest rate at 50 cents. But even at 50 cents workers earn sub-poverty wages. Because farm workers are explicitly excluded from the National Labor Relations Act, growers are under no obligation to dialogue with

their workers and the workers have no recourse to adjudication by the National Labor Relations Board.

The CIW tried for more than six years to establish dialogue with the growers who employ them. They engaged in work stoppages, a 30-day hunger strike, and a 230-mile march. They contacted the Florida state government and even met with the governor with little result. One of the principle complaints of the tomato growers is that their margins were small and they could not afford to charge their clients more for the produce. So the farm workers turned to Taco Bell, a major purchaser and important client of southwest Florida tomatoes. The CIW asked Taco Bell to intervene and bring their tomato suppliers and workers together to the table for negotiations. After a year of silence from Taco Bell, the CIW called for a nationwide consumer boycott in February of 2001.

After pressure from faith communities, the media, and the general public, Taco Bell executives met with worker representatives in March of 2002. At that meeting Taco Bell representatives said

***We believe Christ calls us to accompany the farm workers who are made poor and vulnerable by the fast food and agricultural industries and to use our power to help bring all parties to the table to achieve resolution of these issues.***

that they would not intervene in what they described as a private labor matter between one of their suppliers—Six L’s Corporation—and their workers. Taco Bell and its parent company, YUM! Brands, have maintained this position.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA) and the General Synod of the United Church of Christ (UCC) have endorsed the consumer

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# *Diamonds that Cost an Arm and a Leg*

*by Sarah MacIlvaine*

**D**iamonds are a girl's best friend; or so we have heard from countless advertisements and films. Diamonds are the modern, Western symbol of love and commitment; seventy percent of all purchased diamonds are set in engagement rings and wedding bands. Unfortunately, few customers ever think twice about how their tokens of affection come to the jeweler in the first place. As a result, buyers risk innocently supporting rebel and terrorist groups who obtain the diamonds at a much higher cost than mere dollars.

The worldwide market for rough diamonds was worth \$7.8 billion last year. The majority of these diamonds come from African countries whose industries finance deadly conflicts in Angola, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Liberia. These diamond-rich countries are being torn apart by armed groups fighting for control of the industry. Rebel armies finance their military activities with funds from diamond sales. These "conflict" or "blood" diamonds, as they are often called, make up somewhere between three and ten percent of the annual global diamond trade.

Rebel leader Foday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) has been funded by the blood diamonds of Sierra Leone since 1991. With diamond money, the RUF has been able to wage a full guerilla war against the elected government of Tejan Kabbah. The atrocities, however, are not only aimed at the government and its officials. In a "symbolic" attempt to prevent civilians from voting in the northeast of the country, the RUF began a cruel system of amputations, which increased when leaders realized that people without limbs could not gather crops to feed themselves—or the Sierra Leonian Army. This caused the civilians to be dependent on the RUF for food while cutting off the army's supplies. Starvation

was then used as a tool to destabilize the country, giving an edge to the rebel group.

Similarly, rebel groups in politically unstable regions—people who have little to no interest in the global diamond market and who are, for the most part, illiterate—are greatly rewarded by higher profile terrorist groups or countries willing to do anything to get their foot in the door of the industry. The "lower level" rebels procure weapons, training, and personnel, while "higher level" groups and/or countries get diamonds to sell and trade for information and more sophisticated weapons.

The Liberian government, for example, arms and trains RUF rebels and then sends them into Sierra Leone in exchange for its diamonds. Village children are kidnapped, armed, and forced to participate in atrocities. The scenario is much the same in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo. Just a year after Laurent Kabila came to power in Congo, a new civil war broke out—funded mostly by diamond sales to Rwanda and Uganda. The rebels were seizing mines, forcing miners—often children—to work for inhumane hours with little to no pay and committing atrocities when miners didn't work fast enough.

In addition to these conflicts, reports of links between al-Qaeda and blood diamonds began coming in this spring.

Fortunately, human rights groups have been working to stop the sale of blood diamonds to jewelers in the West. An example is One Sky, a Canadian activist group, which has launched a campaign called *Blood Diamonds Are for Never*. One Sky does not advocate the boycott of diamonds because of the legitimate source of income diamonds can provide for many

countries. However, they—along with other human rights groups—do believe that there are actions consumers and retailers can take to help end the trade of conflict diamonds.

***"It is conceivable that the diamond ring being enjoyed by a young woman in the richest part of the world could have resulted in the dismemberment of a young woman in Sierra Leone."***

**—Salil Tripathi, Amnesty International**

One possible answer is a certification system called the Kimberley Process. Several members of the diamond industry, a coalition of human rights groups, and more than 37 governments developed a system in which each diamond can be traced from the mine to the jeweler. The U.S. Congress—encouraged by the Campaign to Eliminate Conflict Diamonds, a coalition of more than 150 organizations—passed in April the Clean Diamond Trade Act, which will set in place an international system known as the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. The law is designed to ensure that diamonds entering the U.S. are fairly mined and traded.

Under the Kimberley Process, diamonds come with certificates that have an identification number that is also engraved onto the diamond microscopically with a laser. Some problems have arisen with certificates being forged; however, the process is making headway on a system that will provide tamper- and forgery-proof certificates.

International sanctions have also been issued against countries that do not have proof of legitimate diamond mining.

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## **Mt. Olive Finds Itself in a Pickle**

*by Crystal Carter*

TOLEDO, OHIO—The Mt. Olive company has found itself in a pickle. This spring more than 400 people—organized by the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), students, and community members from Toledo—marched through town.

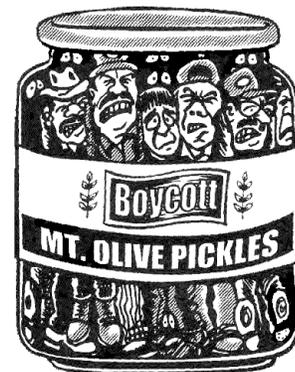
The rally marked the fourth year of a boycott of North Carolina's Mt. Olive Pickle Company. Local students from Toledo Christian School and Notre Dame Academy did not mince words. One student, Bryce Ell, said, "We think the only places inhuman acts can take place are in Third World countries, but this is happening here on our own soil."

The company is a "premier" pickle processor, but gives little attention to the immigrant workers who gather the million-dollar harvest for the company. A background paper from the FLOC web site enumerates the inhumane conditions Mt. Olive employees face. FLOC representatives say that, through fear of being deported or losing their jobs, immigrant

workers have learned not to complain. They continue to work in a deadly environment, receiving 65 cents per 33 buckets (averaging 6 buckets an hour.) Laborers may not have a toilet or a place to wash their hands, and they sleep together in rooms packed with other workers. Sick-ness seems unavoidable because they share "filthy" water buckets, and no medical treatments are provided.

FLOC, who fights for the rights of migrant farmworkers, says that the only way to solve this problem is with an agreement between the company, the farmers, and farmworkers to openly resolve problems and to ensure that workers receive just wages and humane working conditions. Baldemar Velasquez, FLOC's president, said that the boycott will end when laborers get the respect and dignity they deserve.

The rally recognized individual laborers who have suffered while working for Mt. Olive.



Megan Marshall, FLOC press advisor, pointed out one man in particular, Raymundo Hernandez, who was remembered at the event. Hernandez was a Mexican farm worker who was found dead from pesticide poisoning or sunstroke. According to FLOC, his bones were "picked clean by animals and scattered," and his body was left in the local coroner's office until his co-workers heard of his death. Hernandez's death went unnoticed by anyone other than co-workers until FLOC raised the money to send his remains back to his family in Mexico.

Bernadina and Alfredo Hernandez, the widow and son of the victim, attended the rally. Afterwards, Toledo Christian High School students led a question-and-answer session with the Hernandezes. Students from 13 area schools, Toledo Mayor Jack Ford, Arturo Rodriguez (president of United Farm Workers), and Baldemar Velasquez took part in the day's activities.

The mayor encouraged the students, saying that they were participating on the "right side of justice." Rodriguez reminded the crowd that the U.S. was founded and built by immigrants. As the rally continued, the people shouted, "Don't spend a nickel on a Mt. Olive pickle."

—Crystal Carter, a native of Waco, Texas, is a recent graduate of Baylor University in Professional Writing. For more information about the boycott, contact Megan Marshall, Farm Labor Organizing Committee, 1221 Broadway; Toledo, OH 43402; mmarsha@floc.com; or see the web site: [www.floc.com](http://www.floc.com)

### ***Get Your Church to Order No Sweat Apparel***

Anne O'Loughlin of No Sweat Apparel (NSA) recently wrote, "Whatever happens in Iraq this Spring, the global struggle for workers' rights continues." Fortunately, increasing numbers of church groups are going to NSA to buy T-shirts for summer camp, retreats, and mission trips.

Gary Cook of the Presbyterian Hunger Program (Presbyterian Church, USA) reported that Presbyterian youth across the country have embraced the concept of "sweat-free T's." (Many of them had the "sweat-free T" emblem printed on the sleeves of their shirts, along with their group's design.) LeDayne McLeese Polaski of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, who ordered around one hundred shirts for the BPFNA summer conference, wrote that the folks at NSA were great to work with. "Their prices are competitive," Polaski wrote, "they are helpful and friendly, and you'll be supporting economic justice."

You can support the No Sweatshops movement by visiting the on-line catalogue at [www.NoSweatApparel.com](http://www.NoSweatApparel.com) and/or by contacting them when you need to get shirts (or other items) printed for your church, school, team, etc. For more information, contact Anne O'Loughlin, Operations Manager, Bienestar International, Inc., Manufacturers of No Sweat© Apparel, 36 Border St., W. Newton, Massachusetts; [anne@nosweatapparel.com](mailto:anne@nosweatapparel.com).

**No Sweat**

## **Taco Bell Boycott**

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boycott of Taco Bell restaurants and products. These denominations have asked their approximately 4.5 million (combined) membership to boycott Taco Bell until the company convenes serious three-way negotiations between itself, its Florida tomato suppliers, and farm workers in regard to wages and working and living conditions.

Both the UCC and the PCUSA believe that Taco Bell has an ethical responsibility to intervene that is consistent with our churches' teaching and witness. In a 2002 letter to Taco Bell, Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk of the PCUSA wrote, "Taco Bell is a major purchaser of southwest Florida tomatoes and benefits by being able to purchase these tomatoes cheaply on account of the poverty wages earned by farm workers. As such, we believe that Taco Bell has a clear moral responsibility to take leadership to assure just working conditions and compensation for the very persons who provide the products which are at the heart of your operation. Any corporation which benefits through the exploitation of others is gravely implicated in such exploitation and has a moral and ethical responsibility to end that exploitation."

Through this boycott, members of the PCUSA and the UCC are exerting consumer pressure to encourage Taco Bell, and

## **Blood Diamonds,**

*continued from page 3*

Liberian diamonds have been banned from the global market because of the country's involvement with surrounding rebel groups. The world's leading diamond-mining company, De Beers, which accounts for almost seventy percent of diamond sales, banned all purchase of diamonds from Angola. The financial impact of the sanctions on these countries has forced them to come up with certification systems, forcing them to rely on the legitimate diamond market.

The global market, however, is far from being clean. There is currently little guarantee that any diamond purchased is conflict-free. Countries are still smuggling in thousands of diamonds from rebel-controlled mines, and some companies are still buying uncertified diamonds because they are much cheaper than certified diamonds. Consequently, unknowing consumers looking to buy the best diamond at

the best price may be purchasing diamonds mined by severely abused people. "It is conceivable that the diamond ring being enjoyed by a young woman in the richest part of the world could have resulted in the dismemberment of a young woman in Sierra Leone," said Salil Tripathi, Amnesty International's economic relations and human rights campaign coordinator.

Certified diamonds are available at many jewelers. Many offer both certified and uncertified gems. However, this is not usually advertised. Customers have to know about the problem and ask about certification. Others who are sensitive to this issue purchase diamonds from antique rings, which are

those with whom they subcontract, to better business and labor practices that we believe are more in line with God's vision for our world. We do not view our churches' role to be that of negotiator for Taco Bell, the growers, or the workers. Rather, as churches, we see our role as twofold. We believe Christ calls us to accompany the farm workers who are made poor and vulnerable by the fast food and agricultural industries and to use our power to help bring all parties to the table to achieve resolution of these issues.

—*The Rev. Noelle Damico is National Coordinator for the Taco Bell Boycott of the PCUSA. For more information and please visit [www.pcusa.org/boycott](http://www.pcusa.org/boycott). For an excellent article on slavery in Florida's tomato fields and the boycott of Taco Bell see the April 21&28, 2003 issue of The New Yorker.*

### *What You Can Do:*

Instead of merely boycotting, consider writing to Mr. Emil Brolick, President of Taco Bell, at the address below and urging him to take responsibility for slavery and exploitation in the fields where Taco Bell's tomatoes are picked.

Mr. Emil Brolick, President  
Taco Bell Corporation  
17901 Von Karman  
Irvine, CA 92614



more likely to be "conflict-free" and not as expensive as new, certified diamonds.

Uncertified diamonds may be cheaper financially, but is the price really worth an innocent African's literal arm and leg?

—*Sarah MacIlvaine, a native of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, is a Professional Writing student at Baylor University.*

### *Sources:*

"Diamonds Are for Never: One Sky Campaign to End the Trade in Conflict Diamonds" ([www.onesky.ca/diamonds](http://www.onesky.ca/diamonds)); British Broadcasting Company: *Blood Diamonds*, a BBC documentary ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)); Cable News Network: "Diamond Industry Reacts to Charges That It's Letting Trade in 'Blood Diamonds' Pay for African Wars," "Deal Cut on 'Blood Diamonds,'" "Diamond Industry Approves Ban on War-related Gems" ([www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com)); Amnesty International: "Did Someone Die for That Diamond?," "The Campaign to Eliminate Conflict Diamonds Welcomes Passage of Clean Diamond Trade Act" ([www.amnestyusa.org](http://www.amnestyusa.org))

## Twentieth World Food Day Teleconference October 16, 2003 COOPERATION OR CALAMITY: AFRICA IN PERIL

The 20th World Food Day teleconference will feature Urban Jonsson, UNICEF Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa. The program will be available worldwide in English with simultaneous French and Spanish interpretation. Single, reproducible copies of the teleconference Study/Action Packet, will be available in English in early summer and will be sent free of charge to registered sites in North America.

Continuing education credits for teleconference participation will be provided through Marywood University. The American Dietetic Association will offer CEUs for registered dietitians and dietetic technicians, and the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences has once again approved Professional Development Units (PDUs) for its members. The program will be broadcast live from the studios of George Washington University in Washington DC, Thursday, October 16th, from noon to 3:00 p.m., Eastern Time. There are no restrictions on videotaping or rebroadcast.

For additional information, please contact Patricia Young, National Coordinator, U.S. National Committee for World Food Day, 2175 K Street NW, Washington DC 20437; Phone: 202-653-2404; Fax: 202-653-5760; [www.worldfooddayusa.org](http://www.worldfooddayusa.org).

### Interested in an internship in organic agriculture?

### Interested in work in developing countries?

### Check out this unique opportunity.

The internship program at World Hunger Relief, Inc. provides:

- Education in methods of conserving and sharing resources for those with an abundance; and
- On-site training and assistance in sustainable development in specific locations around the world.

The internship involves one year of training and work on the WHRI farm north of Waco, Texas, followed by a three-month experience in Ferrier, Haiti. Room and board is provided, and there is no cost for the internship.

World Hunger Relief, Inc. is a Christian organization committed to the alleviation of hunger around the world. For more information, contact World Hunger Relief, Inc., P.O. Box 639, Elm Mott, TX 76640-0639; [WHRIDale@hotmail.com](mailto:WHRIDale@hotmail.com), 254/799-5611; or go to the WHRI web site at [www.worldhungerrelief.org](http://www.worldhungerrelief.org).

## Sacred



## Seasons

Sacred Seasons is a quarterly series of creative worship tools to help raise awareness of hunger and justice issues. To order, call 254/755-7745; fax 254/753-1909; write to Seeds Publishers at 602 James, Waco, TX 76706; or e-mail [seedshope@aol.com](mailto:seedshope@aol.com). Single packets are US\$50. (Non-US subscriptions are \$135; individual packets are \$60.) For more information, see [www.seedspublishers.org](http://www.seedspublishers.org).

## Tax Cut Proposal,

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shameful looting of the federal treasury by the rich and powerful in America, compliments of their friends in Congress.”

Even *Wall Street Journal* editors are concerned about the tax cut plan's effect on the poor, saying the bill includes huge loopholes that in fact mean the “super-rich” could avoid paying taxes altogether.

The central issue here, however, is not that the poor will not receive much (if any) monetary benefit. The concern is that, because wealthy citizens will not be investing back into the government as much as last year, social services will have to be drastically cut—even more than they have already. Currently 33.6 million people in the U.S.—including about 13 million children—are unsure whether they will have to be enough to eat at their next meal.

The tax cuts could take \$13 billion from the Food Stamp Program over 10 years, \$8 billion from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and \$6 billion from child nutrition programs. In addition, more than 12 million low- and moderate-income families with children—30 percent of all families—will receive no tax cuts from the Bush plan.

Anne Curtis of Network, a national Catholic social justice lobby, says, “in a nation where 14 million children go to bed hungry, where there's a critical lack of decent and affordable housing, where over 40 million lack health insurance; such a sizeable tax cut could squander an opportunity to meet these critical, unmet needs in our nation.”

Supporters of the tax cuts, however, say that they are necessary to reduce the constantly increasing federal budget deficit. Nevertheless, institutions like the Brookings-Urban Tax Policy Center calculate that the tax proposal will actually account for two-thirds of the next decade's anticipated budget deficits.

—*Sarah MacIlvaine, a graduate of Baylor University in professional writing, is working this summer as an editor in London, England. Sources: BBC, Associated Baptist Press, Bread for the World.*



## **War Against Disease, Hunger Continues for Iraqi Children**

BAGHDAD, IRAQ—If health situation doesn't improve

soon, more children under five could die, say humanitarian agencies working in Iraq. Steve Weaver of Church World Service (CWS) reported in May a high incidence of diarrhea among children, overcrowding in hospitals and clinics, and a general lack of sources of protein. Jonathan Frerichs of Lutheran World Relief said that the Baghdad Central Child Hospital was receiving 2,000 patients a day and was forced to bury 100 people in their own garden.

To help meet rapidly growing needs for medical supplies, Church World Service and its partner agencies (local organizations) added \$75,000 to the ongoing "All Our Children" campaign, to which they had already pledged \$1 million before the war. The additional money is earmarked specifically for pediatric hospitals in Baghdad.

The campaign was established to respond to the longstanding health crisis among Iraq's children. (According to UN and other sources, between 500,000 to 1 million children have died in Iraq since 1991. The death rate of children under 5 is reported as 2.5 times greater than in 1990.) Two additional projects will benefit street children, orphans, and other institutionalized children, and those separated from their families by the war.

U.S. and aid officials agree that currently there is no "humanitarian crisis" in Iraq, "which means people are not on the verge of death," said Rick Augsburg of CWS. "But there is severe humanitarian need that, if not met quickly, could result in a higher mortality rate for children and others who are vulnerable."

—from *Church World Service*

## **Zimbabwe Banks Running Out of Money as Crisis Mounts**

HARARE, ZIMBABWE—Long queues of people waited outside banks and cash machines in late May in central Harare amid fears of more strikes and reports that banks were limiting cash withdrawals.

A three-day "stay-away" last month left banks and customers struggling for cash and the situation appears to have worsened, with state media reporting that the central bank no longer has the necessary foreign currency to print new notes.

Fuelling the anxiety, the state-owned *Herald* newspaper reported that cash shortages had resurfaced at "most banks in Harare." The paper said customers were only being allowed to withdraw a maximum of up to 20,000 Zimbabwe dollars (\$24,20 euros).

Zimbabweans are struggling under shortages of many basic goods, including foodstuffs and fuel, while inflation has now topped 269 percent. At press time, African Free Press reported rumors of more protest stay-aways, sponsored by the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Meanwhile, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) have advised people to stock up on provisions and to keep money aside for a possible indefinite job stay-away. —from *African Free Press and the South Africa Mail & Guardian*

## **Political Squall Stalls Bangladesh Development Projects**

DHAKA, BANGLADESH—In early March the government of Bangladesh blocked foreign funding to several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) running poverty alleviation programs, while a 16-month probe into their political links continued. Projects impacting the lives of nearly six million poor people were put on hold. The targeted NGOs include PROSHIKA, International Voluntary Services, BNPS and Center for Development Services.

According to a senior government official, the NGO Affairs Bureau, functioning under the control of the Prime Minister's Office, had stalled funds totaling US\$ 61.70 million to five of the country's large NGOs accused of financing Bangladesh's leading opposition party. Much to the displeasure of the right-wing Bangladesh Nationalist Party government, the clutch of indicted NGOs had earlier supported a pro-democracy movement in the country.

A five-year program launched in 1999 by Bangladesh's second largest NGO, PROSHIKA, intended to benefit an estimated 700,000 rural children, remains only partly implemented after the government blocked funding. The mammoth educational project was to be implemented through 600 small NGOs under PROSHIKA's guidance.

Nearly 10,000 large and small NGOs in the under-developed nation are involved in poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, literacy, health services, and micro-credit programs among the rural and urban poor.

This spring the Intelligence Bureau and the Anti-Corruption Bureau had made no apparent headway into allegations of corruption and misuse of foreign funds. Concerned about the probe's tardy progress, representatives of donor agencies met the government twice to enquire about clearance of their funds. They were told that action would be taken only after the enquiry's conclusion.

As proof of the increasing politicization of the NGO sector, the government—led by Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia—motivated leaders of rival NGOs to form a pro-government NGO coalition. The Bangladesh government boasts a long tradition of policing NGO activities—during the regimes of General Hussein Muhammad Ershad (1982-1990) and Khaleda Zia (1991-1996.) In all previous incidents, the situation was resolved through donor intervention.

—from a story by *Saleem Samad, OneWorld South Asia*

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### **Statement of Purpose**

Seeds of Hope is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group intends to seek out people of faith who feel called to care for the poor; and to affirm, enable, and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

### **Editorial Address**

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## *quotes, poems, & pithy sayings*

The prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) told his wife Ayesha: "If you love the poor and bring them near you...God will bring you near Him on the Day of Resurrection." Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 1376. The Prophet also said: "The people before you were destroyed because they inflicted legal punishments on the poor and forgave the rich." Sahih Al-Bukhari, Volume 8, Hadith 778

No one has a right to sit down and feel helpless, there's too much to do.

—*Dorothy Day*

One cannot level one's moral lance at every evil in the universe. There are just too many of them. But you can do something, and the difference between doing something and doing nothing is everything.

—*Daniel Berrigan*

*Come and see. Come and see, he said.*

Many went and saw. Simon Peter and Andrew went and saw. Philip and Nathaniel.

They went and saw. And followed and tasted and took in.

They risked all they had and were to follow, to walk beside one whose words and deeds ended in a cross.

The Jesus they followed asked hard and discomfiting questions: Why are there poor people? Why do some get to eat lots and some don't get to eat at all? Why are some people considered better than others? How did it happen that church got turned into a marketplace? How did it happen that some people lord it over others? Why is violence seen as a solution to anything?

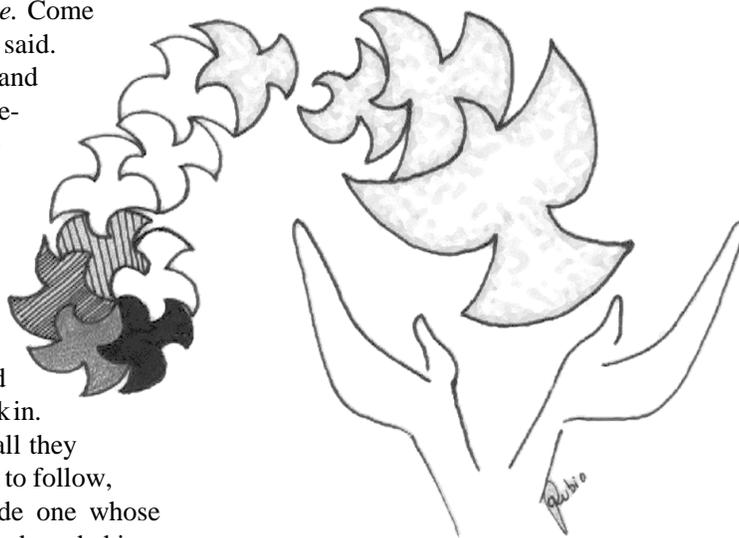
—*Lee McKenna DuCharme, minister in Toronto, Ontario*

We are creating a small part of a future vision of the realm of God that began with broken bread and a cup of wine. The final chapter of the story has been written; we're just not there yet. Our calling is to be faithful witnesses to God's future of a world where peace and justice and mercy are the defining marks.

—*Jim Lowder, Interim Director, Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America*

Perhaps all dragons in our lives are really princesses just waiting to see us just once being beautiful and courageous. Perhaps everything fearful is basically helplessness that seeks our help.

—*Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet*



Seeds of Hope Publishers also produce quarterly packets of worship materials for the liturgical year—with an economic justice attitude. These include litanies, sermons, children's and youth activities, bulletin art, and drama.

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