

Inter Pares

Highlights 2008

In 2008, Inter Pares contributed more than \$6.5 million in financial support as well as political and organizational assistance to sustain the work of our counterparts in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Canada. The following are some of the highlights of these activities. More detailed information is available on the Inter Pares Web site at www.interpares.ca.



RITA MORRIS

Food distribution center in a Burmese refugee camp in Thailand.

FOR PEOPLE LIVING IN rural Bangladesh, access to cultivable land is essential for survival. However, huge areas of coastal agricultural land are being seized by the aquaculture industry to produce shrimp for export. In one region, 13,000 people were forced from their farms to make way for the shrimp industry. **Nijera Kori** initiated a campaign in this region to

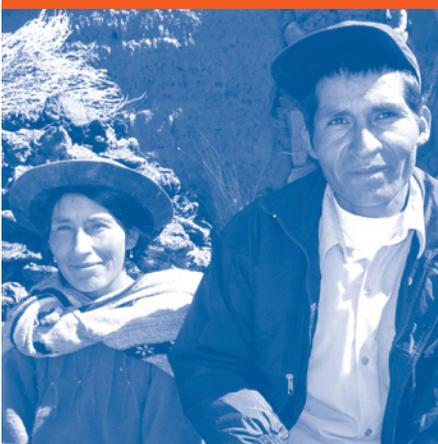
Asia

mobilize affected people. After years of campaigning, more than a quarter of the land has been returned to local people this year. It is through campaigns such as this that **Nijera Kori**, which works with more than 260,000 members, can promote and defend the rights of the poorest people in the country.

AS THE FOOD PRICE CRISIS swept the world this year, among the most affected groups are displaced people from Burma living in refugee camps in Thailand who are entirely dependent on food aid. In conjunction with the **Thailand-Burma Border Consortium**, Inter Pares mounted an awareness campaign with Canadian parliamentarians and officials to secure additional financial assistance to support these refugees. As a result, the Canadian government announced a \$2 million

assistance package over the next two years to help meet food needs in the refugee camps. This demonstration of Canadian support encouraged other international donor countries to provide assistance as well.

IN THE PHILIPPINES, the health organization **Likhaan** works in some of the poorest slum areas of major cities such as Manila. **Likhaan's** community clinics, staffed and operated by trained volunteers from within these communities, provided family planning and obstetric consultations to more than 5,000 women. Because poor people have little access to affordable health services, in 2008 **Likhaan** initiated a self-insurance program through community organizations. **Likhaan** plans to have at least 1,200 people registered this year in the program.



JEAN SYMES

Members of an Andean community in Huancavelica, Peru.

AS THE ECONOMIES of many Central and Latin American countries contract, people are migrating in hopes of finding jobs and livelihoods in Mexico or the United States. These migrants are extremely vulnerable to extortion, physical and sexual violence, and even death. The **Casa del Migrante Tecún Umán** in Guatemala provides support services to migrants, educating them about their rights so that they can better protect themselves if they are arrested or face extortion at the hands of officials. This

Latin America

year more than 4,200 migrants used the support services of the Casa to make their journeys safer. The need for these services is so great that the Casa is committing a greater portion of its resources to human rights training to promote the security and dignity of migrants.

HUANCAVELICA, located high in the Andes, was one of the regions most affected by the violent conflict in Peru, and is among the poorest regions of the country. For more than a decade, the **Project Counselling Service (PCS)** has been working with citizens of Huancavelica to develop skills that enable local people to reconstruct the social and economic infrastructure of the region. By providing training in democratic governance, participatory planning, budgeting, and gender awareness, community leaders, town counsellors and local professionals are engaged in rebuilding their communities based on a culture of justice, equality and

peace. This year the local university integrated the training program into its regular curriculum, ensuring that this training will be sustained. PCS has also extended the training program to the region of Apurimac, based on the success and lessons learned from Huancavelica.

THE ARMED CONFLICTS in Peru, Guatemala and Colombia have killed and displaced thousands of people. The survivors of these conflicts are now organizing to demand truth, justice and reparations from their governments. They want to restore their countries' collective memory, tell their stories to educate the broader public, and demand that their governments address the consequences of this violence. Through the PCS, forty participants from these three countries took part in an exchange in Peru to share experiences and learn about strategies for legal processes, advocacy with authorities, and healing for their communities.

Africa



Bijago fisherfolk bringing in the catch, Guinea-Bissau.

DURING THE COLONIAL ERA, Africa's resources fed the industries of the North but contributed little of value to African communities. Today, not much has changed. The **Africa Initiative on Mining, Environment and Society** (AIMES), a pan-African network of citizens' groups from eighteen countries, is pressing African governments to put an end to exploitive mining practices that contribute little to local economies and destroy local environments. AIMES promotes alternative policy and contracting frameworks with governments and helps organize communities affected by mining activities. As a result of citizen

mobilization, the governments of Zambia, Tanzania and the Congo have re-opened contracts with multinational companies and are demanding changes that bring greater benefits to local economies.

LIKE MANY PEOPLE around the world, the citizens of Guinea-Bissau faced dramatic price increases this year in staple foods such as rice, wheat and corn. In the midst of this crisis, the local environmental organization **Tiniguena** is developing and supporting a movement advocating the production and consumption of local foods. Tiniguena launched the *cozinha do terra* – the “earth kitchen” – where local produce is purchased and transformed into nutritious dishes, thus promoting the value of local foods and recipes. Tiniguena also continued its work in the Guinean countryside, supporting farmers by organizing exchanges of local seed varieties and providing training in organic agriculture. Through these activities, Tiniguena is helping to build the resilience of people by promoting and ensuring access to local food.

AFRICAN FARMERS are increasingly being pressured by governments and multinational companies to use genetically modified (GM) seeds, which impose higher investment costs, threaten biodiversity, and increase the risks of crop failure. Farmer resistance to the introduction of GM seeds has led to the development of a regional network in nine West African countries. Today the **Coalition for the Protection of African Genetic Heritage** (COPAGEN) represents millions of small-scale farmers. Through film, education caravans and public meetings, COPAGEN informs farmers, urban communities and politicians about the consequences of genetic engineering in agriculture. As a result of this work, the government of Benin renewed a five-year moratorium on the introduction of genetically modified crops. COPAGEN's work is helping West African farmers to engage as citizens in national debates on biotechnology in agriculture policies and practices.

Canada



Javiera Rulli of Paraguay at the Ottawa public forum on agrofuels.

MINING COMPANIES in Canada have traditionally undertaken mine exploration and development with little regard for the impact on people's lives and the environment. **MiningWatch Canada** is contributing to making social, health and environmental concerns more of a priority in government decisions on land use. After years of advocacy, and shortly after MiningWatch published its new report on Canada's northern boreal forest, the Ontario government announced it will protect up to half of the province's boreal forest from mining and other resource development. MiningWatch is also challenging the

federal government's decision to allow freshwater lakes to be used as waste dumps for toxic mine tailings, and has petitioned Canada's Auditor General for an urgent review of this decision.

THIS PAST SPRING, Inter Pares, along with a coalition of Canadian organizations, organized a national educational campaign on the impact of agrofuels on human rights, food production and the environment. The Crops, Cars and Climate Crisis campaign included speakers from the Americas, Asia, and Africa who toured Canada to raise awareness about the negative impact of agrofuels development on communities in Southern countries and the potential impact in Canada. Thanks to the hospitality and skills of organizers in Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax and Charlottetown, thousands of Canadians engaged in public debates about the perils of transforming food crops into fuel. You can watch the Ottawa public forum online at www.interpares.ca/cpacvideo.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT and the privacy rights of Canadians are being jeopardized by practices adopted by the Canadian and U.S. governments to screen travellers at airports and border crossings. Watch lists and “no-fly” lists are resulting in travellers being detained at border crossings, interrogated, and in some cases prevented from continuing their journeys. Some travellers have been told the only way to get off the watch list is to legally change their name. These lists have also been used to prevent peace and labour activists from entering Canada and the U.S. In 2008, the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group began an investigation by collecting the stories of people who have been wrongfully detained or prohibited from travelling. This information will be used for public education purposes and to engage with authorities about abusive practices such as racial profiling. For more information, see www.travelwatchlist.ca.

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