



Inter Pares

BULLETIN

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Solidarity Is Our Security

The daily newspapers sit on the kitchen table at the Inter Pares office, where everyone can flip through their pages and see the headlines. Fear. Crisis. Security. Risk. These words are used to describe a range of world events, simplifying complex problems into bite-sized concepts. As we read them, we are encouraged to worry about the world we live in and to fear certain people with whom we share this planet.

But headlines and articles have no meaning if they are stripped of context. Too often people's rights and freedoms are compromised in the name of security. In much of the Western world, including Canada, entire communities are under surveillance. They live in fear of guilt by association, and of the real possibility of being arrested, deported, tortured, or "disappeared" without ever knowing of what they are accused. Today the targets are predominantly Muslim, but history is replete with the practice of targeting and persecuting as public enemies any of a number of definable groups, establishing a pretext for treating them differently. As Hannah Arendt explained many years ago, "states of exception" serve as legally authorized spaces where rule of law does not apply. Throughout history, fear has been mobilized to justify the exclusion and expulsion of entire groups and communities in the name of protecting 'our' security. From Nazi concentration camps, to the 'Red Scare', and the 'war on terror', this fear only serves to justify the complete denial of rights for some, in exchange for a false sense of safety for others.

In our world, in our media, the creation of fear as an instrument of control and public compliance is not limited to the fear of the Other, but extends to almost all aspects of our lives. Fear has been instrumentalized to rally public

support for wars, detentions, renditions, and for restricting people's movement. Fear justifies the erosion of human rights, and encourages us to accept unquestioningly the solutions – medical, corporate, political, and military – we are told will make us safe. It encourages people and governments to act without careful consideration. Fear keeps us expecting more calamities, accepting that the situation can only get worse. It has a paralyzing effect on us, dampens our curiosity about the world and our belief in real possibilities for change.

As a society, we need to think critically about what it means to build a world where each person is able to reach their full potential – a world that secures this dream for all.

What would happen if we traded fear for trust? Fear individualizes and breaks down community, while trust rebuilds the connections among us. By convening people from around the world to discuss and act together on issues of common concern, Inter Pares contributes to rebuilding these human connections. Working in broad-based coalitions related to peacebuilding, women's health, corporate responsibility, biodiversity, economic justice, and civil liberties has allowed Inter Pares to join with others, exchanging ideas that lead to more effective action. When people and organizations have found themselves immobilized by fear, they have found new courage in reaching out to others, building trust and mutual support. Such courage is in the actions of human rights defenders who speak out, even when it is dangerous to do so. It exists in the audacity of groups such as those in Malaysia and Canada, demanding respect for migrants' human rights, and in the ways Africans are speaking out against powerful interests and working to secure their own economic well-being.

This bulletin describes how Inter Pares and our counterparts are replacing fear with common cause, and how together, we are addressing the roots of poverty and oppression – because our security lies in our solidarity with each other. ☘

risk

fear

disease

CRISIS

security

RACISM

Refugees in Malaysia: No sanctuary



REBECCA WOLSKAK

Makeshift camp in the jungle outside Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Victor Biak Lian was visibly angry as he told us about several young men from Burma who were sold into slavery. Victor, a founder of the Chin Human Rights Organization, is a colleague of Inter Pares.

The story began when ten young men, like thousands of others, fled persecution in Chin State, a highly militarized region of Burma. They paid a broker to transport them to Malaysia where they hoped to find work. Arriving at the border of Malaysia and Thailand, the young men were turned over to another broker. Two of the men were separated from the group and put onto a fishing boat which they assumed would take them to Malaysia. Instead, they were greeted by an armed captain who told them they now belonged to him. For the next twenty-two days, the fishing boat plied the waters off the coastline of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. There were seven other crew members, all virtual slaves. They were fed little and worked hard.

Breaking the Curse

Last spring, during the Summit of the Americas, President Hugo Chavez gave President Obama a copy of Eduardo Galeano's famous treatise, *Open Veins of Latin America*. Curious about the significance of this gift, thousands of people around the world bought copies of the book. Published in 1971, it describes five hundred years of pillage of Latin America by European and, later, American interests. If Chavez were an African leader, he might have given President Obama Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* – a testament to the five hundred years of brutal theft and exploitation that have made the continent the poorest in the world, despite its rich natural resources.

This theft, still alive and well today, is made invisible by images of Africa as a region of drought, hunger, and poverty, devoid of any riches and always in need of Northern charity. On the contrary, Africa is extremely rich – in culture, music, language, history, and natural resources. The “paradox of plenty” describes countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, and Ghana, whose staggering mineral wealth have made them battlegrounds – often literally – for resource exploitation. While this wealth generates billions in revenue, the majority in these countries continue to live in poverty. In the case of conflict-ridden countries such as the Congo, millions of people have died in wars fuelled by the looting of its resources.

The pillaging of Africa is also achieved through other means. Each year, the global South loses an estimated \$160

billion in revenue due to commercial tax evasion – almost twice the amount of aid it receives from the North. *Breaking the Curse*, a ground-breaking report co-authored by Inter Pares counterpart Third World Network-Africa (TWN-Africa), paints a damning portrait of the systematic drain of mining-generated wealth from Africa. While mining companies worldwide recorded windfall profits, the standard of living of people living in countries where these minerals were mined did not improve. Looking at seven resource-rich countries in Africa, the study demonstrates that government tax breaks and illegal tax evasion schemes by mining corporations have meant millions in lost revenue for these countries. The report proposes measures to redirect this income to African communities and countries for their development.

As a mining superpower, Canada plays a major role in exploiting Africa's mineral resources. Canadian mining companies held \$14.7 billion in assets in 35 African countries in 2007, a figure estimated to reach \$20 billion by 2010. Through research and advocacy, TWN-Africa and Inter Pares are asserting that the accumulation of wealth in the North must not come at the expense of Africa's economic and physical security. ❧

Breaking the Curse is available at

<http://documents.twnafrica.org/breaking-the-curse-march2009.pdf>.

For more information on Canadian mining interests in Africa: www.pambazuka.org/en/issue/407.

For a closer look at mining in Ghana, view the Inter Pares photo essay “The Price of Gold” available at www.interpares.ca/en/photo_essay/5/index.php.

One day a storm warning came in over the radio and the boat headed for shore. In the dark of night, all of the men slipped over the side. For the next four years they worked on a rubber plantation along the Thailand-Malaysia border and witnessed traffickers prey on other refugees. Some refugees were sold into slavery. Others were taken into Malaysia if they could pay a hefty fee. Women refugees often simply disappeared.

“Theirs is not a unique story,” said Victor. “Thousands of Burmese refugees are coming to Malaysia seeking security. But what they find is exploitation, extortion, trafficking, and sometimes death.”

Victor’s concerns were corroborated in April when the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations released a report on Burmese refugees in Malaysia and southern Thailand. Male refugees, the report confirmed, are often sold into slavery on the fishing fleets. Women are frequently sold to

brothels. The report condemned the Malaysian government’s use of civilian vigilante groups to hunt down refugees in order to deport them. The report noted that some corrupt Malaysian authorities are complicit in handing over refugees to traffickers.

International attention and condemnation are required to put an end to these abuses. In the meantime, Inter Pares and the Chin Human Rights Organization are supporting refugees in Malaysia to organize to reduce their vulnerability. Refugee communities are now negotiating directly with authorities to report mistreatment and corruption by officials. They are developing basic services and working with UN agencies to provide protection to women and children.

Some day these refugees will go home when human rights and freedom return to Burma. For now, they are developing their own collective security in a hostile and often dangerous environment. ❧

Detention as a Means of Protection?

Imagine yourself having to make the difficult decision to leave your home, family, and community to travel to a distant land in the hopes of finding safety and protection. Imagine being locked up when you finally arrive, maybe indefinitely, and treated like a criminal.

Each year, hundreds of people, including minors and pregnant women, are detained when they arrive in Canada seeking refugee status. Unbeknownst to most Canadians, detention of refugee claimants is quickly becoming an institutionalized practice rather than an exception. People seeking security and protection in Canada – frequently after harrowing journeys – are forcibly confined and treated as criminals, often simply because their proof of identity is deemed insufficient.

Alarmed that non-citizens were experiencing arbitrary detention, mistreatment, and lack of due process, Glynis Williams and Jenny Jeanes created *Action Réfugiés Montréal* (ARM), a frontline response to this injustice. Assisted by a team of volunteers, they make weekly visits to the Immigration Prevention Centre in Laval, Québec, where the majority of people detained for immigration reasons in the province are held. ARM’s team provides detainees with information on immigration and refugee law, and ensures that their basic rights are respected.

In a radio interview featuring the work of ARM, Duval, a Congolese man who arrived in Canada in 2008, explained how he was arrested and detained for more than a month

after he submitted his refugee claim. He described feeling like a criminal, under constant surveillance during his detention. Duval recalled his encounter with the staff and volunteers of ARM – the only organization he saw in the detention centre. They assisted him in filling out forms, established contacts for him with outside resources, provided him with telephone calling cards, and were around “just to talk and listen.” Duval acknowledged that “ARM can’t find all the solutions for the migrants who are detained, but they help us get started and understand what is happening.”

Advocating respect for detainees rights is not an easy task. The prejudice with which many Canadians treat migrants is amplified when they are detained; detainees are viewed with suspicion instead of welcomed. In the vast majority of cases, the Canadian Border Services Agency does not even allege that the detainees pose a danger. In these cases, ARM insists that more humane and compassionate alternatives be used.

In times when more and more barriers are being imposed on the movement of people, especially those from the global South, organizations like ARM are keeping alive the spirit that brought Canada to sign the International Convention that protects the right of all human beings to request safe asylum. Through supporting ARM, Inter Pares is working to create mutual security where we care for – rather than fear – each other. ❧

Defeating Fear by Building Solidarity

In the wake of the September 11th, 2001 attacks in the United States, state action around the world was swift and harsh. Suspected terrorists were imprisoned, political freedoms were curtailed, and “anti-terrorism” legislation was introduced. Fear pervaded the lives of ordinary people, particularly those who disagreed with the state, immigrant communities and those defending human rights and civil liberties. It was also in this moment that social justice in Canada saw one of its finest moments when the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG) was born.

This initiative was a response to a new, heightened national security agenda. The ICLMG challenged the idea that security and human rights are incompatible and that enacting laws and policies to curtail political dissent, civil liberties, refugee rights, and personal freedoms will protect us. The ICLMG embodied an approach centred on collaboration, cooperation and solidarity. Together, the organizations involved could question and oppose injustice, where alone, they felt paralyzed and constrained by the fear of possible repercussions. Today, the ICLMG is a coalition of 38 civil society organizations concerned with violations of rights in Canada in the name of “security.” In addition to Inter Pares, its members include Amnesty International, the Canadian Labour Congress, the National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, PEN Canada, and the Muslim Civil Liberties Association.

Solidarity is creative, innovative, and challenges the politics of fear.

The ICLMG was an intervener in the Arar Commission, which probed the actions of the RCMP and CSIS around the rendition of Maher Arar, and is currently advocating for implementation of the recommendations that emerged from that enquiry. The ICLMG has also been publicly active in demanding the repatriation of Omar Khadr, a Canadian citizen and former child soldier detained in Guantanamo Bay, and of Abousfian Abdelrazik, a Canadian citizen whom Canada had arrested in Sudan for supposed terrorist links, and who was being denied a passport to return home despite having been cleared of all suspicion by CSIS and the RCMP. The ICLMG is monitoring watch lists, border controls, and enhanced driver’s licenses, and is tracking Canada’s human rights record. In all cases, it is the solidarity of ICLMG’s broad membership that allows it to challenge the erosion of rights, freedoms, and civil liberties.

Building solidarity and working in common cause, as we do in ICLMG, are key elements of Inter Pares’ approach, in Canada and internationally. We seek authentic partnerships based on equality, respect, and diversity with individuals and groups who share our view that the world of the privileged and powerful is often built on fear and the construction of an “Other”; that a more just world requires a transformation



can and must happen. Just as important is our role as a Canadian organization, among our supporters and the Canadian public, with our own government and in domestic as well as international coalitions for global solidarity.

Solidarity is creative, innovative, and challenges the politics of fear. It means contributing financially to struggles for change. It involves listening to the perspectives of our counterparts, and honestly sharing our own views and opinions. Too often, particularly in the world of international cooperation, partnerships are characterized by North-South paternalism and an appropriation of the work of local actors that serves to undercut true local ownership. The need to justify one’s value-added encourages branding, competition and territoriality as opposed to collaboration, where success and challenges are shared.

Solidarity means bearing witness to injustice in the world and speaking out against intolerance and complicity. It is also about bearing witness to the humanity and hope on the planet and sharing those often awe-inspiring and everyday stories – because this too challenges fear. It is about resisting the urge to paint any one people with the grim, desperate brush of hopelessness, ultimately diminishing their humanity.

After thirty-five years, Inter Pares and our counterparts have learned much about working together in pursuit of peace and justice. And along the way, we have had the privilege to be part of some enduring and inspiring successes. We are particularly proud to have been co-founders of the ICLMG, a story that exemplifies what social justice is all about. ❧

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With the support of thousands of Canadians, Inter Pares works in Canada and around the world with social change organizations who share the analysis that poverty and injustice are caused by inequities within and among nations, and who are working to promote peace, and social and economic justice in their communities and societies.

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