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Inter Pares' Annual General Meeting
April 30th, 2015
Speaking notes from the Executive Director

Welcome everyone. Particularly on behalf of staff, I want to express our sincere appreciation for the solidarity and support from colleagues, Board, friends and allies – all our members here today.

I want to let you know that we really do appreciate the role you play by continuing to be members. We take pride that Inter Pares is a well-governed organization, and to continue being a well-governed organization, we need members. So renewing the membership is not just about the \$10. It is about caring about the governance of the organization.

However, it is also about the \$10, so make sure you pay up. Thank you for renewing your membership!

My report today, as with other years, will give you a very small, selective glimpse of some of what we've done at Inter Pares with over the past year. But I would also encourage you to look at our annual report, which takes a bit of a 40-year retrospective; to sign up for our e-newsletters, if you haven't already; and of course peruse our website and our print newsletters. We spend a significant amount of effort in trying to convey what we do, why we do it and how through these communication vehicles. Our new website went live just under a year ago, the bugs have been worked out and we are thrilled with it. In addition to being beautifully designed, it is a great resource on Inter Pares' work, approach and values. As always, we welcome any feedback you might

have. In addition, feel free to speak to staff who are here and ever-passionate about Inter Pares' programs.

Institutional

- **Viability:** 2015 is the year we've known was on the horizon. It is the year both our five-year DFATD funding agreements end. One was for our Burma program, and the other for our Partnership Branch program. In 2014, these two agreements accounted for 70% of our revenue and come to an end at various points this year. Many of us were dreading this year, but now that it has arrived, I can assure you that we have embraced it.
- How have we planned for this? For almost two years now, we have been working with the board to develop a plan. We went through a number of very detailed financial scenarios – we discussed the programmatic implications – the human resources implication – how we could use our bequest fund most strategically– how we could ramp up our fundraising and proposal-writing and other revenue-generation – what kind of political work we have to do. We hired a change management consultant, who helped us figure out what direction we might want to take, and how to even start having those conversations, particularly amongst ourselves and with the board in a way that would lend itself to generating creative ideas, as opposed to us becoming individually territorial and defensive.
- I am pleased to say that we have a solid plan. The next two years will be a time of significant program development, which will include finding resources for those programs. This is a process that is labour-intensive; that will require experience at the staff level, which I am confident we have. During this time, we will not prematurely erode our human resources. Furthermore, we will continue to seek government funding in addition to other funding for our programs. Our position has long been that Canadian overseas development assistance funds should be supporting courageous social justice work internationally. That includes Inter Pares' programs.

Revenue Generation in 2014

- **Foundations:** Last year, we received \$200,000 in foundation grants, which is the most we've received, I think ever.
- **Fundraising:** As the Treasurer's report will indicate, we had a really solid year in 2014 with respect to fundraising at just under \$1.8 million, surpassing our 2013 figures.
- **DFATD Funding Proposals:** Over the past year, we have submitted three major funding proposals –
 - One related to our Burma program, largely working with ethnic nationalities from Burma; it was submitted last May, and was “unsolicited.” Burma was recently named a country of focus. The proposal includes support for humanitarian initiatives, health, women's rights, media, human rights, and the environment as well as community development. It is worth \$19 million & change over five years.
 - We submitted a second proposal in response to a call for proposals on MNCH. This was submitted in January and focused on the reproductive health work that our counterpart, Likhaan does in the Philippines. The Philippines was recently named a country of focus, and the proposal was worth \$2.6 million over five years. We haven't heard anything yet about this proposal but we believe we will hear before the summer. Incidentally, the President of the Philippines will be visiting Canada in May.
 - A third proposal submitted, was also in response to a call; it was a joint program fund administered by IDRC and DFATD, called CIFSRF. The proposal focused upon scaling up our food sovereignty work in India and West Africa. It was worth \$1.3 million over two-and-a-half years; we'll know by the end of June.
 - Besides those three, there are other ideas in the works, and we have been meeting with DFATD officials to figure out our entry points. We have met with a fair degree of openness and collaboration at the departmental level, which is helpful.

- **Audits:** in addition to our annual institutional audits, we have had routine financial audits of both our DFATD programs. The Burma audit was concluded about six months ago; it was a clean audit. The Partnership branch program audit has yet to be concluded. DFATD is also in the midst of an evaluation of our Burma program. We anticipate that this will go well.

Program

I want to give you just a few examples of the work we've done over the past year. I will focus on our Exchanges and Learning Tours, as we've done quite a number of them over the past year.

Exchanges & Learning Tours

Example #1: Burma Health Tour

- After two or three years of progressive reform, 2014 was widely seen as a regressive year in Burma. New and proposed legislation was heavily criticized for potentially reversing gains on human rights, there were more arrests of peaceful protestors and the number of political prisoners increased. Fighting continued in Kachin and northern Shan States, while religious persecution against Muslims and Christians continued, with over 140,000 Muslims still confined to squalid camps and tens of thousands more fleeing the country in boats.
- Despite this, our counterparts continue to assert that they are not going to “wait and see” – they are seeking out all opportunities to build the peaceful and democratic nation they envision. Our health counterparts are taking this time to think through the details of how a national federal healthcare system might work – one that recognizes the importance of primary healthcare and local community health structures that are integrated in a national system. Knowing this, we decided to bring four healthcare leaders here to Canada to study our healthcare system in the spring of 2014.
- During a two-week study tour, they met with municipal, provincial and federal government policy-makers and practitioners, with those involved in First Nations healthcare, frontline responders, community health care professionals,

academics, and others. Healthcare in Burma, like all sectors, is extremely centralized. Decisions down to the hiring and firing of hospital staff are made in the capital. The system is paralyzed by impractical structures, unable to respond to local needs. Learning about the various levels of decision-making power here in Canada, the strengths but also the challenges our system has, the things people would change if they could (such as including drugs and dental in our plans) – all of this was fascinating for our health partners.

- They also shared their work experience with everyone they met. The group also spoke before the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and held meetings with DFATD officials and elected parliamentarians. Overall, the study tour was very successful – the participants learned about Canada’s publicly funded universal health care system, and many Canadians learned about the current situation in Burma and the inspiring work our partners are doing.

Example #2: India/West Africa Farmer Exchange

- In mid-September 2014, Inter Pares colleagues facilitated an exchange to India. The exchange brought together farmers from West Africa and Canada to India, to learn about the inspiring work of our longtime counterpart, the Deccan Development Society (DDS). Aline Zongo from the West African food sovereignty coalition, COPAGEN, who will be speaking this afternoon, was a key participant. This exchange was two years in the making, with an exploratory exchange among COPAGEN leaders in 2012 and a follow-up exchange of DDS to Senegal, West Africa in 2013.
- While continents apart, West Africa and India share similar challenges. These include water scarcity, climate change, and aggressive efforts to introduce genetically modified crops. During the week-long visit, the farmers learned about biodiverse millet farming practices, and the tragedy of Bt cotton through first-hand accounts of families who have lost loved ones to suicides.
- The delegation also learned how a group of women, disadvantaged by their gender and caste (DDS works with over 5000 dalit or “untouchables”), have managed to gain control over their land, seeds, and lives, and are inspiring

others to do so as well. Throughout the exchange, there was much discussion on the leadership of women. For a region such as West Africa, where hierarchy and patriarchy are so marked, what the participants witnessed was in many ways transformative.

After the exchange, each delegation (Burkina, Senegal, and Canada) shared what they had seen and learned with their communities and networks. The West African participants redoubled their efforts to save and multiply their seeds and apply some of the techniques learned in India.

After the exchange, next steps for Inter Pares included:

- Continuing to find ways of developing and nourishing these bonds of solidarity
- Investigating ways to secure funds to scale up the work that DDS and COPAGEN are doing
- Raising awareness in Canada

Example #3: Shan-Naga Exchange

- In November, Inter Pares facilitated an exchange between activist farmers from Nagaland, in the northeast of India, and farmers from ethnic groups in Burma. The Naga farmers are part of the Millet Network of India, started by our counterpart DDS, and are developing a biodiverse and organic model for their agriculture. The Shan farmers from Burma are tied closely to a chemical-intensive cash crop model for export to China, and must deal with the ongoing armed conflict, the drug trade, and tremendous human rights abuses. On both sides, they face growing threats from mining and other “development” projects that are imposed on them without consultation. This is the second exchange between activists from Burma and India, and both sides felt they learned valuable lessons. For those from Burma, about the struggle to take control over their agriculture, and for the Nagas, about the need to organize to protect their land from resource extraction. We hope to continue these links in the future.

Example #4: Sudan-Canada Legal Clinic Exchange

- For a number of years, Inter Pares had envisioned Amanda Dale, one of our board members, travelling to Sudan to meet with the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development (headed by Asha El-Karib) – SORD, to share her expertise about the work she does in her capacity as Executive Director of the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. Amanda has a Master’s degree in International Law, and is currently working on her Ph.D. at Osgoode Hall. The clinic is a leader in Canada, offering a range of legal, psychosocial, and linguistic supports for women who are experiencing violence, particularly immigrant women. It also makes strategic policy interventions.
- For those of you who came to our 2012 Annual Speaker Series featuring Asha and Amanda, you know that they have a history of solidarity. During that 2012 visit, Asha visited the Barbra Schlifer Clinic in Toronto and was really impressed. Since that time, SORD has established three fledgling legal clinics in the Khartoum area, with part-time lawyers providing services for women in a very repressive legal, political, and social climate. Unfortunately, these challenges are not dissimilar in some ways to what women in Canada experience.
- The exchange, which finally took place in November 2014, saw Amanda going to Sudan to spend time with the legal clinics, sharing her own strategies and observations. The exchange was successful in
 - providing the Sudanese lawyers with a vision of what they might aspire to, as the Schlifer Clinic integrates more than just legal support in their services;
 - speaking to some of the practical next steps the Sudanese might strive towards, such as establishing shelters, or providing counselling services, or even creating a peer support group amongst women survivors;
 - facilitating a strong link between the Schlifer Clinic and the SORD Clinics directly, to build international solidarity and share more technical strategies; and

- giving the lawyers in Sudan a sense of identity – that they belonged to a global human rights and women’s rights movement. The work these folks are doing is difficult and frustrating, and they have been tireless advocates.

As usual, all our exchanges proved to be important learning experiences for everyone involved.

Human Rights

- Many of our counterparts are subject to difficult human right situations. I want to highlight the issues experienced by the Salmmah Women’s Resource Centre, based in Khartoum, Sudan. Salmmah was founded in 1997 as an independent feminist resource center, providing women and men with information on feminism, violence against women, and sexuality. Its main focus was mobilizing and empowering women and youth in order to influence policy and overcome structural, political, and legal obstacles to the achievement of women’s rights. Inter Pares has financially supported Salmmah for about six years, though we have collaborated with them in various capacities for almost a decade.
- After the director, Ms. Fahima Hashim, was involved in a major report on sexual violence in Sudan and appeared at the London Global Summit on Sexual Violence last year, Salmmah was forced to close by Sudanese authorities. Their office was shut down, their assets seized. No official explanation was given. Though no one was detained, Salmmah staff, especially their director, felt very insecure, particularly in the lead-up to the recent Sudanese elections earlier this month. International condemnation of Salmmah’s closure was swift and unequivocal.
- I am happy to say that we helped facilitate the placement of Fahima Hashim, at York University, at the Centre for Feminist Research as a visiting scholar for 5 months. This will allow her some time to recuperate and document her experiences as well as do some awareness-raising in Canada particularly among government officials. She will be in Toronto until the end of August, and has come to Ottawa to attend this afternoon’s 40th anniversary event.

Other

This year, we also organized several Skype dialogues with counterparts from various regions on issues such as religious fundamentalism and women's rights, as well as women's participation in peace processes and elections.

One of our main goals is to ensure that counterpart voices and perspectives are represented in domestic policy debates and discourse. When we organize visits by those we work with, we are always conscious of this. Over the past year, we've had numerous jam-packed visits from counterparts in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, including Pilar Trujillo (PCS), Ousainou Ngum (ACORD), Khushi Kabir (Nijera Kori), and four leading women's rights activists from Burma.

Coalition Work in Canada

We continue to be involved in the work of numerous activist coalitions in Canada. The International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group – fighting the repressive and draconian aspects of the security agenda; the Canadian Health Coalition – attempting to keep the “public” in our public health care system; MiningWatch Canada and the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability – attempting to expose and establish remedy for those who have suffered the worst aspects of Canadian resource extraction; Food Secure Canada and the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network – working to ensure that our food systems are just, safe, fair and democratic; Canadians for Tax Fairness – working on domestic and international tax justice issues; the Canadian Council for International Cooperation and its three working groups – acting to keep the Canadian government accountable for its aid and trade policies, and facilitating a unified voice within our sector.

Up for Debate

This year Inter Pares has also been active in Up for Debate, the Alliance for Women's Rights. In addition to the campaign platform, which is predicated on three issues – ending violence against women, ending women's inequality and supporting women's leadership – the main ask is for a federal leaders' debate on women's issues.

Other Program

You will hear about the work of many of our counterparts this afternoon during our 40th anniversary event.

Documenting Inter Pares' History: In 2013, Inter Pares started a project to work with student interns to gather information from our archive files and from interviews with current and past staff, in order to capture data about our counterparts to store in a database. We have been gathering key details, like start and end dates of counterpart relationships, funding amounts, themes of work, contact names, etc., stretching back over Inter Pares 40-year history. To date, 14 fourth-year students from Carleton have worked part-time on this research project through a course run by Bessa Whitmore and Jean Christie. Starting next week, for the first time, we will have a summer intern, a student named Claire Hamilton, working on this project full time for four months. Claire joins us from Mount Allison University, which has provided Claire a grant that pays for her stipend while she works with Inter Pares this summer. She is looking forward to finding out all about Inter Pares and meeting and possibly interviewing many of you. She arrives in Ottawa today, and will join us for our public event this afternoon.

Peter Gillespie

Lastly, I want to acknowledge a dear colleague who is not well. Peter Gillespie worked at Inter Pares for 25 years and left an indelible mark. For many of us who worked with him, his integrity and commitment to social justice made a deep and lasting impression. I know I will be thinking about him throughout today, as I'm sure will many of you.

Thank you.

Rita Morbia

April 30th, 2015