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Time to End the Afghanistan War

According to Robert Gibbs, President Barack Obama's press secretary, Obama has pledged "not to walk away from Afghanistan." Obama is now meeting with top military advisers and congressional leaders about the future course of the Afghanistan War, as the casualty count among NATO troops and Afghani civilians mount. In the meantime, Congress is taking up another huge defense spending bill.

However, opposition to the Afghan War among American citizens is increasing rapidly. When America first invaded Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, only 6% of Americans opposed this war, considered a "good war" against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Now, according to current polls, half of Americans oppose continuation of this war. With every passing day, more U.S. and other NATO soldiers are killed and wounded in this war zone. As of August 2009, the number of coalition deaths had risen to 295, compared with 294 in whole of 2008. More than 700 Americans have been killed and more than 2,600 wounded since the initial 2001 invasion. Eight Americans died on Saturday in Afghanistan.

Not included in this casualty count are the Afghani civilians killed and wounded, either from direct military action or as a consequence of military action in the country. *The Guardian* estimates that at least 20,000 civilians have been killed as an indirect result of the war. UN agencies report that civilian deaths, kidnappings, car bombings, and raids are the highest they have been since 2001. These figures do not include the number of civilians who have become refugees since the war began. Some 37 million Afghans are living in neighboring countries, fearful of returning home to face the dangers of conflict.

As of now, the Afghanistan War has cost more than \$227 billion dollars and counting. This money has done little to bring stability to the area, yet it has done much to bankrupt the American economy and stop movement on needed domestic reforms, such as health care, the economy, and education.

The Afghan War is unwinnable, according to most analysts. Many compare it to the Vietnam War, another unwinnable war that cost American and Vietnamese lives and resources. A more apt comparison, however, would be the war waged in the 1980s by Soviet Union against the Afghans. The last Soviet general to leave Afghanistan, retired Red Army General Boris Gromov, said on the 20th anniversary of the Soviet withdrawal, Feb. 14, 2009, "Afghanistan taught us an invaluable lesson It has been and always will be impossible to solve political problems using force. We should have helped the people of Afghanistan in improving their life, it was a gross mistake to send troops into the country."

Based on years of experience in the region and building peace in communities around the world, the American Friends Service Committee believes that:

- Military means cannot solve the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan.
- The US must cease air strikes
- The needs, wishes, and well-being of the Afghan people must be at the center of rebuilding Afghanistan
- Negotiations must include all groups involved in the conflict, including the Afghan government, the Taliban, other groups within Afghanistan, and all of Afghanistan's neighbors.

After thirty years of civil war in this country, its citizens want foreign troops out. They also want a government that is not riddled by the corruption that seems to mark the Karzai regime. Peace Center members agree with the Afghani people as activists turn their attention to demonstrate against the war in Afghanistan.

On the 8th anniversary of the invasion of Afghanistan, Wednesday, Oct. 7, 2009, the Peace Center marked the event with a vigil and potluck. During the evening, Peace Center members and guests joined activists around the country and watched *Rethink Afghanistan*, a movie dealing with the current situation in that war-torn nation. A discussion followed the viewing.



The Death Penalty

The Peace Center has always opposed the death penalty. In March 2001 members sponsored a Journey for Justice, walking from Wichita to Topeka. It is beginning to look like there will be another window of opportunity to rid Kansas of capital punishment. The death penalty abolition bill is still on the books thanks to Kansas Senator Carolyn McGinn. The legislature is not currently in session, but a Judicial Council study committee is reviewing the legal language of the bill. In the 2010 the legislative session death penalty abolition legislative will again be considered by Kansas legislatures.

You should educate yourself about the Kansas death penalty and the death penalty in general, contact your legislators to let them know your opinions on the death penalty, and discuss the issue in groups you belong to. The Kansas Coalition Against the Death Penalty will help groups obtain speakers and get other resources. Contact KCACP at P.O. Box 2065, Topeka KS 66601 or kcadp@cox.net.

Half the Sky

from the Chinese proverb "Women hold up half the sky"
 Women represent half the world population,
 two-thirds of the labor force, receive one-tenth of the world income
 and own less than one percent of world property

Women, War and Afghanistan... too many have died; too many have suffered terrible human rights abuses. The recent passage of a highly discriminatory law concerning Shi'a women speaks volumes to President Karzai's failure to secure women's rights. The brute fact is that abuses against Afghan women show little sign of abating.

Unfortunately, reports from Afghanistan tell of US mercenaries protecting the US embassy in Kabul buying and pimping some sex slaves in Afghanistan for International "sex trafficking" – e.g. sex trade. It's more than the recent law passed in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan that explicitly legalizes marital rape as well as forcing women to dress and make themselves up for their husbands' demands. The corrupt Karzai's regime gives this law a stamp of approval.

We who are fortunate enough to have read Greg Mortenson's book *Three Cups of Tea* know, and have met through Greg's tale, the many decent citizens of Afghanistan. One of the most poignant moments of his book tell us of the delight of the women when they are able to cross a newly built

bridge and be reunited with their mothers. For most of them, once married they move to their husband's village never to see their home again. I was touched.

The **RAWA** (Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan) want the occupiers out now – and we should concur – no more troops to Afghanistan.

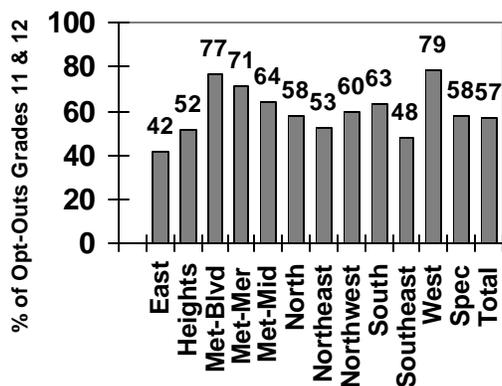
CodePink along with Fellowship of Reconciliation are sponsoring a journey to Gaza in December. Rev. Michael Poage, Fairmount United Church of Christ, will be making this journey.

Gaza – Conditions for the people continue to deteriorate. Gaza is like a prison, with air, land and water access blocked. It is a strip of land with the most densely populated communities in the world. One cannot just leave Gaza and forget what been seen there. International delegations to the border are ongoing, although most are denied entrants. We wish our pilgrims good journey.

—Mary McDonough Harren

Military Opt-Outs Reach 57% in USD 259

USD 259 Percent of Military Recruitment Opt-outs in 2009-10



The Peace and Social Justice Center is pleased to announce that 2009-10 Opt-Outs for military recruitment in the Wichita high schools increased 5% over last year to 57.1% of all high school juniors and seniors.

The Opt-Out Notification for Military Recruiters form became available in 2005 to enable students and their parents to prevent the automatic release of their names, addresses and phone numbers to military recruiters. Any school receiving federal money is required to give to the military, the names and contact information of all juniors and seniors for recruiting purposes, unless the parents complete an Opt-out form. The fact that a big majority of district parents are opting-out shows that as the forms are included in the enrollment packets, increasingly parents choose to opt-out.

The youth of our nation are one of its most precious resources. Students should have access to a variety of opportunities such as jobs, higher education and volunteer work. If they do join the military it should be for the right reasons, not because of recruiter pressures or promises, poverty, or lack of other opportunities.

The Peace and Social Justice Center will work with parents from school districts outside of Wichita to request that their school boards provide the military Opt-Out forms. Call (316) 263-5886 for more information.

Resist Grant Award

The Peace and Social Justice Center of South Central Kansas, has been awarded a \$2,000 grant by RESIST, Inc., a national progressive foundation located in Somerville, Massachusetts. Pat Cameron, Peace Center fundraiser, developed the grant request. The Peace Center has worked on issues such as including student recruiter opt-out forms in packets sent to parents in USD 259, organizing workshops, speakers, and demonstrations educating about and protesting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, sponsoring a peace art and essay contest in the schools, raising environmental

awareness, organizing an annual trip to the vigil at the School of the Americas in Columbus, Georgia, and promoting single payer health care reform. The RESIST funding will allow the Peace Center to link to diverse groups working for peace and justice in South Central Kansas. Cathy Benton, Peace Center director, and Peace Center board members are excited to have received this grant from RESIST.

RESIST began in 1967 in support of draft resistance and in opposition to the Vietnam War. RESIST's small but timely grants and loans are made to grassroots groups engaged in activist organizing and educational work for social change. RESIST defines organizing as collective action to challenge

Continued on next page

Upcoming Events

Oct/Nov/Dec 2009

**Oct 10th School Safety with Dignity Workshop
1:00-2:30 pm**

Facilitated by Donnie Morehouse, Associate Director, ACLU of KS & Western MO

• Oct 13th Program Committee
4:00 pm until 5:00 pm at the Peace Center

• Oct 24th What's Next Action Committee
10:30 am until Noon at the Peace Center

**Nov 7th Fall Fundraiser
6:00 pm at the Peace Center Food & Music**

• Nov 10th Program Committee
4:00 pm until 5:00 pm at the Peace Center

• Nov 14th What's Next Action Committee
10:30 am until Noon at the Peace Center

• Nov 14th Board Meeting
Noon to 2:00 pm at the Peace Center

**Nov 19-22nd School of America's Watch Vigil
Fort Benning, GA.**

Interested in attending? Please call 263-5886.

• Nov 28th What's Next Action Committee
10:30 am until Noon at the Peace Center

**Dec 4th Annual Meeting
St. Paul's UMC, 1356 N. Broadway
6:00pm Dinner 7:00 pm meeting**

• Dec 8th Program Committee
4:00 pm until 5:00 pm at the Peace Center

• Dec 12th What's Next Action Committee
10:30 am until Noon at the Peace Center

Office Space for Rent

Peace Center 1407 N. Topeka

Upstairs room 14 x 15 feet

\$225.00 per month, all bills paid including WI-FI.

The room is freshly painted with new carpet.

Please call Cathy Benton at the Peace Center at 263-5886.

Resist continued :

the status quo, demand changes in policy and practice, and educate communities about root causes and just solutions. RESIST recognizes that community organizing involves a variety of stages and strategies. Therefore, they support strategies that build community, encourage collaborations with other organizations, increase skills and/or access to resources, and produce leadership from the constituency being most directly affected. In fiscal year 2008, RESIST gave more than \$265,000 to 138 organizations across the country.

Universal Health Care Campaign

Continuing the Universal Health Care Campaign, which started in early June, the Peace and Social Justice Center participated with other local groups to amass 1600 signatures on our petition for Universal Health Care, and worked to educate the people of Wichita with sign-holding vigils and over 1000 "Medicare for All" leaflets in English and Spanish.

Representatives from the Peace Center and other groups organized to attend four of Rep. Tiahrt's Town Hall meetings to speak up for real health care reform. We countered Tiahrt's distortions with facts and showed that the private health insurance companies are the real death panels that deny care to protect and increase their profits. A Harvard study in late Sept. 2009, revealed that 44,759 people die each year in the U.S. as a result of lack of health care coverage.

On Sept. 30, 2009, we delivered copies of the petitions to Senator Roberts' and Rep. Tiahrt's offices. We also presented an award to Sen. Roberts, called the "Insurance Company Profits Protector Award." Sen. Roberts voted against the public option amendment while he has received \$1,039,937 in career campaign contributions from the health sector.

The US ranks 37th in World Health Organization's ranking of countries' health systems, yet Congressman Tiahrt, and Senators Roberts and Brownback vote consistently against universal health care and are on the side of the health insurance and Big Pharma lobbies.

Our Kansas Representatives vote for the status quo at a time when too many foreclosures and bankruptcies are due to medical debt of mostly insured people, when denying care increases profits and huge CEO salaries, and when doctors spend too much time and too many resources meandering the insurance paperwork bureaucracy.

Those who represent Kansans in Congress need to tell the truth about health care reform rather than use scare tactics and distortions to mislead the people of this state. They should understand the need for true health care reform and put their constituents' needs above those of insurance and pharmaceutical companies.



Letter to the Newsletter Editor: Honduras

I have communicated with a couple who lived many years in Honduras, and a few in El Salvador, before "retiring" to California. The wife reports that the majority of Hondurans (including Protestants and Roman Catholics) are pleased with the new government without Zelaya. There doesn't seem to be a muzzling of the Honduran press (www.laprensahn.com and www.elheraldo.hn). The "coup" was an order from the Supreme Court and an act of Congress to order the military to remove Zelaya as President. There is some rioting and vandalism in small areas (perhaps taking advantage of the situation).

—Lorraine Boyd In response to "Military Coup in Honduras led by School of Americas Graduates" (Summer 2009)

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Please consider making a donation before the end of 2009.

If you decide to make a contribution, please complete the form below and enclose it with your check payable to the Peace and Social Justice Center; or for tax-deduction purposes, to the Peace and Social Justice Education Fund.

Thanks for your interest in what we do. With your support, we will continue to provide an alternative voice for peace and justice in south central Kansas and throughout the world.

YES!! I WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN THE WORK OF PEACE AND JUSTICE IN WICHITA

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