

MALALAI JOYA IN VICTORIA

Story & photo by Theresa Wolfwood



Often called “the bravest woman in Afghanistan”, Malalai Joya brought her truth to Canada recently. Malalai – named for a famous Afghan heroine- is a popular Afghan MP whose truth about the corruption and criminals in the Afghanistan government has endangered her life and so enraged the government that it has expelled her from parliament- her elected right. Because of assault and death threats- she has survived four assassination attempts- she now has fulltime body guards and seldom sleeps in the same house for two nights running. Nothing has silenced her; she continues to condemn the warlords and drug criminals in the government – a government that the Canada kills and dies for. Afghanistan has become the world’s leading source of opium for heroin & the biggest four dealers are in government.

She says, *"They will kill me but they will not kill my voice, because it will be the voice of all Afghan women. You can cut the flower, but you cannot stop the coming of spring."*

She wants the world, in particular the NATO countries whose armed forces support this government, to know the result of their efforts. She says that Afghans want liberation, not occupation.

"We are hostages of the USA-backed government."

She is the director of the "Organisation of Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities" (OPAWC), one of the groups helping women and children with health and education which does not receive any of the alleged development aid we are sending to Afghanistan. OPAWC recently had to close an orphan’s facility because of lack of funds. This is a continuation of her work which began when she was a teenager. Raised by loving and carrying parents who fled to Pakistan in 1982; Malalai started teaching other students when she was eighteen; her parents believed strongly that girls should be educated and she inherited their sense of responsibility.

Her frail slight appearance and sad eyes belie her strength and determination to seek liberation for Afghanistan and the rights of women and children. She says women are suffering more now than ever – it is a lie that this war has ever helped liberate women. Female suicide are higher than before – for many women it is the only option when they are faced with the dangers of kidnapping, rape, the sex trade and marriage – 80% of which are forced on girls without their consent. Many other women who have spoken out in public have been murdered; widows feel hopeless and commit suicide. Rapists, murderers, kidnappers are never charged.

About the constant danger she lives in, she quotes the Persian writer, Samad Behrangi who wrote, *"Once death is inevitable, it becomes unimportant. What is important is the effect my life, or my death for that matter, will have on others."*

She told us that the USA controlled war, supposedly on ‘terror’ has driven Afghans from the frying pan into the fire - from the control of the Taliban to control by the Northern warlords, who are even worse - just as fundamentalist and misogynist.

Many resist, many are killed or beaten, but still there is popular support for democracy in spite of the danger, demonstrations are common, but ruthlessly suppressed (we never hear about them).

Calling on Canadians to act and support democracy and rights in Afghanistan, she told us, *"The silence of the good is worse than the actions of the bad."*

We can end our support of USA and its use of her country as a base for controlling Asia; call on the UN to stop arms sales top both sides. Act in solidarity with people’s organizations and democratic parties; Call on the international community to depose the Northern Alliance.

Let us speak out & work to elect a government that will make Canada a truly global PEACE MAKER. Organize and demonstrate – we are not likely to be killed for it.

Tell PM Stephen Harper pm@pm/parl.gc.ca to show that Canada really supports women's rights in Afghanistan by publicly condemning its government & withdrawing all our support for it. Write to all MPs & the media.

Send support & copies of your letters to mj@malalaijoya.com

EDITORIAL

December 10 is International Human Rights Day -the celebration of the signing of the International Declaration of Human Rights.

December 25 is Christmas Day – celebrates the birth of a poor man who preached peace & love.

December brings massive social and commercial pressure to shop and consume; many of us are concerned about this rampant consumerism which is so entrenched as a secular tradition in our society that it is separated from any religious meaning or social concern. Gift giving can be a creative and ethical pleasure if we are thoughtful.

FREEDOM FROM WANT is a basic human right.

Want is created by poverty and powerlessness. Poverty creates violence. Our shopping enforces sweatshops, slavery, bonded labour, child labour, and the appalling working conditions of millions worldwide.

Shop for FAIR TRADE items & at FAIR TRADE stores like 10,000 Villages & Global Village Store. Food items, including local products, that help producers get a fair price, are great gifts. Support local craftspeople. Make your own gifts – food, plants, gift certificates for childcare, garden & house work, tickets to local cultural events. Give money to organizations that work to end war & violence and to create social justice and empowerment of those in struggle. Gifts should respect, not destroy the environment. Elaborate imports, plastics with a short lifetime, chemically treated food from faraway increase the forces of global warming.

Give less stuff and more of ourselves.

FREEDOM FROM FEAR requires a culture of peace and respect. Don't buy toys, videos & games that glorify violence. Buy children books, games and equipment (like Fair Trade soccer balls) that help them discover a culture of peace.

Locally and globally woman live in fear of personal, ethnic, gender, and military violence. Women in Iraq & Afghanistan suffer military & personal violence.

Donate funds in friends' names to organizations that work for peace with justice. (Many are described in this issue of OP). Some local ideas: Together against Poverty ph#361-3521; Sandy Merriman House ph#480-1408; Food not Bombs always needs food and help for giveaway meals, 383-5144 x1940.

Support OUR PAPER and other independent media that work for social change.

A GIFT FOR NICARAGUA

By Jan Firstbrook

Looking for the perfect gift this holiday season? Consider giving the gift of literacy for adults in Nicaragua. CASC with the support of the City of Victoria is raising funds to provide literacy training in the city of Tipitapa, Nicaragua. **A donation of just \$15 covers the cost of teaching an adult to read and write.** The money provides local volunteers with training, supplies and transportation.



For \$15 you can make a profound difference in someone's life and in the lives of the people and community around them. Help break the cycle of poverty and give them the tools to improve their lives. Purchase a Nicaraguan art card for \$15 with inside statement, "This gift, given in your name, makes the world a brighter place, with hope for tomorrow." Information about the project is included. 100% of the funds go to fund literacy programs; tax receipts are available upon request. Please support this worthwhile project and purchase a gift of literacy.

Christmas cards will be available at various events and venues or contact Jan Firstbrook at 595-5125 to order.
(a sample of 6 different cards available in full colour)

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LICADHO: Cambodian Human Rights (HR) Watchdog Appeals to Canada for Diplomatic Presence

By Lee Robinson

Editor's introduction: Lee Robinson founded Licadho Canada after participating in HR activism in Cambodia. She works there as an unpaid volunteer with Cambodians protecting the rights of children – orphans and sold into slavery children, women- workers and those in jail – and the many dispossessed. The government is constantly destroying homes and evicting poor villagers from their lands. Robinson has been jailed and harassed for her actions; she continues to live in Phnom Penh and work with Licadho Cambodia.

Canada has shown a long-standing commitment to Cambodia. According to Peter Leuprecht, former UN Special Representative in Cambodia, “Since the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991, Canada and its Embassy in Phnom Penh have made an important contribution to the promotion of human rights, democracy and social justice in Cambodia.” LICADHO, Cambodian’s most respected human rights watchdog, agrees and questions why Canada, their strongest ally in promoting peace and justice, has proposed to cut the Embassy in Cambodia.

Early in 2007, then Foreign Affairs Minister Peter McKay included Cambodia on the list of proposed cuts. LICADHO immediately issued an urgent appeal to the Minister, signed by 294 organizations, insisting Canadian presence in Cambodia was instrumental to ensure stability, lawfulness and the protection of human rights defenders.



The appeal explains "many critical times, each of us has called upon the support of the Canadian Embassy in Cambodia. For example, the current Ambassador of Canada has participated in public events to promote human rights, taken action to protect human rights defenders under threat, advocated against critical problems such as corruption and unlawful land evictions, and attended politically-motivated criminal trials as an observer.”
Displaced from their homes & village for a casino

LICADHO waits anxiously for a response from Ottawa. They continue to offer a wide range of services to thousands of victims of abuses, however, without a diplomatic ally; there is little leverage to advocate for prevention and human rights with the existing authoritarian government.

Police burn homes & beat villagers in Sihanoukville



For more information on the human rights situation in Cambodia visit: www.licadho.org Donations can be made on-line and go directly to the protection and defence of the most vulnerable groups in Cambodia. LICADHO Canada encourages concerned Canadians to phone to Foreign Affairs Minister, Maxime Bernier at [613] 992-8053 and demand a new Ambassador for Cambodia immediately.

Contact in Canada: licadhocanada@shaw.ca **Contact in Cambodia:** licadhocanada@yahoo.ca
www.licadho.org for more details.

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HOMELESS IN VICTORIA

By Alison Acker

Victoria's new Task Force promises 1550 homes for the homeless by March 2012, but where will they go? They won't be getting new housing, that's for sure, because neither the B.C. nor the Federal government is prepared to finance them. But maybe the city's call to action will at last bring all the players together and something will get done.

The 60-page report relies heavily on the economic advantage of "cleaning up the streets". According to Mayor Alan Lowe, the first 50 who cause the most "problems" will go into the new Our Place (which is intended only for transitional housing) or similar shelters that are already bursting at the seams.

They get housed first because they cause the police the most trouble. Police estimate that 324 individuals have cost the city \$9 million a year in "incidents", not counting community and health costs. Those who hang around the needle exchange on Cormorant Street get housing first. The next candidates will somehow get placed through rental subsidies. According to the Real Estate Board, the vacant motels or empty buildings which the homeless eye with envy are too expensive or not suitable. Nobody mentions any building projects for supportive housing in the near future.

The Mayor's Task Force report which came out during World Homeless Action Week in October did get the emphasis right: Homes First, recognizes that the poor cannot contribute to society or get access to health care or jobs if they don't have a home. Councillor Charlayne Thornton-Joe heads up an action plan with goals and targets, aimed at housing 1550 within five years and 175 people within six months. The plan is heavily geared towards curing the problems of drug addiction and mental illness, without recognizing that at least 300 people in shelters or on the street are working but cannot afford housing in today's up-scale market. Not everybody on the street is an addict or mentally ill.

Two other groups have also been working at the homeless problem: the CRD had its own committee which never seemed to get off the ground and the Community Cares Foundation (TCC) spin-off of the Independent Settlement Project begun in November 2006 by the private sector, including many heavyweights like Alex Campbell Sr. founder of Thrifty Foods and Dockside Green developer Joe Belleghem, the group that put in a bid for the former Richmond Elementary school site, but got nowhere with the School Board. It is also the only group that includes anybody representing the homeless themselves - activist Rose Henry & it provides some funding to the Com. to End Homelessness.

Thornton-Joe has also promised to include representatives of the homeless or near-homeless community on the task force, but the Victoria

Committee to End Homelessness reports that the people on Victoria's streets remain sceptical. This committee, which includes the homeless and others who have been homeless, keeps contact with the street community, including

providing a "power lunch" at Our Place every month. That's when the homeless don't just get good food prepared by a First Nations kitchen; they get a chance to talk about their problems and their own ideas for solutions. At the last lunch, their ideas filled seven large sheets of paper which the committee is passing to the task force. They also have tips on empty buildings that could be used for housing, and complaints about treatment at shelters.

With a number of shelters closing, including the one at St. Saviour's Church in Vic. West, the homeless are afraid that short-term solutions are being over-looked or else drowned in red tape; the City's lawsuit against those who erected a tent city at Cridge Park 2 years ago, is still continuing, with lawyers presently arguing over the meaning of the word "abode". The province did attempt to join the city in the suit, but has now drawn back. The homeless community argues that it is against human rights legislation to jail people for sleeping in a park without offering them any alternatives. But there is no official talk about a legal tent-city in Victoria ion the lines of the one in Portland, Ore. So the homeless wait to see if Victoria will deliver supportive housing or if the B.C. Government will go beyond its latest offer: a sandwich and a mat in an over-crowded shelter.

If this concerns you, the Victoria Committee to End Homelessness welcomes your ideas or support or just your willingness to learn from the people themselves what they really need. We meet every Wednesday, 7 pm. Silver Threads, 1728 Douglas Street, Victoria.

POETRY PAGE

Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds

By Elizabeth Mayne

(When archaeologists unearthed an ancient skull in East Africa, they sang the song by the Beatles)

Lucy sits on zebra skin
sips a sugared cocktail,
touches a diamond
on her young brown breasts.
Lucy's happy.

The Israeli general, tanned and fat
from trading guns for diamonds
drinks a beer,
gives her a rolled cigarette.
Murals on bar walls draw her eyes.
Elephants walking into a forest.
Lucy smiles.

He orders another drink.
Whisky, vodka, vermouth,
green liqueur, with a sprig of mint.
Named for an Irishman.
The murals open up into savannah.
Lucy laughs.

Between puffs of smoke
she gulps down her third
Mickey Finn,
Prehistoric hunters stalk
through thick thorn trees.
They jump out of the wall.
Lucy shouts.

Insects scurry out of the zebra chair.
Hunters swoop down
surround her,
pick beetles off her dress
Touch, taste, nod, eat.
One carves a notch on a stick.
The first form of writing.
Lucy nods her head.

Archaeologists dig and dust,
find a skull. Name it Lucy.
Jubilant they sing a song by the Beatles.

Lucy sings along.

The scene on the wall changes.
Men with guns on camels
shoot women and children.
My guns, the General says proudly,
with new accurate aiming devices.
Startled, Lucy fingers the jewel
around her neck.

She begins to weep.
Tears drop
on her young brown breasts,
and on the blood diamond.

To a gift box of Swiss chocolate

By Theresa Wolfwood

wrapped in pictures of Swiss snowy mountains,
quaint castles, pristine lake scenes
they shoulder so snugly against each other in sealed
squares where the alps shelter the smooth brown
chocolate designed to melt on
the receiving tongue
wafers of warm bliss give
moments of ecstatic oblivion to all who taste

but this pleasure has no history
in postcard pictures that hide small
children who hugged their mothers
clung to their brown warmth but were cleaved away
and sold somewhere else in Africa where days are
filled with a sun that can melt
chocolate and memory all day

these waifs hack small fruits that
hug their mother tree and her limbs
golden pods that enclose the precious cocoa
in the heat drenched night in a crowded hut
their fear and sadness overcome in the thick blackness they sleep exhausted
shoulder to shoulder
oblivious of rats and factories where rivers
of smooth dark chocolate flow into neat forms
and harden for our greed and delight

captured children sold as slaves
for our succulent desires
shrivel, starve, sicken,
beaten and bruised they fall
on hostile foreign ground
an end to pain and hunger would be a benison
there can be no possibility of relief

never will they savour that worshipped wafer
on their sere tongues, never will see castles
on glacier green lakes snug
beside snowy mountains.

BOOK REVIEW By Roger Annis

Randall Robinson **AN UNBROKEN AGONY** *Haiti, From Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President*
Basic Civitas Books. USA

Randall Robinson has written a gripping account of a great tragedy of recent times--the violent overthrow of Haiti's elected president and government in February 2004. He situates the tragic events of that year on the broader canvas of the racism and imperial arrogance that has dominated the policies of the world's big powers towards Haiti.

In the year 2000, Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected president of Haiti for a second time. The U.S., France and Canada threw up their hands in exasperation over the result. Aristide promised improvements to the lot of the desperately poor Haitian majority, and he was a man of his word. The big powers began an embargo of aid to the government, and soon they would also block the government's attempts to obtain loans from international financial institutions for ambitious education and health care projects

More ominously, money and arms flowed to paramilitary forces sponsored by the venal Haitian elite. They were a small force, feared and hated by the majority of the Haitian people. But with an overwhelming superiority of arms, they were able to wreck government control of cities in the north of the country in early 2004. However, even their heavy arms could not pave their way into Port au Prince, the capital city. On February 28-29, the U.S., France, Canada and Chile landed troops there. The president and his wife were forcibly taken by U.S military forces to the one of the most isolated countries in the world, the Central African Republic.

An Unbroken Agony kicks into high gear as the author tells the story of how a delegation he led on a harrowing flight to that country in March rescued the Aristides from their quasi-imprisonment.

A shameful silence over the events of 2004 still dominates the political discourse in Canada.

Roger Annis travelled to Haiti from August 5 to 20 as a participant in a human rights investigative delegation. He can be reached at rogerannis@hotmail.com. You can read his reports from Haiti at www.thac.ca/blog/9.