



NETWORK
Connection

PEOPLE LOBBYING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE • SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009

*While you are
proclaiming peace
with your lips, be
careful to have it
even more fully in
your heart.*

—St. Francis of Assisi

PEACEMAKING

dear members

As we have been working to make healthcare reform a reality in our nation, I have been shocked by the lies and distortions used by some opponents to try to scuttle the legislation. The provision for paying a physician for talking with a patient about an advanced directive somehow became a plan to “kill old people.” And people came to believe the fear-mongering.

I had a phone conversation with an older woman who was terrified that she would be killed. She did not want government taking over healthcare. I asked her if she currently had Medicare. She responded that she did and she liked it. But she was convinced that “THEY want to change Medicare.”

This underscores for me the importance of YOU our members. Each of us needs to be active and informed in this democracy. We need to speak out with the truth and advocate with our representatives and our neighbors, with our families and communities. Democracy works best if we are educated and engaged. The quest for truth and the common good is the strong foundation that we need. I count on all of you to join us in this effort. The time is now to step up our work for the common good.

Simone Campbell, SSS

ILLUSTRATION ADAPTED FROM PHOTO BY JOHN LYONS. WWW.MERTON.ORG



Peace demands the most heroic labor and the most difficult sacrifice. It demands greater heroism than war. It demands greater fidelity to the truth and a much more perfect purity of conscience. —Thomas Merton

It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it.

—Eleanor Roosevelt



E. KIM

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Love in Truth

By SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS

I was heartened on many levels by the new encyclical *Love in Truth (Caritas in Veritate)*. Pope Benedict XIV writes of the need for international development based in love and a conscience that holds the common good at the center of justice. While they are challenging words, I felt a great kinship to his message as I read and believe that our *Platform for the Common Good* is rooted in this same faith stance.

There is much that he says about the role of the economy (serving not only shareholders and profit but also workers, consumers AND

ation must be taken into consideration... One must align oneself, so to speak, with the unsung efforts of so many individuals deeply committed to bringing peoples together and to facilitating development on the basis of love and mutual understanding" (paragraph 72)

For me, this is an affirmation of NETWORK's policy regarding Iraq. While we opposed the original invasion, we have also sought partnerships with people in Iraq in order to help ensure that their concerns are considered in U.S. policy-

ress is being made as policies are being formed based on the dignity of individuals and the commitment to mutual understanding. This is peacebuilding in a very real way.

For me, however, this very progress holds seeds of temptations for shortcuts in other settings. I am tempted to equate Iraq and Afghanistan since they are geographically so close and to say policies that may work in Iraq should also apply to Afghanistan. Then I realize that we must first hear the voices of the Afghans since the nations are so different.

Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest countries, whereas Iraq has great possibility for its own development, in part because of its oil. Only 28% of Afghan adults are literate whereas in Iraq the adult literacy rate is 74%. Unlike Iraq, Afghanistan has never had a strong national identity.

For many reasons, it seems clear that we cannot simply transplant our Iraq policy into Afghanistan and we should not try. Our faith values the voices of all people so we must seek out Afghans and understand their perspectives. Our peacebuilding strategy must be based in their reality and grounded in their needs.

Our policies must be at the service of the common good for each nation and the fragile world. And they must support governance that is based on rule of law where justice for all is at the center, but in a form that meets the needs of the local people.

This is true peacebuilding. It cannot be done with guns and grenades; it must be done by touching people's hearts and hearing one another. It is love in the end that is the cornerstone of effective policy—a love that sees the reality of each person and builds strategies with them based on the truth of their lives. This is the only peacebuilding that will last. This is Love in Truth.

Simone Campbell, SSS, is NETWORK's Executive Director.



Two women wait outside a local hospital in Afghanistan.

future generations), the role of society (creating communities of solidarity where all have access to basic necessities including food and water), and the role of politics (instituting regulations that create justice and the common good). In this context Pope Benedict says that peacebuilding is more than "diplomatic contacts, economic, technological and cultural exchanges, agreements on common projects, as well as joint strategies to curb the threat of military conflict..." He goes on to state that the "voice of the peoples affected must be heard and their situ-

making. We have tried to lift up the work of many in Iraq who are striving to build peace.

And we have had some success! We raised up the issue of Palestinian Iraqis who were caught in the no-person's land between the borders of Iraq and Syria for more than two years. The U.S. State Department has recently agreed to accept these most vulnerable people into the United States. Our message of local development by Iraqis, for Iraqis has become the anchor piece of U.S. peacebuilding efforts. Bit by bit, prog-

Restoring Iraq's Healthcare System Requires Teamwork

By JOHN STINSON

I am a retired American Army officer. Since my retirement, I have been hired by both the private sector and federal government to act as an advisor to friendly foreign governments. I recently spent two years as a State Department civil servant living in Baghdad, where I worked with the Iraqi police, judges, courts and the Ministries of Interior and Justice.

While there, I consulted with people from many nations and also came to know Iraqis who are Assyrians, the descendants of people we read about in the Old Testament. They trace their heritage back 6759 years to Ashur in Mesopotamia and include the entire native, non-Arab peoples of the Tigris and Euphrates valleys.

Education has been important throughout Assyrian history. This helped them prosper, but it was also a source of contention even in modern times, including during the rule of Saddam Hussein. Since the 2003 invasion, many doctors, lawyers, bankers, professors and other educated professionals have been targeted by insurgents and are now refugees.

Assyrians may also be called Chaldeans and Syriacs depending on what part of the region they originated in and confessionally are Eastern Rite Catholics (Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syriacs), Orthodox (Syriac) and members of the Assyrian Church of the East. Today, these Christians face many hardships, and ongoing violence has forced many to leave Iraq.

Iraqi Women Religious at Work

After I returned to the U.S., I remained in contact with many friends and colleagues I met in Iraq. In February of this year, one of the Americans contacted me. He was an advisor with a Provincial Reconstruction Team at the time I worked with the Iraqi Ministry of Justice. This friend had been asked by the Papal Nuncio (ambassador) to Iraq and

KATHY THORNTON, RSM



RICK MCDOWELL



A hospital (above) and a classroom in Iraq.

Jordan to assist a group of Iraqi women religious.

These Sisters—the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena in Iraq—had operated various institutions in central and northern Iraq for a long period of time. Since the first Gulf War in 1990/1991 and the time of UN sanctions, their capacity to provide healthcare and education had been severely tested. After the invasion of 2003, a number of their institutions were attacked and several Sisters injured.

Despite the dangers and hardships, the Sisters have availed themselves of every reasonable opportunity to serve God through service to neighbor, including healing and teaching in Baghdad, in Mosul, and in the refugee camps of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

The Prioress of this order is a 69-year-old Iraqi, Sister Maria Hanna. She has



COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Sister Hanna and Sister Aman in Washington.

an abiding faith in a merciful God, a profound love for her neighbors, and extraordinary hope for a better future. Her order is established in the Eastern Rite of the Catholic Church and includes women of all the backgrounds that represent Iraq. Their spirituality is Dominican and they are part of the worldwide family of St. Dominic and St. Catherine of Siena.

Seeing that conditions in Iraq were not going to be normal for some time, Sister Hanna reached out to Dominican communities throughout the world and established many worthwhile partnerships. This allowed a number of her Sisters to enter advanced education programs to study medicine, education, languages and information systems, knowledge they brought to Iraq as they returned home.

Sister Hanna and the other Dominican Sisters who remained in Iraq also continued to work for Iraq's future. Among other ministries, today they operate a Baghdad maternity hospital considered by many to be the finest medical facility in the country. They serve all Iraqis in their health-care and education ministries.

Dreams of a New Hospital

The specific reason that the Nuncio asked for assistance is that Sister Hanna has dreamed for more than ten years of a new maternity hospital in the region

near Mosul known as the Nineveh Plain. Violence there is still high but the need for the hospital is even greater. This is where most of the remaining religious minorities of Iraq live (north and east of Mosul).

Sadly, very little aid has gone to this area. The U.S. Congress, noticing this lack, now requires that the State Department account for all money that is spent in Iraq for religious minorities. Champions of this effort have been Representatives Frank Wolf (R-VA), Mark Kirk (R-IL), Christopher Smith (R-NJ) and Anna Eshoo (D-CA). In spite of the reporting requirement, no specific efforts have been created by the Executive Branch to assist our friends in Iraq.

After our initial contact with the Prioress and the Nuncio, we worked to put together a team of people to assist. One team member, Marty Hudson, was the Acting Health Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Iraq. Her contacts in Iraq and in the United States were invaluable.

Once the team was assembled, we engaged in a series of long-distance discussions with Sister Hanna. Where exactly would the hospital be located? Who would staff it? How much would it cost? Who would provide security, etc.? Many of these questions require a deeper understanding of Sister Hanna's dream so we requested a meeting with Sister Hanna and the Nuncio.

We were able to secure an invitation for the Nuncio to attend the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C., held in May of each year. The Nuncio deputized the Latin Archbishop Jean Sleiman of Baghdad to come in his stead.

Fortunately, Sister Hanna was already planning to visit the U.S. at that time. We developed an itinerary for Archbishop Sleiman and Sister Hanna so they would have the opportunity to tell their story themselves.

Since the Dominican Sisters already operate a maternity hospital in Baghdad, they know what is required to duplicate that effort in another part of Iraq. The floor plans and cost estimates they provided captured the hospital's resource requirements.

If we were to accomplish this effort in another country (e.g., the U.S., the Philippines or Nigeria), it would be a fairly straightforward effort. We would develop plans for building construction, equipment, personnel, ongoing operations and recurring maintenance. But this is Iraq (and specifically the Nineveh Plain) so we needed a detailed political-military security plan as well.

We included current and former members of the Iraqi government in our efforts, along with the larger private sector. We are developing with them something like a "Medical Green Zone"—a safe and secure location for healing and teaching in the north of Iraq. But the term "Green Zone" has negative connotations with Iraqi people since many consider Iraqis who live or work there corrupt and uninterested in what is best for the nation as a whole. We settled on using the term "Health Security" instead.

A Model for the Future

This Iraq Health Security (IHS) complex will form the backbone for public and private efforts. We envision it as a partnership between the private sector, the Governorate of Mosul, and one or more Iraqi federal executive branch ministries (e.g., the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research).

The mission of IHS is to develop and secure the environment so that individuals, entities and communities like the Dominican Sisters are freed to do what they do best without being burdened by

activities for which they are not trained or equipped. Specifically, IHS will provide security, negotiate among various ethnic and religious groups, and develop regional and, if necessary, national and international protocols (the area borders both Syria and Turkey).

With its establishment, the Dominican Sisters will be relieved of the burdens concerning security, utilities and transportation.

Since a typical “brick & mortar” facility is very time and material intensive we are exploring with Sister Hanna the option of acquiring a pre-fabricated, modularly constructed facility. The obvious benefit is a significant decrease in time to complete its building.

Since the political and military situations in the Nineveh Plain are still tenuous, we will need some time to establish a charter, work out relationships, and build a peaceful (or at least more secure) environment. Should the IHS effort fail, any monies expended for a Dominican Sisters’ operated maternity hospital are not at risk. The final location of the

Assyrian bas relief, 865-860 BCE, shows cuneiform overprinting the hand of a helper.



TONY BAGGETT

hospital can easily be moved to a more secure Iraq location or the modular sections can be stored in a secure place until the Nineveh Plain region is ready for them.

One of the first commitments we made to Sister Hanna was that any mon-

Sister Hanna is a child of this murdered generation. She has responded to the violence by dedicating her life to healing and teaching, as have the other Sisters.

This is true peacemaking.

ies acquired for her hospital would go to her directly through a preexisting mechanism—and not be filtered through new charities or offices. We have included in all of our discussions the Papal Mission to the Middle East (the Catholic Near East Welfare Association or CNEWA) as well as Caritas Iraq, Catholic Relief Services and, domestically, U.S. Catholic Charities. CNEWA already assists the Dominican Sisters’ current hospital and other projects through online donations (www.cnewa.org).

We have received full cooperation from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which graciously sponsored lunches for both Archbishop Sleiman and Sister Hanna during their respective stays in Washington.

Why? The Biblical Context

We are often asked why we should do this. Why should we not just assist the religious minorities’ efforts to leave Iraq and go someplace safer?

Archbishop Sleiman provided part of the answer during his short speech at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast. He emphasized that we worship a God of justice but also one of mercy. He reminded us that Mosul is the ancient city of Nineveh, which was the capital of the Assyrian Empire—an ancient enemy of the Hebrew people. After the nation of David and Solomon was split into two (Israel and Judah), there was still hope that it could be reunited until the Assyrian Empire conquered Israel and dispersed its people. Nineveh killed the dream.

This is the background for the story

of the prophet Jonah. Jonah’s antipathy to all things Assyrian was on a level with many Americans’ attitudes toward Osama bin Ladin and al-Qaeda. Jonah was directed by God to preach to his sworn enemies. He was so upset about this task that he decided that he would rather go into exile than head east to preach to the Ninevites.

But God had other plans since, as Archbishop Sleiman reminded his listeners, God cares about saving people. Sister Hanna and the Dominican Sisters are clearly listening to that call.

Why? The Historical Context

What raises the Sisters’ witness from humanly sufficient to theologically heroic is this: the Christian heritage of Iraq, one of the oldest in the world, has been anything but peaceful.

The Christian population of the late seventh century, for example, was virtually wiped out by an Arab Muslim invasion. One Assyrian news service has chronicled a litany of assaults against the Christian population in the region and has identified a major event with significant casualties and damage inflicted against one or more of the Christian communities on an average of once every 50 years since the early eighth century.

During World War I, for example, the Ottoman Empire was besieged on all sides: by Russia in the North and East, Britain and France in the South and West, and by the Greeks and Serbs as well. These were predominantly Christian populations. Inside her borders were significant populations of various—mostly Christian—ethnic minorities that were at best restive if not in outright rebellion. In what probably started as a defensive measure, the Ottoman leadership developed a plan to deal with these minorities that morphed into the twentieth century’s first significant example of ethnic cleansing. Armenian, Pontic Greek and Assyrian communities were systematically terrorized by professional Ottoman military units and hired militias. Hundreds of thousands died.

At that time, the Assyrian population was spread in a wide arc from what is now Syria through northern Iraq/



KATHY THORNTON, RSM

A hospital in Iraq.

southern Turkey, and across northern Iran. Kurds were commingled with the Assyrian Christian populations, and the Ottoman Empire encouraged the Kurds to ethnically cleanse their region of Assyrians. Direct acts of violence, starvation, disease and exposure resulted in the deaths of up to three-quarters of the Christian populations in Iraq and Iran.

Sister Hanna is a child of this murdered generation. She has responded to the violence by dedicating her life to healing and teaching, as have the other Sisters. This is true peacemaking.

After the assaults committed against the Christians in the Ottoman Empire ended with the Armistice of 1918, various communities of Catholics, Orthodox and Assyrians were scattered throughout the Middle East and the world. The League of Nations recognized the injustices inflicted on them and worked to provide them a homeland, but nothing was accomplished. The ones who continued to live in Iraq were an important element of the security forces that guarded this English protectorate. A unit called the "Assyrian Levy" was instrumental in preventing the success of a Nazi inspired Arab-Iraqi uprising against the British in the spring of 1941.

The Assyrians had contributed significantly to the economic, health and cultural fabric of Iraq since its establishment as an independent country following World War I. Conditions in the country declined precipitously during the period of the UN sanctions, however, and the 2003 invasion exacerbated

an already difficult situation for Iraq's religious minorities.

While in Iraq, I attempted to learn from my predecessors and the Iraqi people. It appeared to me that because Iraqi Christians did not have guns or militias or use car bombs, roadside bombs or suicide bombers to get our attention, they were usually ignored. I do not know of any programs we created that specifically supported the religious minority groups. Very few programs spent any money in Christian (or other religious minority) areas.

On the other hand, it was clear that the militias certainly knew the Christians were vulnerable and specifically targeted them. Their churches were attacked and individuals were kidnapped and killed. One teenage boy was literally crucified because he wouldn't convert.

Religious minority communities deserve as much of our support as the people and groups we are already helping. It never happened while I was in Iraq, and that is why I work with individuals and groups to continue the progress we started. Helping Sister Hanna and the Dominican Sisters is a pleasure since they are working to help fulfill the promises that we Americans made to the Iraqi people about their health and security.

Making the Dream a Reality

Our goal in this project is to assist Sister Hanna fulfill her dream. There are specific dollar amounts that we hope to achieve in order to support her new hospital.

Secondarily, we hope to bring about the IHS and the public-private partnership needed to develop a sound social, economic, political and secure environment.

A third goal is to look at ways to help victims of the violence, their family members, and perpetrators. This goal is similar to those in South Africa after Apartheid ended as well as in the post-conflict Balkans and Sub-Sahara Africa. We are addressing the possibility of having the Ministry of Higher Education sponsor a facility we are tentatively calling the Iraqi National Reconciliation Institute.

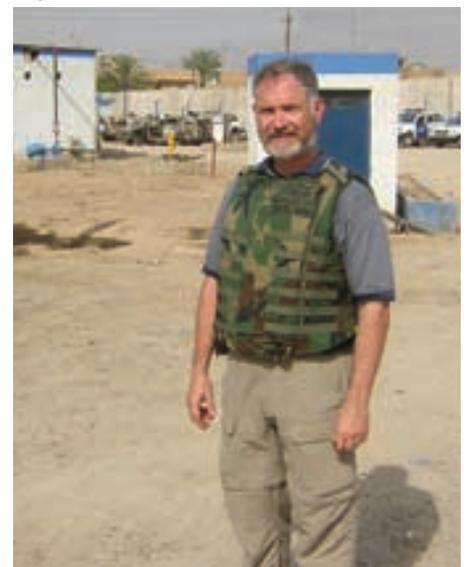
Sister Hanna's faith is clearly the source of her ability not only to forgive but also to live out in her own life Christ's vision that all of us are His brothers and sisters and must be treated with dignity and respect.

This is a remarkable project because of the remarkable people who will make it work. People are offering their lives in service to God and we can witness God's grace on earth through them. Secularists can see this as an act of medical diplomacy.

Please continue to pray for peace—and especially for those who are trying to live out that vocation in a place that has not seen peace in recorded history.

John Stinson is a West Point graduate and retired Special Forces Lieutenant Colonel who served in Iraq for almost two years.

BELOW: Author at the Bayaa police station in Baghdad on May 11, 2005.



Congress and the Nation Focus on Healthcare

By CATHERINE PINKERTON, CSJ, MARGE CLARK, BVM, SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS

Members of Congress return to Washington from their August recess with much to consider. While people debate whether heated outbursts about healthcare at town hall meetings were genuine or orchestrated, it is clear that healthcare reform has become the major issue of the day.

NETWORK has a long history of advocacy for universal access to quality, affordable healthcare. While we are relieved that this issue has finally begun to resonate throughout the nation, we are also dismayed that sustained campaigns of misinformation and scare tactics have emerged.

There is confusion about how reform efforts are moving through Congress, with some even claiming that Congress is mandating certain things before final legislation has been written. Sister Catherine Pinkerton, CSJ, NETWORK's lobbyist on healthcare, put together the following chronology to set the record straight.

Healthcare Reform in Congress What Has Happened So Far

Since early June, Congress has been immersed in intense, complex efforts to reform a healthcare system with skyrocketing costs and tens of millions of people with no or inadequate health insurance. They are from all age groups, of every race and ethnicity, and across all income ranges. Because most people have health insurance through their jobs, many more are at risk as workers are laid off.

In the House of Representatives, H.R. 3200 (full title: "To provide affordable, quality health care for all Americans and reduce the growth in health care spending, and for other purposes") was introduced on July 14 and immediately referred to committees of jurisdiction. Versions of the bill were quickly approved by two committees (Education/Labor and Ways and Means) and a compromise measure was approved by the Energy and Commerce Committee on July 31. During the recess, committee

members worked with the Rules Committee (which creates the final version and sets procedures for floor debate) and Democratic leaders to determine how the versions would fit together so a final bill could pass the full House in September.

Progress in the Senate has been much slower. The late Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), then Chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee and Senator Max Baucus (D-MT), Senate Finance Committee Chair, initially established a joint process designed to lead to complementary legislation with July targeted for floor consideration. HELP Committee leadership was transferred to Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT), and the committee passed The Affordable Health Choices Act on July 15.

Meanwhile, Senator Baucus remained intent on developing his own complex, bipartisan proposal within the Finance Committee. He anticipated a completion date before the August recess, which he regrettably failed to meet. It is hoped the committee will finish its work by September 15. After that begins the process of developing the final Senate bill based on input from both Senate committees and others.

Comparing Current Proposals (as of August)

- The House bill and Senate HELP Committee version require all citizens to have health insurance, enforced through a tax penalty with hardship waivers. The Senate Finance Committee is expected to do the same. Low-income families would receive subsidies of various

*"For all those whose cares have been our concern,
the work goes on, the cause endures,
the hope still lives and the dream shall never die."*

—Senator Edward M. Kennedy, 1932–2009



NETWORK mourns the loss of Sen. Edward Kennedy, a tireless champion of social justice who last visited our office shortly before his cancer diagnosis. We were privileged to work with him on healthcare and other issues during his decades in the Senate. We resolve to honor his life through our continuing strong advocacy for healthcare reform and a world rooted in justice.

Need up-to-date information about legislation in Congress? Check out NETWORK's Legislative Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/networklobby/issues/bills/>. ★ To learn what happened to legislation you followed in the past, go to <http://capwiz.com/networklobby/issues/votes/> and enter your zip code in the "Key Votes" field.

- amounts to help them afford coverage.
- House and Senate HELP versions require employers (except very small businesses) to provide insurance for workers or be penalized. Not yet clear what Senate Finance will say.
 - All three versions will prohibit denial of coverage based on preexisting conditions.
 - Choosing insurance plans:
 - *House*: through Health Insurance Exchange; states could operate own exchanges; includes a public plan
 - *Senate HELP*: through state-based purchasing pools; includes a public plan
 - *Senate Finance*: through state-based exchanges; public plan unlikely but committee is considering nonprofit member-owned co-ops to compete with private insurers.
 - Medicaid expansion:
 - *House*: to cover people earning up to 133% of poverty level
 - *Senate HELP*: assumes up to 150% of the poverty level but does not have authority over Medicaid, which is under the Finance Committee's jurisdiction
 - *Senate Finance*: People between 100 and 133% of poverty level will likely have a choice between Medicaid and subsidies in the exchange.

Next Steps

In response to heated rhetoric during the August recess, the serious question has become: Where will Members of Congress be positioned on their September return? We encourage NETWORK members to continue to advocate for quality, affordable healthcare for all. Some important points to remember:

- Proposals coming out of Congress thus far show a commitment to strengthening what we have.
- We must build on what works in today's healthcare system and fix the parts that are broken (e.g., the lack of healthcare access for millions of people and discrimination against people who are sick).
- People want choices in how they receive healthcare.
- Affordability is key—including help for

- low- and moderate-income families.
- Responsibility should be shared among individuals, employers and government to ensure that everyone has affordable coverage.
- Prevention and wellness services and community-based programs are needed.
- Workforce investments should include more training of primary care doctors, nurses and public health personnel, along with the expansion of loans and scholarships in medical fields.
- We must actively work against waste, fraud and abuse while Medicare and Medicaid systems are modernized and made more efficient.

Iraq

While Congress focuses on healthcare, some work is going on in other issue areas and we at NETWORK are celebrating small but important victories. Our advocacy for the Iraqi Palestinians has resulted in the State Department agreeing to accept the majority of them into the U.S. Our work on development and governmental capacity building resulted in new administration policies and appropriations funding for programs that appear to have effective oversight. We continue to partner with Iraqi colleagues in working toward an enduring peace.

Budget/Appropriations

Congress still has much appropriations work to finish. The House passed their versions of twelve appropriations bills, but when the Senate returns in September it must still pass nine bills before a conference committee can bring the versions together.

The president expressed support for House versions, with the exception of Defense Appropriations. He and his advisers opposed two provisions: an alternative engine for the F-35 fighter jet and a new fleet of presidential helicopters. NETWORK was pleased when an administration veto threat resulted in cancellation of additional F-22 fighter planes.

House Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD) appropriations exceed 2009 funding levels, a fact

that was critical in reestablishing the baseline for future years. Included:

- \$1 billion more for Section 8 rental vouchers for the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program; Senate added \$20 million more for Family Unification Program vouchers; still leaves a shortage in vouchers due to years of underfunding
 - Much needed increases for public housing programs
 - \$700,000 more for Community Development Block Grant program.
- Labor, Health and Human Services and Education funding showed mixed results:
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funded at the same level as 2009 (including emergency economic recovery funds), providing considerably better coverage than in previous years
 - More funding for green jobs training
 - Inadequate funding for reintegration of ex-offenders into the job market and examiners in the Wage Theft Division
 - Child care and Head Start funding that covered little more than the cost of inflation.

Immigration

Despite President Obama's recent statement that immigration reform will wait until 2010, Senator Menendez's office says that they will have a comprehensive bill ready for introduction this fall. While we have not seen the details of that bill, we have seen pieces being prepared for either a comprehensive reform bill or stand-alone legislation. These provisions include the DREAM Act, Family Reunification Act, and various detention reform proposals. NETWORK continues to urge our members to tell their senators and representatives that comprehensive immigration reform must happen this year. There is too much suffering to wait any longer.

Catherine Pinkerton, CSJ, and Marge Clark, BVM, are NETWORK lobbyists. Simone Campbell, SSS, is NETWORK's Executive Director.

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We Work for a Peaceful Future

By SISTER AMAN MIRIAM

My life as an Iraqi woman and as a Dominican Sister has been deeply affected by wars and the politics of my country. I am currently living in the United States and fervently looking forward to returning to Iraq so I can help strengthen in some small way our movement toward peace and normalcy.

I was born in Qaraqosh, a Christian village located in the province of Nineveh. After graduating from high school and attending the University of Mosul where my studies were focused on becoming a mathematics teacher, I joined the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena in September 1999. Our religious congregation focuses on education and healthcare. We have 145 professed sisters, 3 novices and 3 postulants. In addition to our presence in Iraq, we have missions in Jordan, Lebanon, Bethlehem, Sweden, Italy, France and the U.S.

After the outbreak of the war in 2003, our congregation decided that the young Sisters in Mosul Motherhouse should be sent to safer areas in the villages. In November 2004, I was sent to Pisa, Italy, where I studied Italian and helped manage a convent housing program for university students and families of hospital patients. I left Pisa in 2005 with one of the first groups of Iraqi Sisters who came to live and minister with the Adrian Dominican Sisters in the U.S.

Our young Sisters are not in the United States to escape what is happening in Iraq. Instead, we are here to develop our ministerial skills and when possible to pursue areas of study that will benefit our Iraqi people. We always have been and will remain a part of Iraq. Iraq is in our blood. We feel called to help rebuild what we can.

In May 2009, I received my Masters in Education at Siena Heights University. My thesis was about developing a peace-making curriculum for young people in post-war Iraq in order to help students learn how to deal with conflict and how to get along with people of different faiths and ethnic backgrounds.

Education for Peace

My congregation has focused on education for many years. In 1973, the Iraqi government nationalized all Catholic schools, including ours. Our Sisters continued to teach in the schools and were paid by the government.

In the past few years, bombing has damaged many buildings, including our schools and convents. This was a very difficult time. As mentioned, young Sisters had to leave the motherhouse in Mosul for safer places. Sisters attending universities were required to wear the hijab and could not wear any Christian symbols such as habits or crosses. Still



Iraqi children. Photo by Rick McDowell.

today, young Sisters wear the hijab for safety reasons when they go outside, but older Sisters will wear their habits.

In 2007, the government returned our high school in Baghdad. We renovated it and the school reopened last year for girls in the seventh and tenth grades. This year, the eighth and eleventh grades will be added. The government has also returned a grade school in Talkeif, a Christian village in northern Iraq. Our religious congregation plans to open this renovated school for both girls and boys the fall of 2009. We also have nine kindergartens in Christian villages.

One of these schools was bombed last year. Fortunately, the bomb went off early in the morning before the children arrived. We moved the kindergarten class to a house that we rented so that the children could continue their schooling.

Little by little, our Dominican congregation is bringing Catholic schools back to Iraq. Most importantly, our schools are open to children of all faiths. This affirmation of diversity is one of our ways to teach our children to live in peace with one another.

This is so vital because our young people have had to experience so much violence and division. Our university students, for example, have heard the explosions of bombs as they sat in their classrooms. They never knew if they could safely return home or when another bomb would explode. Not too long ago, a van full of university students drove over and through dead bodies, some dismembered. These students will never be able to get such images out of their heads.

All life in Iraq has been damaged by the war and violence. Our children can distinguish the sounds caused by the different kinds of explosions. They wake up to the news of more car bombs and number of people killed. Because of all the new technology like cell phones and the Internet, the young children are very aware of what is going on.

War is not only out on the streets, it is in the home, in the family. Parents watch their children go off to school not knowing if they will see them alive again. All of this has had a psychological impact. Obviously, there is a strong need for peace education in our country.

Healthcare for Peace

In 1992, our Sisters opened a small maternity hospital in Baghdad. Like our schools, this medical facility is open to people of all faiths. The hospital continues to have an average of 3,000 births a year. Our doctors are

Iraqi and our Dominican Sisters are the nurses. The entire medical staff is dedicated and does wonderful work in spite of the problem of not having the most up-to-date technology. Many educated Iraqis, including doctors, have fled the cities and even Iraq itself. We feel fortunate to have such a dedicated staff.

Our Dominican religious congregation is looking forward to building a new hospital that will serve my hometown and the surrounding areas in northern Iraq. So many people have come to Qaraqosh to escape the violence in Baghdad and other cities. My town has grown from about 35,000 to 45,000. The new hospital will serve a larger region that now includes about 160,000 people. We have the land for this hospital. We hope to build it soon. This new and much needed hospital will serve people of all faiths and traditions, not just Christians.

My Return to Iraq

I have been away from my country for five years. In a few days, I have the opportunity to travel to Iraq for a five-week home visit. I will then return to the U.S. for one more year. I will spend that year teaching Arabic at Siena Heights University and hopefully have opportunities for participation in the theological and peacebuilding program. My desire is to bring all my educational experiences with me when I return to live with and minister to my Iraqi people.

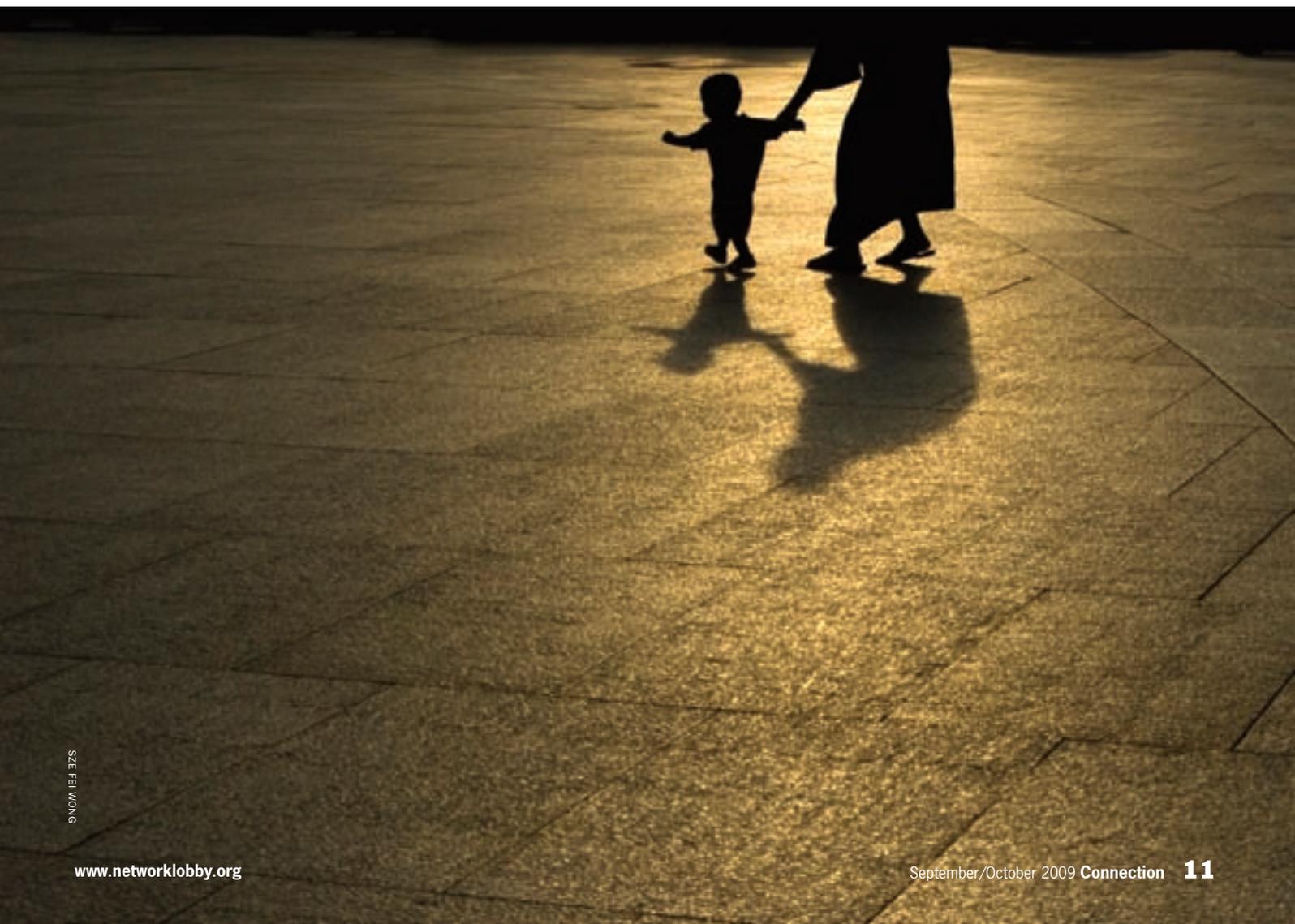
When I get off the plane in Iraq, I already know that I will see a different homeland. Even my family will be different. They will also think that I have changed. I know through my phone conversations that my nephews and nieces have been affected by the violence

of war. I asked my little seven-year-old nephew what he would like me to bring him from the United States. He told me he wanted a toy gun. This was a painful realization of what the Iraqi children are experiencing. I told him I could not bring him such a toy and I would explain my reasons when I arrived.

Our children are Iraq's future. They need—we all need—education about ways we can live in peace. Peace is what I hope to bring to my country.



Sister Aman Miriam is a Dominican Sister of St. Catherine Siena, Mosul, Iraq, currently residing and ministering with the Adrian Dominican Sisters in Adrian, Michigan.



Peace in Afghanistan?

By PETER LEMS

As people in the U.S. move their focus from our military presence in Iraq to healthcare at home, little ongoing attention is paid to the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. We asked Peter Lems, who visited Afghanistan in November and December, to write about this troubled land where peacemaking efforts are critically important.

The war in Afghanistan increases in intensity with mounting deaths and casualties. August presidential elections, the deployment of an additional 21,000 U.S. troops, and the growing reach of the Taliban will all profoundly impact Afghanistan's future. U.S. and Afghan forces have launched a major military offensive in Helmand province and fighting has erupted near Kabul.

The U.S. has spent \$223 billion on war-related funding in Afghanistan and only \$19 billion on development. These skewed policy priorities have brought little security and no peace.

Key Election Issues

Education, healthcare and economic opportunity not connected to illegal activities are scarce in Afghanistan so the nation remains an excellent recruiting environment for the Taliban. Improving prospects for employment, school and health are essential to stemming resentment and despair among many Afghans. No surprise that these were key issues in the presidential campaign in Afghanistan. Most Afghans recognize that dialogue with the Taliban, rather than endless fighting, is the best way—indeed the only way—to end the violence. The newly elected president will be tasked with initiating that dialogue.

Additional peacemaking efforts will need to address legacies of past wars, poverty, tribal and ethnic conflicts, and a drug trade that now accounts for one-third of the economy. It is a challenge that will require the participation of all significant parties to the conflict.



An Afghan widow sits near the door to her tea room.

Rising Civil Society

The U.S. has had limited success in creating a centralized national state in Afghanistan, but a vibrant indigenous civil society has become powerful and effective. It may be the best-kept secret in Afghanistan, but it offers hope for the future and deserves support. National and community-based organizers are working on healthcare, education, women's rights and reconciliation. They provide services to traumatized, internally displaced people and refugees returning from bordering countries. These groups are run by leaders in rural areas, women, young people and many professionals who started their work in the refugee camps of Pakistan and Iran. This rising civil society reaches all strata of society and will be a critical resource to help Afghanistan heal the wounds of war.

The Future of U.S. Troops

In September, Washington's new Commanding General Stanley McChrystal will release his Afghanistan assessment. The report will be an important indicator of what tactics he will continue to use from his former role as head of covert actions in Iraq and how many

more U.S. troops will be sent to Afghanistan. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, President Obama and others have stated there is no military solution in Afghanistan. The "big project" of building an Afghanistan that is stable, democratic and prosperous has been reduced to eliminating al-Qaeda and threats to the West.

What You Can Do

A clear majority of the U.S. public—54% at last count—now oppose the war in Afghanistan. One way to help translate that reality into change is to urge your Member of Congress to cosponsor Representative Jim McGovern's (D-MA) bill (H.R. 2404), which requires the Secretary of Defense to submit an exit

strategy for military forces in Afghanistan. With a large number of cosponsors, Democrats and Republicans, it is an important step to show the public's will.

Learn More

For thirty years, the U.S. and regional states have directly and covertly contributed to Afghanistan's wars. International efforts from 2001 until now to assist in peacebuilding, demobilization, disarmament and real development have been shamefully inadequate.

Visit the Web page of the American Friends Service Committee for online resources that offer alternatives to military actions (www.afsc.org). You will also find information about Afghan initiatives on peacebuilding, development, regional diplomacy and the cost of war.

Peter Lems, at right in Kabul, is the Program Director for Education and Advocacy for Iraq and Afghanistan at the American Friends Service Committee.



Nonviolence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our being.

—Mahatma Gandhi

We know that Jesus “came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near” (Eph 2:17) and few Christians would deny that peace is the fulfillment of his Gospel message. In fact, peace is an important component of the teachings of virtually all faith traditions.

Who hasn’t seen anti-war rallies where the rhetoric was violent? Or online comment-sections of mainstream newspapers full of ugly attacks against immigrants and others?

And who hasn’t noticed the ease with which some demonize those who disagree with them? Conservative versus liberal. Pro-choice versus pro-life. Republican versus Democrat. It happens on all sides.

Sadly, many of those who engage in these behaviors believe they are living out Christ’s message.

Blessed are the peacemakers...



Peace is more than the mere absence of war. It is the essence of how we live with ourselves and one another in our interconnected world.

Why does true peace remain such an elusive goal for people of faith—and for the world?

Who hasn’t heard sarcastic or belittling comments aimed at people because of their gender or how they look, or their age or lifestyle?

Bishop Oscar Romero once said, “Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is a right and it is a duty.”

Peacemaking begins within each individual heart. What can each of us do to create the compassion and peace we want in the world?

We encourage the reproduction and distribution of this back-to-back fact sheet.

Becoming a Peacemaker

WHERE TO BEGIN

The Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC) and Gary Baran compiled the following list of suggestions for ways we can begin to interact in more compassionate ways. More information can be found at www.cnvc.org

Ten Things We Can Do to Contribute to Internal, Interpersonal and Organizational Peace

- 1 Spend some time each day quietly reflecting on how we would like to relate to ourselves and others.
- 2 Remember that all human beings have the same needs.
- 3 Check our intention to see if we are as interested in others getting their needs met as our own.
- 4 When asking someone to do something, check first to see if we are making a request or a demand.
- 5 Instead of saying what we DON'T want someone to do, say what we DO want the person to do.
- 6 Instead of saying what we want someone to BE, say what action we'd like the person to take that we hope will help the person be that way.
- 7 Before agreeing or disagreeing with anyone's opinions, try to tune in to what the person is feeling and needing.
- 8 Instead of saying "No," say what need of ours prevents us from saying "Yes."
- 9 If we are feeling upset, think about what need of ours is not being met, and what we could do to meet it, instead of thinking about what's wrong with others or ourselves.
- 10 Instead of praising someone who did something we like, express our gratitude by telling the person what need of ours that action met.

[W]e seek a world where human needs are addressed and where differences are settled in dialogue, not violence. —Platform for the Common Good

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A New Era in Defense Politics?

By JEAN SAMMON

Sometimes it takes years.

When I came to NETWORK ten years ago, people in the arms-control community were trying to cut funds out of the military budget for the F-22 Raptor, the most expensive fighter plane ever built. The Cold War had ended but the plane designed for air-to-air combat with Soviet aircraft lived on, due to close relationships within the military-industrial-congressional complex. After 9-11, the defense budget became untouchable.

Several years ago, Marie Reitmann, the Public Policy Director at WAND (Women's Action for New Directions) convened the Budget Priorities Working Group in order to get concerned groups working together to redirect our government's wasteful military spending to our nation's more urgent priorities. The BPWG consists of about 40 organizations, including WAND, Project on Government Oversight (POGO), Taxpayers for Common Sense, Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities, and Peace Action. NETWORK Lobbyist Marge Clark, BVM, and I have informally connected with their efforts since we're both personally interested in military spending.

In April of this year, Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced that his defense budget for 2010 would end the F-22 program. He said the 187 planes we now have are more than enough, particularly since none of them has been used in our current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We rejoiced, but only for a moment. The House and Senate Armed Services committees added about \$2 billion back into the defense bills for a few more F-22s. Some Members of Congress said we needed more planes to defend America, some said we needed to keep producing them in order to save jobs. None of them talked about their ties to defense lobbyists or their contributions from defense contractors.

The BPWG intensified its advocacy to

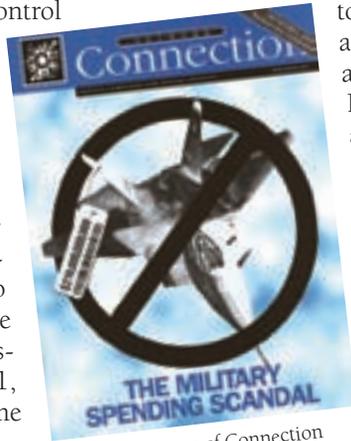
support Secretary Gates's decision. NETWORK signed on to organizational letters to Members of Congress, asking them to support amendments to cut the F-22. And we sent email alerts to you, our members, who responded by sending nearly 2,000 email messages to your senators.

On July 21, the Senate passed (58-40) the Levin-McCain Amendment to eliminate the additional F-22s in the defense

authorization bill. The following week, the House also passed (269-165) an amendment to eliminate the added funds.

These bipartisan votes were a significant departure from politics as usual. Although the battle isn't over yet, we've seen what the combination of a new Democratic president, a respected Republican Defense Secretary, and a determined group of advocates can do. Now, of course, we need to keep chipping away at that military budget. We know it is possible.

Jean Sammon is NETWORK's Field Coordinator.



A 1997 issue of *Connection* addressed military spending.

Another Sign of Hope

Pascale Warda came to NETWORK in 2006 as a member of a delegation of Iraqis who participated in briefings for Congress and the media. (See the May-June 2006 *Connection* issue, available at www.networklobby.org/connection/CNNCTN_MayJun06.pdf.) She recently returned with Sister Maria Hanna, OP, seeking support for their human rights work in Iraq. (See article on page 4.)

The two women had appointments on Capitol Hill but did not have contacts in the Obama Administration. NETWORK's Executive Director Simone Campbell, SSS, who had been instrumental in arranging the 2006 visit and had

kept in touch with Pascale, called Paul Monteiro, her contact at the White House Office of Public Engagement. Paul set up a meeting during which

the Iraqi women and their American friends were able to talk with White House staff about their concerns for religious minorities in Iraq and their plans for a secure medical facility for all Iraqis.

Simone followed up with Joshua DuBois, the White House contact for

faith groups, and Alexia Kelly, the Director of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the Department of Health and Human Services. These contacts resulted in meetings at HHS and the State Department, where Pascale was able to establish relationships that will prove valuable in the work for a

stable, secure and peaceful Iraq.

It may take years, but we believe that every step toward peace makes a difference.



Pascale Warda in Washington in 2006.

Did you get our email about
the conference call
with President Obama?



If not, it's probably because we don't have your current email address. We depend on email since it is the most inexpensive and timely way to get information to you.

Please send an email to
jsammon@networklobby.org
with your current email address.

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NETWORK Capitol Campaign 2009

How has NETWORK made a difference to me? As a Trinitarian, let me describe just three ways. First, as a Georgetown professor I have benefitted from students learning at NETWORK about lobbying, researching and educating for justice from a faith-based perspective as part of their course assignment. Second, as one who loves the Catholic social justice tradition, I relish telling people that NETWORK practices out of and contributes to its richness and vibrancy. And third, as a Catholic who believes that it is "faith that does justice," I am privileged to be a NETWORK member and former Board member. Together with the NETWORK staff, we are joined and committed to helping make this grace-filled world of ours a more just one.

— Kathleen Maas Weigert
Washington DC

Join these NETWORK members by investing in our work for justice. Your support can help make this a better world!

- Learn more at www.networklobby.org (click on NETWORK Capitol Campaign).
- Use the envelope in the middle of this magazine to send a contribution. (Write "Capitol Campaign" on the envelope.)
- Spread the word so others can invest in our mission of justice!

I'm a husband of nearly 30 years, father of three college-age children, alumnus (as is my wife) of Loyola Marymount University, and business executive. I'm a fellow traveler on the journey and have had the privilege of supporting NETWORK's mission for peace and justice for many years. In particular, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to have contributed to the Capitol Campaign 2009 in furtherance of NETWORK's efforts to "place the needs and voices of people living in poverty at the center of decision making" by our Members of Congress.

— Stephen Benoit
Kalamazoo, MI

My relationship with NETWORK is in its fifteenth year. I started as a frustrated sideliners but NETWORK has become my advocacy "lifeline" in dealing with distortions and fear-mongering. A quick trip to the NETWORK Web site gives me an honest and thought-provoking tutorial on the issues before I engage my local community and Members of Congress on the social justice goals I care most about.

— Judy Sharpe
St. Augustine, FL