

Good News: Victories, Pushbacks, Daring Deeds, and Other Signs of Hope

Uruguay Welcomes Guantánamo Prisoners

Six prisoners in Guantánamo who had never been charged and had been cleared for release as long ago as 2009 were accepted humanely by the country of Uruguay. The Guardian reported that when they arrived the former prisoners received hugs from Uruguayan officials, friendly waves, and thumbs up from patients at the hospital that was their first stop for health care, and that their American lawyers were cheered on the streets of Montevideo.

Actual Peace Builder, Human Rights Activists Awarded

Two grassroots peace-builders and human rights activists: Ibrahim Ag Idbaltanat from Mali and Francisco Javier Estevez Valencia from Chile were named winners of the 2014

UNESCO-Madanjeet Singh Prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-Violence.

More info: Rise Up Times, riseuptimes.org, a blog that includes good news.



The Martin Luther King Day march in St. Paul on January 19, 2015.

Photo: Sage Passi

No Business as Usual: Black Lives Matter

Standing in unity with Ferguson, Missouri, in their call to action against non-indictments of police killings of young black males, a multiracial coalition led by young black organizers extended 30 blocks through Manhattan on December 13, calling for “deep changes that will allow us and our communities to live free from fear and suffering at the hands of the police.” Solidarity marches took place all over of the world. Marchers claimed roadways in U.S. cities. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, thousands marched down Highway 35 and in Oakland, California, protesters shut

down a police headquarters for hours. In another action defenders of black lives rallied en masse at the Mall of America in the Minneapolis suburb of Bloomington.

It's a Generous Life

"The radical lifestyle of those who live in intentional communities, make very little money, consume as little as possible, pool their resources, and protest environmental disaster is based on living for the long-term. Some of these people live in the Phillips Neighborhood [of Minneapolis]...The Catholic Worker House, known as Rye House, puts on free, delicious community dinners every week; provides homework help for kids who live around them; grows organic vegetables and raises chickens (so as not to perpetuate our disastrous industrial food system); holds roundtable discussions; offers resources for homeless people; and practices activism on issues important to them."

—Report from Southside Pride, southsidepride.com

Recognition of Palestine

On January 13, international-law researcher Roslyn Fuller writing for "Op-Edge" on RT, wrote about UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon's acceptance of "the Palestinian Authority's ratification of over a dozen major international treaties and conventions, including all of the cornerstones of modern international law, such as the Geneva Conventions, the Convention against Torture, and the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic Relations and on the Law of Treaties," stating that "it is a highly significant move that would seem to be the final act in a sweeping reform to Palestine's status under international law...By becoming a party to these treaties, Palestine acquires rights and duties that it did not previously possess, fundamentally shifting the balance of power, not just between itself and Israel, but between itself and the rest of the world." See Roslyn Fuller's analysis at: "Palestine ICC membership—end of limbo status?" "Op-Edge," RT, January 13, 2015

Revictimized Palestinian-American Rasmia Odeh Released (for Now)

After being kept for five weeks in a Port Huron, Michigan, jail, 67-year old Rasmia Odeh, assistant director of the Arab American Action Network who works with the Arab Women's Committee in Chicago, was released on bond to come home to Chicago pending sentencing (corrected date) which will take place March 12, 2015. More info, and be sure to check date at: uspcn.org and stopfbi.net

DOJ Drops Threats against Journalist (No, I Won't Back Down) James Risen

The U.S. Department of Justice dropped its threat to imprison journalist James Risen unless he revealed his source in reporting the story of Operation Merlin, the CIA's plan to entrap Iran by providing the nation with flawed nuclear weapon blueprints. (However, it must be mentioned in this context that whistleblower Jeffrey Sterling, a former CIA officer, is now in federal court on trial for giving classified information to Risen about the Iraq déjà vu-type CIA operation that provided Iran with flawed

nuclear weapon blueprints.) See antiwar.com for results and RootsAction.org for public follow-up actions.

Finally U.S. (Sort of) Recognizes Cuba

Though it took the Pope and Canada to seal the deal and it was accompanied by a jab from Secretary of State John Kerry—especially hard to swallow these days—about another country needing to improve its human rights and democracy, the U.S. opened diplomatic relations with Cuba. For its part, our island neighbor released U.S. spy guy, Alan Gross, it had held for five years, and three of the Cuban Five held for 16 years in U.S. prisons were released (two of the five had been released in 2012).

ACLU Files Suit on Behalf of Asylum-seeking Mothers, Children

On December 16, 2014, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a nationwide class-action lawsuit challenging the Obama administration's policy of locking up asylum-seeking mothers and children to intimidate others from coming to the United States. The case was brought on behalf of mothers and children who have fled extreme violence, death threats, rape, and persecution in Central America and have come to the United States for safety. Each has been found by an immigration officer or judge to have a “credible fear” of persecution, meaning there is a “significant possibility” they will be granted asylum.

France Held Accountable for Moral Damage

Causing near-apoplectic fits in the equal-justice-is-not-for-all crowd, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) made the bold judgment that certain Somali pirates were entitled to the right to appear posthaste before a judge after capture. The pirates would still be tried and convicted, and the case will not address the general root causes that created Somali piracy in the first place such as destruction of Somalia's economy, and the ability to fish for livelihoods and food while oil tankers command the country's coastline. However, at least a nation was (this time anyway) held accountable, in some way, for withholding legal rights of others when it roams far from its own borders. The French government was ordered to pay damages in a modest range of five figures for “moral damage,” as well as legal costs, to the pirates for holding them in custody for an additional 48 hours, according to France 24.

Anti Gun, Pro-Woman New Surgeon General

Dr. Vivek Murthy was confirmed as surgeon general at the end of last year. A physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, he has a history of advocating for healthcare and women's health, and was opposed by the gun lobby. He was born in India, has lived in the U.S. since a very young child, and is the first surgeon general of Indian descent.