



**CHURCH WORLD SERVICE**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

General Assembly  
November 9, 2004  
St Louis, Missouri

The Rev. John L. McCullough

"When Hurricane Ivan raged onto the Gulf Coast back in mid-September packing 130 mile per hour winds, most Americans were riveted to the scenes on the Weather Channel, CNN or network news. From Mississippi to the Emerald Coast of north Florida, many homes were torn from their foundations, trees were uprooted, bridges ripped from their moorings, thousands of homes flooded or damaged and in some cases, entire communities wiped off the face of the map."<sup>1</sup>

This year's four major hurricanes: Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne together, accounted for an estimated 20.5 billion in insured losses— just more than the \$20.3 billion loss caused by Hurricane Andrew in 1992, in inflation-adjusted terms. Its one thing for insurance adjusters to estimate damages, but it is another thing for the victims to exact the real toll. More than the loss of property, it is the matter of lives turned upside down, and traumatized - perhaps for a lifetime, forever suspicious of strong winds blowing in from the south.

Church World Service Disaster Response and Recovery Liaison (DRRL) Tim Johnson is working with varied groups to develop long-term recovery programs that will help Alabama residents restore their lives. Tim helps connect two types of organizations with ongoing community service programs -- faith groups and local voluntary organizations. Johnson reports that by working together, these groups can better assure that "all who need assistance get it."

In some cases these groups worked together under the auspices of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs). VOADs -- human service organizations with important information and established relationships with the people they serve -- include area churches, local community groups, and private and local government agencies. Following a disaster, VOAD participants keep each other abreast of families and individuals with specific needs.

Barbara Tate is very close to the residents, most of who are originally from Mexico, who live in her mobile home park. Tate spoke passionately about how the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will help replace her lost mobile home.

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<sup>1</sup> Standard Democrat 11/08/04 *Military News Service*

But with tears in her eyes, she explained that although many of her neighbors are allowed to work in the United States, they are not eligible to receive federal assistance because they do not have Social Security numbers.

“Nobody’s going to help them,” she said. “It makes me so upset to see them suffer like this. I don’t know what to do. I love these people.”

Tim invited Tate to attend a long-term recovery meeting in Baldwin County, so she could be “a voice for her community.” Tate was encouraged by this opportunity. “Thank God there is a way to help them,” she said through her tears.<sup>2</sup>

This networking of groups is like weaving durable and flexible fabric. Tim’s purpose? Continuing to help weave the long-term recovery fabric that will restore communities.

During the latter part of October a CWS delegation traveled to the Middle East. It was a solidarity visit, in recognition and support of the new leadership of the Middle East Council of Churches. The Presidents of the Council and its General Secretary articulated the importance of the delegations’ visit during a time of regional turmoil and crisis, but they also challenged the churches in America saying that more than responding to crisis as they occur, the churches must strengthen their witness so as to prevent the root causes from ever bursting into conflict. The other stated purpose of the delegations visit included support for ecumenical and interfaith efforts for peace, justice and reconciliation.

The delegation of *Heads of Mission* was told about the human impact of the Iraq War from the perspective of the people living in the midst of the storm called *Operation: Iraqi Freedom*. Contrary to government collateral adjusters who report civilian losses at approximately 14,000, the victims say the number is closer to 50,000. They detail the stories of broken and shattered lives, of fractured hopes and dreams. The human drama in disasters should not be distorted by official pronouncements, or by the work of statisticians.

At the recent October meeting of the CWS Board of Directors discussions centered on the central theme of The War on Terror and Its Impact on Humanitarianism. The Board explored the critical issue of the effect of the “War on Terror” on international humanitarian work. It was privileged to discuss the topic with USAID’s Thomas Staal, Deputy Director, Office of Food for Peace.

While introducing the topic, I reported:

The military interventions, policy and rhetoric related to the “War on Terror” have had significant impact on CWS programs. Historically humanitarian action is fundamentally seen as “Northern” and “Western”, unfortunately the “war on terror” is perceived by many to represent the same perspective. In the current global context this creates confusion about whom and what we represent, in turn

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<sup>2</sup> Church World Service *News Room* September 30, 2004

creating a liability as well as a moral problem for CWS as a humanitarian actor. The crises in Afghanistan and Iraq have resulted in a dangerous blurring of the lines between humanitarian and political action and also in the consequent erosion of core humanitarian principles of impartiality and independence. This context has challenged our global work in new and significant ways.<sup>3</sup>

As this Assembly gathers, the battle for Falluja wages on. But the real and lasting challenge for us is to look beyond images of armed conflict on those city streets. It is to ask ourselves first: What does it do to people when homes are torn from their foundations, trees uprooted, bridges ripped from their moorings, thousands of homes damaged and in some cases, entire communities wiped off the face of the map; and, secondly: What can we do as a community of faith to help in the healing process?

Edward Ishu calls Baghdad home. He and his wife lived in a modest apartment in a severely impoverished neighborhood. It was there that they practiced the ministry of hospitality, inviting me into their home and to their table where we broke the bread of life. Today Edward's family lives in Amman, Jordan, along with thousands of other Iraqi refugees. Edward has a hard time talking about his country, and what has become of his family, and his home. He pauses; his skin becomes pink, flushed with the depths of his own sorrow. He doesn't want to cry, and even though the tears do not fall from his eyes, his facial expression defies the emotion that he so desperately tries to hide within. It is hard... When I talked with him it was apparent that his pain was far greater than had been reported by the news services; and it was also apparent from his emotion that his trauma is far greater than even he realizes. We talked about justice, and peace, and hope, but it was hard trying to weave the pieces together when so much of the fabric of his life had been torn asunder.

The hurricane season of 2004, and the *War on Terror* represent only a portion of what our human family faces on a daily basis. In June of this year Bishop Thomas Hoyt, President, National Council of Churches USA, and head of the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church in Louisiana and Mississippi, was a member of the CWS delegation that traveled to Colombia. Bishop Hoyt commented, "We talked with people whose communities had experienced massacres, and because of the climate of impunity, they weren't heard. Their attackers are still walking free."

One young Afro-Colombian man told the delegation about his family's experience in the Choco community of Cacarica during the government's *Operation Genesis* seven years ago:

Age 16 at the time, the young man said, "They killed many. Some were beheaded, women raped and cut open. It was something we never expected. During the incursion, you couldn't hear the sound of nature because nature too was shocked at what was going on."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *War on Terror and its Impact on Humanitarianism*, John L. McCullough, 2004

<sup>4</sup> Church World Service *News Room*, June 1, 2004

The perspectives we bring to a myriad of issues and relationships must be informed by our fundamental commitment to the mission. This does and must be manifest in what we say and do, and it must also form the intellectual, ethical, moral and spiritual basis for all of our actions. Before confronting others, we must first ask whether our positions pass the litmus test of our own mission. Do the positions we take have definitive bearing on the duality of eradicating hunger and poverty –and – promoting peace and justice? And even more, do we offer solutions that address the realities of the most vulnerable? This is what keeps us on mission, and what determines the integrity of our witness and actions.

Madam Truong My Hoa, Vice-President of Vietnam, during the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Mennonite Central Committee and Church World Service work in her country, said, “[The] MCC and CWS have been working on reconciliation and promoting mutual understanding between the people of the United States of America and the people of Vietnam and contributing actively in the normalization of relations the two countries. Having the mandates for peace, justice and equality among peoples and among nations, the activities undertaken by MCC and CWS have helped the U.S. general public to better understand Vietnam, a nation struggling to overcome war consequences, heading for peace and development, putting aside the past and looking forward to the future.”

Like other institutions, Church World Service can quote statistics. We can tell you about resettling 4,593 refugees in the United States during this past year, deploying more than three million dollars worth of kits and blankets in seventeen countries, and about allocating nearly five million dollars in hunger and poverty grants to 170 projects in 46 countries. Within CWS we have a saying, “CWS is known by its numbers.” What is more important than numbers is that we have accompanied the Palestinians and Israelis struggling to find peaceful alternatives to the current violence... We have initiated Religious Services to Immigrant Detainees supporting their right to seek asylum, claim safe haven, receive fair and equitable treatment, and have their voices heard... We have trained religious leaders in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea to care for traumatized communities, beginning the cycle of reconciliation... We have reached out to children orphaned and made vulnerable because of HIV/Aids, helping to break through barriers of isolation and hopelessness... We have stood with our partners from Mexico and Canada calling for Just Trade Agreements recognizing that “God has entrusted us with a vocation as stewards of the common good, serving our neighbors and caring for the earth.”<sup>5</sup>

Its one thing to talk about numbers, but it is another thing for people to exact the real toll of hunger and poverty, conflict and injustice. More than material possession, it is about the matter of lives turned upside down, and traumatized - perhaps for a lifetime, forever suspicious of strong winds blowing in from the south, and north, the east and west. It’s about trying hard to weave the pieces of unity, peace and justice, and hope together. It’s about what we can do as a community of faith to help in the healing process of our otherwise broken and fractured world.

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<sup>5</sup> Church World Service, *What Does God Require of Us? A Declaration for Just Trade in the Service of An Economy of Life*.