

Letter from the Director

Thea Harvey

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I have just seen the film "Blood Diamond," and I strongly recommend that every reader of this newsletter see it immediately, just in case we have forgotten why we do what we do. Blood for diamonds; blood for oil; blood for geo-political positioning. Such things would be advocated only by those with so little compassion that they are able to ignore the reality of war, to think that someone else's loved ones are more expendable than their own.

No longer as naive as I once was, I am willing to concede that there may be a time when war is the right answer, that there may possibly be a situation in which there is no other alternative that will save lives in the long run. But there hasn't been such a situation in my lifetime that made any sense to me.

This issue marks the fourth anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq. As in each year since March 2003, I hoped not to have to publish this issue. I was not very optimistic that this hope would be fulfilled, but I wished nonetheless. I wish and pray that the people in Washington who are wasting my money will have their hearts opened and figure out a way to end this. I wish and pray that someone will discover how to get the Sunnis and the Shia to sit down and figure out how to live together. I pray that no more children will have to die as the result of someone else's greed or pride.

And I come to work. Because we do what we do.

One of my favorite authors, the science fiction writer Douglas Adams, describes a nifty (fictional) device for making something invisible. He calls it the Somebody Else's Problem Field. If the SEP is activated, anyone looking at the cloaked object will simply look away, because it is not his responsibility. The discipline of economics has traditionally viewed war as an external disruption of the normal course of events, and thus of minimal interest. However, when the US defense budget claims more than half of all discretionary funding, when the US spends more than the entire rest of the world combined on 'defense,' when a new arms race is developing in space and small arms kill over half a million people per year, we find these concerns cannot be ignored. They cannot be left to Somebody Else.

In this issue, we reproduce for you the speech that William Baumol prepared for our dinner in his honor on January 6, 2007. However, when he actually gave the speech, he went off script a bit to say this:

"The work of this organization, which would appear to be peripheral to all the goings-on in the ASSA, is in fact the most crucial [at these meetings]...[The issues with which EPS struggles are] as urgent, as imminent a threat as global warming, and even more so...

I am calling for us to scream from the housetops that we are under pressures; that we are living under market phenomena which... should turn our minds to this issue and give it [urgent] priority."

We will have the video of the dinner posted on our website soon, so that you may experience his speech in its entirety.

At Economists for Peace and Security, our mission is to combine rigorous economic analysis, the development of

policy alternatives, and the education of policymakers and citizen advocates to achieve peaceful solutions to conflict which recognize the economic, social, cultural and security rights that are inherent to human dignity and well-being.

We cover a wide gamut of topics in that pursuit. We are increasingly effective; studies that we supported are getting notice in national media and having impact on Capitol Hill (see page 6); our website gets thousands of visitors per month who download hundreds of articles, fact sheets and reports; and we are planning our first stand-alone conference in ten years for later this spring (more on page 16).

I recently read an article by Carol Estes in Yes magazine that explains how telling stories can help us empathize with each other, and thus contribute to building peace. Stories like "Blood Diamond" give us the opportunity to experience life in a conflict zone for a few vicarious hours. The author says, "In a world where hatred of 'them' is the leading cause of death, empathy is a powerful tool."

In addition to the daily activities of EPS, the planning, the writing, etc., I find it necessary to occasionally experience a story which reminds me that ultimately the work we do is about saving lives. It makes it all worthwhile.

Our thanks to the Proteus Fund for a grant to update and improve our communications tools, and Peter Michos of Resolutionary for the designs. I hope you will welcome the new look of our newsletter, letterhead and upcoming brochure.

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