

Undercovered #40

News that gets little attention in local media.

A delegation of American health workers and parents whose soldier sons and daughters died in Iraq visited Jordan to meet with Fallujah refugees there and bring \$600,000 of medical supplies and donations for children's hospitals. Fernando Suarez, whose son died stepping on a U.S. cluster bomb, said, "It's time to stop the killing and comfort the children" (codepink.org).

• Although an estimated 40,000 refugees have ventured back into Fallujah, most don't stay. "I couldn't stand it," one said. "I was born in that town ... but I didn't recognize it." Burned, leveled, and ransacked buildings, decaying corpses, land mines, open sewage, no water and electricity, U.S. checkpoints featuring retina scans, fingerprinting, and hours-long waits, and heavy U.S. military presence are deterrents, though troops hand out water, food, and blankets. The U.S. claims few civilian deaths in Fallujah, yet Iraqi survivors report families crushed in their collapsing homes, civilians with white flags shot in the street, wounded people run over by tanks, and victims torched by phosphorus weapons. Witnesses mention cluster bombs and DU tank rounds. U.S. casualties include 136 dead and 800 wounded in the November offensive; so far Iraqi doctors have counted 700 Iraqi bodies, including 550 women and children, in the rubble of nine neighborhoods, with 18 neighborhoods still to go. Numerous bodies already buried cannot be counted (*LA Times*, aljazeera.net, IRIN News, *Ester Republic*).

• More than 1,300 Iraqi policemen were killed in the last four months of 2004; as the election looms, many are leaving the force. "We will be the first targets, and I will leave the country next week for Syria," said Kamal al-Rabia'a, a Baghdad policeman (alertnet.org).

• At a Canada hearing regarding refugee status for U.S. deserters (5,500 U.S. troops have deserted thus far) servicemen gave testimony about being told to regard all Iraqis as potential terrorists, and about killing unarmed families, protesters, and bystanders (canoe.ca).

• Howard Coble, a 10-term Republican North Carolina congressman and close ally of Bush, now agrees with Dennis Kucinich that the U.S. should consider leaving Iraq (bellaciao.org). Congress members and senators can be reached at (800) 839-5276. Meanwhile, British citizens are insisting on accurate counting of civilian casualties.

• Informative websites on Iraq include occupationwatch.org and dahrjamailliraq.com. Dahr Jamail is an Alaskan independent journalist working in Iraq.

• Scientists hope that a sea otter who spent six months on Stimson Reef at Cape Arago is an "advance wanderer" who will be followed by others, possibly from a burgeoning Washington State population (*The Oregonian*).

• The Inuits of Canada are asking the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to rule against the U.S. for violating their human rights by producing 25 percent of the green-



Dead Iraqi boy holding white flag in Fallujah.

COURTESY OF DAHR JAMAIL

house gases, which are destroying Inuits' homeland and livelihood (*Independent*). As Arctic air temperatures rise, ice thins and permafrost melts. Arctic precipitation is as low as in a desert, so most available fresh water disappears with the permafrost. Soil slides away, exposing a salty marine deposit underneath. Loss of sea ice is disastrous for ice-dwelling animals such as polar bears, expected to be extinct within 50 years (*Christian Science Monitor*).

• At the recent International Conference on Global Warming, intended to begin the implementation process for 132 countries that ratified the Kyoto Protocol, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia blocked efforts to begin payments to poor, low-lying island nations to help these nations mitigate problems connected with global warming: land erosion, greater storm damage, and rising sea levels. The U.S. delegation also objected to the term "climate change," preferring "climate variability" (bushgreenwatch.org).

• Bowing to pressure from shareholders and environmentalists, British Petroleum and Conoco Phillips dropped out of Arctic Power, the lobbying group that pushes for oil and gas drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. However, a new struggle is brewing in Congress, with proponents planning to slip ANWR drilling into a budget resolution, which cannot be filibustered (bushgreenwatch.org). With the support of his constituents, Sen. Gordon Smith voted against drilling the last time. Smith can be reached at 465-6750 or (800) 839-5276 or write to 211 E. 7th Ave, Room 211, Eugene 97401.

• On Dec. 24, the Russian military test-fired a new road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missile. With that, the Bush administration's brand-new, partly-functional National Missile Defense system, which is based on intercepting older types of missiles, became obsolete (*Christian Science Monitor*).

• Buried in the recently approved federal budget is \$4 million that the BLM must use to rewrite all management plans for western Oregon, plans that specify which forests and streams get destroyed and which are protected. Pursuant to a back-room deal with the timber industry, BLM will use this process to eliminate protected old-growth forests and stream-side buffers. Contacts include Senators Wyden and Smith and Rep. DeFazio regarding the need for legislation to protect old-growth forests (ONRC).

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Undercovered is a synopsis of culturally and environmentally significant news stories that receive inadequate attention from the mainstream media. Compiled by Michael Carrigan, Kate Rogers Gessert & Brooke Robertshaw

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