

LAFF

THE LAFF SOCIETY

For the men and women engaged in Life After The Ford Foundation

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The LAFFing Parade

Barry Gaberman, who retired as senior vice president from the Ford Foundation at the end of 2006, gave the keynote speech at a three-day conference on international grantmaking in Bangkok in December. The conference was sponsored by Worldwide Initiatives for Grantmaker Support, a global network of national or regional associations of philanthropies, with more than 180 participants from 40 countries. The organization announced the establishment of a fund in Barry's name to bring other philanthropy experts to speak at its conferences, held every four years.

Gladys Carrión has been appointed Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services by the new governor, Eliot Spitzer. She was a program officer in the Foundation's Urban Poverty Program in 1994.

Adrienne Germain and **Mora McLean** made the "Evening Hours" picture page of the *New York Times* Sunday Styles section. The occasion was the sixth annual gala of the International Women's Health Coalition, of which Adrienne is president and for which the event raised \$1.23 million. Mora is president of the Africa-America Institute. Both are Foundation alumni—Adrienne served as representative in Bangladesh, and McLean as representative in West Africa.

In January the memory of **Jose L. Barzellatto Sanchez** was honored by a book discussion, "The Human Drama of Abortion," in New York City hosted by the International Planned Parenthood Federation/Western Hemisphere Region and the Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies. Seventeen other organizations were co-sponsors. Jose, a Chilean-born doctor who died in April, 2006, joined the Foundation in 1989 as senior program officer in the Urban Poverty Program and then served as director of the program in Reproductive Health and Population from 1991 to 1997.

Mary E. McClymont has returned to the
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THE MIDDLE EAST: Comments from Two LAFFers

Given the growing controversy about U.S. relations in the Middle East, we invited comments from two LAFFers with extensive experience in the region
—Richard C. Robarts and Gary Sick.

by Chuck Robarts

Retired president of the Near East Foundation; former Ford staff member in Beirut, Cairo and New York.

Fertilized by an unstable mix of Islam and Western liberalism, Arab nationalism took root and grew in the decaying soil of the Ottoman Empire. In the aftermath of World War I, triumphant European statesmen were determined to give the "Sickman of Europe" a decent burial while playing midwife at the birth of the modern Middle Eastern state system. Today, the combination of oil, Israel and Islam keeps this region high on the international agenda and encourages attention to the events that set the stage for the controversies now plaguing the Middle East.

The Ottoman Empire ruled the Middle East for some 600 years—until the post-
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By Gary Sick

Executive director of the Gulf2000 Project at the School of International & Public Affairs, Columbia University; formerly deputy director of Ford's International Affairs program.

It is commonly said that the United States has no Middle East strategy. That may not be true much longer. The United States has begun to establish the framework of a new coalition strategy in the Middle East that could rebuild tattered alliances, shift attention away from the Iraqi catastrophe, and provide a touchstone for policy making that could appeal across party lines.

The organizing principle of the new strategy is confrontation with and containment of Shia influence—and specifically Iranian influence—wherever it appears in the region. US allies in this endeavor are Israel and the traditional (and authoritarian)
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The LAFF Society

c/o Mary Camper-Titsingh
531 Main Street, Apt #1110
New York, NY 10044

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The LAFFing Parade

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Ford Foundation as vice president of the Peace and Social Justice program after serving for four years as president of InterAction, an association of 160 U.S.-based private voluntary organizations working on international relief and development. From 1988 to 2000 she served at the Foundation in a variety of positions, ending as senior director of the Peace and Social Justice program.

Sir Gordon Conway, the Ford representative in India from 1988 to 1992 and now chief scientific advisor to the UK Department for International Development, gave one of the papers at the 2006 World Food Prize International Symposium in Des Moines, Iowa, last October. The symposium theme was "The Green Revolution Redux: Can We Replicate the Single Greatest Period of Food Production in All Human History." Conway's talk is available from Odeo.com or the symposium website.

As a special honor to the "Father of the Green Revolution," the symposium was officially renamed the **Dr. Norman E. Borlaug** International Symposium. Borlaug, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, was the key adviser to the Foundation in bringing the Green Revolution to Pakistan and India. And in December, the U.S. Congress awarded to Borlaug the Congressional Medal of Honor, the nation's highest civilian honor. Borlaug joined a list of recipients including Thomas Edison, Pope John Paul II, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ronald Reagan.

Lini Wollenberg is now the Director of the Center for Sustainable Agriculture at the

President's Message

Belated Happy New Year!

Deborah and I had the pleasure of meeting over the Holidays with the LAFF chapters in both New Delhi and Bangkok. (See **F. C. Bhambri**'s report on the New Delhi meeting in this issue.) To say that both groups are thriving is an understatement.

The US chapters are also active with meetings scheduled on February 21 in Washington (with Gary Horlich speaking), on February 27 in New York (with **Barry Gaberman** speaking), and at a date to be determined in Boston/Cambridge (with, hopefully, **Peter Bell** as the speaker).

We look forward to the formation of additional chapters in other locations, in the US and overseas, where we have clusters of alumni. Suggestions gratefully received.

Our membership continues to increase. We now have 373 members, including 30 who have signed up for life. Financially, Mary Camper-Titsingh, our Secretary-Treasurer, reports that we ended 2006 in the black with a bank balance of \$8,539.74. Your help in encouraging alumni to become members and in keeping your dues payments up-to-date is much appreciated.

Newsletter editors, Dick Magat, Will Hertz, and Bob Tolles continue to perform yeoman service, as this issue vividly illustrates. Please continue to send them items of interest to us all.

Bob has the next issue at Tollesnwc@aol.com; then comes Dick at rimagat@gmail.com, and Will completes the cycle at wahertz@maine.rr.com.

We hope you will be able to attend the upcoming LAFF event in your area.

Best wishes for a peaceful, productive and healthy 2007.

Peter F. Geithner

University of Vermont, a research and outreach organization that links land users and the university. The center, she reports, is expanding its mandate to include forestry and reach beyond Vermont borders. Wollenberg worked in the Foundation's Asia and Pacific office in the early 1990s and then with the Center for International Research on Forestry in Indonesia. Her e-mail address is lini.wollenberg@uvm.edu.

Barbara Y. Phillips, former program officer for Women's Rights and Gender Equality, is now the proprietor of the Jane Hamill Boutique, a women's apparel and accessories shop, in Chicago. This is in addition to her service on the USA board of the African Women's Development Fund, the boards of the Center for the Advancement of Women and the National Center for Human Rights Education, and the regional advisory committee of the Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative.

Georgetown University has established the **Waldemar A. Nielsen** Chair in Philanthropy in the Georgetown Public Policy Institute. Nielsen, who died in November, 2005, was a well-know writer about, and influential critic of, foundations, and a member of the founding board of Independent Sector. He was on the staff of the Ford

Foundation from 1952 to 1961, first as deputy director of its Behavioral Sciences division, then as associate director of the International Affairs program.

The first holder of the new Georgetown chair is James Allen Smith, a historian, who has followed in Nielsen's footsteps. Nielsen's seminal work was his 1972 book, "The Big Foundations;" Smith, in 1991, published an award-winning history of American think tanks, "Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite." **Dick Magat** recently co-taught one of Smith's graduate seminars at Georgetown.

REVISED DUES SCHEDULE

We have revised the dues schedule to reflect the rising costs of printing and mailing, increased publication frequency of the newsletter, and requests from some members to simplify dues paying.

Here is the new schedule:

One year \$10

3 years \$25 (\$8.33 per year)

10 years \$50 (\$5.00 per year)

Life \$100 (up to you)

The last year you paid is on the mailing label. If you are delinquent, please send a check to Mary Camper-Titsingh, 531 Main Street, Apt #1110, New York, NY 10044.

CHINA AFTER 20 YEARS

By Gustave Ranis

(Gus Ranis worked for the International Division in New York and Pakistan from 1956 to 1961. He recently retired as a professor of economics at Yale).

Returning to China after 20 years leaves one awe-struck by the overwhelming vigor of the country, its teeming millions seemingly all scrambling for individual success, along with nationalist fervor expressed via the up-coming Olympics and Expo. It is clear that China wants to have the tallest buildings, the biggest dam, the largest foreign exchange reserves.

Of course, Beijing, Shanghai and the coastal region generally do not represent China and one also has to note that persons in poverty, while declining by 300 million over two decades, still persists to the tune of 200 million in the rural interior and that the gap between the two Chinas is palpable and growing.

While the “crane” has become the national bird, life for 50% of the population, i.e. the farmers who still don't really own their land and are being taxed in direct and indirect ways, remains harsh. In fact, they are subject to having the land they are cultivating, presumably on long-term leases, sold from under them by local governments anxious to find the resources to continue investing—in spite of Beijing's current efforts to cool the economy.

The result is an anomaly—the country continues to call itself “communist” but is engaged in an effort to enhance “social harmony” in response to 10% growth rates accompanied by spiraling inequality. This anomaly is a particular type of “Dutch Disease.” That ailment is generally defined as the impact of a raw material export boom, and/or foreign capital inflows, on strengthening an exchange rate, thus shifting resources from labor-intensive exports into non-traded goods.

But a broader interpretation of that disease may be more relevant here, i.e. one defined as the massive inflow of foreign exchange, from whatever source, adversely affecting decision-making throughout the body politic. The particular Chinese version is one in which that inflow of foreign exchange is caused by large-scale labor intensive exports associated with the maintenance of an undervalued exchange rate and accompanied by substantial FDI as well

as some speculative portfolio capital inflows.

As a consequence, with foreign exchange reserves now at the \$1 trillion mark, the Chinese government finds itself unable to cool down the investment boom (currently still at 40% of GDP) and shift the economy toward efficient domestic activity and increased consumption. Instead, with saving rates nearing 50% and foreign capital continuing to flood in, there seems to be insufficient concern about the rapidly deteriorating efficiency of these investments.

Rates of return have been falling, capital-output ratios rising, but the boom has continued unrelenting as households have nowhere else to put their money but into the government banks which, in turn, continue to lend to local bodies, seemingly oblivious to what the government's monetary and fiscal authorities have to say on the subject.

In other words, what we have here is very reminiscent of a natural resource curse-related boom which relieves the pressure for care in lending and rational decision-making in general since there are enough goodies around to buy off any and

all critics. In this case, the vent for surplus is not identified as natural resources-based but it takes the form of surplus labor which, transformed into labor intensive exports, has helped generate huge trade surpluses accompanied by accelerated foreign capital inflows.

Such an unremitting avalanche of foreign exchange in the presence of a fixed and undervalued exchange rate and weak financial sector institutions not only renders the central authorities incapable of restraining the continuing investment boom but also encourages rent-seeking and corruption, currently being publicly addressed, and, most importantly, makes it politically difficult to change policy since there is no apparent urgent need to do so.

The way out also seems clear: financial reforms, including a more competitive banking system, inducing the creation of a bond market, a more flexible exchange rate, giving farmers ownership of their land, redressing the unfavorable terms of trade with rural China, and a willingness to accept a 6-7% growth rate as appropriate for a middle income emerging country. ■

In Memoriam

Dyke Brown, a vice president of the Ford Foundation from 1953 until 1962, died in Oakland, California, in December at the age of 91.

Brown first became involved with the Foundation as a law partner of H. Rowan Gaither, director of the study group appointed by Henry Ford II in 1949 to plan the Foundation's programs. Gaither asked Brown to serve as assistant director of the study group, and when in 1952 Gaither was appointed an associate director of the Foundation, he again called on Brown for staff assignments.

After the Foundation's parting of the ways with Paul Hoffman, Gaither became president, and Brown joined him in New York as a vice president. With a strong interest in youth development and delinquency, Brown was responsible for the Foundation's early programs in Public Affairs and Economic Development and Administration.

Living in suburban Scarsdale, Brown was elected to the local board of education, and that experience revived an early interest in secondary education. After leaving the Foundation, he returned to California to

found The Athenian School, an experimental institution that emphasized intellectual achievement, community service, international understanding, ethnic diversity, and environmental stewardship.

Lillian Trager, the Foundation's assistant representative for West Africa based in Lagos, Nigeria, from 1985 to 1987, died in Racine, Wisconsin, in November.

After her Ford assignment, she joined the faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside in Kenosha as professor of anthropology, and held that position at her death. Since 2002, she was also a member of the LAFF Society advisory board.

Before joining Ford, Trager was a recognized anthropologist, with published studies on the Philippines and Nigeria, and she continued to research and write from her base in Wisconsin.

Her work with Ford, she subsequently said, played an important role in developing her research orientation.

In Lagos, she served as a program officer, working on community development and women's issues. An important part of the job was an effort to work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in development.

Richard C. Roberts

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WWI dispensations—using the traditional Islamic “millet” system that identified and protected minority groups. Today one can go country-by-country and identify ethnic, linguistic, and religious fissures in the body politic, e.g. Berbers in Morocco, Coptic Christians in Egypt, Palestinians in Jordan, and Kurds split between Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.

Beginning in the 1930s with Egypt, several states of the Middle East achieved independence. Some did so painlessly, as with the end of the French protectorate in Morocco, and some with blood, as Algeria, considered part of France, broke free after a long war of national independence.

Three national movements—the Arabs led by the Hashemite dynasty, the Armenians, and the Kurds—sought their independence as the Ottoman Empire fought for its life, and lost, in World War I. No effort fared very well. The Armenians lost badly, suffering what they insist was a genocide at the hands of the Turks; only with the demise of the Russian Empire did they achieve an independent state of their own. The Kurds are still waiting for the independence promised them in 1920. The Arabs, with more guns and more friends than the Armenians, did somewhat better.

In the post-war settlement the British and French reneged on their promises to establish an Arab nation, and instead invented a mandate system to control Palestine and Syria and installed Hashemite rulers in Iraq and Jordan. The Hashemite line in Iraq survived until the assassination of King Feisal II brought it to an abrupt end in 1958 and ushered in an era of military dictators leading to Saddam Hussein.

In Jordan King Abdullah continues a benevolent Hashemite reign.

Often suffering as a proxy battleground, Lebanon contends with two persistent aspects of the inter-Arab conflict: the struggles of various minorities and the influence of external/foreign powers. Under its glittering “Switzerland of the Middle East facade, Lebanon was a state divided on the one hand between prosperous Sunni merchants allied with the Christian Maronite elite, and on the other a burgeoning Shia population, particularly in the South.

Lebanon’s neighbors suffered a crushing defeat by Israel in the Six Day War of 1967.

The resulting wave of Palestinian refugees politicized the downtrodden Shias and precipitated the long years of civil war and subsequent emergence of Hezbollah. Decades of Syrian occupation have yielded to yet another Israeli invasion and some ugly anti-government street riots.

The Lebanon we knew in its heyday of the 1960s showed the influence, for good or ill, of external forces in the Middle East. Going back to Ottoman times, the great powers encroached on this region, Britain and France from the West and Russia from the East. The Empire was open to the outside world—it not only adopted military technology, but tolerated, even welcomed, missionary activity especially in the field of education. Dozens of mission schools brought western-style education into the Ottoman provinces, resulting in a legacy of goodwill for America, which we now jeopardize in pursuing our political, military, and economic concerns. Today the Arab states show a range of political systems, but whether they are monarchies or some form of parliamentary regimes, all are essentially one-party, one-man shows.

The Palestinians had a clean slate in terms of government institutions when the exiled leadership moved from Lebanon, via Tunisia, into Gaza in 1983. Yassar Arafat and his cronies then proceeded to set up a tin-pot dictatorship with all the worse traits of regimes in the neighborhood. The Palestinian Authority quickly became a corrupt instrument of a traditional Arab patronage system. Now split into two warring factions, Hamas and Fatah, the Palestinians continue to be their own worst enemy.

There is a lot of to-do about voting, but very little real democracy in the contemporary Middle East. It is ironic that there is more space for political activity in the monarchies of Jordan and Morocco than in the quasi-republican states of Tunisia and Egypt. Democracy, U.S.-style, cannot be imported. It is a home-grown local product prospering in a civil society and best aided by comparable non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The Arab governments have dealt with political Islam as they have with other challenges to their authority. In Tunisia, good public relations work diverts attention from the very real constraints on any organized opposition. The Mubarak government in Egypt has permitted some formal easing on the legal front—women can actually now get a divorce—but has unleashed its security

forces on vocal critics and mounted brutal crackdowns on terrorist cells.

In Jordan, Islamic parties have been permitted to engage in limited political activity, but hardline critics are jailed or deported. Islamic dissidents in Syria remember the Hama massacre and know they could suffer the same fate at the hands of Bashar El Asad.

Looking broadly at the region and into the new century, the Middle East will change dramatically as a result of a demographic transition and the information revolution. The population will be young, and much of it poor. Even now the figures are daunting. In Libya, 60 percent of the people are under 20 years of age. In Jordan, a third of the population survives below the poverty line.

New information technology connects this generation with the rest of the world. TV antennas sprout on refugee shacks. CNN is widely available and several Arab satellite TV stations, financed by Gulf interests, have been launched. This information revolution will change social and political expectations, dramatically challenging traditional cultural concepts. Political leaders will have to contend with a rising generation that is both politically aware and increasingly vocal in their desire for change and their ambitions for economic opportunity.

It could be argued that the nations of the Middle East have not made a lot of progress, political or economic, since the debacle of 1967. Over these last 40 plus years, the grand ideas of Arab nationalism have all petered out. Today the Arab league is essentially moribund and the Arab countries cannot organize a regional summit meeting to establish a common agenda or a strategy for dealing with their Israeli adversary.

On the economic front, the idea that oil income from the Gulf would fuel development in the Fertile Crescent has stalled. Notwithstanding the recent development assistance pledge, the Gulf Arabs have been tourists in Egypt and landlords in Lebanon, not real partners or investors. The global economy has left the Arabs in a catch-up position, far behind Asia or Latin America.

Real progress will not come easily. Now more than ever, the people of the Middle East need the help and encouragement of their friends. There will certainly continue to be ways for American institutions—public and private, governmental and non-governmental—to make important contributions towards the cause of peace and progress in the region. ■

Gary Sick

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governments of predominantly Sunni Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan.

One unique feature of this otherwise unremarkable set of long-standing friendly governments is the possibility that the Arab states may subordinate their hostility to Israel at least temporarily out of their even greater fear of Iranian/Shia dominance of the region.

One of the products of the U.S. armed intervention in the Middle East since 9/11 has been a shift in the fundamental balance of power. In the name of fighting terrorism, the United States empowered Iran. By removing the Taliban, Iran's greatest threat to the east, and then removing the government of Saddam Hussein, its deadly enemy to the west, and finally installing an Iran-friendly Shia government in Baghdad for the first time in history, the U.S. virtually assured that Iran would emerge as a power center rivaled only by Israel.

It is one of the great ironies that U.S. policy would inadvertently make it possible for these two non-Arab states on the eastern and western flank of the Arab Middle East to dominate the traditional Arab heartland. The process was further accelerated by U.S. democratization policies that put its traditional Arab allies on the defensive.

Although these were unintended consequences of U.S. policy, the effects dismayed friends and foes alike. From Iran's perspective, it was a strategic gift of unparalleled proportions, tarnished only by the fact that its two major enemies had been replaced by a pugnacious U.S. military giant looking for new worlds to conquer.

That tarnish was gradually removed as the United States found itself increasingly bogged down in the Iraqi quagmire, with a public fast growing disillusioned with the ugly realities of empire building in a hostile and unforgiving environment. Erstwhile U.S. allies in the Persian Gulf, Jordan, Egypt and elsewhere privately viewed U.S. actions as a failure at best and a betrayal at worst.

They were ripe for a change.

The origins of the new cooperative undertaking against Shia influence are murky, but they appear to have been galvanized by the Israel-Hezbollah war in Lebanon the summer of 2006. This event was perceived by Israel, the United States and the Sunni Arab governments in Saudi

Arabia, Egypt and Jordan as an Iranian attempt to extend its power into the Levant by challenging both Israel and the Sunni Arab leadership.

The perception of growing Iranian strength and reach was unquestioned and hugely menacing to the traditional power brokers of the region. Initially they had to swallow their words of discontent as Hezbollah acquitted itself creditably and entranced the Arab "street." But once the war was over and Hezbollah began challenging the predominantly Sunni and Christian Lebanese government, initial misgivings reemerged.

In the following months we have seen a number of indicators of a new coordinated policy approach. Senior Saudi officials met privately with equally senior Israeli officials, which was itself a remarkable new development. During the same time period, Prince Bandar bin Sultan—the former Saudi Ambassador to Washington, presently Secre-

else is willing to act, Israel may be called upon to launch a strike against Iran on its own.

There have not been (and probably will not be) any formal announcements, but the accumulating evidence suggests that a major new strategy is being pursued.

A tripartite strategy of this sort has a number of appealing qualities. By keeping attention focused as fully as possible on Iran as the true threat in the region, it tends to change the subject and distract public attention from the Iraqi disaster. It provides something of real value to each of the participants. In the United States, the antipathy to Iran as a result of the 1979-80 hostage crisis is so strong that such a strategy is likely to have widespread appeal to Democrats and Republicans alike, with enthusiastic endorsement from pro-Israel lobbying groups.

Perhaps most important of all, it provides a single, agreed enemy that can serve

"...the Arab states may subordinate their hostility to Israel at least temporarily out of their even greater fear of Iranian/Shia dominance of the region."

tary-General of the Saudi National Security Council, and one of the architects of the U.S.-Saudi collaboration against the Soviets in Afghanistan—began a series of private visits to Washington, meeting with U.S. officials at the highest level. Apparently these meetings occurred without the knowledge of the present Saudi ambassador who abruptly resigned after the information became public.

Further, the United States successfully shepherded a resolution through the United Nations Security Council denouncing Iran's nuclear program and imposing limited sanctions. In his speech announcing a troop increase in Iraq, President Bush focused a surprising amount of attention on Iran. The announced increase of U.S. naval presence in the Gulf region together with the supply of Patriot anti-missile batteries to the Gulf were widely interpreted as warning signals to Iran. Finally, the United States is taking an expansive view of the Security Council sanctions by prohibiting a major Iranian bank from operating in the U.S. and leading a campaign to persuade others to do the same.

In the meantime, Israel has maintained a drumfire of criticism of Iran's nuclear program, including suggestions that if no one

as the organizing point of reference for policies throughout the region. Like the cold war, this can be used to explain and rationalize a wide range of policies that otherwise might be unpopular. The Holy Grail of U.S. Middle East policy has always been the hope of persuading both Arab and Israeli allies to agree on a common enemy and thereby relegate their mutual hostilities to a subordinate role. Iran, as a large, neighboring, non-Arab, radical Shia state, may fulfill that role convincingly.

Will the strategy work? Well, it does NOT necessarily mean an immediate recourse to military conflict, as some are predicting. The underlying fundamentals have not changed: none of the tripartite protagonists stand to gain by an actual war. Especially after the Iraqi experience, it is widely understood in Washington that a war with a country as large and as nationalistic as Iran would be immensely costly and almost certainly futile.

However, the strategy is deliberately provocative and risks prompting a belligerent Iranian response (or perhaps it is deliberately looking for a belligerent response)

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MORE ON KATRINA-RITA

This is another of our reports on the roles being played by LAFF members in the nation's response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Ray Offenheiser worked in Ford's International Division from 1986 to 1996, including serving as representative in Bangladesh.

**By Raymond Offenheiser,
President of Oxfam America**

Oxfam America had never in its 35-year history responded to an emergency within the US. In the case of Katrina, however, it was apparent after three days that the scope of the emergency was monumental and that the institutional capacity of federal and private agencies was being stretched to the breaking point. Oxfam America decided to redeploy staff to the region from both our US and overseas offices to support direct relief assistance, focusing on the most vulnerable and poorest communities.

Prior to the storm, Oxfam America had been working with a small number of local partners in the region for over a decade, among them the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, Southern Mutual Help Association, and the Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights. Our first response after the storm was direct support to these partner groups so that they could meet immediate humanitarian needs.

Shortly thereafter, Oxfam helped establish the East Biloxi Coordination and Relief Center and made emergency grants to several new partners—such as the Louisiana Environmental Action Network, the Mississippi chapter of the NAACP and Biloxi's Mail Street Baptist Church—for the purchase and distribution of relief supplies, medicines and food.

In the earliest days we had staff working alongside local residents organizing food distribution programs at local churches. We also set up coordination centers at several key locations—equipped with staff, phones, and computers—to facilitate an organized

response to the emergency. This was critically important because the hurricanes had wiped out much of the institutional infrastructure, making it difficult to assess damage, determine food supply and housing needs, and communicate with the large agencies directing the relief effort.

This was particularly true in minority communities. To make sure they were not overlooked, Oxfam America worked closely with the national and state offices of the NAACP. Minority communities in many cases did not see a FEMA or Red Cross staff member for six weeks after the hurricane. This meant that they could not initiate the process of finding housing in trailers or obtain necessary financial support. In the case of East Biloxi, Oxfam America flew a city councilor to Washington to meet with Senators Trent Lott and Thad Cochran to report FEMA and Red Cross failings. Things suddenly started to move.

Also seriously affected were migrant workers working in the tourist and casino industry along the Mississippi coast. They lost their jobs, their housing costs shot up, and many were driven from their rental apartments. In one dramatic case, Mississippi State police raided a Red Cross shelter and rounded up the residents as presumed illegals, including Red Cross volunteers and former US military veterans. Oxfam staff contacted *The Wall Street Journal* where it ran as a front page story. Oxfam provided funding and seconded staff to help the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance deal with the plight of displaced workers as well as to assist newly arrived workers providing labor for clean up work and reconstruction.

In southern Louisiana, Oxfam discovered that there was a serious problem with high toxicity levels in the muck that had filled houses. Massive amounts of toxic residue along the Louisiana coast had washed 35 miles inland leaving a horrific toxic stew across the landscape. We financed the Harvard School of Public Health to do an assessment and produce a report that was delivered to the state legislatures. We also

worked with the Louisiana Environmental Action Network to provide public-education materials, TV spots and appropriate clothing for this work.

It soon became clear that the real issues for families would be their access to state and federal funds for rebuilding. State officials had negotiated \$11 billion in emergency funds from Congress, much of it in the form of Community Development Block Grants, which in principle should be directed toward poor communities. However, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour secured exemptions to these traditional restrictions, and was promoting legislation that would limit eligibility for these funds to those who lived off a flood plain or who had possessed insurance before the storm. These provisions would have disqualified large numbers of poor and minority home owners.

These major challenges to poor communities led Oxfam to support the creation of the Steps Coalition, an organization of 25 local, state, and national organizations working toward a fair, equitable, and sustainable recovery for south Mississippi. Steps is dedicated to the following five goals: (1) affordable housing, (2) equitable economic development, (3) environmental justice, (4) preservation of cultural and historic sites reflecting the African American and minority experience, and (5) civil rights and social justice.

In southern Louisiana, Oxfam America supports the Terrebonne Readiness and Assistance Coalition (TRAC), a community and faith based non-profit corporation in Houma, which had been serving Louisiana Parishes since 1992. Its traditional mission is to assist individuals, families and communities rebuild following a disaster and strengthen planning and preparation for future disasters. TRAC staff is now helping Terrebonne parish's residents register with FEMA, and has helped over 120 local residents settle claims, recovering more than \$870,000 to date.

Oxfam's grant also supports a collaboration between TRAC and the Massachusetts

Institute of Technology to design, develop and build the LIFT House, an affordable and hurricane-resistant home that can be built with significant volunteer labor. Groundbreaking for the first LIFT house took place in mid-January.

Oxfam's work in advocacy has grown over the last year. Most recently, the FEMA deadline for beginning to withdraw housing assistance has been extended for another six months, thanks to the efforts of NAACP, Oxfam America and other organizations.

In December, Governor Barbour and HUD secretary Alphonso Jackson announced a \$700 million dollar program to give low- and moderate-income home owners

(with or without insurance) grants of up to \$100,000, with special consideration given to low income, elderly and disabled homeowners. An estimated 100,000 households will be assisted.

Equally important, Barbour recognized the work of the Steps Coalition in a major speech and cited the work of nonprofits "like the Steps Coalition" as one of the important improvements since the initial phase of the recovery program.

In Louisiana, Oxfam has emerged as one of the key state partners working on affordable housing together with Policy Link and the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation. Oxfam is the primary organization dealing

with rural issues and organizations. Current plans are to hold a series of rural policy gatherings to identify key issues for the upcoming legislative session, participate in convening a state-wide housing advocacy gathering, and develop an effective system to monitor the states Road Home program.

Oxfam's work to date in the recovery has been financed from \$3 million in individual donor contributions. Recently, Atlantic Philanthropies made a grant of \$2.6 million to Oxfam America to continue its work on behalf of Hispanic minorities along the coast. Other major support is pending with foundations for an expansion of our work on low income housing. ■

(This following piece about Gabe Mehreteab appeared on the New York Times Op-Ed Page)

Home in the Ruins

By BOB HERBERT

New Orleans – As its problems mount, the Big Easy is becoming increasingly unnerved.

Local officials, who will never be mistaken for the brightest lights in the firmament, have been unable to stem a hideous wave of murders. On Tuesday Mayor C. Ray Nagin said, "Enough is enough," then added, "But we've said that before."

The public school system, one of the worst in the nation, is trying to sell off some of its buildings to help with a desperate cash crunch.

Most depressing, more than 17 months after the horror of Hurricane Katrina, mile after mile after mile of the city that loved to present itself as the epicenter of laughter and good times still lies in ruin.

New Orleans is a place that could use a hopeful sign of any kind, some positive development to signal that perhaps better times are coming.

Enter Ghebre Selassie Mehreteab. Most people call him Gabe, and so will I for the rest of this column. Gabe is a middle-aged bundle of energy who heads the NHP Foundation, a national nonprofit organization that has taken on the difficult mission of providing quality housing at rents that poor and middle-class families can afford. There is no more imperative need in New Orleans than affordable housing.

On Garden Oaks Drive in the Algiers neighborhood Gabe showed me a remark-

able sight a sparkling two-story apartment complex, neatly landscaped, that was owned by NHPF, was badly damaged by the hurricane, and is now being completely renovated at a cost of \$20 million.

Nearby are buildings that look like the hurricane hit them yesterday. The NHPF complex, known as Forest Park, will have 284 solid, attractive, energy-efficient units completed this year, with tenants beginning to move in as early as May. The rents will range from \$194 to \$673 a month.

In New Orleans East, which had been completely submerged in the flood, I stood with Gabe and an architect at what was once the site of a housing complex known as Walnut Square. "New Orleans East was under water for eight days," said Gabe. "We had to raze it. It's demolished."

A quiet wind was blowing across the vast empty space where 18 residential buildings used to be.

The effort to rebuild Walnut Square, at a cost of \$37 million, is already under way. There will be 209 apartments, with rents ranging from \$130 to \$820 a month. There will also be a commercial strip, a community center and day care facilities. (The apartments will be built on raised foundations to guard against future catastrophic floods.)

Eventually Gabe hopes to build 3,000 affordable rental apartments in and around New Orleans at a total cost of \$300 million.

How does he do it, when others find the task so daunting?

The key, he said, is to combine the expertise of a successful real estate operation with the talent and vision of an experienced foundation committed to what is essentially a charitable mission. NHPF, which has

its Louisiana office in Baton Rouge, gets the funds to build from government grants, tax credits and low-interest loans, as well as conventional financing.

As Gabe dryly noted, "There is not much profit in developing low-income housing."

No successful rebirth of New Orleans is possible without substantial amounts of new and rebuilt housing—housing that the city's very large percentage of low-income residents can afford. Most of the people homing in on development opportunities here have either no interest or no expertise in building such housing.

"There are essentially two kinds of organizations here," said Gabe. "You have out-of-town real estate developers who look at this as a tremendous opportunity and their main concern, quite naturally, has been how much money they can make. On the other hand, you have well-meaning nonprofit entities that unfortunately, in most cases, do not have the capacity to develop on a significant scale."

Compounding the problem has been the lack of housing expertise in New Orleans. Much of the city's housing stock pre-Katrina was so poor as to be illegal in most major American cities. The Housing Authority of New Orleans, which administered public housing, was in such bad shape its operations had to be taken over by the federal government.

Half the population of New Orleans has been dispersed across the United States. Many of those still in the city are living in trailers or are doubled up with relatives and friends. There is no way to overstate the desperate need for housing.

Gabe and the NHP Foundation have provided at least one model that works. ■

DOINGS IN DELHI

F. C. Bhambri reports from New Delhi on two recent reunions hosted by LAFF-India:

In November, **Sir Gordon Conway**, the Foundation's representative in New Delhi from 1988 to 1992 had a dinner reunion with his old India staff. The event was held in the private dining hall of the India International Center adjoining the Ford Foundation's Office.

We remembered the good old days spent together. Everyone of us briefly shared what we are doing these days, and Gordon told us how many hats he is wearing.

In addition to being a professor of international development at Imperial College, he is chief scientific advisor to the UK Department for International Development. This involves a lot of traveling and lecturing on such subjects as sustainable development, environment, science and technology, global warming, etc. etc. [See item in the LAFFing Parade].

Gordon reported that **Robert Chambers**, another New Delhi veteran as project specialist in agriculture, is retired now and lives near Gordon's house in London.

In December, the LAFF-India Chapter

extended a very warm welcome to **Peter and Deborah Geithner** also over dinner at the India International Center. Peter served as assistant then deputy representative in New Delhi from 1968 to 1973.

The dinner was attended by 25 members, including some spouses. This is the highest number of ex-Ford Foundation staff who gathered for an occasion since the inception of our group meetings from 2002. Some of the members who participated live in the neighboring towns of Gurgaon, Noida, and Gaziabad.

Peter and Deborah are held in very high esteem by all their friends and colleagues in New Delhi. All of us have very fond memories of working with Peter, and we presented a plaque to Peter as a memento. Bhambri, V.K. Chaudhry and some others gave brief speeches in their honor.

Peter and Deborah responded remembering how enjoyable was their stay in India when Peter was working here. Peter brought us up to date about our former colleagues and friends in the States. We also shared similar information from this end.

We exchanged views about the current political and economic situation here and closer relations between U.S.A. and India. ■

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that could quickly escalate into an armed exchange. So the threat of military action is not insignificant.

Will the new policy persuade Iran to change its policies? Probably not, although knowledgeable Iranian political observers say Iran is actually ripe for a deal that would deal with both the nuclear and the Iraqi issues

The new tripartite strategy, however, is not really about Iran but about the three protagonists—Israel, the Sunni Arab states and the U.S. It brings them together, gives them a common purpose, offers an alternative to the current misery of reporting about Iraq, and provides a focus for future planning that might gain a wide measure of support. Unfortunately, that suggests that actually finding a negotiated solution with Iran is very much a secondary priority. ■

[Excerpted from a longer article, available by e-mail from Gary Sick, ggs2@columbia.edu]

The LAFF Society
c/o Mary Camper-Titsingh
531 Main Street, Apt. #1110
New York, NY 10044