



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Armella Sonntag is new provincial animator for Development and Peace

BY ANDRÉA LEDDING

Armella Sonntag is the new provincial animator for Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP), taking over from Michael Murphy, who recently retired. Sonntag has been involved with the organization for nearly 20 years.

“We first got involved when we returned from a mission trip in Peru,” said Sonntag, who lives in North Battleford. “I was working there as a lay associate for Scarboro Missions.”

She and her husband did field work in South America, and returned eager to continue the work from their home base, finding CCODP a natural fit. Sonntag sees not only global challenges, but local and national opportunities to create international change.

“Canadian Catholics should know that our campaigns have made a difference,” she said. “The past three years have focused on mining, and now there is a bill before the house addressing Canadian mining companies and their practices.”

Pressures and education have helped bring about this reform – something Sonntag sees as crucial in addressing the unethical ways in which wealthier countries, including Canada, have exploited foreign lands, resources, and peoples without repercussion.

“Environmentally, socially, politically, economically – actions need to be addressed at all these levels,” she added.



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The Development and Peace Fall Action Campaign this year will shift its focus from mining to farming, Sonntag noted. “Specifically, we are focusing on family farming in the global south,” she noted.

CCODP will be launching the 2009 “Life Before Profit” Fall Action Campaign with a focus on small-scale farmers, who are losing their land and crops to multinationals, government policies, and the trend to divert agricultural products into agrofuels.

In Columbia, arable land has been taken from sustainable, self-supporting farming communities and used to grow African oil palm. In the process, communities have been uprooted and villages and fields decimated, upsetting a long-standing balance of the land and peoples. Physical force and even assassinations are common tactics, and poor farming practice creates short-sighted cash crops from the fertile soil carefully tended for generations by the rightful inhabitants.

According to CCODP material, agrofuel jobs provide exploitative and dangerous labour, and less than a third of the jobs that family agriculture creates sustainably and safely. The material describes agrofuel working conditions as modern slavery.

Most importantly, the agrofuel crops utilize the arable land communities were feeding themselves on, and don’t replace it – instead importing the agrofuel crops. And meanwhile, poor practices such as deforestation, monocultures, and chemical useage wreak environmental havoc and pollute or monopolize water resources.

Sonntag is busy organizing workshops to be held across the province, and says she is hopeful about the campaign.

“We’ve seen already, with mining in the global south, that these action cards and our voices are highlighting injustice, making a difference, and causing our lawmakers to respond.”