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E-newsletter, November 2008



## Council of Canadians joins tri-lateral group calling for NAFTA renegotiation

Last week, the Council of Canadians teamed up with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives to host *Reopening NAFTA: Making it work for people*, a tri-lateral meeting of non-governmental organizations, union leaders and other civil society groups that came together to set some clear goals and objectives for NAFTA renegotiation.

The tri-lateral trade treaty has been the subject of speculation ever since U.S. president-elect Barack Obama promised during the U.S. primaries to re-open the agreement to include better labour and environmental standards for Americans.

The Canadian groups meeting in Ottawa wanted to ensure NAFTA is also improved for our citizens. The group talked about getting better labour standards into NAFTA, scrapping energy provisions like proportional sharing, removing Chapter 11 which allows corporations to sue governments over policies and regulations that infringe on their ability to make profits, protecting water and natural resources to remove any loopholes that would allow bulk water exports, and protecting and creating manufacturing jobs. Representatives also discussed plans to send a tri-lateral group of civil society representatives to Washington in March 2009 when the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE) is expected to send 100 CEOs to shore up NAFTA support south of the border.

"Certainly the establishment's view is that NAFTA is great and shouldn't be reopened. That's not our view," said Bruce Campbell, CCPA Executive Director in recent media coverage of the event.

The day finished with a public forum featuring noted broadcaster Ken Rockburn in conversation with a panel of prominent NAFTA critics and observers including Council of Canadians chairperson Maude Barlow, NDP Member of Parliament Peter Julian, and author Stephen Clarkson.

### Here is more about what's new at the Council of Canadians:

- **Maude Barlow chosen for prestigious UN appointment**
- **Council launches new report, *Our Water Commons: Toward a new freshwater narrative***
- **Victory! Government changes course on GEMS funding**
- **Council of Canadians annual meeting brings national attention to the tar sands**
- **On tour: spreading the word about the tar sands, nuclear power and uranium mining**
- **Join the Council of Canadians today!**

### Maude Barlow chosen for prestigious UN appointment

With a strong passion, interest and involvement in water issues around the globe, Maude Barlow has been tapped as the Senior Advisor on Water Issues to Miguel d'Ecosto Brockmann, President of the 63rd session of the United Nations. Since being appointed last month, Maude has been busy travelling the world continuing both her work to raise awareness about the seriousness of our planet's freshwater crisis.

Reacting to the announcement, Maude said she is honoured to be advising President d'Ecosto Brockmann. "I am excited for the year ahead, and am pleased to note that President d'Ecosto Brockmann has already adopted the call for water to be recognized as

a human right.”

Recognizing the human right to water has been a fundamental part of the work of the Council's Blue Planet Project, of which Maude is a co-founder.

In the letter appointing Maude to this new role, Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann notes the importance of world-wide recognition of the current water crisis. “I firmly believe that our Assembly, as the most representative and democratic global political body, is the right forum to debate policy, affirm principles and provide answers for the global water crisis that you have worked so hard to put on our agenda. I am looking to leaders like you, who combine humanitarian vision with a practical approach to problem solving, to help me,” he wrote.

To read the Council's media release on this click [here](#).

To read a copy of the appointment letter click [here](#).

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## Council launches new report *Our Water Commons: Toward a new freshwater narrative*



The Council of Canadians has just launched an exciting new report titled *Our Water Commons: Toward a new freshwater narrative*. Written by Maude Barlow, National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians and recently appointed Senior Advisor on Water Issues to the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, *Our Water Commons* is part of the ongoing work to bring together key activists, writers and thinkers to address the global water crisis by naming and reclaiming the freshwater commons. With the support of a new organization called On the Commons, the report promotes a better understanding of the concept of “the Commons,” which is described by American Commons pioneer and journalist Jonathan Rowe as “the vast realm that lies outside of both the economic market and the institutional state that all of us use without toll or price.”

Click [here](#) to download a copy of the report.

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## Victory! Government changes course on GEMS funding

One day after a spokesperson at Environment Canada stated that an internationally renowned Canadian-based program that tracks water supplies and trends in more than 70 countries wasn't a priority, the federal government was forced to withdraw the statement.

The Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS), which is based in Burlington, Ontario, has been struggling for several years after former federal funding provided by the Liberal government dried up. Without adequate funding, the GEMS program lost two scientists and was on the verge of being shut down. An Environment Canada spokesperson said the program was no longer a government “priority” and efforts should be made to move it to another country. It had been operating out of Canada for the past 30 years. An article in the *The Globe and Mail* reported that experts were “shocked that Canada would abandon a database it designed and has managed for 30 years, just as dwindling water supplies emerge as a critical issue.”

Less than 24 hours later, Environment Minister Jim Prentice stepped into the fray and said the government had changed its plans and that funding for the program would continue, and it would remain in Canada.

In an interview with *The Globe and Mail*, Maude Barlow stated, “That Canada would remove this support from this program is just outrageous and an embarrassment.”

The Council of Canadians is calling on the federal government to appropriately fund the GEMS program and make water monitoring an international priority.

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## Council of Canadians' annual meeting brings national attention to the tar sands

Council of Canadians' chapter activists, members and staff came together in Edmonton, Alberta earlier this month for the Council's 23rd Annual General Meeting.

In the middle of the Industrial heartland, energy issues across Canada were the main focus of this year's meeting. Titled “*Boom for Whom? Busting the myths of continental integration*” workshops and panels focused on the diverse and far-reaching effects of tar sands development on our water, health, and public services, and the future Canada faces without a Canadian Energy Strategy to ensure Canadians have secure access and control over our energy resources.



A group of Council staff, members of our board of directors, and chapter representatives also spent two days leading up to the meeting touring the Alberta-based tar sands to witness firsthand the far-reaching and devastating



environmental, social and health impacts of this massive resource drain. Viewing the area by bus and helicopter, those on the trip were staggered by what they saw. "What struck me as we began to see industrial sites (we passed both Syncrude and Suncor) was the vastness of everything – the trucks, the tailings lakes (ponds just doesn't do them justice), the plants, the smoke stacks, the machinery," wrote the Council's Energy Campaigner Andrea Harden-Donahue in her blog documenting the visit.

Meeting with and listening to the experiences of First Nations who live in close proximity to the tar sands was also an important part of this year's annual meeting. Michael Mercredi, a representative of the Fort Chipewyan community, which is located downstream from the tar sands, accepted a special award at the banquet Saturday night. He spoke personally and passionately about the effects he has seen on people's health, environment, water and future way of life.



As an outcome of the meeting, the Council of Canadians will continue to build alliances with social justice and environmental groups to demand a Canadian energy strategy that plans for the future and will give Canadians security of energy supplies, as well as strong policies that protect our environment and focus on finding alternative, less harmful energy solutions.

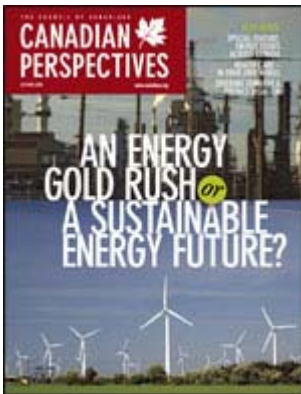
To view photos from our annual meeting click [here](#).

To read Andrea Harden-Donahue's tar sands tour blog click [here](#).

## On tour: spreading the word about the tar sands, nuclear power and uranium mining

Communities in British Columbia and the Maritimes will have the chance to hear about and discuss current Canadian energy issues in the coming weeks.

The "Tar Sands: The dark side of the boom" tour is taking place in B.C. and will address the local impacts the unfettered growth of the tar sands is having in British Columbia. The tour is being organized, endorsed and supported by the Council of Canadians, the Polaris Institute, Canadian Union of Public Employees BC, the Sierra Club, the Dogwood Initiative, Greenpeace, Check-Your-Head, Institute for Citizen Journalism, Tar Sands Free BC, North Coast Enviro Watch and Western Canada Wilderness Committee.



In the Maritimes, Dr. Jim Harding, author of *Canada's Deadly Secret -- Saskatchewan's Uranium and the Global Nuclear System*, will be visiting communities to speak about the growing push for nuclear power and uranium mining in Canada. His tour concludes at the end of the week in Tatamagouche at Mining the Connections: A Forum on Local and Global Mining, Human Rights, Environmental, Community, Economic Impacts.

Click [here](#) to read about Dr. Harding's views on nuclear power and uranium mining in the latest issue of *Canadian Perspectives*.

## Join the Council of Canadians today!

The strength of the Council is in its membership. The Council does not accept funding from corporations or from governments, so membership donations are vital to our activities. We work with community groups, seniors, students, unions and other organizations across the country to promote progressive policies on public health care, fair trade, clean water and other issues of social and economic concern to Canadians. **Join the Council today**, and help us prove that a better Canada is possible.