

Mother Earth is Weeping for Her Children

Mother Earth is Weeping for her Children: The US Military Must Stop Environmental Ecocide

Guest Post by Joy First of NCNR

As I traveled to DC to risk arrest in an action organized by the National Campaign for Nonviolent Resistance (NCNR) I was feeling both nervous, but also knowing this is what I needed to be doing. This would be my first arrest since I was arrested at the CIA in June 2013, and served a one-year probation sentence after an October 2013 trial. Taking almost two years off from risking arrest helped me to really examine what I was doing and why, and I was committed to continuing to live a life in resistance to the crimes of our government.

I have been a part of NCNR for 12 years – since the run-up to the war in Iraq in 2003. As the number of people involved in the anti-war movement declines, I know that we must keep up the resistance. Though we don't have big numbers now, it is more important than ever that we speak the truth about what is happening in the wars in Iraq, Pakistan, and Yemen, in the drone warfare program, and in looking at ways in which the climate crisis is exacerbated by the military.

There are so many ways in which the military is destroying our planet through the use of fossil fuels, nuclear weapons, depleted uranium, spraying poisonous chemicals on fields in the "War on Drugs" in South America, and through the several hundred military bases around the world. Agent Orange, used during the Vietnam War is still affecting the environment. According to Joseph Nevins, in an article published by CommonDreams.org, *Greenwashing the Pentagon*, "The U.S. military is the world's single biggest consumer of fossil

fuels, and the single entity most responsible for destabilizing the Earth's climate."

WE MUST TAKE ACTION TO END THIS DESTRUCTION OF OUR ENVIRONMENT BY THE U.S. MILITARY.

NCNR began planning an Earth Day action several months ago where we hold the military accountable for their role in the destruction of the planet. I was sending quite a few emails to various individuals and lists as we continued our planning. Then about 6 weeks ago I was contacted by Elliot Grollman from the Department of Homeland Security. He wondered what we were doing, and as a way to try and get more information from me, he asked if he could help facilitate our action on April 22. What was very surprising to me was that he told me he knew about our action by reading my private email correspondence. We cannot ever think that anything we say will not be monitored. He called my home phone number in Mount Horeb, WI at 7:00 am on the morning of the action. Of course I was in Washington, DC and my husband told him that and gave him my cell phone number.

On Earth Day, April 22, I joined other activists to deliver a letter to Gina McCarthy, head of the Environmental Protection Agency, calling on the EPA to do their job in monitoring and bringing an end to the military's complicity in causing climate chaos, and then we went to the Pentagon where we would try to deliver a letter to the Secretary of Defense. Both of these letters were mailed several weeks before the action and we never received a response. In both of these letters we asked for a meeting to discuss our concerns.

About thirty people gathered outside the EPA at 10:00 am on the day of the action. David Barrows made a large banner that read "EPA – Do Your Job; Pentagon – Stop Your Ecocide". There was a picture of the earth in flames on the banner. We also had 8 smaller posters with quotes from our letter to Ashton Carter.

Max started the program and talked about Mother Earth weeping as she was being destroyed by her children. Beth Adams read a statement, followed by Ed Kinane reading a statement by environmentalist Pat Hynes.

We had the letter we wanted to deliver to the head of the EPA, Gina McCarthy, or to a representative in a policy-making position. Instead the EPA sent someone from their Public Relations office out to receive our letter. They said they would get back to us, and I will be surprised if they do.

Marsha Coleman-Adebayo then spoke. Marsha had been an employee of the EPA until she blew the whistle on activities they were part of that were killing people. When she spoke up they told her to keep silent. But Marsha talked about how she would see people like us outside the window protesting against the EPA. Those protestors gave her courage to continue to push for an end to the crimes being committed by the EPA, even though she was fired. Marsha told us that by us being outside the EPA, we were offering inspiration to people who wanted to speak up, but were feeling scared to do so.

We had more work to do and so we left the EPA and took the Metro to the Pentagon City mall food court where we had a final briefing before heading over to the Pentagon.

We had about fifty people processing to the Pentagon with people holding puppets made by Sue Frankel-Streit taking the lead.

As we approached the Pentagon I could feel the butterflies in my stomach and my legs were feeling like they were turning to jelly. But I was with a group of people who I knew and trusted and I knew that I needed to be a part of this action.

We entered the Pentagon reservation and walked on the sidewalk towards the Pentagon. At least 30 officers waiting for us. There was a metal fence along the sidewalk with a small opening that we were ushered through onto a grassy area. This

area on the other side of the fence was designated as the "free speech zone".

Malachy led the program and, as usual, he spoke eloquently about why we need to continue this work. He talked about NCNR writing letters to elected and appointed officials over the last several years. We have NEVER received a response. This is chilling. As citizens, we should be able to communicate with our government about our concerns. There is something gravely wrong with our country that they do not pay attention to what we say. If we were lobbyists for a defense contractor, big oil, or another big corporation we would be welcomed into the offices on Capitol Hill and at the Pentagon. But we, as citizens, do not have any access to government officials. How do we try to change the world when those in power refuse to listen to us?

Hendrik Vos spoke movingly about how our government supports undemocratic governments in Latin America. He talked about the importance of our civil resistance action with our willingness to risk arrest. Paul Magno was inspiring as he talked about the many civil resistance actions that we are building on, including the Plowshare activists.

After listening to the speakers eight of us who were risking arrest walked through the small opening onto the sidewalk to try to deliver our letter to Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, or a representative in a policy-making position. We were on a sidewalk that the public regularly walks on to enter the Pentagon.

We were immediately stopped by Officer Ballard. He did not look very friendly as he told us we were blocking the sidewalk and that we had to re-enter the "free speech zone". We told him we would stand against the fence so people could freely pass by.

Again, someone with no power from the PR office came to meet

us and accept our letter, but we were told there would be no dialogue. Ballard told us we had to leave or we would be arrested.

We were eight concerned nonviolent individuals standing peacefully against the fence on a public sidewalk. When we said we couldn't leave until we talked to someone in a position of authority, Ballard told another officer to give us our three warnings.

Malachy began to read the letter we wanted to deliver to Secretary Carter as the three warnings were given.

After the third warning, they closed the opening to the free speech area, and about 20 officers from the SWAT team, who were waiting 30 feet away, came charging at us. I will never forget the look of rage on the face of the officer who came towards Malachy and violently snatched the letter out of his hands and put him in cuffs.

I could see this was going to be another violent arrest at the Pentagon. In April of 2011, NCNR organized an action at the Pentagon and there was a lot of violence by the police at that time also. They knocked Eve Tetaz to the ground and violently wrenching my arm up behind my back. I heard reports from others that they were also roughed up that day.

My arresting officer told me to put my hands behind my back. The cuffs were tightened and he jerked them tighter still, causing a great deal of pain. Five days after the arrest my hand is still bruised and tender.

Trudy was crying out in pain because her cuffs were so tight. She asked that they be loosened, and the officer told her that if she didn't like it, she should not be doing this again. None of the arresting officers were wearing nametags and so could not be identified.

We were arrested at around 2:30 pm and released around 4:00

pm. The processing was minimal. I noticed some of the men were patted down before we were put into the police van, but I wasn't. Once we arrived at the processing station, they cut our handcuffs off immediately as we entered the building, and then the women were put in one cell and the men in another. They took mug shots of all of us, but did not fingerprint any of us. Fingerprinting takes a long time and maybe when they got our ids, they found that all of our fingerprints were already in their system.

Arrested were Manijeh Saba of New Jersey, Stephen Bush of Virginia, Max Obuszewski and Malachy Kilbride of Maryland, Trudy Silver and Felton Davis of New York, and Phil Runkel and Joy First of Wisconsin.

David Barrows and Paul Magno provided support and were waiting to meet us as we were released.

We were at the Pentagon exercising our First Amendment rights and our obligations under Nuremberg, and also as human beings concerned with the plight of Mother Earth. We were on a sidewalk that was used by the public peacefully asking for a meeting with someone in the Pentagon, and then reading the letter that we had sent to the Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter. We did not commit a crime, but we were acting in resistance to the crimes of our government, and yet we were charged with violating a lawful order. This is the definition of civil resistance

It is a very serious problem that our calls for peace and justice are going unheeded by government officials. Even though it seems like we are not being listened to, it is very important to continue to act in resistance. I know that even when we feel like we are ineffective, acting in resistance is my only choice to do what I can to make a difference in the lives of my grandchildren and the children of the world. Though it is difficult to know whether we are being effective, I believe that we all must do everything we can to continue

our work for peace and justice. That is our only hope.

Pictures from the arrests at the Pentagon.