

# My Personal Journey to PALESTINE

Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish once wrote: "Childhood memories grow up in me day after day. I must be worthy of my life. At the hour of my death, worthy of the tears of my mother." So after 29 years in the US, I moved back to Palestine. I teach courses at Birzeit and Bethlehem Universities, finishing a book on history of Palestinian civil resistance, and creating opportunities for young people. This was not an easy decision but it was done at the right time.

I accomplished much in the US from scientific research at Duke and Yale human rights activism, financial security, fame, and personal (marriage, child, etc.). Much of my activism was driven here by the desire to improve this country (e.g. stop it from committing war crimes and crimes against humanity). I strongly believe that unless all of us work together to change US foreign policy (a policy shaped by Zionist lobbies), we are all doomed. We see that millions of US citizens are also concerned about the way this foreign policy is damaging our economy and reputation around the world. I think it must (and it will) change. But I always looked back with mixed feelings about my growing up under Israeli occupation and felt a sense of responsibility (and perhaps even some guilt). I talked to my elderly diabetic mother every week and she tells me stories of what is going on on the ground. Her stories included things like people dying because of being prevented from going to health clinics,

students denied the right to go to school, lands confiscated, children shot in the back of the head, extra-judicial executions, further acts of ethnic cleansing, and more. I also go to Palestine every year and I see the apartheid system getting worse. Walls surrounding towns and villages, US weapons that killed or maimed friends and colleagues, economic strangulation, and much more. Every year when I go visit Palestine, I could not wait to come back even though life there gets worse (checkpoints, the violence of the occupation, the economic deterioration).

In the US, I witnessed acts of love perhaps two or three times a day in person (I see many more in emails and other news sources). In Palestine, I witnessed acts of love in the dozens in some days. In one day of nonviolent demonstration in Bilin and then in the hospital where Ibrahim Bornat was taken after being shot, I witnessed hundreds of acts of love. They came not just from Palestinians but from Internationals and even Israelis who were with us. In the US, writing a letter to the editor or demonstrating in front of a congressman's office are acts of resistance (and yes love). In Palestine, teaching a child to read, eating, drinking, breathing, living, and everything we do in life there are acts of resistance (and love). This is because that is not what the colonial Zionist movement wants (they want us all out to create a more uniform "Jewish state" that is cleansed "nichsayon").

*(continued on page 3)*

## Obama's Vietnam?

President Obama has announced his decision to send 17,000 additional US troops to Afghanistan, on the grounds that "the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan demands urgent attention." Peace Action urges people to quickly call on Obama to choose diplomacy, not escalation.

More troops won't solve problems in Afghanistan. We have seen the disastrous failure of Bush's policy of heading into war without a plan in Iraq. We are still mourning American and Iraqi lives lost, and struggling to rehabilitate our economy.

### Call President Obama at 202/456-1111.

Urge his Administration to:

- De-escalate troop levels in Afghanistan and to reject the idea that there is a military solution to the region's problems;
- Immediately stop military activities that indiscriminately impact civilians such as air and drone strikes;
- Rapidly withdraw US troops;
- Commit to negotiated diplomatic talks involving all major regional players, including major international peace-keeping bodies;
- Address the real needs of Afghans, which include health-care, clean water, education, and security.

Since the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Al Qaeda has increased its attacks. Last year saw the most civilian deaths in Afghanistan since the US invaded, and a new poll shows that only 18% of Afghans want more US troops. Bombings of civilians in Afghanistan and Pakistan are angering those populations and their governments, undermining the US's ability to create stability. Now is the time for us to press President Obama and Congress to find a better approach to Afghanistan.

## Tema Okun, Tom Stern & Christina Cowger To Receive 2009 Peacemaker Award

**Cy King, Keynote Speaker**

To honor persons who have a strong long-term commitment to peace and justice, NC Peace Action has established the Peacemaker Award. This year's recipients are Tema Okun, Tom Stern, and Christina Cowger.

The Peacemaker Awards will be presented on April 16, at the NC State University Club, 4200 Hillsborough Street, Raleigh. Social hour will be at 6:00 PM and dinner at 6:45 PM.

Tom Stern and Tema Okun have been long-time activists in the struggle for peace, justice, and civil rights. Tom came to NC in 1983 to join an African-American-led civil rights law firm. Tema, who grew up in Chapel Hill, has spent her adult life working for social justice non-profits, with a focus on helping address racism.

Tom and Tema got involved in the Middle East after an emergency National Lawyers' Guild human rights delegation to the West Bank in '02. They realized they had, as Jews, an obligation to educate the American public about the inhumanity of the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem.

They became active in Jews for a Just Peace, and helped found the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions-USA. Tom chairs the ICAHD-USA board and Tema leads their fundraising efforts.

Since 2002, Tom and Tema have returned every other summer to the West Bank, and they have offered dozens of educational presentations of their trips each time they return in an effort to raise awareness of the Israel's steady course towards apartheid.

In addition to this work, Tom helped launch the first anti-Iraq war rallies in Durham. Tema teaches about race, class, and gender at UNC-G and UNC-CH.

Christina Cowger is a human rights and peace activist from Raleigh. She is the coordinator of NC Stop Torture Now, a coalition of human rights, justice, and civil liberties organizations and concerned individuals from around the state. NC STN

has campaigned since November '05 to expose and halt North Carolina's role in US extraordinary rendition and torture. The coalition's work has elicited support from numerous state and federal lawmakers for an official investigation of the CIA's North Carolina based rendition aviation program.

Christina has been active in peace and justice causes since the mid-'70s. She was a core member of People for Southern African Freedom, a group based in Eugene, OR, that successfully pressed the state's higher education system for divestment of South Africa-related stocks to help hasten the end of apartheid. In the early '80s she began working on the national staff of the Coalition Opposing Registration and the Draft, headquartered in Washington DC. From there, she joined the movement to oppose burgeoning US military intervention in Central America. She served on the national and regional staff of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) from 1985 to 1992, working as national fundraiser, Mid-Atlantic Regional Organizer, and National Program Director.

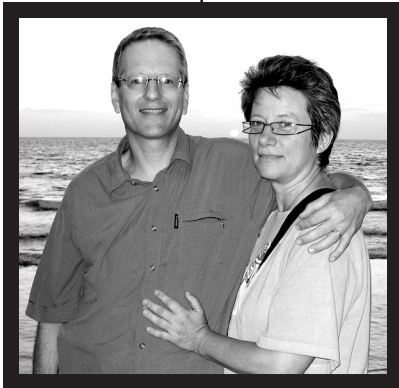
Back in Oregon, Christina continued to organize in solidarity with Latin American trade unionism, self-determination, and fair trade throughout the 1990s. In the wake of 9/11, she helped found the group Progressive Responses, which organized demonstrations against invading Iraq. Progressive Responses still advocates today for a constructive US role in the world. Since moving to NC in '03, Christina has been active against the so-called "war on terror" and against the barbaric US practices of kidnapping, disappearance, and torture.

Cy King will be the keynote speaker. His work to bring about peace and justice is rooted in his religious faith and has taken many paths. A veteran of WWII, Cy was the first recipient of the Peacemaker Award in 2007. He and his wife were leaders in the civil rights movement in the '50s and '60s, and through their efforts NC's State Parks were integrated.

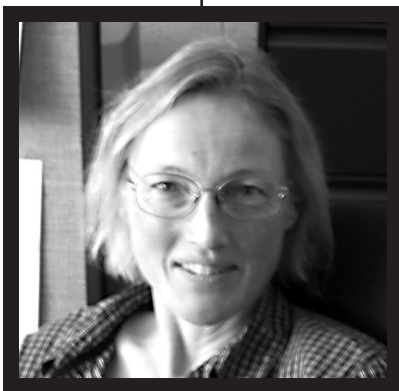
Cy has been part of the NC Stop Torture movement, and has been active and provided leadership in the Wake County - United Nations Association for decades. Cy has also been a leader in NC Peace Action, and was instrumental in establishing NCPA and later the NCPA Education Fund.

In recognition of his major participation and contributions of his work in the civil rights, civil liberties, and peace movement, Cy and his wife Carolyn were presented the W.W. Finlator Civil Liberties Award by the Wake County Chapter of the ACLU, and in 2009 Cy received W.W. Finlator Meritorious Service Award. Cy also received the *Independent* newspaper's Citizens Award.

Contact Bill Towe, [billtowepa@juno.com](mailto:billtowepa@juno.com), 919/469-0831 for info and tickets. (\$20 students and limited income, \$40 for individual, \$100 Peacemaker; 2 tickets and name(s) in program.)



2009 Peacemakers  
Tom Stern & Tema Okun



2009 Peacemaker  
Christina Cowger



2009 Keynote Speaker  
& 2007 Peacemaker  
Cy King

## Just, Humane Immigration Reform

North Carolina, a leader in lost manufacturing jobs, faces a rapid increase in recent immigration in its agricultural and meatpacking industries. It has become a hotbed of anti-immigrant sentiment. NC recently participated in Ordinance 287G that trains local law enforcement to arrest undocumented immigrants. Shockingly, even national level politicians such as Senator Elizabeth Dole, have exploited tensions by campaigning with a dehumanizing anti-immigrant message.

Gail Phares, NC Peace Action board member and Witness for Peace's Southeast Regional Organizer, based in Raleigh, has deep connections in the progressive community in North Carolina. Each year CITCA and Witness for Peace partner with farm worker organizations, as well as immigrant rights, labor and faith-based organizations

in a walk across the state, highlighting issues of trade and immigration. This year the Pilgrimage for Justice will begin in Charlotte on April 5th and then go on the Asheville on April 6th ending up in Raleigh on April 10th at the NC State Capitol where people are invited to participate in an Economic Justice Way of the Cross.

On February 17-27 a delegation of 20 academics, human rights, church and labor leaders, and an aide to Rep. David Price visited Mexico to study why Mexicans and others are streaming north. Upon returning to NC they worked for immigration reform through public education. They are meeting with state and national policy makers to report what they learned in Mexico.

To host a speaker from the Mexico Delegation or to participate in the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace email Gail Phares at CITCA.wfpse@gmail.net or call 919/856-9468.

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## NC Legislation Update

Sen. Philip Berger of Rockingham introduced a bill on Feb. 11 in the NC Senate, SB 155: Community Colleges Can't Admit Illegal Aliens. View at: <http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/Sessions/2009/Bills/Senate/PDF/S155v0.pdf>

### TAKE ACTION!

**1. CALL THE SENATE LEADERSHIP.** These are the individuals who could guide the outcome of Bills.

President Pro Tempore: Senator Marc Basnight (919) 733-6854

Deputy President Pro Tempore: Senator Charlie Smith Dannelly (919) 733-5955

Majority Leader: Senator Tony Rand (919) 733-9892

**2. CALL YOUR REPRESENTATIVE.**

**3. ENCOURAGE YOUR FRIENDS & COLLEAGUES TO CALL**

**4. DO STEPS 1-3 ALL OVER AGAIN & CONSIDER LOBBYING IN PERSON IF THE BILL ADVANCES**

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## My Personal Journey To Palestine

*(continued from page 1)*

Of course, without US support, Israel can't survive as a colonial power. That is why work in the US has been and must continue to be a center of focus. We simply must change US policy in the Middle East (if nothing else than to save the US from economic collapse!). Work must be done both in and outside of Palestine. That is partly why I have not relocated to Palestine earlier. There is something indeed about fate and destiny.

Occasionally, unexpected things happen. I was invited to Azerbaijan for the Winter Session of the NATO International School of Azerbaijan. The conference discussed conflicts and role of NATO and other International agencies in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, the Former Yugoslavia, and the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. We heard from experts like the Azerbaijan Minister of Defense, Brig. General Klaus Wittmann (Previous director at NATO Defense College), Lt. Col. Alonso (US Marine now NATO Country Officer for Afghanistan), Afghanistan activist Noorullah Ahmadzai, NISA Executive Director Mikayil Yusifov and others. I was invited to speak about

the issue of Palestine (with a response from a gentleman from Israel) and presented a few slides and facts/figures on the history of the conflict, forms of resistance, personal experiences, potential solutions, and our responsibility to advance a peaceful outcome (using tactics like those employed to transform Apartheid South Africa). On the way back, I was questioned by Israeli security. The racism, the segregation, the apartheid walls and all the other things do not make life here easy. BUT, there is also lots of love: asking how your health is, offering food, hospitality, your clothing and what little you have, etc. These are acts of love. So as the Buddhists say, we "have joyful participation in the sorrows of this world."

I have a home in Beit Sahour, a lovely town despite the colonial occupation. It is hard sometimes to live under an apartheid system; just two days ago, a distance of 25 miles took over five hours to travel, and settlers come visit us to take the only side of the Bethlehem Ghetto not covered by a settlement.

With humility and serenity, I try to be positive, productive and helpful as one of millions struggling under occupation/colonization.

— Mazin Qumsiyeh

## NCPA 2009 Board Roster

Joe Burton, Vice-Chair,  
Raleigh, 20/20 Vision

Betsy Crites, Durham, Witness For Peace

Rukiya Dillahunt, Raleigh,  
Black Workers for Justice

Thomas Hefner, Greensboro,  
American Federation of Teachers

Mike Howell, Secretary,  
Raleigh, NCPA Board

Steve Lee, Wilmington,  
Wilm. Peace Meetup

Bernadette O'Neil, Wilmington,  
Amnesty International

Wally Myers, Chair, Raleigh,  
Veterans For Peace

Gail Phares, Raleigh, Carolina  
Interfaith Task Force

Khalilah Sabra, Raleigh, NC  
— Mas Freedom Fd.

Mia Austin-Scoggins, Treasurer,  
Raleigh, Code Pink

Sarah Shields, Chapel Hill,  
Al-Awda — NC

Robin Tolleson, Henderson,  
Instruments of Peace

Bill Towe, Cary, NC — Stop  
Torture Now

John Heuer, Director, Pittsboro,  
Veterans For Peace

## Your Guide To Bird-Dogging Elected Officials

Bird-dogging is a tactic that many organizations, and concerned citizens, use to pressure officials to take a public stance on an issue, or to question a stance that an official has already taken. It usually consists of one or more bird-doggers who go to a public event where an official will appear. The bird-doggers ask the official pointed questions about issues they care about in order to elicit a response. Because members of the media often attend official events, bird-dogging plays an important role in getting officials' positions "on record" and holding them accountable to their constituents.

### 1) Identify your targets.

List all elected officials in your area. Next you need to assess your resources in order to determine how many officials you can bird-dog effectively. You should calculate how much staff time can be devoted exclusively to bird-dogging.

When choosing officials to bird-dog, don't exclude officials who are clearly for or against our cause too quickly. Remember, your primary objective is to increase the awareness on our issues not just with the officials, but with the media and the public as well.

### 2) Find out where the officials will be.

One of the easiest ways to find out will be is to call their campaign office, join his or her email list, or to check their website. Stay up-to-date with local newspapers/sites, because they often publish calendars of official events.

You could also consider organizing your own issue forum or official debate. This might be easier to do if you co-host the event with other organizations, or with a prominent coalition. One advantage to this is that you can invite officials to speak only to the issues you choose.

### 3) Get to know the officials.

The more you know about an official's views on your issues, the better prepared you will be for his or her appearance in your area.

The bird-dogging will be most effective if the questions are based on very recent information about the official's positions. This preparation allows activists to ask informed, specific questions about each official's views.

Your questions will have a greater impact if they are based on current events as well.

### 4) Prepare your questions ahead of time.

You'll need to have your questions ready before the event. That way, while every one else is thinking of what they want to ask, you'll already be prepared. Make a list of questions and prioritize them, you don't know how many people in your team will be called on to ask a question, so if only 1-2 of you are picked you are able to ask the most important questions.

The following is a sample question for members

of Congress:

"Our current foreign policy has enmeshed us in a quagmire in Iraq. In addition to the toll the war has already taken on American soldiers and Iraqi civilians, our presence is escalating the violence and insecurity in Iraq. **What will you do to get us out of Iraq, and how will you define a new direction for US foreign policy?**"

If there is an open question and answer period, your pre-planning will pay off. Most people don't raise their hands immediately. But as a well prepared bird-dogger you can express immediate interest in asking a question — so get your hand up early and often, and sit up front.

### 5) Other things to keep in mind...

Work in teams of two or more people and disperse. Bird-dogging can sometimes make people nervous so it's best to go in teams of two or more for support. One person should act as note-taker for the event.

When you ask a question, be prepared with a follow up question - you might just get the opportunity to ask it. If you have a group of people at the event, split them up. Scattering at the event might allow everyone in the group to ask a question.

### 6) Raise the issues.

If possible, identify a special group of supporters: veterans, church leaders, mothers with small children, high school students, etc. As soon as one member of the group is recognized to ask a question, the rest of the group should stand. The questioner can preface his or her question with something such as, "The 10 veterans standing up are all here because of their concern over the Iraq War..."

In order to maximize your question's impact, you should take into account your expected response to an officials question when you ask it.

### 7) Make contact with the media.

Appearances by officials are media events. Even the smallest appearances will attract a local reporter or representative of a state wire service. Have someone prepared to identify and contact media representatives to underscore the importance of the questions you will be asking.

Since the press is under great pressure to meet deadlines, it often covers those aspects of a story which are most convenient. Therefore, it is important for your representatives to be available before, during, and after the event.

Other media suggestions: call offices in advance to find out who will be covering the event and then engage that reporter beforehand, have a press release or fact sheet available, have an articulate spokesperson available for reporters.

## 2009 Congressional Recess Calendar

Fri. 4/3 – Tues. 4/20;  
Easter/Passover recess

Fri. 5/22 – Tues. 6/2;  
Memorial Day recess

Fri. 6/26 – Mon. 7/6;  
Independence Day recess

Fri. 7/31 – Tues. 9/8;  
House summer recess

Fri. 8/7 – Tues. 9/8;  
Senate summer recess

*Subject to change*

## A Legacy For Peace

Bill Towe has devoted most of his life to peace and justice. In the early 1960s, Bill and Betsy Jean became involved in the civil rights movement. They helped organize the Virginia Students Civil Rights Committee, a Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC), the white arm of SNCC.

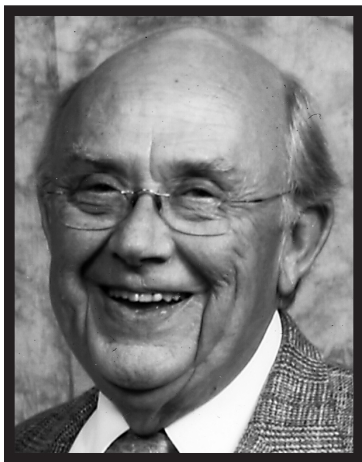
Bill then worked for the NC – Voter Education Project, which made grants to Afro-American communities for registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns. Bill published “Barriers To Black Participation” which documented that the NC General

Assembly had passed a series of local and state election laws that prevented Afro-Americans, as well as women and Republicans from winning elections. The ACLU-NC used this document as the basis for litigation in the mid 1960s, resulting in these election laws being declared unconstitutional. Consequently, the General Assembly has become far more diverse.

Bill’s quest for a more peaceful and equitable society led him to join his local Peace Action chapter in the

1980s. Since then, Bill has supported the organization 100% -- serving on PA boards at the local, state, and national levels, as national board co-chair from 1998 to 2000. Until recently he served as Coordinator of NCPA for many years.

A number of years ago Bill left a bequest to national PA Educational Fund (and ACLU) specifying that the bequest be used for Student Peace Action Network, for students are the vanguard for peace and justice movements.



*Peacemaker Bill Towe*

## Heuer New Director of NCPA

John brings 40 years of peace activism to NCPA. His first march against the Vietnam War in Washington was in 1967. Determined to learn more about this war, he withdrew from the University of Michigan in 1968 and signed up for a merchant ship bound for Vietnam. This trip confirmed his worst fears about the war.

John refused induction into the US Army, moved to Nova Scotia, and took off from his farm work to assist the Halifax Committee to Aid War Resisters. In 1975 John returned to the US and had his citizenship restored. He accepted a position as a VISTA volunteer and moved to Chatham County where he has remained.

In 1977 John joined the Twin Streams Education Center in Chapel Hill. In 1981, he went to work for UNC-Chapel Hill and was



*New NCPA Director John Heuer*

a founding member of the UNC Sustainability Coalition and chaired the UNC Employee Forum in 2001. During his service at UNC he was a member of the UE union.

Following his retirement from UNC in 2006, John co-founded and served as chair of the Grassroots Impeachment Movement and the Coalition for the Constitution.

John is a member of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP, the Triangle Chapter of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Peace 1st, Veterans for Peace and the UFPJ Working Group on Accountability and Prosecutions.

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## National Mobilization: March With UFPJ In NYC April 4

Our country and our world are confronting grave problems — wars and occupations, poverty and inequality, the climate in crisis, and whole economies collapsing under the weight of war spending and greed.

On the April 4th anniversary of Dr. King’s prophetic “Beyond Vietnam” speech, delivered at Riverside Church, we will gather in New York City determined to lead our nation in the new direction so many long for. For the first time in too long, we will march filled with hope. Now is the time that our movements for racial justice and economic equality, our movements against the wars and occupations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and elsewhere, our movements for a new economy based on people’s needs, green union jobs and sustainability will ALL come together to say YES WE CAN! Yes We Can move beyond war. Yes We Can build a new world of justice, equality and peace.

On April 4th, we will bring our urgent message to the financial center of Wall Street. Our call will be heard in Washington, D.C. where Congress and the administration must take action to end these seemingly endless wars. Our call will be heard

by millions of people around the world who share a common vision of a new world and hope for real change in the US.

We look forward to April 4th when massive numbers of people will be in the street in a unified and nonviolent call to cut military spending and to fund human needs and ecological sustainability. Our nation must drastically reduce and redirect its military spending to reflect an entirely new foreign policy based on diplomacy and international law instead of military force, on global cooperation instead of domination, on a plan to live as a part of the world community instead of using brute power to stand astride the globe like the colossus of old.

Our nation must end torture and return to the rule of law; our justice system, that disproportionately locks up people of color, must be fixed; and our economic policy must be rooted in our communities and not an out-of-date notion of trickle down growth. Together we can bring Dr. King’s legacy to life. Together we can build that new world. Join us in New York City on April 4!

*Details at: <http://www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?id=4027>*

# peace EXCHANGE

events, actions, information

**MARCH 19** - Demonstration to Free Palestine, Dana Auditorium, Queens University, Charlotte, 6:30 PM. Contact Charlotte4palestine@gmail.com

**MARCH 25** - "Outlawing War, Competing Human Rights Perspectives." 8:00 PM, Room 240, John Hope Franklin Center, Duke University, Speaker: Noah Eisboard, Clerk at International Criminal Court, The Hague. Contact robinkirkrights@duke.edu

**MARCH 31** - Seminar Critical Issues Facing NC General Assembly, White Memorial Presbyterian Church, 1704 Oberlin Road, Raleigh, NC Council of Churches 919/828-6501, sbradford@nccouncilofchurches.org Registration fee \$20, \$10 for students

**APRIL 2** - "Islamic Reform Through Human Rights, Legal and Theological Issues" 4:30 - 6:00 PM, 136 Social Science, Duke University. The speaker is Mohsen Kadwar, Associate Professor at the Iranian Institute of Philosophy in Terhan. Contact robin-kirkrights@duke.edu

**APRIL 6** - World Affairs Council, meeting, 7:30 PM, Owens Conference Center, UNC - Asheville, Physicians For Social Responsibility. Contact Lew Patrie, patrie.wncpsr@main.nc.us, 818/299-1242

**APRIL 16** - Annual Peacemaker Award Dinner. Tema Okun, Tom Stern and Christina Cowger are recipients of the 2009 Peacemaker Award. Cy King is the keynote speaker. N.C. State Faculty Club, 4200 Hillsborough Street, Raleigh, Social Hour 6:00, Dinner 6:45, Tickets: \$40, \$20; students \$10. Contact: Bill Towe 919/469-0831 billtowepa@juno.com

**APRIL 10** - Grassroots Documentary Film Nights, Film 2004 Presidential Elections, Fuquay-Varina Community Center, 820 Main Street, Fuquay-Varina, dinnerdock@healthprotector.com

## The Latest In Peace

*Stay abreast of peace on the local, state, and national level. Visit [www.ncpeaceaction.org](http://www.ncpeaceaction.org) for articles, resources, and event calendars.*

*Subscribe to NCPA's listserve at [iraqactionalert-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:iraqactionalert-subscribe@yahoo.com).*

## North Carolina Peace Action

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**& More**