

# **Challenge and Change:**

## **A Letter from the President**

**FALL 2010**

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*This letter from Atlantic's President and CEO, Gara LaMarche, is the first in an annual series that will chronicle the work of The Atlantic Philanthropies as it spends down its assets and closes its doors by 2020.*

*In 2009, Atlantic made 401 grants, totalling \$375 million. Our [2009 grantmaking](#) and complete [2009 financials](#) are available on our Web site.*

## INTRODUCTION

2009–10 has been a time of change, challenge and promise — both for The Atlantic Philanthropies and our grantees, and for the countries where we work, almost all of which experienced leadership and political transitions and economic stress. For some priority Atlantic issues, like health care reform in the United States, rural land rights in South Africa, and lesbian, gay and bisexual rights in Ireland, we celebrated important victories that were long in coming. These victories validate the philosophy of our [Founding Chairman Chuck Feeney](#) to make big bets in grantmaking. For others, it will take more time. Fundamental change can take years of tenacity from dedicated advocates, and our job is to help them get, keep and hone the tools they need to achieve it.

Here, then, is a report and some reflections on what, in the past 20 months, Atlantic has been doing to help our grantees respond to these challenges and strengthen them — and ourselves, to serve them better — for the ones ahead.

## PROTECTING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN A TIME OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

Nearly all of the [countries](#) where Atlantic operates were affected by the global recession, as governments made budget cuts to much needed programmes, services and organisations — from human rights agencies in Ireland to after-school programmes in the United States. Foundations can't possibly make up the gaps that have been created. But we can support the organisations and advocates that are working to ensure that social justice — the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised — is not the casualty of economic exigency.

Despite a decline in our own assets, Atlantic, like many of its peer foundations, did what it could



to step in and help our grantees weather the economic storm. But this was further challenged when the Bernard Madoff scandal hit in the United States, decimating the endowments of several social justice philanthropies that had invested with him. In partnership with the Open Society Institute and MoveOn.org, Atlantic stepped in with a matching challenge as well as other grants to help preserve frontline social-change organisations already struggling due to the financial crisis, when they lost critical grants overnight.

In the past year, we considered how to support efforts to repair the broken financial system in the U.S., a system that had its worst effects on the lives of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people. We made a handful of grants, which I'll cover more below, to groups advocating for financial reform and we cheered its passage in 2010.

Whatever recovery there may be in the markets, the recession is still intensely felt in virtually all of Atlantic geographies, and poverty and inequality have grown. Atlantic has worked with its grantees to protect the rights of children, older adults, disabled people, immigrants and low-income people of colour throughout these times.

## **VICTORIES TO CELEBRATE**

Despite this overarching challenge, there have been significant advancements to celebrate.

### **Rural Women Advance in South Africa**

South Africa elected a new President, Jacob Zuma, whose cabinet appointments created many positive opportunities for Atlantic and its grantees. The new Minister of Health developed partnerships with many of our Population Health Programme grantees and the establishment of the Ministry for Rural Development and Land Reform indicated the Government was serious about addressing rural poverty, an objective of the Reconciliation & Human Rights Programme. In May 2010, we celebrated when the Communal Land Rights Act was found unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, protecting the rights of rural landowners, especially women. I was in Johannesburg late in 2009 when our grantees, led by Anninka Claasens of the Rural Women's Action Research Project, convened rural activists to plan this strategy, and I remember how fired up women leaders were. I know they will make great strides with the recognition of their rights.



**PHOTO:** Eric Miller

## Health Care Expanded for Millions in the U.S.

In the United States, we stood with advocates ready to work with and push the new administration to advance a number of progressive policy issues. Atlantic made a big bet on the [Health Care for America Now](#) campaign in 2008 before it was known who would be elected President. The recently released [independent evaluation](#) of the campaign, commissioned by Atlantic, concluded that HCAN “played a valuable role in helping pass health care reform, earning particular praise for building a strong field operation and keeping its progressive coalition together.”

Health care reform was front and centre for nearly all of 2009, but the road was rocky. Advocates pressed on tirelessly for 18 months until reform was signed into law on 22 March 2010. On that day, it was incredibly gratifying to stand alongside advocates and grantees, many of whom had been fighting for health care reform for decades, as we watched President Obama sign into law the historic extension of health coverage to 32 million uninsured in the U.S.

Just a few days ago, a friend of mine, unconnected with Atlantic but aware of our key support for health care reform — which also ended the exclusion from coverage for pre-existing medical conditions — wrote to me: “Yesterday we were able to get health insurance for our son’s caregiver, a breast cancer survivor. She is one of the finest people walking God’s green earth. Thank you.”

## Lesbians and Gays Gain a Civil Partnership Law in Ireland

Gay marriage has experienced similar highs and lows over the last few years in the United States, with some states legalising same-sex marriages while others like California skipping like a broken record between referenda losses and court victories. Gay marriage is a right protected by the South African Constitution — though on the ground there is still much homophobia and violence that our grantees work to combat. In the [Republic of Ireland](#), Atlantic has supported work to secure the rights of same sex couples for many years, and I was thrilled to be in the Irish Senate in July 2010 for the debate leading to passage of the [Civil Partnership Bill](#), which extends to same sex couples many of the same entitlements and obligations as married couples. I know from many conversations with lawmakers,



journalists and policy experts how absolutely essential was the work of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), our grantee, in achieving this remarkable outcome in an initially unfriendly climate, and the brilliant campaign that GLEN ran has many lessons for other advocates and issues.

### **Long-denied Justice and Accountability in Northern Ireland**

On 15 June 2010, the Bloody Sunday Inquiry brought to a close the fight waged for the past 38 years by advocates and the families of the unarmed civilians killed in Derry's Bogside on 30 January 1972. Atlantic has been involved in reconciliation work in Northern Ireland since it established its office in Belfast in 1998, and this decision gave good reason to believe that peace and reconciliation will continue into the future. I felt a thrill standing outside the Guild Hall in Derry during my visit to Northern Ireland this summer, where just a few weeks before the crowd cheered British Prime Minister David Cameron's televised apology, something unthinkable not long ago.



### **Consumers Gain Financial Protections in the U.S.**

In late 2008, Atlantic set aside some funds to take advantage of opportunities for reforms presented by the new presidential administration. The foundation made a handful of grants to support U.S. financial reform. Our grantees — Americans for Financial Reform, Campaign for America's Future, the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the Roosevelt Institute and National People's Action — collectively employed a range of strategies, including policy research, communications, advocacy and grassroots organising to push for reform. Thanks in part to their efforts, we celebrated the passage of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act when it was signed into law on 21 July 2010. Among other things, the law established the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to safeguard people from predatory tricks and traps and strengthened regulations to provide increased oversight and transparency of the financial sector as a whole.



## HOW ATLANTIC IS CHANGING

In the past two years, amid these global challenges and advances, and with our eye always trained on the end of Atlantic as we spend down our assets before the close of the decade, we've also looked at ourselves, asking how can we better assist our grantees in achieving the change they seek?



In our [2008 Annual Report](#), I wrote about the adoption of Atlantic's social justice framework, sharpening our focus to ask why people and communities are disadvantaged and what structural barriers of economic status, race, nationality, gender, age, disabilities, immigration status, sexual orientation, political affiliation or religion stand in the way of full personhood and citizenship. We refined our strategies to focus on dismantling the structures that create and sustain inequity and supporting efforts that raise the voices of disadvantaged communities to speak for themselves and on behalf of others:

The [Ageing Programme](#) has made a priority of improving the health and economic security of older adults by strengthening their capacity for voice and social action. For example, we support

the [Older & Bolder Campaign](#) in the Republic of Ireland that is articulating the impact of the economic crisis on older people and campaigning energetically to protect the State pension, which is the sole income source for half of all older people.

The [Children & Youth Programme](#) has sharpened its strategic focus to address disparities in opportunities available to children, particularly those who are disadvantaged due to income, race, gender or sexual orientation. In the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the United States, the programme aims to create an enduring advocacy capacity for children and youth by supporting a lasting network of organisations to advocate for children. In the United States, for instance, we intensified our grantmaking to support advocacy efforts that promote policies and practices that ensure children's access to health care through enrolment in health insurance. We have also added the objective of school discipline reform to tackle the zero-tolerance practices that put large numbers of young people of colour in a school-to-prison pipeline.

Our [Reconciliation & Human Rights Programme](#) has focused on strengthening the infrastructure to protect human rights in the countries where it operates. In South Africa, for instance, we've supported a coalition of key organisations working together to [defend the Constitution](#).

Because we believe that access to quality health care is a fundamental right, our [Population Health Programme](#) refined its strategies to improve the quality of health care and health outcomes for all,

with particular attention to vulnerable populations. In Viet Nam, for example, we recognised the need for a systematic approach to connect resources to people in need, whether in the primary health care clinics or in the tertiary hospitals — facilities offering the most advanced care — that we built. So the programme has added the development of social work as a field in Viet Nam as one of its strategic objectives. The professionalisation of social work in Viet Nam will advance all of our strategic goals related to improving the health care and well-being of vulnerable populations, and reducing health care inequities.

And in Bermuda, we have strengthened our focus on structural inequalities and income disparities. Our Bermuda strategy now supports groups like Youth on the Move to gather better data on how the justice system criminalises at-risk young people and to provide resources and support to disconnected youth.

I encourage you to explore our Web site to learn more about these programmes and initiatives.

### **Strengthening our Organisational Capacity**

Three appointments made in summer 2010 underscore the steps we have taken this year to deepen our work and gear up for the final years of spend down for maximum impact. Dall Forsythe, our new Vice President for Finance and Operations, who had been the chief budget official for the State of New York and other government agencies and nonprofits, represents an operations approach in line with our social justice values, that maximises every penny of Chuck Feeney's generosity for programmes — for people who need it most. Nobayeni Dladla, the new Director of our South Africa Programme,



an experienced U.N. and South African official, represents the shift to an emphasis on geographic leadership, so that we can make the best and toughest decisions about priorities closest to the ground wherever we work. And Fran Barrett, who heads our newly created Capacity Building Unit after a long career providing management assistance to community organisations, represents our awareness that Atlantic's money is important, but only in the context of strong and well-led organisations that are in a position to sustain themselves after we leave the scene.



## GIVING WHILE LIVING

In keeping with our Giving While Living philosophy, Atlantic is committed to spending our remaining \$2.2 billion endowment and completing active grantmaking by 2016. We will become the largest foundation to spend down our endowment, and we will close our doors by 2020.

The important effort led by Bill Gates and Warren Buffett to encourage wealthy people to sign a Giving Pledge committing to donate 50 per cent of their funds to charity has drawn much attention in recent months. Atlantic exists because our Founding Chairman Chuck Feeney donated virtually all of his wealth to the foundation over 25 years ago.

In June 2010, Atlantic released the publication, *Turning Passion into Action: Giving While Living*, which explores this practice of giving as exemplified by our Founding Chairman. The report includes profiles of him and 10 other philanthropists

who are giving generously and are actively engaged in their giving, and outlines some considerations for donors and emerging philanthropists interested in taking a Giving While Living approach. This publication is available for download from our Web site.

Chuck Feeney continues to demonstrate his commitment to Giving While Living by making Founding Chairman grants that better the lives of people in various countries. His giving has transformed Queensland, Australia, where ten years ago the biotech industry was virtually nonexistent. Through partnership with government, plans have been made to build or expand 12 university and medical research institutions throughout the state, and a total of 19 throughout Australia. And in 2009, history was made when the Australian Government agreed to match his A\$170 million in funding — the largest matching grant ever made by the Government — for the Translational Research Institute Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and Queensland Institute of Medical Research.

We are documenting the course of our spend down to be a record for other philanthropists who want to learn from our experience as well as our mistakes. The first instalment of the three-part series, "Winding Down the Atlantic Philanthropies: The First Eight Years: 2001-2009," was published by Duke University in 2010 and can be downloaded from our Web site.

## **WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT**

Our grantees are on the ground every day working to elevate the voices of those who need change, protect rights and bring about justice. Every day they fight for the future — to ensure that human rights are upheld and protected, to improve health for all and aid those who are sick, to advocate for themselves and on behalf of others, and to ensure that tomorrow's children will not face the same challenges and disadvantages as today's adults. We're proud to be their allies in this vital work, and I hope you'll explore our Web site to learn more about it.



Gara LaMarche  
President and CEO