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Five arrested at protest of World Food Prize in Des Moines

by Sue Stanton

Des Moines, Iowa — According to Catholic Worker and peace activist Frank Cordaro, the World Food Prize award ceremony, which took place Thursday at Iowa's state capitol, was the perfect place to protest the global takeover of the food supply by large corporations.

"The world recognizes how important this award is, even if most Americans don't," he told *NCR* as he stood with other protestors Wednesday. The group stood outside the newly renovated World Food Prize Hall of Laureates, formerly the Des Moines Public Library, where the Rockefeller Foundation's endowment of the inaugural Norman Borlaug Award for Field Research and Application was awarded Wednesday night.

"The World Food Prize is being held at the state house of Iowa," he continued. "The state has given millions of dollars in support of it. People from all over the world come here. It is a very big deal."

Alongside Cordaro on a rainy, windy Iowa day, a group of like-minded supporters, several of them Catholic Workers from out of state, stood behind a banner that read, "Occupy World Food Prize." Their local organizer, Jessica Reznicek, a Des Moines native who took part in the Occupy Wall Street sit-ins, returned to the area several months ago to help organize the event.

"I was very disturbed by the World Food Prize narrative, and once I began to research it, I began to see behind the propaganda," said Reznicek, a member of the Des Moines Catholic Worker. "These corporations are not interested in feeding people. I believe [World Food Prize creator] Dr. [Norman] Borlaug was, but the corporations are doing the opposite. I have a problem with the way they look at feeding through a buying model rather than through the common good. They want complete countrywide domination."

Cordaro gets heated when he talks about feeding the poor.

"It's a scandal, an absolute scandal, in the way we feed the poor in this world," he said. "And the [non-governmental organizations] and humanitarian agencies who do feed them have to come to these corporations, begging for food to feed the poor. We should treat the poor better, and the earth. We are raised to think we are doing the right thing and patting ourselves on the back."

As the wind picked up Wednesday afternoon, the protestors struggled to hold their signs upright as cars drove by, honking horns in support. By dusk, more than 30 people had joined the protest, and some used a bull horn to talk about their opposition to corporations they say dominate the global food network. Around 5 p.m., the protestors moved from the street, where they stood with their signs, to the entrance of the World Food Prize Hall of Laureates.

The group hoped to prevent dignitaries like United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon from entering the building and to disrupt that night's award ceremony.

When the protestors came onto the grounds, World Food Prize organizers and Des Moines police asked them to leave. Cordaro, Reznicek, Kaylynn Strain, Eddie Bloomer and Julie Brown, all from Des Moines, were arrested and charged with misdemeanor criminal trespass when they refused. The five were released later that evening. Cordaro was sentenced to 30 days in Polk County Jail; Renicek was fine \$500; Bloomer was sentenced to 15 days in Polk County Jail; and Brown was fined \$250.

A second protest was planned for Thursday, when the World Food Prize was awarded to Israel soil scientist Dr. David Hillel.

[Sue Stanton is an author and freelance journalist from Ames, Iowa.]

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