Rebuttal: Saving Species From Extinction Is No Mere 'Distraction'

by Amy Harwood

In Besty Hartmann's post The Great Distraction: 'Overpopulation' Is Back (8/30/11), she boldly charges the Center for Biological Diversity of undermining reproductive rights, letting the military and Monsanto off the hook, ignoring global warming, selling out to big advertising companies and distracting people while we subjugate women. Oh, and disrespecting victims of violence, worldwide.

In fact, the Center for Biological Diversity is probably the only environmental group in the country taking on Monsanto, the Pentagon, global warming while also working for environmental justice and reducing the human population to a sustainable level through public education and the promotion of women's reproductive rights and empowerment. You could hardly ask for clearer proof that overpopulation is not a distraction from other issues.

The Center works on all these issues and believes that most people are equally capable of focusing on several problems at once. In this increasingly conservative time, liberals can't afford Hartmann's either/or thinking. We need to work on all fronts and build alliances with other progressive groups, not create false conflicts driving allies away.

We are witnessing one of the most rapid plant and animal extinction waves ever known on the planet. Every basic human need depends on the diversity that exists in the natural world. Our work is to stop the catastrophe sweeping over the planet, making life better for all species, humans included.

We cannot ignore the reality that explosive human population growth has led to loss of habitat, overhunting, overfishing, and pollution of air, land and water. It is critical that we speak out and speak up about this reality. For too long, overpopulation has been ignored by environmental groups and others, largely for political reasons.

Two hundred million women who want access to family planning resources don't have it. The Center has and will continue to stand together with groups working to ensure women everywhere are empowered to make informed decisions and have access to the healthcare they need.

Every campaign we take on is focused on stopping the threats that imperiled species face. That is why we have fought the Pentagon's bombing of critical wildlife habitat, killing of dolphins through undersea sonic booms,

dewatering of rivers, and building of a massive military base in Okinawa, Japan against the wishes of local people. That is why we launched a massive nation-wide campaign to hold Monsanto and other pesticide manufacturers accountable for polluting our rivers with dangerous chemicals. And that's why we are educating people about the connection between overpopulation and the species extinction crisis through innovative and creative media.

The Center has mobilized 5,000 activists to distribute over 350,000 free condoms, packaged in boxes with images of endangered species. The Endangered Species Condom project pushed the issue of overpopulation in a way that no environmental group had been able to do yet. Without distraction, we were able to bring the conversation of ecosystem protection straight to Americans, whose growing population is also the most consumptive. The United States has the highest fertility rate of the developed countries and is also the third largest population in the world.

We have experienced a global population explosion, doubling in one generation. The United Nations predicts we will top 10 billion before the end of the next generation. These are basic facts that help people begin to see that consumption at the root of our ecological crisis is shared by a secret bedfellow: overpopulation.

The Center for Biological Diversity will launch a new campaign this September focusing on the arrival of 7 billion people on this planet. We intend to further commit our organization to finding real solutions that will help us curb species extinction before it is too late. We know that raising the issue of human population growth is essential to this work.