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Through Rainbow-Colored Glasses

By Christine Dinsmore

President Kerry or President Bush? The answer remains a mystery as we go to press. I have my hopes and fears, just like most Americans—like most people across the globe, for that matter.

During the past four years I have done tons of advocacy writing for an international children's organization. I have had the privilege of working with intelligent and politically astute people from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe and every country in between. (I've tried to pass myself off as Canadian, but my Brooklyn accent inevitably blows my cover.) I have yet to meet anyone who doesn't dread "four more years"—even Israelis.

Since the Bush II regime, I have continued to be mortified by what this country does in my name. To give you an idea, during the United Nations Special Session on Children in 2002—the first time the General Assembly focused solely on children—most nations sent heads of state or high-up representatives. The United States sent Tommy Thompson, the conservative Secretary of Health and Human Services. Consistently, he voted with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Holy See against women's and children's rights.

The ratification proceedings for the final General Assembly document—*A World Fit For Children*—dragged on until the wee hours of the closing session. The U.S. delayed the process because of wording on two issues: young people's rights to reproductive health and to complete information about protection from HIV. Thompson needed to be assured that abortion was not implied in reproductive health and that the ABCs of HIV/AIDS prevention—abstinence, be faithful and condoms—was long on A and short on C.

I continue to be amused that the Bush administration is fast friends with the Pope on abortion rights yet total strangers on other issues, like the death penalty and the Iraq war.

The whole world feels as if their future is riding on this election (the one that you know the outcome of as you read and I don't as I write). Regardless of who goes to his inauguration in January, I'm spending the winter and beyond exposing the human rights abuses that are being committed—despite their denials—under orders from the top.

Torture did not begin and end with Abu Ghraib. And homophobia-induced sexual humiliation of Muslims is not the worst of it. We now know that our military beat Afghan prisoners to death. Donald Rumsfeld had the sickening audacity to say he only ordered special interrogation techniques for some prisoners at Guantanamo, not for Iraq, and it's "not as bad as beheadings." So that's his yardstick for abuse?

For anyone who isn't outraged by this, I suggest a visit to the Center for Constitutional Rights Web site www.ccr-ny.org or a night at the Bleecker Theater in Greenwich Village to see *Guantanamo*—a dramatization of events from transcripts of letters and court proceedings. Of nine British Muslims who were held at Guantanamo for over two years in degrading, terrifying conditions, five were returned to England and released within 24 hours. They were guilty of nothing.

History will judge us harshly, as it should. I have been more politicized than ever by the treatment of detainees. Hundreds remain imprisoned without charges or trials. I believe that if I don't use every ounce of my free time demanding that our country abide by the Geneva Convention and immediately halt prisoner abuse, I will some day be seen as "the good American" à la the good German of the Second World War.

I generally try to see life—even the hard parts—with a bit of humor. But my familiar defense mechanism of comic relief just isn't working this time.