

# The London Free Press

## OPINION EDITORIALS

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### Let's keep our Earth alive

In case you missed it, the oddest scrap of news last week came from Stephen Hawking, the renowned English physicist who communicates with a letter-board-rigged computer because he's paralysed by ALS.

Hawking said human beings are making such a botch of things, they had better colonize space, and fast, if they want to survive as a species.

"It is important for the human race to spread out into space for the survival of the species," he said. "Life on Earth is at the ever-increasing risk of being wiped out by a disaster, such as sudden global warming, nuclear war, a genetically engineered virus or other dangers we have not yet thought of."

Hawking, who was greeted like a rock star on a visit to Hong Kong, urged putting a permanent base on the moon in 20 years and one on Mars in 40.

Great. All we have to do is figure out how to grow carrots on Mars.

The idea is science fiction; ludicrous.

But the idea behind the idea is not.

The world is in just as bad shape as Hawking says. The dangers are real. They're immense: - Global warming is already being felt. Young people of today will live to see a world unimaginably transformed -- for the worse. - Just because there hasn't been a nuclear bombing since Nagasaki doesn't mean there won't be another. As former prime minister Kim Campbell pointed out in Ottawa last week, more than 20,000 nuclear warheads remain poised at hair-trigger around the world.

There could be one big Armageddon. Or a "little" nuclear war -- or several, any one of which would make 9/11 pale in comparison.

The priorities of this world are pathetically, perilously cock-eyed. The "war on terror" is all the rage, while polar caps shrink, arms bristle and the population explosion runs unchecked. Oxfam reported last week that 14 billion bullets are produced annually -- two for every person.

Hawking's right. This planet is in big trouble. Real dangers do loom on the horizon. We may be living in the century that sees the end of planet Earth as an inhabitable space.

But the answer isn't to go to the moon. It's to find solutions; to fight, and not go down without a struggle.

Where's the activism that once surrounded civil rights, environmentalism, peace? It's the people who must choose -- choose to do what must be done to keep this planet alive.