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The United Nations between Hope and Frustration

By Paul Berthoud

A construction designed by the victors of World War II, the United Nations has embodied for more than fifty-five years our hope for the building of an international community in a world which has been during that time the object of profound mutations. Decolonization and the collapse of the communist world of Eastern Europe have dramatically altered the parameters of that community in the political sphere, while economic dynamism and technological innovation have brought about fundamental changes in numerous societies and in international relations. The response of the United Nations to those mutations has often appeared to the observer to be problematical, and hope has been tempered in many quarters by frustration. An attempt at understanding the real nature of the United Nations and at gaining an insight into the basics of its functioning will show us that hope and frustration are not the terms of an alternative, but the two facets of a reality.

The double dimension of the Charter

It is useful for this understanding to revert for a moment to the foundation, to the United Nations Charter. This diplomatic document contains more than an ambivalence, a real ambiguity the grasping of which is most important to properly perceive the United Nations. The basic pre-occupation of the founding fathers was peace, and their basic purpose was to ensure the maintenance of peace. They wanted to that effect to restore a community of nation-states the life of which had been twice in a generation shattered by war. Though often perceived differently, this was basically a conservative move, a move to go back to a normalcy based on the principles of national sovereignty and sovereign equality, and consequently of non-intervention in the internal affairs of States. The important new element, in the Charter, was essentially a mechanism of dialogue and conciliation which allowed for the examination of disputes with a view to their pacific settlement. Action was provided for only with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression – an action which the five permanent members of the Security Council could prevent by exercising a right of veto.

The founding fathers were acutely aware, on the other hand, that peace is not just the absence of war, but must be sustained by a behaviour that will avoid the causes of war. They consequently inscribed in the Charter, in the preamble, in the section on principles and in various articles, a number of provisions representing norms of behaviour the observance of which would contribute to avoiding the recurrence of war. In international relations, they call for refraining from the threat of use of force and accepting the pacific settlement of disputes. At the national level, higher standards of living, economic and social progress and de-

(Continued on page 4)

IN THIS ISSUE

<i>The UN between Hope and Frustration</i>	1
<i>About this issue</i>	2
<i>The Next Step in Development</i>	7
<i>Africa and NGOs</i>	8
<i>Living by the Word</i>	9
<i>The Smallest Victims</i>	11
<i>Disarmament at the UN</i> ...	13
<i>Social Work and Human Rights</i>	15
<i>Conference on Disarmament</i>	16
<i>Global Issues in a Changing World</i>	17
<i>Dialogue among Civilizations -A Youth Perspective from Asia</i>	19
<i>The UN and WILPF</i>	20



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The aims and principles of WILPF are to bring together women of different political and philosophical convictions united in their determination to study, make known and help abolish the causes and the concept of war. WILPF works toward world peace, total and universal disarmament; the abolition of violence and coercion in the settlement of conflicts and the substitution in each case of negotiation and conciliation. It also seeks to strengthen the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies, and the institution of international law. WILPF strives for political and social equality, economic equity, cooperation among all people and for sustainable development with environmental protection.

WILPF is conscious that under systems of exploitation and oppression these aims cannot be attained, and that a real and lasting peace and true freedom cannot exist. WILPF aims to facilitate by non-violent means the social transformation to permit the inauguration of systems under which social and political equality and economic equity for all are attained without discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, or on any other grounds.

WILPF sees as its ultimate goal the establishment of an international economic order founded on meeting the needs of all peoples and not on profit.



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About This Issue:

This issue of *IPU* gives special attention to the United Nations, which was established for the pursuit of peace after a terrible world war.

Today, after more than half a century of its existence, peace is not holding anywhere. The rule everywhere is conflict and violence. The fault line goes right through the institutions of global governance into which the UN is being dragged little by little. The items that appear and reappear on the international agenda have changed little during the last five decades from the peaceful machinery created by the Charter. National and international issues are continually linked to newer concepts on how to overcome poverty, promote democracy, or protect the global environment. More recently a new focus has emerged on meeting the needs of the most needy 47 countries across different regions under the umbrella of "the least developed countries". Paul Berthoud's lead article helps us understand some of the UN's difficulties in meeting the challenges posed by a shifting world constellation.

The major UN Conferences of the 1990s on environment, population, human rights, children, human settlements, social development and the advancement of women have now been synthesized into a legislative framework. As a result, the emerging economic and social norms will aim at being the beacons of the UN into the 21st Century. The great significance of these Conferences is that they brought together the decision-makers to find a consensus on resolution of conflicts; the very process of holding a conference which debates controversial issues itself creates heightened public awareness. Their plans of action and recommendations inform governments on specific points which need a more favourable international climate to bring about a change in national policies and legislation. Take for example, women's human rights, environmental degradation and the dangerous consequences of HIV/AIDS. These subjects have now emerged as areas of research and action across regions.

The UN Millennium Summit held in New York in September 2000 was the largest ever gathering of world leaders – 147 in all participated. Their aim was to try to forge a common vision for humanity – a new consensus on the principles and values beyond the Charter written 56 years ago. To review the political map of the world and to assess

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the enormous damage done by conflicts and violence was a monumental task for this General Assembly.

The Millennium Declaration of September 2000 reflects the need to reform and get away from the international scenario based on economic violence and social injustice in every country.

The second half of the 20th Century has indeed witnessed an increase in the violation of individual and collective human rights and a rapid worsening of the conditions of life of a large part of humanity. Not surprisingly, the declaration focuses on three major transformations that have brought the work and mission of the UN to a dangerous edge. The change in substance and style brought about by the information revolution and erratic climate change which is leading to environmental degradation and devastation of food supplies, has created turbulence in the world social order. Floods, droughts, avalanches, tornadoes across the globe have had worse impact on economies of small countries. The man-made and nature-made disasters are beginning to be more and more visible creating extreme poverty and suffering for the ordinary citizens.

At the Davos Economic Forum about two years ago, the UN Secretary-General proposed to business leaders, mainly transnational corporations, to voluntarily "embrace, support and enact" the universally accepted principles respecting norms on human rights, core labour standards and the environment. A few months later a number of representatives from the private sector

were invited to the Economic and Social Council ministerial session in New York. This was the backdoor entry of the private sector, as a "non-state actor", into the work of the United Nations. The event has been widely criticized by the NGO community, which continues to advocate that this "global compact" with the corporate sector is fundamentally flawed. The proposal had not even received the approval of the UN General Assembly before it was introduced at Davos. Furthermore, a "partnership" requires equality of status and equality of power, as well as some shared aims and values of the partners to negotiate a global economic and social contract. It is quite obvious that the enormous power of transnational corporations cannot be matched by the UN whose goals differ considerably from that of corporations.

In the same period as the global compact was being refined after Davos, a new type of people's resistance emerged at Seattle. Its features were diffused, but its profile was clear. Various coalitions across the social spectrum came together there in solidarity to protest against the imposition of new and invisible international regulations. These would, if enforced, make the world trading system into an instrument of rapid profits in the hands of fewer and fewer countries with a larger number of billionaires. The protests in Seattle against the all-pervasive encroachment of the World Trade Organization were followed by street struggles in Washington against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Since then, "We the Peoples" have repeated the struggles in various other places including Prague, Montreal, and Genoa. The

attempt by the G-7 industrialized countries to impose a world political and economic order will continue to widen the gap between the rich and the poor, and make human resources into a vast reservoir of cheap labour.

The dominant development model continues to promote illicit trafficking in arms, drugs, and sex. No individual UN member state can manage this enormously dangerous agenda by its own efforts. These problems have acquired international dimension across frontiers and need solutions at a multilateral level through the agencies and institutions of the United Nations.

In the era of rapid globalization without visible alternatives, there is an urgent need for a more effective and powerful United Nations which is not controlled by any one superpower in the Security Council and whose institutions are more democratic and transparent. Despite its weaknesses and the need for UN structural reform, no community, country or continent can afford to be isolated from the problems of its neighbours. International solidarity has become both a moral and a legal imperative.

People need to be alert to the dangers of the concentration of power and financial resources in fewer and fewer hands and need to organize against this source of conflict and war.

The articles and reports in this issue of *IPU* touch on some of these issues that "We the Peoples of the United Nations" face today. □

Krishna Ahoja Patel, WILPF International Representative and Co-ordinator of this issue of IPU.



(continued from page 1)

velopment, the promotion of respect for human rights and the dignity of the human person, are indications in the Charter of the factors that will increase the prospects of peace to be maintained.

There is thus in the United Nations Charter a double dimension. On the one hand, it offers an institutional framework which ensures the protection of State sovereignty and of national interests. On the other hand, it presents an ideological framework, that is an outline of the profile of an international community in which appropriate behaviour of Member States would seriously reduce the risks of war. This is the ambivalence of the Charter: it gives to the United Nations a double personality. And the ambiguity comes from the fact that there is no operational instrument in the Charter which could serve to project into reality the ideal which it outlines. Except in the case of threats to the peace and breaches of the peace, only non-compulsory mechanisms of dialogue and conciliation exist in this regard.

This was a skilful construction. It reflected in 1945 the possible state of restoration of an international community, i.e., a community of sovereign States, while offering pointers to areas of closer co-operation aiming to ensure a better international coexistence. Depending on the way in which they wanted to pursue their interests in the United Nations, Member States could take a formal static view of the Organization based on its institutional framework. Alternatively, they could take a dynamic view invoking the ideological framework of the Charter in order to push activities and decisions in pursuance

of their desire to progress on the path to a better integration of the world community.

The working of a society of sovereign States

A second element that is important for a proper understanding of the United Nations refers to the nature of its decision-making process. In a society of sovereign States, the structures and the activities of that society are the result of decisions which generally reflect an agreement that has been reached among Member States. In other words, the structures and activities called for by those decisions represent a point of equilibrium between the various interests which have been brought to the negotiating table. Consequently, if those interests are common, or at least convergent, the decisions will be coherent. But they will not necessarily always be based on sound rationality, on principles of good management or on sound logic. If the interests diverge, the negotiation may lead to arrangements, to transactions, to compromises emerging from the confrontation of those interests and the reconciliation of different positions at a point found acceptable by the parties. As a result, the decisions may sometimes be obscure, they may be ambiguous, they may even be contradictory. But they are agreed and they are thus decisions of the body

Paul Berthoud retired a few years ago from a long and varied career with the UN Secretariat, starting in 1951. He was the first Director of the UN Environment Fund in Nairobi, and from 1965 to his retirement was Secretary of the Trade and Development Board and later of the UNCTAD Conference.

which reached them. The record of the United Nations is full of examples of such decisions. Irritating to the observer and anathema to the scornful critic, they are but the reflection of the stage reached by Member States in the movement toward an integrated international community.

Power play in the United Nations

In a society of sovereign States, the point of equilibrium between the different interests brought into play naturally depends upon the power which the parties are able to choose to exercise. This is a point which may vary through time, and it is most instructive to briefly trace in this perspective the life of the United Nations from its inception to this day. Three major phases may be thus identified in the history of the Organization.

In a first period up to approximately 1960, it may be said that the United Nations was largely characterized by the dynamic use made of the Organization by western countries and their allies, at the time essentially the group of Latin American countries which followed a policy fairly closely associated with that of the United States of America. It is true that it was also the beginning of the Cold War, the time of an important fracture between East and West within the Organization which often paralyzed the Security Council. Socialist countries were a small minority, however, visible and noisy, but marginal from the point of view of the overall work of the United Nations. Their opposition did not affect the control of the Organization which during its first fifteen years largely implemented the agenda of the western powers.



A second phase in the life of the United Nations opened in the early sixties with decolonization, this extraordinary restructuring of the world political map. Access to independence and membership in the Organization created in the United Nations a new majority. Developing countries acquired control of the vote in the General Assembly and soon manifested their determination to use the Organization in pursuance of their objectives which were distinctly different from those that had dominated the orientation of the Organization in previous years. This movement placed the East-West conflict in a new perspective. Socialist countries were not any more a small isolated minority, but became one of the two poles between which developing countries could manoeuvre in furtherance of their interests. Drawing heavily from the economic component of the ideological framework of the Charter, developing countries put emphasis on a considerable increase in the resources of the United Nations devoted to development and in operational activities for development, and ensured the creation of a number of mechanisms specifically entrusted with problems related to development. The first oil shock of 1973 and its aftermath marked the zenith of that period, with the New International Economic Order as its banner. Western countries on the other hand were during that period very critical of the United Nations and complained of what they called the tyrannical, automatic or artificial majority that controlled the General Assembly.

One can place in 1980, with the failure of the attempt to launch global North-South negotiations, the

beginning of the successful counter-offensive of the West against the predominance of the developing countries in the Organization. It soon took the form of the so-called financial crisis of the United Nations, which was – and still is – in effect a political crisis for the control of the Organization. External factors after the emergence of the Reagan/Thatcher leadership in the West contributed to a progressive erosion of the position of the developing countries. That erosion became blatant when we entered around 1990 into the third phase of the life of the Organization with the collapse of the Soviet world. The power structure of the Organization was seriously affected by the disappearance of one of the superpowers. It meant for the developing countries the loss of the power they had wielded by playing during the sixties and the seventies a middle role between the two poles of the United Nations power structure.



The United Nations today

The collapse of the Soviet world was perceived in the West as a major opportunity. The euphoria of 1990 will be remembered: the United Nations has been paralyzed for a long time, now it can be revitalized at last! In effect, that euphoria was in the West well placed. We have witnessed since then an important redistribution of power as a result of which the decisions and activities of the Organiza-

tion are today largely dominated by western powers with a major role for the one remaining superpower.

At the institutional level, revitalization of the Organization has taken essentially the form of a revitalization of the Security Council, with a towering position of the United States of America. Conversely, we have seen a considerable weakening of the role of the General Assembly, i.e., a weakening of the position of the developing countries in United Nations affairs. The General Assembly still meets with 148 items on its agenda, but there is undoubtedly a decrease in the political specificity of its position in the functioning of the Organization. The utter incapacity of the General Assembly to bring in any significant way its influence to bear on the question of Palestine is a dramatically telling indication of its weakness.

In the political sphere, significant shifts have occurred. We first witnessed a considerable increase in peace-keeping operations, soon followed by major crises in Somalia, in Bosnia and in Rwanda and considerable retrenchment in such activities. Looking globally at the past ten years, one may identify two major developments that characterize the life of the Organization in the political field: a partial involvement in peace-keeping operations, and a selective erosion of the principle of sovereignty.

On some issues the so-called revitalization of the United Nations has taken the form of a partial involvement of the Organization, coupled with parallel independent action on the part of some Member States. In other words, the Organization is

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(continued from page 5)

brought in or left out, plugged in or plugged out, very much at the mercy of great powers concertation. This has led at times in Iraq, in Somalia and in the Balkans to considerable confusion as to what were the role and activities of the United Nations as opposed to the role and activities of individual Member States. The United States of America and its NATO allies are making a dynamic partial use of the United Nations to the extent to which they can involve the Organization in support of their own policies. The Kosovo war has shown that they do not hesitate, on the other hand, to bypass the United Nations and even violate its statute when they are not in a position to mobilize it in pursuance of their objectives.

It is the emergence in the nineties of the concepts of humanitarian intervention and interference to ensure the respect of human rights which raised the problem of the erosion of the principle of national sovereignty. These new approaches are undoubtedly consonant with the ideological framework of the Charter which was earlier alluded to, but they are inconsistent with its institutional framework. It thus may be said that they reflect an evolution the potential for which was provided for in the Charter. The problem in this regard is the difficulty of ensuring a balancing of ideology and institutional structure that is acceptable to the United Nations membership as a whole. There appears to exist in the West a broad consensus about the necessity of restricting sovereignty when called for for humanitarian or human rights reasons. It is however essentially the sovereignty of others which the West is prepared to restrict, in pursuance

of a practice of selective indignation. It is also a fact that in the field of human rights, a western view of the major importance of political rights as compared to economic and social rights very much dominates the activities of the Organization.

On the economic and social side, the discourse has interestingly enough also been in the early nineties about revitalizing the work of the United Nations: the Cold War is finished, therefore the Organization will be able to work dynamically in the pursuit of its economic and social objectives! This has been rather puzzling, because it cannot be argued by any stretch of imagination that it was the Cold War that had been paralyzing the North/South dialogue. That dialogue had been drawn to a halt by the unwillingness of western countries to go on negotiating with the South on a reordering of the world economy. In point of fact, western countries simply availed themselves of the opportunity created by the climate of expectancy due to the end of the Cold War in order to push ahead an adjustment of the work of the United Nations towards their economic philosophy, i.e., market orientation, deregulation and globalization. This has taken very much the form of placing the responsibility for international economic affairs and for the economic side of development policy in the hands of the Bretton Woods institutions, and of casting the United Nations as an entity that should concentrate on what it does best: social development, humanitarian affairs and human rights. Largely successful, this trend has the effect of neutralizing the United Nations as a focus of intellectual freedom on development policy research and as a source of questioning of the world

economy. It leaves the whole United Nations system in the intellectual mould of the Bretton Woods institutions. In practice, developing countries associated in the so-called Group of 77 have for now shelved their agenda for the restructuring of the international economic order. It cannot be assured, however, that they are satisfied with the reorientation of the activities of the Organization in the economic field.

An uncertain course

The United Nations finds itself today facing uncertain times. In a climate in some respects reminiscent of the first years of its existence, it is being largely dominated by the western world which uses it as an instrument for the pursuit of its objectives. This is taking place, however, in a world that is fundamentally different from that of 1945. A large majority of Member States are uneasy about the monolithism of western power in the United Nations under the leadership of the United States of America. Often no alternative is perceived to the political and military power of the West, and no ideological alternative is perceived to market capitalism as the economic panacea. This situation gives rise to serious reticence and sovereignty is then frequently seen by many countries as the protection that may shield them from undesirable interference.

Meanwhile, reform of the United Nations is still on the agenda. It is recognized that the basis of the international order is unsatisfactory, and many ideas are being put forward for its reordering. We must face the fact that this process will give rise to increased tensions. It often appears in the West that the way to United Nations reform is clear,



The next step in Development

Krishna Ahooja Patel

The final report of the Geneva 2000 Forum, held from 22 to 30 June neatly sums up the most frequently debated themes of the event. The Forum was held in conjunction with the UN Special Session of the Gen-

eral Assembly to evaluate the implementation of the commitments made by governments at the World Summit on Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995. The Geneva 2000 Forum dealt with many themes, including social and economic development, the eradication of poverty,

work, globalization, health, education, and specific generational and gender-related issues. Around 4,500 participants, representing a variety of institutions, national and international organizations and governments, took part.

During the nine days of the Forum, 250 workshops, seminars or lectures were held in some 30 conference rooms in and around the Palais des Nations.

While, as stated in the report, the most debated subject was poverty and exclusion in the poorest countries, NGOs from developing countries were sadly under-represented because of lack of financial support. The Forum's co-ordinator stated in his closing comments: "Running through all the contributions as a

leitmotif was the overriding need of the poor and the excluded to participate and be empowered". Questions and issues which were frequently raised and discussed were: "Are all people treated equally by the policies and actions promulgated in the name of social development? Should some groups benefit from positive discrimination?"

The answers to these questions are not clear or easy. But the economic and social reality worldwide reflects major changes in the world of work. "Even in the midst of change, work remains an important ingredient of social integration, although it may not be the answer to all ills, especially given the growth of the working poor in all countries, industrialized or not", concludes the report. □



eral Assembly to evaluate the implementation of the commitments made by governments at the World Summit on Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995. The Geneva 2000 Forum dealt with many themes, including social and economic development, the eradication of poverty,

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but we forget too easily the difficulty of organizing an international society on the scale of the world as a whole. It is a completely new agenda that presents itself in this task. Will it bring us soon to a renewed domination of western thinking? The adjustment will be difficult. In a society which has to renegotiate its foundations within continuity, the strong are in a dynamic position and welcome change that will further their interests, while the weak have little influence on the process and conse-

quently show a tendency to protect their interests by relying on the existing order. We must thus recognize that the reordering of the international community will be a complex and arduous undertaking.

The state of the United Nations is for many observers cause for disappointment and frustration, and the road to improvement shrouded in uncertainty. Frustration, however, cannot be allowed to displace hope. The United Nations is today essen-

tially a community of nation-states moved by their interests in the exercise of their power. It is on the other hand the only global forum in which the profile of a future genuine international community can be outlined and progressively cast into reality. Sustaining our hope should be the realization that there is no viable alternative to continuing to patiently work towards closing the gap between the ideological framework of the United Nations and its institutional framework. □

Africa and Non-Governmental Organizations

René Wadlow

Africa is a continent where many countries have been devastated by major economic, social and political crises. In many cases, average income per capita is lower than at the end of the 1960s, and income is very unevenly distributed, especially between rural and urban areas. Access to essential services of education, health, and housing is also very uneven, and the health care crisis in sub-Saharan Africa is of tragic proportions. Urban areas have grown in a disorganized way, and living standards in rural areas have stagnated or regressed.

In many rural areas, there has been little diversification from traditional primary products. Despite a number of institutions created to stabilize commodity prices, there is still wide fluctuation of commodity prices on the world market, especially for coffee, cacao, and cotton. Oil wealth has not had the impact on overall development that could have been expected, and there has been a continuing flight of capital outside the continent.

Against this sombre background of socio-economic stagnation, there have been continuing armed conflicts, usually of long duration. All these conflicts – Sudan, Angola, Congo, etc. – have a spillover impact of refugees, regional instability, and economic decline. Although the currents of fracturing of conflict, and of the disintegration of existing States are strong, Africa is a continent which is condemned to co-operate. Without co-operation, the

complex jigsaw puzzle of peoples will close in on themselves, and suspicion of outsiders will grow, further weakening social bonds. Africa is a continent of migration, and virtually every group came from elsewhere at an earlier time.

The United Nations, especially the Security Council, is giving greater attention to African situations. UN documentation, in particular the yearly Human Development Report, proves detailed information on socio-economic trends. But the UN's attention span is always limited by political crises arising elsewhere.

Thus, it is important to strengthen the NGO role in African life working closely with African NGOs. There seem to me to be three areas of action necessary:

1. Conflict resolution

There is a growing grassroots movement for peace and reconciliation, often drawing on traditional African patterns of dispute settlement. These local NGOs must be strengthened and their voices helped to be heard in United Nations circles.

2. Strengthening Civil Society

The 'informal sector' makes up a large percentage of the African population. In many ways, it is the most dynamic sector of economic and social life. It is from this pool that new leadership at national levels is likely to come. Microcredit and the creation of rural credit institutions can be important tools in the development of this 'informal sector', but there are other

ways of strengthening civil society networks, such as adult education, improving communication skills, and sharing of experiences.

3. International Debt Relief

In many cases, the debt which is hanging over the heads of the world's poorest countries was incurred by unaccountable regimes and used for improper and unwise purposes. Some of these regimes are gone, but nearly all the money has been spent. Debt service payments remain. The impact of different debt reduction measures needs to be watched carefully, and debt to private banks analyzed as well as public lending. This requires co-operation between international NGOs which can have an overall focus and national NGOs which can assess the impact at national and local levels.

Co-operation both within Africa and between African and international NGOs is the key to overcoming violence and stagnation in order to build a brighter future for all. □

René Wadlow is the representative of the Association of World Citizens to the UN at Geneva. Formerly, he was professor and Director of Research of the Graduate Institute of Development Studies of the University of Geneva.





Living by the Word

Laura Partridge

While being the guest of WILPF activist, Edith Ballantyne, during my tenure in Geneva, I eagerly accepted her offer to peruse her home library. The hundreds of books shelved throughout the house offered global philosophy, fact and fiction. As happens when surrounded by such wealth, several books just jumped out and made their way into my hands.

The last book I read in Edith's home was Alice Walker's *Living By The Word*. There were obvious reasons for this book to be read at that moment. One, Ms. Walker is a sponsor of the US Section of WILPF. And two, because I truly had been "living by the word" while in Geneva. The following words from this book are appropriate for starting an article commenting on the United Nations Second Preparatory Committee Meeting for the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR).

"For it is language more than anything else that reveals and validates one's existence, and if the language we actually speak is denied us, then it is inevitable that the form we are permitted to assume historically will be one of caricature, reflecting someone else's literary or social fantasy."

On June 1, 2001, the curtain closed on Act II – the Second Preparatory Committee Meeting for the WCAR. The "War of Words", as some have called the meeting, accomplished lit-

tle in its attempt to reach consensus on language. The language examined, during the two weeks of meetings, is that proposed for inclusion in the official WCAR documents. The two documents are titled, (1) the Draft Declaration and (2) the Draft Programme of Action.

It is the language contained in these two documents that has consumed the days and nights of the two-week meeting. The resulting language will historically reflect the world's commitment to eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Or the documents will "reflect someone else's literary or social fantasy".

Throughout the halls of the Palais des Nations, the UN Office at Geneva, Switzerland, everyone speaks of this critical language. Each of the two hundred and fifty plus representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) present had one goal: to influence the language in the documents. The NGOs have worked diligently over the past year to ensure their presence and, hopefully, impact the documents. Money has been sought expressly for the purpose of assuring the inclusion of the language required to address the needs of their constituency.

Numerous caucuses addressing regional concerns and specific issues have been formed over this past year of planning. New caucuses are developed on-the-spot to amend the language in areas not viewed as sufficiently covered by existing cau-

cuses. All groupings are created to lobby for the words needed to eradicate racism.

As representatives of the NGOs met in caucuses, the governments meet and also debate the language, the words. It is here, in huge domed rooms, where the countries barter for exclusion or inclusion of language to serve their purposes. It is here where the power lies. It is here where the representatives of the people sit on the fringes, watch and listen to this exchange of words. It is these rooms that are the battlegrounds of the "War of Words".

So slow is the pace of the work of these meetings that the major conclusion of the Second Preparatory Committee Meeting called for a Third Preparatory Committee Meeting. "At its 9th meeting on June 2001, the Preparatory Committee decided, without a vote, to recommend that the General Assembly authorize it to hold a third session in Geneva from 30 July to 10 August 2001, for a total of ten working days, with Conference Services being provided to hold two simultaneous meetings during this period."

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(continued from page 9)

What does this mean to the people back home? How will these words affect their daily lives? Will this debate and "strategic lobbying" provide relief for those most deeply impacted by the focus of WCAR? How does one translate the activities of the past two weeks to the women and men around the world who are unable to feed their children or to the children sold into modern day slavery? These are the questions that haunt this writer and millions of others who are, daily, affected by racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Our commitment must be two-fold. Yes, our presence and input to the language of the WCAR must con-

tinue. Although today we may not see substantial progress, we know the work at the international level is important. These "words" will, hopefully, serve as a basis for change at some point in the future.

We must place just as much of our energy and resources on what we are doing to rid the world of racism right now, in the place we call home. In *Living By The Word*, Walker referred to a sign she saw at a women's shelter. It read, "Peace on earth begins at home." Days spent sitting and waiting for meetings on language to begin and then sitting more during these meetings, can cause one to question the "activism" of this work. An even more disturbing dilemma is relating the relevance of this type of work to

the situations we will find when we return home. One NGO representative shared this view, "When you leave these UN meetings you have a better appreciation for the work you are doing in your own community."

What will we do with the final language found in the documents produced by the United Nation's World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance? How will this language change the world when the final curtain is drawn? Obviously, only you and I can answer these questions through our actions in the days preceding and following the World Conference. □

In Brief

The General Conference of UNESCO approved the Slave Route Project in 1993 to encourage scientific research about the slave trade and slavery. The concept of "route" in this project expressed the movement of peoples, civilizations and culture; while the word "slave" refers to not any one universal phenomenon of slavery, but to the singular tragedy of the African slave trade and to bring to light the interactions generated by the triangular commerce between Europe, Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean.

The slave route project endeavours to maintain a living memory of the slave trade, for example by the creation of museums on slavery, such

as that of the Coast of Senegal. This was one of the largest slave trading centres on the African Coast from the 15th to the 19th centuries.

The concluding session of the 57th session of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, in April/May 2001, requested that the undated report of the Sub-Commission's working group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery be compiled as slave trade continues in several countries of West Africa under cruel, inhuman conditions.

The Report of the Director-General to the 89th session of the International Labour Conference (2001) once again touches on the concept of decent work. Its title "Re-

ducing the Decent Work Deficit: A Global Challenge", builds on the 'decent work agenda' which the ILO adopted some two years ago. This agenda sets a goal and provides for a framework and method of analysis and action, and a platform for dialogue and building partnership.

Most people spend most of their waking time at their place of work. Work is a defining feature of human existence. Work means sustaining life and meeting basic needs. Is it not a right to work productively in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity? It surely is both a personal goal for individuals and a development goal for countries, as the ILO's Director General points out in his report. □



The Smallest Victims

Jeanne Vickers

Who are they? They are the children, and there are millions of them. They are victimized by the everyday poverty in which their families struggle to survive. They are the innocent inheritors of the HIV/AIDS virus, or have been orphaned because of that scourge. They are ravaged by malnutrition and illness, and if they survive beyond the age of five it is a miracle. They are refugee children, the most vulnerable in times of war and violence.

UNICEF reports that approximately 540 million children in the world - one in four - live in dangerous and unstable situations, and that they, with women, are the majority of the civilians who suffer physically and psychologically when their countries are ripped apart by war and conflict. Children - some as young as ten - are forced or coerced into services by governments and armed opposition groups. In armed conflicts in the 1990s more than 2 million children were killed and more than 6 million were seriously injured or permanently disabled. Some 8,000 to 10,000 children are killed or maimed by landmines every year. During that decade, more than a million were orphaned or separated from their families, while more than 15 million became refugees or internally displaced persons. Unknown numbers were psychologically traumatized.

"For all the gains made", says UNICEF, "the story of the 20th century is also about failed leadership - a lack of vision, an absence of cour-

age, a passive neglect. The number of violations of children's rights that occur around the globe every day are staggering. They range from acts of omission - such as the failure to register births or provide access to health care services and primary school - to the deliberate abuses of armed conflict, forced labour and sexual exploitation ... In the last year alone, approximately 31 million refugees and displaced persons - mostly women and children - were caught in the conflicts that ravaged the world, searching in vain for a safe haven, fleeing inhumane circumstances and ruthless attacks by mortar and machete, rape and dismemberment."

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has said that there is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. "There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they grow up in peace." How successful has the UN been in upholding that sacred trust?

Mr. Annan's foreword to UNICEF's Year 2000 State of the World's Children report sees the present situation as a challenge to world society. "It is a call to governments, civil society, the private sector and the whole international community to renew our commitment to children's rights by advancing a new vision for the 21st century: a vision in which every infant has a healthy

beginning, every child a quality education and every adolescent the opportunity to develop his or her unique abilities."

Brave and stirring words, but where do we stand so far as action is concerned? UNICEF points out that there have been enormous strides towards these goals in recent decades. "Children's lives have been saved and their suffering prevented. Millions have grown healthier, been better nourished and had greater access to a quality education than ever before. Their rights as put forth in the Convention (on the Rights of the Child) have been acknowledged and laws to protect them enacted and enforced."

Nevertheless, most of these goals remain out of reach for millions of children throughout the world, their lives and futures threatened by deeper and more intractable poverty and greater inequality between rich and poor, the spread of AIDS and the abiding discrimination against women and girls, and above all by proliferating conflict and violence. The sad fact is that much of the good work done by UNICEF in developing countries is unravelled by armed conflict and violence. Excellent development projects have to be put on hold in favour of emergency assistance

(continued on page 12)

Jeanne Vickers, former official of UNICEF is an international WILPF member.



(continued from page 11)

while desperately attempting to hold on to what has been accomplished while war rages all around.

Perhaps one of the most devastating, and least understood, violations of children's human rights can be seen in the Middle East, where Palestinian children in Gaza and the Occupied Territories are daily subjected to missile and bombing attacks by Israeli forces, to the bulldozing of their homes by Israeli tanks, and the funerals mourning the deaths of loved ones who have lost their lives in the conflict.

If UNICEF is the motivating force behind the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, should it not be throwing its weight behind the achievement of justice for Palestinian children? At least, in collaboration with the UN Commission on Human Rights, should it not be hammering away at the desperate need for a just solution to this problem,

in order to guarantee Palestinian children the protection they deserve and the right to exist to escape refugee status, to have a country they can call their own?

UNICEF will say that this is a political problem which UNICEF, as a humanitarian agency, cannot deal with. It can, however, be a powerful force in drawing attention to the question of children's rights in such cases of war and violence, and in applying moral pressure to those involved. Awareness-raising is a strong weapon, even if the actual work of conflict resolution must be left to other parts of the United Nations system. However, incredibly, the UN has been held at arm's length with regard to efforts to mediate the Palestinian problem.

The appointment of Olara A. Otunnu in 1997 as Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, to serve as a public advo-

cate and moral voice on behalf of children caught in war's chaos, was a step forward but not enough. There is a regular place for children on the agenda of the UN Security Council as it considers the effects of its actions - whether, for example, to intervene in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone or East Timor - on the rights and welfare of children. But a Palestinian request recently that UN observers be sent to Gaza to protect its refugee inhabitants did not succeed.

How many people know that the first decade of the new millennium has been designated as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World? How will this grand vision be transformed into reality? It is time to translate words into action, to give the United Nations and its non-governmental partners the tools required for the achievement of visible and sustainable results. □

There was a time when national financial contributions to United Nations organizations, based on ability to pay, brought no expectations that the contributions of richer countries gave the right to greater influence or to positions and posts of influence.

In recent years, however, financial contributions, both levied and voluntary, have become a powerful lever for controlling international organizations. Some major contributors have come to consider that, rather than contributing their fair share towards the attainment of the international community's collective and shared goals and public goods, the greater absolute level of their contribution confers ownership, and hence the right to determine the nature of the organization's work, in line with national goals. The result is that the work of some organizations is patterned on the interests of those who pay most and some international organizations are more generously funded than others, depending on the discretion and choices of the more powerful countries. Organizations thus find themselves constrained in pursuing their basic mandate, as has been increasingly the case with the United Nations.

The most recent prominent instance of the above is the announcement by an important country's legislature that the payment of the UN dues are to be withheld because the nation did not win a seat on the UN Commission on Human Rights - the result of an election by secret ballot, where member countries could vote and express their views without fear of pressure or retribution.

In building a more democratic and participatory international community, financing international organizations so that they can fulfil the mandates and tasks given them by the collective membership is thus a major issue, especially if these institutions are to be revitalized and strengthened. The challenge is to seek ways of providing the organizations with adequate funding for their increasingly complex work in a manner which does not subject them to the fiat of a relatively few major contributors, who often use their powers without scruple. Market solutions - either by borrowing or via business donations - are clearly not the answer.

Excerpts from the editorial of *South Letter*, Volumes 1&2, 2001



Disarmament at the United Nations – Reaching a Critical mass of Political Will

Felicity Hill

Reaching Critical Will, WILPF's disarmament-focused project, provides information, reports and primary documents from all UN disarmament fora. Our enormous website is used by representatives of non-governmental organisations, diplomats and UN staff working in this field. Check it out:

www.reachingcriticalwill.org

The goal of Reaching Critical Will is for more WILPF branches and sections, and more NGOs generally, to interact with their governments using the information we provide. Below is a summary of where the issue stands in each of the various UN disarmament processes and what WILPF is doing.

The UN Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA)

The first resolution of the United Nations was about nuclear disarmament. Despite this, the UN's Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA) is the smallest in terms of staff and budget. The DDA facilitates and services the smooth running of all the UN's disarmament work, expanded on below, and produces excellent publications, such as the new series of papers on gender and disarmament which can be found at www.un.org.

The DDA keeps records on the status of disarmament treaties, military spending and the exchanges of armaments as mandated by the General Assembly.

Regional Centers for Peace and Disarmament

The UN has three regional disarmament-focused offices in Africa (Lome, Togo), Asia and the Pacific (Katmandu, Nepal) and Latin America and the Caribbean (Lima, Peru) which provide information to governments and NGOs, and to facilitate the exchange of information between regions.

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)

is based in Geneva and stimulates debate through bringing together key disarmament-focused intellectuals, and resourcing member states and NGOs with high quality research and information.

The Conference on Disarmament (CD)

When in session, this body of 66 governments holds a public plenary each Thursday. The WILPF disarmament intern collects the speeches on paper or tape, and then transcribes or scans them for our website. A short summary report is sent to a large email list, including to the wilpf-news email list.

WILPF intensively follows the CD because it is the world's sole multilateral disarmament treaty negotiating body. Since it finished negotiating the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1996, there has been a stalemate due to no agreement on what to do next. Some governments, including the United

States of America, want to negotiate a treaty stopping the further production of weapons grade "fissile" materials.

Others, including China, want to negotiate a treaty stopping the weaponization of outer space. Because of the proposed National Missile Defence programme of the United States, which would overpower China's small nuclear arsenal, many suspect that China is creating as much fissile material as possible to build more nuclear weapons.

The United States is planning to put weapons in space, which has been made clear from numerous articles and speeches, and specifically through publications from the Space Agency.

While the CD is independent of the United Nations, its secretary is appointed by the UN Secretary-General; it is required to consider recommendations from the General Assembly; and it submits reports annually or more often to the UN General Assembly. Groupings among the members include the Western Group, the Non-Aligned Movement (also known as the G21), the Group of Eastern European States and Others, the P5 (the 5 permanent members of the Security Council, the 5 declared nuclear weapons states) the P4 (the five minus China) and China often refers to itself as the Group of One.

(continued from page 13)



(continued from page 13)

The General Assembly First Committee

The First Committee on Disarmament and International Security matters generates the resolutions of the GA on disarmament and is a kind of global opinion poll on the subject. Fifty resolutions were passed by this Committee in 2000. The texts and voting records as well as the speeches and weekly NGO reports can be found on our website.

Many of the resolutions passed by the Committee are mere updates of the same basic text which has been passed many times before. During the last session, the most controversial resolution, introduced by Russia, was about the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty which the US want to scrap or amend to allow them to build National Missile Defence. On the same issue, Iran introduced a resolution about missiles, and called for a Governmental Expert Panel to be established to examine the issue. Another Expert Panel was established on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education, and of course, the New Agenda Coalition resolution finally got the support of the Nuclear Weapon States.

Since 1998, the New Agenda Coalition resolution has been gathering support and building consensus toward the programme of work needed to achieve nuclear disarmament.

The Disarmament Commission: Established in 1952, this body, made up of all UN member states, was set up by the final document of the 1978 Special Session on Disarmament (also known as SSODI) as

a deliberative body. The UNDC meets for four weeks each year and has no specific agenda, its mandate is to 'consider and make recommendations on various problems in the field of disarmament and to follow up on relevant decisions' of SSODI. Its recommendations are made to the General Assembly and it decides mostly by consensus.

In 1999, the Disarmament Commission reached a consensus on two sets of guidelines concerning the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones and on conventional arms control, with particular emphasis on the consolidation of peace following armed conflicts. In 1996, it reached agreement on guidelines for international arms transfers. In 1993, it was able to agree on guidelines and recommendations for regional approaches to disarmament within the context of global security. And in 1992, it issued guidelines and recommendations for objective information on military matters.

In 1999, the Disarmament Commission chose two main issues for discussion for the coming three years: ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament and practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. The result will hopefully be agreed guidelines on these two issues, although both are extremely controversial.

Treaties

The UN services meetings of treaty bodies such as those of the 187 states parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and the upcoming meeting focused on the Entry Into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban.

For any question on disarmament at the UN, the Reaching Critical Will webpage contains the answer!

Felicity Hills is Director of WILPF's UN Office in New York

WILPF Websites

Reaching Critical Will:

www.reachingcriticalwill.org

Check out WILPF's new-look website at: www.wilpf.int.ch

Each section that does not have its own website is invited to place five documents on line through the International page. Send them to wilpf@prolink.ch

WILPF - NEWS list

Join WILPF's email list for information and discussion about WILPF's international work.

To subscribe to wilpf-news send a blank message to: wilpf-news-subscribe@gc.topica.com





A Social Worker's Perspective on Human Rights.

Linda Zeheitbauer

Social work can be seen and defined as a human rights profession. Social workers, according to the definition of the International Federation of Social Workers: "promote... social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work."

Concretely what does it mean to work according to principles of human rights, and how can a social worker employ human rights mechanisms in his/her professional context? How could issues from the local and national social work be brought to the international platform? These are important questions on which I tried to focus during the training programme at WILPF International, including the attendance at the Commission. This gave me an opportunity to acquire a basis for understanding the human rights mechanisms and the functioning of the Commission of Human Rights. At the same time I developed concrete ideas about how the grassroots

level of social work could be linked to the international agenda. For example how to use the special human rights mechanisms such as the Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts, etc. These mechanisms provide an excellent possibility to bring issues from the grassroots to the international level and this way to put pressure on the government from both sides – from the 'bottom' and from the 'top'.

To give a concrete example: social workers who work with asylum seekers facing deportation to a country where they are not safe could assist their clients to inform the Special Rapporteur on torture about their specific cases. In 2001 in Germany for example, the Special Rapporteur on torture intervened with urgent appeals in two cases of Egyptian asylum seekers facing deportation. In the end, the German government had to give way to the pressure of the human rights mechanisms and to accept the reality, that the two Egyptians could not be deported even though their

asylum requests were "manifestly unfounded."

This example shows that human rights mechanisms could be used as powerful additional tools for social workers. They can provide them with more possibilities in their daily fight for the basic rights of their clients, especially if the government or the authorities are the ones who disrespect their human rights.

In addition, social workers who intervene at all societal levels (local, national and international) have a 100 year-old tradition. It was the first president of WILPF, Jane Addams, a pioneer in social work, who always stressed that local social work must be combined with the fight for social justice and peace at all levels of the society, including at the international level, in order to promote a more just world.

Linda Zeheitbauer followed WILPF's human rights training programme.

Sexual Violence against Women in Armed Conflict

UN Commission on Human Rights is like a Pandora's Box. It is a window of opportunity through which the international community peeps in and tries to address the unimaginable human rights violations happening right now in a world we have all created. So, naturally, the issue of women and girls is addressed. We do not need to look very hard or far to find the answer: "Violence

against women and girls continued unabated during 1997-2000. Unimaginable brutality was perpetrated against women and girls in conflicts raging from Afghanistan to Chechnya, from Sierra Leone to East Timor."

Women and girls have been raped by the government forces and non-state actors, by police responsible for their protection, by refugee camp and border guards, by neighbours, local

politicians, and sometimes family members under the threat of death. They have been maimed and sexually mutilated, and often later killed or left to die. Women have been subjected to humiliating strip searches, forced to parade or dance in front of their neighbours in public and to perform domestic chores while nude. Women and girls have been forced into "marriages" with soldiers, a euphemistic term for what is essentially
(continued on page 16)

Nothing New in the Conference on Disarmament

Tené Kaduma

For nearly three years, the Conference on Disarmament (CD), the world's sole multilateral negotiating forum in the field of arms control and disarmament, has been unable to make any substantive progress with regard to reaching consensus on a program of work. This state of affairs has been referred to in many ways: deadlock, standstill, gridlock, stalemate etc. Not one of the CD presidents, who continue to rotate chairs, have succeeded in making a breakthrough. They have each expressed their commitment to working with all delegations in order to reach consensus on a programme of work. And each has undertaken ever more intensive rounds of consultations with member delegations, only to have to admit to failure at the end of their term.



WILPF and other NGOs that work on disarmament issues have urged the CD again and again to break the deadlock and agree on a programme of work. Reaching Critical Will, WILPF's disarmament project, is one such effort. It aims to increase pressure on the CD from NGOs at the national level by providing

information about the discussions in the CD to WILPF and many other NGOs by putting all statements and documents on line each week.

Ambassador Celso Amorim of Brazil, during his term as chair of the CD, put forward a draft programme of work after lengthy consultations. It has continued to serve the succeeding presidents as the basis for consultations.

The draft contains, among others, a proposal to establish an Ad Hoc Committee to exchange information and views on practical steps for progressive and systematic efforts to attain the "cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", and to establish another Ad Hoc Committee with the mandate to negotiate a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

The draft also proposes to establish an Ad Hoc Committee to examine and identify specific topics related to the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

The arguments have been around the mandates of the different Ad Hoc Committees to be set up. For example, should the Ad Hoc Committee dealing with the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) only examine and identify topics, or should it negotiate a treaty? The same arguments apply to some of the other proposed committees.

One cannot help but conclude that there is a lack of genuine will to achieve disarmament. Some governments and certainly the NGO disarmament community are becoming impatient. How much longer can the Conference on Disarmament hold out on taking genuine steps to implement its disarmament agenda? □

Tené Kaduma is WILPF's Disarmament and Justice Intern, 2001.

(continued from page 15)

repeated rape and sexual slavery and they and their children have suffered disabilities as a result of exposure to chemical weapons".

It is equally disturbing to examine how the international community through human rights and humanitarian law has dealt with the problem of war-time rape and violence against women. Gender-based violence is persistent in almost any conflict but it has traditionally been treated as a mere consequence of the war, escaping sanction, regulation or meaningful recognition. Feminists began writing about the connection between militarism and misogyny as early as 1930.

In Virginia Woolf's words: "For though many instincts are held more or less in common by both sexes, to fight has always been a man's habit, not woman's. Law and practice have developed that difference, whether innate or incidental". □



GLOBAL ISSUES IN A CHANGING WORLD

A new Zed Books Series

Zed Books of London, publishers of the Women and World Development series, have produced a new series of short, accessible think-pieces dealing with leading global issues of relevance to humanity today.

Intended for the enquiring reader and social activists in the North and the South, as well as students, the books explain what is at stake and question conventional ideas and policies. Drawn from many different parts of the world, the series' authors pay particular attention to the needs and interests of ordinary people, whether living in the rich industrial or the 'developing' countries. They all share a common objective: to help stimulate new thinking and social action in the opening years of the new century.

Global Issues in a Changing World is a joint initiative by Zed Books in collaboration with a number of partner publishers and non-governmental organizations around the world. By working together they intend to maximise the relevance and availability of the books published in the series, which include the following:

Another American Century? The United States and the World after 2000 (Nicholas Guyatt)

At the opening of the new century, the United States finds itself in an extraordinary position – in economic, military, political and cultural terms, its actions exert a profound influence far beyond its borders. In *Another American Century?* Nicholas Guyatt offers a road map to this new era of US pre-eminence, drawing on the experience of the past

decade to outline the effects and consequences of America's formidable power.

Guyatt looks at how US policy makers understand their role in the world, and the ideologies which enable them to pursue policies with often such disastrous consequences for people outside America. He explores two questions: How does the US shape the rest of the world? And how does it persuade itself that its actions are just? If the 21st century is to be American, the answers will be of vital interest to everyone.

Howard Zinn, author of *A People's History of the United States*, says that Guyatt has done Americans a great service. "With this book he has given us a succinct, bold and penetrating critique of the triumphalist ideology which insists upon American domination of this and the next century. *Another American Century?* is both sweeping in its argument and rich in the evidence it produces to show the dangers to us all in the idea that our country has the right to impose its will on the rest of the world."

Rethinking Globalization: Critical Issues and Policy Choices (Martin Khor)

In this optimistic book Martin Khor, Director of the influential Third World Network, explains what economic globalization means in trade,

finance and investment, and shows how globalization is not increasing economic growth in most countries, or reducing inequality and poverty.

Khor sets out concrete proposals for what Third World governments can do to shape globalization to their particular circumstances. At stake is nothing less than the whole prospect of rapid, just and diversified development in the South, on which prosperity, the environment and an end to mass poverty depend.

Yilmaz Akyüz, chief economist of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), calls it a "concise, down-to-earth account of various pitfalls in the globalization process - essential reading for policy makers and negotiators, especially of developing countries." Deepak Nayyar, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Delhi, considers it "a valuable contribution (which) examines the implications of globalization for development from the perspective of the South. The simple exposition also makes it accessible to students, policy makers and concerned citizens."

The Myth of Development: the Non-Viable Economies of the 21st Century (Oswaldo de Rivero)

This book, by a former Peruvian diplomat and former ambassador to the United Nations, invites its readers to face reality and be honest



about what is happening to the majority of people in Third World countries. The message of this courageous book is that the benefits of development, so long promised over the past fifty years, have not come about for most people. Nor are they going to. The necessary investment is not available and modern technology actually dispenses with labour rather than providing jobs for the growing multitudes in the cities of the South.

Many countries, and large parts of their cities in particular, are already collapsing into 'ungovernable chaotic entities' (UCEs) under the control of warlords and mafias. State-driven and market-led development models have both failed. Many countries mistakenly called 'developing' would, in fact, be better described as 'non-viable national economies' (NNEs).

What is to be done? The 'wealth of nations' agenda must be replaced by a 'survival of nations' agenda. In order to prevent increasing human misery and political disorder, many countries must abandon dreams of development and adopt instead a policy of national survival based on providing basic water, food and energy, and stabilizing their populations.

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, former UN Secretary-General, calls this book a useful tool for understanding enormous problems that have to be faced by the poverty-stricken, exploding urban populations of the inaptly named 'developing countries.' For *Le Monde Diplomatique*, it is "essential reading – because of the originality of its point of view, the timeliness of its analysis and the star-

ling propositions which it puts forward...Bristling with new ideas, the author provides us with an intelligent way into understanding better the world's present disorders."

***Hungry for Trade: How the Poor Pay for Free Trade* (John Madeley)**

Will free trade benefit transnational corporations or the millions who are currently malnourished? Why should countries not protect their rural communities and ensure self-sufficiency in food production? Food security affects us all - there is no more important issue. John Madeley has been a writer and broadcaster on Third World development and environment issues for the past twenty years. His book is a clarion call to remove our ideological blinkers and think afresh.

Vandana Shiva calls the book "a timely and important resource for the growing debate on trade and agriculture and on the WTO rules that promote trade at the cost of livelihood and food security."

"John Madeley has spent his life advocating the cause of farmers in the poorer countries", says John Montagu, Earl of Sandwich. "His ability to research complex issues and explain in simple terms how they are damaging the poor is astounding."

***Brave New Seeds: The Threat of GM Crops to Farmers* (Robert Ali Brac de La Perriere & Franck Seuret)**

Farmers around the world are being pressured by half a dozen giant corporations to grow genetically engineered crops. What are the pos-

sible downsides for them? For their environment, their health, their independence, their traditional export crops and their access to the marketplaces of their own countries?

This book, with its dialogue between farmers' representatives and experts, is a clear statement of principles that should guide governments and communities in bringing this profit-motivated deployment of scientific power under democratic control.

Brian Tokar, editor of *Redesigning Life? The Worldwide Challenge to Genetic Engineering*, calls it 'an impressively cogent summary of the hazards of GMOs and the urgency of worldwide action. Brave New Seeds embraces the central contributions of farmers in the South to the integrity of our food and the diversity of world agriculture.'

***The Water Manifesto: Arguments for a World Water Contract* (Riccardo Petrella)**

Author of the path-breaking book *The Limits to Competition* (1995), Riccardo Petrella points out that one and a half billion people have no access to clean drinking water and that if present trends continue this number will double in 20 years; all humanity faces declining water quality because of pollution.

In this call to action, he explains what is happening, shows the obstacles in the way of an adequate response, focusing on the corporate interests that now control the water industry, and sets out a cogent critique of the current market-oriented system that sees water as a commodity,

(continued on page 19)



Dialogue among Civilizations: A Youth Perspective from Asia

Neeru Shrestha

Asia is known as a region of diverse civilizations from Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam as well as other religions and cultures. However, the increasing intolerance is threatening the century-long traditions of relative harmony, peace and understanding. In addition, economic globalization has been the most imposing, unjust and undemocratic process in the whole history of global development, leading to local conflict and intolerance. It has been the main factor for the undermining and destruction of our civilizations. Despite the various efforts of the United Nations and its agencies, such as UNESCO, to minimize the negative effects, economic globalization is imposing one value system, the monoculture, and is not respecting the diversity of peoples, nations and the civilizations, although civilizations are not global but local, practiced and developed in communities of people.

Yes, different civilizations have different problems too. Some civilizations promote equality and non-discrimination among other peoples and nations, while some civilizations practice the opposite. But to claim that one civilization is superior to another is the beginning of conflict and war as has been shown by history and as we are witnessing today, from the Balkans to Afganistan, and from the Israel/ Arab conflict to political intolerance in Burma and Bhutan. We should leave all the peoples and the nations free from any kind of imposition of cultural and religious value systems. Similarly, we should limit the role of international economic, financial and trade institutions in facilitating global economic growth and trade, but not impose any one single policy or value system in the name of "free market economy", free trade and free profit.

Unfortunately, we are losing our rich civilizations along with our independent identities, cultures, religions and values as foreign value systems are being imposed on us in every aspect of our lives through the process of globalization. In this context, the main challenge that lies ahead is whether we can bring the forces of economic globalization into a basic framework of the UN human rights system and respect local and national value-systems in the process of economic development and the information revolution.

This year, 2001, was declared by the UN General Assembly as the International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. It is being coordinated by the UN and UNESCO. Contrary to other International Years the UN has declared over the years that have increased public awareness of specific problems and stimulated actions toward improving situations, this Year of Dialogue among Civilizations has made no impact on the general public. There seems to be no dialogue in the communities where understanding of and respect for those of another culture have to be nurtured.

It is a challenge to us young people to bring the dialogue into our communities, into our work places, into our clubs. □

Neeru Shrestha is a young lawyer in Nepal and member of WILPF.

continued from page 18)

rather than as a precious community resource and a fundamental human right.

Petrella calls for a world water contract that would enshrine fresh water as an essential good to which all people have a right. He calls on all of us to mobilize around this demand, as well as for an immediate programme to provide fresh water for the rural and urban poor.

Danielle Mitterand, President of Fondation France Liberté, says it is

time "to oppose privatizing water and turning it into a commodity. To take action, as *The Water Manifesto* proposes, so that access to water is recognized as a human right, will supplement hope with strength." □

Information concerning these and forthcoming titles in the Global Issues series may be obtained from Zed Books, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF, United Kingdom, or by email: Sales@zedbooks.demon.co.uk Visit Zed's website at: www.zedbooks.demon.co.uk



The UN and WILPF

Since its inception 86 years ago, WILPF has seen "as its ultimate goal the establishment of an international economic order founded on the principles of meeting the needs of all people and not on those of profit and privilege." (Paragraph 3 of Article 2 of the Constitution). In this spirit we, in the steps of our foremothers, have consistently been strong supporters of the League of Nations and of the United Nations which replaced it.

It was evident then and it has become ever more obvious that the world is the 'common' of the human race and of all other living beings. No single (personal, national and even less corporate) interests can nor should be served unless the interests of all earth's present and future inhabitants are fully considered. Hence the need for a world institution that mediates the individual and global fundamental interests effectively and efficiently.

WILPF has seen the UN as potentially fulfilling this role. We have always taken the position that strong support does not mean blind admiration but rather informed thoughtful, constructive and energetic critique.

We have applauded the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which over the decades has provided the foundation for many progressive international norms, resolutions and actions. It gave birth to the two International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. With the Universal Declaration they form the International Bill of Human Rights. Other Conventions the UN has formulated and adopted – on genocide, on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, on the rights of the child, to mention only a few – have set a standard of international behaviour. The UN Commission on Human Rights has set up mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the provisions of the many adopted instruments.

The United Nations provides the forum to which issues are brought and debated, and where solutions to problems are sought. And the issues are formidable, be it the elimination of poverty, environmental protection, achieving food security, maintaining peace. It cannot go further than the collective agreement of its member states allows it to go.

We have fought against the immobilizing effect of the UN decision-making process and the lack of democracy in the Security Council. Of the highest concern are the recent developments that make the UN more and more beholden to the transnational corporations through the "Global Compact". In this process "we the peoples", whose voice is already weakened by the parochial interests of the 'nation states', are totally silenced by the growing power given to corporations to roll back labour, environmental and human security and human rights provisions.

To combat these formidable forces WILPF has united its efforts with the citizens of the world who are asking that economic interests be subordinate to the good of all the earth's inhabitants. The UN must promote and defend this common good, and must be seen to be doing so.

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