

NGO NEWS

Sisters of Charity Federation

DPI Conference in Paris, France

by Roma DeRobertis, SCIC

We all need to advocate for human rights amid global poverty, violence, economic globalization and climate change, participants agreed at the recent United Nations Department of Public Information (UN-DPI) conference in Paris, France. The Federation was represented at the conference by Sisters Roma DeRobertis, SCIC, Elizabeth Cahill, SC (Convent Station) and Caroljean Willie, SC (Cincinnati)

The theme of the conference was, "Reaffirming Human Rights for All: The Universal Declaration at 60." After the Second World War and the Holocaust, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Paris in 1948.

The 61st annual conference was the first to be held outside the UN's New York headquarters. More than 1,300 representatives of 461 non-



Sisters Roma DeRobertis, Elizabeth Cahill, and Caroljean Willie

governmental organizations from 65 countries participated in the event.

Eugen Brand, director general of the international movement, ATD Fourth World, told the conference that "misery is a violation of human rights and that persons living in poverty want and need to be part of the collective future of humanity."

"Ethics and democracy require those who are very poor to be full participants in efforts to overcome discrimination and realize human rights and dignity for all", continued Mr. Brand.

The conference also addressed the need for balance between security and human rights in an era of terrorism

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

"All human beings are born with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms."

The United Nations is committed to upholding, promoting and protecting the human rights of every individual. This

commitment stems from the United Nations Charter, which reaffirms the faith of the peoples of the world in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person.

There are strong links be-

tween the UDHR and Catholic Social Teaching. To learn more about the UDHR go to:

www.unhchr.ch/udhr

Navi Pillay, a native of South Africa, is the new High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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Special points of interest:

- UN-DPI conference in Paris
- Systemic Change and the Vincentian Family
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Social Integration
- Sisters of Earth Conference

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DPI Conference cont'd

and counterterrorism. Countries need to define terrorism more narrowly, said Joanne Mariner of the international Human Rights Watch organization. "Government counterterrorism efforts pose a serious challenge to the very idea of universal human rights," said the American lawyer.

Mary Evelyn Tucker, a professor at Yale University, said we need a long-term framework which considers environmental rights of future generations not only of humans, but also of other species. We've reached "a new moment of conscience and consciousness" which broadens our care and compassion not only for human secu-

rity, but also for planetary well-being.

The conference also addressed the national and international responsibility to protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Speakers noted that NGOs play a vital role in maintaining peace and helping to identify conflicts before they erupt.

Representatives of many religious and spiritual traditions were prominent at the conference. Women, young adults and representatives from Africa and other parts of the developing world played a major role. Diverse modes of presentation and participation encouraged many to be

heard.

A conference highlight came during the closing session with a live video-cast of Ingrid Betancourt, the former Colombian presidential candidate who was kidnapped by rebels and recently freed. She said that as a result of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S., she now sees insidious fear of the other—other cultures, religions, governments and heads of state. She said we need to overcome fear of being ill-judged by others in efforts to protect and defend human rights. "NGOs have the right to speak and this speech makes you powerful," stated Betancourt.

Dates to Remember

The Commission on Social Development will take place from 4 to 13 February 2009. This will be preceded on 3 February by the Civil Society Forum. Sr. Faith Colligan, DC, is the chairperson of the task force on the Civil Society Forum.

The Commission on the Status of Women will take place 2 to 13 March, 2009.

The Commission on Sustainable Development will take place from 4-15 May, 2009.

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues will take place 18–29 May, 2009.

The Committee on Teaching about the United Nations (CTAUN) will hold a one day session on 30 January 2009. This conference is for interested educators and administrators at all levels and disciplines. It will provide resources for enriching curricula, school activities and community involvement.

The program will illustrate ways of promoting an understanding of human rights during the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This year's keynote speaker is Greg Mortenson, who is featured in the bestseller *Three Cups of Tea—One Man's Mission to Fight terrorism and Build Nations ...One School at a Time* and co-founder of the non-profit Central Asia Institute and Pennies for Peace.

The Vincentian Family

In addition to the Federation delegation to the DPI Conference, the Vincentian Family was well-represented by the Ladies of Charity and the Daughters of Charity.

The Daughters of Charity, with whom we stayed in Paris, sent representatives to the conference from North America, Africa, Asia and Europe.

The Ladies of Charity (AIC) had representatives from Europe and Africa. One of the

speakers at a breakout session was Nkiru Aronu, national president of AIC Nigeria. She spoke about the dire situation of widows in Nigeria and of the work of the Ladies of Charity to provide job-training skills and help set women up in small businesses through micro-financing projects.

The Ladies of Charity of Nigeria will be the focus of our Alternative Gift Giving program this year. Additional information about this project will be forthcoming.



Roma, Betty and Cj with Daughters of Charity at Rue du Bac, Paris.

Social Integration

The Charity Federation is very involved in the Committee on Social Development. The work of the committee culminates in the two week commission in February.

The theme for the next two-year cycle of the Commission on Social Development is "Social Integration".

The guiding principle of social integration is "unity within diversity with social justice". According to Makiko Tagashira, Social Affairs Officer of the Social Integration Branch, social integration is:

- A dynamic and principled process in which societies engage in order to

further human development;

- Encourages "coming together" while respecting differences
- Represents the attempt not to make people adjust to society, but rather to ensure that society is accepting of all people;
- Not an end-state that societies can achieve but a dynamic process in which societies engage in order to further human development;
- Desires to move from temporary and fragmented interventions to broader

and more consolidated approaches/strategies; and

- Desires to bring various stakeholders to work together towards a common goal.

This is the first year of the two-year process so the committee's emphasis will be on deepening their understanding of the nature of social integration and how it is perceived in different regions.

It will also be a time to collect information about best practices in the field that illustrate social integration. Information will follow about how to submit best practices.

Systemic Change

All over the world the Vincentian Family is being called not only to assist those living in poverty with their immediate needs by providing food, clothing and shelter, but also to help them change the social system within which they live, so that they might emerge from poverty. For that reason, the international Vincentian Family has chosen Systemic Change as its focus for 2008-2009. To help the Family reflect on the theme, the members of the Vincentian

Family's Commission for Promoting Systemic Change have written *Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change*. This book provides an overview of what constitutes systemic change and provides numerous examples of systemic change in which the Vincentian Family is involved throughout the world. The book costs \$7.00.

If interested send order to:

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

58 Progress Parkway
St. Louis, MO 63043

Or email: jmorse@svdpusa.org

Additional information about systemic change and many other facets of Vincentian Family Life can be found at the following website:

www.famvin.org

Migration: People on the Move

by Faith Colligan, DC

Our Catholic Social Teaching affirms the sacredness and dignity of each human life. "The human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Our belief in the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching." (U.S. Catholic Bishops)

"We cannot insist too much on the duty of giving foreigners a hospitable reception. It is a duty imposed by human solidarity and

by Christian charity, and it is incumbent upon families and education institutions in the host nations..." (Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*.)

The United Nations High Level Ministerial Meeting on International Migration identified "Migration as a global phenomenon requiring a global response. An estimated one hundred and ninety million persons, half of them women, one in every thirty of the world's population...on the move be-

cause of war, poverty, globalization, natural disasters, political persecution and discrimination". (UN General Assembly, 2006)



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Updates

- Thank you to all who sent in info about their Peace Day celebrations. Information about the celebrations will be placed on the website. www.sisters-of-charity-federation.org
- Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh decried ongoing religious hate-crime violence in the Kandhamal district of Orissa as a “national disgrace,” responding to a recent escalation in Hindu-Christian conflict in which a nun has been raped, churches have been burned and 35 people have been killed. The violence was touched off by the death of Swami Laxmananda Saraswati, a Hindu leader whom his followers claim was murdered by Christians angered by his efforts to prevent the conversion of low-caste Hindus to Christianity. (UN Wire) Although our SCN Sisters do not minister in this area, please keep the safety and well-being of them and their families in your prayers as the violence is spreading to other areas.

Sisters of Earth Conference



Sisters Theresa Hucul, SCIC, Maureen Wild, SC (Halifax), Clarann Weinert, Paula Gonzalez, Caroljean Willie, SCs (Cincinnati) and Mary Ann Garisto, SC (New York) attended the International Sisters of Earth Conference (SOE) in California.

“Each time I attend a Sisters of Earth Conference, I leave with a deep sense of gratitude for being part of this amazing network of women committed to doing ‘the great work’, said Sr. Mary Ann. Clarann Weinert stated that “The energy among the group was palpable and the commitment to the healing of our earth was so transparent.”

Sr. Maureen Wild was one of the facilitators of the event. The next conference is scheduled for July 2010 in New York.