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THE NEW HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The UN General Assembly established the new Human Rights Council on March 15, 2006. It is a major step forward to protect the human rights of the victims, and will serve as the main United Nations forum for dialogue and cooperation on human rights. The new Human Rights Council will assist the member States with human rights issues and make recommendations to the General Assembly (GA) for further development of international law in the field of human rights.

The United Nations member States approved the establishment of the new Human Rights Council by a record vote of 170 in favor to 4 against and 3 abstentions. The Human Rights Council is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly. This makes it directly accountable to the full membership of the United Nations.

The members of the new Human Rights Council will be elected on May 9, 2006, and the first meeting of the Council will be convened on June 19, 2006. The new Council will consist of 47 members. Membership to the Council is open to all member states of the United Nations. Members would be elected by the General Assembly through individual and direct votes and need absolute majority (96 votes) to be elected. The distribution of seats would be as follows: 13 from Africa; 13 from Asia; 6 from Eastern Europe; 8 from Latin America and the Caribbean; and 7 from Western Europe and other States.

The members will be elected for three-year terms, and after serving two consecutive terms

they would not be eligible for immediate re-election. When voting the members for the Council, the member States will take into consideration a candidates' contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights. The new Council members will commit themselves to cooperate with the Council and to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, and submit voluntary pledges and commitments with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights.

The newly elected members of the Council will undergo the Council's new universal review mechanism during their term of membership, so that they abide by the human rights standards. In the event of any member State of the new Council that persistently commits gross and systematic violations of human rights during its term, the General Assembly has the right to suspend its rights and privileges by a two-thirds of majority vote of the GA. The Council will meet at least three times a year for ten weeks, with a right for one-third of the Council members to call additional sessions "when needed."

The Council will carry over all the Commission's mandates and responsibilities to ensure that there is no protection gap in the transition.

The old Commission's system of independent "special rapporteurs," other special procedures and access for human rights NGOs will be retained.

FIFTIETH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN FEBRUARY 27 TO MARCH 10, 2006

The Fiftieth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place from February 27 to March 10, 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters, New York. The theme was: “Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work and equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels.”

At the opening Session, the Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette told the Commission on the Status of Women, that there was no tool for development more effective, than the empowerment of women.

The Sessions drew thousands of participants from all over the world. There were several side events to choose from throughout the two-week sessions. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; Beijing +5; 2005 World Summit, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, were some of the main documents referred to.

Panelist after panelist highlighted promises made by member States. The thematic deliberation on enhanced participation centered on women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of gender equality in all spheres of society. They zeroed in on three main fields: education, health and work. The panelists acknowledged progress made, but

noted the uneven achievements when taken by regions, and noted the need for an “enabling environment” where gender parity for development can occur.

One of the important panel discussions was the High-Level Panel on Gender Dimensions of International Migration, which anticipated the coming General Assembly’s High-Level Session on Migration this September. The Panel noted the “feminization of migration” which is associated with the “feminization of poverty.” The sad reality is more and more women are in the forefront of the fight against poverty. So, whether women migrate either by choice or are forced into it, the fact remains that for the past several years, more women than men are entering the migrant labor market. This also shows the growing trend of women taking the role of “breadwinner” in their families.

Gretta Fernandes SSpS, Reynaldo Jimenez, SVD and Benedikta Böckelmann SSpS, attended the Session. VIVAT submitted a statement to the 50th Session on women and employment, and made a joint statement with the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, along with the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd and UNANIMA International. For more details on the 50th Session and VIVAT contributions, visit: www.vivatinternational.org → Women → Commission on the Status of Women.

KEY MIGRATION ISSUES WORKSHOP AT THE UN

A workshop on Labor Migration was held at the UN headquarters on March 15, 2006. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) in cooperation with International Labor Organization (ILO), sponsored this workshop.

The workshop centered on the issue of work or labor, particularly what the ILO calls “full and productive employment and decent work for all.”

Work or labor is most often the only asset of a poor person. Thus any talk on poverty reduction should have job generation as its main priority.

And labor must be “decent” which means quality employment (fair wage), security of tenure, development, democracy, social protection and social dialogue (voice). The World Trade Organization (WTO) has the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) mode 4, which deals with temporary movement of “natural persons” or migration. The UN has the Convention on Protection of Migrant Rights and their Family, though many member states have yet to sign on. All these

international instruments contain goals that all member states must strive for.

Providing jobs where the workers are and prefer to be is every government’s responsibility. Migrants have the right to work and have rights at work. Whether found at home or abroad, work has become a key development objective for international bodies and member States. VIVAT took part in this workshop. For more information visit:

www.unitar.org/en/labourmigration.html

FIELD REPORT ON HIV/AIDS IN SOUTH KOREA

As in most countries, HIV/AIDS is still viewed by many in society as a disease that carries great stigma and shame, especially in South Korea. Back in 1985, HIV/AIDS was called to the attention of the public and recognized as a serious disease with little chance of being cured. In South Korea there are 3,600 registered cases, however there are many more unreported ones. During these twenty years, many faith-based organizations and non-governmental organizations have been on the forefront in the battle to treat this disease in a more humane manner and to show deep compassion for those who are suffering from the scourges of this dreaded disease.

Defeat AIDS, and are working in a care center in Seoul. These care centers are known as “Shelters” for those who have HIV/AIDS. In these Shelters, one can receive proper medical care and counseling that will enable the person to resume a somewhat normal life again. However, society throws many obstacles on the path of one who is afflicted with the disease. Disclosure can have the possibility of keeping the victim from meaningful employment, which in turn, creates further suffering. For those who are unable to work for a living, the Government gives a monthly subsidy of 300,000 Korean Won (about US \$270) but this barely covers one’s living costs. (As reported by Eleonora Cichon, SSpS by e-mail dated March 21, 2006.)

VIVAT members are in collaboration with Caritas Seoul, and the Korean Alliance to

VIVAT CHAIRPERSON VISITS SVD MEMBERS OF THE WESTERN PROVINCE USA

At the kind invitation of Joseph Miller, Provincial of the SVD Western Province, Gretta Fernandes, executive director of VIVAT, addressed the members of the Provincial Chapter, which was held in Riverside, California from March 14th – 15th. Gretta used a power point presentation to acquaint the confreres with all aspects of VIVAT International including its history, development, goals, and the present advocacy it is involved

with. A lively discussion followed, and many questions were raised especially how one could better use the resources of VIVAT. One of the participants at the lecture said that VIVAT is an excellent meeting place that brings together all the work that is being done by the SVD and the SSpS in their various JPIC projects throughout the world. And hopefully VIVAT will continue to serve and function as a forum for both our congregations.

GLOBAL WEEK OF ACTION AGAINST SMALL ARMS

International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), announces the Global Week of Action Against Small Arms (WoA), which will take place from May 22 – 29, 2006, just four weeks before the UN Review Conference on Small Arms (RevCon). It will be the climax of campaigning activity during the 100 Day Countdown that is already underway. The main call is to raise public awareness through the national and international media. For more information visit: <http://www.iansa.org/>

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

1. The Fourteenth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD 14) will be held on May 1-12, 2006. It will review progress made in the following areas: Energy for Sustainable Development; Industrial Development; Air Pollution/ Atmosphere, and Climate Change. For more information visit: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/review.htm>

2. The Fifth Session of the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues (PFII 5) will be held on May 15 – 26, 2006. The theme is: The Millennium Development Goals and Indigenous Peoples: Re-defining the Millennium Development Goals. For more information visit: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/session_fifth.html

3. The 2006 follow-up meeting on the outcome of the Twenty-Sixth Special Session: Implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS will take place from May 31 to June 2, 2006 at the United Nations headquarters. The main focus of the meeting is to review progress achieved in realizing the

commitments set out in the Declaration of Commitment made in 2001, renew political commitments and consider recommendations on how the goals can be achieved. Log on to: <http://www.ungass.org/>

4. The Review Conference on Progress Made in the Implementation of the Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, will be held in New York from June 26 to July 7, 2006. The Program of Action is a politically binding international instrument that aims to curb the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons and adopted unanimously by UN member States in July 2001. Visit: <http://www.iansa.org/> or <http://www.un.org/events/smallarms2006/index.html>

VIVAT will be taking part in the above-mentioned events. We encourage VIVAT members to send in their field reports to VIVAT Executive Team, New York.

Important Days to Remember

*World Telecommunication Day – May 17 *World Environment Day – June 5

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