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## KEEP THE PROMISE. MAKE IT HAPPEN.

**International Forum on the Eradication of Poverty - November 15-16, 2006**

*"Eradicating poverty is an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind"*

General Assembly Resolution 51/178

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1995, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared the "*First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006)*". On November 15-16, 2006 the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with United Nations agencies, the NGO leadership, civil society and particular persons who live in poverty, organized an International Forum on the Eradication of Poverty to mark the end of a decade-long struggle realizing its goal. The forum had for its title: **Keep the Promise, Make It happen --- 2015**. Right at the outset, the organizers clearly stated "*the main purpose of the Forum is not to reflect on the past but more importantly to look forward in order to identify the main challenges ahead and the concrete and sustainable strategies to combat poverty in its various dimensions over the next ten years*".

Poverty is a product of complex social deficiencies. Hunger and poverty are interconnected. Extreme poverty results to hunger; hunger brings about diseases, disabilities, and even premature deaths. The figures presented amounted to more than a billion of the world's poor live on an average cost of one US dollar a day. The figures are disheartening, and seemingly the target of "*halving by 2015 the number of undernourished people from the 1990 level*" may be unobtainable. Definitely, this is a challenge that stares us all in the face. But it was noted that the effort exerted over the past decade has produced positive measures. The focus is not just poverty alleviation, rather poverty reduction. There was a common trend in the mind of many if not all the panelists: that poverty is more than just an economic issue. It is also a challenge to

human rights. Understanding poverty as related to human rights also brought into everyone's consciousness the role of those who are doubly oppressed in an impoverished situation: the women and the girl child. Thus, the reduction of poverty is not only capital accumulation and technological progress, but also structural change. It is necessary to create a culture of participation and shared responsibility that brings human dignity. Often those who live in extreme poverty and helplessly struggle remain voiceless and invisible. Conscious of this fact, the Forum pointed to the need of partnership between institutions like the World Bank, Human Rights Commission, and human rights NGOs on the one hand; and those who live in poverty, on the other hand. We need to take into account the knowledge, not only of those who are engaged to fight against extreme poverty with the poor, but also the knowledge and wisdom of the very poor themselves. Those afflicted by poverty should be incorporated to participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of all initiatives that concern them. This partnership to reduce poverty also includes government intervention. Governments need to promote financial development; however, it should keep a clear vision of the respective roles of the public sector and the private stakeholders. The Forum unfolded good practices of the past, and enlightened and informed directions that can serve as guide to make better in the next decade. The Millennium Villages Projects in Sauri, Kenya and Kararo, Ethiopia were among those that were presented. Included also were reports of small but significantly steady changes in the least developed nations, in particular Bangladesh and Sierra Leone.

There is no easy solution in the struggle to reduce extreme poverty. It was very clear, though, over the period of the whole Forum, that the determination to reduce poverty belongs not only to people who want to keep the promise, but also people who want

and are willing and ready to make it happen. The Forum has demonstrated that much also has been and can still be achieved because of people who are not afraid to think beyond the box.

## **THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS** **November 21, 2006**

The importance of Civil Society organizations in carrying out the mission of the United Nations was noted by the President of the General Assembly Sheika Haya Rashed Al Khalifa on November 21, 2006 at a forum on the General Assembly and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which was jointly organized by her office and the UN Foundation. She recognized the value of NGO's who tirelessly work to help those most vulnerable in society while simultaneously holding governments accountable to UN policy. Sheika Haya called for the continued dialogue between NGOs and member

states. This partnership brings the actual needs of civil society to the international agenda, and the President recognized how crucial this sharing of information is to the overall mission and goal setting of UN Policy. She also announced her agenda for the upcoming year, which will allow time for informal discussions and debates between the private sector and civil society on important issues that both face. For more information kindly visit: [www.vivatinternational.org](http://www.vivatinternational.org) → *General Assembly President calls for stronger relationship between UN and civil society.*

## **VIVAT MEMBERS AMONG THE MAASAI IN DOL DOL, KENYA** *Mervin J. Noronha, SVD*

The presence of VIVAT International in Dol Dol dates back to 1996 when two young VIVAT members arrived to carry forward the already 16-year old base foundation laid by some enthusiastic workers from Italy. Those Italian veterans worked tirelessly to bring positive change in the lives of the nomadic native inhabitants, and the VIVAT members took this as their inspiration. Currently three energetic VIVAT members, who are driven by a strong thirst for social justice and respect for human dignity, spearhead the work center. *The VIVAT members try to influence the lives and thinking pattern of the people through their service and presence.* The VIVAT presence is an example of how a few calculated initiatives, through patience and perseverance, could bring about a steady change in the lives of the poor and emaciated masses.

Dol Dol is situated close to Mount Kenya, some 260 kms north of Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. Inhabited by about 25,000 people, it is home to the well-known Maasai tribe who are predominantly pastoralists. They depend solely on livestock – goats, sheep, cows & camel for their existence. A semi-arid area, Dol Dol is prone to constant

draughts and consequent famine. The harsh weather patterns with very few rains, force people to move from place to place looking for pastures for their livestock. A severe drought in 2000 wiped out almost all the livestock in the area, leaving the people still struggling to come to terms with the devastation. As this write up goes to press, the area has received only three good rains this year. Some even consider the present draught situation to be worse than in previous years.

Strongly rooted in their cultural practices and not yet ready to let go of their long cherished customs and traditional belief systems, the Maasai are not yet touched much by the modernity and global trends that are rapidly sweeping across the globe. In this situation the VIVAT members have been making serious efforts to bring education to hundreds of people, believing strongly that education is the basis for any positive change in any given society. A major stakeholder in the education sector in the area, the VIVAT community has always found good representation in the decision making and policy setting bodies of educational institutions and offices, both at the divisional and district levels, thus being able to positively influence the thinking and policies in the education

sector. Even as this write-up is taking shape, VIVAT members in Dol Dol are taking care of the educational needs of about 450 children at various levels – primary, secondary, polytechnic and university. VIVAT members also run three boarding hostels for the primary school children, where utmost care is given to the overall development of each child. These children number about 300 and they attend various public schools.

Since the time the government of Kenya introduced free primary education in the country three years ago, a substantial amount of energies and resources of VIVAT members are now being channeled towards conservation of the rapidly degrading eco system and soil erosion in the area, while still keeping education as the main focus. The immensity of deforestation in the area is alarmingly frightening. Other than holding expensive seminars and workshops, the local authorities pay very little attention towards this problem. On an experimental basis, VIVAT members have planted around 400 trees and 100 flower plants of various kinds, trying to show to the people how in the severest draught situation one can grow trees and save the depleting eco system. In spite of acute scarcity of water, the

majority of these trees are doing quite well, which can be seen as a lesson to all that where there is will there is a way.

Two associate members (Comboni Sisters) of VIVAT are actively involved in the integral formation of about 100 women, grouped into 4 groups according to the area. The aim of this effort is to give basic adult education, help eradicate poverty, promote human dignity, promote justice and equality of women, and fight against exploitation. There are also small projects to enhance the financial and living standards of the families. All this is carried out through regular weekly meetings and time-to-time seminars and workshops. For the year 2007, in the pipeline are a series of seminars and workshops by qualified personnel, which will touch on areas like human rights, family planning, hygiene and sickness prevention, health care, management, and gender & culture.

In all these efforts the support and co-operation of the local partners is commendable and we hope to strengthen these partnerships. *(e-mail dated December 12, 2006)*

## **RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES OF HIV/AIDS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

*Dolores Dorota Zok SSpS*

South Africa is one of the most diverse countries in the world. It is located on the southern tip of the African continent, bordered by northern neighbors Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The people who occupy the land are as dramatically diverse and fascinating as the country's geography. South Africa is home to approximately 46.6 million people. Africans are in the majority, nearly 37 million and constitute 79.3 % of the population. The white population is estimated to be 4.4 million, the colored population 4.1 million and the Asian population 1.1 million. Approximately 23.6 million of the population is female. The life expectancy at birth: 44.19 years, male-44.39 years, female-43.98 years. There are 11 officially recognized languages. English is widely used and many South Africans can speak more than one language.

South Africa is a multicultural society of overwhelming complexity, deep historical antagonisms, profound differences between rich and poor, deep post – colonial legacies and acute

problems of poverty (including lack of access to education and skill-learning). The inequalities of the past have almost guaranteed that the many people, who are ill equipped for the possible jobs in a highly competitive global marketplace, remain that way—under-skilled and under-educated.

There has been much concern about the effect of HIV on fertility in South Africa. The overall impact of HIV on the level of fertility is unlikely to be large in comparison with others factors influencing fertility in South Africa. It is estimated that the HIV-positive population in 2005 was approximately 6 million. The accumulated AIDS deaths up to 2005 were estimated to be 1.6 million. Families affected by the epidemic are being helped with foster care grants, assistance to child-headed households, food parcels and other interventions.

Contemplating the situation of the HIV infected and affected people in South Africa, VIVAT members answered to the needs of the population by sending

members to the Limpopo Province in 2003. The center is popularly known as MUROMANI (where the Romans stay) and is situated in Venda, which is a small area in the North Eastern corner of Limpopo Province. Thohoyandou is the former capital of the independent homeland and the proud heart of the Vha Venda people. The VIVAT members are surrounded by the villages and live among them. The majority of the people are poor and employed by the white farmers in the near by areas. Majority of the population are infected or affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The challenge is to respond adequately to the growing demand of the situation. Unemployment is another factor that the members are faced with. Lack of commitment especially from the side of the youth is another discouraging area. Teenage pregnancy, rape, sexual promiscuity is wide spread among the youth. Children are abused and not taken care of. The grandmothers often look after the families because the parents either died of AIDS or are sick or have gone to the big cities looking for greener pastures.

At the moment VIVAT members are trying to respond to the challenges and needs of the people. The members work with the youth, visiting them in the schools, teaching them prevention programs, and take care of the orphans. Around 600 orphans are coming to the Center monthly and they are given food-parcels, transport money, and school fees. They are visited at schools and at homes every week, just to make sure that they are getting what they need.

At a Clinic run by the members, nearly 180 patients receive Anti-Retroviral (ARV). The members started this project on March 25, 2004 by visiting the families and identifying the HIV infected and affected people with the help of other NGOs. On November 26, 2004 the members started to roll out ARV and have done Voluntary Counseling and testing (VCT) for nearly 800 patients. The mortality rate on the ARV-treatment is 0.11%. The patients on ARV are given food parcels, vegetables, transport, and counseling. The VIVAT members are taking care of the poor areas of the Center's location. The patients are visited weekly and are provided with services and goods based on their need. The members have a big vegetable and fruits garden, which is dedicated completely for the benefit of the patients and orphans. The center has 10 caregivers, 1 doctor, 2 nurses, counselors, administration helpers and drivers etc, who are working together in favor of the poor and HIV infected people.

The Anti-retroviral Treatment is a joint effort of the Government and the Southern African Catholic Bishop's Conference. (SACBC). This project is funded by PEPFAR (United States Presidents Emergency Plan For Aids Relief) The members are happy that the SACBC chose this clinic as one of their sites and are greatly appreciative for the funding provided by PEPFAR in order to accomplish this work. *(e-mail dated October 16, 2006)*

## **Forthcoming Events**

January 20-25, 2007 – **World Social Forum**: Nairobi, Kenya

February 7-16, 2007 - **The 45<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission for Social Development.**

February 26-March 9, 2007 - **The 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.**

### **HEARTFELT GRATITUDE**

**Fr. Reynaldo Jimenez, SVD** served as co-chairperson at VIVAT New York Office for nearly two years. Our sincerest gratitude to the services he has shared through his time, talent and diligence. May the God of Justice and Love ever permeate his missionary life.

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