



## **High Level Meeting on Millennium Development Goals (MDGS)**

The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon is focusing all of his energy and determination to promote the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) during his administration, and if completed, this will be his lasting legacy to the United Nations.

We can find no better way to begin our VIVAT newsletter, at this time, when the September General Assembly convenes, than to open with the words of our Secretary General, namely:

“The year 2008 should mark a turning point in progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Together with the President of the General Assembly, I am convening a special “High-level Event” on the MDGs on September 25, in New York.

This gathering will bring together world leaders, representatives of the private sector and our civil society partners to discuss specific ways to energize our efforts. I expect the meeting will also send a strong message that governments are ready to rise to the financing



**Ban Ki-Moon  
UN Secretary General**

for development challenge. I look forward to working with Member States to make the September event an unqualified success. Together, we must make this year one of unprecedented progress for the poorest of the poor, so that we can realize a better, more prosperous future for all.”

The UN General Assembly adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to galvanize global efforts and set concrete deadlines to improve the condition of the world’s poor in key areas of development. Africa was

and remains a central focus. Yet, despite the unprecedented efforts made in recent years in support of Africa’s development, the situation on most of the continent remains challenging...

The reasons for Africa’s lack of success in achieving the MDGs are complex and not well understood. It is against this background that the United Nations University and Cornell University have collaborated to map out, via a series of conferences (The UNU-Cornell Africa Series), the state of scientific and policy knowledge in the following critical areas.

This process will enable UNU and Cornell, in cooperation with UN agencies and academic institutions in and on Africa, to contribute to advancing fundamental knowledge and policy formation in the aforementioned areas in the African context, and thereby strengthen future capacity development initiatives in the region.

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## **DPI/NGO Conference on Human Rights, Paris**

*61st Annual DPI/NGO Conference commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was held during September 3-5, 2008 at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France*

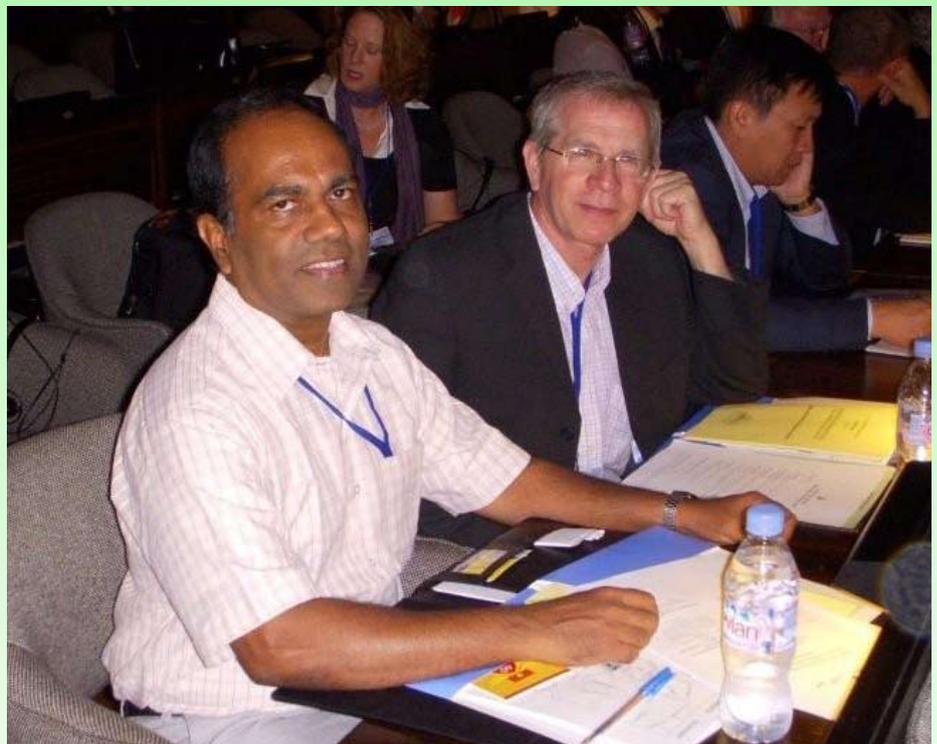
For the past 60 years, the DPI/NGO Conference had been held at the UN’s New York Headquarters. The 61st Annual DPI/NGO Conference was in Paris, France, to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It marked the first time in the Conference’s history that it was held outside of New York.

## Goals of the Conference:

- To provide a forum for diverse actors, including civil society, governments, media, academia, and the private sector to discuss timely human rights issues and their role in addressing them,
- To reflect on the challenges confronted by human rights organizations at the international, national and local levels and articulate measures to address those challenges;
- To identify the most effective ways in which civil society is yielding a positive impact on the respect for human rights, and acknowledge those contributions;
- To engage human rights defenders, victims of human rights violations, members of socially and economically marginalized communities, civil society from regions that are often underrepresented in UN fora, as well as youth, in informing the discussions around human rights;
- To underscore the gap between existing policies for the protection and promotion of human rights and their implementation, and recommend ways to advance accountability;
- To impact the awareness about human rights issues today among various sectors, including academia, media, the private sector and the broad public, targeting groups that are typically not informed by UN and NGO activities.

## Report on the Paris Conference

The DPI/NGO Conference helped us to appreciate still further the centrality of issues related to Human Rights in development work and in our common mission. It also helped us to deepen our awareness of the importance of having personal contact with the grass-roots work of human rights defenders and those who are persecuted in various ways as a result of violations of their basic rights and responsibilities. The many important speakers at the conference brought this message home in their personal testimonies and in their very presence. We found it most inspiring to be able to see and listen to many prominent figures in the history of human rights and we are convinced that this personal experience is what helps us to deepen our own conviction and commitment.



**Felix Jones, SVD-VIVAT International - member of the Executive Team of Central Office New York at the 61st annual DPI/NGO conference, 2008**

The Paris Conference also deepened our awareness of the important part that NGOs play in the work of human rights, how this needs to be understood more and more, and also the importance of international institutions such as the United Nations, various treaties, covenants, International Law and the role of the International Criminal Court, especially in promoting accountability within sovereign states. UN conferences open many doors to networking with other committed people and organisations. They help us to respond to global issues, and introduce us to various movements.

The DPI/NGO Conference in

Paris listened to the personal testimonies of many victims of human rights abuses as well as workers for human rights. The presence of Ambassador Stéphane Hessel, who was 30 years old when he participated in the drafting of the original Declaration on Human Rights made it an historical occasion. Stéphane made reference to René Cassin, Eleanor Roosevelt and others who were present at the drafting of the original declaration. It was a privilege to hear these first hand reports and to put a face on some of these historical people whom we have only read about before.

It was also a privilege to be present when Ingrid Betancourt addressed the Conference and

told of her nearly seven years in captivity in Columbia. She spoke of the nature of human rights being self-evident even in countries where they have not yet been enshrined by law. We listened to debates between different actors in the field of human rights including instrumental figures in the drawing up of the Earth Charter, members of important organisations.

### VIVAT Participation:

Four members of VIVAT ( one from New York and three from Europe) actively took part in this conferences. The conference provided the participants like VIVAT with a greater knowledge of measures and goals that can be achieved by working together with the United Nations and its partners to understand and reaffirm human rights for all. such as Human Rights Watch, UN Special Envoys, the Deputy Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and a host of other speakers whose lives have been dedicated to building a better world. It was immensely interesting to listen to these people and to have the opportunity to meet other participants and to share common interests and challenges. On reflection we believe that we have been given a strong mandate to promote global action on behalf of the poor and persecuted.



**Finbarr Tracey SVD, JPIC Coordinator-Irish British Province,  
Michael Duggan - Ireland, Sujata SSs -England**

## UN expert marks First anniversary of landmark declaration on Indigenous Peoples

### *“Indigenous Brazilians still suffering inequalities”*

– UN rights expert

August 25, 2008 – Brazil’s indigenous peoples still struggle to exercise real control over their lives and lands, despite some advances in their conditions and the Government’s commitment to improve the situation, a United Nations human rights expert said today after wrapping up a 12-day visit to the South American country.

S. James Anaya, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, said in a statement that indigenous people in Brazil are likely to be poor, to endure low health and education standards and to face discrimination that sometimes results in violence.

While the Government has promised to advance indigenous rights in line with the recently struck UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and with national constitutional protections, a significant part of Brazilian society opposes Government policies that try to respond to the aspirations of indigenous peoples.

“Reforms are needed to ensure that indigenous peoples are better able to exercise their right of self-determination within the framework of a Brazilian State that is respectful of diversity,” he said.

“It is evident that indigenous peoples frequently do not control the decisions that affect their everyday lives and their lands, even when their lands have been officially demarcated and registered, because of invasions and mining

by outsiders and other factors.”

During his official visit Mr. Anaya met with senior Government officials, human rights experts and with representatives of indigenous groups and civil society organizations and toured various areas in the states of Amazonas, Roraima and Mato Grosso do Sul, which have large indigenous populations.

The Special Rapporteur found that while indigenous communities have some input into the delivery of services to them by government agencies, they do not have adequate control and sometimes suffer from paternalistic attitudes from government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

“While culturally rich, indigenous peoples remain impoverished economically, without sufficient power or opportunities to develop on a sustainable basis,

are continually suffocated by discrimination.”

Health and education standards remain poor at best, especially for indigenous women and children, while Mr. Anaya said he also heard of persistent discrimination and “alarming accounts” of violence against indigenous individuals – particularly their most vocal leaders.

He added that a mechanism is missing for ensuring indigenous groups are adequately consulted on major development projects, such as the construction of highways, hydro-electric dams and large mines, that lie outside their lands but still affect them.

More broadly, too many Brazilians are unaware of the rights of indigenous peoples, even when they have been enshrined in the national constitution.

“A national campaign of education on indigenous issues and respect for diversity, guided by the Government in partnership with indigenous peoples, and with the support of the news media, would likely help build bridges of mutual understanding,” Mr. Anaya concluded.



## **VIVAT INTERNATIONAL - BRAZIL**

**The workshop elected the “G8” to articulate VIVAT International at the National level**



**The participants of the First VIVAT International Workshop in Sao Paulo, Brazil**

For the first time members of the eight religious congregations that form VIVAT International came together for a week-long workshop in Brazil. There were 40 participants. The workshop included a day on spirituality of Justice and Peace and integrity of creation by Alexandre Otter, SVD. Macos gave an input on how to net work for advocacy and lobbying. The VIVAT Team gave a full coverage of the vision, history, development, structure and activities of VIVAT international as an NGO and of the United Nations. These parts were interspersed by group activities. The workshop had two main objectives. 1.) To get to know VIVAT members in Brazil. 2.) To work together to foster our involvement in the JPIC apostolate and advocacy work in Brazil. The meeting elected a group formed by one representative from each congregation, which will be responsible to articulate VIVAT's mission and Vision at national level. The hope is that the group, affectionately called as “G8,” can keep a network that can lead to a more united NGO body.

Burning issues like, the situation of the comunidades quilombolas, Raposa da Serra do Sol and Justice nos trilhos, were addressed and taken up for further action at national and international levels.

Following the Workshop there was a two-day intensive program designed for people undergoing formation. The participants were from the founding and associated congregations. The program included input on the importance of JPIC already in the initial formation. Most of them were having their first contact with VIVAT's history, mission and vision and their participation and contribution indicate that they are a great asset to make VIVAT truly an areopago of the modern day in their local situation.

# Combating Soil Erosion and Desertification in Kenya

Dol Dol Catholic Mission, Soil Conservation and Reforestation project is conceived primarily as a model project for the areas of Dol Dol, Kimanjo and Mukogodo in Kenya, Africa. The soil erosion of the area is alarming and deadly. Through heavy rainfall the top soil is washed off and fine sand begins flowing through the rivers. The rain water digs deep into the soil and river channels are formed all over, and mind you they are occasionally twenty to thirty feet deep into the earth. Also, sand harvesting and charcoal burning are rampant in the aforementioned areas. Our fear is that if nothing is done today, then certainly within the next twenty five years this place will become a desert. Two years ago, the parish community embarked on a program to halt these destructive forces.

In the Dol Dol Mission, we have planted 125 trees. In Kimanjo, we have planted 275 trees. These two places are ideally located on the mountain slopes overlooking the townships of Dol and Kimanjo. This project covers an area of three acres of land. Small and big trenches of different sizes are dug to stop the soil erosion and to contain the water that runs down the mountain slopes.

The biggest challenge ahead for the coming few years is the constant care and the watering of the trees. The rains are very scarce, the termites are deadly and the elephants run wild through the land. Water is fetched from the nearby dams, but the two nearby dams are hell dry now. We fetch water from a dam 10 k.m. away. Hopefully, in time, we will be creating a small, but significant forest. The local communities and children from various schools are showing some interest by their visits and inquisitive questions.

*Soil Conservation and Reforestation Program:  
Dol Dol, Kenya, Africa James Mailady SVD*

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## GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

Agriculture is back on the international agenda. After having forced smallholder farmers and food self-sufficient countries to adjust to world free trade policies, and after the global market has dumped on impoverished countries all surplus of an intensive and state subsidized farming, now food has become GOLD. Food crops have become fair game for speculators hunting for big money. It is an economic opportunity.

In the past two years, world prices of basic commodities have risen steeply. The FAO food price index rose by 9% in 2006 and 23% in 2007. As of March 2008, wheat and maize price were 130 and 30% higher than a year earlier. Since January 2008 rice prices

have more than doubled. The poor have been most vulnerable to food prices hikes. Higher cereal prices are contributing to worsening hunger and malnutrition, increase impacts households' expenditures on health and education.

The 'unforeseen' food crisis seriously undermines the small and not homogeneous progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The food crisis emphasizes long-term structural problems in the global food system; it is estimated that 100 million people are pushed below the \$1 a day line.

The General Assembly called on the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to convene ad hoc

meetings to raise awareness and promote the engagement of stockholders in support of international relief efforts. The meetings were to address how best identify and implement urgent actions at country and sub-regional levels as well as ensure a stronger commitment from all stockholders to long-term actions including investments in agriculture and rural development. A Comprehensive Action Plan is needed and a High Level Conference on World Food Security was held in Rome, 3-5 June 2008.

In order to avert future crises, it is necessary to support policies of investment in developing country farmers; public sector support for agriculture, rural development and food security in developing coun-

tries; increased reliance on global and regional markets to make up for domestic production shortfalls. Special consideration has to be given to the effects of increasing production of bio-fuels on food availability and prices, to the effects of high energy prices driving up production and transport costs, to the effects of greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation and global warming on food production and prices, and finally to the effect of speculative investors activity on food prices.

Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, addressing the ECOSOC pointed out that many more crises would be faced because the limits of the world's resources are being pushed and because of the world's increasing population. Increased food production is vital in the poorest food importing countries. This would require financing the small farmers in order to increase productivity (seeds, fertilizer and irrigation). He also added that the food production that is subsidized and diverted into fuel, as in the case of corn is seriously aggravating the crisis. This crisis is not just an acute one but it is a chronic nutrition crisis for many. It is an ongoing chronic cycle of neglect. The MDGs are not met, for the developed countries have not fulfilled their promise.

However, we discuss challenges and obstacles in agriculture,

drought, rural development, inter-linkages and cross cutting issues; we keep on analyzing why things are not getting better. Yet, we do not question our general framework: our fixation with economic growth as the driving force for unsustainable development and social inequality. The obsession with economic growth – the very idea of ever increasing production – is clearly unsustainable when perceived from the point of view of its impact on the environment and society. Moreover, the present global economic growth is an extremely inefficient way of achieving poverty reduction; it turns out to be self-serving rhetoric of those who already enjoy the greatest share of world income. “Between 1990 and 2001, for every \$100 worth of growth in the world's per person income, just \$0.60 found its target and contributed to reducing poverty below the \$1-a-day line. As a result, to achieve a single dollar of poverty reduction, \$166 of extra global production and consumption is needed, with enormous environmental impacts which counter-productively hurt the poorest most.” It is the economic system that has to be radically changed. There are limits to growth. We are eating up our own planet. A sustainable economy is an economy that recognizes the dignity of each human being and their vital relationship with mother earth; an economy, which is based on politics of communion and not on the GDP. We do need

an economy of solidarity, simplicity, and sobriety. In other words, a nonviolent economy! A new redistribution of resources is required and the developed countries are called to recognize that they have overexploited – raped - our common mother earth; they are to apologize and give back what they have hoarded at the expenses of the majority of the world population. The development of the most affected is to become the main focus of our future policies, of our future inclusive and flourishing communities. At the negotiations table the presence of the most affected by our ‘western’ economic and agricultural policies is required.

It is no longer time for ‘win-win solutions’. It is our lifestyle that has to be challenged. The Pope gets it right when he stresses that this is a spiritual crisis more than an ecological, economic or political one.

A nonviolent and inclusive future cannot rely on new generation of technologies and transgenic plants. These latter aim at reducing labor more than increasing productivity; at agro-fuel production and world free trade system. Any “green revolution” or desire of integrating Africa into the actual global economy if entrusted only to the private sector and the large agro-industrial corporations may result into a stark utopia. The alternative to the new global impoverishing trend is to go local, indigenous, small, participatory, inclusive and nonviolent.

*By Michael Stragapede*

## Close the book on the hunger crisis.

Provide life-saving food and essential seeds and fertilizer to the 30 countries that need it most...

**TAKE ACTION**

