



Newsletter No. 47

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Dear Readers,

**Welcome to the 47th online issue of the VIVAT Newsletter.**

In this issue we highlight some of the major events VIVAT International has taken part in such as the Second Forum for Catholic-Inspired NGO's, the 54th Commission on the Status of Women, and the 48th session of the UN Commission on Social Development.

In light of the recent earthquake in Haiti, we take a look at the relief efforts undertaken by VIVAT members in response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis. We also continue our coverage on the distasteful effects of mining in Brazil and share some upcoming UN Days of Observance.

As always, we welcome feedback, ideas, stories, and updates from all of our members. We celebrate the unique insight, experience, and talent that VIVAT members possess and are encouraged by all the work that you are doing. Please send us your comments and feedback to [viny@vivatinternational.org](mailto:viny@vivatinternational.org)

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*“Peace is not just the absence of war. Like a cathedral, peace must be constructed patiently and with unshakable faith.” - Pope John Paul II*

## SECOND FORUM OF CATHOLIC-INSPIRED NGO'S, ROME

The Second Forum of Catholic-Inspired NGOs took place from February 12-14, 2010. The theme of the forum was "New Challenges in a Globalizing World," which aimed at addressing new ways of collaboration among Catholic-inspired NGOs and organizations. Representing VIVAT International at the forum were Milan Bubak, Generalate Secretary of JPIC, and Felix Jones, a member of the Executive Team of VIVAT.



*Felix Jones, Milan Bubak attend NGO Forum*

The forum was originally created with the vision of providing a dynamic space for exchange and forming strategic alliances on specific topics. The Catholic-inspired organizations that participate in the forum seek to increase the impact of the Christian message in public life. Overall, the mission of the forum of Catholic-inspired NGOs is to provide a worldwide system of collaboration and mutual help among all such NGOs through a spirit of Christian Communion, passionately promoting the values of Truth, the Common Good, "Subsidiarity," Solidarity, and the Human Person.

This forum brought together a wide variety of Catholic-inspired NGOs who are all active in advocacy in the international arena, and aimed at defining together an interactive mechanism that would continuously invite organizations to share ideas and to develop the most useful collaborative efforts. Participants discussed a number of key issues on the international agenda today, focusing mainly on advancing mutual understanding and collaboration in the areas of education; human rights; migration; health care; environment; and development.

Johan Ketelers, chairman of the Forum Working Group, remarked in his opening address, "In these times of rapid change, there is a growing need to develop new ways of collaboration. The appalling human realities we see in our everyday work remind us of how much there is to be done, and of how much new or enhanced collaborative models are needed".

In this light, participants sought throughout the forum to reflect on how, as members of NGOs, they can continue to deepen the cooperation and dialogue amongst themselves and with other peoples and organizations, and developed ideas for the future of a strong, active Forum Network. Participants shared what each currently does, as well as what each hopes to develop. Specifically, most participants expressed a desire to develop a better way to collaborate and network across different U.N. centers, especially as a means to address the concerns and crises of those who live in the developing world.

Overall, the forum represented a great success, representing the first time that such a collaborative effort of this size has been made at this level. The forum fashioned valuable possibilities for future collective action on a number of key advocacy issues. It fostered interaction between all committed members to the cause, and it encouraged thought on how organizations and individuals can more readily and actively get involved in our global village in a Christian way.

The forum initiated a realization for many organizations that we want a voice, need a voice, and have a voice. As Ketelers stated, "It is about new dynamics that we build together: Dynamics that call for commitment, transparency, expertise, and conviction. It is a process that invites political commitment on the basis of our expertise and action, our faith and existing intergovernmental policy agendas". Through the forum and consequent networking between organizations, all participants felt the need, and also the ability, to unite our work to add a new culture, vision, and spirit to all individual projects and collective work as a whole.

***"Solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone, and it cannot therefore be merely delegated to the State."***

***- Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate***

In the spirit of Ketelers' insightful remarks, the forum showed, ultimately, that if we agree on the urgent need for more collaboration, broader vision, and continued interaction, we should seek to secure short-term continuity of our organizations but, more importantly, focus on the long-term challenges of working together to build new political and social mechanisms that will make a difference in our world. We believe networking, as shown in this past forum in Rome, may be the most appropriate and effective invitation to unite our efforts in working for the Common Good of Humanity.





SOURCE: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/index.html>

## *VIVAT addresses Gender in Relation to Mining at the Commission on the Status of Women*

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) convenes annually in New York to discuss and encourage gender equality and the advancement of women worldwide. This year, from March 1-12, the CSW undertakes a special fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which contained milestone commitments to the world's women. The review is seen as an important step in overcoming the remaining obstacles and new

challenges faced by women, including those related to the Millennium Development Goals.

VIVAT, with the Working Group on Mining, is participating in the CSW by addressing key gender-related issues in the area of mining. The Working Group organized a parallel event to the Commission that specifically targeted discussion on the struggles of rural and indigenous women negatively affected by mining practices worldwide, through a DVD clip and presenta-

tions by two panelists, the event pushing the necessity of "Free, Prior, and Informed Consent". The Working Group on Mining hopes to bring to light the egregious negative impacts of mining in relation to women, indigenous peoples, and the environment to the international arena. VIVAT and the Working Group on Mining plan on holding two more parallel events during Commissions and Forums later this year on indigenous peoples' rights and on sustainable development.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN, PROMOTION OF WOMEN

In the spirit of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) currently taking place at the U.N. in New York, this article illustrates the concrete successes of the SSps in Ethiopia in promoting women empowerment and social inclusion of women and girls.

In Ethiopia, women are still considered less important in many aspects of life than their male counterparts. In addressing this pressing issue, the SSps of Ethiopia focuses their ministry in promoting the integral development of women.

*"The sisters...were able to drill a water source just within the residential area of the village community in order for women and children to have nearer access to water and so that they need not travel on foot for three to four hours a day to obtain water."*

One of the communities of SSps Region in Ethiopia is engaged in water project. It is a project making water available within the community to lessen the burden of women who are laboring daily to secure the water supply for the family. The Sisters, with the help of Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat water unit and some donors, were able to drill a wa-

ter source just within the residential area of the village community in order for women and children to have nearer access to water and so that they need not travel on foot for three to four hours a day to obtain water. The time saved from fetching water can now be devoted to a time for rest after working on the household chores every day. This same time can also now be used for community meetings, socialization and other activities which will enrich the women's lives. Such has been the successful experience of the women in the region of the water project.

Many of the SSps Communities also focus on promoting adolescent girls' formal education by providing them school materials, reference books for their study, and a place to study afterschool. Ordinarily, girls have little or

no access to places to study when they go home after school hours. The simple and unfortunate fact is that the girl children are less considered when it comes to  
(Continued on page 4)



**Women and children taking water from drilled well**

(Continued from page 3)

formal education. They are the last priority to be sent for formal education in every family. Therefore, the Sisters and staff of the project facilitate on-going lobbying and education awareness for girls' education, beginning first with their parents and their families, whose orientation are deeply rooted in a culture that girls need not bother with an education, for they are destined only to a domestic life of getting married and raising a family. Included in this activity is the signing of agreement with the parents of the girl child so that the opportunity to go to school and be given time to study at home will be assured.

Almost all of the SSpS communities also provide

***“When women thrive, all of society benefits, and succeeding generations are given a better start in life.” - Kofi Annan.***

opportunities for women to have economic activities through the provision of initial capital for petty trading and animal husbandry. These enable women to have their own money to contribute to the well being of the family and not be solely dependent on their male counterparts. This is also an opportunity for the women to have business orientation which promotes their economic empowerment. As experienced by the different groups in the project, women are more effective in doing such trading activities. This certainly confirms that women have the inner potential to deal effectively in economic sphere through their innate quality of patience and ability to nurture positive relationships with others.

## VIVAT INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP NAIROBI, KENYA

From the 11th of January to the 15th of January, members from the eight religious congregations that form VIVAT International came together for a workshop at The Dimesse Centre in Karen, Nairobi. The workshop aimed to initiate collaboration between the members, Board of Directors and executive teams of VIVAT, identify the most burning issues in our respective countries of work, and report on what concrete steps we are going to take in pursuit of these issues. 36 members participated in the five-day workshop.

disparities, legal issues, HIV/AIDS, environmental issues, women's issues, and so on. These discussions were complemented by the following presentations: Michael McCabe SMA, a missiologist, spoke on the spirituality of JPIC, Mary John and Marina Cassarino, the JPIC General Coordinators of the Holy Spirit and Comboni sisters presented the tasks and challenges of the JPIC Coordination ministry, and Gervase Taratara C.S.Sp. focused on the themes of Advocacy and Human Rights. VIVAT Executive Directors Zelia Cordeiro SSpS and Felix Jones SVD also presented on VIVAT's history and development, and on the strength and power of grassroots activism.

Finally, the group was able to enjoy a trip to the UN offices in Nairobi, a screening of former Vice President Al Gore's moving documentary on Global Warming 'AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH', and an Afro-fusion dance performance by youth from a Soweto parish, Nairobi.

VIVAT Executive team and JPIC Coordinators also designed and facilitated a half day program for people undergoing formation. The participants were from the founding, member 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 areopagus of the modern day in their local situation.



*VIVAT member from Middle East presents report.*

The workshop included various group discussions focusing on the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) situation in our respective places and our response to those situations. These discussions highlighted various challenges such as refugees, illiteracy, health issues, tribalism, economic injustice and



# VIVAT PARTICIPATES IN THE UN COMMISSION ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Commission on Social Development (CSocD), one of several commissions for the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), convened for its 48th session from February 3 to February 12, 2010, at the UN Secretariat in New York. The Commission comprises 46 member states that are elected on a rotating basis, and it serves primarily to address key social development themes and issues, as well as to follow up on implementation of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and Program of Action regarding social development. While the Commission meets annually to address these issues, this year's session marked an especially important milestone, as the Commission passed its first-ever resolution on promoting social integration. The resolution seeks to promote integrative policies as necessary in order to "eradicate poverty, promote full and productive employment, and achieve stable, safe, peaceful, harmonious and just societies for all". Throughout the ten-day session, the Commission held meetings, high-level panel discussions, resolution consultations, and side events, all with a focus on social development and social integration.

As with all UN Commissions and forums, NGOs and civil society play a large and informative role. This year, the Civil Society Forum released an important statement in commemoration of the fifteenth an-

niversary of the Copenhagen Declaration. The statement advocates for a "Society for All", encouraging governments to adopt policies and practices to promote the empowerment of all peoples. The statement goes on to emphasize the need of empowerment in order to eradicate poverty, among other goals of the Commission on Social Development, and concludes urging gov-



*VIVAT members work to promote the value of respect for human life in all peoples and cultures, based on the conviction that an authentic people is one that knows how to respect and care for the most defenseless and fragile life.*

ernments to adopt a new, strengthened human rights framework and address all issues of social exclusion within their states. The full text of the statement is available online, through the UN CSocD webpage.

While the Civil Society Forum statement is a tangible example of NGOs' role within the Commission's annual activities, side-events held during the ten-day session also allow NGOs to bring their on-the-ground experiences to the forefront of UN discussion regarding social development. During this session, VIVAT actively co-sponsored two successful side-events. The first, called "Climate Change,

Poverty and Social Inclusion: Exploring the Links", was a presentation that linked the ongoing climate crisis to the issue of poverty and social inclusion, illustrating how climate change relates to the topic. The second, called "Mining and Social Inclusion: Free, Prior and Informed Consent", presented a short movie clip and speaker presentation which both addressed the dire

circumstances surrounding mining practices, both in the U.S. and internationally, and advocated for the need for social integration practices to help curtail negative effects of mining on the indigenous peoples of the area, the environment, and the governments themselves. These two side-events allowed VIVAT

to link its own work with the work of other NGOs, and focused on the social development side of VIVAT's work. Upcoming UN Commissions scheduled for later this year, including the Commission on the Status of Women, the Indigenous Peoples Forum, and the Commission on Sustainable Development, will allow VIVAT to hold even more side-events, each linking to the specific area of concern of each respective Commission. We are looking forward to putting together several informative, thought-provoking, and action-inciting events for these upcoming Commissions.

# VIVAT INTERNATIONAL RESPONDS TO THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN HAITI

source: <http://pwojeespwa.blogspot.com/>



Fr. Marc Boisvert with a child of Pwoje Espwa.

The nation of Haiti has fought long battles against poverty, AIDS, and corrupt governance, yet nothing can compare to the devastation left in the wake of the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck on January 12, 2010. The earthquake, which hit just 10 miles west of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, left two hundred thousand people dead and three million people in need of emergency assistance - nearly half of whom are children, the world's most vulnerable population. In addition, the disaster severely compromised the availability of shelter, food, clean water, and sanitation facilities. The lack of these basic necessities coupled with insufficient health services have resulted in countless deaths and have aggravated the problem of inadequate medical care for those requiring specialized assistance, such as the 120,000 Haitian people currently living with or affected by HIV and AIDS.

Members of VIVAT International have been actively committed to the nation of Haiti long before the earthquake struck. The Oblates of

Mary Immaculate, the largest male congregation of religious in Haiti, have witnessed considerable damages to their surrounding community, including the destruction of many of their main buildings as well as the forced relocation of most of their members. Nevertheless, the congregation continues on in their pursuit of humanitarian relief. Some of the projects undertaken before the disaster serve as frameworks for this assistance, including "Pwoje Espwa" (Project Hope), an orphanage run by OMI Fr. Marc Boisvert. Pwoje Espwa, largely funded by the U.S. non-profit Free the Kids, is located

***"But we have not lost Faith, Hope and Love. We know God, though in a mysterious way, is walking at our side. And we ask Him to keep on protecting us and abundantly bless all our friends and benefactors." -Fr. Gasner Joint, OMI, in a letter to the Father General six days after the initial earthquake.***

about 100 miles from the epicenter of Haiti in the Les Cayes region. As Haiti's largest orphanage, Pwoje Espwa is already home to over 650 children - while feeding and educating 1200 other local children. To aid in the disaster relief efforts, the orphanage has now agreed to welcome an additional 100 orphans to their village.

VIVAT members from around the world have also joined in the Haiti relief efforts. The Missionaries of the Holy Spirit Prov-

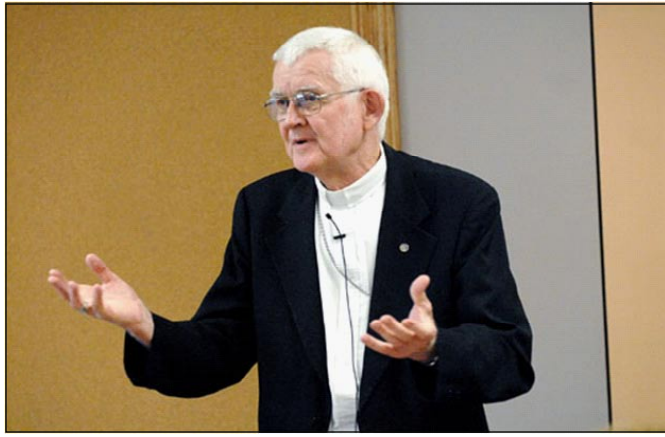
ince in the USA and Caribbean have responded to the call of Haiti by packing food, holding extra collections, and organizing fundraisers. The missionaries have also advocated for Haiti's debt cancellation and for relief and reconstruction assistance to be given in the form of grants instead of loans. Noting that their most important contribution is through their prayers and petitions for Haiti, the SSpS held special prayer services in some communities and remembered the people of Haiti during Holy Hours.

The calamitous effects of this humanitarian crisis are wide-ranging and therefore, require a comprehensive response from the international community. As the media headlines about Haiti begin to dwindle, VIVAT International's response to the crisis will not subside. Throughout the upcoming months and beyond, VIVAT members on the ground in Haiti and elsewhere in the world will continue in their efforts to help rebuild and strengthen the nation of Haiti through support, solidarity, and prayer.



Julita Bau, Angelica Chavol, Socorro Rodriguez and Genoveva Maria preparing food for Children in Haiti (organized by the Kids Against Hunger - Iowa).





## BISHOP PAUL DUFFY OF MONGU, ZAMBIA, CRITICIZED FOR SPEAKING UP FOR THE POOR

Oblate Bishop Paul Duffy of Mongu diocese, serving the people of Zambia's Western Province for the last 25 years, called on the Government of Zambia to help the poor by fulfilling a campaign promise to rebuild the main road and provide more economic opportunities for local people.

Bishop Duffy said the Western Province of Zambia still ranks as the poorest in the whole country and that poor people are still waiting to see promises fulfilled. This was especially true regarding the Mongu-Kalabo road, which has been in a worsening state for several years. He went on to say that people keep hearing promises from government leaders, but are still waiting for action.

Government leaders in Zambia are angrily rebuking Bishop Duffy's statements. A group affiliated with the ruling party is petitioning the Vatican's representative. Western Province of Zambia suffers more than any

other province from high poverty levels, low economic production and a neglected infrastructure. In Western Province, the majority of children are unable to obtain basic nutritional needs. Most women are highly disadvantaged and live in extreme poverty, vulnerable to HIV/AIDS as they are forced to engage in risky behaviors for economic survival. The Diocese of Mongu is involved in several development projects: it runs HIV/AIDS programs and the only teacher's training college in the region; it supports the Catholic radio station and operates hunger relief programs for the local people.

The Bishop's statement has received support from all civil society groups in Zambia, development organizations like Caritas Mongu and from a local member of parliament who said that he totally agrees with Bishop Paul Duffy's statement because the President of Zambia is the one who gave these promises to the people of Lukulu and that people voted for him on the basis that he was going to implement all those development programs.

In a show of solidarity, Zambian Oblate treasurer, Fr Godfrey Mpundu, described Bishop Duffy as a voice of the voiceless in Western Province. Fr. Mpundu suggested that the ruling government leadership review its own record in Western Province over the last 25 years which coincides with the time that Bishop Duffy has been doing missionary work in the region.

## LEVUBU CELEBRATES WORLD AIDS DAY

Since its official commencement in 1988, December 1st has annually been observed as World AIDS Day. The date serves as a day dedicated to raising awareness of AIDS pandemic worldwide, and brings together support for people infected with and affected by AIDS and HIV. This past year 2009, marked another successful commemoration of World AIDS Day for many VIVAT members and their congregations. One such commemoration was documented by Dolores Dorota Zok, SSpS in Levubu, South Africa.

On a seemingly bleak and rainy December 1, 2009, friends of the Mission of Muromani put

together the final preparations for their World AIDS Day activities. While the Venda people of the region believe that rain to be a blessing from God rather than a detriment, the impracticality of the situation began to be realized as the rains hit harder, and Friends of the Mission began to call their Bishop and other guests to inform them not to come. However as they sought to cancel all plans and postpone the day's events, the rain suddenly stopped and the sun began to peak out. Before they knew it, caregivers, patients, guests, and other friends began arriving to celebrate the day. All in all, a vast majority of the Mission's 630 patients on ARV

treatment, as well as other infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS, filled the Mission compound. The day's events began with words of prayer, followed by a moving procession at the compound's entrance to initiate the ceremony. The day continued with common prayers, music and dancing, and a special program prepared by caregivers and their patients. At the end of the joyful day, guests, patients, and their families each received a large sack of maize meal: a staple food for the Venda people, enough to feed their families for an entire month.

Despite the rains returning in the afternoon near the end of  
*(Continued on page 8)*

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the ceremony, Sister Dolores writes that the day was a great success and a truly uplifting experience for the Mission. World AIDS Day is a very significant date to the Mission, which has a large population of members affected by the AIDS pandemic. The day serves as an inspiring symbol of hope for those many of whom are impoverished, who may lose hope and faith from

day to day, because many of whom are impoverished. World AIDS Day is a reminder to them that they are not alone. By the end of the day, as the celebrations wound down and the guests began to leave, Sister Dolores writes, Friends of the Mission were saying, "In Muromani, miracles happen: the sick get better and the rain stops and gives way to the sun, because the Lord hears the prayer of the poor".

## JUSTICE ON THE RAILS

*"I am tired to handle this mining train that passes in front of my house ten times a day. I am tired of listening to this convoy of 300 wagons taking away the wealth of our land and leaving behind a trace of death and deadly accidents: one person dies every month on the train tracks! I am fed up with the white collar discourse: they guarantee that this is going to bring us progress but, for us here, everything has been stopped for more than 20 years!"*

This outburst reflects the situation of several families who live in the areas by the 'Carajás corridor' - a 559 mile railway that crosses the state of Pará and Maranhão, in the north of Brazil. Here the giant Vale do Rio Doce (Vale) dominates the economy and controls regional politics by exerting monopoly over the richest and most abundant iron mines in the world and also by controlling a vast transportation system that includes miles of railways and an immense fleet of cargo ships.

Vale is the second largest mining company in the world, operating in 30 countries. The company, originally owned by the state, has grown 19 times since its suspicious privatization, which transferred a national treasure to private interests. Vale disguises itself in green and yellow, achieving sustainability and social responsibility standards through powerful propaganda and influence over political parties. On the opposite side, peoples and communities in various parts of the world witness labor conflicts (3,500 people have been on strike in Canada for more than six months), pollution, chemical leaking, corruption of local administrations and even the use of private militias to guarantee the interests of Vale. This is, therefore, a good example of the arrogance of many mining companies in the world.

That is why, since the end of 2007, a network of movements from the north of Brazil has launched the campaign "Justiça nos Trilhos" ('Justice on Tracks' - [www.justicanostrilhos.org](http://www.justicanostrilhos.org)) in order to accuse the conflicts involving the multinational and to claim for socio-environmental justice. Since then, the participation in the World Social Forum in Belém strengthened the

network of alliances and the audacity of the campaign, which in 2010 will confront Vale publicly.

The first international meeting of the people affected by Vale will take place next April. Representatives from Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina, Chile, Canada, Mozambique, Italy and - possibly - Indonesia will get together for a three-day 'popular court', in which they will exchange information, expose to the media the hidden face of the company and interrogate Vale's directive board and stakeholders. The Brazilian Network of Environmental Justice ('Rede Brasileira de Justiça Ambiental') together with other big and small entities from Brazil will then deepen an important alliance with the Observatory of Mining Conflicts in Latin America (Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros em America Latina) and with international unionist networks from



*Justice for the land wounded by the Brazilian mining giant Companhia Vale do Rio Doce*

Canada and the US. Right before the event there will be two regional marches - one in Pará-Maranhão and the other in the state of Minas Gerais. This way a better exchange of experiences and strategies may occur between national and international actors involved in all sorts of territorial conflicts.

A precious documentary-film presented in three languages (Portuguese, English and Italian) about the conflicts in the Carajás region will be launched during the event. It will serve as a privileged instrument of accusation and collective consciousness.

In the name of this network we invite VIVAT to support us in whatever is possible: the open veins of Latin America need to resume feeding the anemic body of the poor!



# UNGA DECLARES 2010 INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF BIODIVERSITY



Photo by Wiktor Kanarski, from PNG

**Biodiversity**, the variety of life on Earth, is essential to sustaining the living networks and systems that provide us all with health, wealth, food, fuel and the vital services our lives depend on. Human activity is causing the diversity of life on Earth to be lost at a greatly accelerated rate. Felling or burning

of forests, removal of mangroves, intensive farming, pollution stress, overfishing and the impacts of climate change are all destroying biodiversity. These losses are irreversible, impoverish us all and damage the life support systems we rely on every day. But we can prevent them.

Throughout 2010, there will be various events taking place throughout the world to promote conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, to help increase public awareness for the many facets of biodiversity, and to integrate this issue into key political and social processes. To name a few, over 400 environmental advocates attended the UNDP-sponsored North American Launch

of the Year of Biodiversity, held at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City on February 10 of this year. One day during the 65th session of the United Nations General Assembly will be dedicated to the issue of biodiversity, marking the first opportunity for Heads of State and Government from all over the world to meet and discuss how to address the global challenges for biodiversity. Lastly, celebrations and activities will occur worldwide on the annual International Day of Biodiversity, to be held May 22nd of this year.

*For more information and to learn how you can participate, please visit <http://www.cbd.int/2010/welcome/>.*

## 2010, INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE RAPPROCHEMENT OF CULTURES

The declaration of 2010 as the International Year for the Rapprochement will serve as the culmination of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010), as well as the starting point for a new strategy in pursuing equal dignity of cultures and the strengthening of cooperation for lasting peace. Capitalizing on the more than 60 years of experience in advancing "the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples", the GA has designated UNESCO as

the lead agency in celebration of the Year.

As stated by UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova, "The objective of this International Year is to help dissipate any confusion stemming from ignorance, prejudice and exclusion that create tension, insecurity, violence and conflict...Exchange and dialogue between cultures are the best tools for building peace."

In drafting a plan of action for the successful realization of the Year's objectives, Member States and partner organizations identified four

major strategic themes. UNESCO and its partner organizations will aim to promote reciprocal knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity build a framework for commonly shared values, strengthen quality education and the building of intercultural competences, and foster dialogue for sustainable development.

*For more information on related events and contacts, please visit the event website at <http://www.un.org/en/events/iyrc2010/index.shtml>.*

## INTERNATIONAL MOTHER EARTH DAY

**April 22, 2010** will mark the 40th anniversary of Earth Day. It will be "recognized by future generations as a turning point for all people worldwide and will mark the beginning of a new era of personal, corporate, and government responsibility for preserving the Earth."

**Background:** Acknowledging that the Earth and its ecosystems is our home, and convinced that to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations, it is necessary to promote harmony with nature and the planet, the General Assembly, on 22 April 2009, designated 22 April as International Mother Earth Day (resolution 63/278). In doing so, the Assembly recognized that "Mother Earth" is a common expression in a number of countries and regions, reflecting the interdependence that exists among human beings, other living species and the planet we inhabit.

**Goal:** To "cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystems." (Continued on page 10)



## WAYS TO OBSERVE EARTH DAY: *(Continued From Page 9)*

- Spread the word about Earth Day so that others can participate in these activities too.
- Learn more about the environment or join groups that help protect the environment in your area.
- Make a commitment to reduce, reuse, and recycle.
- Support local growers and producers of food and products, reuse plastic bags or use cloth bags, recycle used items by making craft projects that can support local ecosystems, such as bird houses or baskets.
- Take part in the Plant-for-the-Planet Campaign by planting trees. <http://plant-for-the-planet.org>
- Calculate your eco-footprint using the Earth Day Network Footprint Calculator at <http://earthday.net/footprint2/index.html>
- Hold round tables, discussions, and lectures educating the public about pressing environmental issues and the importance of maintaining local and global ecosystems. <http://www.earthday.net/node/89>.

## THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The most popular and extensive UN means of monitoring Human Rights at the moment, is the Universal Periodic Review (known as the UPR by all in Geneva). And according to Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary-General, 'it has great potential to protect and promote human rights in the darkest corners of the world'.

In brief and stated simply this is a review process of the human rights record of each of the member states of the UN. In all there are 192 such states and the Vatican and Palestine are not included. It is commonly known as a 'peer review' whereby states review each other as opposed to being reviewed by experts.

The Human Rights Council (HRC), made up of 47 State representatives is the body that leads this process. It is important to say that while the process is State led, NGOs can and do play an important role in the review. They cannot intervene to ask questions, make statements or recommendations during the review session but the role they play before and after the review is vital.

Prior to the review they can make submissions about the situation of human rights in their country. These contributions are compiled by the office of the high commissioner for human rights into one of the three major reports available to all at the time of the review. After the review NGOs can remind governments of the list of recommendations they accepted at the time of the review. And they can bring this information to a wider audience in Civil Society.

At the heart of the process is an invitation. Each State is invited to publicly announce what they are doing on an ongoing basis, to fulfill their human rights commitments. It is not simply a matter of saying what basic provisions have been made in the Constitution and in National Laws. They must also detail how these declarations are implemented and protected.

The Review of States began a little over two years ago. 112 countries have gone through the process to date. We have now passed the half stage of a four year cycle. Up to this point all the countries listed in the calendar have taken part in the Review. This is a good indication of how serious the countries are taking this new monitoring mechanism. Usually a high level delegation attends to present the review.

**For those who are interested, there is plenty of information about the UPR on the web.**

*Here are a few hints to get started:*

*It is essential to look at the OHCHR website. This page is in English. You can choose any of the six UN languages from this page. Scroll down till you see on the right side "Human rights monitoring mechanisms." In the window click on Universal Periodic Review. From here you can access plenty of information about the UPR process for individual countries as well as accessing all the reports and recommendations.*

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/WelcomePage.aspx>.

### **Further references on civil society engagement with the UPR:**

*Road Map for Civil Society Engagement with the UPR, by Conectas and International Service for Human Rights: [www.conectas.org/coloquio/leituras/RoadMap\\_en\\_16.09.09.pdf](http://www.conectas.org/coloquio/leituras/RoadMap_en_16.09.09.pdf)*

*The Universal Periodic Review – Handbook, by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) [www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/UPR\\_HANDBOOK.pdf](http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/UPR_HANDBOOK.pdf)*

*The Universal Periodic Review: The Role of Civil Society, by Amnesty International [www.amnesty.org/en/unitednations/universalperiodicreview/roleofcivilsociety](http://www.amnesty.org/en/unitednations/universalperiodicreview/roleofcivilsociety)*

*NGO page, by UPRinfo.org: [www.uprinfo.org/NGOs.html](http://www.uprinfo.org/NGOs.html)*

*Questions and Answers on the Universal Periodic Review, by International Alliance of Women: [www.womenalliance.org/pdf/UPR\\_AandA.pdf](http://www.womenalliance.org/pdf/UPR_AandA.pdf)*

*How can NGOs engage with the UPR? by International Service for Human Rights [www.ishr.ch/content/view/212/293/](http://www.ishr.ch/content/view/212/293/) <http://upr-epu.com/ENG/index.php>*