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In this first issue of VIVAT International Newsletter, we introduce briefly the work of VIVAT International, provide information about the role of NGOs in the UN, and describe some of the activities of the officers of VIVAT International at the UN.

About VIVAT International

VIVAT means "Let Live!" It implies a commitment to espouse the cause of our sisters and brothers who are most vulnerable to the forces of our 21st century global village. The following excerpts from the VIVAT International Charter show its basic orientation.

Sharing a vision of the world and of every human being as created in goodness and dignity, and believing in the equality in rights and in dignity of all individuals, peoples and cultures, we commit ourselves to promote justice, harmony and reconciliation in the world.

We therefore aim to:

- Reach out to persons and peoples living in poverty of any kind, and share in their efforts for a restoration of well-being, dignity, and freedom.
- Promote human rights, sustainable development, understanding and harmony between peoples, cultures, classes and religions, and the creation of a world society and of local societies that enable the participation of all.
- Work for ecological sustainability, the protection of biodiversity, and the preservation of the richness of the planet for future generations.

We recognize that these goals are entirely compatible with the work of the United Nations for human rights, peace and development. We also recognize that the United Nations is an important forum for collaboration with many

others in the world who share these goals. We therefore seek to work together with the United Nations, as well as with other agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

We believe that the presence and long-term experience of our members in many and variegated situations in the world are an important resource for achieving these goals.

The goals of the organization are:

- To promote networking among its members, and most particularly to promote collaboration with the United Nations in achieving common goals such as the goals of peace, respect for human rights, socio-economic and ecological well-being, and equitable and harmonious relations between peoples and nations,
- To distribute information aimed at awareness-raising among its members.
- To glean the grassroots experience and insights of its members and bring these to the attention of others, particularly the United Nations.
- To carry out liaison for networking and collaboration with other agencies and NGOs.

NGOs and the UN

VIVAT International is one of almost 4,000 NGOs collaborating with the United Nations. The Red Cross was the pioneer NGO at the very outset of UN existence. It was a major partner of the UN in rebuilding war-stricken countries and became the model for partnership between NGOs and the UN.

The UN defines an NGO simply as: “any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group which is organized on a local, national or international level.”

NGOs are generally task-oriented and run by people with a common interest. They perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions such as:

- Bringing citizens’ concerns to Governments
- Monitoring policies and encouraging political participation at the community level
- Providing analysis and expertise
- Serving as early warning mechanisms
- Helping monitor and implement international agreements

The Secretary-General has sought to build and expand constructive UN partnerships with civil society and the private sector. He calls this partnership the “quiet revolution”.

The CONFERENCE of NGO’s (CONGO)

The CONGO is an independent, international, not-for-profit association that facilitates the participation of NGOs in UN debates and decision-making processes.

It ensures that NGOs are present when governments discuss issues of global concern and facilitates NGO discussions on such issues.

Through ad hoc committees it provides for a discussion of substantive matters by its members and members of the UN Secretariat, UN delegations and other experts.

(Website: www.conferenceofngos.org)

Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations

*Adopted by representatives of 50 countries
26 June 1945, San Francisco, California,
USA.*

*WE, THE PEOPLES OF THE
UNITED NATIONS,*

DETERMINED

** to save succeeding generations
from the scourge of war, which twice in
our life-time has brought untold sorrow
to mankind, and*

** to reaffirm faith in fundamental hu-
man rights, in the dignity and worth of
the human person, in equal rights of
men and women and of nations large
and small, and*

** to establish conditions under which
justice and respect for the obligations
arising from treaties and other sources
of international law can be maintained,
and*

** to promote social progress and bet-
ter standards of life in larger freedom,*

AND FOR THESE ENDS,

** to practice tolerance and live to-
gether in peace with one another as
good neighbors, and*

** to unite our strength to maintain in-
ternational peace and security, and*

** to ensure, by the acceptance of prin-
ciples and the institution of methods,
that armed force shall not be used,
save in the common interest, and*

** to employ international machinery
for the promotion of the economic and
social advancement of all peoples,*

*HAVE RESOLVED TO COMBINE OUR
EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE
AIMS.*

*Accordingly, our respective Govern-
ments, through representatives as-
sembled in the City of San Francisco,
who have exhibited their full powers
found to be in good and due form, have
agreed to the present Charter of the
United Nations and do hereby establish
an international organization to be
known as the UNITED NATIONS*

SHARING EXPERIENCES AND INSIGHTS

By: Lawrence Correa, SVD

GENEVA, JUNE 2000

I went to Geneva to take part in two events:

1. *Geneva 2000 Forum*, which also concentrated on social development, (22-30 June 2000).

2. The **24th** Special Session of the UN General Assembly, entitled *The World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) and Beyond: Achieving social development for all in a globalizing world* (26-30 June 2000).

Poverty eradication is one of our main issues, as we believe all other problems are related to the impoverishment of peoples. The focus was always to see the developments in the summit in relation to poverty and how policies and decisions taken affect the poor both in the developed and developing countries, and especially in Africa. I supported the idea of establishing a convention on the eradication of poverty. Though this idea is not in the final text, the experts clarified that poverty eradication is already approved and ratified as part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On the whole it was a fruitful time for me as I had the opportunity to contribute to the thinking and influence of NGOs.

I attended both events as an associate of Franciscans International. I am grateful to them for giving me this opportunity.

NEW YORK, October 17, 2000

Celebration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and the International Year for a Culture of Peace: in honor of those who build social justice in the face of hunger, ignorance and violence.

Many NGOs supported this commemoration co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Burkina Faso and France to the United Nations.

On this occasion, I was privileged to read the text in English on the Commemorative Stone in honor of the victims of extreme poverty, engraved on the Plaza of Human Rights and Liberties in Paris, of Father Joseph Wresinski, Founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World (France):

*“Wherever men and women
are condemned
to live in extreme poverty
human rights are violated,
To come together
to ensure that these rights
be respected
is our solemn duty.”*

The same text was read by others in Arabic, Russian, Spanish and French.

SHARING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

By: Carmen Castro, SSpS

Sowing Seeds of the Kingdom

When I ponder on what I believe is a great challenge for religious women and men to engage in being representatives of their respective NGO-congregations to the United Nations, I think of the parables of the *sower* and the *seed*. Committing to VIVAT International is believing that I take a lesson of faith from both the sower and the seed.

At this stage of our presence here in the UN, the voice of VIVAT will not be heard from the podiums and microphones in the UN Conference Halls and Meeting Rooms. The voice

of VIVAT, just another NGO in partnership with the UN, is heard and will be heard in a system and process that begins with meetings at an NGO caucus, listening to multiple ideas of presenters, entering roundtable discussions... and that is where the VIVATvoice may start the task of the *sower*, believing that somewhere along the line, the tiny *seed* may take on new life, but in relation with other NGOs, other UN agencies and civil society.

Formulation of a declaration to be presented in any UN debate of an issue at hand follows a process that is well examined as to credibility, depending on who (NGOs names

and signatures) submits the paper. After the submission to the UN Secretariat, one never knows what will happen until the final declaration of a UN Commission. This is the time for close follow up, study and advocacy.

There are only a dozen religious congregations that frequently meet in conferences, meetings, caucuses or seminars. These include: Franciscans, Maryknolls, Mercy Sisters, Sisters of Charity, Dominicans, Vincentians, Congregation of St Joseph, Loretto Sisters, Presentation Sisters, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Charity Sisters and Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

Although we are a very small minority in the vast multitude of UN staff and personnel, we are convinced that it is good to be here to contribute to making the Kingdom present. This group meets once a month in the Office of the International Catholic Organization (ICO) just beside the UN Headquarters. It is in this circle that one is most at home because we share common values.

The greater challenge is sowing Kingdom Seeds in other circles where ethical values are hardly felt or not felt at all. Here is where the power of the Sower of the Seed takes over.

UNITED NATIONS 2001 OBSERVANCES (March-September)

*In line with our partnership with the UN,
we are invited to integrate the following dates
into our congregational planning in all levels.*

2001 is:

- **International Year of Volunteers**
- **UN Year of Dialogue among Civilizations**
- **International Year of Mobilization against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance**

Observances:

March:

- 8 UN Day for Women's Rights and International Peace
- 21 Int'l Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- 21-27 Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination
- 22 World Day for Water
- 23 World Meteorological Day

April

- 7 World Health Day
- 23 World Book and Copyright Day

May

- 3 World Press Freedom Day
- 15 Int'l Day of Families
- 17 World Telecommunication Day
- 25-31 Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories
- 31 World No-Tobacco Day

June

- 4 Int'l Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression
- 5 World Environment Day
- 17 World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought
- 28 Int'l Day against Drug Abuse, Illicit Trafficking Victims of Torture

July

- First Sat: Int'l Day of Cooperatives
- 11 World Population Day

August

- 9 Int'l Day of the World's Indigenous people
- 12 Int'l Youth Day
- 23 Int'l Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its abolition

September

- Opening day of the Gen. Assembly
- Int'l Day of Peace
- 8 Int'l Literacy Day
- 18 Int'l Day for the preservation of the Ozone Layer
- Last week: World Maritime Day