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VIVAT INTERNATIONAL at its FIRST CROSSROADS

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According to its Charter, the presidency of VIVAT International (VI) alternates every two years between the SVD Superior General and the SSpS Congregational Leader. Having started my term as the first president of VI on 18 November 2000, I am now about to hand over the presidency to the SSpS Congregational Leader, Sr. Agada Brand. Before I do so, however, I would like to thank sincerely all those who were instrumental in setting up this joint SSpS-SVD NGO.

Many sisters and confreres collaborated in this joint project. The idea was already being discussed by a few members of both congregations when John Shevlin SVD made a formal proposal to the SVD Generalate and provided information about the requirements and procedures of application. Sr. Judith Vallimont and Bro. Bernie Spitzley did the preliminary study on the feasibility of the project; Sr. Maria Consolacion Matnao and Fr. Mick Seigel, as JPIC coordinators at both our generalates, accompanied the process of establishing the project; Sr. Maria Carmen Castro and Fr. Lawrence Correa collaborated as the first chairperson and co-chairperson respectively of the VI office in New York; Fr. Thomas Griffith and Fr. Jefferson Pool, both of the SVD USC province, helped in the legal and financial aspects of the project; Sr. Eden Panganiban, Fr. Leo Kleden and Fr. Michael Heinz (with Fr. Estanislau Chindacasse occasionally substituting), along with Sr. Maria Consolacion Matnao and myself, composed the first board of directors; and Fr. Charles D'Souza, SVD Secretary General, acted as VI Secretary. Many more sisters and confreres have collaborated in the tasks of bringing to reality the bi-monthly VI Newsletter; many from on-the-ground collaborate by sending reports, reproducing sections of the VI newsletter in their own publications, spreading the VI newsletter in creative ways, or attending conferences in the name of VI. To them all, my sincere thanks and gratitude.

Two years are certainly too short to undertake an evaluation of VI. Yet, this first crossroads in this joint endeavor of the Arnoldus family offers an opportunity to attempt to take stock of VI. What has been done? What has been achieved?

(1) Certainly if we consider its impact on the world at large, one can wonder if VI was worth the effort. Have the lives of the poor been improved because of VI? Has there been more justice for the marginalized, more peace in the world, more attention to the care of our environment? Has there, indeed, been more LIFE, and more fullness of Life, because of VIVAT? Perhaps a realistic answer to all these is NO. But then these are all problems which none of the great powers in the world, and not even all of them together, have resolved. And, indeed, what can two per-

VIVAT International
greet you at CHRISTMAS
2002 and NEW YEAR 2003
with a prayer filled with
HOPE that PEACE find a
home in your heart and
in all hearts ...till an
enduring Peace happens
unconditionally embracing
ALL as children
of God.

sons released full time for the VI office in New York realistically do in the face of all these serious problems, even if they managed to network successfully with all our sisters and confreres involved in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) work all over the world? No doubt, some small achievements were made, perhaps a change in the formulation of a section of this or that UN document, a more visible religious presence in the modern areopagus which is the United Nations, or some influence towards a more pro-poor stance taken by one or the other UN body. Certainly, there have been small changes or minor readjustments here and there. But the bigger picture seems to remain the same, or even grow worse with or without VI. Indeed, one can well wonder whether it is really worth having VI?

(2) But perhaps we should be gentler with our view of VI. After all, the first years necessarily had to be dedicated to setting up VI as a legal corporation and an accredited NGO and establishing the office in New York. These organizational matters take time and require a lot of attention to small details. In this regard, I believe we can say that our two representatives in New York, obviously with the help of our USC and US provinces, score high. First of all, they have managed to have VI recognized as a legal corporation, with corresponding by-laws, under the State of Illinois in the US. Then, they have succeeded in setting up a functional office in NY, very close to the UN headquarters. And not only has the physical office been established, also a network of our JPIC coordinators in the provinces and regions is in the process of being developed. A mode of communication with the Board of Directors in Rome has also been created. Twice in this two-year period, the chairperson was able to attend the meetings of the Board in Rome. And thirdly, our VI New York office has been working on fulfilling the requirements for the accreditation of VI as an NGO at the UN. We expect that VI will be fully accredited with ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) in June 2004 and with DPI (Department of Public Information) in June 2005. The final application to the UN is expected to be made in February 2003.

(3) But perhaps more important than whatever impact it may have had on the world of the poor and the organizational work it has done is the awareness raising that VI has brought about in both our congregations. And in this regard, there are two particular areas of awareness raising.

First, the awareness about the world-transforming dimension of our mission. Slowly, but hopefully surely, we are beginning to see that our mission cannot be totally detached from the crucial problems of our world: poverty, injustice, war, gender inequality, HIV/AIDS, violations of human rights, ecology, racism, refugees, indigenous peoples. Indeed our mission is basically one of witnessing to God's Kingdom and entails creating a new heaven and a new earth. Terrorism, ethnic wars, religious conflicts and other news we read in the papers, hear on the radio or see on television no longer seem distant to us or things that do not concern us. We begin to see a religious, indeed, a spiritual dimension to all these problems, just as we begin to see a prophetic or a political dimension to our mission of proclaiming the Divine Word.

Secondly, the awareness about the need to collaborate among ourselves as two congregations in the one Arnoldus family. Indeed, VI is not just about our presence as religious missionaries at the UN, but also about collaborating as SSpS-SVD partners in mission. Undoubtedly, those in the Board of Directors and in the office in NY will testify to the fact that collaboration requires a lot of give and take, and above all mutual respect and acceptance, if decisions are to be common and shared from the start. But I believe we are learning and growing. As we all know, VI is probably the very first endeavor of a truly joint project that is collaborative from the very beginning. As such VI has been instrumental to this growth in collaborative spirit among our sisters and confreres.

Dear Sisters and Confreres, in the light of what has been said above, I do believe that it is well worth while having Vivat International as our NGO at the United Nations. It is with this conviction that I pass on the presidency of VI to Sr. Agada Brand, SSpS. And as I do so, I ask that you lend her your full support and collaboration.

Vivat Deus Unus et Trinus in cordibus nostris!

Fraternally in the Word and the Spirit,
Antonio M. Pernia, SVD
October 18, 2002
Rome, Italy

THE JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT

Johannesburg, South Africa, was home to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) from August 19 to September 4, 2002. Johannesburg welcomed about 22,000 participants from all corners of the globe—government delegates, civil society delegates, and media representatives. The theme of WSSD was “*People, Planet and Prosperity*” and of the accompanying Civil Society Forum “*A Sustainable World is Possible*.” Both aimed to draw up a plan to implement Agenda 21 (from the Rio Earth Summit, 1992) in light of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development.

The real challenge for WSSD was to address Agenda 21 in the changed context of globalization and terrorism. Other contentious issues hammered out at the WSSD were subsidies to farmers, trade, corporate responsibility and governance. The summit zeroed in on five key areas of action, known by the acronym WEHAB: Water and sanitation, Energy, Health, Agricultural productivity, Biodiversity and ecosystem management.

Drawbacks and Limitations

Every participant who stayed the three weeks experienced the difficulties of accommodation, the pass-systems, wasted time and energy travelling the distances between venues, and the general confusion especially during the first week because of inadequate communication of necessary information for the thousands that suddenly filled every nook and cranny of the city. In hindsight, Johannesburg organizers lacked foresight to balance

numbers and spaces available. Certainly, there are many lessons for organization and management but, over all, Johannesburg deserves a word of thanks for its achievement.

VIVAT International at the WSSD

Amidst the throng of participants were four delegates of VIVAT International : Lawrence Correa SVD, VI Co-Chairperson, Mick Seigel SVD, Marie Jose Garcia SSpS and Thomas Nelluvely SVD. The VI delegates participated in various events, concentrating on those connected to the four VI issues of focus.

Appropriately, 2003 was proclaimed *International Year of Fresh Water* by the UN to give priority of importance to this prime necessity of billions of people in the developing countries (see www.wateryear2003.org).

A statement jointly prepared by VI and Franciscans International was distributed (full text on VI website, under sustainable development). Some suggestions from that statement were used when the NGOs prepared a common statement to the official UN WSSD.

VI, FI and International Movement ATD Fourth World organized a side event on the topic “Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication”. Mick Seigel SVD was one of the speakers. He spoke on “debt cancellation and justice as a condition for sustainability”.

(The complete texts of *The Plan of Implementation* and *The Johannesburg Declaration* are available on the VI website under sustainable development)

At the joint VI, FI and International Movement ATD Fourth World side event, the participants came up with two proposals in regard to debt and submitted them to the civil society drafting committee. These were:

Recognizing that a government's primary responsibility is to the well being of its people, we propose that the following ideas be incorporated into paragraph 80 of the plan of implementation:

- A. *That it be established in international law that a certain portion of a each country's budget is to be held untouchable to creditors and made available for health, education, welfare, housing, employment and development.*
- B. *That it further be established in international law that when compound interest is applied to a loan to a sovereign borrower or to a government guaranteed loan that subsequently becomes the responsibility of the government, that a stay to the accumulation of interest be applied once debt servicing obligations reach a certain proportion in relation to the principal.*

Some Side Events in which VI Participated:

1. A one day conference on *What Lies Beyond Globalization?—Localization as an Alternative*, organized by the New Economics Foundation. Participants analyzed the impact of globalization on developing countries and showed that localization could solve some of the problems faced by the poor. (Full text: VI website, under sustainable development)
2. Civil society march, held August 31, 2002.
3. Civil society workshop on *Human Rights, Environment and Sustainable Development*

on September 1, 2002. This workshop was designed to provide participants with information, tools and resources to enable them to use human rights principles and mechanisms to protect the environment and promote sustainable development.

4. Global governance caucus. (Full text: VI website under sustainable development.)
5. The Peace Caucus, which brought out a declaration *No Sustainable Development Without Peace*. (Full text: VI website, under sustainable development)

THE EARTH CHARTER AND FOLLOW-UP TO THE SUMMIT

VI has placed much hope in the Earth Charter. Although it did not occupy the expected place in WSSD, its spirit and much of its vision and strategies are seen in sections of the WSSD Political Declaration. VIVAT takes the Earth Charter with as much commitment as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Post-Johannesburg, VIVAT will be closely watching WEHAB. VI members could participate in different ways: at the local level identify issues related to WEHAB such as water, sanitation, pollution, HIV/AIDS, eco-friendly farming, deforestation. Then see what can be done in networking with like-minded people and organizations. Put pressure on governments to

pass legislation to implement the decisions of WSSD. While terrorism is certainly evil, one cannot divert resources and funds from more serious problems such as extreme poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. VI believes that as poverty and injustice decrease, the number of people being drawn to terrorism or supporting it will proportionally decrease.

We are challenged to change our lifestyles personally and communally to consumption patterns and economic behavior that contribute to sustainability. Finally, VINY encourages VI members to send in action reports on Sustainable Development, most necessary for our lobbying, advocacy and networking.

COMMENTS FROM THE VI PARTICIPANTS

Thomas Nelluvely, SVD (Botswana) : *The Civil Society Forum was total confusion during the first week. There was a lot of talk about 'networking', but each group was busy with its own agenda. Gradually, things fell in place. In the UN, there was a lot of horse trading. Powerful governments, especially one leading country, resisted any compromise. Many had given up hope and christened it the 'summit of corruption'. However, though not up to expectations, most expressed satisfaction with the outcome.* (Thomas had an unpleasant welcome. On his first day in Jo'burg, he was held up at knifepoint by thieves in broad daylight. Gabby Afagbeggee SVD drove them off with a well timed scream!)

Marie Jose Garcia, SSpS (Botswana): *It was my first time at a summit. There were many opportunities but I focused on issues relevant to VIVAT and to my present work—poverty eradication, women, children, peace, health, especially HIV/AIDS. The Civil Society March was a very powerful experience. In all the varied experiences, I sensed the presence of the Creator Spirit caring for the world. I am grateful for the experience and commit myself to continue the networking with those who work towards the same goal—a better world for all."*

Mick Seigel, SVD (Japan): *The experience of the summit was a good one. The outcome has not been very significant. There are always two approaches to social change—from below and from above. The ideal is that these go parallel, but this time the governments have been unwilling. We can still work for a change in our lifestyles, our economic behavior, etc. We can change society from the bottom up.*