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BRINGING AFRICA INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF DEMOCRACY AND WORLD ECONOMY

"Only by multilateral action can we give people in the least developed countries the chance to escape the ugly misery of poverty, ignorance and disease."

(Secretary-General Kofi Annan, UN General Assembly, 12 September 2002)

Africa is by far the poorest continent in the World, as is shown by the fact that it includes 34 of the 49 Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Almost all in the UN recognize and accept that the continent has chronic and acute problems. In fact, section VII of the UN Millennium Declaration makes new commitments to meeting the special needs of Africa, particularly to support the consolidation of democracy and to assist Africans in their struggle for lasting peace, poverty eradication and sustainable development, thereby bringing Africa into the mainstream of the world economy.

Many African States suffer from weak and unpredictable political and economic institutions. Their economies tend to be based on low productivity traditional sectors. Many are extremely disadvantaged with respect to elements essential for development such as education, sanitation, transportation, communication, clean water, adequate development financing, electrical power, and energy resources. Moreover, stifling debt burdens, lack of access to developed-country markets, declining Official Development Assistance (ODA), and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, all constrain development.

Recent UN conferences, summits and Special Sessions of the General Assembly have brought out the need and urgency for development. Afri-

can leaders themselves have drawn up a "New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)" (see <http://www.un.org/esa/africa/NEPADenglish.pdf> for the English text or <http://www.un.org/esa/africa/NEPADfrenchttext.pdf> for the French). The UN has been moving with decisiveness to answer the cry of Africa, especially through its support to NEPAD. It may be appropriate to name a few of the initiatives:

High-Level Plenary Meeting of the 57th Session of the UN General Assembly on 16 September 2002 to Consider How to Support NEPAD:

The Member States affirmed their support for NEPAD by committing themselves to debt reduction, to increasing ODA, and to providing market access to African goods and services.

VIVAT International maintains a firm stand for PEACE at this critical time when the winds of war are being fanned against Iraq. VIVAT International supports peaceful dialogue and strategies of non-violence as the democratic and sustainable means to PEACE. VIVAT International stands in solidarity with all PEACE seekers and PEACElovers.

At the same time, they emphasized the need for good governance, accountability, transparency and the rule of law in those countries. At the final review of the United Nations New Agenda for Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF) in October 2002, the General Assembly decided to endorse a recommendation by the Secretary-General that NEPAD should be the framework for the international community's support to African development.

UN Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries (OSCAL):

"Through the coordination of inputs from UN and other bodies, OSCAL facilitates inter-governmental debates and negotiations on Africa and the LDCs. In its advocacy role, it analyzes various issues and trends relating to African development and promotes dialogue involving African countries and LDCs along with their development partners" (Mission Statement of OSCAL—<http://www.un.org/esa/africa/oscal.htm>).

Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS):

This was established on the recommendation of the Secretary-General of the UN by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/227 of December 24, 2001. One of the main tasks of this office is to focus on the implementation of commitments made in the Plan of Action at Brussels, at the national level of each country. This pertains to commitments made by LDCs as well as donor countries. (see <http://www.un.org/special-rep/ohrls/ohrls/default.htm>).

NGOs are also taking strong initiatives. Among them the **Least Developed Countries Watch Project Group (LDCWPG)**. This was set up in 2002 as a follow-up to the 3rd Least Developed Countries Conference in Brussels. A group of LDC civil society activists from Nepal, Benin, Burkina Faso and Uganda, with the support of northern NGOs, set up the Watch Group with a small office in Brussels. Lawrence Correa from VIVAT International (VI)

is one of the members of this group. LDCWPG's long-term aim is to ensure that LDCs and 'development partner' governments implement the Brussels Program of Action.

Two important aspects of the activity will be to strengthen LDC civil society's capacity to participate in national and international follow-up, and to develop policies. Ms Daphne Davies, the secretary of the groups and Lawrence Correa, together with Ms. Barbara Adams from UN Non-governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) had a useful meeting with Ambassador Chowdhury on January 24, 2003 in regard to LDCWPG's collaboration with his office.

The LDCWPG is planning to participate in the ECOSOC LDC Segment in Geneva in July in three ways: first at a civil society plenary on July 14, 2003 where it will finalize its policy statement, secondly through an OHRLLD civil-society dialogue on July 15, and thirdly it will observe the General Segment on LDCs at the ECOSOC meeting on July 16-17, 2003.

Efforts on the part of the UN alone or of a few NGOs at the UN/International level trying to influence the government delegates is not enough to help Africa to come out of poverty, disease and conflict. NGOs at national levels need to get acquainted with the UN programs and the commitments made by their governments and demand their implementation. The pressure and participation of NGOs at the national levels will make a big difference for their government delegates to work towards correct solutions to the problems they face.

For more information on the UN and Africa see: <http://www.un.org/esa/africa>

VIVAT International has taken Africa as a first priority. It recognizes all the activities and programs of its members in that continent connected to HIV/AIDS, conflict resolution, poverty eradication and sustainable development.

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41st Session of the Commission for Social Development, UN, New York

As this is being written, the Commission for Social Development, a body of the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC), is holding its 41st Session (February 10-21, 2003) at the UN, New York. The main focus is on: "National and International Cooperation for Social Development." This is being discussed under five sub-themes: sharing of experiences and practices in social development; forging partnerships for social development; social responsibility of the private sector; impact of employment strategies on social development; and policies and roles of international financial institutions and their effect on national social development strategies.

The session is also considering the United Nations plans and programs of action pertaining to the situations of social groups: the aged, family, youth, and disabled persons. "National and international cooperation for social development: Report of the Secretary-General" is the main document guiding the discussions. (For details on the proceedings of this session of the Commission, see: www.un.org/esa/socdev/csd/2003.htm).

It is significant that for the first time there was NGO participation in a session of the Commission for Social Development. Under the chairpersonship of Lawrence Correa, the NGO Committee for Social Development put in a lot of effort in planning and preparing for various ways of participation and input. The Member NGOs of the committee came together as sub-groups, and prepared and submitted written statements on all sub-themes to the Commission. Lawrence Correa made an

oral statement, as the representative of Franciscans International (as VI is not yet accredited to ECOSOC) and as the chair of the NGO Committee for Social Development. Some of the main points highlighted by Lawrence were:

- The importance of renewing efforts to form partnership with NGOs, even the small and under-funded ones, who often have great expertise and credibility with poor and neglected people.
- The need to ensure that, in forging partners for social development, the participation of the private sector is not solely for economic gain, but is focused on the economic, social and environmental development of all peoples, particularly those who live in conditions of poverty.
- The need for the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to be sensitive and bear in mind the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) while they enforce their policies on national governments. Debt sustainability and debt cancellation for the very poor countries need to be re-emphasized.

(For the full text of the oral statement, visit "Oral Statement to 41st Session of the Commission for Social Development", under commission for social development in VI website.)

The NGO Committee for Social Development also organized daily morning briefings for the NGOs and a luncheon session with Bureau Members of the Commission on February 14, 2003 to exchange views in an informal way and to share the concerns of the NGOs.

Roundtable on Human Rights and Violence Against Women

In preparation for the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW), 47th Session, the NGO Committee on Status of Women (NGOCSW) sponsored a Roundtable on the theme: *Women: Moving from Public/Private Violence to Full Human Rights*. The keynote speakers focused on the following underlying global tendencies:

- Gender inequality is the root cause of violence against women.
- Violence against women, both private and public, is always unacceptable and unjustifiable.

· Violence against women has profoundly devastating consequences for countries, societies and women.

Lively discussion followed on issues such as the economic consequences of gender based violence, unmasking the cultural and religious arguments that support violence, and determining the contexts for trafficking in women and girls. Carmen Castro was an active member of the NGOCSW Task Force. (For details, see www.vivatinternational.org on women.VI encourages its members to utilize these materials for awareness-raising).

NEWSBITS

2-7 January 2003: Asian Social Forum, Hyderabad, India: Sr. Helen Saldanha, SSpS and Sr. Jessie Joseph, SSpS participated as VI delegates in the Asian Social Forum with the theme "Another World is Possible". A brief report will be published in the next issue of VI newsletter.

16 January 2003: Lawrence Correa participated in a one day conference on the Tobin Tax in Washington DC. The NGO community has been pressing for a currency transaction tax as a way of producing money for development work. The purpose of this conference was to educate the NGO community, researchers and activists on the Tobin Tax

23-28 January 2003: World Social Forum III in Porto Alegre, Brazil. WSF III was held to purposely coincide with the World Economic Forum held in Davos, Switzerland. The WSF is an open meeting place for groups and movements of civil society opposed to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital or any form of imperialism. It is a time and a space to come together to debate ideas, formulate proposals, share experiences, and network. (Charter of Principles: www.forumsocialmundial.org.br)

Delegates, participants, observers, journalists and media were estimated to be more than 100 thousand. There were 5,717 organizations registered from 156 countries. The United Nations was also represented by Under-Secretary General Nitin Desai who read the message of Secretary General Kofi Annan. WSF III centered on the theme: *Another World is Possible*. WSF III reasserted the "open nature" and process of the WSFs and upheld the commitment not to attempt to produce overall summary positions nor to point out major alternatives, but rather simply *to bring out the diversity of proposals for building another world*.

VI was represented at WSF III by Fresnida Carmen Castro from VIVAT International, New York (VINY), Michael Heinz from Rome and a good number of PANAM JPIC Coordinators, both SVD and SSpS.

Turn over of Presidency and Executive Team of VIVAT International:

As provided for in the VI Charter and Statutes, the Board of Directors, in their meeting on January 16, 2003, turned over the presidency from Fr. Antonio M. Pernia, SVD to Sr. Agada Valeria Brand, SSpS, and Chairpersonship from Fresnida Carmen Castro, SSpS to Lawrence Correa, SVD for a period of two years, with immediate effect.

30 Jan – 01 Feb 2003: PANAM JPIC Zonal Meeting in Canoas, Brazil. The Pan-American Meeting of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Coordinators was scheduled to follow the WSF. The first day was dedicated to sharing reflections about WSF III as well as reports of JPIC past and present commitments in the respective countries. Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay and VINY were represented. Some lay collaborators were also present. Carmen, as representative of VINY, took time to clarify the vision and mission of VI as well as strengthen communication and networking between JPIC and VINY. The main outcome is expressed in the following resolution: *To renew our conviction that our socio-political commitment is an essential part of the GOSPEL and therefore it should be included in all our Christian and missionary commitments.*

February 9, 2003: Civil Society Forum – "Briefing on the 41st Session of the Commission for Social Development", New York. In his concluding remarks, Lawrence Correa, as the chair of the NGO Committee for Social Development, summarized the day's proceedings. (For details, please visit the VI website: Poverty Eradication>Commission for Social Development>"Civil Society Forum, 2003.")

Forthcoming UN Events

03-14 Mar 2003: 47th Session of the UNCSW, UN Headquarters, NY

08 Mar 2003: International Women's Day Celebration: *Women as Society Builders*

31 March - 4 April 2003: Commission on Population and Development, thirty-sixth session, NY

31 March - 17 April 2003: Disarmament Commission, NY.