



211 East. 43rd St., Suite 706 New York, NY 10017

Tel: 1 646 487 0003 Fax: 1 646 487 0004

E-mail: viny@vivatinternational.org * vivatssps-roma@pcn.net * vivatsvd@verbodivino.it

Website: www.vivatinternational.org

NEWSLETTER no. 14

May – June 2003

WOMEN: from Victims to Leaders of Transformation to a Human Rights System

Women are working to break through the vicious cycle of humiliation.

Women are developing strategies for social and economic transformation.

Women are using the human rights framework as a powerful tool for action.

- Shulamith Koenig, Foreword to "Passport to Dignity", Sept 2002

Passport to Dignity written by Betty Reardon

was a publication introduced during the two weeks of the 47th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW47) last March 2 – 14, 2003. While the 45 UN Member States of the CSW47 debated on the theme: "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the 21st century", the NGOs gathered on a different and revolutionizing plane. The leadership of Betty Reardon was caught up by numerous women gathered at the CSW47 as the new spirit and new vision with which to walk towards the New Millennium. In a powerful and effective dialogue on 'breaking through the vicious cycle of humiliation', the participants tackled the root issue: from patriarchy to a human rights system through the Beijing Platform of Action. Definitively, women expressed that there should be an end to looking at women as victims of patriarchal violence, and move to forming an image of them as human rights mentors and monitors. It was noteworthy that the salient causes of poverty, prejudice, abuse and every form of inequality and violence, if addressed constantly, will change the system, and the human rights of women will be realized. The women were urgently challenged to protect the sanctity of life in order to create a new world order of acceptance of the other, where differences are a joy and not a liability. It became a common acknowledgement that discrimination and inequality are experienced and interconnected across a wide range of differences: age, gender, race, ethnicity,

religion, sexuality, nationality, disability and other categories of identity. It became a common goal to embrace the human rights of all people to food, housing, education, health and work at livable wages.

Why is the most dangerous place for a woman her own home? Gathered around the debate rooms, the 45 UN State members of the CSW47 surfaced the question among themselves: Why is the most dangerous place for a woman her own home? To know some of the most powerful statements across the debate rooms from the Representative of Nigeria, the Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, the Representatives of the United Republic of Tanzania, Japan, Pakistan and Mexico, visit: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2003/wo m1390.doc.htm>

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS...did not effect the agreement of the delegates on the outcome document of CSW47 on "Women's Rights and Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women". **Ambassador Othman Jerandi of Tunisia, the CSW47 Chair suspended the session for a later date. The stumbling block came from the delegates of Iran and Egypt that objected to the inclusion of paragraph O which reads:** "Condemn violence against women and refrain from invoking any custom, tradition, or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination as set out in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women."

Both NGOs and Government Delegates expressed disappointment that CSW47 ended without Agreed Conclusions in the area of women's human rights and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.

VIVAT International and Violence against Women and Girls:

A strong appeal is being made to VI members to be “mentors and monitors” of human rights for women and girls. VI acknowledges the initiatives of some members regarding this issue and urges its members around the world to be actively engaged in advocacy for human rights in the following categories:

- **Marital Status:** marriage, divorce, polygamy and wife obedience
- **Personal Status:** suffrage, citizenship, evidence and travel constraints
- **Economic Status:** inheritance and property in marriage, employment, trafficking in of women and girls, abuse of older women and widows
- **Violence:** pre-marital rape, marital rape, domestic violence, honor killings, state sanctions
- **Health Status:** female genital mutilation, effects of prostitution, HIV/AIDS
- **Educational Status:** equal rights of girls and boys to education
- **Political Status:** gender mainstreaming in and around tables of decision-making

BRIEF REFLECTION OF HELEN SALADNHA, SSpS ON ASIAN SOCIAL FORUM 2003 “Another World is Possible”

I am happy to share with you my experience of being part of a convention organized by the Asian Social Forum, held in Hyderabad, India January 2-7, 2003, on behalf of VIVAT International. ‘Another world is possible’ – this well-conceived theme of the convention was a daring expression of people's power and conscience posing a challenge to imperialist regimes that threaten the right to life of all beings.

It was a unique experience to feel the power of people's movements. About 15,000 people from all over the country and abroad, cutting across the boundaries of nationhood, cultures, and other differences, came together to share their resistance to the oppressive imperialist globalization. This was a purposeful togetherness that called for an end of oppression in all forms.

The panel of speakers consisted of resourceful and experienced persons from different

countries, who by their analytical views and experiential testimonies condemned imperialist globalization and domination by a few developed countries over the poor countries. Speakers addressed such topics as peace and security, WTO- debt development and trade, women in globalization, ecology- culture and knowledge, defending people's rights, alternatives and people's movements etc. Workshops and seminars, numbering about 324 in all, focused on the role of people's movements to make a better world a reality.

Looking at human history, we see the power of people's movements in changing the face of a given society. It is people's power that brings change. I revere those movements within my country and across the globe that confronted the oppressive regimes and overthrew them. I believe that we are not far from such revolutionary movement. The chaos will lead to a New Order some day!

VIVAT International thanks Mick Seigel, SVD for his invaluable services to VI as coeditor of VI Newsletter till March 2003.

NGO FORUM ON THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE SUBSTANTIVE SESSION OF ECOSOC, 2003

An NGO Forum on the High Level Segment of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Substantive Session theme “Promoting an Integrated Approach to Rural Development in Developing Countries for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development” was held at the UN headquarters, New York on April 16, 2003. The purpose of this dialogue was to discuss the theme from NGOs point of view, together with governments and the UN, and to crystallize NGOs issues and concerns that need to be addressed at the Substantive Session of ECOSOC in July 2003. This year, since the Substantive Session would be held in Geneva, it was all the more relevant for the New York based NGOs to have this forum in New York. The Conference of NGOs (CONGO) entrusted the responsibility of organizing and chairing this forum to Lawrence Correa, Chairperson of VIVAT International and the Chair of the NGO Committee for Social Development. The event was cosponsored by NGO Section, DESA (Department of Economic and Social Affairs), CONGO, and the NGO Committee for Social Development.

Based on the presentation of the panelists and the discussions that followed, the NGO

representatives present stressed the point that there needs to be an integrated approach to rural development and that it should address mainly land reforms, development of infrastructure, education and empowerment of girls and women. Some of the main issues and concerns raised in this regard were: creation of job opportunities in rural areas, especially for youth so that they do not migrate to cities; taking care of the elderly and making use of their knowledge and experience in rural medicine and moral, cultural and social values; the need to treat rural and urban development as part of the larger development strategy of a State/Nation, giving equal if not more importance to the allotment of budget to rural development; granting the rural population access to the marketing of their products in cities and other countries; and the need to bring the communication technology to the rural people, so that the education system could be of higher quality and that the educated youth from rural areas would be able to cope with the rest of the country and the world.

(For more details of the Forum, contact larry@vivatinternational.org, and for ECOSOC and its program of work for 2003 visit: <http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ecosoc>)

NEWSBITS

March 2, 2003: Fresnida Carmen Castro participated in the NGO Consultation that preceded the CSW47, held in Barnard College, on Broadway, Manhattan. The Keynote Address delivered by Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, as well as the panel discussion focused on the theme: Equality, Education and Empowerment. Ten breakout sessions were held in the afternoon.

March 3-14, 2003: Fresnida Carmen Castro as representative of Global Education Associates participated in the CSW47 sessions as well as the NGO side events. Carmen concentrated in the work of the VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (VAW) CAUCUS that did the lobbying and advocacy of the NGO language for the outcome document.

March 20, 2003: Lawrence Correa participated in the ECOSOC Hearings and Dialogue with Representatives of Civil Society at the UN, New York. The theme was: “Increased coherence, coordination and cooperation for the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development at all levels one year after the Conference”. Panel discussions concentrated on external debt, international trade, reform of global governance, millennium development goals & official development assistance and policy coherence. (www.un.org/esa/ffd)

24 March 2003: The VI Board appointed Dariusz Pawel Garbaciak, SVD, Treasurer-secretary of VIVAT International Incorporation

for a term of two years replacing Thomas Griffith, SVD, and reappointed Jefferson Pool, SVD Assistant Treasurer/Bursar for a term of two years with immediate effect.

April 10, 2003: Fresnida Carmen represented VIVAT International in a one-day seminar on HIV/AIDS and Children: Strengthening Partnerships and Response. The seminar was co-hosted by the US Fund for UNICEF and the US Conference of Religions and Peace (USCRP). The panel speakers and the dynamics during the break-out sessions were motivational to strengthen partnerships and responses of religious leaders to help stop the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and to care for the millions of orphans who are children of HIV/AIDS parents. An information and action Kit of Communication Materials was distributed for use and testing on the field, sponsored by UNICEF, UNAIDS and WCRP. (www.unicef.org/aids)

April 10, 2003 Sonia Hippler, SSps joins VI Executive Team: Sonia Hippler, SSps, joined VI Central Office, New York as an Executive Team Member on a full time basis, participating fully in the decision making

process. Sonia is from Misiones, Argentina. With her arrival, VI hopes to attend to Spanish speaking members more effectively. Her specialization in communications will be an added asset to VI to communicate with VI membership. Welcome, Sonia, to VI Executive Team.

April 11, 2003: VIVAT International submitted the application for accreditation to ECOSOC, UN, on April 11, 2003. VI members may recall that we have been preparing for this moment since the incorporation of VI on December 19, 2000. If everything goes well, ECOSOC of UN will grant accreditation to VI in the beginning of 2004

April 15, 2003 Lawrence Correa organized an NGO Forum at the UN, New York, on behalf of the Conference of NGOs (CONGO) on the theme of the High Level Segment of the Substantive Session of ECOSOC, 2003.

FORTHCOMING MAJOR UN EVENTS

April 28 – May 9, 2003: 11th Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, UN, New York:

The Eleventh Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD11) will be the Commission's first global meeting devoted to sustainable development since the Johannesburg Summit. (Quoted from http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd11/csd11_pow.htm). For CSD details, visit the said web page. VIVAT International has obtained ad-hoc accreditation to participate in this important Session of the Commission in recognition to its participation in the WSSD process that culminated in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002.

May 12 – 23, 2003: Second Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), UN, New York:

The 2nd Session of PFII will take place at the UN Headquarters, in New York from May 12 - 23, 2003. The theme of this Session is: Indigenous Children and Youth. For details, visit:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/pfii/pfii2.htm>.

VI has been taking an active interest in this issue as part of four issues of focus. It has been granted ad-hoc accreditation to participate in this Session. VI members are encouraged to send reports and suggestions to Carmen@vivatinternational.org, to present to the Session.

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Executive Team (VINY, VIVAT International in New York): Lawrence Correa SVD (Chairperson), Fresnida Carmen Castro SSps (Co-chairperson) and Sonia Hippler SSps (Member).

Editor: Mary Helen Sullivan SSps.

Translators: Maria Angelica SSps (Spanish); Ewald Ottowess SVD (German).