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WORLD SOCIAL FORUM 2004, MUMBAI, INDIA

The World Social Forum (WSF) is "...an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a society centered on the human person." (WSF Charter of Principles: <http://www.wsfindia.org/charter.php>)

About a hundred thousand people from different parts of the world had gathered to take part in the Fourth World Social Forum in the NESCO Grounds, Mumbai, India from January 16-21, 2004. Among them were 70 VIVAT International (VI) members (SVDs and SSpS): two from the Philippines and the rest from India. Mary John, SSpS, Mission Secretary of the SSpS Congregation and Lawrence Correa, the Chairperson of VIVAT International Executive Team, New York were also present. VIVAT International members had also brought along some of their collaborators to this Forum. VI members' participation was enriched by the active presence of three Provincials: Gregory Pinto, SVD, India Mumbai, Preeti Thomas, SSpS, India Central, and Estela Parmisano, SSpS, Philippines South.

Two events were happening simultaneously at the Grounds; in the halls and makeshift tents were conferences, debates, seminars and workshops, while outside on the streets and open grounds were rallies, theater arts, drama and dancing depicting different themes and issues. Both events helped the people move towards the process of transformation. The conferences, seminars and debates were organized by the WSF Steering Team as well as self-

organized by the participating NGO's and other civil society movements. The theme of the Forum "Another World is Possible" captured the hearts and minds of the old, the young, the intellectuals, the indigenous people and the social activists. The participants were given the opportunity to listen, to share and to reflect. In most cases, translations were provided so that almost all could participate effectively. Some of the broader issues discussed were: education, gender, war & peace, trade, globalization, debt, environment & sustainability, indigenous issues, and communal harmony. All along, there was a call for a culture of global governance, the essential ingredients being a culture of understanding, dialogue and peace, and not a culture of force. In all these processes the people of the world were really represented and acknowledged each other as brothers and sisters.

In order that the members of VIVAT International take active part in the WSF 2004 in Mumbai, the local organizers, that is the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Coordinators of SVD Mumbai Province and SSpS South Indian Province, together with JPIC Coordinators at the SVD & SSpS Generalates and the VIVAT International Executive Team, New York had made extensive preparations. That consisted of sending information about the process in advance, and then conducting an orientation program on January 15, 2004. During the forum there was daily evaluation and strategizing for the next day, and a final summarization and evaluation on January 21, 2004.

During the orientation program on January 15, 2004 Miss Fabela Fernandes from the Diocesan

Social Service Center, Mumbai, enlightened the VI participants as to what exactly WSF is and its deliberations are. Lawrence Correa gave some input regarding VI coordinating the SVD-

SSpS participation. The members were encouraged to work in groups based on issues/areas they were already working on or very interested in.

SVD-SSpS JPIC MEETING, MUMBAI, INDIA

Taking advantage of so many SVDs and SSpS involved in JPIC activities, mainly from India being present for the World Social Forum, the organizers also had planned a JPIC Meeting on the mornings of January 21 and 22, 2004. Seventy-two people were present.

On January 21, the participants discussed the key issues arising from WSF 2004, Mumbai. That meeting was comprised of an orientation, group discussion focusing on what they gained and what they would do, and a general debate. During this process, they zeroed down to four main concerns: Indigenous issues, Communalism, Women's Empowerment, and HIV/AIDS. Various ways to address these issues were also debated. All present felt that WSF was a unique experience.

JPIC Coordinators present also shared the JPIC activities in their respective provinces: The members were involved in diverse activities and programs like: lift irrigation projects; helping migrants; health care; empowerment, especially of women; helping HIV/AIDS patients, their families and children; education; community development; and the development of those physically handicapped.

The meeting on January 22, 2004 included only the delegates from India. They were 68 in number. In the first part of the session, Lawrence Correa briefed the members about VI and discussed ways to improve communication between members and the VI Executive Team, and increase participation and collaboration of SVDs and SSpS in VI. He urged them to send reports and information of the JPIC activities they are involved in and contribute to the statements and positions VI takes at the UN.

During the second part, Mary John, SSpS explained in detail how the two Congregations address the JPIC issues at the Generalates' level.

The main and final thrust of this meeting was to choke out a common strategy and to spell out a specific joint JPIC action plan for both SVDs and SSpS in India. Gregory Pinto, SVD facilitated this process. He posed three questions: How to coordinate and cooperate with JPIC activities? Can it be a movement rather than institutionalized functioning? Can we, SVDs and SSpS take one issue at the national level, which is most relevant today, not neglecting of course what we are already doing at the local levels? The process went through three levels: realities, challenges and response. Some of the key realities spelled out were: Erosion of Values, HIV/AIDS, Communal Disharmony, Women Trafficking, Alcoholism, Migration, Indigenous Peoples' Problems, Illiteracy, Ecology and Environment, and Water and Sanitation. Finally, the floor zeroed down to one reality and the response to it, namely, to work towards Communal Harmony. A detailed strategy was worked out that included consulting experts in the field and collaborating and networking with groups that were already working on this issue.

During the evaluation, everyone felt that this was the first time SVDs and SSpS involved in JPIC activities came together in such large numbers at the national level. All agreed that it was a positive experience. There was a strong recommendation that SVD and SSpS involved in JPIC activities have this kind of gathering at the national level every year or every alternate year.

VIVAT International members, SVDs & SSpS, gathered at the JPIC Meeting in Mumbai, India in January 2004, zeroed down to one reality and the response to it, namely, to work towards "Communal Harmony" at the national level.

42nd SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The 42nd Session of the Commission for Social Development was held from February 4-13, 2004 at the UN Headquarters, New York. The Priority Theme of the 42nd Session of the Commission was: "Improving public sector effectiveness" (more information is available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/csd/csocd2004.htm>).

VIVAT International took a leadership role in animating the NGOs, especially through the NGO Committee for Social Development, to participate and contribute substantially to the whole process since October 2003. The NGOs made written and oral statements highlighting

the importance of Public Sector to play the major role in fulfilling the basic and social needs of the people, especially the poor, the migrants, the women and children and the older persons; to provide safe drinking water; and to arrest the HIV/AIDS Pandemic. **The NGOs urged the Governments not to drift away from a people-centered approach to development.** The NGO community was happy to see that some of the language suggested by them was reflected in the final outcome document.

12th SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The 12th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development will take place from April 14-30, 2004 at UN Headquarters, New York. This session will mainly concentrate on water, sanitation and human settlements, addressing a number of cross-cutting issues like: poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development, sustainable development in a globalizing world, sustainable development for Africa, gender equality, health and education. VI is going to participate in

this session on the basis of the ad-hoc accreditation obtained for World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) process. Members are encouraged to see the UN Secretary General's report and other details of the Session at: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd12/csd12.htm>. Please send in points on any of the above issues for statements to be evolved with other NGOs for submission to this Session and for discussions with Governments and NGO networks to: viny@vivatinternational.org

THIRD SESSION OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES

VIVAT International members work directly with Indigenous Peoples in Botswana, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mozambique and Zambia in Africa; Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico and Paraguay in the Americas; and India, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia and Papua New Guinea in Asia and Oceania

The Third Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues will be held at UN Headquarters

in New York from May 10-21, 2004. The theme is: "Indigenous Women". Considering that VI works

directly with Indigenous Peoples in Botswana, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mozambique and Zambia in Africa; Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico and Paraguay in the Americas; and India, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia and Papua New Guinea in Asia and Oceania, we have been actively participating in these sessions since the year 2002. This year too, we have sent in the names of three SSpS and one SVD for pre-registration. In order that the voices of the Indigenous Peoples are heard at this

Forum, we request the VI members working with them to send in points and paragraphs for written and oral statements specifically pertaining to Indigenous Women. You may send them to the e-mail address: viny@vivatinternational.org, addressed to VI Executive Team. For more information on this Session in English, Spanish and French, and for reports on the earlier Sessions, please visit: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/pfii/PFII3/>

VIVAT INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS PROTEST AGAINST EXPELLING ASYLUM SEEKERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

VIVAT International Members, specifically the SVDs in the Netherlands, have been protesting against the policy of the Government of the Netherlands expelling Asylum Seekers. They have sent a letter of protest to the Prime Minister with a copy to all Christian Democrat MPs on February 11,

2004. According to Toon Van Bijnen, SVD both SVDs and SSpS in the Netherlands are involved in addressing issues of migrants and refugees for the last 18 years. For more information write to Toon Van Bijnen, SVD: toonvanbijnen@tiscali.be

VIVAT International commends the dedicated and continuous work of our SVD and SSpS members among the Migrants and Refugees in the Netherlands.

UPCOMING EVENTS/SESSIONS AT THE UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK

- 48th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, March 1-12, 2004, UN, New York: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/48sess.htm>
- 12th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, April 14-30, 2004, UN, New York: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd12/csd12.htm>
- The Third Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, May 10-21, 2004, UN, New York: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/pfii/PFII3/>
- Substantive Session of Economic and Social Council 2004, June 28 – July 23, 2004, UN, New York: <http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ecosoc/>

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