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VIVAT INTERNATIONAL CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE WORLDWIDE

Since the year 2001, UN General Assembly has designated September 21 as the “World Day of Peace”. This is mainly to remind the nations and peoples of the importance of peace, to observe a day of global ceasefire and non-violence, and more importantly to commemorate, in an appropriate manner, the International Day of Peace, through education and public awareness. Many people, non-governmental and other organizations, particularly the faith-based organizations have concentrated on peace vigils and inter-faith prayer sessions to mark this occasion. International Day of Peace Vigil (www.idpvigil.com) was an important initiative towards that end.

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war any more.”

Working towards peace has been an essential dimension, and one of the main purposes and principles of UN from its inception on October 24, 1945. The verses from the Book of Isaiah, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war any more.” carved on the wall in front of the UN secretariat building in New York, remind the passersby what UN stands for. More than ever, establishing peace today is a great challenge to the UN and to all the people

who want to work with UN for peace in the world.

VIVAT International (VIVAT) members, consisting of faith based Congregations’ membership (SVDs and SSps) have taken the statement from the Bible "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt 5:9) very seriously and have been working towards building a culture of peace all over the world. United Nations defines the Culture of Peace “as a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations”(UN Resolution A/RES/53/243, Declaration and Program of Action on a Culture of Peace). Establishing a culture of peace being one of the main issues of VIVAT, it has participated in and collaborated with UN peace initiatives from its establishment in the year 2000. For instance, from the beginning of 2002, it collaborated with UNSECO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) initiated campaign for global movement for a culture of peace through endorsements and actions.

Celebration of International Day of Peace 2004 by VIVAT Members:

- **Holy Spirit Convent, Indore, India:** Thirty SSps participated in an hour-long adoration

for the International Day of Peace. The theme was 'Peace in the World'.

- **Den Haag and Den Bosch, Netherlands:** SSpS took part in a weeklong (September 19-26) program of 'Inter-cultural and inter-religious Peace of Den Haag'. Each day was set apart for a particular aspect of peace. On September 11, the Sisters attended the national day of peace for religious women. On September 19, they took part in the Ecumenical liturgy held in the Lutheran Church. Talks on theme of peace by different speakers, sharing and singing songs of peace were highlights of the day.
- **Netherlands and Belgium:** In several parishes SVDs led peace-prayers during weekends before and after September 21. Some of them signed petitions to the Governments of Sudan, Iraq and the Democratic Republic of Congo demanding peace in Darfour, Iraq and east Congo.
- **VIVAT Central Office, New York, USA:** The executive team participated in the commemoration of the International Day of Peace by taking part in the interfaith prayer service held at the Church center near UN headquarters on September 21.
- **Wittlich, Germany:** SVDs together with the Wittlich group of Pax Christi organized two days of social and liturgical encounters between Christians and Muslims.
- **Manila, Philippines:** SSpS together with other religious groups and NGOs convened a day's events, which included peace prayers in Quezon City Memorial Circle, performances by the students from different colleges, particularly from the College of the Holy Spirit, and a candle light procession in the evening. The prayer song 'Let there be peace on earth' resounded all through the day. Arnold Maria Noel, SSpS received the Chi-Rho Peace Award from Maryknoll/Miriam College as part of the celebration of the International Day of Peace.
- **Santiago, Chile:** SSpS participated in the 'Spiritual Forum of Santiago for Peace'. There were about 400 participants from different faith backgrounds. Maria Salome, SSpS was one of the speakers. She also composed a special prayer for peace for this occasion.

AFRICA-MADAGASCAR JPIC WORKSHOP, LOME, TOGO

SVD and SSpS Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Coordinators of Africa-Madagascar (AFRAM) Zone met together with Michael Heinz, SVD, and Mary John, SSpS, the Congregational JPIC Coordinators of SVD and SSpS in Rome, respectively, for the first ever Zonal Workshop from September 13-18, 2004 in Lome, Togo. AFRAM Zone consists of Angola, Benin, Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The following is from the outcome statement of the participants, which speaks for itself:

"The concern for PEACE and JUSTICE among our people, coupled with the restoration of

Integrity of Creation has become imperative. We have also realized that the individuals are powerless on their own; hence, the need for co-operation and co-ordination of efforts in the zone.

This calls for exchange of views and ideas, in short, networking among all concerned, and effective support from provincial/regional administrations. We, however, acknowledge with respect the small steps already taken by individuals and communities.

We have agreed on the following plan of action for the next three years.

1. Botswana and Kenya have chosen HIV/AIDS as their top priority. But the other provinces/regions are involved in one way or another.
2. Human rights.
 - * Empowerment of women
 - * Just wages
 - * Fight Domestic problems, Child trafficking (Ghana, Mozambique and Madagascar) and Corruption
 - * Conscientization on Human rights
3. Integrity of Creation
 - * Prevention of indiscriminate logging (Mozambique, Madagascar and Ghana) and bush burning (Togo, Madagascar, Ghana)
 - * Right to clean water for all.
 - * Promotion of a clean environment, planting of trees, and use of natural fertilizer.

4. Improve communication and networking and sharing of materials
5. Integrate JPIC concern in our formation programme right from the beginning

We propose to meet once a year in small groups. It will help us evaluate ourselves and share our experiences.

Group one: Togo/Benin, and Ghana.

Group two: Kenya/Tanzania, Botswana, Madagascar, Mozambique and Ethiopia (SSpS)

Group three: Angola, Congo.

We suggest meeting at the Zonal level once in three years.”

(From the outcome statement sent by Lusi Ujan Zacharias, SVD, JPIC AFRAM Zonal Co-ordinator, September 17, 2004)

REPORTS FROM MEMBERS FROM THE FIELD

Eradicating Trafficking of Children in Mozambique: Luis Pedro, SVD, together with other religious men and women, is actively involved in the project of addressing the problem of trafficking of children in Nampala and Nacala (northern part of Mozambique). They have created an ad hoc commission to collect information, and prepare legal papers and present them to the Government authorities. They work in collaboration with the Commission on Human Rights of Mozambique. In this way, this project creates mechanisms so that the Bishops Conference, religious and the society as a whole could lobby the authorities to

take their responsibility to stop crime organized on an international scale. **(From the report of Luis Pedro, SVD, October 17, 2004)**

Anthony Ranada, SVD participated in the Second World Congress Against the Death Penalty in Montreal, Canada, from October 6 to 9, 2004. He was invited keeping in mind his activities in favour of abolition of the death penalty within the PRESO foundation in the Philippines. He is the president of PRESO. To know more about his activities with PRESO and his participation in the Second World Congress, contact him at: ajr1947@frequency.ph

SOME OF THE ACTIVITIES AT THE CENTRAL OFFICE AND THE UN, NEW YORK

September 16, 2004: VIVAT Executive Team organized an ‘open house’ at the Central Office, New York on September 16 to celebrate the accreditation obtained by VIVAT from the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of UN. About 20 people, mostly from religious/faith based NGOs in and around New York, joined us in this celebration. It was also

an opportunity to say ‘thank you’ to some of them who had helped us in this process one way or the other. All enjoyed the light refreshments meticulously selected and beautifully arranged by Kathryn Glenn, SSpS.

October 13, 2004: On behalf of VIVAT, Kathryn (Rose Martin) Glenn, SSpS took part in

a round table at UN Headquarters to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of UN, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

October 19, 2004: Kathryn Glenn, SSpS participated in a Conference on “Malaria and

the Millennium Development Goals” on October 19, at UN Headquarters. She has some tips to VIVAT members; one of them is “continue to be advocates for bettering the health of the people we minister with and to”. (Read her report in www.vivatinternational.org, under poverty eradication.)

HEARTY WELCOME TO GRETTA FERNANDES, SSpS

VIVAT International heartily welcomes Gretta Maria Fernandes, SSpS as the Co-Chairperson of VIVAT Executive Team at the Central Office, New York. Gretta comes from the South Indian Province of the SSpS. Before coming here (2000-2004) she was the assistant directress of *Streevani* (voice of women) in Pune, India, an organization for the empowerment of women. Her involvement was mainly at the grass roots, enabling rural women to empower themselves. She has a Masters Degree in Social Work and a Degree in General Law. Her rich experience with the grassroots and her educational qualifications will surely add to the richness of the Executive Team of VIVAT in New York.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS AT UN HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK

Commission for Social Development: The 43rd Session of the Commission for Social Development will take place from February 9-18, 2005. It will review the implementation of the outcome of the Social Summit and the 24th Special Session of the General Assembly of the UN. (More information: www.un.org/esa/socdev/csd)

Commission on the Status of Women: The 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will take place from February 28 to March 11, 2005. It will focus on:

- Review of the implementation of the Beijing Women’s Conference and the outcome documents of the Special Session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the 21st Century”.
- Current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls. More information: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw

VIVAT International will participate in and contribute to the above-mentioned Commissions.

DATES TO REMEMBER AND INTEGRATE IN OUR PRAYER AND OUTREACH

- * November 25: International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
- * December 1: World AIDS Day
- * December 10: Human Rights Day

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