DEAR READERS,

Welcome to the 51st Issue of the VIVAT Newsletter!

VIVAT International kicked off 2011 in quite an exciting manner, celebrating the official mark of VIVAT’s ten year anniversary on January 15th. As our past two commemorative Newsletter issues have highlighted, VIVAT’s 10 years of work have been greatly influential and inspiring!

This issue features a series of reflections from several VIVAT members--reflections and experiences regarding specific events, as well as internal reflections on thought-provoking concepts. The issue will also respond to VIVAT’s presence in the World Social Forum in Dakar and discuss the obstacles and challenges that have evolved from the movement. Other topics include the 5th International Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE), VIVAT’s work regarding the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and information regarding a VIVAT-affiliated online course for JPIC. In the spirit of reflecting back on our ten years, and looking forward to our next ten, we look forward to the successes to come for VIVAT and our members!

You inspire us and we thank you! We always welcome feedback, ideas, stories, and updates from our members! Please send us your comments and feedback to: viny@vivatinternational.org

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Memorable Month at VIVAT

A reflection by Philip Gibbs, SVD

Recently I had the privilege of spending a month with VIVAT International in New York. Previously I had learned a little about VIVAT through the quarterly newsletters and from accessing the VIVAT website, but experiencing the reality of VIVAT ministry was an eye opener for me. Felix SVD and Zelia SSpS who form the Executive team organized for me to have a pass to enter the UN and arranged for me to attend a number of events. During my stay I participated in a Civil Society Forum on the Eradication of Poverty and then took part in the 49th session of the Commission for Social Development (CsocD). The Commission provides an opportunity for written and oral statements from Non Government Organizations (NGOs) like VIVAT. I had a chance to help the executive team prepare a written statement on the Culture of Poverty and an oral statement on the Family and Eradication of Poverty.

During the week of the CsocD there were “side events” led by NGOs on topics such as Climate Change, Community Values, Men and Families, and Social Integration: all in relation to the eradication of Poverty. My background in social research and many years in serving in Papua New Guinea helped me situate the topics and I learned a lot about understanding poverty in a sense much broader than just lack of money or income. I was surprised and impressed by the variety of NGOs present – some led by Church Congregations similar to VIVAT – others by Civil Society organizations like the World Youth Alliance, and faith based groups such as Bahá’í.

I also learned how VIVAT is growing. Eight congregations have joined the two founding congregations as full or associate members. Previously I had thought of VIVAT in terms of a small office in New York. Now, having seen how they deal with information from various parts of the world, including a VIVAT office in Geneva, I am more aware that all of us are part of VIVAT by virtue of being members of our Congregations. It is encouraging to note how VIVAT now has over 30,000 members serving in 130 countries, and so has the potential to be an important network for highlighting humanitarian issues and the experience of the marginalized at the decision-making levels of world bodies.

The potential is there, but I noticed how in reality there are real challenges. Firstly, Felix and Zelia are committed to working as a team. I learned a lot observing how each puts his or her energy into pursuing a common goal, while doing their best to give space and freedom to the other person on the team. Another challenge is in making an effort to share work and responsibility with other NGOs and religious Congregations.

Furthermore it requires a lot of patience during Commission meetings, sitting for days listening to presentations by various country delegations and other NGOs, while waiting for the chairman to call on us to speak. Advocacy also requires courage and prudence approaching another delegation and meeting with them personally so as to make a point. VIVAT arranged for me to meet and discuss matters with the representative for Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples at the UN. It was a mutual sharing that opened up possibilities for future dialogue, including links with the recently established VIVAT office in Geneva specializing in Human Rights matters.

Finally I think a major challenge is to maintain effective communication with the members of our Congregations so as to motivate them to have an active interest in the area of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). That includes topics such as respecting human rights, eradicating poverty, gender justice, and environmental issues. I am now much more aware of how the VIVAT office relies on feedback and information from the members in the field.

Despite the limits of the UN and the seriousness and extent of the issues that are faced, in the short time I had in New York I became aware of the enormous opportunity for global dialogue in UN-sponsored events. I met many dedicated people, particularly in the area of Human Rights who are professionals striving for the common good. Certainly that was my impression after a memorable month at VIVAT in New York.

The Forty-Ninth session of the Commission for Social Development concluded its session by adopting five draft resolutions calling for wide-ranging steps, from support for the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and the upcoming review of the action plan on ageing to improving the lot of youth, persons with disabilities and families.
VIVAT Celebrates 10 Years of Mission at the UN

Ten years is a significant period of time in the life of any organization. VIVAT International, an organization that has access to United Nation resources, eligible to attend meetings and conferences, can actively engage in the formulation of UN documents, as well as alert the UN of any prevalent issues. Being an organization that has members throughout the world, especially in frontiers, VIVAT International stands alongside the UN's mission of vocalizing the needs of the poor to the world's policy making bodies. On January 15, 2011 the celebration of the feast of the Founder of the SVD and SSpS, Arnold Jansen and VIVAT's 10th anniversary took place at Collegio del Verbo Divino.

The Solemn Eucharist was presided by His Eminence, Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, President of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace. The principal celebrants were VIVAT President Anthony Pernia, SVD and Superior General of the Oblates of Mary, Louis Lougen, OMI. Participating in the celebration were the superiors general of member congregations of VIVAT, along with the “contact persons”, the members of the VIVAT Board of Directors, the SSpS Congregational Leadership Team, VIVAT Executive Team in New York and the VIVAT representative in Geneva. Cardinal Turkson lauded the vision and mission of the founder and the legacy he has left for missionaries to emulate. The Eucharist included symbols outlining the vision and mission of VIVAT International. The liturgy was followed by an agape.

At Dakar: My Time of “Mouvance”

A reflection by John Paul Pezzi, MCCJ

The World Social Forum (WSF) at Dakar in February was the third WSF and the second World Forum on Theology and Liberation (WFTL) that I took part in. I suffered a certain uneasiness at Belem and Nairobi, but I inexplicably warmed to Dakar as if affected personally by the African sun.

My key to understanding the whole event came unexpectedly, a word springing up like a spark from the fire-sticks of a Khoisan nomad [see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpPNG3r2GRY] that made me change my mind. This word is 
mouvance, a French word used by a Canadian theologian. The meaning is that the WSF revealed a deep tidal wave, barely rippling the surface of the sea until it comes to shallow water. It is perceived but not visualized, nor can it be analyzed, and yet it exists. It is strong; it is growing; it changes even the course of fish in the depths, and when it comes to the surface it sweeps away everything in its path. The Dakar WSF seems to be a mouvance. We find ourselves in a liminal moment of cultural history, a space and time in which the past has already been dissolved but the future hasn’t taken shape yet, even though some of its characteristics can be intuited. This mouvance is very significant for the political and economic life of society, and also for the WSF and the WFTL.

First of all, the WSF and the WFTL in Dakar manifested a major shift in orientation. Even if the WSF takes place soon after the World Economic Forum, the dialogue or contrast is no longer between an economic event of powerful governments and a social celebration of the grassroots. Certainly at the WSF economics are important and some aspects of globalization are criticized, but the focus is on an interpretation of current global political, social, economic and cultural matters. The true future counterpart of the WSF is the “United Nations System” which was founded to be a “Family of Peoples” but has instead become a dreadful “Club of Governments”. Today the WSF is unique as a free and democratic open space for civil society.

It is in this open space that, despite the Statutes of the WSF itself, will be forged the intermediary organizations between people and governments, between states and nations. And there will be indicated the operational and daily plans for moulding a 

different World.

“Together for Peace, Justice, Democracy and Development”
Experiencing the World Social Forum and the 55th Commission on the Status of Women

A reflection by Petra Bigge, SSpS

“Do not wait for the leaders to act; we all have to act!”

This was the urgent message I heard at two recent events I attended: The World Social Forum (WSF) and the 55th Commission on the status of Women (55th CSW). The WSF was held in Dakar, capital city of Senegal, February 6 to 11. The 55th CSW took place in New York City February 22 to March 4. Both events featured many grassroots organizations that shared their experiences and work. The events were also opportunities for networking—forming new alliances and/or strengthening alliances already existing. Because the WSF was held in Senegal at the time of political uprisings in various North African countries, the organizers faced special challenges. An example is what happened when the director of Cheikh Anta Diop, the venue for the Forum, was changed. The new director rescheduled exams for the same days as the Forum, meaning there was no room for Forum participants. The resourceful Forum coordinating team handled the situation quite well by providing tents. Translators and participants developed flexible ways to work together without the usual translation equipment. In these two events, the WSF and the 55th CSW, I noted the main challenges addressed as agrarian reform, environmental concerns, the matter of “green markets” or “green economy, and many gender related issues.

Agrarian Reform

From what I heard and learned at the WSF, there are a growing number of suicides among farmers worldwide and a growing number of people being displaced from their land. Half of the displaced people are the indigenous poor. 80% of farming is done by women, even though in many countries women do not, and cannot, own land. They are completely dependent on men: husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles. I felt an urgent need to empower these women through collaborative efforts with NGOs, to advocate for laws granting women the right to own land. It seems multinationals, with support of local and national governments, are gaining possession of the farmland, and thus displacing the poor and indigenous.

Similarly, governments that support these multinationals do not admit the long term effects of their agreements with multinationals on the people. And the multinationals, in turn, are not sensitive to the environmental impacts of their actions; for example the use of fertilizers that destroy the soil and contaminate the water, that affect the health of workers and the surrounding population. Might this be a modern form of “slavery”? One action aimed at returning land to the local farmers is the Ekta Parishad Movement initiated in India in 2007. Called the “march of the despised,” it had more than 25,000 landless farmers walking to New Delhi to fight for their rights. This group is planning a similar march for this coming year with an expected participation of 100,000 landless farmers. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if VIVAT International members, with their rural communities, participated in this non-violent action?

Environmental Concerns

Another sign of hope was the Bolivian government’s stand on the rights of Mother Earth. Bolivia presented a discussion paper in preparation for the 2012 Rio +20 summit. In this presentation, Bolivia emphasized that we cannot only talk and fight for Human Rights, but we also have to acknowledge the rights of Mother Earth and the rights of Water. Some governments have already put in place legislation to protect the environment; some have started legal
procedures against companies that are polluting the environment. It became very clear to me that if we do not start now as “one world’ to combat climate change, our earth will be depleted. This could lead to conflicts and wars over limited resources.

During the discussions, the seriousness of the environmental situation was emphasized. Figures given indicated that, in 2007, 71% of the world’s population believed in Climate Change. Two years later that percentage was down to 51%. Some believe that “the idea of climate change is a socialist idea circulated by people who want to take away our standard of living.” Other interesting figures I picked up are 16% of the world’s population consumes 78% of its resources; 70% of the world’s population consumes less than what is needed to live; the world’s population is consuming 30% more of the natural resources than the world can reproduce.

Gender related issues
Violence against women was another major area of focus. Perhaps we could all join the campaign to counter violence by adding as a line at the bottom of our emails this message: “I don’t forward violence. Take a stand; the violence stops with you.” The sessions on violence included topics like violence against the girl-child, violence in families, trafficking especially against women and girl-children, sexual violence in war situations, and more. Worldwide there are between 60 million and 110 million missing women. Many are believed to have been brought into prostitution or into forced labor. There are groups working for the legalization of prostitution, a real act of violence. Participants were urged to focus not only on the victims but also on the perpetrators. Unanswered questions were raised: Why do our sons behave like this? Why are they going into brothels? Why is rape used as a war operation?

Early and qualitative intervention is needed to counter gender inequality. This intervention can begin already in the schools with equal curricula for both boys and girls, with equal treatment of both girls and boys, with disavowing abuse of girls by boys, adolescent and younger, and with encouraging girls to advance in school. Early in the educational process, it is important to provide equal opportunities for girls in the fields of science and technology. Female role models in these areas exist; they need to be presented to the younger generations. Girls and women can be encouraged to go into traditionally male dominated professions.

Although there is participation of women in politics, they are far fewer than men. And even though some women are in politics, there is no guarantee that automatically they will work for women’s rights. Often they are used for achieving men’s agenda.

Closing
My days in Dakar and New York were very enriching. They were excellent opportunities for me to gain information. Many organizations brought their people working at the grassroots. I would like to have seen some of our own (SSpS) people present as we are engaged in some excellent projects for the empowerment of women and conservation of the environment. The challenges of our world today are so complex and so diverse. Where are we as religious in this walk? Are we walking together with society?

It gives us great pleasure to inform you that the original priority theme for CSW 56 has been revised to read: “The empowerment of rural women, in relation to climate change and food security.” The review theme is the agreed conclusions from the 2008 session on “Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women.”

Resolution on Gender and climate change adopted at CSW:

The Philippine Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York reported that the 55th Session of the United Nations’ Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) adopted by consensus a Philippine-initiated ground breaking resolution on gender and climate change last March.

VIVAT Vice President at New York Office

VIVAT International New York office was blessed by a brief visit of Maria Theresia, SSpS, the Congregational Leader of the Missionary Servants of the Holy Spirit and Vice President of VIVAT International. While in New York she attended a part of the special high-level meeting of the Economic and Social Council with the Breton Woods Institutions, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and a briefing on the situation of Cuba.

She also held an informal meeting with VIVAT members and associates in New York, which concluded with a reception to mark VIVAT’s 10 years of Advocacy and Lobbying at the UN and at the grassroots level.
Citizens United for Rehabilitation

By Jose de Jesus Filho, OMI

From March 21 through 25, the International Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) brought together Prison Reform and Human Rights activists from 25 countries around the world for its 5th International Conference in Abuja, Nigeria. The Conference was endorsed by Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and co-sponsored by Federal Ministry of Justice and other organizations across the world. During the conference, panelists discussed several issues regarding prison reform and human rights, such as unjust arrests and detention; lack of legal representation for the poor; and overcrowding.

Prisons and other detention facilities foster abuse and misuse of power. Poor sanitation, inadequate medical facilities, meager food supplies, and lack of potable water result in serious outbreaks of dysentery, cholera, and tuberculosis, which are exacerbated by overcrowding. Pregnant women are shackled during labor and delivery. All in all, there is a lack of oversight and accountability in prisons and detention facilities.

The Conference endorsed 48 recommendations “ways forward,” calling for major improvements in all the above issues, and highlighted the following recommendations:

1. Reduce the annual admissions to prisons by increasing the use of alternatives to prison and pre-trial detention, ensuring all individuals have legal representation, and providing oversight of arrests and police trainings on due process law.

2. Reduce pre-trial detention and prison overcrowding by reducing pre-trial waits, setting a maximum allowable wait time, implementing a population cap, and compelling the respective State governments to pay the full cost of the upkeep of their offenders.

3. Reduce AIDS/other communicable diseases in prisons by providing programs for inmates on transmission testing, treatment, counseling, and coping with AIDS and other diseases.

4. Reduce recidivism by developing standards to ensure basic needs of prisoners are met, making programs available to prisoners that provide useful job-training and skill-building, as well as rehabilitation, and reducing prisoner abuse; building relationships between reform advocates and correctional officers.

5. Make prisons accessible to people with disabilities by providing them with necessary equipment and materials.

6. Abolish the death penalty.

7. Create facilities specific for women and provide appropriate programs for them, as well as training for the staff.

8. Prevent torture, as well as cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and punishment in our prison cells and centres of detention.

VIVAT participation through José de Jesus Filho, OMI, presented the situation of torture in Brazil and the efforts to prevent and eradicate it. The Brazilian Catholic Church shared its experience monitoring places of detention to prevent torture in Brazil and the success so far achieved in this purpose. There are approximately 5000 detention centers in Brazil.

The main job now is to implement the OPCAT (Optional Protocol to the UN Convention to Prevent Torture), which obligates the UN state members that ratified it to create national visiting mechanisms in order to prevent torture behind the walls of places of detention. Even though Brazil has ratified the OPCAT, so far it has not implemented it. Once implemented, the NPM (National Preventive Mechanism) will be formed by specialists from the civil society, independent from the state, with the power to visit any place of detention without previous communication and without restriction to access to any area inside the place, any person and any record regarding the situation.
Edward Flynn, CSSp, of the Geneva Office of VIVAT International follows the activities of the UN Human Rights Council, including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. When a country in which VIVAT members are present has been reviewed, Edward will send us a short report with links to more complete information, such as the documents on which the Review is based and the draft conclusions adopted by the Human Rights Council.

What is the UPR process? The information given immediately below this paragraph is taken from the official information website of the UPR at http://www.upr-info.org/-UPR-Process-.html. A more complete explanation of the UPR process is given at this same website as well as a video presenting the process.

“The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a new and unique human rights mechanism of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council aiming at improving the human rights situation on the ground of each of the 192 UN Member States.

“Under this mechanism, the human rights situation of all UN Member States is reviewed every four years (48 States are reviewed each year during three UPR sessions dedicated to 16 States each).

“The result of each review is reflected in an “outcome report” listing the recommendations made to the State under Review (SuR) including those that it accepted and which it will have to implement before the next review.

“The UPR is a full-circle process comprising three key stages:

“1) Review of the human rights situation of the State under Review [SuR].

“2) Implementation between two reviews (four years) of the recommendations accepted and voluntary pledges and commitments by the SuR.

“3) Reporting at the next review on the implementation of those recommendations and pledges and on the human rights situation in the country since the previous review.”

Edward says that the recommendations that are made during the review process are an area where NGOs can make a valid contribution: “The country in question (or State under Review, SuR) is being asked by other countries to make changes regarding the exercise of Human Rights within their territory. Hence, the recommendations are very important in relation to any future action or developments regarding Human Rights within a country. Those recommendations that are accepted will be implemented by the SuR. That is the promise. NGOs can also take these recommendations into their future plans. They can continue to lobby their government in relation to those recommendations that have been accepted. They can also continue to campaign about those recommendations that have not received the support of the country concerned.”

In this issue we will present Edward’s full report on the UPR of Austria. Note that in each of Edward’s report the link to the documents on which the report is based and the link to the draft of the concluding report adopted by the Human Rights Council are given.

After Edward’s full report on the UPR process for the review of Austria given below, you will find links to Edward’s reports on Australia, Namibia and Saint Kitts and Nevis. In each of these latter three reports Edward names twenty of the more important Human Rights issues that were discussed in the UPR.

AUSTRIA

The review of Austria was held on 26th January 2011. The delegation of Austria was headed by Mr. Michael Spindelegger, Minister for European and International Affairs. At its 10th meeting held on 28th January 2011, the Working Group adopted the report on Austria.

In preparation for the Review the stipulated three documents were produced. These can be accessed at the link above. A list of questions prepared in advance by the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Namibia, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was transmitted to Austria through the troika. These questions are available on the extranet of the UPR.

The Austrian delegation stated that the support of human rights was a core concern to its government. Austria had a long-standing record of active engagement not only to ensure the protection of human rights at the national level, but also to advance the international system for the promotion and protection of human rights at the UN and in regional organizations such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the European Union.

Gender equality, including in the labour market, was considered a major issue. Measures had been taken to end inequalities. A National Action Plan had been presented in June 2010. The Law on Equal Treatment had recently been amended to ensure greater transparency with regard to incomes in the private sector. In addition, 50% of the national budget for labour market policy was being spent on specific programs to improve women’s chances on the labour market, inter alia through capacity building and training.

Victims of domestic violence received free legal and psychosocial support to help them secure their rights in criminal procedures. Prosecutors with special training covered domestic violence cases. Victims could also rely on a well-established system of crisis intervention centers in all federal regions.

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There were 21 state-financed women’s shelters with 750 places and a 24-hour hotline.

During the interactive dialogue, 54 delegations made statements. A number of delegations welcomed the comprehensive national report, Austria’s participation in and commitment to the UPR as well as the participative approach for the preparation of the report and the involvement of NGOs in the follow-up to the review.

Out of 157 recommendations made to Austria during the Review 97 were accepted immediately. Austria will examine a further 54 recommendations and provide a response by June 2011 at the 17th session of the HRC. Six recommendations were rejected. These concerned the ratification of The International Convention of the Rights of all Migrant workers and members of their families.

This is the link to the complete draft report: http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session10/AT/Austria-A_HRCWG.6_10_L.6-eng.pdf

AUSTRALIA
The UPR of Australia took place in January 2011. There were 145 recommendations.

NAMIBIA
The review of Namibia took place in January and February 2011. There were 72 recommendations.

SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS
This review also took place in January and February 2011. 113 recommendations were made.

Edward’s full reports may be found on the VIVAT website.

Websites for most of the UN organs, councils, committees, forums, departments, offices, agencies, programs, funds and related organizations can be found quickly by seeking the name or the acronym on a search engine, such as Google. For example, a search for OHCHR takes us to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/WelcomePage.aspx

Or a search for NGLS will take you to the UN Non-governmental Liaison Service at http://www.un-ngls.org; this is a very useful site to know upcoming events and when and how to register for them.

An alternative to using a search engine is to access the list of UN entities that can be found at http://www.un.org/EN/aboutun/structure/index.shtml; a web links is given.

A calendar of major future events at the UN, up to about three months in advance, is available at http://esango.un.org/irene/index.html?page=calendar&month=3&year=2011&event_type=all&section=8

But many people are less aware of other useful sites and how to find them. We give a few below.

The Journal of the United Nations gives a detailed program of meetings and agendas for the coming week, as well as a summary of major events that took place over the previous week http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/En/lateste.pdf

Many people do not know that there is an official UN News Service that gives UN views on current world events and outlines what UN bodies are doing in relation to those events http://www.un.org/News/

A number of country and regional maps are available at http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/english/htmain.htm

Online JPIC Course

Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation is a distance-education program for those who minister to God’s children in difficult social, economic, or environmental conditions.

Ministers worldwide confront a variety of social justice, peace and ecological issues. Problems include ethnic and religious conflicts, gender violence, corrupt political systems, environmental degradation, drug abuse, crime, and poverty.

Ministers need access to the best resources available on practicing social analysis in ministry, resolving conflicts, establishing peace and justice, and respecting the integrity of creation. Further, collaboration with others, both during training and in ministry, will allow them to enhance each other’s experience and build solidarity in their ministry.

Duquesne University, in partnership with the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, has created the program in Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation to help meet these needs. Link: www.duq.edu/ipic
The governments of India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA countries) have signed an agreement on South-South and triangular cooperation with the ILO in the field of decent work. The IBSA-ILO declaration builds on commitments by the IBSA countries to promote cooperation as an important tool for achieving social and economic development.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) is being organized in pursuance of General Assembly Resolution 64/236 (A/RES/64/236). The Conference will take place in Brazil in 2012 to mark the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), in Rio de Janeiro, and the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. It is envisaged as a Conference at the highest possible level, including Heads of State and Government or other representatives. The Conference will result in a focused political document. We encourage VIVAT Members to mobilize to have a meaningful participation in this conference.

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