D E A R  R E A D E R S,

Welcome to the 52nd Online Issue of the VIVAT Newsletter!

In this issue you will learn of the many new and exciting activities that VIVAT members are actively participating in throughout the entire world. As VIVAT enthusiastically prepares for the RIO+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in June, it continues to make significant contributions to issues including labor trafficking, human rights, and the eradication of poverty.

Spring 2012 has been full of many incredible events. As VIVAT turns its page with new leadership, it continues to grow in structure and service. It not only held a strong presence at the 50th Commission on Social Development convened by the United Nations through several important co-sponsorships, it has also conducted several workshops and conferences around the world, including in India and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Furthermore, VIVAT members have received recognition for the HIV/AIDS Ministry in India. The issue also provides a step by step guide on how to use social media for the advocacy of the VIVAT mission.

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

C O N T E N T S:

Turning the Page at VIVAT International 2

“Can You Hear Us?” 3

VIVAT Workshop in India and DR Congo 4

HIV/AIDS Ministry Recognized 4

World Interfaith Harmony Week 5

Getting to Know the ILO 5

Ordinary Citizen Addresses the Issue of Labor Trafficking in the USA 6

An Example of Courageous Response to Labor Trafficking 6

Justice and Peace Latino America Commission 7

Social Media and NGOs 8

Rio +20: UN Conference on Social Development 9

UN: Fourth and Final Prep Com on Arms Trade Treaty 11

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Turning a Page at VIVAT International

The newly-appointed SSpS Secretary General, Selvi Selva Rani (SSpS), is now also the secretary of the Board.

Allow me to take this opportunity to share with you some of the other more significant developments which were approved or noted by the Board at its last meeting:

1. The Board decided to join the ICR (International Religious Congregations at the FAO) in its effort to seek representation or accreditation at the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) in Rome.

2. The Board approved the Statutes of the VIVAT National Branches in Argentina and Bolivia. Thus, with the Statutes of Indonesia approved earlier, we now have three National Branches. Two other National Branches are still working on their Statutes, Kenya and India.

“Indeed, even if only one person experiences fullness of life because of VIVAT, then our efforts shall have been worthwhile.”

3. The Board approved the application for Associate Membership of two religious congregations, namely, the Sacred Heart Fathers (SCJ/Dehonians) and the Religious of the Assumption (RA). This decision was subsequently confirmed by the joint meeting of the two Founding Congregations. This raises the total number of religious congregations constituting VIVAT to twelve (12).

4. The Board approved the French and Italian versions of the Charter and Statutes of VIVAT International. The English, Spanish and Portuguese versions had earlier been approved. A booklet that will contain all language versions of the Charter and Statutes will eventually be published.

5. The Board expressed gratitude for the financial donations coming from the Comboni Missionaries (MCCJ) and the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit (Cssp).

The above are just a few signs of growth, limited to the period of the last six months, which VIVAT International continues to experience throughout the years. After a decade of existence, VIVAT has grown not only in terms of its internal structures but also in terms of its service to our missionaries in the field and the many poor and marginalised people in the world. Indeed, even if only one person experiences fullness of life because of VIVAT, then our efforts shall have been worthwhile. I’m certain, however, that more than one have been served by the selfless dedication and tireless commitment of our confreres and sisters around the world.

It is with this conviction that I pass on the presidency of VIVAT International to Maria Theresia Hörnemann. And as I do so, I would like to thank the out-going officials and members of the Board for their selfless service – Judith Vallimont (SSps outgoing Board member), Emmanuel Kofi Fianu (SVD outgoing Board secretary), Zelia Cordeiro dos Santos (SSpS outgoing ET Chairperson). My thanks also go to the many confreres and sisters in the field who have collaborated and continue to do so with the Executive Team in New York, our representative in Geneva, and the Board of Directors in Rome.

I end my term by asking everyone to lend Maria Theresia their full support and collaboration. Vivat Deus Unus et Trinus in cordibus nostris.

Fraternally in the Word and the Spirit,

Antonio M. Pernia, SVD
Outgoing President
“Can You Hear Us?”

The 50th Session of the Commission for Social Development was convened by the United Nations from February 1st to 10th, in an effort to advise the UN’s Economic and Social Council and Governments on social policy issues and on the social perspective of development. The priority theme this year was Poverty Eradication and included the review of relevant United Nations plans and programs of action pertaining to the situation of social groups such as: disabled persons, youth, ageing, and the family.

VIVAT International co-sponsored two side events including, “Climate Change and Poverty: Lives in the Balance,” where the impact of the environment on the eradication of poverty was discussed thoroughly. H.E. Abdul Ghafoor Mohamed, Permanent Representative of Maldives at the United Nations, spoke about the grassroots perspectives from vulnerable countries. Two others spoke about the perspectives from the working group on poverty and climate change. The event concluded with an interactive discussion with participants about the subject at hand.

In addition, VIVAT co-sponsored a side event titled “Poverty –A Contributing Factor to and Consequence of HIV Infection,” where the economic impact of the infectious disease on the poor was discussed in depth. VIVAT also spoke at this side event titled “HIV Pushes Households and Individuals into Deeper Poverty.”

VIVAT International further supported the commission by drafting a written statement, discussing the relation between human trafficking and poverty. “This is an international crisis that calls for united and decisive action on the part of the international community. The vulnerable must be protected. The traffickers must be stopped,” stated VIVAT.

The Civil Society Forum was held one day before the opening of the sessions and served as a comprehensive platform to discuss The Social Protection Floor Initiative, an initiative built on a coalition led by the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization. VIVAT contributed to the formulation of Civil Society Declaration. According to the Civil Society, about 75 percent of people in the world do not have adequate social security, which in turn undermines social cohesion and economic performance and creates political and institutional instability. The Social Protection Floor Initiative would serve as a tool in the eradication of poverty through its social transfers and universal access to essential services.

VIVAT International also highlighted that alongside the government programs for the people, there are other organizations throughout Brazil, such as a variety of Business Firms, Churches and Religious Orders that run schools, hospitals, shelters for the poor and homeless, food pantries, financial aid for those in special needs, and provide many more necessities.

The Civil Society Forum’s Declaration also discussed several other recommendations, including an emphasis on reducing military expenditures and allocating that money to social development in order to greatly advance peace. It further discussed the importance of urging governments to include the triple bottom line -social, economic and environmental- in both their policy assessments and their investment planning.

At the commission, VIVAT participated in a panel with Secretary of Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger of Brazil, Luis Henrique Paiva, on The Bolsa Familia Program and The Plan “Brazil without Extreme Poverty.” VIVAT discussed the gaps in the programs and offered the Brazilian Representative recommendations on lessening the inequalities in salaries of Brazil.

For further information on the commission, please visit: http://social.un.org/index/CommissionforSocialDevelopment/Sessions/2012.aspx

“Let us help alleviate poverty and raise the dignity of people, especially the poor. Let us help minimize the large gap between the rich and the poor.”

-Rosalina Argusino, Philippines
In response to the ongoing struggle to protect human rights throughout the world VIVAT International has expanded its education of its members on human rights advocacy at the grassroots level. Years of work assisting those living in poverty on the local level now has the added dimension of working for systemic change.

VIVAT International responds to human rights challenges through conducting Workshops to further the goals of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) with member congregations. During the workshops participants learn how VIVAT International advocates on behalf of the marginalized at the national level. Participants are encouraged to engage in active collaboration with VIVAT members at the grassroots level, with the Executive Team in New York and with the Geneva office. Members at the national level identify key issues for their advocacy work and establish working groups to ensure follow up. Additionally the workshops educate members on the basic structures of the UN, its collaboration with NGOs, human rights and advocacy.

India

August 2011 VIVAT members from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Japan and UAE gathered in Indore, India, for a workshop to educate themselves on advocacy and networking. They reflected on how to integrate JPIC ideals into their activities and programs. Members identified the following issues as the most problematic for the region: HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and rehabilitation; street children; rights of Indigenous Peoples; land alienation and tribal lands; children; women; domestic/migrant workers; people affected by leprosy; physically and mentally challenged individuals; rag pickers; income generation, vocational training and conflicts in the Middle East (Palestinian Rights), Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

The participants developed a three year plan of action to address the most salient issues in their country and a monitoring plan to evaluate the progress of their work. The Indian delegation chose to focus on the human rights of domestic and migrant workers, children, Dalits, food security, and the negative impacts of mining.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

In mid-October 2011 the workshop in the DRC worked to create clear, concise and identifiable goals for this developing nation facing many challenges. The social issues of child soldiers and sexual violence against women, and the systemic issue of corruption were identified by the participants as key areas for advocacy for human rights and policy change.

At the conclusion of the workshop the participants committed themselves to educating the membership about VIVAT International and to work in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations to advocate for human rights. They also pledged themselves to raise the awareness of the community regarding the harm caused to the environment by human behavior and to promote the culture of life and peace through dialogue. Over the next 3 years, the members will monitor and evaluate the progress of the region in achieving these goals and integrate advocacy work into their programs and activities.

HIV/AIDS Ministry Recognized

ASHA JYOTHI, a Care and Support Centre for those living with HIV/AIDS located in Pregnapur, Medak District, Andra Pradesh, India, was awarded a certificate of appreciation for its valuable contribution to the community. The District Collector of Medak made the presentation during the observances of the Republic Day Celebrations of the country held in Medak. Founded by a Congregation of VIVAT International in 2006, ASHA JYOTHI has received this recognition in 2008, 2010 and 2012. Since its founding by the Society of the Divine Word, this Center has served over 8650 infected individuals.

The entire VIVAT International Community shares in the joy of this recognition given to one of its organizations.
World Interfaith Harmony Week 2012

Common Ground for the Common Good

The UN General Assembly Resolution, adopted in 2010, calls for the establishment of World Interfaith Harmony Week (1-7 February), reaffirming the role of mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue as an important dimension of a culture of peace. This resolution, which recognizes “the imperative need for dialogue among different faiths and religions to enhance mutual understanding, harmony and cooperation among people” encourages all Member States to “support, on a voluntary basis, the spread of the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world’s churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship during that week.” It emphasizes the importance of this support through the love of God and the “love of one’s neighbor or on love of the good and love of one’s neighbor, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions.”

The 2nd Annual World Interfaith Harmony Week opening event was held on Wednesday, February 1st in the General Assembly Hall. The programme included distinguished speakers, musicians and eminent representatives of diverse religious traditions.

Getting to Know the UN International Labour Organization

Founded during the aftermath of WWI in 1919, the ILO was established with a vision based on the premise that social justice is the only platform on which universal, lasting peace can be established. The ILO’s primary goals are to promote the rights of the individual worker, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues. As the first specialized agency of the United Nations, its unique tripartite structure gives an equal voice to workers, employers and governments. This ensures that the views of social partners are reflected in labour standards and in formulation of new policies and programs. The ILO provides NGOs the information needed to promote their work for justice around the world.

“The ILO has a global role in promoting human rights and establishing safer social and working life norms. The core conventions adopted by the Organization remain highly topical.”

Tarja Halonen - President, Finland
In October 2011, advocates for immigrant rights came from across the United States along with international representatives to attend the National Immigrant Integration Conference (NIIC), which took place in Seattle, Washington. The NIIC is a gathering of leaders who envision democracy for all, achieved by advocating legislative change, advancing citizenship, voter registration and full integration of immigrants in the civic community, encouraging them to hold office and speak on their own behalf. Members of the Canadian Toronto-based Maytree Foundation attended and presented ‘Cities of Migration’ immigrant integration practices, which have been shown to be effective in cities worldwide including the United States.

This year's NIIC event was hosted by One America, an organization founded to ensure that the rights of immigrants in the United States would continue to be recognized and protected locally and nationally in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks. One of the most calculated abuses of these rights is human labor trafficking. Many immigrants each year are recruited by companies to come to the United States on H-2B visas. For a high processing fee, the company promises them work opportunities in America for high wages and better living conditions than those available to them in their homeland. Once here, they enter the American workforce as their company’s prisoners instead of employees.

An Example of Courageous Response to Labor Trafficking

Among the highlights of the Conference was the privilege of meeting Mark Massey and his testimony of encountering human labor trafficking in a very unexpected way. For his actions on behalf of immigrants, Mark Massey had received the Freedom from Fear Award, newly established by the non-profit Public Interest Projects. The organization’s web site (www.publicinterestprojects.org) describes this award as recognition of leaders “with a deep sense of shared humanity” who “have exposed themselves to considerable risk.”

Indeed, Massey’s story involves considerable courage and danger. Reporters Erica Hallerstein of AlterNet and Michael Overall of Tulsa World have written articles about Massey’s experience, which would define the next decade of his life. These articles are the sources for the narrative below:

A lay Pentecostal church outreach worker, in 2002, Mark Massey first learned of the suffering of Indian immigrant workers at the factory when they visited his church in Tulsa, OK. Brought to the United States by the factory’s owner, the workers quickly learned that the promises he had made to them of opportunity, green cards and high wages were false. Their passports were taken upon arrival and with them their freedom. Forced to live in crowded, unsanitary conditions and work for $2 per hour, the threat of deportation, kept many from speaking out.

When Massey came to the aid of the Indian workers, he was warned by an intermediary that the company would harm him if he continued to help the workers. Nevertheless in the middle of the night Mark drove his van to the steel company site and helped the workers escape, even though he was filled with fear and had no idea if what he was doing was legal or not, but his deep faith in God and his outrage at such abuse impelled him to act. He and his family gave shelter to 52 workers, and he approached Catholic Charities for immigration legal assistance for the workers.

His courage inspired the workers to take on the company in court. With testimony from eventually more than 200 Indian immigrant workers, a subsequent trial found the factory owner guilty of violating labor laws and fraud. Although the $1.3 million that the court awarded to the workers has not yet been paid, the negative publicity and court ruling caused the factory to close in August 2002.

In the next decade, Massey worked in Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida to help immigrant workers, brought here on the H-2B visa, who find themselves in similar situations of enslavement. Massey has faced threats from company managers and once was arrested for his efforts in New Orleans, LA. Remembering his courage on their behalf, the workers in Tulsa, OK, raised his bail money. Mark Massey’s courage has helped hundreds to gain their freedom, avoid deportation and gain permanent legal status.

At the NIIC, his story illustrates the lesson that organized efforts, which have a great impact on quality of life, can begin with individual acts of courage and service to the most vulnerable.
Representatives of different Units of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) committees of the Latin American (LA) region (COLAJYP) of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) met in Lima from January 23rd to 27th of this year.

Vicente Lopez, Provincial in Mexico and the liaison between COLAJYP and the Major Superiors of the LA region, Jeevendra Paul, director of the OMI Development Office in Rome, spoke on grant possibilities for sustainable development and Nicanor Sarmiento, recent PhD graduate in Indigenous Theology presented “The Christian Theologies of the Andean Region, a Rainbow of Theological Voices” and Daniel LeBlanc representative to the UN in New York and to VIVAT International participated in the session.

This session of COLAJYP gave everyone the opportunity to update themselves on achievements, on-going efforts and current challenges in the different units of the region. Priorities of the OMI JPIC ministry were reviewed. They spent some time in dialogue with Marco Arana and with representatives of civil society organizations, mainly on “The ecological crisis and suggestions for change; a look at ecology from a political perspective”. They took the time for Daniel to give them the comments received from Camille Piché (OMI JPIC Coordinator) and to better understand our participation in VIVAT International, the priorities at the international level and discussed ways to ensure a better communication between the different levels of action. Finally, they considered regional objectives for the next three years, concluding with the election of a new leadership team for COLAJYP.

There were also opportunities to meet with the JPIC animators of other VIVAT congregations in Peru: Asmeret Aregay (Comboni Sisters), Deisy Martinez (Little Sisters of the Assumption) and Juan Goicochea (Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus).

Upon review, it was noted that many Oblates in the region work on JPIC issues, sometimes individually, but mostly with others, Oblates, religious women and men, lay people and members of civil society organizations, often-times faith based. Some of these issues have to do with Indigenous peoples, women, prisoners, children and youth, mining, defense of the environment, water, population and migration (internal, south-south and south-north), amongst others.

There was a clear recognition that there are many other areas of great importance in LA and that, in one way or another, one or more Oblate is responding to the challenges, usually in collaboration with other civil society actors and at times with ombudsmen and in the political arena.

There was a general consensus that, in the next three years, special efforts are to be made: (1) JPIC animators will work with those responsible for the formation of future Oblates to assure a good education in JPIC, and assure opportunities for those in formation to experience concrete JPIC missionary experiences. (2) They will also concentrate on education in JPIC for the laity, especially youth, where we minister, with special emphasis in the area of education, both formal and informal. (3) And, encourage and help, where needed, the units of the region who have not yet a JPIC committee to do so.

Near the end of the session some time was spent considering the needs and who could best lead these efforts. Miguel Pipolo (Brazil), Roberto Tolentino (Mexico) and Carlos Salcedo (Peru) were elected to form the Executive Committee as President, Secretary and Treasurer, respectively. Daniel Diaz (Cuba) was elected alternate.

This opportunity and renewed contact gives much hope that gospel values and our Oblate charism are being more widely and fully put into practice for the good of the people we work with, especially those living in poverty. We learn and grow when together, and more yet when we allow the lives and reality of those we work and live with to touch us.

There is a need to better understand some questions in order to be able to participate, dialogue and act on them, such as ecological and economic sustainability, types of governance, corruption, trafficking or persons, violence, extractive industries, dams, the right to clean water, free, prior and informed consent, social movements, social conflicts and so much more.

“We learn and grow when together, and more yet when we allow the lives and reality of those we work and live with to touch us.”
Social Media and NGOs

Social Media has generated thousands of dollars to causes such as poverty eradication, women's rights, and sustainable development. It has created an outlet for millions of people to advocate for their causes and to receive the support needed to keep visions alive. So what exactly is social media?

According to the United Nations Department of Social and External Affairs, “It’s about reaching and connecting people.” Social media is an instrument of communication, consisting of open participation, conversation, connectedness, and the building of a worldwide community. According to Internet World Stats, over seventy-eight percent of the North American population has been penetrated by the Internet, and about sixty-one percent in Europe. There are approximately 2,267,233,742 estimated Internet users in the world as of December 31, 2011. Social Media gives everyone the opportunity to break down communication boundaries across the world and spread important messages in very short periods of time.

There are several forms of social media, including social networks, blogs, podcasts, forums, wikis, and content communities. The most commonly heard of are Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter, as well as Flickr, StumbleUpon, and LinkedIn. By utilizing these websites, there is an opportunity to raise public awareness, raise funds, enhance relations with an existing audience, reach new constituents and supporters, advance the organization’s mission, and much more. Not only is it low cost, it gives an opportunity for conversation and complements the messages we’re sharing through other channels. Social media should be utilized to promote our cause.

If you are set on utilizing social media, begin with a strategic plan with realistic and concrete goals. Whether the goal is to find a certain number of people to sign a petition, or to generate buzz on a particular topic, make sure you keep your goals in mind, but never forget to be flexible as you go along.

In order to cause awareness, influence, action, and impact the people, tell their stories. Use social media as a platform to support, educate, and hold conversations. It should be about them, not you. Listen to what they are speaking about, and respond back. Helpful tools that will help you listen are Google Alerts, which updates you on the latest relevant Google results on your choice of topic, and SocialMention.Com, which allows you to search information on social media to see if people are talking about the topic you choose.

Always remember to be patient and to utilize the strengths of your community. Evaluate your results, iterate, and re-launch if necessary. Expand your definition of success. Did you increase awareness? Shift the organization’s reputation? Gain new and repeat program participants? Gain new emails and contact information? Signatures? Raise funds? Get more mentions online? If you achieved any of these, consider the investment a success.

For more information on social media and how you can utilize it, please visit the helpful links below:
http://socialmedia-listening.wikispaces.com/Tools
What is Rio+20?

Rio+20 - the short name for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012 - is a historic opportunity to define pathways to a safer, more equitable, cleaner, greener and more prosperous world for all.

Twenty years after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, where countries adopted Agenda 21 - a blueprint to rethink economic growth, advance social equity and ensure environmental protection - the UN is again bringing together governments, international institutions and major groups to agree on a range of smart measures that can reduce poverty while promoting decent jobs, clean energy and a more sustainable and fair use of resources.

Rio+20 is a chance to move away from business-as-usual and to act to end poverty, address environmental destruction and build a bridge to the future.

Why do we need Rio+20?

• The world now has 7 billion people - by 2050, there will be 9 billion.
• One out of every five people - 1.4 billion - currently lives on $1.25 a day or less.
• A billion and a half people in the world do not have access to electricity. Two and a half billion do not have a toilet. And almost a billion go hungry every day.
• Greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, and more than a third of all known species could go extinct if climate change continues unchecked.
• If we are to leave a liveable world to our children and grandchildren, the challenges of widespread poverty and environmental destruction need to be tackled now.

We will incur far greater costs in the future - including more poverty and instability, and a degraded planet - if we fail to adequately address these critical challenges now.

• Rio+20 provides an opportunity to think globally, so that we can all act locally to secure our common future.

What issues will Rio+20 tackle?

Solutions for many sustainable development problems - including challenges related to cities, energy, water, food and ecosystems - are known.

At Rio+20, countries will seek ways to make them a reality by:

• Making the transition to greener economies while focusing on poverty eradication.
• Protecting our oceans from over-fishing, destruction of marine ecosystems and the adverse effects of climate change.
• Making our cities more liveable and more efficient.
• Broadening the use of renewable energy sources that can significantly lower carbon emissions as well as indoor and outdoor pollution, while promoting economic growth.
• Better managing forests to provide a broad range of benefits - reducing deforestation by half through 2030 could avoid an estimated US$ 3.7 trillion in climate change damages from greenhouse gas emissions - and that’s not counting the value of jobs and income, biodiversity, clean water and medicines provided by forests.
• Improving the way we conserve and manage our water resources, in order to promote development and guard against desertification.
What will happen at Rio+20?

Thousands of participants from governments, the private sector, NGOs and other stakeholders will gather in Rio at the end of May and beginning of June 2012 for a strong push towards sustainable development.

The last session of the Preparatory Committee for the Conference and the actual conference will take place there in June 2012.

In parallel with and between the official events, there will be numerous side events, exhibitions, presentations, fairs and announcements by a wide range of partners.

The official discussions will focus on two main themes: How to build a green economy to achieve sustainable development and lift people out of poverty, including support for developing countries that will allow them to find a green path for development; and how to improve international coordination for sustainable development.

Governments are expected to adopt clear and focused practical measures for implementing sustainable development, based on the many examples of success we have seen over the last 20 years.

How can I participate or contribute?

It takes more than governments to build sustainable development - partnerships among people, community groups, organizations, businesses and academia are needed. Rio+20 is a major opportunity to form partnerships and to highlight work by all stakeholders. The official website www.unsd2012.org provides a platform for civil society, business, academia and NGOs to share their preparatory activities for Rio+20. Information on how to register to attend the Conference will also be posted. (source DESA)

The Commission on Status of Women 2012 focused on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges. A powerful documentary produced by Wiktor Kanaski, sivd was part of a presentation by Lilly Be'Soer Kolts, a grassroots women from Papua New Guinea who came to New York to be part of various events at the commission. The three minutes clip “was a great tool to reach out the audience and touch their hearts” - Joyce Onguglo.

Lilly is the founder of the women's human rights NGO, Voice for Change, in Papua New Guinea. Lilly Be'Soer

On 9 March 2012, the draft resolution entitled: "Indigenous Women: key actors in poverty and hunger eradication" (E/CN.6/2012/L.6) was adopted at the Commission on the Status of Women at its Fifty-sixth Session. To view the resolution please view the “What's New” section of our homepage, www.un.org/indigenous and click on the link "Adoption of a Resolution on Indigenous Women".
The atrocities that are being committed in Syria have again captured the attention of the United Nations when the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, informed the General Assembly that the current situation in Syria has worsened. A General Assembly resolution called for the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad.

Nevertheless, another much more pressing issue also captured the attention of the UN. The nations of the world are preparing the way to regulate commerce in arms, munitions, and related equipment in order to halt or at least drastically reduce the illicit arms trade which causes hundreds of thousands of deaths each year, and creates immense numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons.

The nations of the world have labored to establish the procedures that will be used to negotiate the Arms Trade Treaty [ATT]. The actual treaty will be negotiated at the UN headquarters in New York in July this year. The negotiations will be difficult. The states that produce and sell weapons have a vested interest in limiting the scope and force of the treaty. Such states want the treaty to be strictly about regulating commerce, downplaying humanitarian concerns. Some states such as China, Egypt, Russia, and the United States, hold reservations regarding efforts to make violations of Human Rights, including gender-based violence, and International Humanitarian Law, criteria for prohibiting the sale or transfer of weapons to an offending nation. They would also exclude as a criterion the deleterious effects of armed violence on efforts to foster development.

Most NGOs want a strong and comprehensive treaty with mechanisms to ensure compliance in order to safeguard human lives and create conditions for human and social development. Organizations across the globe have been campaigning for an effective treaty to stop the illicit flow of weapons for a very long time. In fact, the first attempts to bring about such a treaty go back to the League of Nations after WW I.

At this point there is no guarantee that the negotiations will come to a successful conclusion. Now it is necessary to influence global public opinion in order to pressure the governments of the world to negotiate, sign and ratify a comprehensive and effective treaty that will help to save the lives and dignity of countless thousands of human beings.

Churches and humanitarian groups are pleading that the public support a strong and robust Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), putting pressure on governments to create an effective and comprehensive treaty that will reduce gun violence around the world. [http://speakout.controlarms.org/speakout/index.php](http://speakout.controlarms.org/speakout/index.php) is the website to join the Speak Out campaign in support of the Arms Trade Treaty. You can state why the ATT is important to you.

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**Upcoming Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>April 7</strong></td>
<td><strong>May 7 - May 18</strong></td>
<td><strong>June 5</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>World Health Day</td>
<td>Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 11th Session</td>
<td>World Environment Day</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>April 23 - April 27</strong></td>
<td><strong>May 21- May 30</strong></td>
<td><strong>June 13-15</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Commission on Population and Development, 45th Session</td>
<td>Resumed Session, Committee on NGOS</td>
<td>3rd Preparatory Committee Meeting UN Conference on Sustainable Development</td>
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<td><strong>April 4</strong></td>
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<td><strong>June 15-23</strong></td>
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<td>International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action</td>
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<td>Peoples Summit for Social and Environmental Justice in the defense of the commons</td>
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<td><strong>June 20 - June 22</strong></td>
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<td>Rio+20 Conference</td>
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