DEAR READERS,

WELCOME TO THE 61ST ONLINE ISSUE OF THE VIVAT NEWSLETTER!

At the United Nations headquarters, the months of September and October always seem to burst with a marvelous energy as the General Assembly convenes change-makers from every corner of the globe. This year’s General Assembly was no exception, providing a critical stage for forward movement on development and human rights initiatives.

VIVAT once again added its own energy to the deliberations, helping to secure both commitments to honor the rights of indigenous peoples and greater curbs on abuses by corporations. This issue, which further details these UN initiatives, also touches on the injustices faced by the world’s growing number of immigrants and two workshops in Papua New Guinea and Paraguay that have enriched the VIVAT community.

Finally, this issue also includes a poignant farewell. After seven years of service, both the President of VIVAT, Sr. Maria Theresia, and the VIVAT Executive Team in New York will be stepping down. Their tireless advocacy efforts will be sorely missed. However, this farewell is also accompanied by a warm welcome, to the new team and new president who will continue VIVAT’s important work. We wish them God’s blessing in their work.

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From September 16th to October 1st the United Nations convened the 69th session of the General Assembly (GA). The GA this year attracted an exceptional number of heads-of-state, 120 in total, as the world continues to grapple with ever-more interconnected problems. The president of this year’s GA was the honorable Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa, elected in June of this year. Mr. Kutesa currently serves as Uganda’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and received a unanimous vote of support from all countries in Africa.

Led by President Kutesa, member states in this year’s General Assembly voiced great concern over the continuing spread of the Ebola virus in West Africa and the growing threat from extremism in the Middle East. In light of the international scope of these issues and the significant risk they pose to the socio-economic development of dozens of nations, heads of state sought to create a coordinated vigorous response from the international community. In addition to work on these recent issues, General Assembly participants also took time to not only measure global progress in poverty eradication and human rights promotion, but also renew their promises to further these goals. In a speech marking development progress, UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon noted that in the past two decades the likelihood of a child dying before the age of five has been nearly cut in half. This reduction means about 17,000 children have been saved every day. In addition, efforts to fight tuberculosis have saved an estimated 22 million lives since the inception of the first millennium development goals in 2000. As Secretary Moon underlined, the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) have been the largest antipoverty campaign in history.

However, despite this progress, many of the poverty reduction targets of the Millennium Development Goals remain out of reach. 1.2 billion people still live on less than $1.25 a day, lacking adequate healthcare, sanitation, and housing. In order to move towards righting such injustices the 69th GA worked extensively to build momentum for the next round of development goals, the Sustainable Development Goals, to be in place from 2015 to 2030. At an MDG session, leaders called on all actors, whether from government, business, or civil society, to keep pushing for inclusive development. VIVAT has also raised its voice to help support the MDGs, participating in consultations to draw greater attention to human rights and poverty issues, particularly those associated with mining. Reflecting VIVAT’s mission, the 69th General Assembly also invested significant time in addressing human rights. Specifically, the Assembly elected 15 new states to serve on the Human Rights Council, the UN body responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. Given the international attention granted to development issues at the 69th General Assembly, VIVAT is confident all nations will act with greater resolve in pursuing the current MDG goals and in implementing the future post-2015 framework.
BUILDING ON the momentum of the World Indigenous People’s Conference, the United Nations community moved directly into the Climate Summit of 2014 on September 23rd. The summit similarly overlapped with the General Assembly, drawing high-level participation and media attention. It is important to note that the summit did not include any direct negotiations by member states. Instead, the goal was to both draw greater public attention to the problems of climate change and to galvanize future action by governments during scheduled negotiations in 2015.

To meet this goal of building greater political momentum, the Climate Summit was preceded by the People’s Climate March, an event organized by civil society groups. While the March included a whole weekend of speakers and conferences, the event itself drew over 300,000 participants to New York City. In a powerful signal to policymakers that climate change is an especially worrying issue, thousands of people from all backgrounds streamed down the 3 mile parade route. The march included significant participation from religious civil society groups and the VIVAT executive team joined the marchers along with many colleagues. As a further sign of the strength of religious participation, a climate vigil, filled with faith representatives praying for greater climate action, overlooked the march’s starting point from a nearby hill. This energetic and compelling display of people-power in support of climate action provided a memorable opening to the official Climate Summit, emphasizing that climate protection is an essential element of any development agenda.

Following the Climate March’s dramatic display of popular support for mitigating climate change, the Summit itself placed the spotlight on actions by governments and the private sector to combat climate change. Responding to this call, governments and business heads came forward with a long list of goals and contributions. For example, leaders from more than 40 countries, 30 cities and dozens of corporations, launched large-scale commitments to double the rate of global energy efficiency by 2030 through vehicle fuel efficiency, lighting, appliances, buildings and district energy. Countries also pledged an additional $2.3 billion for the Green Climate Fund, a transfer fund for climate aid from developed to developing nations. Such commitments from all sectors of society will help ensure that poor communities, who have contributed little to climate change but are the most adversely affected by the phenomenon, will be safeguarded. The executive team at VIVAT, which has long advocated for a society oriented around serving the needs of the poor, is given hope by such an outcome and overjoyed by the strong display of grassroots mobilization that helped to achieve this goal.
UN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ CONFERENCE

RESTORING THE HUMAN RIGHTS FOR THE WORLD’S OLDEST COMMUNITIES

FOR A FEW DAYS marked by their exceptional color and hospitality, thousands of indigenous people and advocates descended on the United Nations Headquarters from September 22nd to 23rd for the World Indigenous People’s conference. The conference participants worked towards a common goal, the adoption of a final, six-page outcome document. Member states and civil society negotiated the contents of the document over the course of both the conference and earlier consultations. VIVAT contributed actively to this negotiation process, helping to serve as a voice for the 5% of the world population that identifies as indigenous.

In its advocacy work, VIVAT has long focused on indigenous issues, especially the right to free, prior, and informed consent for indigenous communities. This right, often abbreviated as FPIC, is critical to granting indigenous communities the ability to control their own land and preserve their culture. However, particularly in settings where indigenous lands contain valuable natural resources, governments are too quick to compromise the right of their indigenous citizens to FPIC and instead force communities to relocate or irreversibly dilute their way of life. Responding to this global demand for greater defense of such basic rights to autonomy, the outcome document prominently features a strong commitment to FPIC on the part of all signatories. Specifically, paragraph three of the document, the first paragraph not composed of diplomatic introductions, calls for “consultations with the indigenous peoples concerned…in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent.” This conspicuous inclusion of the phrase represents a significant victory for indigenous activists and led to the document’s acceptance by a wide range of civil society groups.

VIVAT was also proud to have participated in the conference and is confident that such strong words will be matched by concrete actions to protect the rights of the indigenous on the ground. Speaking of the conference, indigenous advocate and Nobel laureate Rigoberta Menchu affirmed that “We have set an important precedent with regard to our rights. The dream is that it will allow us to have a prosperous life for all the peoples benefited by this day.” By continuing to defend such rights to FPIC and to recognize the rich contribution of indigenous communities worldwide, the executive team at VIVAT also joins in the celebration of such an achievement.

“The vast majority of the world’s genetic resources are found on indigenous peoples’ lands, and their specialized livelihood practices and traditional ecological knowledge contribute significantly to low-carbon sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of biodiversity and maintaining genetic diversity.” (source: un.org)
A GROUP of 19 gathered in Tucson, AZ for an immersion experience on migration across the desert. This experience was organized through the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), so there were several from various religious communities and JPIC coordinators/promoters. During our days together, we experienced many facets of the immigration issue, from spending part of a day with an organization that brings water, food, and medical aid to those who cross the desert to attending immigration court.

The most memorable experience for me personally was our day with the Samaritans, who go out to the migrant trails and provide medical aid and water to those in need. On that particular day, we traveled to Warsaw Canyon, a remote area far away from the Interstate. We did not encounter anyone crossing the desert, but we did find an area where a group of migrants had obviously camped. The conditions in the desert are very treacherous, the landscape dry and slippery. Without good shoes, it is easy to fall and break bones. Also, the climate of Arizona is dangerously dry, requiring frequent hydration. So many migrants who cross the desert are unequipped for the treacherous conditions of this environment.

Arizona had been getting a lot of rain around the time of my immersion experience. On the one hand, this rain brings new life to the desert and provides green grass for the cattle that graze in the more mountainous regions of Arizona. On the other, this rain also brings hazardous conditions to the fragile desert environment. Dry riverbeds fill with water, gullies gush with torrents of water, and low-lying regions flood. Many migrants, who tried to cross the desert under these torrential conditions, probably lost their lives while trying to seek a better one. These are the realities that migrants face each day.

Migration and the harsh system that surrounds it are not only problematic in the United States, but also pose many problems and injustices in many countries around the world. Within the European Union, for instance, several million migrants have "irregular status," which for many of them means they do not have their immigration papers. Mexico has been deporting women and children from Central America who try to cross through Mexico to get across the US border. Many of these vulnerable people are deported back to conditions of poverty and violence. In some instances, children have been killed after arriving back to their home country. These are realities that migrants face at an international level.

The issue of migration feels overwhelming at times, and one wonders what can be done to bring justice to such an unjust system. One action that each one of us can take is to find out about the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrants and Members of Their Families (please see: www2.ohchr.org). Since 2003, only 34 countries have ratified this convention, unfortunately the US not being among them. It is important for each one of us to find out if our home country has ratified this important convention. If your country has not, then it is important to do advocacy work around getting it implemented. This important convention ensures universal human rights for migrant workers and their families.

Brian McLauchlin, SVD
Worldwide it is estimated that there are more than 230 million migrants – that is, people living outside their country of origin. Listening to the news, that number seems to be growing on a daily basis. With recurring economic crises and a growing number of conflicts across the globe the increase is set to continue for some time yet.

People are on the move, across and within borders (and have been forever) in all regions and continents. Some cross into a neighbouring country in the region, (this accounts for about 40% of the total global migrant population) while many cross several borders before they settle.

As a result, when it comes to employment - ‘Migrants are often to be found working in jobs that are dirty, dangerous and degrading.’ They regularly live in a twilight zone, without proper papers, fearful for their future and unable to fully contribute to their new country.

In the first place, travelling to another place in search of work can be a hazardous journey. So far, this year 3,000 people have died as they travel the seas from North Africa to Europe.

The island of Lampedusa, (Italy) has become well-known as a landing point for migrants and where many dreams have come to an abrupt end. And to get to this point they have already become indebted back home, paid off middle men and survived the high seas in overcrowded boats.

But this only tells part of the supply side of the story. The other side is about the declining growth rate of populations in practically all countries of Europe and the growing need for more people to support an aging population. People are living longer and hence have a greater need for good enduring pensions. More people will be needed in the workforce to keep those pensions in a healthy state.

In most European Union countries life expectancy hovers around 80 years or above. About half of the countries in Europe have a negative birth growth rate. Ireland has the highest rate at 1.77%. Bulgaria has the lowest at minus 0.78%. Some years ago a Eurostat report stated that ‘the impact of population shrinkage, coupled with the ageing of key European societies, spells big problems for pensions, health and welfare systems across much of the union.’

Yet, despite these negative trends with regard to population numbers the EU is not very favourable towards accepting more immigrants. In many societies there is a significant number of irregular migrants. They are making a great contribution towards the well-being of the states where they dwell. In the countries where they can work services would receive a major blow if these undocumented were to depart.

It is time for Europe to change its thinking about migrants. A more positive and flexible approach to the solution of this issue would be welcome. Many other countries in Asia and Africa are more open to receive migrants in greater numbers. Is Europe open and generous enough to follow their lead? They need to make a greater contribution than at present.

Edward Flynn, CSSp
FROM AUGUST 4-8, 2014, representatives of VIVAT International met in Pikry, Paraguay for a VIVAT International Workshop.

In the workshop, there were several presentations by local resource persons: “Biblical Bases for Justice and Peace”; “Justice and Peace in the Social Doctrine of the Church”; “The Current National situation and the Work of Lobbying”; and “The Experience of Human Rights in Paraguayan Context”.

The Executive team of VIVAT from New York and Geneva shared with the participants how VIVAT cooperates with the United Nations, particularly considering the shared objectives of both the UN and VIVAT International. The composition of the United Nations and its different organs were explained with special attention to how, as VIVAT members, we can work with the UN. The participants of the workshop were also informed of the process and importance of:

1. The Universal Periodic Review carried out by the UN as a way to verify the dedication to human rights goals in each country and
2. CEDAW (Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) provides appropriate measures for women to enjoy their rightful place and dignity and how countries could be made accountable for its implementation.

Presentations were given to reflect the global work of VIVAT International, but also provided several examples of collaborative efforts between the international and ever-growing number of nationally organized VIVAT groups. Workshops participants were informed about the process of establishing a national office of VIVAT, taking into consideration the legal requirements at the national and international level. The national VIVAT Groups of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile shared their experiences, achievements, and challenges as a national organization.

RESOLUTION:
After reflecting on their experience in ministering with the people of Paraguay, the participants of the workshop identified two priorities for their ministry in the year ahead. They felt that addressing these two issues will do much to enhance their collaboration with the people they serve.

The priority issues are:
1. TRAINING
   a) For the members of VIVAT, to sensitize them to the needs of the communities and peoples they serve.
   b) To sensitize/educate communities to help them prioritize the problems they want to address and to empower them to take appropriate actions to overcome their problems.

2. LAND
The issue of land grabbing affects indigenous peoples, farmers and urban dwellers. We want to assist these communities in protecting their right to their land and prevent the degradation and destruction of the environment by landgrabbers.
Life can be violent for both women and men in Papua New Guinea (PNG). But women experience a high level of violence in many ways: physical, emotional, sexual, and in controlling behavior.

Partnering with the Catholic Bishops’ Conference and with Caritas Australia, PNG JPIC coordinator Fr Philip Gibbs SVD has been instrumental in arranging a series of training programs for men, designed to promote gender equality and respect. The principal trainer is Paulo Baleinakorodawa from Fiji.

Specifically the objectives of the male advocates training is to:

- Provide an opportunity for PNG men to explore their attitudes towards issues related to gender, violence and gender-based violence.
- Help build a perspective amongst men that clearly recognizes that gender-based violence is wrong and that they have a crucial role to play in its prevention as well as in creating alliances with women to promote gender equality and eliminate GBV.
- Help PNG men understand how the process of socialization shapes our understanding of what it is to be a man or a woman, and how this understanding influences behavior and attitude.
- To help men reflect on the different forms of gender based violence in society, analyze the root causes of such violence and understand the impacts on women, children and men.
- To explore guidelines and strategies for ‘positive masculinity’ for men in PNG.

Over a hundred men have been trained in three workshops. These trained men are then expected to go and raise awareness amongst other men and boys in their respective communities. Several months after each workshop the facilitators go to meet with those trained to assess implementation of the plans and to assist with advice. The follow up also provides an opportunity to identify those who will be selected for advanced training. Some indications of change in perception that happened have come from comments such as “I feel very guilty now to know that I have been contributing to violence against women and girls as a man in this culture through my own attitudes and behavior. Even when I see a woman being hit and I do not do anything to stop it, I am contributing to violence against women.”

Scenes may viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzfCif7T-A

Philip Gibbs, SVD
THE MINING CORPORATION is like a monster for the little peasants of Tumbak. From 11 to 13 Sept. 2014 the villagers of Tumbak in Flores, Indonesia had a nightmare. Company cars and excavators came into their collective lands of Lingko Roga to extract manganese. The farmers carried out protests in their struggle against the company, PT. Aditya Bumi Pertambangan. Some 35 villagers of Tumbak including women kept defending their rights to their own lands. They built up a living fence and blocked roads where company cars and excavators were passing through. Some mothers, reportedly, removed their clothes to protest bare-chested against the company which grabbing their land for mining operation.

THE LOCAL POLICE of Manggarai institutionally backed up the company. They have often intimidated the little peasants, saying: "If you continue blocking the road, then tomorrow you will be faced with a huge wall." The “great wall” means a security force coming up with a large numbers of police and army to keep security and protect some vital assets of mining company.

ON SEPTEMBER 13, 2014, the chief of Manggarai Police deployed as many as 20 police members to guard company cars and heavy equipment. The Policemen armed themselves with 5 rifles and 8 gas water canes. The little peasants and a few of women (mothers) tried to block the road, to hold and pull out the company cars. At the time, Fr. Simon Suban SVD, the JPIC coordinator of SVD Ruteng Province and a member of VIVAT International-Indonesia was among the people. They held and pulled out the company cars. A policeman roughly pulled Fr. Suban’s arms and pounded his stomach until he fell down and lost consciousness for an hour. Moreover, some peasants and the SVD JPIC staff had been violently abused both physically and verbally by some security forces. Some were beaten and kicked with boots and the others were pierced with sticks. In addition, a policeman chased a seminary student who used a video camera to film their attempts to negotiate with the villagers.
ON OCTOBER 13, 2014 some 1,500 people of Manggarai including priests, nuns, lay people, catechists’ students and local Civil Society Organizations did a peaceful protest against mining in three cities of Ruteng, Borong and Labuan Bajo simultaneously in whole district of Manggarai. The simultaneous action was organized by the Catholic Church of Ruteng Diocese in West Flores. The recent Synod of Ruteng Diocese highly recommended stopping the mining operation in the whole district of Manggarai because it does nothing to provide economic benefits for the little peasants’ communities. Moreover, it has caused the destruction of forests and the contamination of drinking water and has draining wellsprings. In addition, mining corporations trigger social conflicts among the people living around the mining location and destroyed cultural and sacred sites of the local people.

A similar protest action was also carried out in Jakarta focusing on some state institutions such as the National Office of Human Rights Commission and the National Police Headquarters. Organized by VIVAT International-Indonesia in collaboration with 14 national CSOs, the National Solidarity Forum came to the office of the Human Rights Commission and urged it to publicly reveal the human rights violations in Tumbak and in other locations of mining sites in the whole district of Manggarai. The Chief of National Police and The NTT District Police as well were asked to conduct a legal process to investigate the police officers allegedly involved in violent acts and intimidation against peasants in Tumbak.

To date there are 21 mining licenses issued by local government in Manggarai districts including manganese and gold mining. The Forum, therefore, asked the local authorities to immediately revoke all permits and to not issue new licenses.

"We demand that the local government stop all mining activities, revoke all mining business licenses (IUP), no longer issue new mining permits in the district," said Fr. Simon Tu-kan SVD.

Paul Rahmat svd
VIVAT International-Indonesia
DEAR VIVAT MEMBERS AND FRIENDS,

As my time as a President of VIVAT International comes to an end, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all of you who share our dream for a better world and who are committed to this dream through their life and mission. VIVAT International is one of the instruments that helps us to give the voiceless a voice, to make the struggles and suffering of those living in poverty at and beyond the margins known to the world.

GOOD BYE

2015 will see several changes. In January I will hand over the presidency to Father Heinz Kulücke, Superior General of the SVD. Father Heinz has rich experiences at the grass roots level as well as in handling NGOs through his many years of being a missionary in the Philippines. I am sure he will continue to make VIVAT International an even more useful tool for all of us to be a prophetic voice on the international level.

Members may feel even more the changes that will take place in the Executive Office in New York. Both Sr. Zelia Cordeiro and Fr. Felix Jones are going to finish their term. Words cannot express what I want to say in order to thank them for their dedicated, competent, committed and loving service during the past seven years. They have closely followed the needs of VIVAT members, have made contacts and have responded to actual events as well as trained VIVAT members around the world especially through the workshops and the internship programme. It is with gratitude that we say good bye to them, knowing that also in the future VIVAT will be at the heart of their mission. We thank them not only for their hard work, but also for doing it very consciously as a team. THANK YOU!

As president I was able to do my service only because of their constant support, concrete advice, help and hard work.
WELCOME

After saying Good bye I equally welcome the newly appointed members of the Executive Team Sr. Helen Saldanha SSpS and Fr. Robertus Mirsel SVD. We are most grateful to them and to their respective Provinces that they have said “yes” to this important and challenging service. Sr. Helen is from the Province of India South, a social worker and lawyer by profession and has long years of experiences in JPIC issues especially with women. At present she serves as the Secretary of the Women’s Desk of the Bishops Conference of India. Fr. Robertus is from Flores West and has done his studies of theology in Indonesia and sociology in the USA and in Germany. He was teaching and a member of a research team. Besides that he was always involved in advocacy work for people of the grassroots in defending their rights against the government and profit-driven companies. Since 2011 he is the JPIC coordinator in his Province in Flores. Both, Sr. Helen and Fr. Robertus, have been involved in the National branches of VIVAT International in their respective countries.

Dear VIVAT members and friends, change is a sign of life. And VIVAT International is all about LIFE. We trust, that the journey we made together so far will continue with new faces and in new places. As people caring for life, we continue to believe that a better world is possible, not with weapons and war, but in the power of the Spirit. In this regard our present world situation puts before us big challenges and we are urged to respond with faith, hope and in a nonviolent way.

May God bless all of us, but especially Fr. Heinz, Fr. Robertus and Sr. Helen who take over new responsibilities in the coming three years as well as Sr. Zelia and Fr. Felix who prepare themselves for new missions.

Sr. Maria Theresia Hörnemann SSpS

VIVAT-USA: Universal Periodic Review

The VIVAT-USA team asked themselves, “How can we make a difference in the United States and the world by using the UN’s global processes? After reflection VIVAT-USA decided to work on a shadow report on immigration issues here in the United States using the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The UPR is a process in which the UN Human Rights Council examines how each State is fulfilling its human rights obligations and commitments. The United States will be having its next UPR in the 22nd session of the second cycle (May 2015).

Since the topic of immigration issues was too broad, we focused the report on dealing with the separation of family members, especially of children from their parents during the deportation proceedings. Our shadow report presented established facts along with some recommendations regarding how to remedy this situation to the Human Rights Council. With the increase of unaccompanied children crossing the USA border this year, and the continuance of deportation policies that break up families under the Obama administration, this report is even more relevant. Read full report.