

**61st Annual Department of Public Information (DPI)/Non-Governmental
Organizations (NGO) Conference**

Reaffirming Human Rights for All: The Universal Declaration—60th Anniversary

**September 3-5, 2008
UNESCO, Paris**

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*"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."*

- Article One of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**I. Overview**

This three day conference was divided into various plenary sessions, workshops and roundtables with the ultimate goal to raise awareness of the Universal Declaration as a tool to be used in ending discrimination and ensuring that the views and voices of those discriminated against are heard. There were approximately 2,000 participants representing 180 countries.

**II. Highlights from Plenary Sessions and Workshops**

- A. Opening and Keynote Addresses--**Prominent speakers: Ban Ki-moon (Secretary-General, UN), Rama Yade (French Deputy Minister in Charge of Foreign Affairs and Human Rights), Simone Veil (former French Minister of State) and several other UN leaders

One of the main challenges in raising awareness of human rights is the difficulty in reaching the poorest of the poor in the world with this important message. It is not only difficult to communicate the message of human rights, but also to ensure their rights are upheld when they are impoverished without a voice or power. Other vulnerable groups include women and homosexuals. Six countries in the world apply the death penalty to homosexuals.

- B. Women's Rights are Human Rights: Cases from Africa, Caucasus, Europe and the Middle East—**Moderator: Ani Kalayjian, UN Representative to the Armenian International Women's Association and Professor of Psychology Fordham University, NYC

The moderator spoke first about positive activism for women's rights in various countries around the world, citing examples related to

abortion rights, wages, political positions and contraception availability. She spoke about embracing universal feminine energy such as caring, compassion, conscientiousness and community building. She said that actions such as peace over war, freedom over oppression, voice over silence and service over self-interest are important. This segment of the workshop portrayed an esoteric environment mixed with a lot of statistical information about female experiences in societies. The moderator asked everyone to participate in a meditation with candle light and oil. Several of the participants elected to leave the room.

Joyce L Oneko, founder and president of Mama Na Da Da, a women's NGO in Kenya, spoke about the activities of this organization and how they are making a positive impact in the lives of women in their local community. Ms. Oneko said that most women in rural areas of Kenya do not know anything about human rights. Women lack resources for family planning or combating HIV. Many children do not live more than five years usually due to sickness related to malaria and mothers do not have access to health care for their families. Since women learn from one another, this NGO, Mama Na Da Da, offers a place for peer learning and networking between mothers. These mothers have received much needed training from a special grassroots conference particularly for women hosted by Ms. Oneko's NGO. It took them two years to organize the conference because of apathy and disinterest in local community leaders, mostly males. Also, the problems of women were not of interest to males in the community. No media representatives or newspaper was present at the conference because no prominent community leader chose to attend the meeting. However, approximately 500 women attended the conference and they gained confidence due to their exchange with one another. Ms. Oneko says that women in Kenya need places where women can meet, more support structures and more networking opportunities.

Dr. Andrea Zielke-Nadkarni, professor of nursing education and science at Applied University of Muenster, Germany, spoke about the Worldwide Network for Gender Empowerment that began about five years ago to connect activists for women's rights. She also presented findings from a research study looking at violence against women in the workplace, specially, female nurses as victims in German hospitals and nursing homes. She said the three types of violence observed included verbal, physical and sexual abuse.

**C. Wednesday Afternoon Round-table Session: Upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**—“*All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated.*” (Article 5, 1993 Vienna Declaration)

Critiques of the current Human Rights Declaration were presented, which

included these points:

1. Need clearer communication of UNESCO's involvement with human

## Rights

2. The process for dealing with complaints about human rights needs improvement.
3. Consider writing a “declaration of human duties”, a duty to support others, a duty to relate to God

### **D. Overcoming Discrimination to Realize Human Rights and Dignity for All—***“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”* (Article 2, Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Eugene Brand, Director General, International Movement ATD Fourth World, declared this the “Year of the Poorest of the Poor”. Mr. Brand said that too many times the poor are used in research, but when are they engaged as equal partners? What about those who have been hungry since they were children? He said that we have a ‘fear of the other’. We need to engage in dialogue to reach mutual understanding between the poor and non-poor. Working together is the ethical thing to do. All people have dignity. We need to do away with the misunderstanding that poor families are only interested in fighting against poverty. They also want to work for the future well-being of the world. We need to create meeting spaces for the poor and the non-poor. Mr. Brand offered a dual approach to creating space for trust and mutual sharing. First, we need to find a common rationale between the poor and the non-poor and then, we must all take a risk in dialoguing together. I missed his second point.

Lita Anggraini, Coordinator for the National Network for Domestic Workers Advocacy, presented on her humanitarian work and sociological research on Mayotte Island, which is one of the four Comoro Islands. However, politically, it does not belong to the Comoro Islands, but to France. Even though, this is by choice of the people of Mayotte, it has contributed to a lot of social problems on the island. Currently, there are few NGOs working on the island despite the sad social situation. There is a lot of human trafficking due to the choice to remain under French law, which leaves many people in an illegal citizenship status. It’s difficult to get official French paperwork, so many of the people of Mayotte are undocumented, which places them in vulnerable situations. They are expelled without papers from the island by French officials, and it is very difficult to return to Mayotte once they are forced to leave. Those without French paperwork do not have any health coverage either. There are a lot of street children, orphans and disappearances among children. Forced labor, sexual abuse and abduction of women are other problems.

Some NGOs have arrived to help disabled children, but more support is needed. One group there to help female victims of violence can only help women with official French paperwork, which leaves a lot of

other women without resources. How can these “non-existent people” stand up for their rights such as a ‘right to an identity’? For more information about Mayotte go to [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/mayotte](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/mayotte)

**E. Trafficking in Women: A Major Human Rights Violation—  
Moderator: Hayrettin Kilic, NGO Representative, International Blue Crescent**

Aspa Plakantonaki, Coordinator on Human Rights Projects focused on refugees and trafficking issues at Euroconsultants, Greece, presented on how the International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation (IBC) has tried to raise awareness and combat human trafficking in Greece and Turkey. (I have asked for her complete power point presentation and documents used in training, which I will post to the village once I receive everything.)

The primary role of IBC has been to raise awareness in the community about human trafficking. They have not done any hands-on work with victims of human trafficking or with the traffickers themselves. Ms. Plakantonaki pointed out that there is still a lot of confusion about the definitions related to human trafficking and they have worked hard to create presentations and media campaigns to communicate this information more effectively. She is willing to share these resources with CBF and our partners that are interested in community training events.

Women are most commonly trafficked for sexual exploitation in Turkey and Greece. One third of mothers with children usually coming to Turkey or Greece with illegal documents are promised work; however, they are later trafficked. Victims of trafficking in Turkey most often come from Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Nigeria. Those in Greece come from Nigeria, Romania and Bulgaria. It is common for victims from Nigeria to be controlled and scared by voodoo practices.

The IBC says that a holistic strategy for combating human trafficking is needed, which includes prevention, protection and prosecution. As a side note, representatives from Unanima International were present in the workshop. They are trying to stop the demand for trafficking by focusing on those that use sexual labor or the traffickers themselves. Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking in Europe (CHASTE) [www.chaste.org](http://www.chaste.org) shared a creative way of helping the local police communicate with victims that speak a foreign language. A message to the victims is recorded on i-pods in various languages that the police can use during raids. The victims listen to the message and can better understand that the police are there to help them. The police can in turn better assess the victims’ countries of origin by identifying which language they can understand on the i-pod.

**F. Addressing Gross Human Rights Violations: Prevention and Accountability**

“No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.”

Jan Eliasson, former UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy to Darfur was one of the speakers at this round-table session. When countries sign the

Pax Romana Treaty they are agreeing to investigate and prosecute war crimes taking place in their territory. If this is not done in a particular place, the International Criminal Court has the right to step in. Human rights protection is the responsibility all of countries; however, the UN can step in when this doesn't happen. An early response to conflict is needed instead of trying to clean up full-blown disasters.

### **G. The Institutional Aspects and the Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution**

There is a call for a division of labor in mobilization because the problems around the world are so large. There are no real borders in our global world because the problems of poor water quality or supply, disease, financial crisis affect everyone. "Why don't we celebrate a day of Interdependence instead of our individual Dependence Days?"

Points made by Anwarul Chowdhury:

1. We need an on-going and closer connection between the UN security councils and the NGOs. This would allow us to see the small conflicts before they turn into huge wars.
2. The peace-building commission needs to engage with NGOs on the ground. A concrete mechanism needs to be developed.
3. Inclusiveness of NGOs with the UN representatives on the field. The NGOs have knowledge that has been developed over many years.
4. We need to involve more women's NGOs in the UN security council work on the field.
5. Global benchmarks are needed for Resolution 1325
6. NGOs need to be pro-active, insistent and strategize. We need to establish a larger picture for establishing a culture of peace.

### **H. Protection of Internally Displaced Persons and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement**

Moderator: Cecile Meijer, NGO representative to the UN, Society of the Sacred Heart

Speakers: Moetsi Duchatellier, Human Rights Officer, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Geneva)  
Carol Rittner, Distinguished Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey (USA)

As of December 2007, there were 26 million internally displaced persons (I.D.P.s) around the world in some 52 countries such as Sudan, Colombia, Iraq, DRC. Half of the IDPs in Africa are due to internal conflict. There are two main reasons for displacement: natural disaster or man-made disasters. IDPs are forced to flee without any other choice. However, they do not pass international borders; therefore, they do not have the international support systems that are available to refugees. As a response the IDP crisis around the world, the UN created in 1992 the position of Secretary-General of Internal

Displacement. However, there are no agreed upon principles per se, but the current laws serve as a guide. Some of these guiding principles include a distinction between the civilian populations and the military populations. IDPs have the right to receive humanitarian support. They also have the same rights as others do in their home countries. There is a booklet published by the UN on these guiding principles, which has been translated into 50 different languages. (See the resource section below for more information.)

Some of the most vulnerable groups among IDPs are the elderly, disabled, women and children. UNIFAM (UN development for women) and stoprapenow.org estimate that ~40 women/day are raped in the Congo. 40,000-60,000 IDPs in Sierra Leon have been victims of sexual violence. Some call IDPs the “Fogotten Peoples” because they are unprotected by International supports. There is no legal international status for IDPs nor international support systems in times of crisis. There are more IDPs than refugees in the world. Some say that the local governments are responsible for taking care of the IDPs; however, many countries do not give women very many rights. Women are more vulnerable and often cannot find any protection. Who enforces that countries take care of their IDPs or oftentimes, when a country is in internal conflict, they do not have the means to care for IDPs. Also, sometimes the sexual violence against IDPs is by government representatives, rebels or even UN forces.

What can be done about the violence done to women by local governments? These suggestions were proposed:

1. Involve males in strategies to protect women.
2. Inform yourself about IDPs [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)
3. International lawyers need to develop definitions of IDPs beyond the current working definitions.

Ways to send complaints about sexual violence or other mistreatment of IDPs:

1. Contact local UN office
2. High Commission of Human Rights [urgent-action@ohacr.org](mailto:urgent-action@ohacr.org)

## **I. Closing Session**

The conference ended with a live-video feed of Ingrid Betancourt. She has recently been released from captivity in Colombia after being captured just after the US attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>. She commented on how the world has changed during her jungle captivity. Ms. Betancourt says she sees an insidious fear around the world..a fear of the “other”, other cultures, of being wrongly judged. She sees a fear of what others will think of us. “People are not able to go to the limit of what they think they should do. We want to please others, we do not want others to think badly of us.” Ms. Betancourt made a plea for people to speak out.

She also offered a reflection on the human being. Ms. Betancourt believes that human rights’ violations could be committed by anyone when we are under certain pressures. There is always the risk that we could become the torturer. We must touch these people doing the torturing with our words. We

must avoid retaliating with violence and use our real instruments, which are our words. Words that express our beliefs, our faith, our .... Your words can make a difference.

There are 3,000 hostages currently in Colombia that are largely unknown by the outside world. Ms. Betancourt said, “Your voice freed me. Thank you for fighting for human rights. Thank you for existing.”

Shamina de Gonzoga, chair of the 61<sup>st</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference ended with his response to Ingrid Betancourt heart-felt words. He said, “Our lives are to be given. To BE present with others. In suffering we find peace and we learn to give.”

### **III. Personal reflections**

It is a rare opportunity to attend a conference of this kind and to interact with people from a variety of countries and language groups. As I sat in the seminars, I began to keep track of countries represented, such as, Ireland, Australia, Great Britain, DRC, Nigeria, Senegal, Cuba, Mexico, Sweden, US, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Korea, Japan, Argentina, France, Germany, Kenya, Armenia, Cameroon, Sudan, Indonesia and Haiti. It is amazing to see such a diverse group of people come together with a common purpose to uphold an agreed Declaration of Human Rights. It was encouraging to see everyone place such a high value on human life and fairness.

As I began to learn more about the Declaration of Human Rights and contemplate its universal application, it was easy to get overwhelmed. Human rights’ violations are happening all over the world and it is such a complicated issue without clear cut solutions. These human rights’ violations and the government corruption affect the whole world in our present global economy. I was struck by my previous limited exposure to human rights violations and therefore, my lack of real thought on issues surrounding human rights. I suppose I have supported the concepts of human rights that were discussed, but only on a personal level. It was challenging at this conference, however, to engage with others on such a macro level. It was good for me to be challenged in this way and this challenge has made me more in tune with global human rights struggles. This sort of experience truly broadened my understanding of human needs and suffering around the world.

I could not help but draw upon my own Christian perspective in regards to the human rights violations. I think human rights violations are linked to our sinfulness. We have a tendency to seek to control, to have power or show discrimination. A holistic approach to promoting human rights is necessary. It must include not only a universally agreed upon declaration of human rights, but people must respond to the physical, emotional and spiritual desires of each other. We must all have a sense of belonging and that our lives matter. We must educate one another about human rights and how to treat others with fairness. Actually, I think this should start in the family when children are young. Children must experience fairness, kindness and love and to see how others around them are also recipients of those same blessings. However, I wonder about those that grow up in war-torn countries? How will

these children experience love, kindness, fairness when there is mistreatment, death and disease all around them? Who will be a model for them and then, how will they model it for others once they grow up?

There are no easy answers in my mind to the suffering that so many are experiencing around the world. It is a God-sent that there are both NGOs who are trying to relieve suffering as practitioners and others that are working at the policy level for more protection and relief.

#### **IV. Relevance for the work of CBF field personnel**

I see an invaluable service that CBF field personnel provide in working to provide aid to those that are suffering due to human rights' violations of various kinds. We are not only offering humanitarian help, but we can also offer the hope and love of Christ. I do not believe human rights will ever be upheld without the transformative work of the Holy Spirit because our human sinfulness leads us to take advantage of others. We need Christ to indwell us, change and empower us to live as He would.

#### **V. Areas for further thought and potential response from CBF field personnel and churches:**

--How are we responding to vulnerable groups in our community, such as, women, children, the elderly, those that are disabled (80% of disabled people are in developing countries), homosexuals?

--Is there a role CBF or one of our partners could play on Mayotte Island, particularly related to victims of human trafficking or other persons in need without resources?

--What action can we take beyond raising awareness about human trafficking? There seems to be a need within the global community for those that can help victims more directly and those with strategies to stop traffickers.

--There are more in the global community that might be willing to join the Stop the Traffik Network. (I will attach a list of the organizations working on the issue of human trafficking around the world that was provided at the workshop.) Can we help expand the network? Are there others ways that people in the network could share resources and experiences more effectively?

--There may be an opportunity to collaborate with others in writing articles for a journal published in England that will have one month solely devoted to the issue of human trafficking. I am currently in contact with Hayrettin Kilic about this opportunity.

--How should we respond to the IDP crisis around the world?

#### **VI. Resources**

A. Websites:

[www.empowertheUN.org](http://www.empowertheUN.org) Networking site for NGOs which includes a blog, free website for your organization and a ‘voice of the people network’

[www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/mayotte](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/mayotte) Provides general information about Mayotte Island

Human Rights Watch [www.hrw.org/backgrounds/wrd/trafficking.htm](http://www.hrw.org/backgrounds/wrd/trafficking.htm)  
[www.stoprapenow.org](http://www.stoprapenow.org) Organization dedicated to stopping violence against women

[www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org) Provides information about Internally Displaced Peoples

Department of Public Information (D.P.I.) distributes information about the work of the UN to the public. [www.un.org/dpi/ngosection](http://www.un.org/dpi/ngosection) Archives of this annual conference should be available at [www.undpingoconference.org](http://www.undpingoconference.org)

[www.unp.un.org](http://www.unp.un.org) United Nations Publications

B. Contacts:

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Website: [www.euroconsultants.gr](http://www.euroconsultants.gr)

3. Unanima International

Contact: Sr Rhona Burns fj—Board member

Email: [rhoburns@yahoo.fr](mailto:rhoburns@yahoo.fr)

Address: 9 rue des Tatras  
35200 Rennes France

Phone: (33) 02 99 35 13 47  
\* Working to stop traffickers.

4. Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking in Europe (C.H.A.S.T.E.)  
Website: [www.chaste.org](http://www.chaste.org)  
They supply i-pods to police with info for trafficking victims in 11 languages.
5. Nina Caridi Conn  
Email: [ninac5amdg@yahoo.com](mailto:ninac5amdg@yahoo.com)  
Phone: 201-444-2872  
Cell: 201-788-9867  
Fax: 201-444-3339  
Nina lives in NJ and she works with a large number of women in the Junior League interested in helping victims of human trafficking. Nina would like to be trained in leading human trafficking seminars.
6. Amanda Chapman—pursuing a Master’s degree in International Public Service at DePaul University  
Email: [ALChapman@live.com](mailto:ALChapman@live.com)  
She is interested in being a part of a human trafficking network. She also recommended this resource:  
[www.WARinternational.org](http://www.WARinternational.org) which is the website for Women At Risk, International located in Grand Rapids, MI; check out the WAR Chest
7. Beatrice Frey, Consultant Paris-Brussels, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)  
[beatrice.frey@unifem.org](mailto:beatrice.frey@unifem.org), [www.unifem.org](http://www.unifem.org)

#### C. Publications

1. Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, United Nations Publication E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, OCHA/IDP/2004/01
2. Tears of the Desert: The story of a woman from Sudan who has been raped and beaten in order to silence her. She is now a refugee in England. (Published in September 2008)