

Many to Many

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“Many to Many” under the aegis of Operation Peace Through Unity is a communicating link between “we, the peoples” of all nations, races, creeds and ideologies offering in the spirit of the preamble of the United Nations Charter an instrument for the furthering of better relationships based on deepening mutual understanding and the aspiration to promote unity and cooperation beyond all differences.

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I. Sanction

Generally speaking '*sanction*' has come to mean a confirmation of law by state or states which will permit the use of economic or military action against a 'rogue' state to force it into conforming with international agreements or codes of conduct. Powerful nations and their allies may use '*sanction*' in an attempt to bring some sense of order, stability and conformity to a globalizing world. The word has Latin origin meaning 'to make sacred' – to make holy.

But as civilizations are collapsing around us, new walls of mistrust being built and old ones broken down, and climate changes sure to transform both the planetary environment and the world's economy, humanity as a whole is engulfed in an atmosphere of chaos, anxiety and unpredictability - evoking very different responses from each and everyone.

Faced with today's sweeping challenges some will use old and well known means of protecting that which, by custom or tradition, have come to be seen as our rightful possession or position. Some nations believe that the right combination of military force and persuasive diplomacy will be able to coerce countries and peoples into uniting under one umbrella within the circumference of which law and order are restored, and the predominant life style effectively secured. Others are looking ahead and seeing new options.

Throughout the world people are rising up against any attempt at enforced unity, which human experience throughout the ages has demonstrated, again and again, will not result in bringing peaceful relationships. The remaining pockets of dictatorship will not endure.

The universality of today's many challenges and the fact that we have all one way or another contributed to the overall state of affairs, are empowering people throughout the world and across all boundaries to individual and corporate action. The world today is awash with new ideas and inventions, commentaries and debates, resolutions and proposals for change, and most of these, despite disagreements and displays of cynicism and doubt, are reflecting a new sense of inclusiveness, a deeper understanding of the issues at hand, and a determined search for solutions which will benefit all.

However, such upsurge of energy in times of comprehensive change and transformation calls for both vigilance and balanced thought so that insincerity, manipulation and hidden agendas are not allowed to weaken, deviate or corrupt the new foundations being built. A world teacher warns us that 'the enemies who uplift a sword are not so dangerous as those who penetrate under the mask of light'; that we need to remember that there are those who are 'servants of darkness who strive to penetrate into the Holy of Holies'.

Let us make sure that any future use of '*sanction*' will be true to the origin of the word: making sacred – making whole, rendering powerless those working behind 'masks of light' and enabling humanity to serve and nurture - and become - what is good and beautiful.

Says the Teacher: "Lightning of spirit can bestow a wonderful future".

II. 59th Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference Report

This year's Annual DPI/NGO Conference held at the United Nations headquarters in New York from 6-8 September 2006 focused on "Unfinished Business: Effective Partnerships for Human Security and Sustainable Development". It aimed to build on what had already been accomplished by increased NGO (non-governmental organization) and civil society participation in many of the debates that took place at the UN over the past year. New this year, each panel and roundtable featured a youth speaker and included a large percentage of youth representatives, which made up one-fifth of all the 2,500 registered participants.

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The Conference consisted of five plenary sessions, six roundtables and 30 midday NGO workshops. Common factors repeated by speakers throughout the Conference as essential for meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and as a means to end conflict were:

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- ! Partnerships between the UN Member States, NGOs, the private corporate sector and all levels of society.
- ! Values, ethics, political will and a good plan. (It's not about the money, but what you do with it.)
- ! The use of technology to share knowledge and to provide a platform for all to communicate.
- ! The need for a shift of consciousness, new paradigms, new paths, and new approaches.
- ! Greater involvement of women.
- ! Pluralism and respect for cultural diversity.
- ! Disarmament, truth and transparency.

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President of the UN General Assembly (GA), Jan Eliasson, opened the Conference and in acknowledging NGO partnership with the UN said, "Without passion nothing happens in life, but without compassion wrong things happen." Pouring himself a glass of water, he pointed out that for 1.2 billion people in the world a glass of water is a luxury. Lack of clean water being one of the main causes of child mortality in the world, he went so far as to say that water is more important than the MDG's.

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Emphasizing the importance of youth at the Conference, DPI/NGO Conference Chair, Michaela Walsh, said that with the given age of the population in many countries — 50% in some countries are under 15, and 50% under 30 in others — it is a reality that we need to give voice to. She underscored that the MDGs and peace go hand and hand; making the point that the world economy simply cannot afford these present efforts to narrow the digital divide, provide clean water, stop global warming, etc.—and the cost of war.

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In one of the midday workshops, Sarah Titchen of UNESCO New York, reminded all that we're facing a changing time — different 8-9 weeks ago than 1 year, 5 years or 10 years ago — and resulting in much unpredictability regarding how we can contribute to peace. A few years ago there was a focus on disarmament, now it has shifted to values, ethical issues, dialog, and what dialog can bring to peace around the world. The vital role of education, culture and media communication is increasingly being recognized. Merely changing school textbooks for children can bring new messages of quality and hope, and remove prejudices. This has been most successful in Southeastern and Central Europe.

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Hans Blix, Chairman of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, also pointed to disarmament's fall in popularity and the need for a change of course. He emphasized that the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 (NPT) has been — and remains — of tremendous value. For without it nuclear weapons might have spread to many more than the eight or nine states, which now have them. Yet today, the treaty and fundamental bargain are under strain. One key factor he gave is that *preaching arms control to others while not practicing it oneself is not a recipe for success.*

- Rachel Kyte, the director of Environment and Social Development Department, International Finance Corporation (IFC) pointed out that 70% of the entrepreneurs in Africa are women, but they can't get credit. She also expressed the importance of being an enlightened consumer worldwide — the need to be informed and financially literate. In the Q & A session following the panel discussion a participant asked, "How can we deal effectively with economic terrorists?" The answer was: Educate, educate, educate! ... It's up to all of us to make *responsibility profitable.*

- Along these lines, Lester Salamon, Director, Center for Civil Society Studies at the Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies, shared findings that we are in the midst of a fundamental shift that will impact new governance. It recognizes the rise of the "third sector" — civil society — and that it has a certain economic value. He specifies that to make the most of this breakthrough opportunity, the three challenges for civil society, or the 3 C's, must be met: *Consciousness — Conscientiousness — Competence.*

- Director, Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR), Salvano Briceno, cited findings based on the "Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015" that *risk could be reduced if we plan in advance.* Currently, only 1% of the money earmarked for disaster relief is directed toward preparing for disasters, while 99% is allocated for it after it happens. This phenomenon is known as the "CNN syndrome". Disaster reduction is a new concept, which involves a shift in understanding from just preparing for them to actually reducing them by accessing risk and vulnerability and then implementing measures based on these findings.

- In one of the midday workshops, Gary Knell, President and CEO of Sesame Workshop, along with surprise guest Muppet, Grover, explained "Muppet diplomacy" and how using the media — to which children have a natural attraction — is able to teach tolerance, understanding and respect, along with ABC's, to children under the age of 6. In Bangladesh, where poverty prevents preschool education, one TV station was able to reach 80% of the children.

- Rina Lopez Bautista, President of the Knowledge Channel Foundation, also gave an example of the use of mass media to provide universal access to primary education and to help children break the chains of poverty. She illustrated how her foundation, an NGO, by partnering with the government of the Philippines and the private sector was able to provide educational curriculum via TV to over 2.7 million students in 1,650 public schools and over 6 million home viewers — and added that for schools where power is not available, solar panels were installed.

- While it's true that Asia has some of the fastest growing economies in the world, and in the past 15 years, some 300 million Asians have moved out of poverty, Nalaka Gunawardene, Director and CEO of TVE Asia Pacific explained that the glass is barely half full. Citing one stark statistic, she said that *every single day, approximately 14,000 Asian children die needlessly from preventable diseases.* These are the 'silent tsunamis' unfolding at any given time, which hardly

register on the news media's radars. So quickly, disasters become yesterday's news, therefore a call was made to help keep alive the stories of human survival and human security in our mass media.

- Bhai Sahib Dr. Mohinder Singh, Sikh Leader & Chairman of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (Birmingham, UK) spoke of the Sikh tradition, both historical and contemporary, which seeks to promote the idea of a new planetary consciousness ... One that "demands us to move beyond the boundary of tolerance and acceptance, hitherto advocated and practiced by governments, to a greater threshold of respect and ultimate sacrifice for others."

- This call for a shift in thinking was emphasized by Shamina De Gonzaga, Special Advisor on NGO Relations to the President of the UN GA and one of the youth panelists. She reminded all that the point [of working within the UN] is to actually see something achieved, and to do that we have to stop the blame game, i.e., from country to country, between Member States and NGOs, etc. Noting that nothing will change unless we end the duality, she added that if you're going to partner, there's a certain amount of compromise that's necessary ... What matters are the values to which we adhere.

- Carolyn McAskie, Assistant-Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, UN Peacebuilding Commission, said that conflict is normal.... What we must outlaw is *violence*. She and others on the panel stressed the need to search behind the obvious to better understand each situation and find out *why*. In the Q & A period she was asked if she believes there are intractable conflicts. She answered by saying that there are only intractable people and pointed to the need to reform the way the UN and governments are financed, by asking, "Why is it obligatory to fund the armies and not the children?"

- Perhaps, the most poignant moment of the Conference was Eugenie Mukeshimana's, account of surviving the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, which claimed a million lives in 100 days. Speaking from her heart, she conveyed a sense of the atrocities she had witnessed saying she didn't believe it [the Rwandan genocide] would have happened that way if people cared about human beings. She expressed sadness and deep concern for the people of Sudan and all the people around the world still caught in similar situations: "I don't believe we are doing enough... It shouldn't be a matter of begging. It should be a priority... It's important to say: denial is harmful to humanity."

- The Conference closed with a summary of all the Roundtables by their moderators and with several warm standing ovations for Secretary General Kofi Annan, and his wife Nan Annan, whose term of office will be over at the end of this year. Confirming the partnership of the NGO community and civil society with the UN, in his final address he said earnestly, "You have made your voices heard, but you have done more — you have moved the global agenda... You have the capacity to push the envelope, to say things we cannot say, I cannot say... In some areas you lead and we catch up... You must use it responsibly. The power of the global citizen is the best thing that's happened to our organization in a long time."

- For further information on the 59th Annual DPI/NGO Conference, please visit:
<http://www.unngodpiconference.org/>

- Iris Spellings, OPTU Representative to the UN DPI/NGO

III. Right Livelihood Awards 2006

This year the Award, SEK 2 million (US\$275,000) will be shared between three ‘pioneers for justice, truth and peace-building’, with the Honorary Award going to Chico Whitaker Ferreira (Brazil). Ferreira, described as a Roman Catholic activist, has dedicated his life to work for social justice and true democracy. He played a key role in establishing the World Social Forum with the motto “Another World is Possible”. The Forum aims to bring together people from social organizations throughout the world that are working to build a people-centered world. (www.worldsocialforum.org)

One of the three sharing the 2006 Livelihood Award is David Ellsberg (USA), receiving it “for putting peace and truth first at considerable personal risk, and dedicating his life to inspiring others to follow his example”. The Watergate experience opened Ellsberg’s eyes to the fact that “the President’s ability to escalate his entire strategy throughout the war had depended on the secrecy and lying and thus on his ability to deter unauthorized disclosures – truth telling – official.” And in 2004 he founded the Truth-Telling Project to encourage the exposure of official lying. (www.ellsberg.net)

Another recipient is Ruth Manorama (India), who for several decades has been working tirelessly to better the conditions of Indian women, in particular the lives of Dalit women, belonging to the lowest caste, the so-called ‘untouchables’.

A Dalit woman herself, their plight, and that of others living in similar deplorable conditions, have motivated her to work through many different national and international groups and organizations to bring these urgent issues to public attention, to lobby government to take action, and also to empower – through education and training – the women themselves actively to participate in the problem solving process and to take leadership within their communities and in society. So far women in more than 120 slums have been trained to protect their rights.

Among the many organizations that Manorama are involved in are the Women’s Voice, the National Alliance of Women, and the National Federation of Dalit Women. Manorama is continuously working for the rights of unorganized labour, through building an organization for the women workers, unionizing them and endeavouring to assure minimum wages. (www.idsn.org)

The third Award winner is the Festival Internacional de Poesia de Medellin (Colombia). This Festival which began in 1991 started as a protest against the prevailing political violence and hatred throughout Columbia and Medellin in particular. According to Fernando Redon, one of the Festival organizers, it was an attempt “*to create through poetry an atmosphere that without ignoring the spiral of death and the inertial strength of hate could put a little light in this somber scene.*”

For the duration of the 10-day Festival, public readings would take place in the streets of Medellin, in the parks, residential areas, libraries and university, schools and theatres, churches and factories, railway stations etc, and people, overcoming their fear, would attend and participate in ever increasing numbers. This international festival has brought much attention to Medellin, and in 2006, 747 poets from 137 countries participated, reading their poems in different languages and dialects in some 30 Colombian cities.

Under the motto: “for a peace which is more active than all wars” the International Poetry Festival of Medellin will, says Fernando Rendon, continue to *“maintain its efforts, as a way of opposition to barbarism and of looking into alternative routes of democratic and peaceful resistance to the extreme violence that strikes our country, seeking the strengthening and defence of the fundamental rights of the Colombian people: the right to live, the right to have liberty of expression, the right of meeting and the right to create.”*

(www.festivaldepoesiademedellin.org)

As in previous years the Right Livelihood Awards will be presented in December in the Swedish Parliament, Stockholm. Jakob von Uexkull, a Swedish-German philatelist, founded the Right Livelihood Award Foundation in 1980, and provided the original funding. Since then other individual donors have contributed to the Awards.

For more information on the recipients as well as the foundation: www.rightlivelihood.org or e-mail kerstin@rightlivelihood.org

IV. UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT, SHEIKHA HAYA RASHED AL KHALIFA – Quotes from Statement, 27 November

At the Forum on General Assembly and Non-governmental Organizations, New York, 27 November 2006, the President of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed al Khalifa in her statement reminded the meeting that *“The United Nations relationship with civil society is as old as the Charter”* and specified three areas within which civil society’s contribution had been particularly active: *in galvanizing public support for the UN’s goals; as partners in the implementation of the UN’s humanitarian efforts; and representing the needs of people on the ground.*

“It is no coincidence” said the President, *“that the recent High-level Panel’s report on System-wide Coherence recommended increasing the UN’s capacity to promote partnerships between the UN, governments, civil society and the private sector, in order to achieve shared development goals in each country”*.

Mentioning her intention to convene a series of informal thematic debates on development, gender and the dialogue among civilizations during the coming General Assembly session, involving the private sector and civil society, the President stressed that: *“we must always remember that the UN is an organization which represents the aspirations of peoples all around the world. We must continue to strive to create an atmosphere that can build effective partnerships towards achieving our shared goals”*.

V. UNITED NATIONS – working as One

On the 9th November the report by the High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment was submitted to the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan by the Panel’s three Co-Chairs: Shauhat Aziz, Luisa Diaz Diogo, and Jens Stoltenberg, the Prime Ministers respectively of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Mozambique and Norway.

In the ‘Executive Summary’ the Panel Co-Chairs state that we live in an era of unprecedented global change “in its speed, scope, and scale”: as the world becomes more interdependent “we are increasingly exposed to sharp and growing social and economic inequalities”. While the United Nations is able to achieve consensus between UN member nations, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), and of developing comprehensive concepts in global matters, whether sustainable development, humanitarian issues or the environment, it often fails when it comes to realizing the plans and programmes of action mutually agreed upon.

The central concept emphasized throughout the report is ‘*One*’: United Nations will need to overcome its fragmentation and “deliver as *one* through a stronger commitment to working together on the implementation of *one* strategy, in the pursuit of *one* set of goals”. The UN’s analytic expertise, its operational and coordination capabilities, and its advocacy role would then be more effectively brought together at the country level, at the regional level and at the global level. And member state should shape the governance structures, the funding framework and the business practices to make it so.

The Panel has developed clear recommendations which it believes will, if implemented, give the UN better focus on performance, efficiency, accountability and results, while also enhancing the role and voice of developing countries.

Among the recommendations is the establishment of One UN at country level, with one leader (an ‘empowered Resident Coordinator’), one programme, one budget and, where appropriate, one office. The suggestion is that five One UN country pilot programmes are set up by 2007, and subject to satisfactory review, another 20 by 2009, and all other appropriate programmes by 2012.

In order to oversee the One UN Country Programme, provide system-wide coherence, ensure coordination, and to monitor performance of global activities, the Panel proposes that the existing joint meetings of the Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNICEF/WFP be merged into the UN Sustainable Development Board. This Board would be responsible for endorsing the One UN Country Programme, allocating funding, and evaluating its performance against the objectives agreed with respective programme countries. It should also oversee and ensure joint planning between all Funds, Programmes and Agencies, and monitor any overlaps and gaps.

Another recommendation asks that a MDG Funding Mechanism be established to provide multi-year funding for the One UN Country Programmes, stating that “if the UN is to work more coherently and effectively, both at country level and globally, significant changes are needed to the way donor funding is managed.” According to the Panel, current UN funding is highly fragmented, unpredictable and constrained by too much earmarking, which has encouraged duplication and inefficiency. Urging that performance, funding and accountability of UN organizations must be integrally linked the Panel suggests that a new MDG Funding Mechanism for voluntary donor funding be established, governed by the Board, which would provide multi-year funding for the One UN Country Programmes as well as for well performing agencies.

Highlighting the ‘increasingly compelling case for urgent action on the environment’, the Panel argues that global environmental degradation and climate change will seriously affect the world’s ability to meet the Millennium Declaration Goals: because the impacts are global but will be felt disproportionately by the poor, coordinated multilateral action to promote

environmental sustainability is urgently required. Among its recommendations the Panel proposes that the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) should be upgraded and should have ‘real authority as the environmental pillar of the UN system’.

The report also sees gender equality as an important key to effective development and makes several proposals for change in UN’s delivery of gender equality and women’s empowerment by:

- Consolidating the three existing UN entities into an enhanced and independent gender entity, headed by an Executive Director with the rank of Under Secretary-General;
- The gender entity having a strengthened normative and advocacy role combined with a targeted programming role;
- The gender entity being fully funded;
- Gender equality being a component of all UN One Country Programmes; and
- The commitment to gender equality remaining the mandate of the entire UN system.

Another area, within which the report sees a need for a more complementary and coherent working relationship, is the one between the UN and the Bretton Woods Institutions. It therefore recommends that as a matter of urgency “the Secretary-General, the President of the World Bank and the Executive Director of the International Monetary Fund set up a process to review, update and conclude formal agreements on their respective roles and relations at the global and country level. These reviews must be periodically updated as well as assessed. This process should be undertaken on the basis of the enhanced performance, strengthened delivery and more influential role that the UN will have if our reforms are implemented”.

Despite all past and present disunity between the world’s countries, the United Nations with its universal membership has been and is a unique meeting place where international agreements, development goals are continuously being formed which have the well-being and dignity of people at the heart of the development agenda. The report points in particular to the 2000 UN Millennium Summit where all 191 member states (147 represented by Heads of State and Government) endorsed the Millennium Declaration.

The report acknowledges that the primary responsibility for action and implementation of the MGD and other commitments lies with each member state. Not only reform within the UN system is needed; countries need to take ownership of development plans, donor commitment to principles of aid effectiveness and to “good donorship”: “Decades of piecemeal and failed development efforts demonstrate that assistance policies cannot be imposed – they must be owned not only by governments but by their people and communities.” The Panel points out that, while this concept is broadly accepted, it must now be put into practice.

The Co-Chairs Executive Summary expresses the belief that reform to improve the coherence of the UN System must be underpinned by the following clear principles:

- ! *National ownership and people-centred approaches*: National sovereignty and national ownership of development plans must remain the bedrock of effective development. Programmes should be delivered as close to beneficiaries as possible.
- ! *Core comparative advantage*: The UN needs to become flexible enough to respond to the operational and policy needs of all countries, and to advocate global standards and norms.
- ! *Maximum effectiveness and accountability*: Change must prepare the UN to address new challenges, and improve its performance measured by outcomes. Responsibility and

authority must be clarified, and staff given the means to deliver on their mandates and be held accountable for them.

Full report can be read on www.un.org/events/panel/resources/pdfs/HLP-SWC-FinalReport.pdf

“The true measure of the success for the United Nations is not how much we promise, but how much we deliver for those who need us most”

UN Secretary-General-elect Ban Ki-moon, from his acceptance speech to the General Assembly

VI. Peacebuilding Commission

The UN Peacebuilding Commission is a new body within the UN system created by two joint resolutions by the General Assembly and the UN Security Council (A/RES/60/180 and S/RES/1645 (2005)). It will function as an advisory subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly as well as the Security Council and its Organizational Committee is made up by representatives from 31 UN member states, from the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Military, the financial UN contributors and others.

The Peacebuilding Commission has the potential for filling ‘a huge gap in the UN system’ by the primary mandate it was given: to promote post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery by bringing together all the relevant actors, both within and outside the UN; to devise strategies, and to identify the resources to promote sustainable reconstruction, peace and development. The ‘real work’ will be done through the setting up of country-specific committees tailored to each, which will involve country representatives as well as other relevant contributors such as regional organizations, regional banks and international financial institutions. For the first time all major actors in a given situation can be brought together to discuss and decide on a long-term peacebuilding strategy, beginning with immediate post-conflict efforts while also aiming for long-term recovery and development.

On the 11 October the Peacebuilding Fund was launched by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The Fund will be used to help people recover from years, even decades, of violence and conflict; to rebuild state institutions and enabling countries to reach ‘that crucial tipping point at which a majority of the people no longer expect conflict to be renewed, and instead believe that their societies are moving in the right direction’.

The first two countries eligible for support from the Peacebuilding Fund are Burundi and Sierra Leone.

A Lunchtime Briefing was arranged (2 November) by the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) at UN Headquarters on “Operationalizing the UN Peacebuilding Commission”, to provide information on the Peacebuilding Commission’s mandate, functions and membership, and to look at the coordination challenges facing the Commission and its relationships with civil society. Among the key issues were:

- civil society participation;
- the need to strengthen the rule of procedures;
- peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding processes: closing the gap through the Peacebuilding Commission; and

the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding (in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1325)

Among the speakers on this occasion was Dr. Tim Murithi, Senior Researcher, Centre for Conflict Resolution, University of Cape Town, who argued for the development of a 'symbiotic partnership' between UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), seeing such a complementary relationships as a way of avoiding duplication or replication of functions and strategically targeting the disbursement of mobilized resources.

However, Dr. Murithi also pointed to some of the problems facing peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, such as the proliferation of external actors with varying reasons for involvement: while there are those who are genuinely interested in improving the welfare of the peoples in question 'there are others who may seek to engage with post-conflict reconstruction processes in order to secure their own economic or political interests.'

The United Nations University (UNU) Policy Brief "The Impact of Spoilers on Peace Processes and Peacebuilding" seems to agree that this could present a real challenge to its work, believing that 'understanding the sources, impact and nature of 'spoiling' is essential for peacebuilding and for the success of the new UN Peacebuilding Commission." (www.unu.edu) We need, says the Brief, to keep in mind that there are those within our societies that are actively opposed to peace and will use a variety of methods to spoil progress.

However, as the UN Secretary-General said at the launching of the Peacebuilding Fund: "The international community now has at its disposal a new and well-designed peacebuilding platform. Used well, it can help countries avoid a relapse into conflict, and enable them to regain – or find for the first time – the path to peace". It is up us, all of us, to use it well.

<http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/>

VII. How the faithful behave towards each other

On the 12-13 November the Alliance of Civilisations held their Fourth High Level Group Meeting in Istanbul, Turkey. Here the High-level Group members - 20 world renowned experts who last year had been appointed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to explore ways of addressing the increasing polarization between Muslim and Western societies - presented their report to Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The report states that although religion is often cynically exploited to stir passions, the core of the problem is politics, not religion. While the report documents the critical situations between religions, in particular between Western and Muslim populations, it also asserts that 'there is nothing inevitable or insurmountable in these conditions': that because the causes of current tensions are political and not religious or cultural they are solvable.

Among the examples of how politics have contributed to today's tension is: the perception of double standards in the application of international law; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become a critical symbol of instability, in the Middle East as well as the rest of the world; Western military operations in Muslim countries leading to a climate of fear and animosity; and

the self-proclaimed religious figures advocating narrow and distorted interpretations of religious teachings, which again can lead to extremism and violence.

The report offers various recommendations including:

The appointment of a High Representative to assist the UN Secretary-General in defusing cross cultural tensions, build bridges of understanding and creating pathways toward reconciliation, especially in times of crisis;
The international community should seek a settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a renewed sense of urgency. Progress on this front rests on the recognition of both the Palestinian and Jewish national aspirations and on the establishment of two fully sovereign and independent states co-existing side by side in peace and security;
A regional Middle East conference to be convened as soon as possible and involving all the relevant actors with the aim of reinvigorating the peace process;
A Forum for the Alliance of Civilisations should be established under UN auspices to provide a regular venue for representatives of governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to forge partnerships and to express commitments for action.

Concrete proposals in areas of education, media, youth and migration are also included in the report, which it is hoped will help build bridges and promote a culture of respect and understanding between peoples of different faith and culture.

Speaking at the launching of the report, the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan said: *“At a time when the increasing polarization between major cultures and belief systems throughout the world urgently needs to be addressed, the presentation of this Report and its recommendations to the international community constitutes a hopeful and exciting step in efforts to sow the seeds of respect and understanding.”*

For full report and further information at www.unaoc.org or e-mail sivacolundhu@un.org

VIII. The Defense of Spiritual Liberty

25 November is the 25th anniversary of the UN ‘Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief’. The Declaration was proclaimed on 25 November 1981 and began: *“Considering that one of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations is that of the dignity and equality inherent in all human beings, and that all Member States have pledged themselves to take joint and separate action in co-operation with the Organisation to promote and encourage universal respect for an observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.”*

The Declaration took nearly 20 years of difficult negotiations to draft. Preparation of the Declaration began in 1962 and the Declaration was proclaimed in November 1981. Originally, UN negotiators had thought of drafting a single text which would have included the elimination of discrimination based on race, sex, and religion. However, there was too great a diversity of views. It was easier to deal with race because in the 1960s and 1970s in UN circles ‘race’ was only the Apartheid policy of South Africa which everyone was, at least verbally, against.

Religion and belief were more difficult questions. The defense of spiritual liberty has been one of the most persistent of struggles, and there is no area of the world that does not have its martyrs to the cause. The struggle has often been against religious authorities who have wanted to maintain their faith within narrow limits claiming that they alone held the truth. It is significant that the words “dogmatic” “sectarian” and “inquisition” all arise from the religious vocabulary. The stoning of the prophets and the auto-da-fe have been the answers of religious authorities – and often ordinary believers as well – to new ideas. Today, in most parts of the world, religious organizations can no longer put heretics to death. Now, religious organizations can only try to marginalize those who hold new ideas or to excommunicate them; the inquisition has lost its secular arm.

If religious organizations are no longer able to put to death heretics, the State has taken over the task of establishing orthodoxy and putting heretics to death. Although today, governments are the prime agents of repression against spiritual life, governments are also timidly building the defenses of spiritual liberty.

The Declaration of 25 November 1981 builds upon Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

One of the most difficult areas in drafting the Declaration concerned the rights of the child to have “access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents or legal guardians, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.” The Declaration went on to state that “The child shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, respect for freedom of religion or belief of others, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.”

Despite the rather undramatic title of the Declaration, it is a milestone on the path of spiritual liberty. Thanks to the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, we who work for a world of understanding and solidarity have a UN text on which to base our efforts to defend spiritual liberty. Its 25th anniversary should remind us of the important tools we have at hand.

Rene Wadlow, editor of the online journal of world politics www.transnational-perspectives.org – and representative to the UN, Geneva, of the Association of World Citizens.

IX. Rickshaws for India

People Aid’s “Rickshaws for India” programme breaks the shackles of poverty that keep poor Indian families bound, and gives them the means to self-efficiency and dignity. Rickshaws are the major mode of taxi travel for short journeys, and as they are bicycle-propelled they are non-polluting.

This year was the 10th anniversary of the programme, and to mark the occasion a dinner was held in Wanganui, New Zealand. It was well attended with the costs generously borne by the Grand Hotel. There was a fascinating lecture by Rob Harley, New Zealand TV journalist, documentary maker and author of several books, the latest entitled “Brave, Mad and Memorable”.

The grand result of this initiative of St. Lukes Church, Wanganui, was a total of 14 rickshaws donated at a cost of NZ\$750 each.

This was indeed an example of the cause of peace and justice being promoted by the unity of a wide range of people. The gift of a rickshaw not only liberates a needy family, but directly involves at least a further 30 people, lifting them from despair to hope. It is a gift that keeps on growing year after year.

Meg Hartfield, Wanganui.

People Aid contact: website: www.peopleaid.org e-mail: emailnz@PeopleAid.org

X. The Great Invocation in Maori, English and French

TE INOINGA NUI
Na te maramatanga kei te
Ngakau o Te Atua
Kia koha te maramatanga ki te
Ngakau o te tangata
Kia koha te maramatanga ki te ao

Na te aroha kei te ngakau
O Te Atua
Ki horapa te aroha ki te
Ngakau o te tangata
Kia hoki mai ano te Karaiti
Ki te ao

Na te mauri o Te Atua
Kia marama te haere a te tangata
I te huarahi o Te Atua

Na roto mai I te Tangata
Ma te maramatanga me te aroha
Tatau e arahi
A ma tenei e pa kuaha ki te Kino

Ma te Maramatanga,
Ma te Aroha,
Ma te Kaha e whakau
Te whakaaro nui te ao

THE GREAT INVOCATION

From the point of Light within the Mind of
God
Let light stream forth into the minds of men.
Let Light descend on Earth.

From the point of Love within the Heart of
God
Let love stream forth into the hearts of men
May Christ return to Earth.

From the centre where the Will of God is
known
Let purpose guide the little wills of men –
The purpose which the Masters know and
serve.

From the centre which we call the race of
men
Let the Plan of Love and Light work out
And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let Light and Love and Power restore the
plan on Earth

