

EDITORIAL

In the age of globalization, Internet, and exchanges of all types, discrimination based on race, gender, language, religion and others would seem to be out of place. We have a whole series of instruments and mechanisms in international law to address these discriminations: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief, and many others. Regional institutions have also set up their own mechanisms and many countries have adopted legislation to forbid and punish these types of discrimination.

However, despite all these measures, discrimination is still well alive, as we can see in the daily news. The articles and pieces of information you will read in this Newsletter are also a proof of this. Whether it is the testimonies of the young girls, who participated in the Commission of the Status of Women, or the fate of the Batwas in Africa or the Dalits and Adivasis in India, they all remind us that an organization like UFER is still relevant - and now maybe more than ever.

If racism and the various forms of discrimination are still well alive, it is because we have not tackled with enough determination their root causes, ignorance, poverty and fear. We have to work on these causes everywhere and at all levels, with children as well as with adults, with men as well as with women, with rich and poor alike and in countries of the North and the South.

Each one of us can bring his or her contribution wherever he or she is. But in joining efforts with associations created for this purpose, we can increase our impact. Through its activities and despite its limited means, UFER seeks to support the efforts of those who are struggling with or for the victims of discrimination. It endeavours to address the deep causes of this evil. It is with this in mind that UFER has initiated a training program in 2000, as a contribution to the UN World Conference against Racism (2001), with the aim of empowering those who work in community-based organizations. This program is already bearing fruits, as you will see while reading this issue of the Newsletter.

Raymonde Martineau

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NEWS FROM THE UNITED NATIONS

by Raymonde Martineau

❖ GIRLS CONTINUE TO BE DISCRIMINATED

The Commission of the Status of Women, composed of 32 Member States of the UN, held its 51st session from 26 February to 9 March 2007. The main theme of this year's session was *the elimination of violence and discrimination against girls*. The Commission recognized that “despite increasing efforts to improve the situation of the girl child, girls remained largely ‘invisible’ in public policies and programmes, and their needs unmet.”¹

The Commission also deplored that “much discrimination and violence against girls occurred in the private sphere of their homes and communities, and perpetrators of crimes against girls were often those charged with their protection”.² Girls also remained vulnerable to trafficking especially for sexual exploitation. According to UNICEF, an estimated 1.2 million children are trafficked each year. Human trafficking generates an estimated \$9.5 billion a year and fuels other criminal activities.³

One of the conclusions of this session was that “empowerment of girls is key to breaking the cycle of discrimination and violence and to promoting and protecting the full and effective enjoyment of all their human rights”⁴.

The Commission was attended by a significant number of young girls under 18 years old (207). The Grail sponsored several of them and accompanied them throughout the Commission. They were accredited for UFER and Grail. They followed the official session and participated in many side events organized by NGOs, in which they were able to express their concerns and provide suggestions for action. It was a conscience raising experience for them. As one of them said, “attending the meeting inspired me to make a change in this world”.

According to them, the most serious problems that girls had to face were domestic violence and sexual abuse, lack of self-esteem and machismo. Several girls said that many young girls in their countries remained traumatised following violence and abuse which they experienced. One girl from Mexico said that “machismo is present in families of all economic and social status.” A girl from United States complained that “girls face pressure according to their appearance. They can't be too tall, too small, too big or too skinny”, she said.

¹ 51st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, Interactive expert panel on *Key policy initiatives to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child*, 27 February, 2007, Moderator's Summary, para 2.

http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw51/panel_summaries/Panel%20%20I%20Moderator%20Summary%20Draft%201%20March.pdf, consulted on 21/06/2007.

² Idem, para 4

³ UNICEF statement on the occasion of the Day of the African Child (16 June, 2007) <http://www.un.org/apps/news/printnews.asp?nid=22933>, consulted on 16/06/2007

⁴ See note 1, para 8

In order to overcome these problems, the young girls emphasized the need for more education, more gender consciousness, and empowerment for girls. A girl from Portugal said that: “a good way to prevent discrimination or violence is learning to like us as we are, if you do, you can feel more comfortable and are more able to protect yourself”. Several of them mentioned the need to make boys more conscious about the active role that women play or can play in society.

This last point was the subject of a panel held during the Commission which stressed the importance to “educate boys in their early childhood – their formative years.” The panel also noted “the high costs associated with unequal power relations, and the benefits that men would derive from a more gender-equal society.”⁵

Back in their countries, these young girls will continue to need our support in their efforts to overcome the discrimination and violence which they too often face. Empowerment is a long process. These testimonies can only comfort UFER in its conviction that empowerment should remain one of its priorities.

❖ WILL HUMAN RIGHTS BE BETTER OFF WITH THE NEW HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL?

A year ago, the new Human Rights Council (HRC) held its first session. The Council was created by the General Assembly (GA)⁶ to succeed the discredited Human Rights Commission. The Council is, like the Commission, composed of Member States. The main difference, so far, is that the Council is an organ of the GA while the Commission came under ECOSOC. We will see with the time if the Council is better able to protect human rights than the Commission did.

At its fifth session (11 to 18 June, 2007), the Council established its basic institutional structure. It will have four main pillars:

1. A *Universal Periodic Review Mechanism* by which the Council will examine the “fulfillment by each State of its human rights obligations and commitments”⁷, starting with members of the Commission;
2. The *Special Procedures*, as established by the Commission but with some modifications, especially regarding the duration of the mandates;

⁵ 51st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, Interactive dialogue to evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on *The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality*, 2 March 2007, Moderator’s Summary, para 3 & 16
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw51/panel_summaries/Panel%20on%20Men%20and%20Boys%20SUMMARY%207%20March.pdf

⁶ Resolution A/RES/60/251, adopted on 15 March 2006.

⁷ Idem, operative paragraph 5 (e).

3. The *Advisory Committee* composed of 18 experts, which will replace the Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. The Council will take a decision on the future of the Working Groups on Indigenous Populations, on Contemporary Forms of Slavery and on the Social Forum at its Sixth Session;
4. A *Complaint Procedure* which will replace the one established by ECOSOC resolution 1503 in 1970. It will still be a confidential exercise.

According to its Rules of Procedure, the Council will meet for at least ten weeks each year in three regular sessions or more. These sessions will be preceded by organizational meetings. The Council may also hold special sessions to deal with emergency situations. Some working groups would also meet between sessions. Delegates of small delegations complained that the meeting schedule was placing a heavy burden on their shoulders as well as on the Secretariat.

The sixth session will be held in Geneva, from 10 to 28 September. Members of the UFER Committee will be attending it. The president of the Council for this year will be Ambassador Doru Romulus Costea of Romania, who succeeds Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba of Mexico.

❖ IN BRIEF

- *Peace and Environment*
 - One rarely mentions protection of the environment as a contribution to peace. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, however, “Sudan is unlikely to see a lasting peace unless widespread and rapidly accelerating environmental degradation is urgently addressed.”⁸ One of the root causes is “overgrazing of fragile soils by a live-stock population that has exploded from close to 27 million animals to 135 million now.”⁹ Deforestation and drought complete the picture.
- *More and more defenceless civilians victims of conflicts*
 - Addressing the Security Council, after visiting conflict areas, John Homes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said that “he had seen how hundreds of thousands of civilians had been uprooted from their ordinary lives by the effects of conflict and had been left stranded, their fate of no apparent consequence to those who fought around them”.¹⁰ He

⁸ UNEP Press Release of 22 June, 2007, consulted on 24/6/2007
<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=512&ArticleID=5621&l=en>

⁹ Idem

¹⁰ UN Press Release of 22/06/07 consulted on 27/06/07
<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/sc9057.doc.htm>

emphasized the need to invest more in conflict prevention, mediation as well as post-conflict measures to prevent the resumption of conflicts.¹¹

- *New routes for drug trafficking*
 - Although there have been significant and positive changes in world drugs markets, according to the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), there is however a disquieting development. "Africa is under attack, targeted by cocaine traffickers from the West (Colombia) and heroin smugglers in the East (Afghanistan) ... This threat needs to be addressed quickly to stamp out organized crime, money-laundering and corruption, and to prevent the spread of drug use that could cause havoc across a continent already plagued by many other tragedies."¹²
- *Death penalty*
 - Rwanda has just become (27 July) the 88th State to abolish death penalty. There are still 72 countries which practice this cruel and degrading treatment. Another 25 countries have not executed anyone for the past 10 years, although death penalty still forms part of their legislation, and 11 more have abolished this punishment for common law crimes.¹³
- *Some interesting documents*
 - *The Unfinished Story of Women and the United Nations*, par Hilka Pietilä, Janvier 2007, publié par le Service de liaison non-gouvernemental, UNCTAD/NGLS/2007/1
 - *Indigenous Women and the United Nations System, Good Practices and Lessons Learned*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2007
 - *Equality at Work: Tackling the Challenge*, International Labour Conference, 96th session, 2007, Report I(B)
http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Media_and_public_information/Press_releases/lang--en/WCMS_082596/index.htm
 - *Education for All Global Monitoring Report – 2007*, UNESCO, Director: Nicholas Burnett, Education on the Moves series, 400 pages
http://publishing.unesco.org/details.aspx?Code_Livre=4506

¹¹ Idem

¹² Press Release, UNODC, 26/6/07, consulted on 27/6/07
http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press_release_2007-06-26.html

¹³ Death penalty in the world, Website: <http://www.peinedemort.org/peinedemort.php>, consulted on 28 July, 2007 (in French only).

HOW TO BUILD PEACE

By Gaëtane Gascon

I wish to share with you what I learned during a Symposium, held at St-Paul University of Ottawa, with the theme "Peace as a Profession in the 21st Century". I hope to give you a glimpse of how the peace issues are treated here in Canada and Quebec. The Symposium's objectives were twofold: firstly to support the citizens engaged in non-violent conflict resolution and secondly to promote the creation of a Department of Peace by the Canadian Government. Many civil society organizations engaged in non-violent activities took part in the meeting represented by enthusiastic students, prudent professionals, daring activists and wise elders.

I like to note the brilliant contributions of two key lecturers: Professor Johan Galtung from Norway and the former Minister of the Canadian Government Flora Macdonald.

▪ **Johan Galtung**

Johan Galtung, born in 1930, is recognized as the initiator of research and training on the peace issues. He writes a lot, he has intervened since decades in international conflicts. He is the Founding Director of the international network, the Transcend University www.transcend.org that aims at contributing to conflict transformation through peaceful means. His vision of peace includes social justice and a refusal of « all forms of structural violence created by the state power. » Transcend University offers programs of courses on line using many different languages.

Johan Galtung criticizes the Anglo-American Manichaeism that divides the world between the good ones and the bad ones. Like many of us, he learns from the Buddhists, Hindus and indigenous traditions and cultures.

Conflicts are complex. There are more than two parties in a conflict and consequently, the non-violent interveners are not the neutral third party as they often pretend. They have to take in account their own contradictions and manage adequately their inner dynamics, personally and collectively. They have to spare no efforts to avoid being parties to the conflict in order to play a positive role. Conflicts are present in all human groups. The goal is to prevent them to degenerate into violence.

Conflicts are the salt of the earth. They cannot be solved. They rather transform themselves. They are an opportunity to imagine something new. Transcend conflicts mean to build bridges across opposed positions. Johan Galtung's approach is constructive, concrete and creative.

▪ **Flora MacDonald**

As for Minister MacDonald, "Flora" as she is affectionately called, she made a clear, insightful and humorous presentation. Involved with non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan, she visits the country and supports especially the Afghans' initiatives that she is eager to promote. The media are too silent concerning these projects. Most of the

reporters limit themselves to the war related news, since for security reason, they are not encouraged to travel outside the military controlled areas.

Here in our land, at a time when the questioning of the militarization of Canada and the pertinence of its involvement in Afghanistan grow, it becomes more and more obvious that the response offered to the Afghans is not fully appropriate. As a practitioner of community development methodology, I cannot imagine how the military can convincingly play in civilian reconstruction.

- **Some conclusions**

I left the meeting convinced that we, as Canadians and Quebecers, can and should intervene non-violently in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and other conflict situations. I am glad to have met many persons involved in creative projects. The non-violent groups present at the Symposium need full support since they offer alternatives to the military approach in peace building. The project of a Peace Department within the Canadian Government is a necessary instrument in order to channel the resources from the military to non-violent initiatives in peace building and co-ordinate a Canadian response to the world conflicts.

With its diplomatic resources, the wealth of the various cultural origins and the vast experience of civil society organizations, Canada could be engaged more effectively in peace building.

However, the symposium had some important limitations. Sometimes the language of the participants betrayed the superiority feelings of those who think that they can contribute to conflict areas, without seeking the knowledge from those who work in the same regions. Moreover, it is important to recognize the limitations of the North-American dominant society we belong to. Our society contributes indirectly to the international conflicts, when it does not question its consumerism that drains the resources of the earth and above all its beliefs a military approach could solve conflicts.

In particular, I regretted the absence of First People and Quebec peace building organizations. One realizes that there is still a long way to identify the areas of collaboration between the "solitude's" of Canada. To respond to the challenges of international peace, we need the contribution of all the Canadians' living strengths and originality.

Peace, in the sense of the absence of war, is of little value to someone who is dying of hunger or cold. It will not remove the pain of torture inflicted on a prisoner of conscience. It does not comfort those who have lost their loved ones in floods caused by senseless deforestation in a neighboring country. Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free.

The Dalai Lama, *The Nobel Lecture,*
December 11, 1989

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION TRAINING.

On 4th and 5th June, I attended a two-day workshop where UFER was invited by “CEJI” (a Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe). The invitation specified that: “The workshop was developed in the context of the increasing importance of intercultural relation as recognised by the forthcoming European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and in response to the demand for diversity training sessions that are open to the general public. It is based on a training programme for adult educators developed by CEJI with the support of the European Commission and the Ford Foundation.” The workshop was led by Robin Sclafani (Grail and UFER member) and Judith Jordaky (CEJI).

The main objective of the training was: “To change the ideas and behaviour of individuals and groups related to the religious aspects in intercultural relations”. The trainers used “highly interactive and participatory methods”, which means that there was no talk or lecture; we only received some texts which we discussed in small groups of 4 or 5 people, which were changing all the time. We were 16 very different people : 10 women and 6 men; 9 living in Brussels, 1 coming from Liège, 4 from Holland, 1 from Italy, 1 from Spain. Among the 16, 12 were from western origin, 1 Arab, 2 from Middle East, 1 Chinese.

➤ **Here are some of the issues proposed to the groups:**

1. The rites of passage in three phases: Separation – Transition – Reincorporation.
 - Elements and structure of a ritual;
 - Concrete experiences of such rites, religious or secular, and their influence on personal evolution.
2. Indicate, on a scale from “agree” to “disagree”, where one stands on statements such as:
 - It is possible to develop and live by a good moral code without religion.
 - I think religious institutions have a responsibility in world conflicts.
 - With regard to gender equality issues, religion has institutionalised the oppression of women.
 - It is possible to reconcile religion and science.
 - The religious books I know best (Bible, Qur’an, etc.) are mostly story-telling or mythology.
3. Place 10 religious or philosophical groups in chronological order and find their related prophets, founders, thinkers as well as:
 - Their holy book / reference text
 - The major celebration
 - The primary belief
 - A symbol
 - A holy place

- ✓ *If you want to do the exercise, they are by alphabetical order: the Bahai faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Humanism, Islam, Judaism, Laicity, Paganism, Sikhism, and Taoism.*

4. On the basis of press cuttings (see below), find:

- The victim(s)
 - Perpetrator (s)
 - Confronter (s)
 - Bystander(s)
- Le Soir: *Deux écoles, deux conceptions* (scarf in schools), 31 May, 2007
 - The World Jewish Congress: *Religious minorities in Geneva lobbying for own cemeteries*, 13 October, 2006
 - The Times: *Religious beliefs give no right to discriminate against gays*, 24 April, 2007.

After the groups work on the above items, we tried to answer five questions and five core concepts on Media Literacy.

Conclusions

I am grateful for having had the opportunity to take part in this seminar. I mostly appreciated the chance of meeting the group and enjoying rich and various exchanges, even if it was sometimes a bit exhausting. It was easy to see that I was largely the oldest one among a majority of 20-30 years old, with maybe two men near 40 and two women probably around 50. It is good to realize once more that different generations have different types of languages. And in English on top of it! If it was possible to understand each other in small groups, in the plenary sessions, however, with low voices and a very rapid delivery, it was more difficult for me to follow the flow!

In fact, I mostly appreciated the group itself with various ways of thinking, very special associations of ideas and unexpected reactions. It was wonderful to have had people who were different and could complement each other. There has been no dispute when confronting our various experiences on these issues. When I think of the group, I imagine a flowered prairie where each colour, height and perfume of flowers gives value to the other ones. Wouldn't our world, as multicultural, multi- linguistic and more or less religious as it is, be able to achieve a fraternal harmony?... Let us dream.

Alphonsine Piérard.

A SEVERE CASE OF DISCRIMINATION: THE CASTE SYSTEM

***Bijay Singh**, who participated in the Training Program in Korea, in 2004, works in Orissa, India, with an organization called Solidarity for Developing Communities (SFDC). The purpose of this organization is to correct the injustices which the caste system has imposed on the Adivasis (indigenous peoples) and Dalits (untouchable) and to create peaceful living conditions in the Indian society. He sent us a paper on this problematic, which he wrote in order to develop a better understanding of the caste system within his organization and among their partners. I have tried to sum*

WHAT IS CASTE DISCRIMINATION?

Caste discrimination is a stratification of the society on the basis of birth. It is an attempt to justify this stratification on the basis of a division of labour by accident of birth – not on the basis of skills, aptitudes and equal opportunity. This was the first job reservation system introduced in the society by which some professions/occupations are not changeable but are permanently assigned by the society for a particular group of people determined by birth.

PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES

The social exclusion of Dalits and Adivasis has immense consequences economically, politically, psychologically and spiritually on the whole Indian society. It is estimated that 90% of the 267 million Dalits and 85 million Adivasis are poor. These two communities are the poorest in the whole of India. Some Dalits and Adivasis, especially among the youth, start resisting the oppressive system. This generates counter reactions from members of the upper castes who have occupied the higher positions in all fields of life. They try to squash any resistance from the lower caste. As a result, the position of the higher castes is hardened and they continue the system which is beneficial to them.

CONCRETE MANIFESTATIONS

Although “untouchability” has been abolished by the Indian Constitution, it is still practiced in both gross and subtle manner. It manifests itself in all spheres of life, starting from drinking water facilities to sitting arrangements in the schools, the refusal to eat or drink food prepared by a person of a lower caste, a separate bathing place in a pond or river, banning of access to the temples or the houses of the higher castes, the impossibility for persons of different castes to get married, the raping of women of the lower caste to teach a lesson to that community, etc. It is deeply rooted in the psyche of the whole society.

ACTIONS OF SFDC TO REDUCE CASTE DISCRIMINATION

SFDC is undertaking four types of actions:

- *To remove the “untouchability”:*

- help the Dalits and Adivasis to love themselves as they are, have self respect, and be self confident so that they will be able to resist these practices.
 - Since “untouchability” within the Dalits communities is no less severe than between the higher and lower castes, SFDC will work to remove these practices so that the “untouchability” between higher and lower castes can also be removed.
- *To reduce socio-economic inequality*
 - help the Dalits and Adivasis communities to catch up with other communities and become equal to other members of the society,
 - gently persuade the higher castes to leave space for members of the lower caste in order for them to get equal opportunity
- *To reduce atrocities against and among the Dalits and Adivasis*
 - Help the Dalits and Adivasis to grow as peace loving communities in order to resist the violence and torture inflicted on them. For that purpose, SFDC will organize trainings on active and non-violent methods, provide legal education and aid to the victims of atrocities, etc.
- *To promote solidarity*
 - look for opportunities during time of crisis and calamities within the higher castes to be of some help,
 - encourage both lower and higher castes to extend and accept invitations to participate in social functions and national ceremonies,
 - organize rural youth camps of mixed communities.

IN CONCLUSION

Bijay focuses on inner transformation through spiritual growth and meditation. He does not advocate changing religions as Dalits communities have done in the past.

He is convinced that Dalits and Adivasis communities have the kind of resilience that nobody has. If this resilience is harnessed persistently with a determination to end the caste discrimination, then this system will come to an end sooner than the skeptics think.

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NEWS FROM THE MEMBERS

❖ INTERVIEW WITH VITAL BAMBANZE

By Raymonde Martineau

Vital Bambanze, Batwa from Burundi, took part in the training seminar organized by UFER in Geneva, in 2000. In 1999, he had created an association called "Let's Unite for the Promotion of Batwas". I met him during the last session of

R.M. For the past few years, you have been very active as representative of the organization *Let's Unite for the Promotion of the Batwas* within international institutions dealing with indigenous issues. Tell us about your organization.

V.B. It was founded in 1999. Since 2003, it is legally recognized in Burundi. We do advocacy work in favour of land rights, education, culture, etc. We also initiate income generating activities for the Batwas and organize training programs for leaders.

R.M. How do you finance your activities?

V.B. We receive funding from NGOs such as Trocaire (Ireland) ICCO (Netherlands), Minority Rights Group, USAID and others as well as from the World Bank.

R.M. How did you accede to the international arena?

V.B. My participation in the UFER seminar in 2000 was my first contact with the international world. I am grateful to C.M. Eya Nchama, who was working, at the time, for the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Burundi, for this possibility. I was going out of my country for the first time. He helped me to get my first passport.

R.M. What did the seminar give you?

V.B. It enabled me to familiarize myself with the functioning of the United Nations system. I learned a lot through the conferences and the visits to the UN.

R.M. How did you use what you have learned during the seminar?

V.B. During my stay in Geneva, I contacted the secretariat of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in order to find out how I could promote the cause of the Batwas in this forum. I learned about the existence of a Fund to facilitate the participation of indigenous delegates. I submitted a request and the following year I participated in the deliberations of the Working Group in the name of the association *"Let's Unite for the Promotion of Batwas"*.

R.M. Since then you have participated in several other instances dealing with indigenous issues. How have you acquired your knowledge about them?

V.B. I had the opportunity to do a five-month internship at the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. This enabled me to better understand the functioning of

all these organizations and mechanisms. I subsequently participated in the deliberations of the Working Group on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in meetings of WHO, UNESCO, WIPO, the World Bank and UNICEF.

R.M. Do you see positive results of your endeavours?

V.B. Yes, in recent years, lands have been distributed to the Batwas, there is also a greater awareness about education of children. We succeeded in introducing into the Constitution the participation of Batwas in the Senate and in the National Assembly (3 in each instance). I am a member of the National Commission on Land and other Resources.

R.M. Do you participate in regional and international networks?

V.B. Yes, we work with organizations pursuing the same aims in Rwanda, Ouganda and Congo, including the one represented here by Pacifique Mukumba (*Support Center for Indigenous Pygmies and Vulnerable Minorities*). We are also members of the *Indigenous Peoples of Africa Co-ordinating Committee (IPACC)*. We also collaborate with several international organizations of indigenous peoples or working for indigenous peoples, among which DOCIP (*Indigenous Peoples' Center for Documentation, Research and Information*) based in Geneva. This organization will take an intern from our organization to train him/her in order to set up a documentation unit on Batwas in our organization.

R.M. In conclusion, which contribution could UFER make to your efforts?

V.B. & P.M. What we need most is training to develop the skills and knowledge of the members of our organizations, at the national, regional as well as international levels. These training sessions could take place locally for militants of the Great Lakes region. We would be ready to constitute an organizing committee to work with the persons in charge in UFER. One subject which is dear to our heart is racism in the XXIst century: its root causes, its manifestations, the means to combat it, etc.

Ref. on the Batwas:

Les Pygmées Batwa de la région des Grands Lacs, Rapport de Minority Rights Group International, Londres, avril 2001 (In French only)

<http://www.minorityrights.org/admin/Download/pdf/Batwa%20ofrench%20Report.pdf.pdf>

❖ IN BRIEF

Gaëtane Gascon, one of the two trainers of the Training Program in Korea in 2004, sent us some reflections about her present life. “I am at a stage where more importance is given to *being* than *doing*. I am becoming an Elder. The Indigenous and Africans traditions treat older people with a special respect. This honour entails also the responsibilities to listen to other generations and to transmit the heritage received. That is why, as a recently graduate in Conflict Studies from the universities of Saint Paul and Ottawa, I am eager to contribute to building peace especially in training, research and networking.

To do so, I support UFER. I assist the Canadian Institute of Conflict Resolution www.cicr-icrc.ca to implement its plans to build up its presence in Quebec.

I have accepted to be part of the committee that deals with the intercultural and interreligious relationships as well as with indigenous issues of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Quebec's. The Committee is composed of a team of men and women that are known for their thoughts and practices in these fields.”

Rita Ayoub, who participated in the UFER Training Seminar in Geneva in 2000, is the coordinator of a training program on inter-religious dialogue at the Islamic-Christian Institute of the St-Joseph University in Beirut. On 24 June of this year, a team from the TV program “*Le Jour du Seigneur*” of France 2 went to Beirut in order to report on the state of the Islamic-Christian relations. Part of the filming was done during a training session given by Rita.

Marielle Peltier, who saw the program on TV, said that “in a short period of time, she was able to emphasize the tensions, the issues, the questions, the difficulty to live and the courage of the Lebanese as well as the prophetic role of Lebanon, more important than ever in the present regional and world context.” In the interview made with her, Rita insisted on the necessity to make a clear distinction between two levels of tensions and dialogues: the level of profoundness and the political level. For her, dialogue and openness are integral parts of religion.

If you want to see and hear this program, go on the site: http://www.jds.tv/html/main_frame.php?page_frame=visualiser&id_video=362. (The part involving Rita is the fourth one).

Suk-In Yoon, Christina, who participated in the UFER Training Program in Korea in 2004, has been appointed Director of the Caritas Volunteer Center established in Seoul, in 2005. Caritas is the official organ of the Archdiocese in the areas of relief work,

charitable aid, welfare and development. Suk-In had acquired extensive experience in that field during her long career involvement with the Korean Red Cross.

Her main role now is to train and allocate volunteers to hospitals, homes for the disabled and senior citizen, community services centers, etc. Since her nomination, she has developed training programs for trainers and introduced leaders to modern systems of management. She hopes to extend this training to volunteers working at parish level.

The Volunteer Center is also developing a partnership program with private enterprises, such as banks and businesses. They participate in social activities and contribute financially to the programs.

Paul Beersmans, member of the Committee of UFER, made another study tour to the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir, from 24 January till 16 February 2007, in order to find out the latest developments in the area. This time he concentrated on the Jammu province.

In his conclusions, he noted that “the relations between India and Pakistan are improving, there is no deadlock but the process is very slow.” As in previous reports, he emphasized the need for a dialogue on three levels: bilateral, national and internal. “The overwhelming desire of the Kashmiris, he said, is for restoration of normal civic, social and economic activity and development.”

He reminds us of the great variety of cultures, traditions, languages and religions which exist in these regions. He expressed particular concern for the Kashmiri Pandits, many of which still live in camps in appalling conditions with no hope of coming back to their land. The Kashmiri Pandits (or Pundits) are “descendants of Hindu priests and among the original inhabitants of the Kashmir Valley, with a recorded history of over 5,000 years.”¹⁴ They have been forced to flee the Valley by Islamic extremists.

For the full text of the report see: <http://www.basjak.org/doc/jkin071rap.doc>

Paul is undertaking another study tour this summer, this time he will visit the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh.

C.M. Eya Nchama, member of the Committee of UFER, who is a native of Equatorial Guinea and an ardent promoter of the African languages, has drawn our attention to a website on the Fang language, his mother tongue. <http://www.monefang.com>

This is a very interesting initiative. If some of our readers are aware of similar sites for other languages, let us know.

¹⁴ K.P.S. Gill, *The Kashmiri Pandits: An Ethnic Cleansing the World Forgot*, in Freedom from fear, occasional writings on Terrorism and Governance , <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/kpsgill/2003/chapter9.htm>, consulted on 2 July, 2007