

UFER

International Movement for Fraternal Union among Races and Peoples

An idea in action

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The International Movement for Fraternal Union among Races and Peoples (UFER) is a federation of organisations and persons involved in the promotion of understanding, dialogue and cooperation between races, peoples, ethnic and cultural groups, in the spirit of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

EDITORIAL

Forty years ago this year, Martin Luther King was assassinated. I feel that I must open this Newsletter with some extracts from his famous speech of 28 August 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C.



*“I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, **I still have a dream...***

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.”

I have a dream that one day ... the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood...

I have a dream that my little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day ... little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains and the crooked places will be made straight and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. »

This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South

With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.”

UFER is a very small association on a world-wide scale, but I wish that for each one of us it may contribute to keep alive the dream that we all need to “*be able to work together ... to struggle together ... to stand up for freedom together ...*”

For the past ten years, the Board of UFER has met twice a year up to 2007 when we decided to meet only once a year and to use the Internet to communicate among us between meetings. This seems to work quite well. We just finished our meeting of 2008. We take advantage of this Newsletter to give you some news of our Movement.

①

After 55 years of existence, our first task still remains **the active participation in meetings and conferences of the United Nations through our consultative status and the collaboration with networks of NGOs** with the aim of making joint declarations and actions. Since we cannot follow all the issues in which we are interested, we have set some priorities for the coming year:

- the preparation of the Conference on Racism of 2009;
- issues related to the Status of women and the girl child within meetings of the United Nations in Geneva and New York as well as of Committees of NGOs.
- The Human Rights Council and its Advisory Committee as well as the NGO Committee on this subject in Geneva.

We have kept you informed of the creation of the Human Rights Council (in 2006) and of its evolution as well as of our concerns. Today we realize, more than ever, that this new structure leaves very little space to civil society. This enables States to avoid, if they want, “issues which hurt them” (Guantanamo, Charia ...) and to proclaim that they respect human rights without fearing that NGOs will contradict them. Our main hope is the Advisory Council, recently established by the Council and composed of independent experts, whose functioning is not yet quite defined but where we have a better chance to be heard ... We will continue to keep you informed.

②

We have already talked to you about projects initiated by members of UFER who had participated in one of our seminars on conflict management. In the course of our interaction with them, we decided to set up a small fund with the aim of **encouraging these local initiatives of members eager to promote the priorities of UFER**. We do not have and will never have the means to finance projects: it is not our vocation. But we can accompany initiatives of members, assist them in the elaboration of their project, and direct them towards donor organizations. This is the purpose of the fund: to make a modest contribution for a start and to help them introduce coherent projects to organizations likely to finance them. If sufficient funding is received, UFER can be reimbursed in order to assist other projects. We decide to dedicate 5000 € to this fund. Members wishing to assist us may add to their membership fees (used for the functioning of UFER) a small amount with the mention **FLI (Fund for the support of Local Initiatives)**.

③

The present format of the **Newsletter** is appreciated by the members as well as the Committee, which expresses its thanks to the two editors to whom we owe its conception and realization.

We particularly welcome the articles from members who share their reflections and life experience in relation with the objectives of UFER.

Some members often send us interesting articles found in other publications. We thank them but the purpose of the Newsletter is not to publish articles which can be found elsewhere. We are interested, however, to receive your personal reactions to a

text which you have read, a conference you have attended or an event in which you participated.

Your contributions should not exceed two pages (single space). A brief presentation of yourself and the context in which you live should accompany your article: it is more interesting for the readers.

If you hesitate to write because neither English nor French is your mother tongue or the language in which you have studied, we might be able to help you because we accept articles written in Spanish, Korean, German, Dutch ...

The theme of the next General Assembly (2010) will be migration. Articles and testimonies on this subject are most welcome.

It is not the Board which ensures the existence of UFER, it is the commitment of all of us. We are always happy to receive news from you, from your work, about the situation in your country, your town, your village. Let's share experiences and ideas!

For the Board
Marielle Peltier
President

HUMAN RIGHTS

❖ THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

By Paul Beersmans, Member of UFER Committee and President of Belgian Association for Solidarity with Jammu and Kashmir

The 7th session of the Human Rights Council was held in Geneva from 3 to 28 March 2008. I participated in this session from 10 to 14 March 2008. UFER transmitted a written statement on the human rights situation in Jammu and Kashmir (A/HRC/7/NGO/1). The full text of this written statement can be found on the website of UFER: www.ufer-international.org. UFER also sponsored a joint statement on extreme poverty which received the support of 92 NGOs (A/HRC/7/NGO/84).

The session was opened by UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. The first days (from 3 to 5 March) were attributed to a high-level segment when dozens of senior dignitaries (Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers, etc.) addressed the Council praising their countries' efforts to promote and protect human rights. Particular focus was being paid to the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

A. Highlights of the session

- The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, presented her report on the activities of her Office. She said the launch of the Universal Periodic Review should constitute a turning point in the historic development of the Council.
- The Council considered the reports presented by mandate holders on extreme poverty, migrants, arbitrary detention, the effect of economic reforms, toxic waste, freedom of expression, violence against women, mercenaries, torture, minority issues and the right to health. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the prevention of genocide also addressed the Council.
- The Council also heard reports on the situation of human rights in Sudan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cambodia, Somalia and Liberia.
- After the presentation of each report an active dialogue was held between Member States of the Council, observer States and NGOs.
- The Council continued with its review, rationalization and improvement of mandates process.
- General debates were also held relating to contemporary forms of racism, people of African descent, the follow-up of the Durban Conference and the elaboration of complementary standards.
- The Council discussed in private the report of its Working Group on Situations, which examines complaints about gross violations of human rights in specific countries, it appointed new Special Rapporteurs and elected the members of the Council's Advisory Committee (a kind of successor of the Sub-Commission) which will meet for the first time from 4 to 15 August 2008.

B. Comments

- The transition from the Commission on Human Rights to the Human Rights Council dominated the work of the UN human rights system all over the last year. Since the Commission has been dissolved, States and NGOs alike have been striving to give shape to the newly created. The terms of the resolution that created it were rather vague and left room for new institutional structures, as well as for the definition of mechanisms of work. During this 7th session, there certainly was a change. The general impression is that the Council is again dealing with the main human rights issues notwithstanding the fact that some days were spent on the review, rationalization and improvement of mandates.
- The session was well attended; sometimes representatives of NGOs were not allowed to enter the conference room as all the seats were taken. They had to go upstairs, to the visitors' tribune, from where they could follow the debates.
- It is difficult for NGOs which do not have the possibility to follow the session on a regular basis - which of course is very expensive for an organization - to intervene orally at the right moment, as one has to be flexible and to follow the debates very closely. Therefore, we opted this time to use the procedure of a written statement: through this procedure our contribution became an official document that was distributed to all the participants.

C. Universal Periodic Review

- The General Assembly has mandated the Council to "*undertake a universal periodic review, based on objective and reliable information, of the fulfillment by each State of its human rights obligations and commitments*" (Res.60/251, par.5.e.). The review is conducted by a working group composed of the 47 Member States of the Council. The first review of the 192 Member States will take four years with three sessions a year examining the reports of 16 countries each time. The first two sessions of this exercise have taken place in April and May 2008.
- Paul Beersmans and his wife, Jeannine Heyndrickx, attended the second session. Not surprisingly, each State presents a rather rosy report of its human rights situation after which other countries can take the floor. They tend to be very moderate, asking some questions and making general recommendations. They certainly have in mind that one day they will also be in the hot seat. NGOs can attend the working group but cannot intervene. They have the possibility, however, to send written information prior to the meeting, which will be summarized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights into a document presented to the working group. Time will show if this procedure will really help to "*promote the full implementation of human rights obligations undertaken by States*", as stated in the resolution which created the Council.

D. References

With regard to the new Human Rights Council and the developments of the past year, following websites are useful:

- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: www.fes.de
- International Service for Human Rights (ISHR): www.ishr.ch
- Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR): www.ohchr.org

❖ IN BRIEF

- The **Review conference on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance** (also known as the Durban Review Conference) will be held in Geneva from 20-24 April 2009. It will be a follow-up of the conference held in Durban on the same subject in 2001 which ended up in a controversy over accusations of racism against Israel, which prompted the United States and Israel to leave the conference. Canada has announced in January that it will not participate in the Conference in the fear that there will be expressions of "intolerance and anti-Semitism". The victims of racism will again have to pay for a political conflict. For more information on the Conference and its preparatory process consult: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/racism/DurbanReview/sessions.htm>
- **Louise Arbour**, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has decided not to accept a second term in her function when her mandate expires at the end of June this year. This function is one of the most difficult within the United Nations. The

incumbent is constantly under pressure and often the object of harsh criticisms on the part of States which do not appreciate being criticized for their human rights records. It was the case with Ms. Arbour and some of her predecessors. In a statement during the 7th session of the Human Rights Council in March, she said that “comments by representatives of Member States which impeached the integrity of the High Commissioner and or of members of her Office through allegations of bias, hypocrisy, insubordination and dereliction of duties, were in her opinion outside the acceptable range of interactive dialogue.”¹ There is an obvious effort by some governments to control the Office of the High Commissioner.

- **James Anaya**, American Indian, professor at the University of Arizona (USA), has been appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples. He succeeds Professor Rodolfo Stavenhagen. Mr. Anaya has been active for many years at the international level. He first came to the UN as a young lawyer representing the National Indian Youth Council (USA), an NGO in consultative status with the UN.

❖ WOMEN’S RIGHTS

• **COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

By Sharon Joslyn, UFER representative in New York & Jeanette Loanzan, the Grail, Philippines

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) held its 52nd Session at the United Nations in New York, from February 25 to March 07, 2008. The focus was “Financing for Gender Equity and the Empowerment of Women”. There were thirty Grail delegates participating and two UFER delegates. Most of the Grail delegates were from the USA with one woman from Kenya, one from Portugal, one from the Philippines, two from the Netherlands and two from Mozambique.

○ *Highlights of the session*

There were two clearly emerging directions from the sessions. One is the need for policy reform to ensure representation of girls and women’s issues at the government policy level with the corresponding resource allocations. The second direction was the work on the ground with the girls and women. Both are needed in order to realize the Millennium Development Goals in reducing poverty and increasing gender equity.

The priority theme of the next session of CSW will be: "*Equal sharing of responsibilities between Women and Men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS*".

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/53sess.htm>

¹ Press release, United Nations Office in Geneva, *Human Rights Council discusses annual report of High Commissioner for human rights*, 7/03/08,

[http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/\(httpNewsByYear_en\)/43B484BEE435A4D4C1257405003D8947?OpenDocument&cntxt=25FA7&cookielang=en](http://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/(httpNewsByYear_en)/43B484BEE435A4D4C1257405003D8947?OpenDocument&cntxt=25FA7&cookielang=en).

- *Follow-up from the previous session*

Denise Milice from Mozambique is a teenager, now sixteen years of age, who participated in the previous session of the Commission. She works with the Grail team in her community in Mozambique. She had received a Mary Purcell scholarship awarded to the girls last year. Mary Purcell is the founder of the Working Group on Girls (a committee of UNICEF where Grail and UFER members are involved). Through her participation Denise was motivated to begin a teen group of twenty girls and ten boys. They discuss topics of interest to them such as body image, dating, relationship with parents. They also spent a day of solidarity with orphans at an institution where all but four were infected with HIV/AIDS

She returned this year to CSW 52 and presented her work on panels as well as holding an interview with UNICEF. (See www.girlsrights.org/whatsnew.php, halfway down the page). Some great materials have been produced by the NGO Working Group on Girls as a follow-up to the CSW 51. They can be found on www.girlrights.org.

All of us who participated were renewed in our commitment to continue our efforts for women and girls. Whether our actions are on the high level of policy making or programs on the ground, we know that each step is important. “Dripping water hollows out a stone.” (Ovid 43 B.C.)

- ***VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN***

During the 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched a global campaign to end violence against women, which will continue till 2015. In his statement he said that “it is a campaign for women and girls who have the right to live free of violence, today and in the future.”² He called on the Security Council to establish a mechanism dedicated to monitoring the implementation of resolution 1325 on women, peace and security adopted in 2001. There is a lack of accountability on the part of governments. More women should take part in peace negotiations. Is it necessary to recall that between 80 to 90% of casualties in today’s warfare are civilians, the majority of which are women and children? In addition, rape is more than ever a tool of war.

² Unite to End Violence against Women, United Nations Secretary General’s Campaign, <http://endviolence.un.org/>

• **GENITAL MUTILATION**

On 27 February 2008, ten UN agencies “pledged to support governments and communities to abandon female genital mutilation ... (They) expressed their concern about the ‘medicalization’ of the practice, whereby it is performed by health professionals in health facilities”.³

The Commission on the Status of Women and the World Health Assembly recently adopted resolutions urging states to adopt measures and enforce legislation to protect women and girls from these practices.⁴

The issue is still widely discussed. In October 2007, two members of UFER Committee, Berhane Raswork & C.M. Eya Nchama, made an intervention on the subject in a Symposium in Geneva. The intervention of Mr. Eya Nchama gives an account of the situation in many countries.⁵ The intervention of Mrs. Raswork can be requested at her organization: cominter@iprolink.ch.

On 6 February, 2008, a special meeting was organized in Geneva by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices affecting the Health of Women and Children, the Office of Gender Equality of Geneva and the International Organization for Migration, to commemorate the International Day for Zero Tolerance on Female Genital Mutilation. On International Women’s Day, in a meeting also held in Geneva, on the humanitarian situation in Somalia, a topic was dedicated to raising awareness of the Somali community on the negative effects of genital mutilation.

• **WOMEN & THE MEDIA**

On the occasion of International Women’s Day this year, UNESCO pursued its global operation called *Women Make the News* to promote gender equality in the media. The purpose of this operation is to “challenge the media to fulfill their democratic responsibility to represent women and men in a fair and balanced way.” UNESCO invites “print and broadcast media to share with (them) features, articles, interviews and TV and radio programmes dedicated to this year’s theme *Women’s Untold Stories* to highlight women’s multiple talents, achievements and contributions to their communities.”⁶

³ United Nations News Centre, *UN Agencies Rally to End Female Genital Mutilation within a Generation*, 27/02/08, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25777&Cr=female&Cr1=>.

⁴ Commission on the Status of Women, 52e session: E/CN.6/2008/L.2/Rev.1, of 11/3/08, <http://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/N08/268/82/pdf/N0826882.pdf?OpenElement> and 61st World Health Assembly, Res.WHA61.16 of 25/5/08, http://www.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/A61/A61_R16-en.pdf

⁵ *Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Africa and Around the World*, on the Website of the Geneva Government: www.geneve.ch/integration, press on “documents”

⁶ UNESCO, *Women Make the News 2008*, http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=18295&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

❖ INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

• **PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

The 7th session of the Forum took place from 21 April to 2 May, 2008. This year's team was "*Climate change, bio-cultural diversity and livelihoods: the stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new challenges*". "The survival of the traditional ways of life of indigenous peoples depends in large part on the success of international negotiations in developing strong, enforceable agreements that will truly be effective in combating climate change", declared a report presented to the Forum.⁷ Particular concern was expressed about the fate of indigenous peoples from the Arctic and those living on small islands in the Pacific that have become particularly vulnerable following rapid changes which have occurred in these regions.

The opening ceremony was attended for the first time by a Head of State: President Evo Morales of Bolivia who made a statement. One of UFER representatives in New York, Jenna Messier, attended the ceremony. She said that "the crowd was very excited and many photos were taken and small outbursts of support for Evo were yelled from the audience consistently". In his statement, that can be found on the website of the Forum: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/>, he presented his ten commandments to save the planet. He also suggested the holding of a World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. He concluded by saying that "we can continue on the road of capitalism and death or we can advance on the indigenous route of harmony with nature and life".

• **REPRESENTATION OF THE BATWA OF BURUNDI**

The Batwa of Burundi, represented by the organization UNIPROBA, issued a declaration on 15 February 2008 to protest against their exclusion from the representation of Burundi within the Parliament of the East African Community.⁸ They recalled that the Batwa of Burundi have always been the victims of marginalization, discrimination and exclusion although they are fully fledged Indigenous citizen from Burundi and recognized in the present National Constitution of the country as a social category which has been made vulnerable in the past. They call on the government of Burundi to reestablish them in their rights and to grant them a representation in the Parliament of the East African Community.

⁷ *Impact of Climate Change Mitigation Measures on Indigenous Peoples and on Their Territories and Lands*, Submitted by Victoria Tauli-Corpuz and Aqqaq Lyngge, Forum members, E/C.19/2008/10, para. 68, 20/03/08.

⁸The East African Community (EAC) is the regional intergovernmental organization of the Republics of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania established in 1999 and with its Headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania. See: http://www.eac.int/about_eac.htm.

- **COMMISSION ON TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION OF CANADA**

By Gaëtane Gascon

Since her retirement from international non governmental organizations, the author is involved in peace building activities especially at the international level and with indigenous people

- **The context**

Will spring 2008 be decisive for the Indigenous people's future? Will the decisions taken by the Canadian Government's concerning the Indian Residential Schools remain sterile or be the beginning of renewal?

First, in April 2008, the Canadian Government launched the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in accordance with the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement of 2005*. Justice Harry LaForme a member of the Mississauga's First Nations of Ontario has been appointed as President of the Commission. Then, on June 11, 2008, in the presence of First Nations in the name of the Government and of the all the citizens, the Prime Minister and all the party leaders solemnly and officially offered their excuses to the 80,000 former survivors and their family.

Already in 1998, the Government established the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AH) « ...to address the legacy of physical and sexual abuses suffered by aboriginal people in residential schools. » In 2005, the survivors received a financial compensation. The creation of the Commission doesn't replace the twenty class actions lawsuits that are on going.

- **The Indian Residential Schools –means of assimilation**

The Indian Residential schools were set up following the *Gradual Civilization Act*, a bill passed by the Parliament of the Province of Canada in 1867 and ratified by the London Parliament in 1869, Canada was then dependant on the United Kingdom. The clear objective was to eradicate the indigenous cultures and affirm the European culture's superiority.

The schools operated from 1892 to the 1970's, 132 establishments, six in Québec, received 150,000 small children and youth. They were the fruit of an agreement between the federal government, the Churches and religious communities. Parents were separated from children, thus being prevented from transmitting their spiritually, culture and language. The children were forced to reject their community's traditions and ways of life. « We were taught that all what was Indian was bad », said Marcelline Kanapé, Innu educator.⁹

Parents wanted their children to be educated in order to cope with the European culture, but not at the price of being stripped of their parental responsibility and deprived of their children's presence. The assimilation programme has impacted on all aspects of Canadian life, including in Quebec despite the limited number of residential schools. It has damaged

⁹ Lepage, Pierre, *Mythes et réalités sur les peuples autochtones*, Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, Montréal, QC, Canada, 2002, p.30

the Aboriginal people's social fabric, affected their self-appreciation, the family relationships, with the non-Aboriginal people, with the Churches and with the territories.

As for the non-Aboriginal people, they were unaware of the fact that the First Nations' social diseases were greatly due to what specialists call «*ethnocide*.» Prejudices, which were taught up until recently through the school system, are still heard. Most people ignore the First Nations' contribution to the building of Canada in the past and today. The complexity of the present *Indian law* prevents civil society organizations to intervene efficiently. Unions, political parties, women and community groups' attempts to repair the wounds of the past and create an inclusive future have limited success.

- ***Mandate, Objectives and Guiding Principles***

The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, created last April, will examine 150 years history during a five years' process and organize seven national events in seven regions of Canada. Sixty millions dollars have been budgeted for its activities. Its mandate is to listen, with compassion, to the former students, to allow them to tell their story, paying attention to emotions. The aim is to promote the reconciliation with the past, between the members of the First Nations, Métis and Inuits and Quebecers and Canadians.

The methodology will reflect the aboriginal philosophy. It is a healing process. « It needs to manifest the outcomes we wish to achieve, empower the community and individuals, offer the best we have and make of this Commission a gift to the world...», said Robert Watts, interim director of the Commission, during a lecture on April 14, 2008.¹⁰

- ***The Future***

Aboriginal people are resilient and the assimilation attempt did not succeed completely. According to the 2006 Census, the Aboriginal population counted 1 172 790 persons, more than 3.7% of the total Canadian population of 31 612 897. They represent the youngest population and an increase of nearly 20% during the last five years. Moreover, the Aboriginal people promote their individual and collective rights through democratic means such as the UN, the courts, the national and international media and the education of their youth.

The Government's apologies have the merit of freeing the Indigenous people from the burden of shame and guilt for the harms done by the Residential schools. This is an essential step on the healing road and for preventing that violence be transmitted from generations to generations. But words are not sufficient if they are not followed by concrete gestures.

The Government of Canada should sign the 2007 *United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples Rights*. Moreover, the recognition of their right to self-determination, the respect for the agreements and a firmer support for their project to improve their living conditions is expected from all levels of Governments and from civil society organisations.

- ***References***

Commission Truth and Reconciliation: <http://www.trc-cvr.ca/indexen.html>.
Aboriginal Healing Foundation <http://www.ahf.ca>

¹⁰ Robert Watts and other Aboriginal Elders have had a strong influence on the peace programs of St-Paul University in Ottawa my alma mater. Those who took part in the 2004 UFER Korea training program and the MISH meeting in Montreal in 2006 will remember the methodology and the peace circles inspired from Indigenous traditions.

❖ HUMAN MIGRATIONS

What to answer when you are asked: "Who are you?" And "Where are you from?"

By Lee Keum Yeon (Cecilia), Seoul, Korea

As a freelance human rights activist, I have met many migrant workers. I was struck by their courage as they face the challenges of their very difficult situation. To-day, I like to introduce to you, Mira, a Mongolian woman doctor and Samar a Nepalese union leader.

○ *The story of Mira from Mongolia*

Mira, 37 years old, left her two daughters and her father in the capital city of Mongolia, to come to Korea in 1995. She was to be part of an exchange program for a one-year internship, as a medical doctor, at the University hospital. But she couldn't carry on her training. An administrative mistake prevented her from getting the legal paper needed to work. She left the hospital and started her hard illegal migrant worker's life. For ten year, she had to change her work place every two or three months to escape the sexual harassment from both the male migrant workers and the factories owners. Seeking protection, she went to live with a Nepalese who, soon after, began to abuse her physically and mentally. She stayed with him till his deportation. Male Mongolian workers used to tease her saying: « *Why do you live with a Nepalese? Why not live with me?* »

At the industrial complex where she worked, she treated many workers as doctor. She played the role of interpreter, especially when the workers were interviewed by the manager or when they had serious problems. She even helped the police to communicate with their Russian speaking clients.

She used to phone home weekly, in order to give and obtain news from her family. She also sent money for winter clothes or for computer for her children as well as for medical care for her father. In Korea, Mira would prepare the delicious *momos* for her Nepali friends that were craving for their national dish. Mira even joined NGO workers in protest rallies against the immigration policy.

One day, as she was treating sick workers with oriental medicine, she was arrested, detained and, later on, deported to Mongolia. Going back home empty handed after ten year, she found her grown up daughters and aged parents. Despite the fact that she had given so much to her family, she realized that there was no place for her in her home. She had no work, no position, no income, no plans and no future. Once, she came back to Korea as a care-giver for a friend, the vice mayor of a Mongolian city, who needed a medical treatment. Afterwards, she returned to Mongolia. She felt alone as before and she started to work in a restaurant and in a factory.

To the various requests made to Mira, her response was always: « ***Yes I will do it.*** » But one day a Women Studies Department professor planning to write a book asked Mira

about her life in Korea and what Korea meant to her? For once, Mira replied: « *NO, I refuse to work for you. I will write my story when I will be ready to do it myself.* » This was the first indication that Mira was taking charge of her own life and that things were changing for her.

○ ***Korean-Nepalese solidarity***

Korea counts over 500,000 migrant workers, half from China. They are part of the total one million foreigners that represent 2% of the 50 million inhabitants. Coming from all over the world, the foreigners are migrant legal and illegal workers like Mira, foreign wives, English tutors, visitors, business people, asylum seekers and others. The one-language speaking Koreans are keen to learn English in the context of global society. The white English speakers are considered superior. I wonder who the inferior ones are!

But the main issue is how to foster mutual understanding between the 2% foreigners and the rest of the population that forms a homogenous society. How people with different nationalities, languages, races, cultural codes and religions can live harmoniously together.

My strategy is to do what I can when I am asked. For example, I give short talks to the school teachers that need information on the migrants' situation and on inter-cultural themes. I visit mixed married couples. I go to Nepal and discuss projects with friends. One of these projects aims at supporting the 210 under-age working children from twelve different districts in Nepal. The project is coordinated by **Samar**, former trade union leader among migrant workers in Korea who was arrested and sent back to Nepal. He now heads the Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions, (GEFONT) that takes responsibility for the children workers. The project's slogan is « *children out of work and into school* ».

Technology facilitates communication between Korea and Kathmandu in Nepal. Solidarity is the core value and the bridge between Samar and I. The small project we are involved in is a drop of water in the ocean, but the collaboration experienced through this activity becomes a reality when we do take common action.

Miscellaneous

❖ THE ELDERS

On the occasion of his 89th birthday, on 18 July 2007, Nelson Mandela convened, together with Desmond Tutu and Graça Machel, a group of leaders to contribute their wisdom, independent leadership and integrity to tackle some of the world's toughest problems. The Group comprises twelve eminent personalities of a certain age (5 women and 7 men) from four continents. "Together we will work to support courage where there is fear, foster agreement where there is conflict, and inspire hope where there is despair", said Mandela. Members have already undertaken missions in Sudan and Kenya. (For more information see the Website: <http://www.theelders.org>)

This is an encouraging initiative which shows that older people have an important contribution to make to society. Many older people, men and women from many

countries, give their time behind the scene to support families and communities – sometimes even outside their country – among them several readers of this Newsletter.

❖ A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE: REIKI IN TUZLA

By Chris de Leeuw, Grail member, 82 years old. Since she retired, she has more time to do things she likes such as Chi Neng Quigong and Reiki.

Tuzla, a city in Bosnia, where many refugee women live whose husbands and sons have been murdered in Srebrenica during the war in the Balkan, where in 1995 at the end of the war one grenade killed 75 youths and wounded 135 people, a city with many traumatised women and children, a city with a population of around 160.000 where *four* centres for psycho-social service make clear that there is a big need for relief of these women and children, where still 21 refugee camps exist where people live in very poor circumstances....

That is where Reiki WorldWide sends 2 to 4 people each month, to give Reiki for one week in various centres. Most people come from The Netherlands, but some also from Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Ireland and the USA. Reiki is the passing on of healing energy via the hands, to benefit the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual healing process.

In 1993, when I was initiated in Reiki, I was deeply and happily aware that God's grace could work in many, many different ways and that this was a good and practical way! When I heard about the possibility to go to Tuzla, I hastily followed a preparation weekend and went.

Last May, I went for the fourth time to the centres, to a refugee camp, to a centre for bodily and mentally handicapped children, to a group of women suffering from breast cancer, etc.; a full programme with two appointments each day from Monday unto Friday. And as each month there was a list of women wanting Reiki, of children jumping on our treatment table with a smile of 'here I am!' Even if one doesn't speak the Bosnian language, there is a language of the heart. Wonderful!

When I come home, I am always filled with gratitude and joy, but also with sadness that so little can be done for the women still living in those refugee-camps. We were the first group going to Srebrenica to give Reiki to the women there. On the road going there we saw many empty houses without windows: signs of the passed war; houses where women didn't want to return to: who is going to rebuild them now husbands and sons have been killed? How can one go back to live amongst people who killed their husbands and sons? Formerly Serbs (Orthodox), Croats (Catholics) and Muslims peacefully lived together. Since the war that is nearly impossible.

Of course it is the idea that Bosnian people take over themselves in the long run. Reiki courses have been given and, after some years, Reiki Masters have been initiated. During our stay some of these Reiki people came to join us, but I understood that it will take time before more women are that far that they are able to treat their own people. The influence of war goes so deeply, that it takes years to get over it.

Unfortunately our website www.reikiworldwide.nl is still in Dutch, but we hope that in a couple of months there will be an English version also. In the meantime if anyone is interested to help in person or in money, in order to support, among others, a group of young women who started to operate a hairdresser salon, I would happily give some more information: chrisdeleeuw@antenna.nl

NEWS FROM MEMBERS

❖ REACTIONS TO PREVIOUS ISSUES

- **Claire Vellut**, from India, wanted to add additional comments on the issue of discrimination against Dalits. “Yes, discrimination against women and Dalits exists all over India, she says. Fortunately, there are many exceptions, such as Mayavathi, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and the Bahujan Samaj Party leader. She is a woman and a Dalit. In Uttar Pradesh, the largest State, after 20 years of coalition government, her party was able to lead the government through an absolute majority in May 2007. Mayavathi, with the members of her party, worked at the grass root level for several years, uniting all the minorities - without distinction of caste - the economically weak, the Muslims, the tribal populations, the landless laborers. Mayavathi realized that the caste factor can be eliminated. All the poor and neglected people can have a voice by their share number”.

❖ PUBLICATIONS

- **Els Van Hoecke**, from Bolivia, published a book on the women working in the mines in Bolivia entitled: “*El trabajo invisible de las mujeres de las minas en Bolivia*”. A resume of the book, made by Lucy Martinez, was published, in French and English, in the AFI-ICA Newsletter “*Intercom*”, No 1/2008. We take some excerpts from it. “The book teaches us ... who those women workers in the mines of Bolivia are ... (It) describes the different categories of work that the women do in the mines ... These brave women ... do not have any social protection ... (They) are exposed to dust and toxic gas, to bad ventilation and humidity, to temperature changes between inside and outside. These bad conditions yield professional diseases: bronco-pneumonia, rheumatism, cancer, backaches, and skin diseases. As a consequence, these women die at an early age.” Fortunately these women have started to unite and there is hope that through their solidarity things will begin to change. For more information, contact Els Van Hoecke: elsvanhoecke@yahoo.es.

- **Alfred Sawadogo**, from Burkina Faso, has recently published a new book entitled “*Afrique: la démocratie n’a pas eu lieu*” (*Africa: democracy has not come*), Harmattan, Paris, 2008. He has also published several other books on subjects like polygamy and Aids in Africa, among others.

- **Simone Bulle**, from Geneva, draws our attention to a recent article published, in French, by the Third-World Commission of the Catholic Church (COTMEC) in Geneva, which is entitled “*At the origin of the crisis in Kivu*”. This article, which adopts the views expressed by Gérard Prunier in another article, goes against the idea widely spread in the international opinion that the violence in the Congo is the consequence of the genocide in Rwanda. According to Gérard Prunier, “the roots of the problems in this region are not mainly ‘Rwandese’ but ‘Congolese’ ... (and) it is the deteriorated security situation in Kivu which contributed to the conflict with Rwanda in 1996.” The author favours a regional mediation, even sub-regional, rather than international to solve the conflict. If you want to read the whole article in French, see the COTMEC Bulletin no 295, January 2008, page 2: <http://www.cotmec.ch/index.php/bulletins/view/92>.

❖ **IN BRIEF**

- **Manoj Shrestha**, from Nepal, who attended the Training session in Korea in 2004, wrote (on 27 April) that the country has completed the Constitution Assembly Election. But the political stability is difficult. The population expects the right things for the nation and its people. The strong influence from other countries makes difficult for Nepal to form and introduce the desired Constitution.

“Now it's the end of spring, he says, my school's new session has started on April 18th. The flow of new students is increasing. I would like to ask you to convey my regards to all whom I know...”

- **Lee Kum Yeon**, from Korea informs us that the Gyeongnam Provincial government will host a World Conference for women's human rights, from November 25 to 27, 2008. They expect 200 international delegates and 2,000 from Korea.

The theme is: ‘*Women’s human rights and global community*’ with four sub-themes:

1. Equal participation of men and women in politics.
2. Elimination of all forms of violence against women.
3. Protection and empowerment of minority groups.
4. Vitalization of women’s economics.

The city of Gyeongnam is located in the South-East part of Korea, three hours and a half by express train from Seoul.

Those interested to take part in the conference, to send delegates or to propose a contribution can contact Lee Kum Yeon who is a member of the executive committee. kumyeon@hotmail.com

- **Paul Beersmans**, President of the Belgian Association for Solidarity with Jammu and Kashmir, has undertaken another trip to this region, from 31 January to 16 February 2008. At the end of his trip, he concluded that a solution to the conflict is not for the near future. It is clear that neither India nor Pakistan is willing to make territorial concessions; a solution must be found through peaceful means at the negotiation table. But a big problem is to find out who the representatives of the Kashmiris are and what their expectations and aspirations are. They continue to be very divided. The full report of the trip can be found on: <http://www.basjak.org>.
- **YOON Suk-In (Christina)**, from Korea, participated in the XXth World Volunteer Conference, organized in Panama, from 2 to 5 April 2008, by the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE), an NGO in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. The theme of the Conference was "Volunteering for Human Development: More Solidarity, Less Poverty". (For more information see Website of IAVE: <http://www.iave.org/>). On her way to the Congress, Suk-In spent a week in Montreal where several members of UFER gathered to meet with her and to learn more about volunteer work in Korea and her involvement in that area.

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