

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

Bruxelles

Headquarters
President, Marielle Peltier
40/10, rue Washington,
1050 Bruxelles
Belgique

Genève

Representation UN
Berhane Raswork
145, rue de Lausanne
1202 Genève-
Suisse

New York

Representation UN
Sharon Joslyn
P.O.Box 540082, Bronx
New-York 10454,
USA

Montréal

Secretary General
Raymonde Martineau
812 Outremont
Outremont PQ H2V3N6
Canada

EDITORIAL

Raymonde Martineau, Secretary-General

In his article on the 10th session of the Human Rights Council published in this issue, Pierre Binette makes an analysis on the North-South conflict which influences the deliberations on the promotion and protection of human rights. This conflict has never been more acute than in the Durban Review Conference, which took place in Geneva from 20 to 24 April 2009.

There were already strong oppositions during the preparatory stage of the Conference. An unprecedented press campaign was launched to discredit the Conference, which was labelled by some Medias as an "alliance between anti-Western leftists and Islamists".¹ Countries like Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, New-Zeeland, Poland and United States announced, at different stages of the process, that they would not participate in the Conference. Tensions were high during the whole preparatory process and the final document was bitterly debated. An agreement was finally reached at the last moment and the Conference could take place.

At the opening session, however, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, the only Head of State present, made a virulent attack against Israel and all the members of the European Union left the room in protest. They only came back after Mr. Ahmadinejad had left the podium. However, the Czech Republic, which presides over the European Union, decided to leave the Conference. The Secretary-General of the United Nations and the High-Commissioner for Human Rights were forced to issue statements in which they deplored some of the remarks made by President Ahmadinejad.

To everyone's surprise, the final document was adopted by consensus as early as 22 April, as a way, it seems, to compensate the effects of the speech of President Ahmadinejad. The NGOs, on their part, generally supported the Conference. They used this platform to promote their causes.

Opinions vary on the results of the Conference. Some, from all sides, deplore a compromise which erased from the final document controversial issues such as homophobia, defamation of religions, women under charia law, Israël, casts, etc. Others consider that Palestinian voices could not be heard.

On the other hand, Amnesty International considers that "the adoption of the Document offers an opportunity for a fresh start in national and international

¹*The Daily Telegraph*, sur son site web: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/telegraph-view/5183425/Boycott-the-United-Nations-Durban-Review-Conference.html>, *Boycott the United Nations Review Conference*, 19/04/2009

efforts to combat racism". The organization "urges states to approach this task in an action-oriented fashion, avoiding the mutual recriminations and politicization and political bargaining that marred so much of the Conference".² As for Human Rights Watch, it is of the opinion that "nations that attended this conference in good faith proved that it's possible to reaffirm the global commitment to fight racism, despite efforts to derail the process," and that "states that boycotted the conference for fear it would foster hatred should be reassured by this declaration and should join the global consensus against racism."³

These wise analyses encourage us to use this document in order to pursue our struggle against racism and all forms of discrimination which exist in every country. The role of NGOs is crucial for this struggle. They are the ones who can give a voice to the victims, without being hampered by political considerations.



EDITORIAL BOARD:

Gaëtane Gascon	gaetane.gascon@videotron.ca
Lise Gagné-Iattoni	lise.iattoni@yahoo.ca
Raymonde Martineau:	raymonde.martineau@sympatico.ca
Colette-Pasquis-Audant	cpasquis@videotron.ca

25€ or 35US\$ TO be sent to the following account in Belgium:

Banque Fortis

IBAN : BE50 0013 6970 0018

BIC : GEBABEBB

² Amnesty International, Press release, 24/04/09, *Durban Review Conference: We have the words, now it is time for the action*, on the website: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/IOA41/020/2009/en/e89b0d39-26a3-4c66-9143-74ac7ef40717/ior410202009en.html>

³ Human Rights Watch, Press Release, 22/04/09, *Governments should endorse anti-racism declaration*. On the website: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/04/22/governments-should-endorse-anti-racism-declaration>

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE LAST SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

By Pierre Binette, UFER member and professor at the School of Applied Politics at the University of Sherbrooke, Québec, Canada. During his sabbatical in Europe, he had the opportunity to take part, as representative of UFER, in the 10th session of the Human Rights Council, in March 2009.

As a typical professor of international relations, I used the opportunity of my presence at the Human Rights Council (HRC) to interview several participants including governmental delegates from different regional groups, United Nations staff members and NGO representatives from North and South who work in various sectors of the promotion and protection of human rights. The evaluation of the performance of the HRC and, most of all, the inherent dynamics were among the issues raised during these interviews.⁴

Dynamics

Two dynamics seem to guide the recent developments in the HRC.

1. The percentage of the draft resolutions and decisions put to the vote was never as high as in the 10th session of the Council (almost 40% while between the 1st and the 9th session the percentage of the drafts put to a vote was 18%).
2. Since the creation of the Council, we see a radical decrease in the number of draft resolutions being withdrawn because of lack of consensus. Between the 1st and 5th session, almost 20% of the draft resolutions were withdrawn. Between the 6th and the 10th session, only 4% of the drafts were withdrawn. It seems then that, since the creation of the Council, the delegates progressively submitted less and less drafts resolutions which they thought would be defeated or too strongly debated during the vote. They establish the possibilities of success of a draft resolution on the basis either of preliminary consultations with regional groups or, more simply, on the basis of an experience of the voting pattern and of the solidarities within the Council. Allow me to propose some avenues of reflection which could help explaining these two dynamics.

⁴ With regard to the performance of the HRC and its mechanisms, refer to the excellent articles of Paul Beersmans in the previous UFER Newsletters (see the website: <http://www.ufere-international.org/>).

North-South oppositions and the polarization of votes

The polarization of votes and thus the organization of the power struggle within the Council seem at first sight to explain these two tendencies. A rapid examination shows that only one draft resolution was defeated in a vote since the creation of the Council. It was a draft amendment presented at the second session of the Council by the European Union and Canada (A/HRC/2/L.48) with a view to amend a draft resolution on the crisis in Soudan (A/HRC/2/L.44) presented by Algeria in the name of the African group. The purpose of the proposed amendments was, among others, to make Soudan more aware of its responsibilities towards the humanitarian crisis in this country and to recommend more interventionist politics. The outcome of this vote is very revealing. In spite of the support of 6 countries of the Latin American and Caribbean Group, the quasi-systematic one of Japan and South Korea in the Asian Group and Ukraine within the Eastern European Group, the Group of Western Europe and other States, which includes Canada, was unable to gather a majority in the Council.

In fact we saw a polarization of the vote. This polarization is not East-West as was the case in the time of the Commission on Human Rights but North-South. If we look at the composition of the Council in March 2009, the calculation is simple.

- On the side of countries of the South: **(26 States)**:
 - ✓ 11 States of the Asian Group
 - ✓ 12 States of the African Group
 - ✓ 1 State of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (Cuba)
 - ✓ 2 States of the Eastern European Group (Azerbaijan and Russia)

- On the side of countries of the North: **(12 States)**
 - ✓ 2 States of the Asian Group: Japan and the Republic of Korea
 - ✓ 7 States of Western Europe and other States including Canada and Switzerland
 - ✓ 3 States from the Eastern European Group namely Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

The remaining **9** States, Cameroun, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the **7** other States of the Latin American and Caribbean Group have more changing positions. With the exception of Mexico and Bosnia-Herzegovina, these States usually side with the States of the South. But even if these 9 States supported a proposal from the States of the North, it would be defeated (26 South against 21 North).

There are, naturally, other factors that influence the composition of coalitions and solidarities. For example, the subject of the resolution/decision or, also, the question of the abstentions can play an important role. Usually, however, these abstentions cannot reverse the majority rule in favour of the South.

The stands of Russia

This deserves a special comment. Since Vladimir Poutine acceded to power in Russia, the latter abandoned its pro-western politics. In the first years of the presidency of V. Poutine, Russia would have liked to play the mediator between the West and Asia. But it rapidly modified its politics and became radically closer to the positions of the South. When there is a vote in the HRC, it stands together with the countries of the South. As an observer state in the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Russia votes almost systematically with the States of this organization who are members of the Council (17 in March 2009). This transition of the Russian position occurred in parallel with the reintroduction of a more relativist vision of human rights. This vision maintains that the interpretation and implementation of human rights can vary according to the specificity and the cultural history of a State. Without going as far as questioning the universal character of human rights, this position allows for a type of cultural relativism which alters their essence.

Sources of polarization

With the systematic support of Russia and China, the countries of the South can now take the risk of a vote in the Human Rights Council and affirm their conception of human rights. In fact, some issues are still sources of polarization. The traditional issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is naturally one of them. Another one is the defamation of religions, which consists in maintaining that the defamation of a religion, namely Islam, constitutes a violation of human rights, while the position of the countries of the North is, traditionally, that human rights are not collective but individual rights. We can add to these two issues the question of the control of the decision process in relation with the review of the Durban Conference and the ones of women's rights and the right to choose one's sexual orientation.

While the balance of power favourable to the countries of the North within the HRC enables them to make just claims, one should not forget that States, whether they are from the North or the South, support visions which are in conformity with their national interests. That is why it is crucial that non-governmental organizations pursue their promotion efforts and watchdog role in favour of human rights.

This North-South polarization and the resort to voting do not necessarily allow a more effective protection and above all a more important respect for human rights at the international level. What will be in the long-run the value of these resolutions and decisions adopted by a majority vote, notably with regard to the law and the application of this law? Public international law and, even more, the one related to human rights is a voluntary law. For an organization such as the United Nations, which has a universal vocation, the agreement of a large number

of States from all the regions, if possible, is necessary for a resolution to carry a real weight once adopted. In international forums, when time came to adopt resolutions or conventions, the international actors have traditionally sought consensus. For many negotiators, the simple fact that a State requests a vote at the time of the procedures for the adoption or the rejection of a draft resolution or convention reduces the possibilities of implementation of the resolution. That is why delegates often prefer to postpone to the next session or even withdraw a draft resolution which is due to be defeated or too strongly debated at the time of the vote.

Conclusion

Since I am optimistic by nature, I hope that the arrival of President Obama will modify this dynamics of polarization within the HRC. In March 2009, the participants in the HRC were clearly awaiting, maybe too passively, this revival. It is clear, however, that the return of the United States as a member of the Council could bring a modification of the dynamics, if there were a significant progress on the Palestinian issue and warmer relations between Iran and the United States; if the war on terrorism was not associated anymore with an opposition between Islamic and Jewish-Christian civilizations; if the world first power reasserted the value of multilateralism.

In the next few months, I will have the opportunity to publish a more detailed article in which I will undertake more systematic and scientific studies of the present dynamics within the Human Rights Council. I hope, however, that this brief resume will arouse some reflection on an issue of great interest to all of us.



COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

By Sharon Joslyn, representative in New York

The 53rd session (CSW 53) was held from 2 to 13 March, 2009.

- The Priority Theme this year was: *Sharing of responsibility between women and men, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS.*
- The Review Theme was: *Equal participation of women and men in decision making processes at all levels (50th session).*

In this article, I would like to focus mainly on some of the resolutions made at the end of the session since they impact gender equity.

1. In 2006, the Commission decided on the creation of a specialized agency for women aimed at **consolidating gender related activities** under a single umbrella. Following CSW 53 deliberations, the most viable option will probably be the formation of a separate department in gender affairs.

There are currently four United Nations bodies focusing on gender issues: The Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), The Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Equity. As Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has said, the United Nations Gender Equity lacks a recognized driver which could lead to fragmentation.

The option at hand is to unify all four entities under one with the creation of a composite entity which would combine the features of both a fund and a department. This will be resolved during the General Assembly in the fall.

2. There was a renewed resolution for United Nations **assistance to Palestinian women** adopted with three countries opposed: Netherlands, United States and Great Britain.

3. Another resolution adopted was one that called on governments, along with the United Nations, civil society and private sector to intensify efforts to fully implement the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action calling for the **removal of all barriers of women's participation in all spheres of public and private life.**

4. At the conclusion of CSW several resolutions were adopted stressing the need for the **sharing of responsibility** as stated in the priority theme.

5. Two immediate criticisms made were the **absence of reference to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the lack of specific mention of women under occupation.**

The **Outcome Document** will soon be available on the website: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/53sess.htm>. NGOs are now in the process of studying the document looking for positive statements, omissions and gaps. I was present at the first reading with the Working Group on Girls, of the NGO Committee on UNICEF.

Next session

CSW 54, which will be held in 2010, will have as a Priority Theme the *Beijing Platform for Action*. It will be a challenge both as to content and venue since the building of the United Nations in New York will be undergoing renovations and space will be limited.

LOUISE ARBOUR, A NEW INVOLVEMENT

By Gaëtane Gascon

At the end of 2008, the Honourable Louise Arbour completed her mandate as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. And next July she will become the new President and CEO of *International Crisis Group* (Crisis Group), which has its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. «*The Crisis Group is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 130 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict* ». ⁵

The *Crisis Group* brings together various countries' ex-leaders: presidents, prime-ministers, ministers and ambassadors and other experts. These personalities, after having had access to the highest positions of power, now use their skills and notoriety at the service of peace building.

Louise Arbour didn't remain inactive during the interim between her two mandates. Among other activities, she supports the Indigenous people that advocate for a change in Canada's position concerning the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. With many other human rights organisations, she thinks that the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights is urgent and inescapable.⁶ There are signs of changes in the other non-signatory countries such as the USA, Australia and New Zealand. It is hoped that our country will join them.

For many of us, Louise Arbour's carrier is particularly inspiring. Despite the lack of support of the federal Canadian government, she has shown a constant involvement in the promotion of human rights and international justice. Born in Montreal, in 1947, Louise Arbour brings with her decades of practical experience in Canadian and international affairs. As former Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda and High Commissioner for Human Rights, she is well prepared for her new position.



⁵ *International Crisis Group*, www.crisisgroup.org

⁶ **Vivre ensemble** volume 16, no. 55, Spring 2009. Interview with Louise Arbour entitled : *Un combat pour la dignité humaine*

WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Seoul, Republic of Korea, 25 to 27 November 2008

By Fina Bijnens, member of the UFER Board

This conference was organized by the province of Gyeongsangnam and took place in the town of Changwon. The theme was: *“Women’s rights at the international level”*. Five members of UFER took part in it: Juliana Kim, Marie-Rose Jaspers, Kim Hea-Young Rosaria, Fina Bijnens and Kum-Yeon Lee Cecilia. The latter had a large responsibility in the preparation and the holding of the conference. We were 3000 delegates from 30 different countries.

I rarely participated in such a well organized world conference, from the technical as well as the artistic point of view. There was a place for every woman, those in full activity, young and older, mothers with their babies, the handicapped with their wheel-chairs, the blinds, the hearing-impaired who were provided with interpretation in sign language.

I noted with great surprise and sorrow the absence of African women! There were only three of them, from Rwanda, Ghana and South Africa. Why? Some received their visa very late and could not find a seat on a plane.

In such a conference, there is no shortage of speeches. Those interested can ask for the documents at the UFER secretariat in Brussels. The opening address by the Governor of Gyeongsangnam-do was remarkable and full of promises.

All through the Conference, there were beautiful and refined cultural presentations: dances, music, drums, etc... Let me just mention the two dances at the opening-session which really impressed me. First, there was a group of young girls (most of them sexually abused, ill-treated, etc...), who get together and slowly pull through. Through a modern dance, a loud and rhythmical music, they expressed their sufferings and struggles. At the end of their dance, they invited the women in the audience to come on the podium while singing: “come, give us a kiss, we are still able to love...” Very moving! Several participants went and kissed and danced with them. The second dance was performed by “winged” women. The beautiful music and movements said: “We, women, we have wings, we will fly towards the future.” While they were leaving the podium as if they were flying, on a screen behind them we could see birds flying ... Very beautiful!

Themes

The themes were discussed in six workshops:

1. Elimination of Violence against Women and Sexual Exploitation
2. War and Violence against Women
3. Economic Empowerment of Women
4. Human Rights Protection for Migrant Women
5. Human Rights Protection for Disabled Women and Sexual Minority Women
6. An Equal Voice in Policy Decision-Making

Final declaration

As in every conference, there was a final declaration. It was read by the group of women who had organized the conference.

- The declaration confirms that, as proclaimed in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, women are entitled to dignity and liberty from birth as well as to all other rights and freedom and, without being subject to any form of discrimination including gender discrimination.
- It reaffirms, as guaranteed in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), that women have the same rights as men in civil, political, economic, social, cultural and in all other areas; it recognizes that, as provided by the Optional Protocol of CEDAW, when women's right to equality is violated, international procedures for remedy exist.
- It recognizes that discrimination and violence against women are gross violations of human rights and undermine women's capabilities, not only slowing down the development of women themselves but also the development of society as a whole.

Here are some **recommendations** which came out of the lively discussions in the workshops:

1. Work to amend laws that violate women's rights to **equality**;
2. Increase the proportion of women at different levels of positions in **public institutions and enterprises**, with a view to ensure full and equal participation of women in politics and policy-making;

3. Pursue legislations aimed at eliminating discrimination against **women irregular workers** in terms of working conditions and at providing assistance to **businesswomen**;
4. Pursue the adoption of measures to improve the quality of life of **women farmers** and to protect their rights;
5. Undertake practical groundwork for balancing **work and family** and securing financing and concrete measures to encourage participation by men;
6. Create a practical support system for **women with disabilities** and ensure that their rights to childbirth and childcare are protected;
7. Protect the rights of **lesbian women** and ensure that their sexual orientation is respected in order for them not to be subject of discrimination and violence.
8. Establish a **Special Committee for Women and a Foundation for Women's Human Rights** in Gyeongnam to prepare legislation and other institutional measures to protect women's human rights.

The determination and optimism of these Korean women, as well as their dynamism for another world to exist impressed me and did me good.



THE FINANCIAL CRISIS IN BURKINA FASO

By Alfred Sawadogo, member of UFER, expert on African civil societies and author, among others, of "Afrique: la démocratie n'a pas eu lieu".

In a country where incomes are so low that it is considered as one of the poorest in the world, to speak about financial crisis is a euphemism. As a reminder, Burkina Faso is regularly classified at the 191 position among 192 countries for sustainable human development. Burkina Faso is part of West Africa and is situated 1000 km from the ports of Benin, Togo, Ghana and Ivory Coast. It has 14.000.000 inhabitants and has for a long time dedicated itself to agriculture, despite the rain shortages. We do not talk about financial crisis but about the high cost of life.

The first signs

One morning, in 2007, anger swept through the main towns, just like a hurricane. Tires were set on fire in the streets and symbols of power were attacked: official vehicles and traffic lights. Arrests and imprisonments; cemetery peace was restored. But the government was made aware of the seriousness of the situation: the high cost of living had considerably reduced the buying power of the inhabitants of Burkina Faso. The proportion of poor people was increasing rapidly; the level of 42% seems to have been reached, where the annual income per inhabitant does not exceed 45000 FCFA (68,60 Euros) in 1994, 68000 in 1998, 82000 in 2003.

***Some indicators:** a bag of 100 kg of mil or maize (basic food for the population) costs 16.500 or 20.000 FCFA. It so happens that the basic food of the urban population, which is supposed to be the richest, is rice at noon and a paste made of mil or maize flour in the evening; the minimum guaranteed wage is about 30.000 FCFA (45,70 Euros)*

Burkina Faso comes first in Africa for the use of two-wheel engines; all types of “inexpensive” motorcycles can be found in the streets of Ouagadougou (about 2.000.000 inhabitants). You can imagine the dust of the harmattan combined with the smoke of the two-wheel engines and the one of the cars as old as of my own car: 15 years ... The price of the litre of gasoline is a cause of distress for the people of Burkina Faso. When the price of gasoline was \$140 in New-York, many people seriously considered to swap their motorcycle for a bicycle ... The price of a litre of gas was almost 1000 FCFA (1,5 Euro). The workers strikes for a less expensive fuel did not have any effect, or very little.

Accompanying measures

There is a general discontent among the citizens. The consumers blame the shopkeepers for imposing prices which they consider abnormally high. The shopkeepers complain that the government imposes too many taxes. The citizens complain that the government is not doing anything to reduce the cost of living ... In reaction to this discontent, the government has taken the following measures:

1. **Price control**, which had been suspended in principle because of price liberalization, was re-established (weakly) and without real efficiency.
2. The most significant measure: **the abolition of customs dues for 6 months** (extended) on essential imported goods: rice, milk, salt, pasta, flour, soap, etc. Normally, the consumer prices should have been revised downwards. But that was not the case, certainly because of the well known collusion between the business sector and the political. The consumer

continues to buy the bag of 50kg rice at 20000 FCFA; local products such as mil and maize continue to be abnormally expensive, not always to the benefit of the producers. The liberalization of prices, instituted a long time ago under the pressure of the IMF and the World Bank, benefits big investors – businessmen and politicians in power for more than two decades. Poverty increases, the angular faces of malnourished women or other unmistakable marks are a sign of it. Other measures would be needed.

3. ***Distributions.*** Who would have believed it? Yes, in 2008 local productions were good: mil, maize, rice, beans. However, prices did not go down. If in villages survival is not yet synonymous of scarcity of food, the situation is different in big urban centers like the capital Ouagadougou. Many families are confronted with precariousness. The government then organized a distribution of food with the assistance of the World Food Programme (WFP). In the outlying suburbs of the capital where low-income families are the most numerous (women are the ones mostly concerned), there is a mad rush at the counters. On presentation of the family card, according to the number of mouths to be fed, you receive a ticket of 1500 FCFA (or several tickets). The owner of the ticket goes to one of the designated stores to receive the foodstuff of his choice: mil, rice, milk, etc. It is the first time that such a distribution takes place in the country. Such is the situation under the economic crisis.
4. ***The support of the government to the local agricultural production.*** With the explosion of the price of imported rice in particular, the local rice became more interesting, because of its competitiveness on the local market. Consequently, the government developed a strong policy of support for this production: free donation of improved seeds and fertilizer to the producers, with the help of the specialized agency of the United Nations for Food and Agriculture (FAO).
5. ***Orientation towards a dangerous agricultural politics.*** The direct support provided to the producers by the government was a real success: in some cases cereal production doubled. The people of Burkina Faso are very happy about this governmental initiative. In fact, for the past ten years or so, the State had withdrawn from the agricultural sector, since it had been “liberalized”. Cereal production had diminished. The explosion of the cost of living reminded those in power that the agricultural sector was a nerve center that needed to be supported at arm’s length. A tendency towards a dangerous agricultural politics is however about to emerge. The government encourages “Agro-business” which means to acquire large exploitations, 100 to 200 hectares. Up till now, agriculture was a family affair, small exploitations, ill-equipped indeed, but which maintained a social balance and provided to everyone the possibility to own its plot of land, accessible to all. The new agricultural politics enables those who have money to buy and occupy the good land of

the country, which means that, in 20 or 30 years time, Burkina will be a country where the peasants will not own land anymore. Their only alternative will be to become highwaymen or other armed rebels for the recuperation of their lost land.

According to the estimates of the IMF in Burkina Faso, the economic growth for 2009 will be 3.5%, too weak for an annual soaring population growth of ... 3.1%.

For comments or information: sawadogoyambangba@yahoo.fr

An interesting experience is taking place in Namibia with a view to reduce poverty and inequalities. Civil society organizations, with the Lutheran Church as a leader, have launched a pilot project, in January 2008, in a village, Otjivero (about 1000 inhabitants), which consists in paying a basic income grant of US\$14 per month, for a period of two years, to each inhabitants of the village under 60 years old (from this age a pension is paid by the State). The aim of the project is to show that income security indeed works and is a good mean to reduce poverty, as a commission created by the government in 2002 had already concluded, without any action taken on it by the government. Civil society decided to take the bull by the horns. The funds come from individuals, communities and international NGOs.⁷

After one year, the results were more than positive. A report published in April 2009 shows that child malnutrition has gone from 42% to 17% and the rate of school drop-outs from 20-30% to 5% in six months, the health condition of the inhabitants has improved and the economic activity increased.⁸ Those who thought that a basic income grant would encourage laziness and dependence and increase the rate of alcoholism were proved wrong. The report shows also that Namibia has the capacity to mobilize the necessary resources to sustain a basic income grant for all Namibians and would even greatly benefit from it on a long-term basis. (Edit.)

⁷ For more information on the project see : <http://www.bignam.org/page5.html>

⁸ *Basic Income Grant Pilot Project, Assessment Report, April 2009*, on the website : http://www.bignam.org/Publications/BIG_Assessment_report_08b.pdf

EXCITING MISSION ... AND PERMANENT CHALLENGE

Lasalle Center in the district of Saint-Michel, Montréal, Québec, Canada
(Mixed community involved with the poorest)

By Gilles Martineau

The author of this article is a member of UFER and has been Provincial of his congregation, the *Lasalle Christian Brothers* (<http://www.lasalle2.org/English/english.php>), from 1970 to 1977, and Assistant-provincial of the congregation for French-speaking Canada, from 2001 to 2008.

From 1956 to 1970, he taught at the secondary level in the public system and, for the last two years, he was involved in the training of teachers. Finally, from 1985 to 2000, as missionary in Cameroun, he taught in a technical college in Douala.

In June 2008, I received a proposal for an involvement in an educational project, in the district of Saint-Michel, in Montreal. This is where I am now, with a local team already functioning, with children attending primary schools in the area and some young people at secondary school level who need assistance to do their daily homework.

Origin of the project

Where does this rather bold project come from?

At its regular chapter, in 2004, the congregation of the Christian Brothers of French-speaking Canada promoted a project of a “mission centered on the poor with a group of brothers and associates, with the following objectives:

- Work in human and Christian education of young immigrants of all origins, from 12 to 18 years old, in underprivileged milieu;
- Explicit testimony of Jesus-Christ;
- Possible offer of an environment between the school and the family.”

Context

The district of Villeray, Saint-Michel, Parc-Extension has a population of about 150 000 inhabitants, representing 8% of the population of the city of Montreal. One resident out of two is an immigrant. They are from 75 different cultural communities. It is a young population. Those between 5 & 19 years old form 17% of the population. The majority is between 20 and 40 years old and is of Haitian origin. The other groups come from Central America, from North, Central & Southern Africa, from South-East Asia and from Eastern Europe. The annual average income of the majority is around \$Can 15 000. (In Québec, the annual average income is about \$Can 30 000). The employment rate of the residents is the lowest on the island and, consequently, the unemployment rate is 14%, the highest in the whole of Montreal. The types of employment are among the most vulnerable:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----|
| ▪ Manufacturing | 27% |
| ▪ Retail trade | 10% |

The City of Circus Arts offers more than 1500 jobs in the area. This industry constitutes the most flourishing sector of activities of the district.

Means of action

The focal point for our congregation and its associates will certainly be the parish pastoral which enables us to reach out to almost 200 young people. The team has thus chosen the following means in order to respond to the needs of these young people:

- Homework assistance, for French and mathematics especially;
- Priority given to activities which facilitate an ethnical mix: do-it-yourself and sewing workshops;
- Introduction to Christian faith;
- Basic spoken French for adults;
- Reaching out to more young people at the secondary school level;
- Team and social games which facilitate a good integration, before the homework.

With the prospect of a more intensive development, the congregation could create a welcome center for the 12-18 years-old where they could meet and talk with each other with the daily presence of members of the congregation on a continuous basis. The aim would be to maintain and develop a relation with the young people, respond to their needs and provide them opportunities to take their lives into their hands and to develop their sense of responsibilities, in line with the Christian values and the Lasalle spirit.

Present situation

We are in our second year of presence in this underprivileged milieu. From three brothers at the beginning of the Centre, there are now five of us plus three or four lay associates who joined us for a small group of a few dozens of young boys and girls of primary school and about half-a-dozen of young people from the secondary school. We do mostly homework assistance and give some basic French courses. The young people arrive at the Center around 3.30 p.m. and take part in organized team games, as well as in do-it-yourself and sewing workshops. At 4.30 p.m., they gather to three or four around a table with an adult as assistant and the homework is done in a relative silence and a good working climate. At about 6 p.m. the remaining young people leave the Centre to go back home and we also return to our residence a few blocks away from the Centre.

This is our present contribution. We try to help the young people to the best of our abilities, but we know that we can do more. We pursue our task and try to make a difference in the life of each of these young persons who join us each day.



A YOUNG MAN ON DEATH ROW IN THE UNITED STATES

By Anna Boekstegen, former President of UFER

“Capital punishment is irrevocable. All judicial systems make mistakes, and as long as the death penalty persists, innocent people will be executed”. (Amnesty International).

Since 1973, over 120 people have been released from death row in the U.S. with evidence of their innocence. From 1973–1999 there was an average of 3.1 exonerations per year and from 2000 – 2007 the number was five per year.⁹

Will Brett Hartmann, a young man of 33, on death row in the state of Ohio, since 1998, for a murder conviction, still have a chance to bring new evidence to prove his innocence? A week before his scheduled execution on April 7 of this year, the 6th circuit court granted a stay of execution for three months awaiting the decision of the Supreme Court in a case concerning the right of a defendant to DNA testing of all evidence found at the place of the crime.

In Mr. Hartmann’s trial only one DNA testing was done while hair and fiber evidence not disclosed at trial remains untested and has never been brought up

⁹ Sources for this article: Death Penalty Information Center and Amnesty International.

upon appeal due to the post conviction attorney's missing filing dates. The state's case was weak, based on circumstantial evidence. The state's public defense team did little to defend him. Mr. Hartmann has maintained his innocence all throughout the trial and since then.

There remain many unanswered questions in Mr. Hartmann's case. Police records show that the state has exculpatory evidence that was never made available to his defense attorneys. Judicial systems are not failure proof. As long as the death penalty persists, innocent people might be executed.¹⁰

UFER has appealed to the Governor of Ohio to grant clemency to Brett Hartmann, stressing the presumption of innocence and our opposition to death penalty, which is a cruel and degrading treatment and an irreversible punishment.

In the U.S.A., not all states impose the death penalty. 15 states are without it. Among the 35 states that still have the death penalty on their books are two (Kansas and New Hampshire) that have not executed anyone since 1976. The total number of executions since 1976 is 1,158. 1999 was the year with the highest number of executions (98). Since then their numbers have steadily decreased with 37 executions in 2008.

A defendant is much more likely to receive a death sentence, if the crime was committed in the Southern States. Is capital punishment a deterrent to murder? According to a survey of the former and present presidents of the country's top academic criminological societies, 84% of these experts rejected the notion that the death penalty acts as a deterrent to murder. Consistent with previous years, the 2006 FBI Uniform Crime report showed that the South had the highest murder rate while the South accounts for over 80% of executions. By far the highest number of executions since 1976 has been carried out in Texas (436), with the second highest state being Virginia with 103 executions.

Another aspect of the danger of unfairness appears when examining the question of race of the victim or race of the defendant. In 96% of the states where there have been reviews of race and the death penalty, there was a pattern of either race-of-victim or race-of-defendant discrimination. The following is a telling statistic: 15 white defendants whose victim was black have been executed while 235 black defendants whose victim was white were executed. A comprehensive study of the death penalty in North Carolina found that the odds of receiving a death sentence rose by 3.5 times among those defendants whose victims were white. A study in California found that those who killed whites were over three times more likely to be sentenced to death than those who killed blacks.

¹⁰ For more information, see the website: Brett Hartmann, an Innocent Man on Ohio's Death Row: <http://www.enddeathpenaltyforbretthartmann.com/index.html>

Support for capital punishment in the U.S. has decreased over the years. The May 2006 Gallup Poll found that overall support of the death penalty was 65% (down from 80% in 1994). The same poll revealed that when respondents are given the choice of life without parole as an alternative sentencing option, more choose life without parole (48%) than the death penalty (47%).

There are vigorous grass roots efforts to abolish capital punishment. Thanks to these efforts, the state of New Mexico very recently abolished the death penalty. Another indication that the climate for capital punishment is changing is the drop in death sentences per year. While in 1999, 284 defendants received the death sentence, the number in 2007 was 115. In 2005, the Supreme Court struck down the death penalty for juveniles. 22 defendants had been executed for crimes committed as juveniles since 1976. Likewise in 2002, the Supreme Court had held that it is unconstitutional to execute defendants with mental retardation.

Will the United States follow the example of the more than two thirds of countries worldwide that abolished the death penalty in law or practice?



IS UNIVERSAL COMMUNICATION POSSIBLE?

By Colette Pasquis, UFER member. The Unima project was undertaken jointly by the philosopher Lionel Audant, Colette's husband, and their son Pascal a computer scientist. Lionel and Pascal implement their project with the collaboration of Quebec and Chinese Universities. The project is a real challenge!

Unima Software Inc. is a firm specialised in the creation of a universal communication technology through animated mental images. It is the Babel Tower revisited. In fact, this technology would allow people to communicate despite the barriers of languages, cultures and geography. How is this possible? To do that, one needs to find a universal basis that would serve as a common language. For example, the physical reality that we perceive is common to all. How can we use this reality as the basis of our communication? In fact, a computer' interface is a tool capable of reproducing this reality as well as associating to it a text in any language. Example: If a *dog jumps in a swimming pool*, one can describe this action in any language. If one communicates by associating a sentence from one particular language with an animation, anyone would understand. The software would only have to connect this animation with any other language chosen by the user, provided that the computer data base includes the chosen language.

The Research

First of all the question to be answered is how to use a general theory of animation so as to convert text into animation? To this end, we need to set three conditions:

1. A scientific formulation of a theory of animation ;
2. An appropriate writing system compatible with this theory of animation;
3. A distribution and marketing system capable of providing this new form of representation to the various cultures.

The theory is quite advanced and the technological application progresses step by step. The first product that will be available soon on the market is multilingual animated software. Then one could learn through animation sequences any language starting from any other language.

Moreover, several languages use ideograms. Among them, the Chinese language is the closest to the images and the immediate capture of reality. This language will accelerate the translation of a text into animation.

Technology and partners

Unima has developed a technology of representation and communication through animated images: *USlic (super interactive language of universal communication)* for which a major patent has been registered in 2008.

The main research partners are:

- a) The Industrial Research Assistance Program (NRC-IRAP) is the main faithful partner of Unima. It has already supported three Unima researches. A fourth request is being prepared.
- b) The PROMPT (www.promptinc.org) which supports Unima research in investing in the Universities and research centres such as :
 - Polytechnique of Montreal
 - The University of Montreal
 - The Information Technologies Applied Research Centre of Montréal. (CRIM)
- c) The University of Nankai in China supported by the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology.
- d) Linguabec (www.linguabec.com) a Québec firm specialised in the production and commercialisation of language didactic programmes.

Long term perspectives

Unima means a real anthropological transformation. In the past, the prehistoric man wanted to represent his hunting parties in a lively way, as the hunting was happening in reality. But he did not have the means to do so. The human being then turned to a more and more abstract representation of reality that resulted in an *overdevelopment* of reason and its production, the speculative thought. This was done at the expense of imagination that took refuge in the arts and of emotions and instincts which remained underdeveloped. This new writing could contribute to solving the dualities that separate human beings and breed violence. The animated image and the universal communication would become a place of harmonization for human beings faculties. This would allow us to dream of a pacification of mentalities, cultures and peoples. We could then say with a chance of success: *War, never again!*

For additional information on the Unima firm, please consult the website:
www.unimasoft.com



UFER CHRONICLE

In the Editorial of no 2008-02 of the Newsletter, we mentioned that the Secretary General of the United Nations had paid tribute, last December, to Ms. Estela Barnes de Carlotto, President of the "Grand-mothers of the Plaza de Mayo" in Argentina, for their role in the adoption of the Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Here is their testimony on the support which UFER has given to them in their struggle followed by one from Berhane Raswork, member of UFER Committee and Executive Director of Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children.

❖ **THE DISAPPEARED GRAND-CHILDREN**

By the Grand-Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina

The Association “Grand-mothers of the Plaza de Mayo” of the Republic of Argentina was created following the disappearance of our sons and daughters and of their children, most of them born in clandestine detention centers. This was the result of the terrorist action of a military dictatorship which usurped power between 1976 and 1983.

Women united through our pain, we undertook an unfamiliar and dangerous task for the search of two generations. In Argentina, the insecurity and the secret nature of the repression constituted obstacles for the search for our loved ones.

We went abroad, in Europe, where the ancestors of many Argentineans come from. Many international organizations have seen us going through their offices looking for solidarity. The United Nations was the first organization which received us and we found there other non-governmental organizations which lent us a hand.

The International Movement for Fraternal Union among Races and Peoples (UFER) was one of them, as we the Grand-Mothers attended for the first time, in Geneva, the Commission on Human Rights. We then met a representative of UFER, Eya Nchama, a delightful person who understood us right away and offered us his solidarity. He put us in contact with the headquarters of UFER and introduced us to his colleagues. He took us as his friends.

The following year, UFER took up our cause and one of its members, Monique Costermans, took the floor before the 180 countries represented in this gathering. For the first time, the Grand-Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo had a voice, we became known, and people heard our plight. From 1984 on, UFER let a Grand-mother speak in its name to ask for justice for the 30 000 disappeared persons and for their grand-children.

The affection, the comprehension and the solidarity of this wonderful organization UFER were real allies in the struggle for universal human rights. Its good advice and its signs of permanent friendship up till today are the demonstration that there are no borders to give a hand in the struggle for the common good. We salute such wonderful people on the occasion of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and we thank them in the name of the Grand-mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the tens of grand-children whom they helped us to find.

❖ **WHAT UFER MEANS TO ME**

By Berhane Raswork, member of the Committee of UFER and Executive Director of the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC)

UFER gave me the first opportunity to work with International NGO's in Geneva. It was in 1982, when the NGO Working Group on Female Circumcision invited me to be their coordinator, that I linked up with UFER to become a member. I joined their team of representatives in Geneva, headed by Monique Costermans. I have ever since enjoyed my work with UFER.

As a coordinator of the NGO Working Group and as a member of UFER, I traveled extensively in Africa to hold consultations and dialogue with community leaders, affected women, excisers, health workers, political leaders etc.

These contacts and discussions revealed to me the complexity of the problem of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) within the African societies. The experience was extremely enriching. At the international level, as a representative of UFER, I made interventions on FGM at the Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-Commission as well as the Commission on the Status of Women.

It was discomfoting for African delegates to hear me speak openly about a subject which was so sensitive and taboo. But I believed strongly that the truth needed to be told. Some delegates used to approach me in the corridors and ask me why I could not leave African women alone to lead their traditional life styles.

The more I listened to these kinds of remarks, the more determined I became to continue the campaign. My colleagues in UFER and the members of the Working Group were the source of my energy. They encouraged me to continue my fight.

After the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC) was established in 1984, I continued to represent UFER and IAC in the UN and within the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO).

Later on, I served UFER as its Secretary General and participated in its work. Its training sessions in South Korea and Geneva reflect perfectly its objective of fighting racism and promoting fraternal union. The working environment is so friendly and caring one feels at home in UFER.

Long live UFER to continue giving voice to the voiceless.

IN MEMORY OF VIRGINIA LEARY

Virginia Leary died in Geneva on 8 April, 2009. Born in South Lake City, Utah, USA, Virginia was one of the first women to attend the Law School of the University of Chicago. She then worked for a prestigious law firm where she could have made a brilliant career. Instead she chose to dedicate her life to the promotion and protection of human rights. She joined the AFI/ICA where she was elected to the International Council in 1966, which brought her to Geneva. Among her functions, she represented UFER to the United Nations Office in Geneva. She then worked for the ILO and obtained a Doctor degree in International Law from the Geneva Institute of International Law.

From 1976 to 1995, she was a professor at the University of Buffalo in United States where she founded a Human Rights Center. After her retirement, she came back to Geneva. Virginia continued to work for human rights until her death, in particular for women's and children's rights, labour rights and the right to health. She became an authority in these fields and published several books. She collaborated with several well-known NGOs such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Commission of Jurists. She undertook several missions for them, one of them in Sri Lanka, in 1981, following which she alerted the government and the international community to the imminence of an ethnical conflict in the country and made recommendations to avoid it.

Virginia was a warm, brilliant but modest woman and very dedicated, to her students among others, who continued to benefit from her knowledge, experience and wisdom even after her retirement. She always supported UFER which benefited from her sound advice. She will be greatly missed.

Your reactions, comments and articles are most welcome. You can send them to: raymonde.martineau@sympatico.ca

Visit our Website: www.ufer-international.org