

# UFER

International Movement for Fraternal  
Union among Races and Peoples



## An Idea in Action

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UFER News 2009-02

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

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# EDITORIAL

*By the Editorial Board*

The 21<sup>st</sup> century seems to bring back one of the worst nightmares of humanity: wars in the name of religion on a background of fundamentalism and fanaticism. In view of such a perspective, several organizations and committed individuals in various areas are anxiously wondering: what to say, what to do, and especially how to say and how to do?

Max Weber, German sociologist of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, considers that religion imparts culture. If we compare culture to a circle, religion would be the center and economy, society, literature and art, triangles which have one of their points within this circle. For Weber, the prosperity of the protestant countries in comparison to others comes from Calvinism and in particular from one of its manifestations Puritanism, which considers work and professional success as religious values. Even when culture turns away from religion, the footprint of the latter on the other domains remains. We see how the evangelical culture still has great resonance in the dechristianized countries of the West: human rights, voluntary work, attention to the poorest etc.

This influence of religion on certain groups allows the exploitation, for example, of religion for political reasons. Religion can help to conquer power because of its ascendancy over minds. But we should be careful when we speak of fundamentalism. For example, in Islam, a religion which is often at the fore-front today, when one speaks about Islamic fundamentalism, a difference should be made between a branch which tries to establish a radical Islam but in Muslim countries through the taking over of power (Muslim Brothers of Egypt and Jordan, FIS in Algeria before the nullification of the election which they had won), and another branch which would like to spread radical Islam all over the world through violence (FIS after the elections, Jihad Islamic, Jama 'at Islamyya.) Islam is not the only religion to be concerned by the drifts of the renewal of religious feeling. There is a Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and even animist fundamentalism, of which we could give numerous examples. There is also a more muffled fundamentalism as can be seen in such stands as: the refusal to ordain women, the imposition of celibacy to the priests, the stigmatization of birth-control and homosexuality.

## **But what can be done?**

*Medias:* Popular newspapers, television should analyse fundamentalism, reveal the real motivations, and denounce the real issues. Stigmatize the ideologies instead of the individuals.

*Education:* When the immigrant arrives in a western country, he or she should not only have to learn the language but also the values as well as the

fundamental characteristics of the country of adoption in particular secularism, a secularism which is not against religion but which makes a difference between the public and the private spheres. This is a way to protect religious freedom.

*Politics:* The decision-makers must be firm in ensuring that the line between public and private in the religious field is respected. The conference given by Louise Arbour, former UN High-Commissioner for Human Rights, on 7 October at the University of Montreal, is interesting in that respect. Referring to a study made by the *Global Peace Index*, she says that no religion is more bellicose than the other but a problem arises when the State uses religion for its own objectives or when it dictates state politics, even when religion espouses an ideal of peace. <sup>1</sup>

The State as well as public administration and the services offered to the population should not be associated with a religion. The State should be vigilant in order to prevent any intrusion within the sphere of the State and public services of practices which go clearly against human rights.

Your editorial team has given you some food for thought. We would very much like to exchange with you on this situation which is becoming more and more preoccupying. Let's not leave it to the specialists and the politicians to take decisions, as was done with the economic issue with the result we know. We call on you to share with us your reflections, reactions, questions, actions on this issue which concerns all of us.



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<sup>1</sup> *L'avenir des opérations de maintien de la paix dans les conflits contemporains (in French):*  
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=6364&l=1>

## OVERVIEW ON THE 12TH SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

*By Paul Beersmans and Raymonde Martineau*

The 12<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council took place in Geneva from 14 September to 2 October 2009. The chairman of this session was the Belgian Ambassador Alex Van Meeuwen.

### ▪ Skimming through the agenda

During the **first week** many important issues of human rights were on the agenda: ‘Children in armed conflicts’, ‘Contemporary forms of slavery’, ‘International solidarity’, ‘Right to water’, ‘Toxic wastes’, ‘Human Rights of migrants in detention centres’, ‘Right to development’, and naturally ‘the impact of the global food, economic and financial crises on human rights’.

The **second week** was almost completely devoted to the consideration of the Periodic Reports of some 16 countries.

During the **third week**, in addition to some procedural & practical questions, more important issues such as ‘Integration of gender perspective in the Council’s work’, ‘Mechanism on the rights of indigenous peoples’, ‘Racism and racial discrimination’, ‘Situations in Somalia and Cambodia’ were discussed.

### ▪ Resolutions and decisions

The Council adopted 28 resolutions and three decisions. Among them, it is interesting to note that the Council adopted a text on elimination of discrimination against **persons affected by leprosy and their families**, requesting the High Commissioner for Human Rights to collect views of relevant actors on a draft set of principles and guidelines on this issue. It also voted a text on the **right to truth** stressing the importance of protecting witnesses within the framework of criminal procedures related to gross human rights violations. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, see UN Press Release of 2 October 2009 (Roundup):

<http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/2BCB0BE279D63553C125764400232E57?opendocument>

- **Some side events**

On the first day, the Latin American countries challenged the legitimacy of the delegation of **Honduras**, which they said was not representing the democratically elected government of President Zelayas.

In front of the main gate of the Palais des Nations, there was a demonstration of **Iranians**. They had been demonstrating for the last forty-seven days already and would continue until there is again protection for the Ashraf refugee camp in Iraq. They also demonstrated against the “theo-fascist mullah regime” in Iran.

- **NGO’s**

It continues to be difficult for NGO’s to participate in the deliberations of the HRC unless they have permanent representatives in Geneva. Since there are several sessions during the year, it is more expensive than when there was only one session of the Commission on Human Rights and one of its Sub-Commission.

Many parallel meetings were organised by NGOs at lunch time. They gave NGO’s the possibility to highlight specific human rights situations in various regions of the world.



**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES VOICES AT THE  
UNITED NATIONS**

*By Joy Garland & Sharon Joslyn,  
representatives of UFER at the United  
Nations in New York*

When all the trees have been cut down,  
When all the animals have been hunted,  
When all the waters are polluted,  
When all the air is unsafe to breathe,  
Only then will you discover you cannot eat money.

The Eighth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) was held at UN Headquarters in New York from 18 to 29 May, 2009. The special theme was “*Indigenous Peoples development with culture and identity: articles 3 and 32 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*”. The session focused on ways to further implement these rights which were again brought to the attention of the international community with the official endorsement of the Declaration by Australia in April, 2009. It had previously voted against it together with Canada, New Zealand and United States. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the United Nations on 13 September of 2007, following two decades of negotiations. For more details on advancements of the implementation of the Declaration, see [www.un.org/indigenous](http://www.un.org/indigenous).

Participating in the session were approximately 2000 Indigenous representatives from all regions of the world, as well as state delegates, civil society representatives, academia, thirty-five UN bodies and other intergovernmental agencies.

### **Issues discussed**

Other items covered throughout the session were the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and **industrial corporations** including the importance of promoting corporate social responsibility. The disproportionate negative impact on Indigenous Peoples by extraction of minerals, oil and gas was discussed. A half day’s focus was spent on **climate change in the Arctic Region**.

During the session the International Indigenous Women’s Forum released a report exploring the manifestations of violence against Indigenous women with recommended strategies to combat it. Violence against Indigenous women is increasing. The report is entitled ***Mairin Iwanka Raya: Indigenous Women Stand against Violence***. The PDF version can be located at: <http://www.indigenouswomensforum.org/resources/vaiw.html>

An interesting study was also published on ***Indigenous Peoples and Boarding Schools: a Comparative Study***: [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/E\\_C\\_19\\_2009\\_crp1.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/E_C_19_2009_crp1.pdf)

Other information on Indigenous issues can be followed as they develop in the publication ***Update/Informativo*** of DOCIP (Indigenous Peoples’ Center for Documentation, Research and Information) which writes on these issues in English, Spanish, French and Russian. The publication summarizes all of the interventions presented in the Working Groups and UNPFII. This publication can be accessed at: [www.docip.org](http://www.docip.org)

There are about 400,000 indigenous people living in the Arctic region with 40 indigenous languages. Global warming already has an impact on their daily life through, among others, the shrinking of the Arctic ice cap, rising sea levels, changes in plant and animal ranges and behaviours.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the as yet unexploited traditional lands of indigenous peoples are viewed by governments and the private sector as opportunities for economic growth and exclusive profits, and indigenous peoples' special relationship with their lands - a fundamental element of their spiritual, religious, cultural and physical survival - is often at odds with these interests.<sup>4</sup>

*"There can be no food security without climate security."*

*Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations  
At the World Summit on Food Security, Rome, 16/11/2009*



## **THE GOLDSTONE REPORT ON THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION ON THE GAZA CONFLICT IS A HOT POTATO**

*By Raymonde Martineau*

The least that we can say is that this report has mobilized several instances of the United Nations and received a lot of media coverage. The mission had been established by the President of the Human Rights Council, at its 11<sup>th</sup> session, in

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<sup>3</sup> *Indigenous People Indigenous Voices*, Fact Sheet, Distributed at the Eighth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (18-29 May, 2009),

[http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/PFII8\\_FS2.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/PFII8_FS2.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *Indigenous Peoples and Industrial Corporations*, idem,

[http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/PFII8\\_FS3.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/PFII8_FS3.pdf)

April 2009, “to investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law that might have been committed at any time in the context of the military operations that were conducted in Gaza during the period from 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, whether before, during or after.”<sup>5</sup>

The Head of the Mission was Judge Richard Goldstone, former judge of the Constitutional Court of South Africa and former Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. There were three other members from Pakistan, Ireland and United Kingdom. The mandate of the mission was to look at all parties: Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, which governs Gaza, and armed Palestinian groups. The report placed civilian victims at the center of their mandate and examined violations of their rights. Israel refused from the start to cooperate with the mission. In order to have access to Gaza, the mission had to obtain the cooperation of Egypt.

The Mission, after having shared its findings on the many violations of human rights perpetrated in Gaza, drew its conclusions and made many recommendations to all concerned.<sup>6</sup> It insisted, among others, that both Israel and the Gaza Authorities conduct open and transparent investigations and that a report on the findings be given to the Security Council. If within six months there are no good faith investigations conforming to international standards, the Security Council should refer the situation or situations to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

The report, which was criticized by both sides, was presented at the 12th session of the **Human Rights Council** in September 2009. However, on the last day, under the pressure of the United States, the Council decided to postpone the consideration of a resolution on the recommendations contained in the report to its next session, in March 2010, in order to “give more time for a thorough examination of the report”. Even Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian authorities supported this move. There was a strong reaction among Palestinians against this position and Palestine did an about-turn and requested a special session of the Human Rights Council with the support of 18 of its members. The session on human rights situation in the Palestinian occupied territories was held on 15 & 16 October.

The **Special session** adopted a resolution, by a recorded vote of 25 in favour, 6 against and 11 abstentions<sup>7</sup>, which endorses the report of the Mission and recommends that the General Assembly considers this report at its current 64th session.

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<sup>5</sup> *Report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict*, par. 1, A/HRC/12/48, of 24/09/09.

<sup>6</sup> *Idem*

<sup>7</sup> Voted against: Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Slovakia, Ukraine, United States of America. Did not participate in the vote: Angola, France, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar and United Kingdom.

This was done on 5 November, when the **General Assembly** adopted a resolution (another one!) by 114 in favour, 18 against and 44 abstentions giving Israel and the Palestinians three months to undertake “independent, credible investigations” into serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law committed during the conflict in Gaza.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that the only western countries which voted in favour of the resolution are Ireland, Portugal and Switzerland.

Let’s see what will happen in the next months.



## **ALTERNATIVES TO THE MULTIPLE CRISIS**

*By Gaëtane Gascon, Gatineau (Quebec), Canada.*

### **Introduction**

Last September, Professor François Houtart stopped in Montréal, between two visits to Vietnam and Mozambique. Together with other lecturers, he addressed the yearly Congress of *Entraide Missionnaire*, a Quebec-based international NGO. The participants were mostly men and women, veterans of social action and international solidarity. The most inspiring aspect of the Congress was the vibrant response which they gave to the content of the presentations which, obviously, met their own positions.

You will find here a short summary of the themes discussed, especially an analysis of the origin of the multiple crisis and the diverse alternatives to capitalist ideology, as well as a proposal for a Universal Declaration to be submitted to the United Nations. Hoping to hear your own views, I end by sharing some reflections on the alternatives that I see around here and within the UFER Movement.

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations Press Release of 5 November, 2009, GA/10883, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/ga10883.doc.htm>

## 1. Analysis of the crisis

What was that message? First of all, an analysis of the present financial crisis and its links with the other crisis which affect the planet such as the food, energy and climate crisis, *and which result in a social and humanitarian disaster* (François Houtart). The speakers as well as Professor Houtart showed that the *'condition to resolve the crisis is to abandon the capitalist system and redefine the concepts of growth, development and prosperity.'*<sup>9</sup> That system "is sick from its own systemic logic of accumulation and monopolizing... That ideology puts individuals, private property, market and unlimited profit above the community and its needs..." (Jacques Gélinas)<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Four Major Parameters

On the other hand, the alternatives to the capitalist ideology are numerous, creative, diverse and present all around the world. In order to analyse the crisis, François Houtart does not propose a *"new dogma but an articulation of the various alternatives..."* and a long term vision around the following four major parameters:

2.1 First, ensure a ***sustainable and rational use of natural resources***, which supposes another philosophy of relationship with nature: stop plundering natural resources for the sake of profit; rather respect the source of life: water, land, forests. Combat the destruction of biodiversity and atmosphere taking into account ecological and social dimensions.

2.2 Prioritize ***use value over exchange value***. Economy would be defined as the activity that ensures the bases of material, cultural and spiritual life of all human beings around the world.

2.3 Generalize ***participative democracy***, not only in the political sector but also in the economic system, in all the institutions, between men and women. The state participative concept involves necessarily human rights promotion both individually and collectively.

2.4 Finally, recognize ***multiculturalism*** that completes the other parameters. Appeal to all philosophies and cultures to take part in the building up of alternatives. Appeal to all moral and spiritual strengths capable of promoting the

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<sup>9</sup> The conference of François Houtart is available on internet. In POLITIQUE, revue de débats – *Crises et sortie de crises*. Série no. 12, sept 09, 68, rue Coenraets - 1060 Bruxelles. *If you want a copy, I can send you one.*

<sup>10</sup> Gélinas Jacques dans Sentiers de foi.info [www.sentiersdefoi.info](http://www.sentiersdefoi.info) Vol.5 no. 23 sept 2009

necessary ethics for the building of common good, all knowledge including traditional and indigenous societies' knowledge.

### **3. New Universal Declaration submitted to the United Nations.**

To guarantee coherence and efficacy of the various alternatives, François Houtart proposes to unite the concrete proposals in a ***Universal Declaration of Human Kind's Common Goods*** submitted to the UN. It would be an ensemble such as the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*. Thus the Declaration would be widely communicated through the most international and credible institution that humanity possesses, the United Nations.

Among other elements, the Declaration would include the following : the banning of speculation on food; public control over petroleum and mining exploitations taking into account the social and ecological impacts, protecting especially the rights of indigenous peoples; the recognition of the status of public goods for water, electricity, postal system, telephone, internet, collective transport, health and education.

### **4. Example of alternatives**

The project discussed at the Congress is not farfetched and unsubstantial. Varieties of alternatives brighten our daily lives and express a long term vision. UFER Newsletter relates many of them regularly and offers a possibility of dialogue. For example, in the last issue an article by Alfred Sawadogo described the way his country, Burkina Faso, faces the food crisis that affects so many other regions of the world. And, one could also read how the Namibian decision to guarantee everyone a minimum income has positive repercussions on the society as a whole.

For example, here in Gatineau, many of us, men women, are part of the movement called, *Woman and Governance* that offers training and support to women that seek election at the municipal councils, the National Assembly of Quebec or the federal Parliament. The goal is to obtain fair women representation in public affairs' management. As far as possible, we use local products and markets, seek to protect our many rivers and lakes, look for substitutes to the solo-automobile which is, unfortunately, the only transportation means outside the urban centers. We support research and campaigns that demand respect for human rights by the multinationals of the mining sector, an important part of Canadian economy. We join cooperatives; contribute to the immigrants' integration and pay attention to the First Peoples' points of view on our common future.

I am convinced that we are not unique and that in each of your areas, alternatives to the dominant ideology are part of your commitments.

## 5. Conclusion

I agree with François Houtart when he says that the proposed changes require a lot of work to abandon the capitalist economy and redefine the concept of growth, development and prosperity. The translation of alternatives into individual and collective practices will be the result of many social struggles, of the work of intellectuals and of moral values injected into social life.

In particular, I think that, faced with inertias as well as religious, philosophical and economic fundamentalisms, we must choose the avenues of dialogue and value all kinds of expressions. Moreover, the Congress stressed the importance of democratic organizations both at the local and the international levels, including the UN. These organizations belong to us and are meant to serve the well-being of people and communities.

All this might look like a utopia, but utopias have hands and feet, let us free them, they will work and run for us.



## HUMAN RIGHTS STRUGGLE IN HONDURAS

*By Dr. Monica Maher, Research Fellow, Harvard University Committee on Human Rights Studies and Member of UFER Committee and the Grail<sup>11</sup>*

### **Military coup**

The early morning of Sunday June 28, 2009, soldiers stormed the Presidential Palace in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, captured the constitutionally elected President, Manuel Zelaya, and forced him onto a plane out of the country. Despite

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<sup>11</sup> Monica participated in an International Feminist Delegation to Honduras last August on behalf of Just Associates (USA), Feminist Radio (Costa Rica), the Nobel Women's Initiative, Petateras (Mesoamerica), the Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity (Mexico). For more information on delegations and reports of solidarity: JASS (Just Associates) - Feminist Movement Building: [www.justassociates.org](http://www.justassociates.org)  
Mercy Institute Justice Team: <http://www.sistersofmercy.org/>  
Quixote Center/Quest for Peace: <http://quixote.org/>

immediate and widespread condemnation of the military coup by the international community, including the European Union, the Organization of American States and the United Nations, the de facto government, headed by former President of Congress, Roberto Micheletti has remained in power with support of the military. Upon taking power, Micheletti suspended basic civil and political rights of free speech, association and movement. Armed forces have brutally attacked peaceful demonstrators with bullets, tear gas, pepper spray, and subjected them to arbitrary arrest, detention and torture, all documented by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Despite recent claims by Micheletti that his imposed “state of siege” on Honduran citizens has been lifted, reports on the ground point to the contrary. In a word, the human rights situation remains urgent.

Within the atmosphere of terror, Hondurans throughout the country have responded en masse to defend democracy and restore their constitutionally elected President. Zelaya remained in forced exile until Monday, Sept 21, when he slipped back into the country and took refuge in the Brazilian Embassy in Tegucigalpa. Still, at this writing (Oct 26), the de facto government has refused to negotiate a solution to restore President Zelaya, even with great restrictions to his power. National elections are scheduled for November 29; given present militarized conditions, many Hondurans plan an election boycott, and most governments around the world will not recognize election results. The European Union and United Nations have stated they will not monitor what they consider an illegitimate election process.

### **Beacon of hope**

The bright beacon of hope in this crisis is the broad popular movement that has emerged over the last three months in resistance to the coup. The merging of many social movements in Honduras (labour, student, feminist, ecological, faith) is unprecedented, as are the movement’s demands; the call now is not only to restore the constitutionally elected President but for a new constitution so that it reflects the needs of the Honduran majority, 80% of whom live in poverty. The current political system benefits only a tiny minority, a privileged religious, economic and military oligarchy which controls the life of the country. Today, Hondurans are waking up, taking to the streets, and demanding a right to participate fully in the civic life of their nation. Groups are studying the constitution and envisioning how they would rewrite it to reflect their specific needs as women, indigenous, peasants and youth and to protect their rights.

Zelaya’s government had tried to facilitate widespread civic participation; now that has come into being through the events surrounding the military coup which ousted him. And, what the Honduran elite had asserted they were trying to avoid, an authoritarian government, they have established; in trying to save democracy from “Communism,” they destroyed what official roots of democracy existed. Despite the collapse of legitimate institutional structures, Honduras will emerge much stronger from this crisis with a firmer foundation for democracy,

rooted in broad based participation that has never before existed. In fact, Hondurans were known throughout Central America as the sleeping population, the people who could persevere and “put up” with any abuse. This has all changed now in the minds of Hondurans themselves as well as their Latin American brothers and sisters. Hondurans say they have never been prouder to be Hondurans when they see the strength and endurance of the resistance movement. Similarly, citizens throughout Latin America feel very proud of Hondurans and have written songs of solidarity and carried out demonstrations in their home countries. There is a wave of citizen engagement that cannot be stopped that is demanding participative (not just “representative”) democracy. This is not a struggle for power between two men but the struggle for self-determination of a whole people, and in fact, a whole continent.

### **A transnational conflict**

The coup has indeed solidified social movements throughout all of Latin America, who see it was a coup against the entire region. There is very strong evidence to show that the coup was the result of long-term strategic geo-political planning of the transnational right, including the elite not only of Central America but of Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba and the U.S. Key Honduran businessmen have turned to U.S. lobbyists, including the former lawyer of the Clintons, to argue their case in Washington, and to Congressional members, like Rep. Connie Mack who has spearheaded a Congressional Resolution in favour of the coup. Conservative leaders justify the ousting of Zelaya with quasi-legal arguments, viewing it is a kind of pilot project which could be replicated in other parts of Latin America. Due to such pressures, the United States has still not formally declared a “military coup” in Honduras and is supporting the upcoming elections, to the dismay and outrage of the majority of Hondurans.

Conservatives are worried about the growing trend of progressive governments who increasingly advocate for the rights of the poor and indigenous, such as in Bolivia, Venezuela and Ecuador. These countries, like Honduras, belong to ALBA, the Bolivarian Alternative (Trade Agreement) for the People of the Americas, a symbol of the demand of the South for economic self-sufficiency. Zelaya’s alliance with such governments in the region sent a warning signal to the wealthy, who declared he was trying to establish a kind of popular authoritarianism of 21<sup>st</sup> century Communism, infuriated for example that he had raised the minimum wage by 60%.

### **Women’s human rights**

The good news is that transnational solidarity has also increased in support of the resistance to the coup. The delegation of which I took part in August, for example, gathered well-known women journalists, lawyers and human rights activists of the Americas to do an in-depth investigation of women’s human rights after the coup. One of our findings, based on official statistics of the coup government, is that femicide increased 60% in the first month after the coup.

In addition, armed forces have used sexual violence, including gang rape, against women protestors. Due to international pressure, the US Consulate granted temporary visas to leaders from the Center of Women's Rights in Honduras (who sponsored our delegation) in order to appear before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, in early November in Washington, to report on the human rights situation of women.

### **Possible response**

Members of the *Grail* in New York met in September to discuss the situation in Honduras and brainstorm on how to impact on US foreign policy. At a meeting in October of *Women of the Americas* in the Bronx, participants discussed the importance of being in solidarity with women in Honduras at this time. One idea is to bring a representative of the Honduran Resistance to New York, in early March, to speak to Grail members and to participate in the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Another one is sponsoring a small Grail delegation to Honduras in 2010. At its Committee Meeting in Geneva, in December, UFER will examine ways to support this struggle for human rights in Latin America.

### **Recent developments (mid November)**

The Movement for Democracy in Honduras had formally declared a national campaign not to recognize the upcoming elections as either free or fair. Neither Zelaya nor Micheletti are candidates. Both National Party Candidate Pepe Lobo and Liberal Party Candidate Elvin Santos have supported the military coup, and the Independent Candidate, Carlos H. Reyes, leader in the Resistance Movement, has withdrawn. Many other candidates in the general election, including mayors of local municipalities, have also withdrawn, due to militarized conditions that make a democratic election impossible.

The San Jose-Tegucigalpa Agreement, orchestrated by the U.S. and signed by Zelaya and Micheletti, has failed due to lack of compliance by the de facto government. In the face of this failure, U.S. State Department authorization of the elections as legitimate, even without reinstatement of Zelaya to finish out his term until Jan 2010, has created an atmosphere of greater impunity in the de facto regime.

On November 12, over 200 people attended the First Gathering of Women in Resistance in San Pedro Sula (Monica Maher attended as an international observer.) Here, women signed a pledge not to vote and focused on advocacy for a national constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution so that it respects and promotes their rights. The power of women's leadership for social change is palpable. They insisted, "We sing, we dream, we fight, we transform, we resist."



# UFER CHRONICLE

## TESTIMONY

**How I met UFER and what it has contributed to my struggle for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.**

*By Cruz Melchor Eya Nchama, member of the Committee of UFER*

Equatorial Guinea, the country I come from, is a former Spanish colony that became independent on October 1968, a few weeks after the election of Francisco Macias Nguema as President of the country. From the beginning, the Government had to face opposition, such as the *coup d'état* attempt by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Fearing to be overthrown, Francisco Macias Nguema took some disproportionate measures and set a bloodthirsty regime: assassinations of political opponents, detentions, incarcerations, tortures, humiliations, etc. Spain of General Francisco Franco Bahomonde, in connivance with the Equatoguinean regime, promulgated, on 30 January 1971, a law declaring State secret any information coming from Equatorial Guinea; thus Equatoguineans living in Spain, as I was, could no longer campaign against human rights violations in their country. In 1972, Mr. Macias Nguema proclaimed himself as life-long President of Equatorial Guinea and, in 1973 he imposed a new Constitution.

That was the context in October 1973, when I arrived in Geneva. A few of my compatriots were already living in Switzerland, notably in Fribourg where they were studying. We met and decided to work against the Equatoguinean dictatorship in informing international public opinion about human rights violations in our country. We contacted many human rights organizations such as the *Swiss League for Human Rights*, the *International Federation for Human Rights*, the *Ecumenical Council of Churches*, the *International Commission of Jurists* and *Amnesty International*. These organizations took various steps in support of our country, using among others, the information provided by us. In 1975, a *Swiss Committee in Support of Equatorial Guinea in Struggle* (COSGUEEL) was created.

I met Raymonde Martineau at the Geneva section of *Amnesty International* of which both of us were members. She introduced me to Gaëtane Gascon, who was working with her at the AFI Secretariat. I shared with them my wish to obtain the support of an NGO that has a consultative status (ECOSOC) at the United Nations in order to bring to the attention of the *Commission on Human Rights* the case of Equatorial Guinea. The United Nations already had quite a lot of information on human rights in Equatorial Guinea, but this information was treated in the framework of the confidential procedure instituted by the resolution 1503 adopted in 1970 by the *Economic and Social Council* (ECOSOC). We wanted our case to become public.

UFER accepted to support our cause. Moreover, it allowed me, from 1975, to participate, in its name, to the deliberations of the *Commission on Human Rights* and of its *Sub-Commission on the Elimination of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities*. It was not easy then to speak about human rights violations in Africa since the continent was attempting to limit the debate to issues related to human rights violations by the Apartheid regime in South-Africa and Namibia.

Thanks to UFER support, I made a month-visit in Canada and USA in 1976. Gaëtane Gascon, then working for Development and Peace, a Canadian NGO based in Montreal, obtained the support of her organization in our favour. In Chicago, Anna Boekstegen and Yvonne Vanden Avenne introduced us to the Northwestern University where we made a presentation. In New York, Eileen Schaeffler introduced us to American Churches and to the United Nations.

In August 1978, the Ambassador of Equatorial Guinea to the United Nations requested the President of the Sub-Commission to expulse me from the hall accusing me of being a dangerous terrorist. As I was duly accredited by UFER, Theo Van Boven, Director of the Human Rights Division at that time, replied to the Ambassador that I had the full right to be in the hall and finally it is the Ambassador that, shamefully, left the room.

In March 1979, Canadian Ambassador Yvon Beaulne, then President of the *Commission on Human Rights* introduced a resolution whereby the case of Equatorial Guinea went from the confidential procedure to the public procedure. It was a very important day for me after five years of advocacy in favour of the promotion and protection of human rights in Equatorial Guinea. It was the first time that a country treated under the confidential procedure of ECOSOC resolution 1503 became public.

Following this precedent, Latin-American and Asian friends, who had also been fighting for many years to obtain that their case be treated publicly by the Commission, came to me and asked for my support.

For many more years, I continued, as UFER representative, to advocate, in UN forums, in favour of the respect of human rights not only in Equatorial Guinea,

but also in many other countries. (See the website of C.M. Eya Nchama' site: <http://www.cmeyanchama.com> )

## **FOLLOW-UP TO THE LAST ISSUE**

### ➤ REACTIONS FROM READERS

- *From **Marita Estor**, Germany:* “It gave me a good picture of the present work in Geneva and a review of some of the work done earlier. I remember the difficulties around the UN-Conference against Racism since the preparation of the first one. It seems still difficult, if not impossible to isolate the issue of racism and make this the focal point of a conference. I read the analysis of the dynamism of the HRC, which was particularly helpful to understand the bits and pieces we read about it even in the better newspapers. Thank you for the work you are putting into the realisation of HR and particularly women rights and keeping us up to date by this publication.”
  - *From **Teresa Wilson**, United States:* “Thank you very much for sharing this analysis of the meetings in Durban. I watched the press at the time, very discouraged and it is helpful now to see this newsletter. The Grail is very fortunate to be part of your ongoing effort.
- *From **Simone Bulle-Laresche**, Switzerland:* She found the last issue varied and interesting, she particularly appreciated the articles on death penalty in USA and the one on universal communication.

### ➤ DEVELOPMENTS

#### ***Latest news on the young man on death-row in the United States:***

Brett Hartmann's stay of execution has been lifted and he could receive a new execution date at any time. The family thinks that it might be at the beginning of 2010. For the time being, executions in Ohio have been put on hold because of a spectacular failed execution of a 53 year-old man during which correction officials tried for two hours to find a vein without success. The Governor decided to defer the execution till a more “efficient” method has been found. This has been done, it seems, and executions should resume from 30 November

on. We will keep you informed of developments in the case of Brett Hartmann and of possible actions. Check our website: <http://www.ufer-international.org>

### ***Women's conference in Korea (November 2008)***

**Cecilia Kum Yeon Lee** reports on follow-up to the conference:

- In January 2009, the Governor of the Gyeong-Nam province has officially established a women's rights' desk in the department of women and health with two full time employees.
- In October 2009, in a small town of the province, fifty women activist created their own action plan based on the conference Declaration. They now begin to form a network to eliminate all violence against women in their countryside. The network includes a large spectrum of women, from migrant women to farmers.
- In November 2009, a Special Women's Rights Committee composed of 20 members was formed and elected a chairwoman. Its role is to help preparing legislation and other institutional measures to protect women's human rights in the province.
- Media and women's activists have also produced joint documentary films on gender issues such as sexual violence.
- Even though changes are not yet seen, they are looking forward to an ongoing cooperation between women's organizations, the local government and enterprises for a better life of all human beings in Gyeong-Nam.

## **NEWS FROM MEMBERS**

- *From Manoj Shresta, Nepal:* "The situation of Nepal is still in a transitional period. There is ideological fighting between the hard liner of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal [Maoist] and the soft liner from other parties. The main problem in Nepal is corruption: corrupted people and a corrupted minded system. People have been suffering from political instability for years. We are very worried about the nation. The country has been affected by cholera and heavy rain falls in the last few months. My school however is running well."

- *From **Anuradha Kandala, India:*** She is still working on her PHD while continuing to be involved with an NGO called SPREAD (Society for the Promotion of Rural Education and Development) and teaching at the university. She has just now completed a ten-week course on peace and conflict studies in Pondicherry, organized by the Faculty of Education and International Studies at Oslo University College in Norway in collaboration with the South-Asian Himalmag Center. At the end of the course, she had to produce a group paper and she chose to work on ethnic conflicts in China. We are looking forward to hearing about her experience.

## COMMUNICATIONS

- The **Committee of UFER** will be meeting in Geneva on 5 & 6 December 2009. The main item on the agenda will be the preparation of the next General Assembly, which will take place from 12 to 17 September 2010 in Brussels, Belgium.
- We encourage you to send your views, comments and articles for the next Newsletter **before 30 March 2010** to one of the members of the editorial board (see page 1).
- Please inform us of any **change of addresses**. Those who wish to receive the Newsletter by E-Mail instead of by normal mail should inform Raymonde Martineau: [raymonde.martineau@sympatico.ca](mailto:raymonde.martineau@sympatico.ca)

Visit our Website: [www.ufer-international.org](http://www.ufer-international.org)

Membership fees:

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Or to be transmitted to a member of the Committee or a representative

