

Fostering Global Citizenship

Newsletter with February-March 2016 Articles

This newsletter is part of a Soka Gakkai International (SGI) project with IPS. It includes independent news and analyses as well as columns by experts, news from international NGOs and a review of global media for a glimpse of what is happening on the ground. Newspaper articles reproduced in this newsletter are for personal use and aim at giving information to readers. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is forbidden.

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Migrant Workers Help Singapore Students Gain a Global Perspective

SINGAPORE - Government statistics show that in this affluent Southeast Asian nation, one in three workers are migrants. They build the modern infrastructure, clean the buildings, cook and serve in restaurants, look after the children and elderly at home, while often being paid very poorly and treated shabbily and looked at suspiciously by the locals. Beginning with the 2013 Little India riots where hundreds of Indian workers attacked police vehicles to the recent arrest of 27 Bangladeshi workers suspected of having links to Islamic terrorist groups, there has been much tension in the community with regards to migrant workers. As one law student put it: “We only find out about migrant workers through second hand sources which does not really say who they are.” >> Pages 13-14-15

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Call for Gender-Responsive Implementation of Agenda 2030

By J C Suresh



Photo: Closing plenary of CSW60 | Credit: UN Women

TORONTO | NEW YORK - UN member states committed themselves to the gender-responsive implementation of Agenda 2030 as the 60th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW60) concluded on March 24 agreeing on a set conclusions, calling for stronger laws, policies and institutions, better data and scaled-up financing.

The Commission recognized women's vital role as agents of development. It acknowledged that progress on the Sustainable Development Goals at the heart of Agenda 2030 will not be possible without gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

The conclusions agreed at CSW60 urge a comprehensive approach to implementing all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets through thorough integration of gender perspectives across all government policies and programmes. Eliminating all forms of gender-based discrimination depends on effective laws and policies and the removal of any statutes still permitting discrimination. Temporary special measures may be required to guarantee that women and girls can obtain justice for human rights violations.

5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social

5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

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5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

The Commission endorsed significantly increased investment to close resource gaps for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Funds should be mobilized from all sources, domestic and international, ranging from fulfilling official development assistance commitments to combatting illicit financial flows that shortchange public resources for gender equality, the Commission resolved.

With humanitarian crises and other emergencies disproportionately affecting women and girls, the Commission underlined the imperative of empowering women in leadership and decision-making in all aspects of responding to and recovering from crisis. On the eve of the World Humanitarian Summit on May 23-24 in Istanbul, it emphasized prioritizing women's and girls' needs in humanitarian action and upholding their rights in all emergency situations. Every humanitarian response should take measures to address sexual and gender-based violence.

In his opening remarks at the launch of the Report for World Humanitarian Summit, titled 'One Humanity: Shared Responsibility', UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on February 9, 2016: "We must also empower and protect women and girls. . . Education in protracted crises must also be given priority. No child or adolescent should be denied an education because they are in a crisis situation or because of a lack of funds."

Members of the Commission united behind ensuring women's equal participation in leadership at all levels of decision-making in the public and private spheres, encompassing governments, businesses and other institutions, and across all areas of sustainable development. Depending on different circumstances, this may involve establishing temporary special measures, setting and achieving concrete benchmarks and removing barriers to women's participation.

UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka welcomed the agreement and the commitment of UN Member States to make the 2030 Agenda, adopted in September 2015, a reality in countries around the world. She said: "Countries gave gender inequality an expiry date: 2030. Now it is time to get to work. These agreed conclusions entrench and start the implementation of a gender-responsive agenda 2030 with which we have the best possibility to leave no one behind."

Growing global commitment was already in evidence with a record number of more than 80 government ministers from around the world attending the Commission, UN Women said in a media release. Around 4,100 non-governmental representatives from more than 540 organizations participated as well, the highest number ever for one of the Commission's regular annual meetings.

Given the major contributions to Agenda 2030 of civil society, including women's and community-based organizations, feminist groups, human rights defenders and girls' and youth-led organizations, the Commission welcomed open engagement and cooperation with them in gender-responsive implementation. It emphasized fully engaging with men and boys as agents of change and allies in the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.

To guide systematic progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment throughout the 2030 Agenda, the Commission stressed enhanced national statistical capacity and the systematic design, collection and sharing of high-quality, reliable and timely data disaggregated by sex, age and income. Members also agreed to bolster the role of national mechanisms for women and girls in championing their equality and empowerment.

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

[IDN-InDepthNews – 25 March 2016]

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UNIDO and CTBTO Express Support for 2030 Gender Equality Target

By Rita Joshi



CTBTO Staff

BERLIN | VIENNA - The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) are determined to undertake necessary steps to make “Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality”, the theme of the International Women’s Day 2016, a reality.

Director General, LI Yong, said: “UNIDO recognizes that investing in the economic empowerment of women sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive industrial development.”

He added: “Women make an enormous economic contribution, whether in businesses, as entrepreneurs, as employers or as employees, or by doing care work at home. But they also remain disproportionately affected by poverty, discrimination and exploitation.”

Li declared: “To step up its game for gender equality, UNIDO has recently adopted a new gender policy and gender strategy, and is constantly increasing its portfolio of projects designed to empower women economically.”

The CTBTO admitted that as a security-related organization with a strong technical focus, the Organization is active in traditionally male-dominated fields. “While the CTBTO has yet to reach the aspired 50 per cent female representation across all staff levels, there has been slow but steady progress over recent years towards that goal. The CTBTO has now reached female representation of 43 per cent overall, and 35 per cent in the professional and higher positions,” the Organization said.

CTBTO Executive Secretary Lassina Zerbo highlighted women's contribution to the nuclear test-ban: “Women were and are the driving force behind the ban on nuclear testing. The civil society movements that pushed for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996 and its predecessors were to a large extent grounded in women’s initiatives.”

He recalled a crucial contribution by Dr. Louise Reiss, the scientist who helped to convince President John F. Kennedy to conclude the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty through her ground-breaking Baby Tooth Study.” Dr. Reiss, who died at the age of 90 in January 2011, directed a study that examined hundreds of thousands of baby teeth during the cold war and helped persuade the world’s leading powers to ban nuclear testing in the atmosphere.

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Dr. Reiss and her husband, Eric, both physicians, were founding members of the Greater St. Louis Citizens' Committee for Nuclear Information, which joined with the schools of dentistry at Washington University in St. Louis and St. Louis University in 1959 to create the Baby Tooth Survey.

The goal was to show that radioactive fallout from nuclear testing was getting into the nation's food supply and ultimately working its way into human bones and teeth. And the study succeeded. Dr. Reiss was named director of the project and, along with her husband, worked with other scientists in the project's laboratory.

Zerbo said: "I am particularly proud of the women working at the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO). They brave the elements in the world's remotest corners to build and maintain our monitoring stations, they work long hours to screen vast amounts of data for suspicious events, and they develop new methods of analysis and management practices. My sincere appreciation and thanks go to all of them, for without them we could not have become what we are today: the world's centre of verification excellence."

In CTBTO, women hold responsible positions not only as budget officers and in-charge of corporate communications but also network infrastructure engineers and responsible for the International Monitoring System (IMS), which when completed, would consist of 337 facilities worldwide to monitor the planet for signs of nuclear explosions.

Female staff includes Radionuclide Analysts. Only these measurements can give a clear indication as to whether an explosion detected by the other methods was actually nuclear or not. They are supported by 16 radionuclide laboratories. 80 stations measure the atmosphere for radioactive particles; 40 of them also pick up noble gas.

According to the CTBTO Chief, "there is still a long way to go to achieve real equality on a global scale, where the gap is closing slower than anticipated only a few years ago: In 2015 the World Economic Forum estimated that it may take up to the year 2133 to fully close the gender gap".

In a profound personal note, the CTBTO Executive Secretary said: "International Women's Day is of the utmost significance to me – not only professionally, but also as a father to three girls and husband to a woman who has sacrificed part of her own professional career to be the rock of our family. For me, celebrating Women's Day means being appreciative and mindful of the road ahead where gender parity is achieved through common endeavour."

He added; "It is a day that reminds all men that their mother is the first woman in their lives! The one who teaches empathy, building in all of us something we need: perspective and prospective. . . Together, women and men are the two wings of humanity; they must both fly in harmony." [IDN-InDepthNews – 9 March 2016]

Global Citizenship in Ecuador: The Gap Between Principle and Practice

By Nelsy Lizarazo

QUITO - Universal or global citizenship is, according to the Dictionary of Humanitarian Action a principle, category or condition thanks to which anyone in any part of the world may be recognised as a subject with rights.

It's an established and accepted concept, at least in an international sphere, which is directly linked to the universality of Human Rights. The concept of Universal citizenship fundamentally means that human rights are not related to which particular state an individual may come from and therefore must be protected and respected anywhere a person may find themselves.

The Ecuadorian Constitution, approved by a wide majority of the population in 2008 consecrates Universal Citizenship as one of the principle guidelines of Ecuador's international relations in the following terms: "It advocates the principle of Universal Citizenship, the free movement of all inhabitants of the planet, and the progressive extinction of the status of alien or foreigner as an element to transform the unequal relations between countries, especially those between North and South."

With the introduction of this principle into constitution, Ecuador became the global flag-bearer for free movement of human beings and the elimination of borders. In other words, it became the vanguard of a completely new focus in the politics and legislation of migration that understands that no human being can be considered illegal as a result of their

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migration status. Without doubt this was a completely integrational focus that in time can eliminate the discriminatory difference between nationals and foreigners.



In the midst of broad backing from movements and organisations working for human rights, and despite direct criticism by conservative sectors of Ecuadorian society and the fears of a population with a high dose of xenophobia and racism, President Rafael Correa made public his decision to eliminate tourist visas for all foreigners coming to the country, allowing everyone to stay for 90 days.

Less than one year later, the government of the Citizens' Revolution – a term used by President Rafael Correa to describe his project for government – reviewed the measure and re-imposed the tourist visa; first for citizens of the People's Republic of China, and then, a few months later, for those coming from countries such as Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Nigeria, among others. The Citizen's Revolution realised that Ecuadorian territory was becoming a transit-point to Brazil and the USA and the opening of Ecuador's borders also led to regional tensions, due to the "instability" that the measure caused across the continent.

Over the next two years, the influx of Cubans and Haitians into Ecuador increased exponentially and the principle of Universal Citizenship was found to have no applicable legislation to back it up and so the Interior Ministry and the police force intervened, exercising powers given to them under existing Migration Law.

In fact, back in 2010, the government set up a detention centre for immigrants to which foreign citizens found to have "irregular situations" and who have been detained in police raids are taken. In this place, that was previously a hotel and continues to be known as "Carrion Hotel", people cannot leave until they have resolved their situation, either through deportation or through the receipt of some kind of visa.

Human Rights organisations and those working in the fields of migration and refugees systematically denounce the abuse of rights that immigrants in irregular situations are subject to. On the other hand, the authorities argue for the need to control immigration in order to guarantee people's security and they have given assurances – right from the beginning – that the detention centre measure was taken in order to guarantee dignified treatment for people.

So, the principle of Universal Citizenship, an advanced principle as regards the right to freedom of movement, continues to find itself today with numerous obstacles both in a national and international context.

Nationally; Migration Law that has not been modified in accordance with this principle and, therefore, orientates many of the practices by the authorities and relevant bodies in a way contrary to the meaning of Universal Citizenship; in addition to an atmosphere that is unfavourable to the entry and integration of people from other countries due to the usual arguments regarding work and security.

Internationally; a region that, despite advances in integration, still doesn't count on migration policies that are aligned among the different countries and, even less so, to the principle of Universal Citizenship; and a world in which the need to seek a better life in other places – whatever those reasons may be – is the object of business and is ground lost to the abuse of human rights.

Nevertheless, to count on the principle of Universal Citizenship in the country's constitution continues to be a great advance from the perspective of those of us who believe in freedom of movement as a right and the exercising of human freedom: an exemplary decision that marks a long and difficult road, but not an impossible one. [IDN-InDepthNews – 21 March 2016]

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South Korea Set to Make Rapid Strides in Global Arena

By Valentina Ieri



Ambassador Hahn Choong-hee, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations in New York | Credit: UN Multimedia

NEW YORK - North Korea's nuclear ambition has not been checked effectively even though there were four resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. And North Korea's alleged hydrogen bomb test and a successive rocket launch early February culminated their die-hard ambition to have a substantial nuclear capability together with delivery means.

Against this backdrop, the Republic of Korea (ROK-South Korea) is certainly putting its foot down and stepping up as a key player in the global arena, particularly on North Korean issue.

Since 2006, North Korea has conducted four rounds of nuclear tests and six rounds of missile launches, making it an unprecedented precarious situation surrounding the Korean Peninsula.

In an interview with INPS (the International Press Syndicate), Ambassador Choonghee Hahn, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Mission of South Korea to the United

Nations, said: "Talking for the sake of talking is not acceptable anymore. This is a systematic and intentional violation of the UN Security Council resolution by North Korea, that clearly disdains and ridicules us. It is an outrageous situation which requires an extreme response."

"North Korea's militarization and nuclear capabilities are much more advanced than ten years ago," said Hahn. "We want robust and substantive sanctions measures to make North Korea to realize that they do not have any other choices but to stop their provocations and abandon their nuclear weapons programme."

Responding to the launch of the space satellite on February 7, the UN Security Council called for an "emergency meeting" referring to it as an act of threat against international security. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned the act as a "deplorable violation" of UN sanctions.

"The Security Council must be united in sending a strong and unequivocal message, as 'mediocre' measures will simply embolden North Korea to continue to conduct further nuclear test and missiles launch in the future," remarked Hahn.

Also South Korea's Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se, who held discussions with representatives of the Security Council members and the UN Secretary-General on February 9-10 in New York, has stressed the need for a strong and effective Security Council sanctions resolution. This resolution should become "the terminating resolution in order to prevent North Korea from conducting fifth and sixth nuclear tests", he said.

In response to North Korea's tests, the ROK government closed down on February 10 the Gaesong Industrial Complex, a special administrative zone located ten kilometres (six miles) north of the Korean Demilitarised Zone.

"The Gaesung complex," explained the Korean Ambassador, "has been an historic symbol of the inter-Korean relationship for over 15 years, which fetches the North Korean economy between 100-120 million U.S. dollars a year."

"It was not an easy decision to close down all the 125 small companies of the complex, but we do not want any part of this money to go towards the development of weapons of mass destruction," stressed Hahn.

Over 54,000 North Korean workers lost their jobs and along with their immediate families altogether 200,000 would suffer from economic distress. To add fuel to the fire, North Korea's President Kim Jong-un expelled all the South Korean managerial personnel from Gaesung, forcing them to leave immediately and abandon all the expensive equipment.

However, despite the tensions on the peninsula, South Korea is keen on taking a leading role to maintain stability, peace and economic prosperity in the country – in the hope of a reunification of the two Koreas – and in the entire East Asia region.

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"The ROK is indeed a historical example of good governance, whose policies managed to transform the country from a major aid-recipient to a major aid-donor," underlined Hahn.

"The Korean development process, known as Saemaul Undong, led to successful political and economic outcomes. Today we are trying to share our experience by combining our regional contribution with our global contribution."

Recently, the ROK expanded its leadership by launching initiatives to guarantee sustainable development, environmental protection and international cooperation, in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2013, President Park launched the North-East Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) in order to promote sustainable peace and cooperation among the neighbouring countries – China and Japan – and move beyond the so-called "Asian Paradox".

According to the NAPCI 2015 report, the initiative "is a key element of the Trustpolitik [...] A future oriented effort by the ROK Government to replace a structure of conflict and discord in the region with an order of dialogue and cooperation".

Another project proposed in 2014 is the Eurasia Initiative, aimed at economic cooperation in the energy sector between East Asia, Central Asia, Russia and the South Caucasus.

The plan is to build a new energy network, of gas and oil pipeline in the region, and a Silk Road Express (SRE), which would connect Busan (South Korea) with London, via North Korea and Russia.

Additionally, in July 2015, the ROK was elected to the presidency of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and will chair the council until July 2016.

On his election as ECOSOC President, Oh Joon, the Permanent Representative of the Mission of the Republic of Korea to the UN, said: "I believe that the development that my country experienced can happen anywhere in the world. The ECOSOC will support bringing

Hahn explained that in July 2016, under the umbrella of ECOSOC at the UN Headquarters, Korea would preside over a High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) for the first time since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, as a way to review and follow up on the SDGs.

"Korea not only will lead the modalities of the Forum, but will also set the stage for the discussion of issues such as sustainable development, gender issues, girls education, inequality and good governance, for the next 15 years," added Hahn.

South Korea will also strengthen its role in the global arena due to the fact that for the first time the UN Department of Public Information-NGOs (DPI-NGO) Conference will be held in Asia. The 66th annual conference takes place in the city of Gyeongju on May 30 and June 1, 2016.

Known as the largest gathering of NGOs from all over the world, with over 1,500 NGO representatives, the Conference will bring together members of the civil society, UN officials, academics, policy experts, parliamentarians and the private sectors to discuss the theme: "Education for Global Citizenship".

It is the first time that a major UN high-level event will focus on the concept of Education and Global Citizenship, noted Hahn.

"There are many global challenges – climate change, extremism and intolerance – so we need to educate people to understand such complexities, raise awareness, increase mutual respect, accept diversity regardless of race and restore human dignity."

Global Citizenship Education is an education that encompasses all other types of educations. "It is an opportunity to discuss the responsibilities and strategies to best achieve the 17 Goals of the 2030 Agenda among all the different stakeholders," he continued.

The ideals of equality, respect and transparency are reflected as well in the way the Korean Mission to the UN in New York is leading the group Uniting for Consensus (UfC), which calls for a vital reform of the Security Council.

The group asks for a transparent, accountable, democratic and inclusive reform, where any country could be eligible for running for a seat in the Council on the base of its constructive role and contribution. An expansion or enlargement of the number of permanent seats with veto power is not right and appropriate answer considering the current and future situation of the international community, explained the Korean Ambassador:

"The permanent seat with veto power reflects the unique and special political arrangement of the post-WWII based on the lessons of twenty years' crisis between the two world wars, which aims to assure the unity of the big five players of the Cold War era – UK, France, China, Russia, U.S. – but after 70 years it is unrealistic to just enlarge the same format maintaining the same concept."

Contrarily to the UfC, other groups such as the G4 – led by Germany, Japan, Brazil and India – and the African Group whose position was known as the Ezulwini Consensus, argue for an increase of permanent seats with veto together with an increase in non-permanent seats.

According to Hahn, UfC 's main idea is to provide countries that perform well during their initial presence in the Council with an opportunity to be re-elected.

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"The concept of 'long-term re-electable seats' is an appropriate way to abide to the principles of the U.N. Charter of fair and democratic representation and equal opportunity based on the accountability. It also reflects the current international political environment, whereby a country's power configuration and influence can shift quite rapidly," highlighted Hahn.

The novelty behind UfC is its willingness to involve other actors around the activities of the Security Council, as the reform of the Council could also touch on the daily life of ordinary people, said Hahn.

"Gaining the support of all important stakeholders such as private sector, think-tanks, NGOs, and the civil society is important and necessary in helping the UN member states reaching a consensus," said the Korean Ambassador.

"The general public needs to know what is happening in the Security Council and how the reform of the Council will affect their life, which will support their legitimate right to express their opinions on the Security Council reform. In this way, the Council can improve its performance, its democratic representation and accountability," he added. [IDN-InDepthNews – 24 February 2016]

Sideline Mother Languages Threat to Global Citizenship

By Jaya Ramachandran

PARIS - While the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has signed an agreement with the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) to measure global citizenship and sustainable development education, the persistent marginalization of mother languages worldwide is threatening Goal 4 of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Agenda 2030 includes seven targets in Goal 4 that aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".

The seventh target – Goal 4.7 – obliges the international community to ensure that in the next 15 years "all learners (would) acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development".

UNESCO relates global citizenship to the empowerment of learners to assume active roles to face and resolve global challenges and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world. But the chances that Goal 4.7 would be achieved are rather bleak unless adequate steps are taken urgently. The reason can be deduced from some important data released by the UNESCO on the occasion of the International Mother Language Day, celebrated annually on February 21.

According to a new paper by UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report), 40% of the global population – the combined population of China, India and the United States – does not access education in a language they understand.

UNESCO also points out that more than 50 per cent of about 7,000 languages spoken in the world are likely to die out within a few generations, and 6,720 of these languages are spoken by a mere 4 per cent or 296 million, slightly less than the population of Indonesia. "Only a few hundred languages have genuinely been given a place in education systems and the public domain, and less than a hundred are used in the digital world," says UNESCO.

The GEM Report titled 'If you don't understand, how can you learn?' argues that being taught in a language other than their own can negatively impact children's learning, especially for those living in poverty.

Marking the Mother Language Day, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova underlined the basic principle of children learning in a language they speak. "With a new global education agenda that prioritizes quality, equity and lifelong learning for all, it is essential to encourage full respect for the use of mother language in teaching and learning, and to promote linguistic diversity. Inclusive language education policies will not only lead to higher learning achievement, but contribute to tolerance, social cohesion, and, ultimately, peace."

The study finds that learning improves in countries that have invested in bilingual programmes. In Guatemala, students in bilingual schools have lower repetition and dropout rates. They also have higher scores in all subject areas. Children in

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Ethiopia who participated in bilingual programmes for eight years improved their learning in subjects across the curriculum, says the document.

According to the paper, countries with colonial histories often find that shifting to bilingual education is complicated, as can be seen in many Latin American contexts that continue to use Portuguese, or Spanish, or in many Francophone African countries, where French remains the predominant language of instruction.

The GEM Report's World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) shows that this trend seriously hampers students' chances of learning. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, 55% of grade 5 students who speak the test language at home learned the basics in reading in 2008, compared with only 25% of those who speak another language.

In Iran, 80% of grade 4 students who did not speak Farsi at home reached the basics in reading, compared with over 95% of Farsi speakers. In Honduras, in 2011, 94% of grade 6 students who spoke the language of instruction at home learned the basics in reading compared to 62% of those who did not. In Turkey in 2012, around 50% of poor non-Turkish speaking 15 year olds achieved minimum benchmarks in reading, against the national average of 80%.

In multi-ethnic societies, including Turkey, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Guatemala, the paper shows that imposing a dominant language through a school system – while sometimes a choice of necessity – has frequently been a source of grievance linked to wider issues of social and cultural inequality.

Aaron Benavot, Director of UNESCO's GEM Report says language can serve as a double-edged sword. "While it strengthens an ethnic group's social ties and sense of belonging, it can also become a basis for their marginalization. Education policy must ensure that all learners, including minority language speakers, access school in a language they know."

The paper offers key recommendations to ensure that children are taught in a language they understand:

1. At least six years of mother tongue instruction is needed so that gains from teaching in mother tongue in the early years are sustained.
2. Education policies should recognize the importance of mother tongue learning. A review of 40 countries' education plans finds that only less than half of them recognize the importance of teaching children in their home language, particularly in early grades.
3. Teachers need to be trained to teach in two languages and to understand the needs of second-language learners. Teachers are rarely prepared for the reality of bilingual classrooms, including with inclusive teaching materials and appropriate assessment strategies. In Senegal, only 8%, and in Mali, only 2% of trained teachers expressed confidence about teaching in local languages.

UNESCO Director-General Bokova emphasized that "mother languages in a multilingual approach are essential components of quality education, which is itself the foundation for empowering women and men and their societies".

With this in view, UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action, a road-map to implement the 2030 Agenda, encourages full respect for the use of mother language in teaching and learning, and the promotion and preservation of linguistic diversity, noted Bokova. "Multilingualism is essential to drive these objectives forward – it is vital for success across the 2030 Agenda, regarding growth, employment and health, as well as sustainable consumption and production, and climate change," she added. Bokova assured that UNESCO brings the same focus to advancing linguistic diversity on the Internet, through support to relevant local content as well as media and information literacy.

Through the Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) programme, she said, UNESCO is highlighting the importance of mother and local languages as channels for safeguarding and sharing indigenous cultures and knowledge, which are vast reservoirs of wisdom.

International Mother Language Day was proclaimed by the UNESCO General Conference in November 1999, and has been observed every year since February 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.

The date represents the day in 1952 when students demonstrating for recognition of their language, Bangla, as one of the two national languages of the then Pakistan, were shot and killed by police in Dhaka, the capital of what is now Bangladesh. [IDN-InDepthNews – 21 February 2016]

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Countering Religious Hardliners Through Dialogue

By Monzurul Huq



A view of the plenary | Credit: Katsuhiro Asagiri

TOKYO - Religious identity, which in a broader context is perceived as belonging to a certain faith, is a topic of heated debate these days, mainly because a religious sense of belonging is directed toward achieving a certain goal by inflicting harm on others. The ongoing debate has been intensified in recent years with the concept of a clash of civilizations winning support among a group of Western academics and intellectuals.

It has received further impetus with the involvement of Western governments in the process of toppling regimes that the leaders of the Western world termed as “evil empires” – and thus paving the way for a blowback in the form of emergence of various religious-based terrorist groups claiming the righteousness in the name of divinity.

As a result, religion has become an item of sale and journeyman vendors of faith are busy selling the tickets to heaven to confused and puzzled human beings all over the world.

Against this backdrop, healthy academic discussions among people belonging to different religious faiths are increasingly being sidelined, and thus creating a dangerous vacuum that has been easily filled up by zealots from all sides.

This is what lends significance to the latest initiatives taken jointly by the National Center for Peace and Conflict Studies of the University of Otago, New Zealand, and the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

The four-day international conference held in Tokyo in early February attracted leading scholars of three Abrahamic religions as well as Buddhism. It focused on the possibility of engaging positively with the followers of four religions in actions that would lead to mutual understanding and thus harnessing the process of establishment of peace and justice in the world.

Warrior and pacifist tendencies are inherent parts of almost all religious faiths. A delicate balance between the two contradictory trends is essential for avoiding conflict among the believers of different faiths.

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However, the current world situation proves beyond doubt that the warrior trend is gaining leverage over the pacifist one – not only in the Middle East where the religious-based division is sharper than in many other parts of the world, but also in other regions that were seen less confrontational until recently.

The conference was composed of two separated plenary and 11 sessions focusing on ways of enhancing the pacifist and non-violent traditions of four major religions of our time that would act as a means of countering the destructive teachings fueling religious intolerance around the world.

While the two plenaries worked as a common basis of broadening the perception of the complicated issue of intra-faith understanding leading to the realization of what has been termed as global citizenship, the individual sessions focused more on specific issues related to the pacifist and militarist trends as well as on ways of nurturing and enhancing the pacifist traditions in all four religions.

In his welcome remarks, Dr. Olivier Urbain, Director of Toda Institute of Global Peace and Policy Research, highlighted the importance of holding periodic dialogues among the followers of different religions and emphasized the need for a return to the original purpose of religion that provides the answer to many of the complexities of the world.

Since the paradoxical role of religion reflected in warrior and pacifist traditions is predominant in almost all of the mainstream religious trends, he stressed the importance of dialogue that can bring out the best of all religious teachings of each other to apply these in transforming the conventional perception that many behold as they see the world through a narrow perception of “my religion is the best”.

The founder of Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, Daisaku Ikeda, had sent a message to the conference in which he emphasized that the manifold challenges the world is facing today “remind us of the urgency to bring together the call of human conscience and shift the focus of peace studies to transform the current ‘culture of war’ and counter the xenophobia that continues to plague our planet”.

He said that because of this he had found it profoundly meaningful that scholars were joining religious practitioners and leaders representing Abrahamic and Buddhist traditions to discuss the role of religion in ending the vicious cycle of violence and hatred. His message concluded with the hope that “a world in which all may live in peace, in which none are marginalized or ignored and the inalienable dignity of every man, woman and child is allowed to shine – I believe religions will have an increasingly vital role in the building of such a world”.

The keynote speaker, Sihem Bensedrine, President of the Truth and Dignity Commission of Tunisia, spoke about the difficulties in finding a common ground not only among the believers of various religious groups, but also among those belonging to one particular religion but having difference of opinion on a number of important issues. She cited the example of her own country, which, with a population of just 11 million has supplied around 6,000 Islamic State fighters involved in merciless political violence in the name of religion. Religion, she said, is now at the heart of most ruthless violence and barbarism prevailing in the name of Islam.

As President of the Truth and Dignity Commission of Tunisia, Bensedrine had to supervise the difficult task of reconciliation and according to her the biggest challenge that she faces in the process of finding a conciliatory ground is the dismantling of dictatorial organisations that for very long ruled over the society with absolute impunity.

Since transition always provides losers, it is important that those who are on that side also become part of the process; and preservation of national memory is essential to ensure that violence is never repeated, she said. Though essentially different in nature, the Tunisian example of reconciliation however, can serve as an important lesson capable of providing clues of how to narrow the existing gap among the believers of different faiths.

In a panel discussion in the second plenary, representatives of four participating religions outlined the perception of warrior and pacifist traditions in their respective religions and looked at ways of strengthening the pacifist trend as a means of establishing peace on earth. Each religion was represented by two participants coming from different geographic locations and thus ensuring a broader representation of religious thoughts.

Moderated by Kevin Clements, the Chair of Peace and Conflict Studies and Director of the National Center for Peace and Conflict Studies of the University of Otago, New Zealand, each participant first expressed his or her view about the issue from religious understanding, which was followed by a lively Q&A.

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If the essence of all religions is to ensure a peaceful existence of believers followed by an afterlife of rewards for abiding by the rules, the violent element too has become an essential part of religions for various reasons. Believers of Judaism, for example, had resorted to warrior trend out of the feeling of constant insecurity.

A tiny minority dwelling in a terrible place is what Noam Zion sees as the ultimate reason for the Jewish people to turn warriors. Omar Farouk, on the other hand, considers Jihad as the highest form of pacifism in Islam and some other conference participants, including the keynote speaker, find foreign jihadists joining the ranks of IS fighters no less vulnerable in their adopted societies than the Jewish people of Palestine.

Even some Buddhists are turning violent in some parts of the world and thus running against the teachings of Buddha.

Amid such contrasting and disturbing development surrounding religions, panelists reminded the audience of the need to intensify the effort for diminishing the warrior tendencies and enhancing the pacifist ones. There was general agreement that this difficult goal can only be achieved through dialogue and debate.

The conference, thus, turned out to be a timely initiative that put into limelight the importance of focusing on global issues discussed through religious positions. However, the organizers as well as participants were well aware of the fact that to make the dialogue and debates more meaningful and comprehensive, it is essential to broaden the scope of participation by including the representation of other religions and non-believers as well; the groups that jointly account for a huge chunk of the global population. [IDN-InDepthNews – 14 February 2016]

Migrant Workers Help Singapore Students Gain a Global Perspective

By Kalinga Seneviratne*

SINGAPORE - Government statistics show that in this affluent Southeast Asian nation, one in three workers are migrants. They build the modern infrastructure, clean the buildings, cook and serve in restaurants, look after the children and elderly at home, while often being paid very poorly and treated shabbily and looked at suspiciously by the locals.

Beginning with the 2013 Little India riots where hundreds of Indian workers attacked police vehicles to the recent arrest of 27 Bangladeshi workers suspected of having links to Islamic terrorist groups, there has been much tension in the community with regards to migrant workers. As one law student put it: “We only find out about migrant workers through second hand sources which does not really say who they are.”

Though this is not a peculiar phenomenon to Singapore, yet, with one of the highest ratios in the world between migrant workers and the local population, and with most of these workers coming from neighbouring countries in Asia, ill treatment of foreign workers in the country could have regional diplomatic repercussions.

The weeklong [Migrant Workers Awareness Week \(MVAW\)](#) that started on January 31 was an initiative launched by the National University of Singapore ([NUS](#)) in 2014 and expanded this year to include the Yale-NUS joint-venture university.

It was designed to expand the scope of law studies by getting the students to mingle with migrant workers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work with them to find out first hand about the workers, their hopes and aspirations that have brought them to Singapore to work. It was an initiative of the law school to especially sensitize the law students to the legal, social and political issues that encompass labour migration.

The five-day series of events brought together close to 400 students from the two elite universities with NGOs and up to about 130 foreign workers. It started with Bengali poetry reading on January 31 that reflected the loneliness of Bangladeshi workers here and ended with a “talk in the park” between students and migrant workers in a darkened area at night on February 5. In between there were panel discussions on the law and migrant workers, social issues dealing with domestic workers and trafficked sex workers.

“Many of our students come from rather affluent middle class backgrounds,” law student Victor David Lau, Vice President of Events at NUS Law School told IDN. “So we come from a position of privilege and we may overlook certain matters such as the rights of migrant workers.”

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A student viewing the migrant worker exhibition at the National University of Singapore (NUS) library.

Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

“Many of our students may have a domestic worker at home,” he added. “This person is a citizen of another country and needs to be respected.”

Though Lau believes that the changes in mind-set of law students may not come overnight and would take time to develop, the university’s out-of-class room education strategy is designed to address the problem of students having a stereotype view of migrant workers through second hand information obtained from the media that does not reflect the hardships workers go through, nor their hopes and aspirations that drives them to work overseas.

In addition to the panel discussions and meeting in the park, students were also taken on guided tours to a foreign worker dormitory and the “red light” Geylan area to observe sex workers at work.

Opening the weeklong education process, Dean of the NUS Law Faculty Prof Simon Chesterman said that there is an underbelly to Singapore’s prosperity and that is the rights of migrant workers. “Our students are encouraged to do pro-bono work to help migrant workers to deal with constant problems,” he noted. “I have seen at Changi airport foreign workers returning home without their legal grievances resolved.”

In the opening panel discussion of the MVAW under the theme of ‘Migrant Workers: Persons or Projects?’ there was much debate about the need to improve legal protection for the foreign workers. The panel’s moderator, senior law lecturer Prof Sheila Hayne, said that when she first came to Singapore she was warned that Singaporean law students were only interested in getting their grades and going on to make money. “But, I have found many are socially aware,” she noted. “Many migrant workers come to us and complain about the injustice.”

Prof Hayne believes that with socially aware law students there will be possibilities of making a difference working and networking with migrant workers, NGOs, community, government officials and the media.

Pointing out that there is a foreign domestic worker force of 227,000 in a population of 4 million in Singapore, Jolovan Wham, Executive Director of the *domestic worker advocacy NGO HOME* argued that there is a historical perspective about unpaid home care that tends to downplay the rights of domestic workers.

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“There is no focus on human rights and labour rights of domestic workers, instead the relationship between the employer and the worker is based on loyalty and trust,” he noted. “By treating the domestic worker as part of the family, it reinforces that she is not an employee. So limits on working hours, holiday entitlements and union protection are not given.”

Wham argued that domestic workers have to be included in the Labour Act. But, fellow panellist, Tan Fang Qun, Deputy Director of Workforce Policy and Strategy of [Ministry of Manpower \(MOM\)](#) disagreed, arguing that the domestic workplace is very difficult to be included in a legal framework. He cited a recent foreign worker survey conducted by his ministry that found that only one in ten foreign workers were unhappy with working conditions in Singapore.

Alex Au from the NGO [Transient Workers Count Too](#), another NGO that handles thousands of migrant worker complains each year, disagreed and in a passionate address to the students and academics, he argued that the structure of the Singapore economy need to be understood before healing the problem of exploitation of foreign labour. “Migrant workers are disposable, Singapore gives priority to corporate rights over human rights and workers’ rights,” he lamented.

Both Wham and Au pointed out that one of the biggest areas where migrant workers are exploited is by recruitment agents.

As of December 2014, there have been more than 1.3 million migrant workers in Singapore. 73% of these workers are work permit holders who are classified as unskilled or low-skilled workers and they come here through recruitment agents who charge them anything between \$3,000 to \$10,000 to find them a job that would pay you as little as \$400- 600 a month.

Most of the workers who come under this category are from the Philippines, Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, Indonesia, Nepal and China, where these payments are not documented. Thus, even though such payments are outlawed in Singapore, MOM is unable to stop the practice.

Both Wham and Au believe that if the future lawyers are made aware of the problem they may be able to help to find legal remedies to this modern day scourge. “All the NGOs give plenty of opportunities for volunteers to participate in our work” said Au, adding that they take sometimes 100s of students at a time to help them to conduct surveys, to go out to the community and talk to workers and find out if they get proper salaries and so forth.

Wham pointed out that HOME has only 6 full time staff and the missing link is to translate awareness into action. He believes that law students in particular should be well equipped to help in this task.

“You need to go and talk to your MPs (member of parliament) about migrant worker rights,” he argues. “Let your MP know that we care about global issues – about rights of migrant workers”.

Law student Lau says that with the seminars involving the NGOs, they are trying to reach out to the academically oriented students. “Not only that these students will bring these issues into their assignments, but also need to incorporate it in their work as well,” he argues. “Education is not only about studying but also creating a social effect and if we can bring these social ideas to their work it will be great.”

*The author is a Sri Lanka born journalist and academic, who teaches regional communication issues at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. [IDN-InDepthNews – 6 February 2016]

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http://www.fostering-globalcitizenship.net/documents/Education_for_Global_Citizenship_Project_Report_2014-2015.pdf

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