

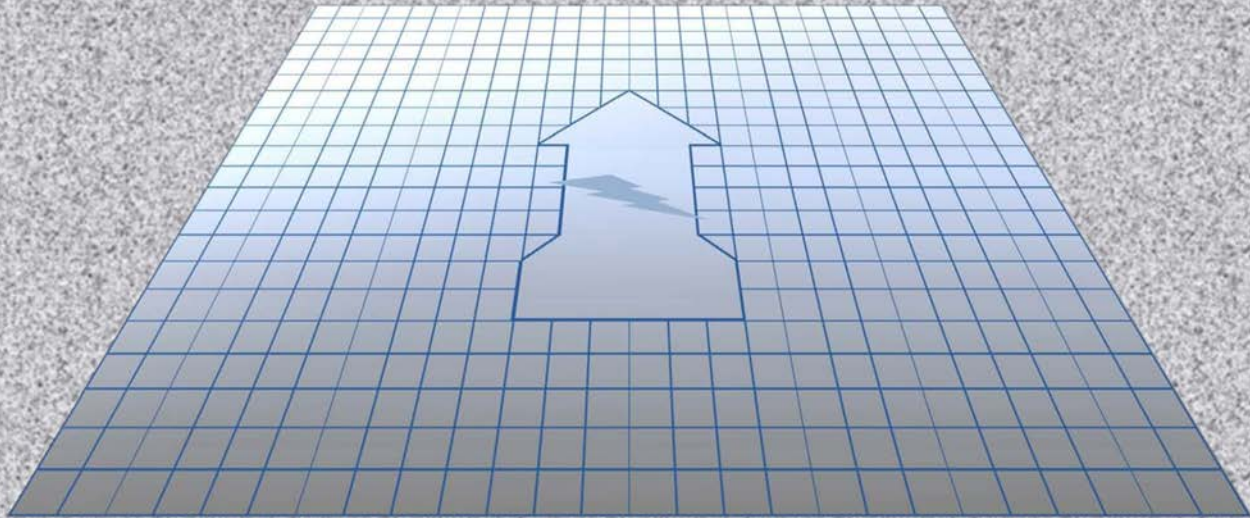


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FREEDOM FIGHTERS CAN TURN INTO GOONS

TOWARD A WORLD WITHOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

2011 Report of the Joint Media Project



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Irene Sounded Strong Climate Change Warning

By Ernest Corea*



WASHINGTON DC - Goodbye, Irene. Other tempests, too, will straddle parts of the U.S. during the 2011 hurricane season which, as usual, began in June and will run through the end of November. But Irene, though gone, is not forgotten.

Many cannot forget how Irene took away precious lives, destroyed homes, plans and livelihoods. Others remember it for their fearful moments of anticipation when they followed its every move and wondered whether it would affect and alter their lives. Some remember it for the dislocation of their holiday plans by the enforced evacuation of potential hurricane victims from perceived danger zones.

On top of the grim memories, perplexing questions arise, despite the "let's all look the other way" approach of science-deniers, as to whether and how climate change affects weather patterns including the intensity of hurricanes. (Their intensity determines their destructiveness.)

A great deal of scientific research has been conducted and continues to be undertaken on the impact of climate change, and on the economic consequences that might follow. As research continues, more knowledge is forthcoming, enabling private citizens and policy makers to reach

informed decisions. The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) recently compiled a summary of key items that included the following:

- Sea levels are rising and allowing storms to reach further inland and damage property. As sea levels rise due to climate change, storms – including hurricanes – have a higher “jumping off point” when they hit land and are able to penetrate further inland before they dissipate, posing greater risks to roads and buildings.
- Sea levels are expected to rise as the ocean warms and expands and as land-based glaciers and ice sheets rapidly shrink. One recent study estimates that total sea-level rise by the end of the century could be between 2.5 feet and 6.6 feet, though scientists consider the worst-case scenario less likely.
- Warmer air increases the chance for more intense precipitation that can drive flooding. Since 1958, the amount of rain or snow falling in the heaviest one percent of storms has risen nearly 20 percent on average in the U.S.

On the specific question of how climate change affects hurricanes, the UCS responded: "The short answer is that global warming makes the ocean warmer and increases sea surface temperatures, which can make hurricanes stronger. But several factors, including differences in wind speed and direction, can break up hurricanes.

Many future projections show a decrease in the frequency of all hurricanes globally, but a higher chance of intense hurricanes forming when they do occur. The changing nature of hurricanes in a warmer world remains an active area of research."

Hurricanes, Cyclones, Typhoons

To recap briefly: A hurricane is defined as "a type of tropical cyclone, which is a generic term for a low pressure system that generally forms in the tropics. The cyclone is accompanied by thunderstorms and, in the Northern Hemisphere, a counter-clockwise circulation of winds near the earth's surface."

Hurricanes range from Category 1 with the lowest wind speeds to Category 5, the highest. Hurricanes are also known as typhoons, based on their geographic location.

"If a storm was to form in the Atlantic or eastern Pacific Ocean, we would call it a hurricane," says one explanation,

adding that "a typhoon is generally any storm that begins in the Western Pacific."

More than one hurricane could form within the same, broad geographic area. Hurricanes are therefore given specific names, so that each might be easily identified by those observing their course and calculating where they might make landfall, and by others likely to be affected by them. Australian Charles Wragge is credited with being the first weatherman to have identified hurricanes by name, as early as in the 19th century.

Wragge, say the history books, initially named hurricanes after figures from Greek mythology. In what is considered a typically Australian change of pace he later named them after politicians and was seriously able to say: (Name of politician) is "wandering aimlessly about..." and "causing great distress." Contemporary weathermen might want to check out how it sounds – just as a trial – if they substitute a local politician's name.

Today, hurricanes are named from a list maintained by the World Meteorological Organization. The names alternate between traditionally male and female. The names of hurricanes that cause particularly heavy damage and loss of life are usually eliminated from the list so that they will not be applied to storms of the future. Many will be happy to know that Katrina and Irene will not reappear as names of future hurricanes. ➤

Irene, whose destructive path began near the Bahamas, wreaked its damage on a swath of coastal states in the U.S. from North Carolina to Maine, and then on to parts of Canada.

The worst affected states were North Carolina (6 hurricane-related deaths), Virginia (4), Maryland (3), Delaware (2), Pennsylvania (5), New Jersey (7), New York (10), Vermont (3, plus 2 missing), New Hampshire (1), Maine (2). That's a total of 43 known deaths, a figure that could rise when the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) completes its assessments and accounting.

Floods caused the greatest devastation. Roads and bridges were washed away, and homes were demolished. Overnight, individuals and families realised that their homes, in most cases with mortgage-based loans not fully paid, had been splintered into matchstick-like remnants, their belongings lifted into the skies and deposited goodness knows where.

The reaction of most hurricane victims was captured by a distraught woman who looked into a television camera, her eyes glazed over with sorrow, and said: "I now have nothing, nothing."

Over three million people were without power to light their homes or provide facilities for cooking. Many consumers were informed by their suppliers that it would take at least two weeks before power could be restored. Inter-state travel came to a halt as major airports were closed in almost every state affected. Over 11,000 flights were cancelled. Public and private road transport within the affected areas came to a halt as well.

FEMA, already by an inadequate budget, now faces the challenge of having to support and augment the efforts of the states concerned in recovering from hurricane-related damage. Total costs of recovery could be as high as \$20 billion.

In this grave situation, the (Republican) majority leader in the House of Representatives insisted that funds expended on hurricane damage recovery should be matched by cuts in other programs.

That's like telling a cancer patient: "Yes, Medicare (the state supported health insurance program) will pay for your drugs, but the amounts involved will be deducted from your Social Security (pension) payments." How crass can politicians become in moments of human tragedy? The squabble has continued in Congress where the House of Representatives is rooting for a lesser amount than the Senate supports as an urgent transfusion to FEMA so that its funds do not run dry before the end of the current financial year on September 30.

Sharing Knowledge

As Irene's immediate impact wound down, and people had more time to spend of reflection, a question that has surfaced with some anxiety is: did ubiquitous meteorologists, presented with opportunities for their moments of fame, and anxious

to demonstrate their professional acumen, overdo their warnings. The media too has come in for its share of criticism, for having allegedly over-hyped their reports in an effort to outdo their rivals in round-the-clock news coverage.

The question about weather forecasters is based partly on the fact that they have and continue to make some serious bloopers, thus raising doubts about their credibility.

In Canada's capital, Ottawa, for instance, a weather forecaster broadcast his entire segment of the day's news while standing in a dry studio, holding an umbrella over his head.

He had forecast that the skies would open and rains would pour down that day. As it happened, Ottawa experienced a gorgeous Fall day, with crisp air, bright sunshine, and skies whose brilliant blue expanse was broken only by a straggling handful of clouds. His umbrella performance was by way of showing remorse. Mistakes can be made because, as meteorologists like to say, it takes only a fluttering of a butterfly's wings to change a weather pattern, but forecasting capacities have developed enormously down the years.

Most weathermen and women are qualified and experienced meteorologists who take their profession very seriously. They are supported by vast changes in communications technology and instrumentation. On what basis should they not share this knowledge with people most likely to be affected by ferocious changes in the weather? The same goes for the media – despite the lowering of standards caused by frenetic competition.

Custodians of knowledge that needs to be in the public domain have a responsibility to share that knowledge as widely as possible. The same principle applies to discourse on climate change and its impact on hurricanes as well as other weather patterns.

Consider This

The insured value of property along Irene's tumultuous route from North Carolina to Maine is estimated to be in the region of \$4.9 trillion. That comes on top of the deaths, heartbreak, and misery that Irene set off.

The possibility that climate change will result in more intense hurricanes, causing similar loss of life and property damage make the overall situation too serious to be forgotten as memories of Irene recede.

Climate change-sceptics will claim that this was a "one off" experience and will be repeated, if at all, years hence. The scientific evidence is too compelling to be ignored.

So, consider this: Policies and practices that can mitigate the effects of climate change – including energy efficiency measures, and the use of renewable energy – have potentially long-lasting benefits. Their introduction will diminish the future intensity of hurricanes and create peace of mind. Why is nobody listening?

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Resource Rich Arctic Severely Threatened

By Devinder Kumar



NEW DELHI - A new study is pleading for the resource rich Arctic located at the northernmost part of the planet Earth to be treated as "a global common and a common heritage of mankind", in the interest of preserving an important ecosystem and halting morbid militarisation of the region.

The area consisting of a vast, ice-covered ocean, surrounded by treeless permafrost, should not continue to be regarded as an exclusive domain of the Arctic Five countries – Russia, Norway, Canada, Denmark (Greenland) and the United States – as well as of the Arctic Council which includes three more countries in the Arctic Circle, Sweden, Finland and Iceland, says the study by think-tank close to the Government of India.

"These countries are . . . militarising the Arctic in pursuit of their narrow national interests," says the study by the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA). "Their

focus is limited to issues such as claiming Exclusive Economic Zones . . . , rights and resources for sea passage and the like," argues the report by Col P K Gautam (Retd).

The study calls upon India and other developing countries not to leave "the issue of the Arctic's future to the developed countries." The first step in this regard, according to Gautam, will be for India to become an ad hoc observer to the Arctic Council. At the same time, he advises the "strategic community" in India to take the lead in articulating and debating the idea of including the Arctic in the discourse on global commons.

All the more so, because: "Protecting the ecology is low in their (Arctic Council's) priority. Their business as usual attitude towards global warming combined with the prospects of the pollution of the Arctic due to increased shipping is likely to further degrade the ecology of the region."

Global Warming

Several independent studies indicate that the Arctic sea ice has receded by about 40 per cent since 1979. "We are confronted by a new ocean," was the comment made in the Arctic Environmental Assessment of the U.S. Navy released in August 2011.

Besides, the Arctic region is experiencing rising air and water temperatures, loss of volume in ice sheets and glaciers, melting of permafrost, and the pole ward migration of ecosystems and fishing stocks from warmer regions.

"The Indian summer expedition contingent of 2011 to the Arctic has reported melting glaciers, receding snow levels, pollutants and changes in the life cycle of some organisms," says the study, and warns that global warming will lead to the further melting of the Arctic in the near future.

"Once that happens, two geopolitical events will take place. The first will be a new recoverable source of oil and gas. The second will be new and shorter strategic sea routes that will change the pattern of energy flows on sea lanes of communications (SLOCs) with new security implications," says the author of the report.

The ecology of the Arctic Ocean is of international concern that needs the attention of the international community, he adds, and passionately pleads for an initiative to save the Arctic by declaring it as a global common.

Exclusive Economic Zone

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the Arctic contains 10 per cent of the world's known petroleum reserves and 25 per cent of undiscovered reserves. These percentages are equal to 90 billion barrels of oil, 1,669 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids. "Within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) fossil fuel extraction is legitimate, but it needs to be environmentally friendly," says Gautam.

Russia is expected to benefit the most since most fossil fuel reserves are within its jurisdiction in the Arctic region. However, in September 2010, Russia and Norway signed an Arctic border pact, ending the 40-year dispute over the Barents Sea and the Arctic coastline.

According to figures published by Institute of Oil and Gas Problems, Russia will be extracting up to 30 million tons of oil and 130 billion metric cubes of natural gas on its Arctic shelf by 2030 under the North Pole as its territory. Since it has not ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), the United States is unable to stake its claim before the Continental Shelf Commission, but is taking all measures to control the resources and routes. ➔

The second impact of Arctic melt down will be opening up of new sea routes via the Arctic to the east coast of Asia and the west coast of North America. "It must be kept in mind that the region is extremely cold and dark for half the winter. There is also a view that the route will remain closed in winter. Even in summer the going is difficult because floating ice poses a threat to shipping," says the study.

It adds: "Highly capable, motivated and trained personnel with appropriate equipment will be required to navigate the new strategic Arctic sea. Coastal infrastructure in the region is comparatively underdeveloped. Search and rescue operations will be very difficult. Though no match for the traditional warm water routes such as the Indian Ocean, sea faring powers are not going to be deterred by adverse weather."

Three Routes

According to the study, the three routes in order of the possibility of being opened up are the Northeast Passage (also known as the northern passage), the northwest passage and the north polar passage that cuts straight across - when all the ice is melted.

The Northwest Passage shortens the shipping route between Asia and the U.S. east coast by 5,000 miles. The northeast sea route over Eurasia cuts short shipping routes between Europe and North East Asia by 40 per cent, compared to the Suez or the Panama canals.

The Northeast Passage is expected to be the first to open up in summer, says the study, adding that if there is rapid ice melt then the direct route via the North Pole may be the preferred option. In 2008, one think tank predicted that the Northeast Passage will be navigable in five to ten and the north polar route in 30-40 years.

Gautam points out that special ship hulls to withstand the cold and ice conditions will need to be built and icebreakers will also be required. Russia has 20 nuclear powered ice breakers, Canada 12 and the United States one. It takes 8 to 10 years to build one at a cost of about \$1 billion.

Presently, South Korea is the major builder of ice- capable ships. Russia intends to build more powerful icebreakers, both diesel powered and three more nuclear powered icebreakers by 2020.

The private sector is investing in a fleet of Arctic tankers. In 2005, there were 262 ice-class ships in service worldwide and 234 more on order. The concept of double-acting tankers (which can steam bow first through open water and then turn around and proceed stern first to smash through ice) is a recent development.

Militarisation

More such ships will be operating in these waters in the future, remarks the study. These new ships can sail unhindered to the Arctic's burgeoning oil and gas fields without the aid of ice breakers. Such breakthroughs are revolutionising Arctic

shipping and turning what were once commercially unavailable projects into booming businesses.

The Russians similarly have ice breaking oil tankers which shuttle oil from the Siberian coast to ice free ports for transfer to conventional tankers for outward journey. In future, these could transport oil pumped offshore as well.

In August 2010, the first such tanker of 114,564 tonnes (SCF Baltica) escorted by two powerful nuclear icebreakers successfully delivered gas condensates to China skirting the Arctic coastline. The icebreakers cleared the way through 4,000 kms before reaching the Russian port of Pevek in Chukotsky Sea, from where the tanker continued the journey on its own. The route, it is claimed, is twice as fast as the Suez Canal route and about 15 per cent cheaper.

The distance from the Russian port of Murmansk to Shanghai through the Arctic route is 10,600 km while it is 17,700 km via the Suez Canal. Russia intends to carry out further trials that include shipping crude along this route. China too has been investing more in conducting scientific research at the North Pole by setting up a research base and beginning expeditions north of the Bering Strait since 2000.

"While the US Congress may question the science of climate change, the Pentagon thinks otherwise," according to a study published in the New Scientist in March 2011. A 2009 study of the security implications of climate change concluded that the Arctic is the key challenge for the U.S. Navy. Admiral James G. Stavridis, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, in a foreword to Prof. Paul Berkman's Environmental Security in the Arctic Ocean: Promoting Cooperation and Preventing Conflict, warns that global warming and a race for resources could lead to conflict in the Arctic.

Writing about it in the Naval War College Review, the former U.S. admiral and his co-author see the role of the U.S. navy to include the U.S. navy's Arctic road map and the setting up of a Task Force on Climate Change (TFCC) with a five year action plan.

The authors even support ratification of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) by the United States. In September 2008 the 'Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic until 2020 and Beyond' were approved. They call for creating a force capable of maintaining military security in various military and political situations.

Canada has beefed up its coastguard with four armed icebreakers. It is setting up military bases and a deep water port on the shore of the Northwest Passage with military facilities 595 kilometres from the North Pole. It is also raising a force made up indigenous and Inuit Indians to patrol the northern borders. ☑



Picture: Col P K Gautam | IDSA www.idsa.in



UN Meet Holds Out Hope for the Poorest

By R Kim

SEOUL - More than one billion people inhabiting drylands in some 100 countries are caught in the pangs of poverty and excruciating hunger. They appear to have found a credible champion of their cause in the UNCCD, an acronym for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

This was signalled by the tenth conference of parties to the convention (COP10), which concluded in South Korea's Changwon on October 21. Commenting its outcome, UNCCD Executive Secretary Luc Gnacadja welcomed in an interview that the "poor sister" of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), was coming "closer to its rightful place".

UNCCD is the sole legally binding international agreement linking the environment, development and the promotion of healthy soils. Its dual focus on environmental and developmental concerns places it in a unique position to facilitate progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015.

"COP 10 will be remembered as the session that has brought lots of innovative both in the actions and the way parties interact among themselves," added Gnacadja.

Changwon Initiative

The major outcomes of COP10 include: creating a solid scientific foundation within UNCCD; high-level political support, including the Changwon Initiative, for the process of UNCCD; and sending a strong message on combating land degradation to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio plus 20), to be held in Brazil in June 2012.

The Changwon Initiative is a series of action plans to strengthen scientific findings behind land degradation issues, mobilise resources and forge greater partnerships, particularly with the private sector, and raise awareness about successful sustainable land management efforts around the world.

"I do believe that this Initiative will be a new landmark in the UNCCD process by fully capitalising the potentials of the process and galvanising stakeholders into action based on solid partnerships," Lee Don Koo, Minister of the Korea Forest Service and President of COP10, said.

Welcoming the Initiative, UNCCD Executive Secretary Gnacadja said: "Such a political initiative holds the potential for focused actions that aim at making a difference on the ground and contribute the improving the livelihoods of people living in ecosystems prone to desertification, land degradation and drought."

Together with the Changwon Initiative's aim to partner with the private sector, nearly 100 business leaders declared their support to combat desertification and restore productive lands with the inaugural Sustainable Land Management Business Forum held during COP10. ➡

Seeking to promote efforts for sustainable land management, the Land for Life Award was announced on October 17. The Award is part of the Changwon Initiative's efforts to raise awareness and award.

The Land for Life Award will provide global recognition to individuals, teams, institutions, businesses, research institutes, public offices, political leaders, decision-makers, journalists, media, nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations whose work and initiatives have made a significant and innovative contribution to sustainable land management.

"We do hope that following the path of the Republic of Korea, several other countries and international organisations will do their utmost to reinforcing actions to combat desertification and land degradation," Gnacadja said.

"This conference has been highly successful and this is a big chance for Korea to increase its international cooperation on sustainable development issues," Lee Don Koo said.

The Forgotten Billion

A highlight of COP10 was the film *The Man Who Stopped the Desert*, an award winning documentary about Yacouba Sawadogo, a small-holder farmer in Burkina Faso who revived traditional agricultural techniques to restore barren land.

Another highlight was *The Forgotten Billion – MDG Achievement in the Drylands*, launched by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UNCCD, which was unveiled in September 2010. As the world reviews its progress in tackling global poverty and achieving the MDGs, drylands can no longer be ignored, cautions the report.

Drylands account for more than a third of the world's land surface and more than 2 billion of its people. Yet for too long, drylands and their inhabitants have been neglected in development processes, making their living a "mission impossible".

Combating the degradation of the land in all ecosystems, not just in the drylands – where it is known as combating desertification – is not an option. About 22 percent of the global land degradation is occurring in the drylands of the world, while 78 percent is taking place in the non-drylands areas, that is, on the most productive lands.

About 41 percent of the Earth's is made up of both the drylands and deserts. The drylands – the areas outside the deserts – make up 34 percent of Earth's land area with 22 percent of this area in the process of degradation. By contrast, 78 percent of the degradation of the land is taking place in the humid areas.

Consequently, the global community loses 12 million hectares of productive land every year. This is equivalent to losing an area the size of South Africa or of France and Germany and Switzerland put together over a decade. This is not sustainable, say the report.

It reminds that despite the challenges of living in those areas, drylands have been inhabited for thousands of years. Today they underpin the global food supply, supporting about half the world's livestock and major areas of cereal production

in the North American Great Plains, Argentina's Pampas and the wheat belts of Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Drylands are also the setting for major world cities such as Beijing, Cairo, Karachi, Los Angeles and Mexico City.

These simple facts explode the myth that all drylands are empty, barren places with little economic value, argues *The Forgotten Billion*. They also highlight the truism that drylands do not exist in isolation. In biophysical terms, drylands have in fact a planetary influence as vast sources of soil dust, material that affects soils, oceans and the atmosphere far beyond the dryland realm.

UN agencies' initiative

COP10 gave cause for hope to the poorest in drylands for yet another reason. With 10 percent of the world's dryland ecosystems already degraded, putting at risk the social and economic well-being of millions of people, UN agencies have agreed to step up their efforts to protect and revitalise drylands.

According to a new UN report, increased investment in drylands, strengthened links between science and policy, and diversified livelihoods for communities to relieve pressure on natural resources are among the solutions to realize the potential of drylands.

A UN system-wide response sets out a common vision and agenda for UN-wide action on drylands management and the UN's role in addressing climate change and food security through a positive development and investment approach.

Prepared by 18 UN agencies through the UN's Environment Management Group (EMG), the report was launched on October 20 in Changwon. It signifies a milestone by the UN system in supporting the implementation of the UNCCD's 10-year Strategic Plan by "delivering as one" in the areas of environment, development and humanitarian assistance by bringing together the UN's expertise, operational and coordination capabilities, and its advocacy role at the country, regional and global levels.

Developed following calls by governments for a UN system-wide response to land challenges, a central element of the common agenda is the need to address the underlying causes of land degradation and create enabling conditions for the sustainable development of drylands.

"Drylands have all too often been the poor relations in respect to more high profile ecosystems such as forests and coral reefs. Yet as this report underlines, they play a critical role in the Earth's planetary systems and support the lives and livelihoods of around two billion people," said Achim Steiner, Chair of the EMG and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

"The potential for enhancing carbon storage in dryland forests as both a climate mitigation and adaptation measure and in particular in Africa will be at the centre of Forest Day at the upcoming UN climate convention meeting in Durban," he said. ☑

<http://www.unccd.int/media/docs/Forgotten%20Billion.pdf>

Yet Another Chance to Make Aid Effective

By Jaya Ramachandran



PARIS - Global development cooperation, which surged in the early 1960s amidst post-war optimism and enthusiasm, and has since continued to evolve, is recognised as a key factor in advancing international development.

"But lack of co-ordination, overly ambitious targets, unrealistic time- and budget constraints and political self-interest have too often prevented aid from being as effective as desired," says a background paper by the Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD-DAC) of an international grouping branded as "rich man's club".

A fresh attempt to make aid effective will be made at Busan, South Korea, from November 29 to December 1, 2011. This will be the fourth

High-Level Forum since 2002 when the principles for aid effectiveness were outlined in the Rome Declaration.

The Fourth High-Level Forum in Busan could be considered successful if it achieves "a broad partnership among nations at all levels of income and development, as well as private actors and nongovernmental organizations, based on a clear division of labor and transparent communication," says J. Brian Atwood, who chairs the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the 34-nation Organisation For Economic Cooperation And Development (OECD), most of which are post-war industrial nations.

Atwood's yardstick includes:

- A set of principles, founded on solid evidence, to guide the new consensus on development cooperation, together with a commitment to eliminate policies that present obstacles to achieving development results.
- A revitalized global effort to achieve the MDGs and focus on the need for global public goods.
- A recognition that the world's poorest and most fragile states need security and capacity, and that working with them means being willing to adapt modalities and to take risks.
- An acceptance that people, no matter how impoverished, must be empowered to participate directly in the development process.
- An acceptance that all participants in development efforts must produce measurable results and that these results must be duly reported to the citizens of all nations.

"This is an ambitious set of goals, but this is what is required if Busan is to deliver a more effective aid system – one that is capable of tackling today's complex development challenges and that successfully combines the efforts of an increasingly diverse and dynamic set of development actors," writes Atwood in a paper titled 'The Road to Busan: Pursuing a New Consensus on Development Cooperation'.

Beyond the goals outlined above, says Atwood, there are a number of other issues which participants at Busan must consider. These include questions of how best to engage the Group of Twenty (G-20), how to integrate private and nongovernmental participation into an international dialogue on aid effectiveness in a way that is logistically feasible, how to strengthen the link between political commitment and implementation, how best to address the particular needs of fragile and conflict affected environments, and how to achieve better coherence and effective collective action in the current aid and development arena.

"Busan presents the ideal forum for debating these hard questions and for creating a revitalized development agenda that is inclusive, adaptive and principled," concludes the DAC Chair who served as Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) from 1993 to 1999 during the administration of President Bill Clinton. ➡

Picture credit: <http://www.aideffectiveness.org>

How far some 2000 delegates will succeed in achieving that objective remains to be seen. However a look back shows the admirable objectives agreed in the previous three fora.

The Rome Declaration stated that: development assistance be delivered based on the priorities and timing of the countries receiving it; donor efforts concentrate on delegating cooperation and increasing the flexibility of staff on country programmes and projects; and that good practice be encouraged and monitored, backed by analytic work to help strengthen the leadership that recipient countries can take in determining their development path.



Accountability

The Second High Level Forum in Paris in 2005 marked the first time that donors and recipients both agreed to commitments and to hold each other accountable for achieving these. The commitments were laid out in the Paris Declaration.

Beyond its principles on effective aid, the Paris Declaration lays out a practical, action-oriented roadmap to improve the quality of aid and its impact on development. It puts in place a series of specific implementation measures and establishes a monitoring system to assess progress and ensure that donors and recipients hold each other accountable for their commitments.

The Paris Declaration outlines the following five fundamental principles for making aid more effective:

- Ownership: Developing countries set their own strategies for poverty reduction, improve their institutions and tackle corruption.
- Alignment: Donor countries align behind these objectives and use local systems.
- Harmonisation: Donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures and share information to avoid duplication.
- Results: Developing countries and donors shift focus to development results and results get measured.
- Mutual accountability: Donors and partners are accountable for development results.

At the Third High Level Forum at Accra, Ghana, in 2008, civil society representatives also participated, broadening the stakeholders in the aid effectiveness agenda. The forum emphasized the need to deepen implementation towards the goals set in 2005 was identified, along with a set of priority areas for improvement.

Designed to strengthen and deepen implementation of the Paris Declaration, the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) takes stock of progress and sets the agenda for accelerated advancement towards the Paris targets.

It proposes improvement in the areas of ownership, partnerships and delivering results. Capacity development also lies at the heart of the AAA.

OECD-DAC is convinced that the principles put forward in the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action have gained support across the development community, changing aid practice for the better.

"It is now the norm for aid recipients to forge their own national development strategies with their parliaments and electorates (ownership); that donors support these plans (alignment); and streamline their efforts in-country (harmonisation); for development policies to be directed to achieving clear, monitorable goals (managing for development results); and for donors and recipients to be jointly responsible for achieving these goals (mutual accountability)," OECD-DAC claim.

"These principles have also served as the foundation for other commitments, tailored to specific contexts: the Bogotá Statement (concentrating on effective aid principles in South-South co-operation), Istanbul Principles (on the role of civil society) and the Dili Declaration (on effective aid in fragile and conflict-affected states)," OECD-DAC adds.

OECD-DAC expects the Fourth High Level Forum in Busan to turn towards whether this progress in the aid effectiveness agenda is enough to overcome even greater global challenges. In the face of the recent financial, security, food, health, climate and energy crises, and to meet the Millennium Development Goals, the development community must indeed do more. ☑

Picture credit: <http://ambdhaka.um.dk>

African Leaders Urge New Approach

By Jerome Mwanda



NAIROBI – In run-up to an important global forum on aid effectiveness, African leaders from fragile and conflict-affected countries have called for new approaches to development in the region and a reassessment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The call emerged from a regional meeting on peace- and state-building in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, September 7-9, 2011. Recognizing that not a single fragile state has achieved any of the eight MDGs, the African Development Bank (AfDB), along with the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Union Commission (AUC), organized the meeting.

Participants in the meeting were 11 ministers of finance and planning from Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Somalia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe. They were joined by some 140 senior representatives from international organizations, and civil society.

Their aim was to shape the agenda for the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, South Korea, from November 29 to December 1, 2011, which is expected to be joined by approximately 2000 delegates from around the world.

According to Development Cooperation Directorate of the Development Assistance Committee (DCD-DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris, "they will review global progress in improving the impact and effectiveness of aid, and make commitments that set a new agenda for development".

The Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness follows meetings in Rome, Paris and Accra that "helped transform aid relationships between donors and partners into true vehicles for development cooperation", says DCD-DAC

The DAC is an international forum of many of the largest funders of aid, including 24 member states. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and UN Development Programme (UNDP) participate as observers.

At the Busan Forum next November, leaders and experts are scheduled to take stock of progress since the Accra Forum in 2008. They will also propose a new framework to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

In addition, they will seek to situate aid in its broader development context, considering ongoing and new complexities such as trade, security, and climate change. The Africa meeting sought to influence not only that agenda but also other African and international processes.

Mandated by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, the AUC, ECA and the AfDB have jointly produced the annual report on Assessing Progress in Africa toward the Millennium Development Goals 2010. This year, the three pan-African institutions have been joined in this effort by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

This year's report shows that, prior to the onset of the food and fuel crises and the global recession, African countries were making steady progress toward attainment of the MDGs.

Mixed Progress in MDGs

The commitment, enunciated in the Millennium Declaration of 2000 and encapsulated in the eight MDGs, has been the main impetus to advance international development over the last decade. The international community is currently evaluating progress made by countries toward the targets of the MDGs in order to chart a course forward for accelerated action on the MDGs between now and 2015.

According to the report, at the regional level progress towards MDGs in Africa has been mixed across countries. Though there is unequivocal progress on practically all MDGs, a number of targets will not be met, not because there is no progress but because the rate of progress is slower than required, says the report.

Progress has been further slowed down by the recent triple crises: food; fuel price; and financial and economic, that engulfed the entire globe. But African States and Governments remain committed and determined to achieve MDGs, says the report. ►

Picture credit: channels.com

Key areas of progress include a reduction in the proportion of undernourished people on the continent, universal primary education and gender equality and empowerment. On the health front, commendable progress has been made in reducing tuberculosis, while the proportion of children sleeping under insecticide-treated bed-nets is increasing in the drive to combat malaria.

"An important element of this relative success has been the introduction, by many African countries, of specific and institutional innovations that have maintained some of the gains achieved," states the report.

The MDGs rely on international cooperation and global partnership, which are critical for the achievement of the goals. "The partnership has remained strong, even during the 2008-2009 crisis period. Net Official Development Assistance (ODA) rose in 2008 despite the crisis," says the report.

"However, the rise was well below the commitment of 0.7% of GNI (Gross National Income) by OECD countries," says the report and adds: "Africa is likely to be allocated only about USD 12 billion of the USD 25 billion envisaged for 2010 at the Gleneagles Summit (of the Group of Eight major industrial nations). This is due in large part to the underperformance of some European donors who give large shares of ODA to Africa."

In 2009, only five developed countries reached or exceeded the UN target of 0.7% of GNI as aid to developing countries – Sweden, Norway, Luxembourg, Denmark and the Netherlands. Additionally, the OECD projects that overall ODA as a proportion of GNI for the OECD/DAC members in 2010 will be 0.33%, instead of the 0.36% forecast at Gleneagles.

The report notes further that on the creation of open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system, no progress was made in 2010.

Also, for Africa, success in the Doha trade talks will be measured by progress in agriculture, Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA), duty-free and quota-free access for LDCs (least developed countries), Aid-for-Trade and Special and Differentiated Treatment (SDT). The prospects for progress on some of these issues do not appear to be very good.

The report urges African governments to: maintain sound and stable macroeconomic policies, improve national capacity to monitor and report on the MDGs; strengthen national statistical systems; strengthen MDG-based planning at all levels of government by delegating planning to lower tiers of government and building appropriate MDG-related capacity at those levels, and harnessing the potential of regional integration, including South-South cooperation. ☑



Credit: www.h-net.org/gateways/africa

Europe Vying with U.S. to Sell Arms

By J.C. Suresh

TORONTO - The United States and its four major European allies – France, Britain, Germany, and Italy – are locked in an "intense" competition for selling arms to affluent developing nations, says a new report prepared for the U.S. Congress.

Between 2007 and 2010, the U.S. and Russia dominated the arms market in the developing world, with both nations either ranking first or second for all four years in terms of the value of arms transfer agreements, says the Congressional Research Service (CRS) www.crs.gov

During those four years, the United States made 38% of arms sales agreements worth nearly \$72 billion. Russia bagged 19.6% of all such agreements valued at \$37.1 billion. Together, the U.S. and Russia made 57.6% of all arms transfer agreements with developing nations. France, the third-leading supplier, shared 5.8% of arms deals worth nearly \$11 billion from 2007 to 2010 with developing nations.

The report explains that the four major West European arms exporters have supplied "a wide variety of more highly sophisticated weapons" to nations that the U.S. chose not to supply for policy reasons.

Britain, for example, sold major combat fighter aircraft to Saudi Arabia in the mid-1980s, when the United States chose not to sell a comparable aircraft for policy reasons. More recently, however, European aircraft suppliers were made finalists in the competition for a major sale of combat aircraft to India, while the U.S. aircraft was rejected, says the report titled *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 2003-2010*.



The leading buyers of arms in the developing world in 2010 were: India (worth \$3,600 million), Saudi Arabia (\$2,200 million), Pakistan (\$2,200 million), Egypt (\$900 million), Algeria (\$900 million), Israel (\$700 million), Taiwan (\$700 million), U.A.E. (\$600 million), South Korea (\$600 million) and Iraq (\$600 million).

Between 2003 and 2010, Saudi Arabia purchased arms worth \$29,000 million, India \$16,900 million, China \$13,200 million, Egypt \$12,100 million, Israel \$10,300 million, U.A.E. \$8,600 million, Taiwan \$8,300 million, Pakistan \$7,600 million, South Korea 7,300 million, and Algeria \$4,500 million.

The report's author Richard F. Grimmett recalls with some nostalgia that the four NATO allies of Washington "generally supported the U.S. position in restricting arms sales to certain nations during the Cold War era. In the post-Cold War period, however, their national defence export policies have not been fully coordinated with the United States as was the case previously."

In recent years, however, the potential for policy differences between the U.S. and major European arms exporters over conventional weapons transfers to specific countries has increased, because of a divergence of views over what is an appropriate arms sale. Leading European weapons exporters, especially France, view arms sales foremost as a matter for national decision. According to the report, "economic considerations appear to be a greater driver in French arms sales decision-making than matters of foreign policy."

Emerging Trends

Such a conflict resulted from an effort led by France and Germany in 2004-2005 to lift the embargo on arms sales to China adhered to by members of the European Union. Washington viewed this as a misguided effort, and vigorously opposed it.

In the end, the proposal to lift the embargo was not adopted. However, it proved to be a source of significant tension between the U.S. and some members of the European Union. "The arms sales activities of major European suppliers, consequently, will continue to be of interest to U.S. policymakers, given their capability to make sales of advanced military equipment to countries of concern to U.S. national security policy," cautions Grimmett.

According to the report, the major West European suppliers, individually, have enhanced their competitive position in weapons exports through strong government marketing support for their foreign arms sales. All of them can produce both advanced and basic air, ground, and naval weapons systems. They have competed successfully for arms sales contracts with developing nations against the United States, which has tended to sell to several of the same major clients, writes Grimmett.

The significance of this emerging trend is underlined by the fact that the continuing demand for U.S. weapons in the global arms bazaar, from a large established client base, had created a more difficult environment for individual West European suppliers to secure, on a sustained basis, large new contracts with developing nations. ➔

Picture above shows Saudi King with President Obama | Credit: presstv.ir

It finds that France, Britain, Germany, and Italy collectively held a 13.3% share of all arms transfer agreements with developing nations during 2010. "In the period from 2003 to 2010 they have generally been important participants in the developing world arms market," informs the study.

In fact, individual suppliers within the group of four have had notable years for arms agreements during this period: France in 2009 (\$7.9 billion) and in 2005 (\$5.7 billion); Britain in 2007 (\$10.1 billion) and 2004 (\$4.8 billion); Germany (over \$4.8 billion) in 2008, and in 2006 (\$2.6 billion); and Italy in 2009 (\$2.7 billion).

In the case of all of these West European nations, large agreement totals in one year have usually resulted from the conclusion of large arms contracts with one or a small number of major purchasers in that particular year, notes the report.

Grimmet says, maintaining their market share of the arms trade in the face of the strong demand for U.S. defence equipment, among other considerations, was a key factor in inducing European Union (EU) member states to adopt a new code of conduct for defence procurement practices.

This code was agreed on November 21, 2005, at the European Defence Agency's (EDA) steering board meeting. Currently voluntary, the EU hopes it will become mandatory, and through its mechanisms foster greater cooperation within the European defence equipment sector in the awarding of contracts for defence items.

By successfully securing greater intra-European cooperation in defence program planning, and collaboration in defence contracting, the EU hopes that the defence industrial bases of individual EU states will be preserved, thereby enhancing the capability of European defence firms to compete for arms sales throughout the world.

The report further points out that some European arms companies have begun and others completed the phasing out of production of certain types of weapons systems. "These suppliers have increasingly sought to engage in joint production ventures with other key European weapons suppliers or even client countries in an effort to sustain major sectors of their individual defence industrial bases – even if a substantial portion of the weapons produced are for their own armed forces. Examples are the Eurofighter and Eurocopter projects," says the report.

It adds: A few European suppliers have also adopted the strategy of cooperating in defence production ventures with the United States such as the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), rather than attempting to compete directly, thus meeting their own requirements for advanced combat aircraft while positioning themselves to share in profits resulting from future sales of this new fighter aircraft.

Data in this report are intended to provide a means for Congress to identify existing supplier-purchaser relationships in conventional weapons acquisitions. The report's author hopes "the use of these data can assist Congress in its oversight role of assessing whether the current nature of the international weapons trade affects U.S. national interests."

For most of recent American history, maintaining regional stability and ensuring the security of U.S. allies and friendly nations throughout the world have been important elements of U.S. foreign policy. Knowing the extent to which individual arms suppliers are transferring arms to individual nations or regions provides Congress with a context for evaluating policy questions it may confront.

Such policy questions may include, for example, whether or not to support specific U.S. arms sales to given countries or regions or to support or oppose such arms transfers by other nations. The data in this report may also assist Congress in evaluating whether multilateral arms control arrangements or other U.S. foreign policy initiatives are being supported or undermined by the actions of arms suppliers. ☑



Picture credit: <http://www.crs.gov/>

Cautiously Tasting the Fruits of Arab Spring

By Bernhard Schell



Amr Moussa, former Arab League Secretary-General

AMMAN - As the United States and the Arab world strive to redesign their relationship to derive most benefit from the Arab spring, they realize that an array of misapprehensions is weighing heavily on the horizon, discussions during a World Economic Forum Special Meeting at the Dead Sea revealed.

Former Republican presidential nominee, Senator John McCain from Arizona, tried a fresh cell therapy when he assured that the United States does not fear the political participation of Islamist parties in newly democratic Arab countries. The United States must help the Arab Spring succeed, he said. A free-trade agreement between the U.S. and countries of the region would benefit all, McCain added.

He spelt out this three-point agenda at the World Economic Forum Special Meeting on Economic Growth and Job Creation in the Arab World, which concluded on October 23 at the Dead Sea, Jordan. "Young Arabs want U.S. leadership and access to U.S. technology and investment," McCain pointed out.

President Barack Obama's rival in the 2008 election issued a stern warning to Syrian President Assad. "The Assad regime has spilled too much blood to remain in power. It should not assume that the international community will let it get away with mass murder." He also warned Iran not to try to hijack the Arab Spring.

Responding to the political olive branch, Amr Moussa, Secretary-General of the 22-member League of Arab States (June 2001-June 2011), said: "Arabs have a lot of affection for the U.S., but there are many issues between the MENA (Middle East and North African) countries and the U.S."

Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Principal among those issues is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the question of UN recognition of a

Palestinian state. "We need a solid, productive, equal relationship with the U.S.," Moussa said. He and other panellists welcomed the idea of a free-trade agreement between MENA countries and the U.S. He also called for a revival plan for Egypt in which the U.S. and the Gulf States would contribute money.

The relationship between the United States and the Arab world should be based on transparency, predictability and longevity, urged Anwar M. Gargash, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Several of the Arab panellists criticized the U.S. for adopting a double standard in its dealings with the Arab World, pointing to the 2006 Dubai Ports World affair in which American politicians blocked a UAE company from acquiring a British company that managed several U.S. ports.

Robert D. Hormats, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Economic, Energy and Agricultural Affairs, admitted that current U.S. fiscal problems would constrain Washington to limit financial aid to support the Arab Spring. However, he said that the U.S. Government will use new and innovative techniques to assist Arab countries, such as increasing opportunities for U.S. companies to invest in the region, and provide support for young Arab entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized businesses. ➔

The Special Meeting ended with a call for action and radical change in the region's mindset. "In the Middle East, we need fewer leaders and more doers," said Habib Haddad, Chief Executive Officer of UAE's Wamda and a Co-Chair of the Special Meeting and a Young Global Leader. "We need to be ready to push all the buttons we have," he said. Haddad emphasized that the region needs more courageous investment. "It is not that the region doesn't have money," he said, "it is how we leverage and use it."

Wamda is a platform created by Abraaj Capital, and its subsidiary Riyadh Enterprise Development (RED), to facilitate entrepreneurship in the MENASA (Middle East North Africa & South Asia) region.

Education

Jordan's Queen Rania Al Abdullah spoke of how education and support for small businesses can unlock Arab youth potential. "Partnering with academia, NGOs and the private sector could reposition the Arab world as a hub of creativity and innovation. We have within our people all the potential and power to change our fate," she told participants in a plenary session on Addressing the Employment Challenge.

About one-quarter of young Arabs are unemployed, and the statistic is even higher among women, she said. That costs the region about 15 billion U.S. dollar, cripples communities, hinders development and frustrates an entire generation.

Although many young Arabs possess a dynamic entrepreneurial spirit, the prevalent belief is that traditional public sector jobs are the best route to stable, well-paid employment.

"We have to re-engineer the expectations of our children, instill in them the belief that there are no limits to their aspirations," she said. Education must be reformed so that young people learn the skills required by the job market: problem-solving, teamwork, communication and entrepreneurship.

Governments have a role in clearing red tape, while networks of investors must get involved with innovative funding for schools and start-ups and by offering internships and apprenticeships. "When we create one entrepreneur, they create three or four new jobs, sparking a chain reaction that seemingly does the impossible: create something out of nothing," said Queen Rania.

"We can all do more to encourage young people to take risks, to teach our children to see and foresee the next big opportunity, to nurture the next generation, to break assumptions and confound expectations," she added.

Improvements in people's lives

Translating the political changes of the Arab Spring into improvements in people's lives is the greatest challenge facing governments in the region today. "Unless ordinary people see tangible progress over the next three years, there will be a huge popular backlash," said Tony Blair, UN Middle East Quartet Representative, speaking on a panel about geopolitical trends.

Blair's sense of urgency was shared by former Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Moussa, who endorses proposals for a major international effort to support reform in the region and emphasized that such an effort must be designed to meet the particular needs of states emerging from the upheavals of the past year.

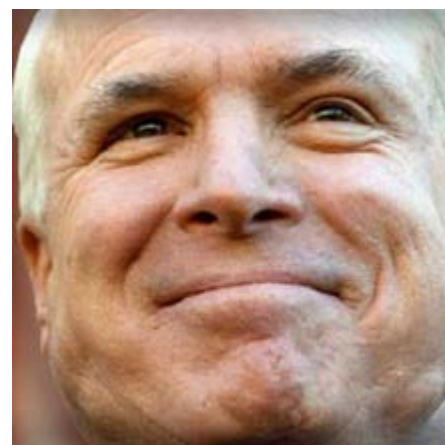
Nasser Sami Judeh, who recently stepped down as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jordan, underscored the urgency: "Young people across the region have fought for change with their blood; we must find ways to meet their aspirations without more violence," he said.

One of the main demands of the Arab street is that its voice be heard and heeded. "People everywhere want to participate in decisions that affect their destiny and we should not expect things to be different in the Arab world" said Barham Salih, Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Iraq.

Building a participatory system takes time, however. "Democracy is not just about voting, it is an attitude of mind that took centuries to evolve in the UK and cannot be achieved in a few weeks or even a few years," said Blair. "Elections are central and people must accept the outcomes," added Moussa.

As people in the Arab world strive for justice within their own societies, a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue remains central to regional stability. Moussa stressed Egypt's commitment to finding a solution. "Peace between Israelis and Palestinians remains the foundation of our foreign policy" he said.

The former Arab League chief is a presidential candidate for the elections in Egypt, which are expected to take place in March or April 2012. For Blair, the Arab Spring offers an opportunity to put the peace process on a more stable path: "It alters the positions of all sides and, in doing so, gives us a chance to make progress." Failure to do so will further complicate the regional picture, he warned. ☑



Picture U.S. Republican Senator McCain | Credit: <http://mccain.senate.gov/public>

Mourning a Calamity, Confronting a Challenge

By Ernest Corea

WASHINGTON DC - The threat of a possible terrorist attack to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the "day of infamy" in 2001 did not materialize, and did not undermine the solemn and moving memorial events that marked the event.

The threat was considered "credible and specific but not corroborated." White House counterterrorism adviser John Brennan speaking at two political talk-shows on September 11 said that the reported threat "is credible in terms of the source that it comes from. And what we're trying to do is to put the pieces together."

He indicated, too, that the reported threat was consistent with information gathered from Osama bin Laden's quarters in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Brennan said: "We know that al-Qaeda has been trying for many years to carry out an attack here on our homeland."



Applause during Concert of Hope | Credit: whitehouse.gov

We know that they have tried to carry out major attacks similar to the 9/11 type of attack that took place 10 years ago. But we also know that they are now trying other types of attacks, maybe smaller attacks using car bombs or other types of things."

Vigilance and the pursuit of counter action continue. On September 11 itself, however, the emphasis was on reflection and remembrance.

Reflective Thoughts

Speaking during a 'Concert for Hope' in

Washington's Kennedy Centre, President Barack Obama captured the reflective nature of the day's events, when he said:

"Ten years ago, America confronted one of our darkest nights. Mighty towers crumbled. Black smoke billowed up from the Pentagon. Airplane wreckage smoldered on a Pennsylvania field. Friends and neighbors, sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters – they were taken from us with a heartbreaking swiftness and cruelty. And on September 12, 2001, we awoke to a world in which evil was closer at hand, and uncertainty clouded our future.

"In the decade since, much has changed for Americans. We've known war and recession, passionate debates and political divides. We can never get back the lives that were lost on that day or the Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in the wars that followed.

"And yet today, it is worth remembering what has not changed. Our character as a nation has not changed. Our faith – in God and in each other – has not changed. Our belief in America, born of a timeless ideal that men and women should govern themselves; that all people are created equal, and deserve the same freedom to determine their own destiny – that belief, through tests and trials, has only been strengthened..."

Other voices were raised as well; those that wondered aloud why the tenth anniversary of other cataclysmic events, including the civil war, did not receive the same attention as this tenth anniversary. Others pointed out that there has been no accountability for the war in Iraq which caused thousands of Americans and Iraqis to "die for a lie", or for the use of torture and rendition when suspected terrorists were interrogated.

Obama, meanwhile, much as he is moved by the calamity that hit the U.S. 10 years ago, cannot dwell only on the past as he continues with the business of governing, and also gears up for the major event in his future; the presidential election of 2012. ➔

Moving Forward

So on the very day after the commemorative events in which he immersed himself, he was back on the issue that is fundamentally important to some 14 million unemployed Americans and their families. Pivoting to the question of jobs is simply a reminder that life must go on, and does.

Obama outlined his jobs plan during a speech to a joint session of the Houses of Congress on the eve of the September 11 commemorations. Details of the plan were fleshed out in draft legislation (The American Jobs Act) that he unveiled at the White House on September 12 and submitted to Congress. A White House summary outlines the main provisions of the legislation as follows

"First, it provides a tax cut for small businesses, not big corporations, to help them hire and expand now and provides an additional tax cut to any business that increases wages.

Second, it puts people back to work, including teachers, first responders and veterans coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan, and construction workers repairing crumbling bridges, roads and more than 35,000 public schools, with projects chosen by need and impact, not earmarks and politics.

Third, it helps out-of-work Americans by extending unemployment benefits to help them support their families while looking for work and reforming the system with training programs that build real skills, connect to real jobs and help the long-term unemployed.

Fourth, it puts more money in the pockets of working and middle class Americans by cutting in half the payroll tax that comes out of every worker's paycheck, saving families an average of \$1,500 a year.

Fifth, it removes the barriers that exist in the current federal refinancing program to help more Americans refinance their mortgages at historically low rates, save money and stay in their homes."

Common Cause

These proposals have been generally well received by economists, with the exception that it has been criticized for not dealing adequately with the problem of foreclosures that has many householders sinking in debt.

Republicans in the House of Representatives have said that the proposals "merit consideration." It should, because it includes proposals that have been floated by both Democrats and Republicans.

Darrel M. West, Vice President and Director of Governance Studies at Brookings Institution points out, for instance, that "the moment provides an opportunity for bipartisan cooperation, if our leaders can find the political will. / Among the measures Obama offered were proposals that can also be found in a plan put forward recently by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, traditionally thought of as a Republican-leaning organization, and in proposals offered by his rivals in the presidential race. And many echoed themes that experts here at Brookings have advocated for some time."

Now, "the devil is in the details," as that old saying goes, and in this case particularly in the details of financing for the jobs package. Obama undertook in his speech to the joint session and in statements elsewhere that the new jobs package would be fully funded. He has now explained that this would be done by raising the taxes of the wealthy to support the needs of the unemployed and indigent. Changes in the tax structure would apply to individuals earning over \$200,000 a year and families earning over \$250,000 a year.

The changes will bring in slightly over the amount required for full funding of the jobs package. Moreover, the principle of taxing the rich to support the less well-endowed has recently been strongly endorsed by some of the country's wealthiest entrepreneurs.

The problem, however, is that most Republican legislators have signed a pledge never, ever to raise taxes in any shape or form. The coming days and weeks will show whether politicians will unite to liberate 14 million unemployed Americans and their families from anxiety and the threat of long-term poverty, or whether a partisan pledge will triumph. ☑



Picture credit: ecosquared.wordpress.com

Shalit Freed, Palestinians Under Duress

By Ernest Corea

WASHINGTON DC - The prisoner-for-prisoners exchange agreement between Hamas, the Palestinian organization that holds sway in Gaza, and the Government of Israel, demolishes the argument that Hamas cannot be included in any negotiating process "because it is a terrorist group."



For the record: the Government of Israel agreed that in exchange for the release of Sergeant Gilad Shalit [in picture], who was abducted and held captive by Hamas for five years, 1027 Palestinians languishing in Israeli prisons – many for periods of well over five years – would be released. The exchange began on October 18 when Shalit returned home as did 477 Palestinians held prisoner in Israel. The final stage of the exchange is scheduled to take place in a month when over 500 Palestinian prisoners are due to be released.

The agreement was reached after protracted negotiations between the two parties. In their most recent phase, Egyptian officials and a publicly un-named German served as intermediaries.

Thus, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's imperious claim that Palestinian Authority president Mohammed Abbas had to choose between partnering with him or with the Hamas leadership now stands exposed as yet another effort to avoid entering into significant peace negotiations.

No wonder President Bill Clinton, commenting on the currently stalled US-sponsored peace talks, said that "a key reason there has been no Israeli-Palestinian peace deal" is the existence of the Netanyahu government.

Neither the Government of Israel nor Hamas can plausibly claim now that seemingly intractable problems cannot be resolved through negotiations if the political will to seek resolution exists on both sides, and negotiations are carried out in good faith.

Peace process

From UN Secretary General Ban ki-moon reacting to the exchange, to Shalit appearing over television in Egypt shortly after his release, hopes have been expressed that the exchange will lead to a continuation of positive developments. Ban described the agreement as a "humanitarian breakthrough" and suggest-

ed that it could lead to a revival of the peace process. Shalit said: "I very much hope that this deal will advance peace." Will it?

Emotional outbursts immediately before and after the exchange began were not encouraging. In Israel, the day before the exchange, courts were filled with angry supporters of petitions seeking judicial intervention to prevent the exchange. The courts did not oblige. On the political front, it was said that the exchange was a one-off deal and would not be repeated.

Reactions from the Hamas side were equally unhelpful, with returned prisoners declaiming that more Israeli soldiers should be abducted in order to seek the release of all Palestinians in Israeli jails. Other harsh words were said as well.

These may be ignored as irrational reactions to an event that caused happiness, but raised concerns. The larger issues – nurturing the state of Palestine, and bringing peace and security to the region – await resolution.

The Middle East Quartet (EU, Russia, UN, and US) are said to be pursuing the resumption of bilateral peace talks between the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel. On the Palestinian side, the Quartet itself is somewhat suspect as an interlocutor because some of its members have been less than supportive of efforts by Palestinians to seek multilateral restitution through the UN, when they were convinced that the Government of Israel was an uncooperative partner in the bilateral peace process.

Flouting laws

The Netanyahu government continues to initiate or approve more and more settlements on Palestinian land, despite an international legal opinion that such construction is illegal because it contravenes the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 which prohibits an occupying power from moving any of its own civilian population into occupied territory. Netanyahu, moreover, has demonstrated his contempt for a presumptive Palestinian state by arguing in advance for shackles to be placed on the state's eventual operations.

He has demanded that a Palestinian state should be totally disarmed (while co-existing with a militarized neighbour), that the air space over Palestine should be under Israeli control (surely a case of air piracy), that Israel would have full control of Jerusalem as its capital, and that the Palestinian state would also have to recognize Israel as a Jewish state in advance, thus eliminating for all time any further discussion of the future of dispersed Palestinians longing for a return to their homeland. ➤

Picture source: Jewish Reporter

To acknowledge that Netanyahu's caveats are illogical, and render negotiations directed at securing their realization meaningless, is not to let Hamas off the hook. Hamas cannot help in nation building efforts, and in creating a regionally and internationally recognised Palestinian state, if it seeks to do so through tactics that include civilians, both adults and children, as its victims. The fact that it has been confronting a militarized, occupying power does not give Hamas an escape hatch through which to get away from its own responsibilities.

Practical approach

Three years ago, Efrain Halevy, Israel's former intelligence chief, interviewed by Mother Jones magazine, said that for pragmatic reasons it made sense to bring Hamas into negotiations. When he was asked whether Hamas should be required to recognise Israel's right to exist before Israel would talk with it, Halevy replied:

"Israel has been successful in inflicting very serious losses upon Hamas in both Gaza and the West Bank and this has certainly had an effect on Hamas but this has not cowed them into submission and into accepting the three-point diktat that the international community has presented to them: to recognize Israel's right to exist; to honor all previous commitments of the Palestinian Authority; and to prevent all acts of violence against Israel and Israelis.

"The last two conditions are, without doubt, sine qua non. The first demands an a priori renunciation of ideology before contact is made. Such a demand has never been made before either to an Arab state or to the Palestine Liberation Organization/Fatah. There is logic in the Hamas' position that ideological 'conversion' is the endgame and not the first move in a negotiation."

The same three-point "diktat" was repeated by State Department deputy spokesman Mark C. Toner on Oct. 18. No mention was made of Halevy's experience-based assessment.

Child victims

Major issues that continuously cause tensions between Israelis and Palestinians are usually discussed in political, diplomatic, and constitutional terms. There is another perspective that cries out to be taken into account as well and this was highlighted by the UN Secretary General when he reacted to the prisoner-for-prisoners exchanges in humanitarian terms.

He could be expected to do so, for only the UN maintains a continuing record of the humanitarian tragedies that are imposed on Palestinians by Israeli occupation, blockades, and so on. These records show that every aspect of Palestinian life is affected and that children, in particular, are hapless victims.

For many Palestinian children, says the UN's Special Committee to investigate Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the territories occupied since 1967, "...life is difficult and the future is hopeless." The committee's assessment was based on testimony concerning "worrying health, psychological and social problems, increasing school drop-out rates, and an increasing incidence of child labor." (A full account of the grim details may be accessed at www.un.org)

International commentators frequently proclaim the need to ensure Israel's security. Indeed. Palestinians need security too: food security, health security, educational security, and others that together provide a full life for adults and children. Palestinians cannot achieve these conditions while living under duress. ☑

Picture credit: feedage.com



The writer has served as Sri Lanka's ambassador to Canada, Cuba, Mexico, and the USA. He was Chairman of the Commonwealth Select Committee on the media and development, Editor of the Ceylon 'Daily News' and the Ceylon 'Observer', and was for a time Features Editor and Foreign Affairs columnist of the Singapore 'Straits Times'. He is Global Editor of IDN-InDepthNews and a member of its editorial board as well as President of the Media Task Force of Global Cooperation Council.

Italy Faulted for Xenophobia and Ignoring Human Rights

By Jaya Ramachadran



STRASBOURG - The 47-nation Council of Europe has faulted Italy for "the presence of racist and xenophobic political discourse" targeting Roma and Sinti, and the protection of the human rights of migrants, including asylum seekers.

The Council's Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, says a racist and xenophobic "type of discourse is a powerful vector of anti-Gypsyism in Italian society and as a result, it also offsets the benefits of social inclusion work for Roma and Sinti carried out around the country."

In a report published in Strasbourg, the Council of Europe's seat, on September 7, 2011 on his visit to Italy in May 2011, Hammarberg [picture right] expresses concern that there has only been a limited response to his repeated calls for "a greater European role, in the form of solidarity and co-operation in meeting the human rights challenges relating to arrivals of migrants, including asylum seekers, from Northern Africa."

He calls on the Italian authorities "to act urgently to address" the phenomenon of racism and xenophobia. The measures he suggests feature self-regulatory initiatives by political parties and a vigorous implementation of the criminal law provisions against racist offences, some of which, according to the Commissioner "also need to be fine-tuned".

"In order to combat anti-Gypsyism, further efforts are needed to promote knowledge of Roma history and culture," he says, and reiterates that "a wide dissemination and use, notably in schools, of the Council of Europe's Fact Sheets on Roma History would make an important contribution to this endeavour."

Evictions, Violent Hate Crime and Statelessness



The Commissioner's report points to widespread evictions in recent years of Roma and Sinti from settlements in Italy, often in manners that are at variance with human rights standards. "The declared state of 'Nomad emergency' together with the legislation and extraordinary powers flowing from it, have provided the bedrock for the development of these practices, which have had a negative impact on the enjoyment by Roma and Sinti not only of the right to housing, but also of other human rights, including children's right to education," says the report.

The Commissioner urges the Italian authorities to act in accordance with international and Council of Europe standards in the field of housing and evictions, and to bring the situation fully into line with the revised European Social Charter, in light of the findings of the Committee of Social Rights in its June 2010 decision Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) against Italy.

"Reported instances of anti-Roma violence at the hands of private individuals, but also sometimes by law enforcement officials, point to a continuing need for the Italian authorities to improve their response to racially-motivated violence in general," says the report.

The Commissioner calls on the Italian authorities to respect the relevant Council of Europe standards and use the latter's extensive guidance on both improving the response of the police to racist offences and on combating racially-motivated misconduct by the police. "In particular, the system for monitoring racist incidents and racist offences could be improved through the introduction of a more flexible and victim-friendly system of reporting and recording relevant incidents," he says.

The report points out that many Roma who came to Italy from the former Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 70s and during the war in the 1990s still live in Italy today without Italian or any other citizenship. Their descendants, whose number is currently estimated at around 15 000, are also de facto stateless in Italy in spite of having been born and lived there all their lives.

The Commissioner urges the Italian authorities to address this situation. He also reiterates his call for the ratification by Italy of the European Convention on Nationality without reservations.

Hammarberg sees a continuing need for a national strategy for the social inclusion of Roma and Sinti in Italy that would provide coherence to and support efforts at regional and local level in this field. As an interim step towards such a strategy, the Commissioner suggests the establishment of a task force at national level, which would support and service a network of regional and local stakeholders that are active in social inclusion work for Roma and Sinti. ➔

"In order to maximise the strategy's chances of producing long-term results, it should focus more heavily on social inclusion, non-discrimination and combating anti-Gypsyism and less on coercive measures such as forcible evictions and expulsions," says the report.

Human Rights of Migrants

Commissioner Hammarberg has on many occasions called for a greater European role, in the form of solidarity and co-operation in meeting the human rights challenges relating to arrivals of migrants, including asylum seekers, from Northern Africa, but the response has been limited.

The report points out that following the political unrest in Tunisia and the armed conflict in Libya, the number of migrants, including asylum seekers, arriving on boats to Italy, and in particular Lampedusa, has increased sharply.

Since mid-January, approximately 24 000 people have arrived from Tunisia. At the end of March 2011, migrants also started to arrive on boats from Libya – the biggest groups being nationals of Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Ivory Coast, Bangladesh, Eritrea and Somalia – and by June 23, 2011 their number had almost reached 20 000.

In addition to arrivals from Tunisia and Libya, some 2 000 migrants landed in southern Italy on boats coming from Egypt, Greece and Turkey. On June 23, the total figure of arrivals by sea to Italy since January 2011 therefore stood at around 46 000.

"It is clear that these events pose a number of challenges relating to a wide range of human rights, including the right to seek asylum and the right to life, notably in connection with rescue operations at sea. With most of the migrants from Northern Africa seeking refuge and a new life in 'Europe' generally, and not specifically in the countries that they reach first, the European dimension of these challenges is equally clear," says the report.

The ongoing military operations in Libya, and their impact on migratory movements bound to Europe, has lent further visibility to this European and international dimension. The Commissioner stresses the need for Italy to abide by its human rights obligations vis-à-vis all migrants, including asylum seekers, who find themselves within Italy's jurisdiction. This is a responsibility which in the Commissioner's view has not been met fully.

More generally, the Commissioner stresses that a more objective and balanced representation of the migration movements prompted by the events in Northern Africa, and notably the conflict in Libya, would assist in ensuring a human rights compliant response to these phenomena in both Italy and Europe as a whole.

In this respect, the Commissioner notes that the 20 000 arrivals from Libya to Italy mentioned above stand, at least for the moment, in stark contrast with the many times greater forecasts concerning the potential number of arrivals from Libya which had been made publicly in Italy at the beginning of the conflict.

"It is also sobering to note that these arrivals account for around 2% of the persons having left Libya as a result of the conflict. Indeed, 98% of the approximately 1 100 000 people who have left Libya so far have done so by crossing land borders into Tunisia, Egypt, Niger, Chad and Algeria," says the report.

The Commissioner also notes that since May 2009, and up to the beginning of the armed conflict in Libya in February 2011, the Italian authorities have carried out operations jointly with Libya in the central Mediterranean, aimed at intercepting migrants fleeing Libya on boats and returning them there (so-called respingimenti, or push-backs).

"The practice has been repeatedly criticised for violating international human rights law, as migrants, including asylum seekers, are returned to Libya where they risk being ill-treated or in turn deported to other countries where they are exposed to such a risk, without being given an opportunity to seek and enjoy international protection through an individual assessment of their case," says the report.



Old Practices to Continue

Indeed, in a case that is currently pending before the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights, a group of Somali and Eritrean migrants who were travelling by boat from Libya have argued that the decision of the Italian authorities to intercept their vessels on the high seas and send them straight back to Libya exposed them to a risk of ill-treatment there, as well as to a serious threat of being sent back to their countries of origin, where they might also face ill-treatment.

The Commissioner notes that the beginning of these operations started shortly after the conclusion of agreements between Italy and Libya in 2008 and 2009. In his 2009 report on Italy, Hammarberg expressed "his disapproval of bilateral or multilateral agreements for the forced return of irregular migrants to countries with long-standing, proven records of torture", a concern which was shared by the Parliamentary Assembly in June 2010.

In February 2011, following the beginning of the armed conflict in Libya, Italy announced that it had suspended the implementation of its agreements with Libya. However, the Commissioner also notes that on June 17, 2011, Italy signed with the Libyan National Transitional Council a Memorandum of Understanding, which refers to the commitments contained in the agreements previously signed with Libya and provides for mutual assistance and co-operation in combating irregular immigration, "including the repatriation of immigrants in an irregular situation." ☑

What About Civil Liberties and Cultural Diversity?

By Kalinga Seneviratne*

SINGAPORE - While marking the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, media around the world is asking the question whether the threat from Al-Qaeda has receded. But what we should also be asking is whether civil liberties and respect for cultural diversity around the world are improving as a result.



Nine days after the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush addressing a joint session of the U.S. Congress and the American people said: "They (Al Qaeda) hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other."

Perhaps he was correct. But, if we look back on the decade since this statement and the so-called "war on terror" which followed, we must ask the question how much of these freedoms, he referred to, are intact today. Also whether political correctness – which was a hallmark of evolving multiculturalism in the Western world, particularly in Europe and Australia – has taken a backwards step.

A couple of years before the 9/11 attacks, the then U.S. Vice-President Al Gore addressing an APEC conference dinner in Kuala Lumpur hailed Malaysia's 'Reformasi' movement which was campaigning to abolish the Internal Security

Act (ISA), and then rudely walked out of the function room to the horror of the host, the then Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

After 9/11 as part of the war on terror, U.S. and its western allies like the UK, Denmark, Netherlands, France, Germany, Australia and many others have passed a rash of legislation such as the 'U.S. Patriotic Act' and other anti-terror laws, which even go further than the ISAs. It is now a well-known fact that terror suspects have been held for years without trial (such as in Guantanamo Bay) and worse they have been flown to secret locations in different countries where they may have been tortured.

These laws and actions have been criticized by human rights groups, within western countries, for curtailing basic freedoms. After Australia passed a draconian anti-terror law in 2005, Nobel-prize winning author J.M. Coetzee, a South African living in Australia said upon reading the bill: "I used to think the people who created (South Africa's) apartheid laws that effectively suspended the rule of law were moral barbarians. Now I know they were pioneers ahead of time-".

After the British government rushed through parliament the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, Ben Ward, special counsel in Europe for the New York based Human Rights Watch said: "First we had indefinite detention, now we have curfews and tagging – but still without trial. The government refuses to acknowledge the basic truth: punishment without trial is unacceptable, no matter what."

The 9/11 attacks came at a time when the West was taking an enlightened approach to multiculturalism and racism, after decades of campaigning and intellectual interventions by people of colour (such as Edward Said and Stuart Hall).

It was also a time when the global economic justice movement mistakenly called the "anti-globalisation movement" by the mainstream western media, led by civil society groups in both the rich Northern countries and the poor Southern countries was gathering momentum, after their success in closing down the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting in Seattle in 1999. ➡

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Picture Credit: GlobalSecurity.org

For many people of colour – it does not matter if you are Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or even Christian (remember the Catholic Brazilian who was gunned down by the London police in 2005 because they suspected he was a Muslim suicide bomber) – the global war on terror has become a war against them.

My Non-White Danish Friend

I visited a Danish friend of mine in Copenhagen last year (2010). Born and bred in Denmark as a Christian by his White Danish mother, he has a tan skin complexion because his father is from South Asia. His White Danish wife told me that in recent years, when they return to Denmark from overseas trips he gets pulled aside by immigration authorities for a security check. His wife and children who don't have the tan complexion are never checked. Now in his late 50s, my friend is having serious question marks about his Danish identity.

A Pakistani born Danish citizen who is a Muslim and a lecturer at a local university told me that the word migrant is associated with coloured Muslims in Denmark, and you don't need to be a Muslim to be associated as such and suspected. He pointed out to me a recent newspaper article there which reported that increasing number of "migrant" women were going to government funded shelters for abused women to escape from domestic violence.

People immediately associated this with Muslim men abusing their wives at home and it fitted in well with their stereotype of Islam, and why Muslim migrants don't fit into the Danish society. In fact, what was happening was that these were Filipino and Thai women who were escaping from their abusive White Danish husbands many of whom were alcoholics.

I am a Buddhist Australian of Sri Lankan descent, yet, a couple of years ago when I arrived at Brisbane airport – ironically on the invitation of the Australian Journalism Education Association to give a keynote address to their annual conference on reporting in the age of terrorism – I was questioned at the airport by a security officer while I was waiting for my bags to come through, who I presume, suspected that I was traveling on a fake Australian passport.

Asia has unfortunately absorbed this ingrained racism in the war on terror. I go to Bangkok often for work-related visits, and my bags are always scanned by an x-ray machine by customs officers there. This only happened after the 'war on terror' era began, and I have noticed that they only scan baggage of people of colour – not of East Asians or Caucasians.

Recently I was so offended by the behaviour of the Thai customs officials, that I wrote a letter to the editor of The Nation about the fact that Asians should be careful of absorbing the racism ingrained in the war on terror, if we are to develop greater regional cooperation. Otherwise the Indian sub-continent region and East Asia could drift apart. I also pointed out in the letter that for 20 years Thai Buddhist monks have been performing our family religious functions in Australia, including my father's funeral service in Sydney, yet, when I arrive in Bangkok they seem to view me as a suspected Muslim terrorist.

I have often been told by Thai and Filipino friends when I mention these type of experiences I come across in Asia, that "you look like a Muslim". I ask them "what do you mean?" On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks it is time that we sit back and think, what has it done to race relations, concepts of justice and civil liberties, and how can we develop cross-cultural communication strategies that recognize and respect diversity. This is a better weapon against terror than drone aircrafts and x-ray scans.

Recent terror attacks in Norway are a good reminder that terrorism and intolerance is not the domain of one particular religion or colour of people. Religious diversity has been part and parcel of Asian societies for centuries, whereas it is a new phenomenon in Europe. Thus it is high time that we in Asia take a lead in developing proper cross-cultural educational programs to educate both the media practitioners and the public on how to understand and live in harmony with cultural and religious diversity. ☑



From top to bottom: the World Trade Center burning; a section of The Pentagon collapses; Flight 175 crashes into 2 WTC; a fireman requests help at Ground Zero; an engine from Flight 93 is recovered; Flight 77 crashes into the Pentagon. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Afghanistan Has Its Own 'Guantánamo'

By Richard Johnson



Credit: www2.macleans.ca

GENEVA - The United Nations has revealed the existence of a Guantánamo-like system in Afghanistan, operated by the country's security agencies and aided and abetted by western nations contributing troops to the International Security Assistance Forces deployed for the last ten years to bring democracy to the Hindukush.

Guantánamo, also known as G-Bay, Gitmo or GTMO, is an acronym for the Guantánamo Bay detention and interrogation camp of the United States located within Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. The facility was established in 2002 by the Bush Administration to hold detainees from the war in Afghanistan and later Iraq.

Principal agencies accused of perpetrating torture and charged with other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment of those suspected of being Taliban fighters, suicide attack facilitators, producers of improvised explosive devices, and others implicated in crimes associated with the armed conflict in Afghanistan, are the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and the Afghanistan National Police (ANP).

This dramatic revelation of a system akin to 'GTMO' or Iraq's notorious Abu Gharib prison emerges from investigations carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which interviewed 379 pre-trial detainees and convicted prisoners at 47 detention facilities in 22 provinces across Afghanistan between October 2010 and August 2011. Altogether, 324 of the 379 persons interviewed were detained by NDS and ANP, according to a new report.

"UNAMA's detention observation included interviews with 89 detainees who reported the involvement of international military forces either alone or together with Afghan forces in their capture and transfer to NDS or ANP custody. UNAMA found compelling evidence that 19 of these 89 detainees were tortured in NDS custody and three in ANP custody," the UN informed on October 10, 2011.

In an apparent reference to practices reminiscent of the infamous rendition by the United States, UNAMA reminds foreign military forces: "Rules of the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) also state that consistent with international law, persons should not be transferred under any circumstances where there is a risk they will be subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment."

UNAMA found "compelling evidence" that 125 of the 273 detainees interviewed – who had been in NDS detention – "experienced interrogation techniques at the hands of NDS officials that constituted torture, and that torture is practiced systematically in a number of NDS detention facilities throughout Afghanistan."

The 84-page UNAMA document says: "Nearly all detainees tortured by NDS officials reported the abuse took place during interrogations and was aimed at obtaining a confession or information. In almost every case, NDS officials stopped the use of torture once detainees confessed to the crime of which they were accused or provided the requested information." UNAMA also found that children under the age of 18 years experienced torture by NDS officials. ➔

"More than one third of the 117 conflict-related detainees UNAMA interviewed who had been in ANP detention experienced treatment that amounted to torture or to other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment," the report states.

UNAMA takes note that Canada, Britain and the United States ceased transfers of detainees to NDS facilities in Kandahar and Kabul "at various times in recent years based on reports of torture and ill-treatment or implemented post-transfer monitoring schemes allowing them to track the treatment of detainees their armed forces handed over to Afghan authorities."

But its firm advice to harbingers of democracy in Afghanistan is: "The situation described in this report of transfer to a risk of torture speaks to the need for robust oversight and monitoring of all transfers of detainees to NDS and ANP custody by international military forces in Afghanistan, and suspension of transfers to facilities where credible reports of torture exist."

The report contains shocking evidence of Afghan security agencies resorting to practices similar to those in GTMO and Abu Gharib. One detainee is quoted saying: "When they took me to [Department 90], I did not know where I had been taken. . . . After two days, I learned (from my cellmates) that I was in 90. There is so much beating at 90 that people call it Hell."

'90' is the acronym for the national facility of the Counter-Terrorism Department – known as Department 90/124 – of NDS, Afghanistan's principal internal and external intelligence-gathering organ that plays a key operational role, arresting and interrogating persons suspected of security-related offences.

While it received its current name after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, says the UNAMA report, it is "among the most enduring of the State's institutions, with many of its institutional structures, personnel, facilities and legal regulations dating back to the communist period."

In 1978, the Afghan government established the Da Afghanistan da Gato da Saatane Adara, but later replaced it with Kargari Estekhbarati Muassesa (KAM) in 1979. Khadimate Ettala'ate Dawlati (KhAD) came into being in 1980, but was re-named Wezarate Amniyate Dawlati (WAD) when it became a full ministry in 1986.

The institution continued to operate during the Mujahdeen era (1979-1989), the Afghan civil war (1989-1996) and, during the Taliban rule (September 1996- October 2001) when it was known as the Islamic Intelligence Service of Afghanistan.

At the Department 90 torture facility, which UNAMA investigators were not allowed to visit, NDS interrogates "high value" suspects – including persons suspected of being Anti-Government commanders or of having been involved in high-profile attacks.

Eleven of those whom UNAMA interviewed said they were initially detained by NDS, "Afghan Special Forces", "campaign forces" or unidentified armed Afghan men. Seventeen stated they were initially detained in operations involving small numbers of international military forces usually described as "special forces" along with "Afghan Special Forces", "campaign

forces", "quick reaction forces", or unidentified armed Afghan men. None reported being detained by regular ANP or Afghan National Army (ANA). Detainees reported being held in NDS Department 90/124 for an average of 15 days.

The UNAMA cites another detainee: "[NDS officials] bound my hands and attached them to metal bars on the window high above my head. They used both a chain and shackles to hold my hands there. I could not touch the floor at all. It was before darkness [evening] when they released me from this.

"Every hour, someone came and asked me if I was ready to confess, ready to accept my crime [alleged membership in a terrorist group]. Then they left again and locked the door. . . . Then, on the next night, they took me out of my cell. It was about 3:30 in the morning. I was in a very bad condition when they woke me up. They took me back to the interrogation section . . . to the first 'manager' – the [NDS] man I saw on the first night. He showed me a cable and said, 'I will shock you with electricity'.

"And then he shocked me [displays visible injury]. After that, I did not know where I was or who I was. When I was okay again, I saw that I was back in my cell. But both of my thumbs had ink on them. I did not know it, but they had taken my thumbprints [as proof of a confession]." - Detainee 82, held in an NDS facility in Khost, eastern Afghanistan.

UNAMA has asked the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners to address and end the practice of torture and ill-treatment, and arbitrary detention in all NDS and ANP facilities. "Troop Contributing Countries and Concerned States" should in particular:

- Suspend transfer of detainees to those NDS and ANP units and facilities where credible allegations or reports of torture and ill-treatment have been made pending a full assessment. Review monitoring practices at each NDS facility where detainees are transferred and revise as necessary to ensure no detainees are transferred to a risk of torture.

- Review policies on transferring detainees to ANP and NDS custody to ensure adequate safeguards and use participation in joint operations, funding arrangements, the transition process, intelligence liaison relationships and other means to stop the use of torture and promote reforms by NDS and ANP.

- Build the capacity of NDS and ANP facilities and personnel including through mentoring and training on the legal and human rights of detainees and detention practices in line with international human rights standards.

- Increase efforts to support training to all NDS and ANP interrogators and their supervisors in lawful and effective interrogation methods, and alternative investigative approaches (such as forensics).

UNAMA has urged the Afghan government to develop the necessary legal framework and procedures to regulate the NDS, and make these public. It should ensure that legal procedures provide for external investigation and prosecution of allegations of serious criminal conduct, including torture and ill-treatment of detainees by NDS officials, in the civilian criminal justice system. ☑



Herero survivors after an escape through the arid desert of Omaheke | Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Germany Scuttles Herero Demands

By Karina Boeckmann

BERLIN - The German government is insisting that it will neither render an apology nor pay any reparations to the Herero and Nama who suffered the first genocide of the 20th century that took place between 1904 and 1907 in German South-West Africa – modern-day Namibia – during the scramble for Africa.

A chilling account of the "killing fields" of Namibia has been published in 2010 by David Olusoga and Casper W Erichsen under the provocative title 'The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism'.

"When the Great Powers partitioned Africa in 1884, unfortunately we were allotted to the Germans," said Advocate Krukoro from the Ovaherero Genocide Committee, one of the 60 Namibian delegates, during the Berlin visit from September 27 to October 2, 2011.

In 1904 some 17,000 German colonial troops commanded by General Lothar von Trotha started a brutal extermination war on Herero and Nama to suppress revolt against the continued deprivation of land and rights. After their defeat at Waterberg on August 11, 1904 they were chased, murdered or driven deep into the Omaheke desert where they died of thirst under the eyes of the German soldiers.

Thousands of men, women and children were later interned in German concentration camps and died of malnutrition and disease. The territories of Herero and Nama were expropriated, their community life and means of production destroyed. Although being a crime against the Law of Nations the discussion about the mass murder of Namibian peoples didn't start until Namibian independence in 1990.

"According to the authors," wrote Ian Thomson in a review for The Telegraph in August 2010, "the 'killing fields' of Namibia presaged not only Hitler's genocidal madness, but served as inspiration for the dictator's hoped-for empire in the European east, where Jews and Slavs were seen as 'subhuman'. In the previous century, German settlers had been encouraged by the Kaiser to scorn the Judaeo-Christian morality of compassion for the weak and view the African tribes in their midst as metamorphosed apes. ("Exterminate all the brutes!" exclaims Conrad's European trader Kurtz.)" ➔

Before a delegation of Namibian government representatives and leaders of the indigenous Herero and Nama travelled to Germany in September 2011 to repatriate 20 skulls of their ancestors, stolen by the former colonial 'Kaiserreich' for racial research, the German government asked the delegation not to raise the reparations issue.

According to the Namibian Sun, the demand was made in a memo sent by the German government to Namibia's Foreign Affairs Ministry. "For a smooth flow of procedures, the German government will not allow an opportunity to discuss reparation," read the memo.

Nevertheless, the delegation not only demanded reparations from the German public, but also an apology for the mass murder of 80,000 Herero and Nama. "We have finally come to demand reparation in order to close this dark chapter of our history in the service of a sustained and everlasting reconciliation that is imperative for both Germans and Namibians to live side by side in peace and prosperity," the secretary and liaison officer of the Ovaherero/ Ovambanderu Council for the Dialogue on the 1904 Genocide, Ueriuka Tjikua, told journalists.

Ignoring the memo, Tjikua said what had happened to the OvaHerero, OvaMbanderu and Nama people in Namibia was not something that can be wished away by the Germans. "The issue of genocide and reparation will continue to haunt the Germans for decades to come if this matter is not attended to, addressed and resolved amicably to the satisfaction of all stakeholders," he said.



German Schutztruppe in combat with the Herero in a painting by Richard Knötel. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Marshall Plan

Tjikua said a Marshall Plan was implemented for Germany after World War II. "Why not construct a similar plan for the descendants of the genocide survivors? We are human beings too, like the Jews who suffered the same fate. Therefore, it is only fair and just to demand the restitution of the losses and irreparable damage caused by the colonial German government. You are giving us the skulls today – where is the flesh?" he asked.

Tjikua said they had gone to Germany in peace and to receive the mortal remains of their forefathers and mothers as well as to return them to the land of their ancestors.

"We expect to be provided with the research findings since these remains (skulls) were stolen and brought to Germany for research purposes. We have therefore a vested interest to know and learn how the intellectual capacity of the black people differs to those of the Germans, as the racists and fascists on this planet earth would like us to believe," he added.

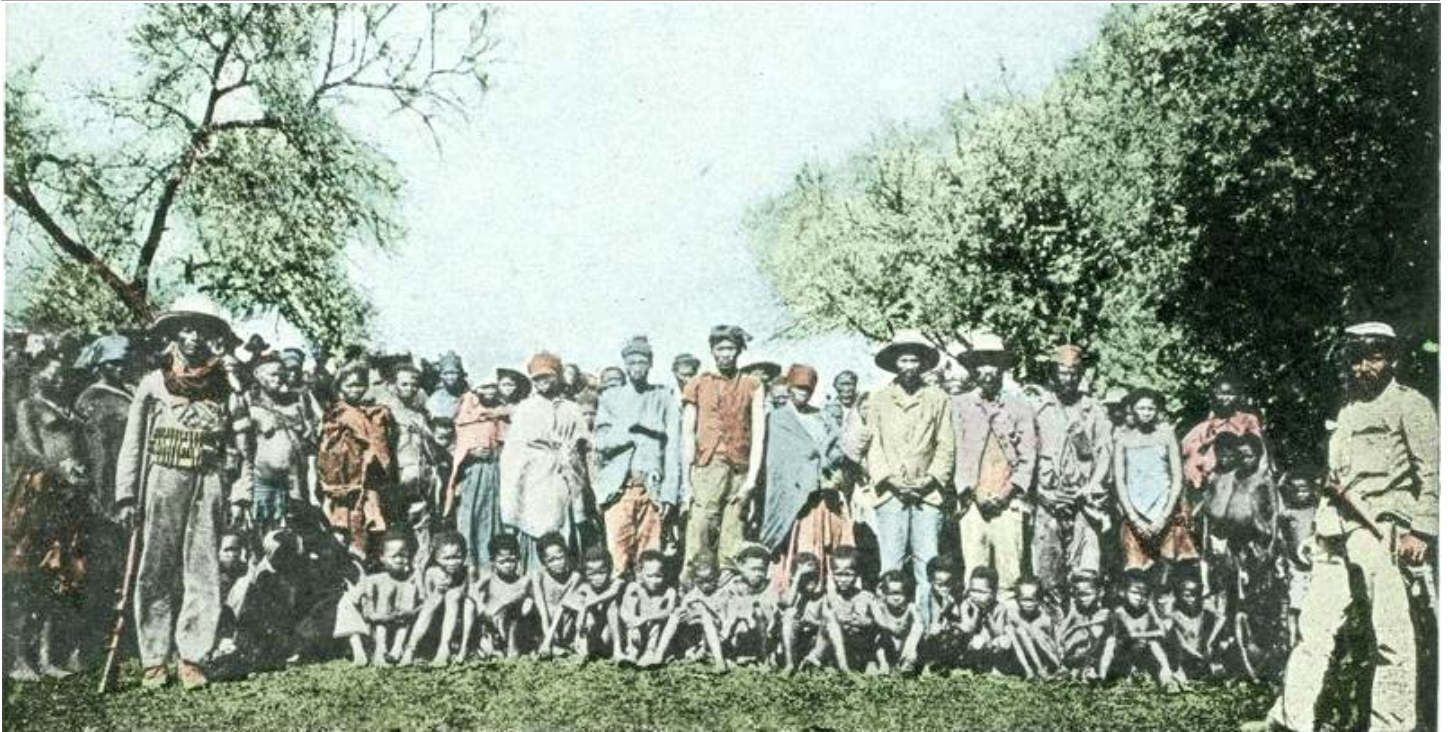
Tjikua said the purpose of the mission to Germany was to extend a hand of friendship to all Germans and to invite the German Government to accept a call to engage both the Namibian and German governments in a Structured Dialogue for Restorative Justice. "We are fully aware that human remains (skulls) in Germany amount to hundreds, if not thousands, and we therefore appeal to the German Government and other institutions, whether private or public, to release all Namibian remains (skulls) to be returned to their country of origin in the near future," he said.

"Historic Responsibility"

The German Foreign Ministry has routinely avoided the use of the term "genocide" in dismissing the Hereros' and Namas' claims for compensation and instead chosen vague terms such as "Germany's historic responsibility with respect to Namibia".

"The transfer of these skulls today to the government of the Republic of Namibia reminds of a dark and painful chapter in our common German-Namibian history. During the German colonial rule in Namibia it came to a bloody repression of revolts in former German-South West Africa by imperial colonial troops, in which several members of the Namibian People were killed," said the State Minister in the German Foreign Office Cornelia Pieper on September 30 at Charité University in Berlin that hosted the ceremony in which the skulls of nine Herero and eleven Nama were returned to the Namibian delegation.

The remains of four females, 15 males and one child were part of the Charité anatomic collection. They were used by German scientists to prove the alleged racial superiority of white Europeans over black Africans. Now, 100 years later, the chairman of the executive board of the 300-year old institution, Karl Max Einhaeupl, has deplored "the crimes perpetrated in the name of a perverted concept of scientific progress", and said: "We sincerely apologize". ➔



Herero prisoners of war in 1904 | Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Pieper declared that Germans acknowledge and accept the heavy moral and historical responsibility toward Namibia. She referred to two resolutions of German Parliament in the years 1989 and 2004. But in fact, both resolutions are vague and spare a clear German apology and a compensation offer to the descendants of the victims of German colonial rule.

The treatment of Herero and Nama in Namibia – mass extermination on the ground of racism, extermination through labour, expropriation of Namibian peoples of land and cattle, research to prove the alleged racial superiority of white Europeans – was the seed that later bred the Jewish Holocaust (1933-1945).

"Bastard studies"

The German professor of medicine, anthropology and eugenics, Eugen Fischer, who in the former German colony conducted "bastard studies" on the offspring of German or Boer and native Namibian women, later became the teacher of Josef Mengele who tortured thousands prisoners in Hitler's concentration camps to death. "The Germans have forgotten what they did to our peoples. Men, women and children were murdered," said Ida Hoffman, member of the committee that had prepared the travel to Germany. "German soldiers raped our women and fathered our children. Their blood is in our blood," she said.

Berlin consistently refuses to pay reparations to its former colony arguing that it has been providing development assistance: some 500 million Euros since Namibian independence. But Herero and Nama said that this money never reached them. "We want an official apology from the German government," Supreme Chief Alfons Maharero said. State Minister Pieper left the ceremony at Charité after protests against the choice of terms in her speech like "reconciliation" and "killings" that were countered with "apologize/reparations now" and "murders". She left shortly after finishing her statements and only seconds before the Namibian Minister of Culture, Kazenambo Kazenambo, rose to speak.

"Imagine a German state minister leaves a hall where a ceremony is being held to repatriate the human remains of victims of German genocide without hearing the delegation head, a Namibian minister, and without hearing what the highest representative of the Nama and Herero has to say. She has no sense of dignity and honour. She left behind the display of human remains of the first German genocide and the first German concentration camp", said Yonas Endrias, a political scientist from Berlin.

"Germany is in big part responsible for the dire situation of the Herero and Nama in Namibia," said Hewat Beukes from the Nama Genocide Committee. "The crimes committed against the Namibian Peoples did not stop in 1907. The ever-intensifying consequences remain with an impoverished nation on all levels and is leading to social and cultural disintegration."

After the "Kaiser's Holocaust" the German State confiscated most arable land and handed vast tracks to German settlers. As these farmers prospected, the indigenous people impoverished and Herero and Nama today are the poorest of the poor. "Unemployment in Namibia officially stands at 52 per cent, but we now know that Government statisticians were ordered to twist the figures as the true percentage of unemployment is much higher", Beukes said. "Such horrendous unemployment takes place in the face of enormously abundant resources: diamonds, gold, uranium, copper, fish and now oil," he added. ☑

The Enduring Fact of Slavery

By Tina Davis



In 2005 I was asked to work on an international documentary film about modern slavery. I knew a bit about human trafficking and child labour, but I really had no clue about the scope of slavery in today's world. When I heard the word "slavery," the images that came to mind were pictures from my schoolbooks of slave ships and people in chains. It was not something I associated with our times.

I then spent two years traveling to some 10 countries investigating modern slavery. I met with experts and people who either were slaves or had been enslaved, trying to understand both the causes and effects of this horrible crime, as well as possible solutions. Investigating slavery has taught me more about freedom than anything else.

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I then spent two years traveling to some 10 countries investigating modern slavery. I met with experts and people who either were slaves or had been enslaved, trying to understand both the causes and effects of this horrible crime, as well as possible solutions. Investigating slavery has taught me more about freedom than anything else.

According to the international anti-slavery organization Free the Slaves, there are 27 million people living in slavery around the world at this very moment—people trapped and held against their will, forced to work and not paid for their labor; people who can't just walk away. This is the highest number of people ever to be enslaved at one time in history, more than the entire amount of people enslaved during the 350-year period of the transatlantic slave trade. This is the reality even though slavery is illegal in every country in the world today. So how is this possible?

Endless numbers of people live in conditions of extreme vulnerability as a result of poverty, conflict, natural disasters and other causes. Their vulnerability makes them easy prey for slaveholders who only have one thing in mind: profit. The mechanisms of slavery are very similar regardless of whether it happens in the UK, in Cambodia or any other place in the world. Usually people are lured by the promise of a job; they are asked to take a journey with the people who hire them, and only once they have arrived at their destination does the brutal reality of their enslavement become clear. They are forced to work for no pay beyond subsistence, often in very dire conditions. They are controlled by violence and unable to leave. The traditional chains of slavery are gone, but they are bound by psychological chains of fear, threat and oppression that are just as powerful. Slavery is a global phenomenon. There are, for example, an estimated 14,500 to 17,500 people brought to the US each year to be used as slaves. ➔



Picture above: Slave laborers at a brickworks in Uttar Pradesh break for their daily meal
[From the documentary film *Modern Slavery* by Tina Davis]

Tina Davis is a Norwegian documentary-maker, writer and TV producer. She is also a board member of the Norwegian Anti-Slavery Association. Her documentary *Modern Slavery* won the award for Best Documentary in 2009 at the Norwegian National Amanda Film Awards and the Special Recognition Award in 2010 at Human Doc International Film Festival in Poland. She is currently writing a book about human trafficking.

In making the documentary we spotlighted different forms of slavery that exist today. We filmed human stories of people who had been held in child sex slavery in Cambodia, as child soldiers in northern Uganda, in bonded labor in India, in sex trafficking in Moldova and in domestic slavery in France. Most of these stories were of people who had managed to get free of slavery and were now rebuilding their lives. Their strength and resilience amazed me. Some were even using their newfound freedom to help liberate others from the same horrific plight they had endured.

Even though the individuals we met were from different parts of the world and had been forced into different forms of slavery, their personal experiences were surprisingly similar. The way their personalities had been systematically broken so that they would obey their slaveholders, the intense fear that kept them trapped, the shame they carried for some of the things they had been forced to do, and the strong wish for freedom that had kept them alive.

Vulnerable Lives

India was the first place we visited, where I saw what slavery looks like in real life. In a brickworks in the remote countryside of Uttar Pradesh, whole families lived in tiny makeshift huts. It felt like being a hundred years back in time. These were people trapped in debt bondage, a common form of slavery in India today. A contractor comes and offers them work and gives them a small advance. They are then transported to another part of the country unfamiliar to them. People in this form of bondage are mostly illiterate and lack understanding about the workings of money, loans and interest. They are told they have to work off the advance before they are paid any wages. The advance sum can be as small as \$20, and yet whole families often end up working year in and year out without clearing this debt. In some cases they get a small allowance for food. If they complain or try to leave, they are beaten. However long they work, their slaveholders decide that the debt just never gets paid off.

We filmed here every day for about a month, and we soon got into the same monotonous daily rhythm as the slaves. We would find silly things to laugh about together, and they enjoyed the interest we showed in their work. Soon my small team and I became part of the scenery. They would notice when I was challenged by the intense heat and offer me water, and they offered to share whatever little food they had with us. The slaves had to perform very hard labor in the boiling heat every day amongst endless rows of bricks in what seemed like the world's most forgotten place. Soon the days started to blend into each other, and we lost our sense of time. After a while we started feeling trapped too.

Then the day came when we were to leave. We said our goodbyes, got into the car, and as we drove away, I experienced the most painful moment of all during my period of working with slavery. I knew we could go to the hotel, take a warm shower, and then fly back home. The slaves who had become our friends could not leave, and we couldn't do anything there and then to help them without jeopardizing their safety. We could walk away and go back to our lives in freedom. They were stuck there.

Slavery is not something that affects only people from developing countries. And vulnerable life situations are not the only factor that put people at risk. Slavery only becomes possible when there is an absence of the rule of law--weak law implementation and law enforcement as well as corruption. This, together with the enormous numbers of vulnerable people around the world, explains why there are as many as 27 million slaves today.

But the situation is far from hopeless. There are concrete solutions to the problem of slavery. Around the world there are courageous people working on the ground to liberate and rehabilitate slaves. Often they work in very dangerous situations, and they work not only to free slaves but also to help build sustainable freedom for them. Their efforts are giving former slaves the chance to build lives of dignity, financial autonomy and citizenship.

According to Kevin Bales, president of Free the Slaves, the average cost of building sustainable freedom for a former slave is US\$400. A person who has been liberated through this process is able to be productively reintegrated into their local community. Slave labor generates some US\$40 billion of the global economy. But this is only a tiny portion of the total global economy. Unlike at other periods in history, the global economy does not depend on slave labour. There is wide moral agreement around the world that slavery is unacceptable. Slavery is illegal in every country of the world, and many of the necessary mechanisms to tackle slavery are in place. All of these factors mean that it is now a very realistic goal to finally eradicate slavery once and for all, for the first time in history.

A major obstacle in achieving a slave-free world is the lack of public awareness. It is ignorance of the slavery in our own backyards that allows it to thrive. But as awareness of the problem grows and slavery is exposed, we can begin to really eradicate it with the goal to secure freedom for all. If we fail to do this, I wonder, can any of us be truly free? [Courtesy of SGI Quarterly July 2011]



Rania arrived in Paris from Morocco as a child. Acquaintances of her family had promised she would have the chance of an education and a better life. Instead, she was forced to work as a maid for no pay. She was unable to leave the house or to receive schooling. Today, as an adult, Rania has been helped to go to court against her former slaveholders

Japan Seeks Partners in Eco Project

By Taro Ichikawa

TOKYO - Japanese logistics enterprises have approached their counterparts in Germany to explore possibilities of learning from each other's experiences the best ways to exercise social and environmental responsibility in managing smooth flow of goods.

Logistics enterprises in Germany contribute some 7.5 percent to the gross national product (GNP) with an annual turnover of 150 billion Euros, and are blessed with a growth rate of 6 percent a year.

This booming sector of the economy provides jobs to some 170,000 people, comprising 9 percent of the total workforce in the national capital region Berlin-Brandenburg, which serves as a transportation hub not only for Russia and Poland but also for destinations such as Brussels and Milan.



[In the front] VVL Director-General Martens with General Manager of TTA Environment Department Endo | Credit: Katsuhiro Asagiri, IPS Japan

Against this backdrop, a delegation of the Japanese logistics companies' representatives belonging to the Tokyo Trucking Association (TTA), led by its vice president Junichi Nagai, met with the Transport and Logistics Association (Verband Verkehr und Logistik-VVL) in Berlin in September 2011. TTA is presided over by Kazuo Ohtaka.

VVL represents the interests of a large number of companies on the ground, which employ 12,000 persons, and promotes education and training of young people working or interested in a job in the logistics sector.

"Our member companies provide jobs that bridge hi-tech and personal initiative," thus enabling young people not to become slaves of technology but use technology as a tool, VVL director general Karl-Dieter Martens told the delegation.

"This was an extremely useful exchange of information among professionals," said Nagai, who heads the Nagai Transportation Company, set up by his father after World War II, which, he added, is committed to corporate social responsibility.

Martens was impressed by kangaroo as the company's logo that underlines its philosophy. Like the kangaroo pouch

pocket that provides a place of shelter for the young after they are born, the Company's truckers move their cargo with great care, explained Nagai.

Keen interest

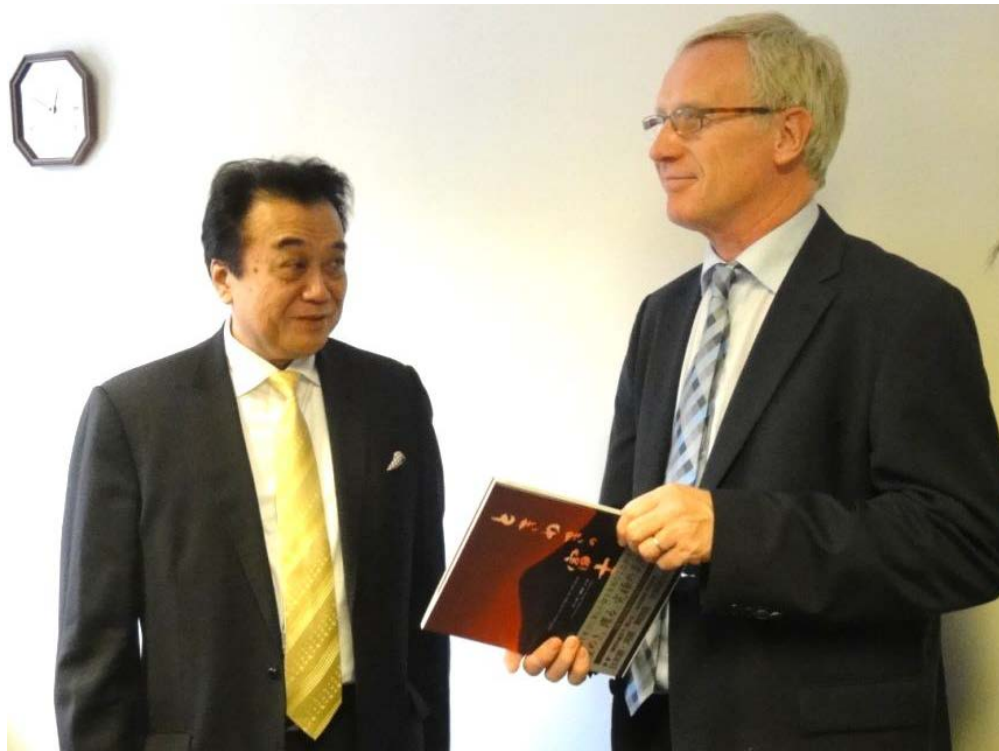
The VVL managing director showed a keen interest in the Green Eco Project [www.tta-gep.jp] presented by Keiji Endo, General Manager of TTA Environment Department. The significance of the project is underlined by the fact that Asia-Pacific already has the largest number of motorized vehicles in the world and if the present trend continues, the region would in the coming years have more automobiles than Europe and North America combined.

In Japan alone, the number of vehicles has increased from 8.12 million in 1966 to nearly 79 million in 2009. Of these 54 percent are passenger vehicles, 34 percent light-duty vehicles, and 8 percent trucks. The rest are motorcycles and buses. At the same time, the number of logistic companies has been rising. "Presently, we have more than 60,000 logistic companies, which is a 50 percent increase on the 1990s," Endo said. He pointed out that 99 percent of the companies in Japan own less than 100 trucks, and 76 percent of all the companies are small-scale enterprises owning less than 20 vehicles.

As part of environmental regulations for diesel engines, the national Automobile NOx /PM Law aims at curbing nitrogen oxide (NOx) and particulate matter (PM) emissions. PM is a small discrete mass of solid or liquid matter that remains individually dispersed in gas or liquid emissions usually considered to be an atmospheric pollutant.

To avoid such emissions, large trucks more than nine years old and small ones older than eight years are not allowed to be registered in Tokyo since 2003, regardless of how many kilometers they have covered.

In Tokyo, according to a more stringent regulation, a vehicle older than seven years must either install a diesel particulate matter filter (DPF) or buy a new automobile. Those who violate this regulation are penalized. ➡



TTA Vice President Junichi Nagai [left] and VVL Director-General Martens [right].

As a result of this directive, all measurement stations in Tokyo had confirmed that the pollution level had been improved upon 2005. The air became cleaner and cleaner, and the sky is looking blue, said Endo.

However, small and medium-sized companies had to pay a heavy price for this regulation. They were forced to buy a costly DPF or a brand new truck. As a result, the membership of the Tokyo Trucking Association suffered a decline of 20 percent. Also the number of trucks had decreased by more than 20 percent since 2003.

'The Revised Energy Conservation Law' is another tool to protect environment. This law obliged trucking companies to regularly report their CO2 emissions. "But small enterprises are not in a position to collect and control such data, particularly as 99 percent of trucking companies are

small and medium-sized," Endo added.

Against this backdrop, the Tokyo Trucking Association launched a new project called 'Green Eco Project'. Environmentally friendly driving called Eco-driving became the linchpin of the project underlining Corporate Social Responsibility of logistic enterprises for environment. According to a survey, the practice of Eco-driving resulted in the reduction of nitrogen oxides emissions by 15 percent and CO2 emissions by 20 percent.

Key Aspects

The Green Eco project has four key aspects: sustainability; reasonable costs; accuracy of data collected; and, above all, the activities should be such that drivers are kept motivated.

VVL's Martens was impressed to hear that the practical tools deployed are not internet-based but involve posters and stickers for members to share their motivations with each other.

The truckers write data in the check list by hand because it is an economic way of record keeping. Besides, by keeping track of such sheets, each member can easily see improvements of fuel efficiency and reductions in traffic accidents.

An important plank of the project is Green-Eco-driving education. Good drivers are given recognition as a means of motivation. Managers are involved in the project on an equal footing, and have the possibility to take part in seminars seven times a year. Endo reported that the project had made great strides: member participation has been on the rise every year. By July 2011, over 530 companies and more than 12,214 vehicles participated in the Green Eco project.

In addition, fuel consumption was reduced over the past four years – the fuel saved was equivalent to what would have been used by 546 large-sized tank trucks. The savings were worth about US\$14.40 million or about 10 million Euros.

The reduction of fuel consumed implied a reduction in 22,888 tons CO2 emissions or equivalent to 1,635,000 cedar trees forested. Also the number of traffic accidents declined by 40 percent over a period of four years.

"We can say that this Project has made a great achievement not only in terms of national economy but also of the society as a whole," Endo told VVL, adding that the next step would be to benchmark fuel efficiency database for each type of vehicle. "In Japan, we have many advanced devices to support the practice of Eco-driving, such as Digital Taco-graph or Drive recorders," he said.

However, the Green Eco Project neither requires huge financial investment nor hi-tech. All that it needs is a piece of paper called Driving Management Sheet, and a pen to start with – all this to protect environment, reduce fuel costs, bring about a decrease in the number of traffic accidents and foster better communication among company co-workers.

This year being the 150th anniversary of the establishment of official relations between Japan and Germany, Endo hopes the TTA delegation's visit to Berlin will stimulate fruitful exchanges between logistics enterprises of the two countries. ☑

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BAD NEWS FOR THE WORLD ECONOMY

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By Santo Das Gupta
 IDN-InDepth NewsReport

PARIS (IDN) - The prospects for the world economy look rather gloomy in the coming two years, says a respectable international economic organisation of 34 countries. The situation can, however, be redeemed if leading industrial and emerging countries take "bold decisions" to get the global economy back on track, it adds.

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HELP PEOPLE, NOT THE ERITREAN DICTATOR

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By Mirjam van Reisen*
 IDN-InDepth NewsViewpoint

The European Union had better change its policy towards Eritrea. The people would be better off if the EU were to spend its allocated funds for Eritrea on housing and education of the Eritrean refugees in Sudan, South Sudan, Libya, Egypt or Yemen.

BRUSSELS (IDN) - Should the European Union help a merciless dictator or come to the aid of refugees? I think the answer is obvious. We are talking about Eritrea, the open air prison in the East of Africa.

This small country of about 6 million inhabitants on the shore of the Red Sea is ruled by the autocrat Isaias Afewerki since independence in 1991. At the Africa conference of the Evert Vermeer Stichting (EVS) in The Hague on October 29, I urged EU Development Commissioner Andris Piebalgs to reconsider his policy before spending the remaining tens of millions of euros of his budget for Eritrea.

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TURNING NUKE FREE 'UTOPIA' INTO REALITY

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By Ramesh Jaura
 IDN-InDepth NewsAnalysis

BERLIN (IDN) - It sounds like a utopia. But it is a "concrete utopia", very much in the spirit of Ernst Bloch's philosophy and concomitant with Nichiren Buddhism. Whereas the former visualises elimination of all forms of oppression and exploitation, the latter envisions transformation of the human spirit – which would enable culture of peace to prevail over culture of violence, and pave the path leading to sustainable human security that encompasses a world free of nuclear weapons and other tools of mass destruction.

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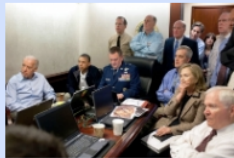
INFORMED ANALYSIS

Five Reasons Why Israel Should Back Nuclear Weapons Ban



Forward To The Future In Quest Of Global Security. Europeans are finding it hard to keep their heads above water as tidal waves of an overwhelming desire for participation in governance pound at the Arab shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The challenge thrown down by Arab uprisings is however only one front in the uphill battle for achieving "security for the global world". Is there a European answer to that challenge?

Osama's Gone, Questions For Pakistan Remain



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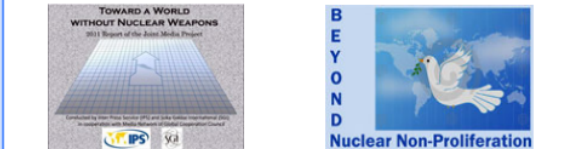


A. K. CHOWDHURY



Strengthening Public Awareness For Nuclear Abolition

The Global Cooperation Council has launched a special website as part of a media project of Inter Press Service news agency and Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a Buddhist association based in Tokyo.



Some personalities who have been interviewed, have contributed their views or whose views have been incorporated in articles as part of this project are:



Japan Responding Creatively to Crisis

The human spirit has a truly remarkable capacity -the ability to generate hope from the most devastating of crises. This ability to create value can be seen in the response to the earthquake that struck Japan on March 11, writes Daisaku Ikeda, a Japanese Buddhist philosopher and peacebuilder and president of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), in a column for IPS.

'Abolish Nukes in the Middle East and Beyond'

As 'people power' topples one Arab regime after another, confronting the international community with an unprecedented volatile situation, an eminent Buddhist leader is urging the

Global Cooperation Council has set up a **Media Task Force** in order to strengthen its media network, with veteran journalist and Sri Lanka diplomat, **Ernest Corea** as president.



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