



**EDUCATION FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP 2014**

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Eighteen-year-old Sangita remembers the night when she woke up to water surrounding her bed. Pointing at the tree where she took shelter she says, "That tree over there saved my life, but I want to forget about that horrible night." Credit: Mallika Aryal/IPS.





## **Roberto Savio**

### **Co-Founder and President Emeritus**

### **IPS-Inter Press Service**

The world is clearly in need of global governance. The balance of power that brought stability during the Cold War has been upset. The number of people forced to flee their homes by conflict and violence has for the first time in the post-World War II era, exceeded 50 million people. Pope Francis speaks of a “piecemeal” Third World War.

Europe’s inability to give an adequate answer to migrants, many of whom are escaping from conflict where EU has a direct responsibility, like Syria and Libya, is a troubling reality. Europe now faces two short-term existential challenges, the possible expulsion of Greece (Grexit), and the referendum about Europe (Brexit) that Prime Minister David Cameron has announced if he does not get some radical exemptions from European statutes. National interests and a total lack of solidarity and common identity are shattering the European design.

The other traditional player in the West, the United States, finds itself in a self-inflicted decline. The lack of dialogue between the three pillars of democracy, the executive, the parliament and the judiciary has made the country dysfunctional.

The emerging powers are by no means contributing to global governance. China is on a nationalist path, like India, and Brazil. South Africa, and many other middle powers, are all weakened by internal problems of governance. Japan is the only exception, but in a difficult regional reality.

Therefore, at least in the medium term, we will have to continue to live in a world without an accepted compass where political institutions, like parties, suffer a serious loss of credibility among citizens, and a glaring inability to face global problems. The best example are the on-going negotiations for finding a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, with very little hope that the December Paris Conference on Climate would find an adequate answer to the survival of the planet as we know it now.

At the same time, civil society is making a constant progress on the idea of global citizenship. In the last two decades, the number of NGOs has tripled. People from around the world gather at the World Social Forum in search of “an other and a better world”. They constitute global alliances, and all have a global agenda they are turning into a local reality. Global citizenship is happening, because there is a growing awareness at peoples’ level, which is scarcely reflected in the national political agenda.

Traditional media are caught in an existential dilemma. Their readers are basically traditional in their approach, and if they change their direction they will lose substantial circulation, with serious financial consequences. So there is no reflection in media of this emerging global citizenship, which is based on global themes, like environment, gender equity, human rights, which are not considered marketable.

Therefore, much more attention and support should be given to those very few media institutions who have their *raison d’être* on global issues. IPS is the largest and oldest of them, and has become the main provider of information and analysis to the global civil society, which it does not find in the traditional (and rich) news agencies, like AP, AFP and Reuters. SGI is one of the few institutions that, because of Dr. Ikeda’s persistent efforts for peace and cooperation, has been siding with IPS. For this, I want to express my profound gratitude.



## **Daisaku Ikeda** **President** **Soka Gakkai International (SGI)**

Fifteen years have already passed since the end of the twentieth century, infamous as an era of war and violence. We have not succeeded in putting that legacy behind us as we progress into the new century, and we continue to be tormented by armed conflicts and civil unrest. As hate crimes and hate speech arise in different locales around the world, a vortex of discrimination and hatred exacerbates violence and oppression on all levels, further threatening people's lives and dignity.

Against a backdrop of intensifying global issues, including environmental degradation, poverty and inequality, and food and energy insecurity, there is an urgent need to generate forms of shared action and solidarity that transcend differences of nationality, ethnicity and religion; it is this that will empower people to resist the destructive forces of discrimination and hatred.

This media project, launched one year ago by the Inter Press Service (IPS) and the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), aims to promote education for global citizenship based on this awareness.

To date, the will to subdue and triumph over opponents has been the driving principle in the realms of politics, economics and ideology. We must change this and develop instead a sense of a shared agenda and of our shared future as humankind. The goal of education for global citizenship, one of the pillars of the United Nations Global Education First Initiative, is to establish the basis for such a transformation.

Global citizenship may seem far removed from the mundane reality of our day-to-day lives. But in fact it is not. Nor is it something that can only be realized by those who have enjoyed a privileged upbringing. I think the most essential foundation for global citizenship lies in sensibilities and awarenesses that exist in all people. We see this, for example, in the kind of imaginative empathy that is extended to those who have been impacted by catastrophe or disaster, without regard to nationality, ethnicity or religion.

In that sense, the ideal of living as a global citizen in no way conflicts with that of living as a good citizen of a given society or as a good neighbor within one's community. As my dear friend, the environmental activist Dr. Wangari Maathai (1940–2011) put it: "Education, if it means anything, should not take people away from the land, but instill in them even more respect for it."

To live as a global citizen is to live rooted in the community where one's daily life takes place, and it is here that we must initiate concerted action to respond to larger issues even as they first become evident in local phenomena. This has been demonstrated by Dr. Maathai's initiative of empowering people to plant trees in their local communities, a movement that spread throughout Kenya, throughout Africa, eventually becoming a global movement.

This fall, the United Nations General Assembly is scheduled to adopt a post-2015 development framework toward the creation of a sustainable global society, carrying forward the work done under the Millennium Development Goals. To be successful, it is crucial that these new Sustainable Development Goals be pursued in a spirit of shared action and human solidarity, rooted in the ideal of global citizenship.

The SGI is proud to support this media project and sincerely hopes that it will contribute to extending the realm of shared action and inspiring members of the younger generation to exert themselves for the benefit of the Earth and of humankind.

# Trilateral Forum Highlights NGOs' Key Role in Dire Situations



By Jamshed Baruah

BERLIN - SENDAI (IDN) - Tearing down ideological barriers and overcoming historical animosities, civil society organisations from Japan, China and the Republic of Korea participated in a landmark trilateral forum during the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR).

The conference, held from March 14 to 18 in Sendai – the centre of Japan's Tohoku region that bore the brunt of the

2011 earthquake and tsunami leading to the Fukushima nuclear power plant catastrophe – agreed on a new framework for the next 15 years (2015-2030) to reduce the risk of disasters that kill and destroy livelihoods.

The trilateral forum was one of the major events, organised by Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a lay Buddhist organisation based in Tokyo, during the WCDRR. It provided a platform for fostering people-to-people cooperation in Northeast Asia to reduce risks of disasters. Their total economic impact worldwide amounted to 1.4 trillion

dollars between 2005 and 2014.

According to observers, the forum initiated a powerful move towards trilateral cooperation that could serve as a model beyond regional boundaries.

Explaining the rationale behind the March 16 forum, Feng Chen from the Seoul-based Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), said: "The three countries . . . continue to suffer disproportionately from various types of disasters caused by natural hazards." As neighbouring countries



in the region, Japan, China and the ROK should work together to reduce the risk of “dreadful disasters”, he said and affirmed the commitment of TCS to do so.

The need for cooperation between the three Northeast Asian countries was stressed also by Haoming Huang, vice chairman and executive director of the non-profit 126 member organisation operating nationwide, the China Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO), which was founded in 1992, and enjoys special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

“CANGO’s mission is to create a strong, empowered network of Chinese NGOs to address poverty alleviation, environmental protection and social development, particularly in China’s poor, remote and minority-inhabited areas,” according to Haoming Huang.

Another participant in the Forum was Young-Jin Park, the current Secretary General of the Korean Disaster Relief Association, The Hope Bridge. He said it was the nation’s first relief organization founded voluntarily by key figures in the media and other parts of society, without any set religion or ideology, in 1961, when there was no culture of emergency relief and sharing in Korea.

With a half-century of emergency relief work and specialized activities, the organization has separated its emergency relief efforts into domestic and overseas efforts, and is providing effective relief according to the type of disaster, region and target.

Aoi Horiuchi, the Secretary General of the Japan CSO Coalition 2015 Committee in preparation for the 3rd World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR), also participated in the forum. He has since 2012 been a member of the Research and Proposal Group of the non-profit, non-partisan networking Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC) founded in 1987. He is involved in coordination between the NGO Conferences and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the advocacies of the Millennium Development Goals.

Daisuke Namaki of the Next Stage Tohoku Coop was another participant in the trilateral forum. Born in Osaka in 1973, he had experienced the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995 in Kobe, Japan. Since 2002 he has been engaged in a government policy-based business of accommodating intern trainees from Asian countries and introducing

them to Japanese companies. Since 2006 he has served as Representative Director of the Next Stage Tohoku Coop. Reflecting the valour of the people of the region, the Tohoku Soka Gakkai organised a panel exhibition, ‘The Light of Humanity’, featuring 22 individuals who are struggling to overcome the tragedy of the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 and making efforts toward restoration.

Commending the trilateral forum, SGI Executive Director for Peace Affairs Hirotsugu Terasaki said it had manifested “highly fulfilling exchanges of opinion . . . about the various trends and characteristics that are emerging within civil society” in the three countries. “This has reinforced my conviction that a more resilient community can be forged when civil societies offer complimentary support towards one another,” Terasaki said.

Referring to the Sustainable Development Goals, which are scheduled to be endorsed in September, Terasaki pointed out that SGI President Daisaku Ikeda had urged in his peace proposal 2015 China, South Korea and Japan to “join together to create a regional model that will embody best practices that can be shared with the world, including those relating to the development of human talent”.

“It goes without saying that an active flow of people as well as cultural and economic exchange is already widespread among these three countries, which hold between them a population of approximately 1.5 billion. On that basis, trilateral cooperation regarding specific challenges, including disaster prevention, will not only contribute to the security and stability of this region, but also resonate positively within the international community,” said Terasaki.

More specifically, he added, the kind of trilateral cooperation concerning disaster prevention, as had been discussed in the trilateral forum, would not only be beneficial in terms of simply dealing with future disaster response, but could certainly, in a more broader sense, make a contribution toward setting a clear example across the entire global society, he added.

SGI also organised together with the ACT Alliance and Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief (JRPD) a symposium titled ‘Community based DRR (disaster risk reduction) from a faith-based perspective –

sharing best practices.’ This was a follow-up of a side event at the 6th Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) held in June 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand.

ACT Alliance’s general secretary John Nduna said that the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) in disaster risk reduction is not always recognized and that international frameworks such as the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) only have impact when they benefit the people at the grassroots level.

Nobuyuki Asai, chair of the Soka Gakkai Youth Peace Conference, spoke on the capacity of FBOs to mobilize existing community networks and to protect the vulnerable in times of emergency.

On March 16, as an outcome document of the symposium, 13 FBOs issued a statement in which they called on governments to recognize the unique role of Local Faith Communities (LFCs) and FBOs and to give priority to the engagement and collaboration of both in the implementation of the post-2015 framework on DRR.

Two days later, Kimiaki Kawai, Program Director of Peace Affairs for SGI, gave a presentation at the WCDRR’s IGNITE Stage on Soka Gakkai’s relief efforts in Tohoku following the Great East Japan Earthquake. He highlighted the ability of FBOs to utilize their existing networks of communication and their local facilities in disaster response. He emphasized that the strengths and resources of FBOs could complement those of other DRR stakeholders.

The importance of FBOs was underlined by the Pew Research Center in 2012, when it found that faith, in all its forms, constitutes a natural and important element in the lives of billions of people with over 84 percent of the world identifying with a religious group. Faith drives people to take action.

Kimiaki said, as discussed during this WCDRR, there are numerous good examples of the added value of Local Faith Communities and Faith-Based Organisations in responding to disasters all over the world, including the Ebola crisis in West Africa, conflict in South Sudan and Central African Republic, the Great East Japan Earthquake, Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, and the flooding in southeast Asia.

IDN-InDepthNews - March 31, 2015

Image credit: Katsuhiko Asagiri

# Key to Preventing Disasters Lies in Understanding Them

Two fisherwomen walk along the seashore in Nemmeli, India. The village that saw widespread destruction in the 2004 tsunami now has a unique community college where locals can learn disaster management. Half the students are women. Credit: Stella Paul/IPS



By Ramesh Jaura

SENDAI, Japan (IDN) - The Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction concluded on Wednesday after a long drawn-out round of final negotiations, with representatives of 187 U.N. member states finally agreeing on what is being described as a far-reaching new framework for the next 15 years: 2015-2030.

But whether the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) heralds the dawn of a new era – fulfilling U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's expectation on the opening day of the conference on Mar. 14 that “sustainability starts in Sendai” – remains to be seen.

Margareta Wahlström, the U.N. Secretary-General's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Head of the U.N. Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), has emphasised that the new framework “opens a major new chapter in sustainable development as it outlines clear targets and priorities for action which will lead to a substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health”.

But she warned on Wednesday that implementation of the new framework “will require strong commitment and political leadership and will be vital to the achievement of future agreements on sustainable development goals [in September] and climate later this year [in December in Paris]”.

The new framework outlines seven global targets and four priorities.

The global targets to be achieved over the next 15 years are: “a substantial reduction in global disaster mortality; a substantial reduction in numbers of affected people; a reduction in economic losses in relation to global GDP; substantial reduction in disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, including health and education facilities; an increase in the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020; enhanced international cooperation; and increased access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments.”

The four priorities for action are focussed on a better understanding of risk, strengthened disaster risk governance and more investment. A final priority calls for more effective disaster preparedness and embedding the ‘build

back better’ principle into recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Following are excerpts of an IPS interview with UNISDR head Margareta Wahlström on Mar. 16 during which she explained the nitty-gritty of DRR. (Interview transcript by Josh Butler at IPS U.N. Bureau in New York.):

IPS: Do you think this conference would come out with solutions to reduce disaster risk?

Margareta Wahlström (MW): The conference and the collective experience has got all the solutions. That's not really our problem. Our problem is to make a convincing argument for applying the knowledge we already have. It has to do with individuals, with society, with business, et cetera. Not to make it an oversimplified agenda, because it's quite complex.

If you really want to reduce risks sustainably, you have to look at many different sectors, and not individually, but they have to work together. I can see myself, I can hear, there has been a lot of progress over this 10 years.

One of the critical thresholds to cross is moving from the disaster to the risk understanding. I think we can all understand the disaster superficially, but that's not really what will reduce the risk in future. What will reduce risk is if we understand the risks, and not just one risk, but several risks working together to really undermine society.

That's what this conference is about. As much as it is about negotiating a document, now laying the ground for work in the coming decades, it is also about people learning very rapidly from each other, allowing themselves to be inspired.

IPS: An important issue is resilience. The poor and vulnerable have always shown resilience. But what we need to strengthen their resilience is money (finance for development) and technology. Do you see these two things happening as a result of this conference?

MW: Not only because of the conference. If anything, the conference will up the priorities, increase the understanding of the necessary integration of planning. In any case, historical experience shows the most critical foundation stone for resilience is social development and economic development. People need to be healthy, well educated, have choices, have jobs. With that follows, of course, in a way, new risks, as we know. Lifestyle risks.

I think the technology is there. The issue of technology is more its availability, that can be an issue of money but it can also an issue of capacity on how to use technology. Which, for many countries and individuals, is really an issue. We need to look at ourselves. The evolution of technology is faster than people's ability to use it.

Financial resources to acquire it can definitely be a limitation, but an even bigger limitation in many cases is capacity. If you think of money in terms of government's own investments, which is the most critical one, I think we will see that increasing, as the understanding of what it is you do when you build for resilience, that means risk sensitive infrastructure, risk sensitive agriculture, water management systems. It's not a standalone issue.

I think we will see an increase in investment. Investment for individuals, for the social side of resilience, in particular the focus on the most poor people, will require a more clear cut decision of policy direction, which can very probably be helped by the agreement later in this year hopefully on the post-2015 universal development agenda. That will, at best, help to put the focus on what needs to be done to continue the very strong focus on poverty reduction.

IPS: Do you think the issue of ODA (official development assistance) has any relevance these days?

MW: In terms of its size and scale, probably not, compared to foreign direct investments, private sector growth. But of course it's got an enormous important symbolic value, and political value, as a concrete expression of solidarity.

Nevertheless to be very, very fair, still there are a number of countries that depend a lot on ODA, 30-40 percent of their GDP is still based on ODA in one form or the other. Which is probably not that healthy in terms of their policy choices at the end of the day, but that is the current economic reality. Really the need for economic development, the type of investments that stimulate countries' own economic growth, people's growth, need to remain a very critical priority.

That's why I think you see, both in the SDGs discussion and this discussion, such a strong emphasis on the national resource base as the foundation, including for international cooperation.

IPS - IDN - March 18, 2015

# Sendai Conference Stresses Importance of Women's Leadership

By Jamshed Baruah and Katsuhiro Asagiri

SENDAI, Japan (IDN) - Women play a critical role in reducing disaster risk and planning and decision-making during and after disasters strike, according to senior United Nations, government and civil society representatives. In fact, efforts at reducing risks can never be fully effective or sustainable if the needs and voices of women are ignored, they agreed.

Even at risk of their own health and well-being, women are most heavily impacted but often overcome immense obstacles to lead response efforts and provide care and support to those hit hard by disasters, said participants in a high-level multi-stakeholder Partnership Dialogue during the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDDRR) in Sendai, Japan, from Mar. 14 to 18. Participants in the conference's first of several intergovernmental high-level partnership dialogues, on 'Mobilizing Women's Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction', included the heads of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

In an interview with IPS, UNFPA Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin said the Sendai Conference offers "a new opportunity for the world to galvanise around a common disaster risk reduction agenda and commit to collective actions that put women at its centre".

The fact that serious gaps remain in the area is not for lack of guidance and tools on relevant gender-based approaches and best practices. What is needed is requisite political will to make sure that women's voices were enhanced and participation ensured. All such efforts must bolster women's rights, including sexual and reproductive health rights, he said.

Osotimehin pleaded for key actions at all levels, and stressed that dedicated resources are lacking and as such, money must be devoted to disaster risk reduction and women must be empowered to play a real role in that area.

He pointed out that sustained and sustainable disaster risk reduction requires an accountability framework with indicators and targets to measure progress and ensure that

national and local actors move towards implementation.

A physician and public health expert, before Osotimehin became UNFPA chief in January 2011 in the rank of Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, he was Director-General of Nigeria's National Agency for the Control of AIDS, which coordinates HIV and AIDS work in a country of about 180 million people.

WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin underscored that the "global reset" that began on Mar. 14 in Sendai must include steps to place women at the centre of disaster risk reduction efforts.

As several other speakers and heads of governments also emphasised in several other fora, Cousin said the WCDDRR is the first of a crucial series of U.N.-backed conferences and meetings set for 2015 respectively on development financing, sustainable development and climate change, all aimed at ensuring a safer and more prosperous world for all.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe echoed similar sentiments in a keynote address. He said that Japan had long understood the importance of enhancing the voice, visibility and participation of women.

For example, if a disaster struck during the middle of the day, most of the people at home would be women so their perspective is essential "absolutely essential for restoring devastated".

"No matter how much the ground shakes, we will remain calm in our hearts," said Prime Minister Abe, quoting the powerful words of women in one of the districts he had visited in the wake of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, and pledging Japan's ongoing strong commitment to ensuring all women played a greater role in disaster risk reduction.

Abe announced that boosting women's leadership in disaster risk reduction would be a key element of the country's new programme of international support.

He said: "Today I announced Japan's new cooperation initiative for disaster risk reduction. Under this initiative, over the next four years, Japan will train 40,000 officials and people in local regions around the world as leaders who will play key roles in disaster risk reduction and

reconstruction.

"One of the major projects that will be undertaken through this initiative is the launch of the Training to Promote Leadership by Women in Disaster Risk Reduction. Furthermore, at the World Assembly for Women in Tokyo to be held this summer, one of the themes will be 'Women and Disaster Risk Reduction'."

Abe said, "We are launching concrete projects in nations around the world" and would build on existing efforts to promote women's leadership in disaster risk reduction in such partner countries as Fiji, Solomon Islands, and other Pacific island nations.

"We have dispatched experts in the field of community disaster risk reduction to conduct training focusing on women over a three-year period ... Now these women have become leaders and are carrying on their own activities to spread knowledge about disaster risk reduction to other women in their communities," he said.

IPS - IDN - March 16, 2015



# Opinion: A Radical Approach to Global Citizenship Education

By Wayne Hudson

BRISBANE (IPS) - Although global citizenship education has now received the recognition it deserves, much of the literature recycles old agendas under another name – ‘education to promote peace and justice’, ‘sustainability’, ‘care for the environment’, ‘multi-faith’ and ‘multi-cultural understanding’ – and so forth.

Another literature proposes that children learn specific global knowledge: world history, global ethics, global law etc. In my view these approaches do not grasp the revolution that global citizenship involves.

They do not rise to the level of the times and promote an approach to education which is radical enough to bring about the changes which are needed. There is also a problem about the tendency for some advocates of global citizenship education to promote political and social activism under another name.

Finally, there is a major problem about the way global citizenship education tends to be presented in Western terms, heavily indebted to the European Enlightenment. I propose an approach to global citizenship education which is much more radical and involves a new conceptuality of pedagogical practice.

Clearly I would not argue for a global citizenship education that ignores the achievements of the West or the rich heritage of the European Enlightenment. Equally, however, global citizenship education cannot be education in the Enlightenment ideology of the West.

It cannot ignore the substantive claims of Islam. It cannot pretend that Russian Orthodoxy is some sort of private option and that the Russian Federation is a secular nation state. And it must relate to the actual diversities – political, cultural and ethical – found around the world, if it is not to be yet another example of educational utopianism with only limited impact on the ground.

Global citizenship education cannot be simply Western, and it must relate to children living in poor countries and in rural environments, and not only to the children of urban elites. Many current forms of global citizenship education do not seem to address their needs.

Global citizenship education which goes beyond both Western ideology and utopian dreaming needs in my view

to make two radical leaps:

First, it needs to make a post-secular leap and reconcile moderate secularity with a recognition of non-mundane performances in both public and private life. This represents a rejection of American ideology about ‘the public square’ or ‘the public sphere’.

It reconnects with real world realities, and involves a model of global citizenship education which takes different spiritual perspectives seriously at the level of religious citizenship, at the level of human rights, and at the level of the role of the state.

Pious declarations which simply recite Western Enlightenment mantras about these matters will fail in practice in the Islamic world and Russia. They may not even recommend themselves to Islamic minorities in Western Europe. In the longer term they may not be implemented in practice in much of Asia, including India, Burma and China.

To this extent, global citizenship needs to be more global than most writers on global citizenship education currently envisage. It needs to take cultural, religious and civilisational differences much more seriously than is currently the case.

What is at issue here is not particularism, or an irrational form of cultural relativism, but an approach that addresses actual heterogeneities and real world contexts and does not rely on Kantian moral philosophy, or on Anglo-American political philosophy.

‘Global’ cannot mean Anglo-Saxon or even European. A global approach must both respect, and to a degree explain, differences, and this implies the need for more powerful concepts than individual traditions traditionally provided. This leads on to the second leap.

In my view, global citizenship education also needs to make a leap towards a new conceptuality: one that can encompass historical and historical particularities, while also creating portability across cultures and nation states. This is a strong claim, and one with which educationists around the world are relatively unfamiliar, even though it is possible that nothing less will adequately traverse the world of electronic media, especially social media, or allow an integration of the sciences with the humanities and the fine arts.

A new global conceptuality is not on offer in educational institutions at present, and it does not inform most thinking on educational development. This is partly because the type of thinking involved is more commonly found among mathematicians, physicists and philosophers than among professors of education.

However, it may not be that difficult to produce and exemplify such a conceptuality in pedagogic practice. Indeed, I think that it will be easier to establish this conceptuality in pedagogic practice than to explicate the new concepts in philosophical or other theoretical terms.

Here my position is substantially alternativist and obviously requires considerable exemplification. The approach I commend differs from many dominant strategies in education, which often assume that curricula should implement pre-existing educational concepts and strategies.

My approach to global citizenship education implies a very different conception of pedagogy and learning, one which paradoxically has links both with strong cognitivism of a type educationists tend not to favour and with strong pragmatism of a type they favour, but do not always practice.

It has particular links with the pragmatism of the American philosopher and mathematician Charles Sanders Peirce, as opposed to the weaker pragmatism of John Dewey, William James or Richard Rorty.

My claim is that such an unusual approach to philosophy and practice has benefits for global citizenship education. Pedagogy based on this approach has the advantage of being suited to delivery using new technologies.

It is also inexpensive, practical and easy to implement in local communities around the world. Of course, such an innovative approach may be controversial, at least until the foundations for the approach in contemporary philosophy, mathematics and cognitive science are better understood. However, this is the approach I am working on. It is one that I think can make a real contribution to the current debates.

IPS - March 13, 2015

Image credit: Oscar Navarrete /IPS.



# Soldiers of Conscience Breaking the Silence

By Mel Frykberg

This news feature tells the story of how groups of Israelis and Palestinians are empowering communities at daggers drawn to consider themselves as part of a solution, rising above parochial interests and swimming against prevailing political tide, thus lending a vibrant local dimension to the broader concept of global citizenship.

HEBRON, West Bank (IDN) – The ancient biblical city of Hebron, in the southern West Bank, is holy to Judaism, Christianity and Islam and is steeped in historical, archaeological and religious treasures.

However, the hilly, windy and narrow streets, nestled among picturesque hills, belie a bitter and bloody history, and a palpable sense of tension.

The city of Abraham is now home to over 250,000 Palestinians. Less than 1,000 Israeli settlers, guarded by hundreds of Israeli soldiers, live cheek-and-jowl in the midst of the Palestinians, in an atmosphere of extreme hostility. Over the decades the hatred between the two communities has regularly descended into violence and ended in bloodshed.

In 1994 Israeli settler doctor Baruch Goldstein machine-gunned over 20 Palestinians to death as they prayed in the Ibrahimi Mosque while settlers have also been killed and wounded by Palestinians.

Israel's occupation has forced hundreds of Palestinians out of their businesses and homes in the city's old market, and in Shuhada Street a main road in the city centre where Palestinians are forbidden to walk.

Israeli security forces have also been accused by various human rights organisations of abusing Palestinians and killing them unnecessarily.

It is against this background that two peace organisations, one Palestinian and one Israeli, have worked together for justice and to educate Israelis and foreigners about the life under occupation.

Breaking the Silence (BTS) is a group of veteran Israeli soldiers who have served in the Israeli military since the start of the Second Intifada, or uprising in October 2000. The former Israeli soldiers take Israelis and tourists on tours of Hebron and explain the situation on the ground

to them.

“We endeavor to stimulate public debate about the price paid for a reality in which young soldiers face a civilian population on a daily basis, and are engaged in the control of that population's everyday life,” Achiya Schatz, BTS's director of public outreach told IDN.

“We explain to the tour groups that Israelis are not the victims of the occupation but that the Palestinians are.” Many of the Israeli soldiers recall abuses that were committed against Palestinians while they were serving.

“On one occasion we trashed the house of a Palestinian we thought was a ‘terrorist’ and he and his wife were roughed up and taken out into the street,” recalled Schatz.

“We later found out we had the wrong guy. The guy we wanted was living two houses down the road.”

Schatz also recalls commanders of the units being disappointed when they hadn't been able to kill a ‘terrorist’. Soldiers from BTS have provided testimony to far worse abuses and Schatz explained that what he witnessed was not exclusive to Hebron but the regular behavior of some Israeli troops throughout the West Bank when dealing with the Palestinian population.

Apart from educating Israelis about the occupation BTS also believes in building bridges with Palestinians, particularly activists.

“It is important to us to introduce Israelis to Palestinians as this helps to break down stereotypes. Often this is the first time Israelis have met Palestinians in person,” said Schatz.

To this end BTS works together with a Palestinian activist group called Youth Against the Settlements (YAS)

YAS is a national Palestinian, non-partisan activist group which seeks to end Israeli colonisation activities in Palestine (building and expanding settlements) through non-violent popular struggle and civil disobedience.

“There is a lot of cooperation between our activists and Israeli activists. We plan things on the ground together such as tours, community action including protests, increasing awareness about human rights violations, and showing Israelis what our lives are like,” Issa Amro, YAS spokesman told IDN.

“When Palestinian and Israeli activists unite and cooperate against the occupation, we call it co-resistance,” added Schatz.

“Many Palestinians and Israelis have become friends as our joint activities have helped us get to know each other better on an intimate basis. Palestinians are also given hope when they see that there are Israelis who care,” Amro explained.

Foreigners and Israelis on a tour with Ir Amim learn about life in East Jerusalem under occupation. Credit: Mel Frykberg

Ir Amim is another Israeli peace organisation that works with Palestinians. It is a non-profit organisation founded in 2004 that focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Jerusalem.

Ir Amim established the Jerusalem Policy Forum with the Palestinian NGO, the Peace and Democracy Forum.

The group provides information to the Israeli parliament and Jerusalem Municipality on actions which they believe undermine Jerusalem's stability, impede equality or threaten future peace negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians.

It seeks to ensure the dignity and welfare of all its residents and safeguard their holy places, as well as their historical and cultural heritages.

Ir Amim's public outreach is primarily aimed at the Israeli public, with the goal of re-orienting the public discourse on the issue of Jerusalem.

The group encourages the public to analyse events on the ground and their consequences for Israel. This is done through study tours, media work, briefings, house meetings, and educational programmes.

Swedish tourist Amie Karlsson went on one of Ir Amim's tours of East Jerusalem. “I wasn't aware of how disadvantaged East Jerusalem was compared to West Jerusalem,” Karlsson told IDN.

“Ir Amim informed us that East Jerusalem gets only a fraction of the municipal budget that Jewish West Jerusalem gets. It was obvious how neglected the eastern sector of the city was with garbage everywhere, a shortage





of street lights and no street signs. However, the Jewish settlements inside East Jerusalem were well tended and cared for,” said Karlsson.

Despite the positive experiences of Israelis and Palestinians working together for peace, Schatz, and other Israeli

activists have paid a personal price for their activism and commitment to human rights.

“I’ve received death threats and been called a traitor by former colleagues. It is possible to love Israel and hate the occupation because it is wrong,” said Schatz, adding that the threats and insults were a price he was willing to pay.

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Image credit: St.Dekker - Flickr - CC BY 2.0

# UN Scheme to Teach 'Respect for All' Aims at Fighting Discrimination

By A.D. McKenzie

PARIS (IDN) - "What the world needs now is love, sweet love" goes a syrupy Burt Bacharach-penned song from 1965. But love is difficult, if not impossible, to teach, so education experts have come up with another solution: teaching respect for all.

"And by all, we mean all," says Christophe Cornu, senior project officer in the Section of Health and Global Citizenship Education at UNESCO, the United Nations agency responsible for science, culture and education.

The organization, in association with the governments of the United States and Brazil, has produced specific tools and resources to fight discrimination and violence through education as well as within education, even as the level of hatred and intolerance rises in many regions.

The tools include a 300-page manual, a range of relevant UN documents, online interactive forums, and proposals for student activities such as writing articles and staging plays, all of which were highlighted at the Second UNESCO Forum on Global Citizenship Education (GCED) that took place January 28 to 30 in Paris.

"Teaching respect for all is a means of promoting an educational response to combat discrimination and violence by strengthening the basics of mutual tolerance and cultivating respect for all people," Cornu told IDN.

In its manual, UNESCO says that the project is founded on the "universal values and core principles of human rights," and is targeted at learners aged 8 to 16, with the aim of equipping them with skills to "cultivate respect and stop discrimination on all levels".

Educational institutions need to adopt a "holistic" approach where "all aspects of the school environment work to ensure non-discrimination," the agency says.

It adds that "curricula must dedicate time to sensitive issues, such as discussing stereotypes and recognizing injustices". Teacher-training is also a key part of this approach as educators - who can be victims of discrimination as well - need to be skilled in teaching conflict resolution and dealing "sensitively with issues of discrimination".

The Paris-based organization's mission has acquired

increased urgency with the growth of extremism and intolerance, which has seen certain groups and individuals targeted, officials say.

According to UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, the agency is strengthening efforts to address the "world-wide rise" of discrimination and is especially promoting Global Citizenship Education.

"The opportunities for exchange of knowledge and information have never been so numerous, but intolerance is on the rise, notably in the form of a violent and destructive extremism," Bokova said at the conference.

"Young people are often the ones calling for change, but they are also the first victims," she added. "What education do we need then, to build a more peaceful and sustainable future for all?"

According to UNESCO, the aim of Global Citizenship Education is to "equip learners of all ages with those values, knowledge and skills that are based on and instill respect for human rights, social justice, diversity, gender equality and environmental sustainability and that empower learners to be responsible global citizens."

"Teaching Respect for All", meanwhile, seeks to involve all of society's "stakeholders", from parents to pupils to policy makers; and the media also has a role to play.

The role of media

"Media is a duty-bearer to increase public awareness," states the UNESCO implementation guide. "Media professionals have a particular responsibility in combating negative stereotypes, fostering respect for diversity and promoting tolerance among the general public."

This was drafted before the January 7 assault on the staff of French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo, in which 12 people including journalists were murdered. Critics accused the magazine of Islamophobia and racism, while the cartoonists and supporters defended the right to freedom of expression and the liberty to satirize subjects that included religion and politics.

The current divide in France and many other countries is indicative of a lack of understanding of both religion and secular values, some commentators have argued, while the attacks have meanwhile focused attention on

the lives of Europe's marginalized youth and the failings of education.

"When you teach respect for all, you acknowledge that everyone has prejudices, and there should be a space to discuss these prejudices, to demystify stigma," Cornu told IDN in an interview.

This dialogue can take place in both formal and informal educational settings, with curricula "shaped around such values as a culture of peace, human rights, tolerance and respect," say experts involved in the project.

While these values should be recognized as "universal", they should also be adapted and draw from local systems and culture, UNESCO advises.

Dr. Helen Bond, an associate professor at Washington DC-based Howard University and one of the authors of "Teaching Respect for All", said that "manifestations of discrimination" can take many forms.

These can include bullying, name-calling, stereotyping, stigma, anti-semitism, Islamophobia and gender and poverty-based prejudices, she said during the GCED conference.

Discrimination can also be seen "in targeted laws, which prevent certain groups from obtaining access to certain government programmes", participants noted. They said that discrimination and intolerance usually start with "micro aggressions", and that the violence can become even greater if policy makers don't take necessary action.

'Respect for all'

In France, after the Charlie Hebdo assault and related attacks at a kosher supermarket, students in some schools refused to observe the national minute of silence that the government had requested, highlighting their feelings of exclusion from the mainstream and the contention that the newspaper had added to stereotype and stigma.

Further, in a case that shocked many people, school officials reported an 8-year-old pupil to the police in the southern French city of Nice when the boy expressed "solidarity" with the "terrorists" even though he seemed not to know the meaning of "terrorism".

The latter incident, which occurred as the GCED conference was taking place in Paris, underscored the impor-

tance of discussing “respect for all” in school settings and having teachers who are trained in this area.

“The tragedy has been an eye-opener about something missing in the curriculum,” Cornu told IDN. “We need to teach all students how to live together, and focusing on just one religion is not the right approach.”

The UNESCO scheme has examined how “Teaching Respect for All” can be “integrated” into the school curriculum and “incorporated in all subjects and across school culture”.

Pilot projects have taken place in Brazil, Ivory Coast, Guatemala, Indonesia and Kenya, looking at different aspects of the issues. The Kenyan government has focused on developing peace education, while the Ivory Coast has examined how to prevent discrimination against people with disabilities.

Some of the questions raised by “Teaching Respect for All” include: how can “difficult discussions and situations in the classroom be managed”, and how can students be empowered and motivated to “confront discrimination, prejudice and bullying”?

In a section of the UNESCO manual aimed at children and youth, the advice is to “be brave and say ‘NO,’” even if this is “not an easy thing” to do.

“Everyone has the right to be treated with respect,” the advisers state, adding that “no matter what, being discriminated against is NEVER OK.”

IDN-InDepthNews – February 23, 2015



PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: A demonstrator supporting Batay Ouvriye’s unionisation campaign holds a sign that says, “Respect the rights of working people.” Credit: Ansel Herz/IPS.

# Global Citizenship Education Seen as Key to Development and Peace

By A. D. McKenzie

PARIS (IDN) - With inequality as well as extremism a growing concern around the world, education has a crucial role to play in contributing to peace and sustainable development, experts say.

“Education is a common good, and it’s the moral responsibility of governments to provide it. But the challenge we now face is how to use education to have peaceful and sustainable societies,” said Peter deSouza, professor at the India-based Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. A keynote speaker at the Second UNESCO Forum on Global Citizenship Education that took place January 28 to 30 in Paris, deSouza told IDN that the world ran the risk of “losing the battle” regarding the true aims of education to produce better citizens.

“We need to move into campaign mode and have a powerful movement for education now because we’ve seen with the women’s movement and with the environmental movement how minds and values can change,” he said in an interview on the sidelines of the conference.

He argued that the international education discourse was unfortunately being driven by corporate sway, or what he called the “Davos way”, referring to the annual World Economic Forum in Switzerland that brings together “global elites” from the business, political and entertainment sectors. This produces a “hegemonic and detrimental discourse”, deSouza said.

“Education is becoming more and more corporate driven, with business opportunity being the aim, but in the meantime public schools are falling off the radar and inequality is increasing,” he added.

At the conference, the two main themes were global citizenship education in the post-2015 development agenda and its role for building “peaceful and sustainable societies”.

The discussions were expected to result in “concrete inputs” to the emerging Framework for Action on Education post-2015 that will be adopted at the World Education Forum in May, being held in the Republic of Korea, officials said.

“New skills for new times”

Opening the discussions, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova told the 250 participants from around the globe that the world needed “new skills for new times”. She said that education was not just about transmitting information and knowledge, but also about providing the values, capabilities and attitudes that can contribute to a more “peaceful, just, inclusive and sustainable” world. “We must sharpen our vision and place global citizenship education in the context of all our work – to eradicate poverty, to enhance social inclusion, to respond sustainably to the needs of all societies, to build a culture of peace,” Bokova said.

She emphasized that education could help foster greater respect and understanding between cultures, give learners “tools to make the most of diversity” and also “harness the energy of young women and men for the benefit of all”.

The conference began exactly three weeks after the January 7 attacks in Paris in which 17 people were killed by three young militants. The victims included nine journalists who worked for Charlie Hebdo, a satirical weekly newspaper that had published controversial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad.

In the shadow of such violence, discussions on the role of education in the fight against extremism, and in promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue were of particular significance. Participants called for the full engagement of youth, alongside educators, in developing long-term policies for global citizenship education.

Secular values

Amira Yahyaoui, president and founder of the Tunisian NGO Al Bawsala, stressed that young people needed to be educated about how to live together in a diverse world, and especially about “laïcité” (or secular values) in relationship to religious beliefs.

She also called for more attention to the plight of children in conflict-torn regions who “no longer have the right to childhood”, saying that these youngsters must be taught the “right to survive”. She said that educating parents and grandparents was fundamental as well.

“When it’s a mother who explains to a girl that she is not equal to her brother, how can you educate against this

inequality?” she asked.

According to UNESCO, the aim of global citizen education (GCED) is to “equip learners of all ages with those values, knowledge and skills that are based on and instill respect for human rights, social justice, diversity, gender equality and environmental sustainability and that empower learners to be responsible global citizens.”

GCED also gives learners “the competencies and opportunity to realise their rights and obligations to promote a better world and future for all”, and it is aimed at all ages: children, youth and adults.

Although global citizenship education can be delivered in a variety of ways, the main method in most states will be through the formal education system, officials said. As such, governments can integrate the concept either as part of existing programmes or as a separate subject.

The values of “global citizenship” have been in consideration for some time, but UNESCO explained that it has “gained momentum since the launch of the UN Secretary General’s Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) in 2012, which has identified ‘fostering global citizenship’ as one of its three priority areas of work, along with access to and quality of education”.

Among the UNESCO measures in this area is the “Teaching Respect for All” project, launched jointly with Brazil and the United States in 2012 to “counteract discrimination both in and through education”. Work on this is being carried out in Brazil, Kenya, Ivory Coast and other countries.

The organization has also created a clearinghouse on GCED, in cooperation with the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding.

While the numerous areas of discussion (which included sexuality and health education) were at times overwhelming and repetitive during the conference, the significance of the issues seemed inescapably real. This was underscored by the presence of many young people among the academics, policy makers, NGOs and UN agencies participating.

Chernor Bah, the Sierra Leone-born chairperson of the Youth Advocacy Group of GEFI, said the meeting was

important because it raised concrete proposals for the post-2015 education agenda, such as how to measure the outcomes of GCED and build international partnerships.

“We have a responsibility to one another, and our humanity is more important than our nationality, ethnicity or religious beliefs,” Bah told IDN. “As the African saying goes - I am because you are. And that’s what being a global citizen is really about.”

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Image credit: UN Photo/Evan Schneider.



# OPINION: Global Citizenship, A Result of Emerging Global Consciousness

By Arsenio Rodriguez\*

MYRTLE BEACH, South Carolina (IPS) - Globalisation is an integral feature of modernity. It already has significantly advanced to transform local experiences into global ones, to unify the disparate villages of the world into a global community, and to integrate national economies into an international economy.

At the same time, however, the process of globalisation brings about the loss of cultural identity.

Many young people today grow up and live in a consolidating global world and define themselves as people not belonging to any particular culture. In 2013, 232 million people, or 3.2 per cent of the world's population, were legal international migrants, compared with 175 million in 2000 and 154 million in 1990.

To these figures one must add at least an estimated 30 million undocumented migrants.

As a result, more people in the world are intermarrying across cultural, ethnic and religious groupings. In Europe, for example, in the period 2008-10, on average one in 12 married persons was in a mixed marriage. Their children are exposed to hybrid cultural settings plus sometimes the host country setting if both parents are immigrants.

In 2013, more than one billion traveled internationally as tourists, thus increasing their firsthand knowledge of the world beyond their own borders. On the other hand, there are nearly three billion Internet users in the world today. More than a billion are connected in social networks across the planet.

The interconnectedness of people today is beyond anything that has happened before in history. And to this one must add the ecological, cosmological and modern physics concepts that emphasise interconnectedness in the world at large and our appreciation of being on the same planet, the global village.

For many now, home is not bound to a specific location, but rather to a conscious experience of culture. People living between cultures feel more "natural" in a globalised world because it reflects the combination of different

cultures, views and social belongings.

There is, however, as part of the global synthesis and interconnectedness process, a socio-cultural energy of resistance, acting as a counterforce. And although many people define and identify themselves as global citizens, the cultures and societies in which they live do not easily accept their status, and constantly try to place and categorise them.

Wherever they feel at home, they are simultaneously perceived as outsiders, tourists, and as members of a foreign culture. Simultaneously, as the world integration persists, cultural entrenchments, ethnic, religious and parochial groups resist, fearing the dissolving forces of globalisation, manifesting the resistance in fundamentalism, violence and tribal and ethnic wars.

Culture and globalisation have come to be understood as mutually exclusive and antithetical; the former is typically associated with one specific culture while the latter signifies the homogenisation of all cultures into one.

For the global citizen, self-understanding and cultural identity are defined by the lack of belonging to a specific culture. Global citizens lose their sense of belonging and become strangers to society, but in return they gain the freedom of self-expression and self-definition since they are unfettered by the normative constraints of culture and society.

The world is in the midst of a great transition. Prevailing business as usual models are not going to work for a nine billion, highly consumptive society. Scientific, business and government authorities throughout the world agree that we need to align our production and consumption cycles, our markets, with the natural cycles of our life support systems.

And our fragmented approaches are not efficient or effective enough to accomplish this. We need a global consciousness and a global citizenship.

Not a global government but a federated international system based on collaboration and cooperation, rather than competition and hegemony, linking citizenry in their

respective communities and countries on issues of common interest and with respect for the cultural diversity.

And it cannot be not just be governments participating in this concerted effort of international cooperation. Private business stands today as the most powerful sector in the planet. However, it has yet to assume a corresponding responsibility in shaping the future of the societal context in which it is embedded and on which it ultimately depends.

A new world-culture is emerging through an integral vision, which is independent of existing traditions and conserved values. It is initiating a new way of thinking in terms of an indivisible totality, and it discards the relative values of comparison in favour of the recognition of the intrinsic worth of everything and everyone.

Increasing numbers of people, communities, even corporate enterprises are increasingly understanding this interconnectedness and the advantage of cooperation and collaboration as a business model.

The movement to global citizenship should be to connect people committed to create a just, peaceful, and sustainable world, to accelerate a cohesive global movement of personal and social transformation, reflecting the unity of humanity.

True global citizens aim to connect caring communities, groups, and individuals at a global level, to promote understanding of humanity's underlying unity and advance its expression through peace, social justice and ecological balance.

Anyone who transforms his/her perception of the world from one of me against "the other", of "us" versus "them", into a unified perception that recognises the interconnectedness of life starts to belong to the global citizenship movement.

This emergence is already happening everywhere as people are becoming conscious at many levels of political organisation, that the functioning of the life support systems that underwrite the well-being and prosperity of humanity is at risk.

There is broad consensus amongst the world's scientif-



ic, business, intergovernmental and non-governmental communities that: (a) we need to align our production and consumption cycles and our markets with the natural regenerative cycles of nature; (b) prevailing business-as-usual models based on intense and wasteful consumption are not going to work for the expected nine billion inhabitants; (c) there is an urgency to change our ways; and (d) piecemeal approaches are not effective or scalable enough.

Sustainable solutions are there, people are already making a difference, making things happen. All we need to do is a wide-range scaling up and a fast acceleration of this process.

We have a systems problem, so we need a systemic solution. There is only one force on earth that is powerful enough to fix this – all of us. We need to collaborate consciously in the largest enterprise, ever to be set in motion; one that contains all others – a truly global citizenry and

for this we need a massive cultural change in our consciousness. [IPS - January 10, 2014]

\* Arsenio Rodriguez is Chairman and CEO of Devnet International, an association that works to create, promote and support partnerships and exchanges among civil society organisations, local authorities and entrepreneurs throughout the world.

Edited by Kitty Stapp

Image credit: DIAC Australia CC BY 2.0

# Driving Home The Concept Of Global Citizenship

By Jaya Ramachandran

NEW YORK (IDN) - Education for Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development (EGCSD) is far from having become a buzzword. In fact, beyond the domain of experts, the concept has yet to gain currency. Though, while explaining it, even those well versed in the theme do not find it easy to drive home the message.

“As technology advances and governance is increasingly conducted beyond the parameters of the nation-state, the concept of global citizenship remains mysteriously absent. What does the term mean in historical terms and what practices might help its evolution into a coherent and democratic political practice?” asked Ron Israel, co-founder of The Global Citizens’ Initiative (TGCI), in a recent article.

A global citizen, he says, is someone who identifies with being part of an emerging world community and whose actions contribute to building this community’s values and practices. Sounds a simple definition. But the devil is in the detail.

Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, a Bangladesh diplomat most noted for his work on development in the poorest nations, global peace and championing the rights of women and children, is of the view that the concept of global citizenship is “an idea, a way of behavior” for individuals.

In fact, the basic change Ban Ki-moon wants in his Global Education First Initiative launched in September 2012, is to change the mindset, notes Chowdhury: “To prepare the younger generation, in this case, to feel that we are part of a bigger world, to feel that we cannot just think very parochially, we cannot achieve our broader objectives, objectives that are in the best interest of humanity, without feeling as a part of one whole world, that we are part of this bigger planet and we should feel the same way.”

Arsenio Rodriguez, Chairman and CEO of DEVNET International, who has worked with the World Bank and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), finds the essence of global citizenship in the fact that “when we are born we inherit a common home, a sun for energy, an Earth for all commodities, shelter and nourishment, a sustaining milieu for body, mind and spirit, and our fellow beings to

share the extraordinary experience of life”.

Life is thus in its ultimate essence, a relationship between peoples and between people with the planet and its sustaining wealth. “To make this relationship a productive and fruitful one for all is our challenge. Whereas new concepts and models are beginning to sprout they have not yet taken hold to steer us fully into sustainability and global citizenship,” he adds.

Going into historical detail, Palitha Kohona, Sri Lanka’s Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations says, the concept of global citizenship has challenged the minds of humans for a very long time not only in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Universal acceptance evaded

Despite all the philosophical and religious exhortations, the concept of global citizenship has continued to evade universal acceptance. Historically, the world has witnessed the growth of many empires, which encouraged subjects to become accustomed to the common factors of being part of such empires.

“Perhaps, not as equals but as individuals who were subject to the same ruler. The result was not what most would imagine to be global citizenship,” argues Kohona.

Nevertheless, a much wider perception of the world became established in the minds of many as a consequence. Around 330 B.C., Alexander the Great expanded little Macedonia’s sway almost to the shores of the Indus River and left, as his legacy, a concept of oneness with the culture of Greece in the minds of his subjects.

Later a bigger empire centred in Rome brought under its umbrella vast areas of Asia Minor, North Africa and Europe. A type of political unity that did not exist in the Western world before now prevailed. The political and socio-cultural footprint left behind by Imperial Rome is a factor even today in the psyche of many.

Kohona recalls that a much bigger empire resulted from the expansion of the Caliphates of Baghdad and Damascus. The oneness of belonging to one regime, which encompassed economic relations, and religion and culture, was evident from Spain to Northern India during this

period. The underpinning framework of religion was a tangible factor in this case.

In more recent times, says Kohona, the world witnessed the Portuguese and Spanish empires, which straddled the globe creating a sense of oneness among citizens and subjects. Religion, culture and trade relations were essential factors of these empires.

The Ottomans, the Dutch, the English, and the French created more recent empires. They said that that the sun never set on the British Empire and its legacy is far reaching. The Chinese empire which expanded, at one time to Poland and Syria under Genghis Khan and his sons, was so unified, that a *laissez passer* issued by an official in Khanbalik was honoured all the way to the Middle East. “However, the oneness created by these empires, for various reasons, including geographical reality and the limits of physical power, did not encompass the whole world,” says Kohona.

Besides, one empire was often challenged by another and fell in due course. Nor did they create a feeling of global citizenship in a true sense. In fact, empires competed with each other and in certain empires the concept of oneness did not exist at all as there were different categories of subjects.

“One result, however, of these global empires was that they had the effect of bringing together different peoples, cultures, philosophies, religious beliefs, scientific ideas, political concepts and economic systems, helping to generate, at least in certain respects, feelings that there were common strands among us humans or the desire to bring them under one common umbrella,” says Kohona.

While the 20th century witnessed the emergence of sub-regional, regional and international organizations based on human rights and democratic norms – a process that has continued into the 21st century, experts believe that it is through education that the concept of global citizenship can be anchored in the minds and lives of people at several levels.

IDN-InDepthNews – January 11, 2015



# OPINION: Understanding Education for Global Citizenship

By Kartikeya V. Sarabhai\*

AHMEDABAD, India (IPS) - Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) brings together concerns about the environment, economic development and social aspects. Since 1972, when the first U.N. Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm, Sweden, there has been increasing awareness of the intricate link between conserving the environment and human development. The fact that our lifestyles and the way we have developed have a major impact on the environment was known earlier. Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, in 1962, had been an eye-opener, especially in the United States where it was published.

But the 1976 U.N. Conference on the Human Habitat was perhaps the beginning of the realisation that development and environment had to be dealt with together. By the time of the first Rio conference in 1992, the deterioration of the environment was recognised as a global issue.

The conventions on biodiversity and climate change both were formulated at this conference. It was increasingly clear that no longer could countries solve their problems at the national level. With greater awareness especially on climate change one realised that what happens in one part of the planet has an impact on another.

Notwithstanding what President George W. Bush declared at Rio – that “The American way of life is not up for negotiations” – the world came to realise that ultimately these issues had to do with people's lifestyles. The development paradigm that had emerged was carbon intensive and extremely wasteful.

The global footprint measure was developed in 1990 by Canadian ecologist William Rees and Swiss-born regional planner Mathis Wackernagel at the University of British Columbia. It was a good way of knowing just how an individual's action impacted the planet. Since the 1970s the total human footprint has exceeded the capacity of the planet.

While the global debate then and to a large extent even today seems based on the idea that making changes in policy and introducing new technologies can somehow shrink this footprint to sustainable levels, this assumption is widely questioned.

At the core of the change that is required is the transformation that happens in the way people relate to the planet and how we produce, consume and waste resources. It is not laws alone that can change people's behaviour but people themselves behaving with a sense of responsibility. This sense of responsibility is at the heart of the concept of citizenship.

Global Citizenship therefore almost naturally emerges from an understanding of environment and sustainable development. ESD therefore becomes the foundation for Global Citizenship Education (GCE).

A Global Citizen is not someone who can be passive, but needs to contribute. ESD, unlike most formal education programmes, has the necessary action component built into it. ESD though shortened to three letters actually stands for four words. The missing word in the abbreviation is “for”, a word as important as the other three.

It is not Sustainable Development Education, which would indicate it is about teaching people about sustainable development (SD). What “for” does is, it puts an action goal at the end of the education process. It is not just to increase public awareness and knowledge about SD but in fact to act to achieve it.

The Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) of the U.N. secretary-general speaks of Global Citizenship as one of the three key concepts that the world needs to strive for in education today. GCE involves widening horizons and seeing problems from different points of view. Multi-stakeholder discussions are an important part of a GCE Programme. While we may strive for this, it is not always easy to understand and experience different points of view.

The Centre for Environment Education (CEE) in Ahmedabad, India, along with CEE Australia has launched the Global Citizenship for Sustainability (GCS) Programme which involves connecting children in schools in different countries around a nature-based theme.

For instance, Project 1600 connects eight schools on the coast of Gujarat in Western India with similar number of schools on the coast of Queensland in Australia. Through projects concerning the marine environment, children living in very different societies at different levels of development compare notes. The exchange forces students to think out of the box and understand issues from a very different perspective, from a different part of the globe.

Internships where students spend time in countries and environments that are very different from their own are also a very effective tool for GCE. Increasing global connectivity has also opened up possibilities for GCE that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago.

The work on ESD done during the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development led by UNESCO and partnered with a number of organisations across the globe has set the foundation towards GCE. Tools to measure GCE are still under development, as is the concept itself. The Brookings Institute through its Global Citizenship Working Group of the Learning Metrics Task Force 2.0 Programme has made a beginning in these tools.

The continuous feedback and strengthening of the programme should lead to specific insights on GCE much as the last decade of work in ESD has taught the global community the finer points of creating a sense of responsibility to the planet while the same time engaging in a development process.

\*Kartikeya V.Sarabhai is the founder and director of the Centre for Environment Education headquartered in Ahmedabad, with 40 offices across India.

Edited by Kitty Stapp

IPS - Dec. 30, 2014

# Driving Home The Concept Of Global Citizenship

By Jaya Ramachandran

NEW YORK (IDN) - When United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the Global Education First Initiative in September 2012, “fostering global citizenship” was one of his three priorities, along with “putting every child in school” and “improving the quality of learning”.

Ban said: “Education is much more than an entry to the job market. It has the power to shape a sustainable future and better world. Education policies should promote peace, mutual respect and environmental care.”

As the international community moves toward adopting the post-2015 development agenda, popularly known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the need for education for global citizenship is becoming increasingly important.

Because none of the goals impacting the Earth and its inhabitants can be achieved without people and governments around the world transcending narrow national interests and acting in the interest of the planet.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012 in Brazil gave the mandate that the SDGs should be coherent with and integrated into the UN development agenda for universal good beyond 2015.

The Open Working Group established by the Rio outcome document has meanwhile agreed on 17 goals and 169 targets, which aim at poverty eradication, changing unsustainable and encouraging sustainable patterns of consumption and production and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development.

These are the overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development as explained in Ban’s “synthesis report”, *The Road to Dignity by 2030*, released on December 4, 2014.

Ban proposes an integrated set of six essential elements that taken together will aim to facilitate the deliberations of Member States ahead of the special UN Summit on sustainable development from September 25 to 27 and enable them to arrive at the concise and aspirational agenda mandated by the Rio Conference.

The six essential elements are: (1) to end poverty and fight inequalities; (2) to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children; (3) to grow a strong, inclusive, and transformative economy; (4) to protect our ecosystems for all societies and our children; (5) to promote safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions; and (6) to catalyse global solidarity for sustainable development.

ESD and EGC

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and, by implication, Education for Global Citizenship (EGC), is a critical component in the proposed post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

The proposed Goal 4 (the post-2015 education goal) seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all”. While proposed Goal 12 aims to “ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”; and Goal 13 states the need to “take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”.

ESD (and EGC) is included in the three proposed targets to help achieve these goals:

- First, “by 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”.

- A second ESD-related target proposes to “ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature” by 2030.

- And finally a third target suggests to “improve education, awareness raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction, and early warning” in order to help combat climate change.

This analysis, posted on the website of the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, affirms

the three key elements that Soka Gakkai International (SGI) president Daisaku Ikeda suggested as the basis of an educational program for global citizenship.

Already back in June 1996, in a lecture at the Teachers College, Columbia University, Ikeda spelt out the following as essential elements of global citizenship:

- The wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living

- The courage not to fear or deny difference; but to respect and strive to understand people of different cultures, and to grow from encounters with them

- The compassion to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one’s immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places.

Education for global citizenship, he said in his *Peace Proposals 2014*, should include:

- Deepen understanding of the challenges facing humankind, enable people to explore their causes and instill the shared hope and confidence that such problems, being of human origin, are amenable to human solutions;

- Identify the early signs of impending global problems in local phenomena, develop sensitivity to such signs and empower people to take concerted action; and

- Foster empathetic imagination and a keen awareness that actions that profit one’s own country might have a negative impact on or be perceived as a threat by other countries, elevating this to a shared pledge not to seek one’s happiness and prosperity at the expense of others.

The Aichi-Nagoya conference in November 2014 in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, launched the Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), focussing on action on the ground.

The GAP and further outcomes of the World Conference will inform the deliberations of the World Education Forum to be held from May 19 to 22, 2015 in Incheon, South Korea, which will aim to reach agreement on a new education agenda post-2015 and to adopt a global framework for action for the years to come.

IDN-InDepthNews – December 28, 2014

# Citizens of the World, Unite!

By Roger Hamilton-Martin

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) - As politics, economies, conflicts and cultures become increasingly intertwined, will individual identities also begin to transcend national boundaries?

The elusive nature of “global citizenship” was noted by Sri Lanka’s permanent representative to the United Nations, Dr. Palitha Kohona, at an IPS Forum on Global Citizenship on Nov. 18 at the Sri Lankan Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York.

“The concept of global citizenship has challenged the minds of humans for a very long time although its exact definition has never really crystallised,” Kohona said.

The idea was famously put forth by Tony Blair during a speech in Chicago in 1999. “We are all internationalists now, whether we like it or not. We cannot refuse to participate in global markets if we want to prosper. We cannot ignore new political ideas in other countries if we want to innovate,” Blair said.

Ambassador Kohona said that even after the collapse of the empires spawned by the Westphalian system, the growth of powerful individual states has not encouraged the development of a genuinely global system.

Kohona stressed the importance of the United Nations as an institution in which to hold up the principle of global citizenship.

“The establishment of the United Nations has created the forum for humanity to make an effort to address common issues together from a global perspective. It is the most effective forum available to all nation states. The United Nations and its agencies have been successful in generating sympathy for the usefulness of approaching many of today’s challenges together.”

The Forum was chaired by Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, former representative for Bangladesh and the prime mover of the 1999 General Assembly resolution that adopted the U.N. Declaration and the Programme of Action (PoA) on the Culture of Peace.

“When we speak of global citizenship, certain thoughts

come to mind,” he said. “The first thing to understand is spirituality. What are our values, what are our commitments as human beings? The second is the belief in the oneness of humanity. We should come out of our narrow boundaries, not only of ourselves but of our communities.”

Despite challenges, many of the panellists agreed that the promotion of global citizenship is advancing against the headwinds of the purported clash of civilisations, declining resources, and cultural cynicism.

IPS Chair Ambassador Walther Lichem noted that, “Almost to the day 200 years after the initiation of multilateral diplomacy at the Congress of Vienna, we become aware that multilateral diplomacy is increasingly giving way to global governance.”

Lichem noted that global citizenship needs to be seen in the context of a system that espouses norms such as the “responsibility to protect,” a principle that puts the international community above the nation state when it comes to protecting its own citizens.

“Global citizenship is to be understood as a citizenship with human rights as a way of life,” Lichem said.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has identified global citizenship as the third priority area in his Global Education First initiative, seeing it as important that students don’t simply learn how to pass exams and get jobs in their own countries, but are instilled with an understanding of the importance of respect and responsibility across cultures, countries and regions.

“Global citizenship is a fight against limbo,” said Erol Avdovic, vice president of the United Nations Correspondents Association. “It is the fight against misconception and against ignoring – or even worse, manipulating – simple facts.”

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, an entity that explores the roots of polarisation between societies and cultures was in attendance at the Forum, with spokesperson for the High Representative Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, Nihal Saad noting that education for global

citizenship “has the power to shape a sustainable future and better world.

“Educational policies should promote peace, mutual respect and environmental care. It does not suffice for education to produce individuals who can read, write and count. Education should and must bring shared values to life.”

Saad’s sentiments were shared by Monte Joffee, Soka Gakkai International’s USA representative, who said, “Our curriculum needs to include more topics of a global nature so our students can develop empathetic resonance with ‘the other’.

“This does not reach to the core of today’s educational crisis. Speaking only of American education, I must say that the inequalities of educational funding, the levels of despair and hopelessness in too many of our communities... are numbing realities and ‘add-ons’ to the curriculum about global citizenship are not the solution.”

Joffee related the story of Anand Kumar, an Indian mathematician who is well known for his “Super 30” programme in Patna, Bihar. It prepares economically disadvantaged students for the entrance examination for the renowned Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) engineering schools, with great success.

His programme selects 30 talented candidates from disadvantaged, tutors them, and provides study materials and lodging for a year.

Joffee noted that this story provides a great model for Global Citizenship Education. “Educators must say, ‘I will start right here, with the student right in front of me.’”

Ramu Damodaran from United Nations Department of Public Information Outreach Division also spoke of the importance of academics being given more opportunities to have a voice at the United Nations.

Edited by Kitty Stapp

IPS - Nov. 29, 2014

# The Long Journey To Global Citizenship

By Monzurul Huq

*“I think Voltaire said something that applies to my perception. He said, I should be ready to die for what I believe, but I should not be ready to kill for what I believe. So, when you look at fundamentalism, that’s one of the problems, when you look just at the basic violence in society in the pursuit of individual interests, that’s one of the problems. When you’re looking at the world divided into pieces and somebody tries to take control of someone else, then there is another conflict and you’ve war.” – Professor Carlos Alberto Torres.*

NAGOYA, Japan (IDN) – Education for global citizenship, funded among others through tax on financial speculation, will not only promote enlightened patriotism but also foster the cause of peace and counter nationalistic and fundamentalist trends, says Professor Carlos Alberto Torres in an exclusive interview.

Torres is a leading expert on issues related to global citizenship. For the last decade, he has been working from a global perspective on human rights, pluralism and citizenship. He has contributed significantly to defining the theoretical perspective of educating the global citizen. Together with some of his colleagues, he established in 1991 Paulo Freire Institute and is currently serving as its Director.

Professor Torres, who was in Nagoya in November 2014 to attend the UNESCO Conference on Education for Sustainable Development and talked to IDN-InDepthNews about the concept of global citizenship – its dimension, possibilities and also the difficulties that we face in transforming the idea into reality. Below extensive extracts from the interview:

IDN: How optimistic are you that global citizenship is achievable in the near future?

Torres: If we were not optimistic we would not be talking about it. Paulo Freire (the Brazilian pedagogue pioneering the tradition of popular education in Latin America and an icon of social changes through education) used to say that we have to work on our own dreams. And he said there are dreams for today and there are dreams for tomorrow. My goal is that we have dreams for today.

The notion of global citizenship has several different aspects as a concept. One is to articulate a critical per-

spective. Second is to help replace the notion of a global model of neo-liberalism, which has produced an impact on education that I consider deleterious. And this impact is concentrated around the regime of high stake testing and models of accountability, which are usually more connected with the ways to manipulate power than actually to see what is happening and how you connect global citizenship education.

Having said that, what we need for this concept to be successful is clear conceptualization. Secondly, we need what I’ll call a legal bind. There must be some legal elements in international law that defend some of the definitions proposed in this concept. Third, we need principles that articulate and will define the bases on which we’re operating; and in this context is to defend the planet, to defend the people and to defend peace.

When I use the term peace as an immaterial good, I’m serious about it because the moment we achieve some peace, even individual, we can move forward. I’m not sure if you’re a religious man or not, but my own perception of spirituality is connected with achieving inner peace. And by achieving inner peace, you achieve a sense of “perfection”. Otherwise, you’ll not have it. That does not mean you’re escaping reality. It means that you’re engaging in reality, trying to use this newfound peace to promote your struggles. It might look like a paradox, but it is not. So, I’ll say - peace is an immaterial good of society and we need to promote it as a global movement.

Once you have all these things in place, you have to create some revolutions. These revolutions could be used at several levels. Let me give you one example, why we have so much inequality. Because there are some people who are taking advantage of the way the system works and accumulate resources without saying that you need peace. Ok, so you can work on this and there is the notion of Tobin tax. It has been endorsed in Europe. Tobin tax is a very small percentage tax on speculation and currency, which means that if someone speculates, he has to pay a tax in every transaction. The amount of money involved is very small, but with the speed of circulation of financial capitalism, the amount involved can become immense. So what do we do with the money? I put it in education.

And why you do that? Because we want global citizenship education. So, you see, this is one example of a revolution, and I can give you several more.

Is it going to be a concept that is easily and immediately accepted? Of course not. So we have to create a model of intellectual persuasion in which people begin to see the importance of this concept, the implications of this concept and how they can be applied in our daily life. Finally, one of the great dilemmas is, can we find the way in which this concept of global citizenship will help national citizenship. The answer is yes and I’m working on that with some other colleagues.

IDN: Doesn’t this idea come in conflict with nationalism?

Torres: Well, in a way it does not have to be in conflict because we’re looking at the local and the global. If the global works in the local and the local works in the global, then it does not have to be in conflict. But it will conflict with ethnic nationalism, because it is a model of nationalism that privileges a particular ethnic group. It will also be in conflict with a model of nationalism that plunders resources of the environment that nobody should. And it will conflict with the model of nationalism in which pollution is allowed and this nationalism is usually also one sided, or if I may put it in this way, is controlled by economic elites that want to continue their model of capital accumulation without any concern about environment. In that regard it is in conflict with nationalism.

Does it get into conflict with nationalism in terms of patriotism? No, it does not. What kind of patriotism are we talking about? Here is one of the wonderful dilemmas of this discourse from a political and philosophical perspective. Think of this – patria means motherland. Patriotism is love for the motherland. So, love for the motherland could guide you into being essentially active in promoting attacks on other motherlands. So, this notion of helping global citizenship and peace is to moderate some irrational trends in some models of nationalism, not all of them. The second element is that nationalism is always attached to some founding documents. These founding documents are connected with some constitutional source. The US constitution has been the most successful one that inspired hundreds of other constitutions. So, in the US

what defines patriotism? The only answer that you have is the idea of freedom. Then how could you be emotionally attached to an idea?

IDN: Is it through the American way of life?

Torres: But how do you define that, the idea of freedom? You want to be more specific and want to say ok, the American notion is an exception. But I think you have to create some kind of a narrative to explain this notion of patriotism attached to freedom. Another example very much in discussion in some European countries, but has reached also the US. It is constitutional patriotism. You really look at the constitution and you try to live by the principles of the constitution. What happens when nationalism triumphs over constitution? What happens when nationalism takes a political perception of patriotism that is extremely damaging to the basic socialization inside a country? Answer to all such assumptions is, you need global citizenship. It works as a moderator.

IDN: How will this perception work in reality?

Torres: I said that you need some global laws. I think what we need to do is to persuade people, I think we need to create more interest groups that are concerned about this. We do have lot of global citizens already.

IDN: But we have other the side as well, like the fundamentalist trend, nationalistic trend and so on.

Torres: You have to face that trend, confront that trend peacefully and try to persuade. But we do have already the global citizenship. Imagine all those people connected with environmental struggles. They are global citizens. Are they pursuing interests independent of you or me? No. They are pursuing independent interests of the planet. Then you have businessmen, people who live on airplanes, who cut a deal today in Osaka and then they go tomorrow to Malaysia, cut another deal there and then come back to London. And in less than three weeks they have been in five different continents cutting all sorts of deals. These people are also global citizens. I want them to abide by a global citizen ethic, not a business ethic. So, it's a long haul, it has to start somewhere. My first work on this was in 2002. Academics have meanwhile written a lot about the contradictions and all sorts of things. Now I want people to begin to look at how we change the world.

I come from a perspective which is critical theory. In critical theory we don't teach or do research to reproduce the world. We do teach and do research to change the world. This is a fundamental principle. And if we can achieve some of that, living more and more in peace and creating better and better defenses for the planet, then we would have achieved what I call the idea of the global commons – the planet, the people and the peace.

IDN: I guess one of the difficulties we face in understanding global citizenship is the existence of military forces. Armies are usually trained from a narrow national perspective of defending the patria from presumed enemies. Do you think we can become true global citizens without demilitarization?

Torres: I will love to say one day that there is no more need for military men. I will love to say that. But I know this is not going to happen ever. Psychoanalytically speaking, individuals are built on pressures – we can modify them, we can control them, we can supplement them. But they are in us. We may diffuse some of the pressures, but they are in us. One is the sexual stimuli, which correlates with so many things from good and bad to violence, but which also correlates from good and bad; because if suddenly somebody attacks you or attacks your wife or your daughter and you react with violence defending someone else, your ability to react will obviously be seen as positive. But if you, without any provocation and for no particular reason, attack somebody then it'll not be seen as a good thing. But you and I, and everybody around have these two portions – the libido and the violence. Because of this, it will be absolutely impossible to eliminate the option of violence.

Revolutions take place because people decide to end a state of affairs in which they are denied, some of them are violent and some of them are non-violent, but changes occur. My view is that, when you look at citizenship, one of the real questions that you come across is: are you ready to die for your citizenship? Are you ready to die for your belonging to the patria? If you were not in this job, say in Bangladesh army; then you probably have to tell me yes. If I'm forced through conscription into the Bangladesh army and I did not join voluntarily, I probably could say no. But

I would rather prefer not to be that bold.

I think Voltaire said something that applies to my perception. He said, I should be ready to die for what I believe, but I should not be ready to kill for what I believe. So, when you look at fundamentalism, that's one of the problems, when you look just at the basic violence in society in the pursuit of individual interests, that's one of the problems. When you're looking at the world divided into pieces and somebody tries to take control of someone else, then there is another conflict and you've war.

But look at what has been happening in Europe. Think historically. The incredible amount of wars was connected with the constitution of the nation states in Europe. Look now. I mean there is no guarantee. We have the Crimean Republic or we have Russia – there is no guarantee. But we have come a long way.

\*Monzurul Huq is a Bangladesh journalist, who has authored a number of books in Bengali on Japan and other subjects. He moved to Japan in 1994 after working at the United Nations Information Center in Dhaka and BBC World Service in London. He represents two leading national dailies of Bangladesh – Prothom Alo and the Daily Star – and contributes regularly to a number of other important publications in Bangladesh. He has written extensively both in English and Bengali on matters related to Japan and East Asia. He is also a visiting professor at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Keisen University and Seishin University, teaching subjects related to Japanese politics, Japanese media, the developing world and world affairs. He also works as a radio broadcaster for NHK. A member of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan since 2000, he has served at the Board of Directors of the Club for two consecutive terms and was elected president of the Club in 2009.

IDN-InDepthNews – November 25, 2014

# Laying the Foundations of a World Citizens Movement

By Anthony George

JOHANNESBURG (IPS) - Has organised civil society, bound up in internal bureaucracy, in slow, tired processes and donor accountability, become simply another layer of a global system that perpetuates injustice and inequality? How can civil society organizations (CSOs) build a broad movement that draws in, represents and mobilises the citizenry, and how can they effect fundamental, systemic transformation, rather than trading in incremental change? This kind of introspective reflection was at the heart of a process of engagement among CSOs from around the world that gathered in Johannesburg from Nov. 19 to 21 for the “Toward a World Citizens Movement: Learning from the Grassroots” conference.

Organised by DEEEP, a project within the European civil society umbrella organisation CONCORD which builds capacity among CSOs and carries out advocacy around global citizenship and global citizenship education, the conference brought together 200 participants.

Key partners were CIVICUS (the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, which is one of the largest and most diverse global civil society networks) and GCAP (Global Call to Action Against Poverty).

The three-day gathering was part of a larger series of conferences and activities that were arranged to coincide during the 2014 International Civil Society Week organised by CIVICUS, which closed Nov. 24.

Global citizenship is a concept that is gaining currency within the United Nations system, to the delight of people like Rilli Lappalainen, Secretary-General of the Finnish NGDO Platform and a key advocate for global citizenship education.

At the heart of this concept is people's empowerment, explains Lappalainen. “It is important that people understand the inter-linkages at the global level; that they understand that they are part of the system and can act,

based on their rights, to influence the system in order to bring about change and make life better – so it's no longer someone else deciding things on behalf of the citizens.”

The process of introspection around building an effective civil society movement that can lead to such change began a year ago at the first Global Conference, also held in Johannesburg.

The discourse there highlighted the need for new ways of thinking and working – for the humility to linger in the uncomfortable spaces of not knowing, for processes of mutual learning, sharing and questioning.

This new spirit of inquiry and engagement, very much evident in the creative, interactive format of this year's conference, is encapsulated in an aphorism introduced by thought-leader Bayo Akomolafe from Nigeria: “The time is very urgent – let us slow down”.

Akomolafe's keynote address explored the need for a shift in process: “We are realising our theories of change need to change,” he said. “We must slow down today because running faster in a dark maze will not help us find our way out.”

“We must slow down today,” he continued, “because if we have to travel far, we must find comfort in each other – in all the glorious ambiguity that being in community brings ... We must slow down because that is the only way we will see ... the contours of new possibilities urgently seeking to open to us.”

A key opportunity for mutual learning and questioning was provided on the second day by a panel on ‘Challenging World Views’.

Prof Rob O'Donoghue from the Environmental Learning Research Centre at South Africa's Rhodes University explored the philosophy of ubuntu, Brazilian activist and community organiser Eduardo Rombauer spoke about the principles of horizontal organising, and Hiro Sakurai, representative of the Buddhist network Soka Gakkai

International (SGI) to the United Nations in New York, discussed the network's core philosophy of soka, or value creation.

A female activist from Bhutan who was to join the panel was unable to do so because of difficulties in acquiring a visa – a situation that highlighted a troubling observation made by Danny Sriskandarajah, head of CIVICUS, about the ways in which the space for CSOs to work is being shrunk around the world.

The absence of women on the panel was noted as problematic. How is it possible to effectively question a global system that is so deeply patriarchal without the voices of women, asked a male participant. This prompted the spontaneous inclusion of a female member of the audience.

In the spirit of embracing not-knowing, the panellists were asked to pose the questions they think we should be asking. How do we understand and access our power? How do we foster people's engagement and break out of our own particular interests to engage in more systems-based thinking? How can multiple worldviews meet and share a moral compass?

Ubuntu philosophy, explained O'Donoghue, can be defined by the statement: “A person is a person through other people.”

The implications of this perspective for the issues at hand are that answers to the problems affecting people on the margins cannot be pre-defined from the outside, but must be worked out through solidarity and through a process of struggle. You cannot come with answers; you can only come into the company of others and share the problems, so that solutions begin to emerge from the margins.

The core perspective of soka philosophy is that each person has the innate ability to create value – to create a positive change – in whatever circumstances they find themselves. Millions of people, Sakurai pointed out, are proving the validity of this idea in their own contexts.

This is the essence of the Soka movement.

His point was echoed the following evening in the address of Graca Machel, wife of the late Nelson Mandela, at a CIVICUS reception, in which she spoke of the profound challenges confronting civil society as poverty and inequality deepen and global leaders seem increasingly dismissive of the voices of the people.

Then, toward the end of her speech, she softly recalled “my friend Madiba” (Mandela’s clan name) in the final years of his life, and his consistent message at that time that things are now in our hands.

What he showed us by his example, she said, is that each person has immense resources of good within them. Our task is to draw these out each day and exercise them in the world, wherever we are and in whatever ways we can.

Those listening to Machel saw Mandela’s message as a sign of encouragement in their efforts to create the World Citizens Movement of tomorrow.

November 26, 2014

Image credit: Zukiswa Zimela/IPS



# Global Citizenship: Gradual Unfolding of a New Concept

By Monzurul Huq\*

NAGOYA, Japan (IDN) - The concept of global citizenship is one of the new ideas that the United Nations is actively promoting in recent years. In today's interconnected world challenges we face need solutions based on new thinking transcending national boundaries and ideas whose outreach stretches beyond conventional understanding of identities based on nationality.

The conventional education systems are producing individuals who are able to read and write and thus are capable of coping with the realities of life within a narrow perspective. However, as the world today faces diverse challenges interconnected with elements and phenomenon of a much broader perception, the global community is in need of citizens capable of contributing more meaningfully in the process of resolving interconnected challenges of the 21st century. This is why the idea of fostering global citizenship has been recognized as one of the priorities of education for sustainable development.

UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) held in Nagoya, Japan, from November 10 to 12 had on its agenda a wide range of topics related to sustainability that policy makers, experts, stakeholders and civic group representatives from around the world discussed.

The focus of attention was to find new ways of promoting education that would help intensifying efforts for poverty eradication, environmental protection and economic growth beyond the timeframe of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development that comes to an end this year.

There were also specific discussions on global citizenship as a means of achieving the ultimate goal of sustainable development. A workshop on global citizenship, eco-pedagogy and sustainable development was held on the second day of the conference, which was followed by a side event comprising a panel discussion on ESD and global citizenship education in the new era. Both the workshop and the panel discussion focused on emerging issues related to global citizenship, particularly on the necessity

of defining the concept of global citizenship in a more meaningful way.

The concept of global citizenship is not a completely new idea. It has been on the agenda of social science discussions for quite some time. The two main speakers at the workshop were Carlos Alberto Torres, Director, Paolo Freire Institute of UCLA; and Miguel Silva, Global Education Manager of North-South Centre of the Council of Europe.

Carlos Torres, in his keynote presentation, focused on the need for global citizenship education for ensuring social justice in our interdependent world and identified three global commons that constitute the core of global citizenship:

- Our planet is our only home and we need to protect it.
- The idea of global peace is an intangible cultural good with immaterial value.
- People are all equal.

In short, this planet, peace and people constitute the global common that call for better understanding among nations. However, he also pointed out that, since economic citizenship cannot be accomplished without bare essentials, global citizenship would remain unattainable unless we multiply public sphere to ensure social justice. Removing ambiguities, thus, is the essential prerequisite of a theoretical framework for global citizenship education that would focus more on common good and common virtues like tolerance as a civic minimum.

Utopia "helps us at least to walk"

Weather this noble goal is achievable or not will depend much on what we do to transform our dream into reality. To some it might sound like a utopia, but Carlos Torres reminded the participants: "utopia is a horizon that we intend to reach. We take two steps forward, utopia moves two steps ahead . . . However, it helps us at least to walk." Thus, the onward journey of humanity to global citizenship is also a journey forward, despite the realities of a deferred dream of our past.

Miguel Silva, on the other hand, focused on how global

education can help develop strategies and capacity building for education for sustainable development leading to fostering global citizenship. Global education targeting institutions, practitioners and learners from formal and non-formal sector, according to Silva, is a school of holistic education dealing with the growing interconnection between local and global realities that can enable learners understand world issues while empowering them with knowledge, skill, values and attitudes desirable for world citizens to face various global problems.

Since it can help learners to understand the complexities of the world, be aware of contradictions and uncertainties, and to realize that there is no one-dimensional solution for complex problems. One of the critical issues, thus, according to Silva, "is to foster this multi-perceptivity and critical approach to the problems that we have to deal with, as this would help learners to understand cultural diversity of languages leading to the realization that mutual understanding can be achieved."

To summarize, global education can comprehend and fosters empathy and intercultural skills in communication, while its methodology can create a learning environment based on dialogue, active listening and respect for other opinions and constructive assertiveness. According to Silva, global education, thus, promotes the principles of pluralism, non-discrimination and social justice, and creates the ground for global citizenship aware of global realities and working for a sustainable world based on dialogue and cooperation, while sharing common human, social and economic values.

The moderator of the workshop later asked participants to get involved in group discussions to share practical experiences for the advancement of education for sustainable development and also to identify challenges to the advancement of global citizenship. The outcome of workshop presentations and group discussions were later summarized and the concluding remarks of the chair outlined that democratic values should serve as guiding principles for educational theory and practice; and for improving quality education for fostering global citizenship



what is essential is to make room for thoughtful dialogue and critical thinking.

The workshop was followed by a panel discussion on education for sustainable development and global citizenship education in the new era, where the panelists focused on various approaches to the notion of global citizenship and assessed the progress made so far in implementing the concept of education for sustainable development at the end of the UN decade.

Moderated by Shoko Yamada of Nagoya University, the panel discussion was a joint Japan-Korea academic initiative where two panelists each from Japan and South Korea participated in the discussions. The panelists focused more on ESD as they tried to link the two interconnected philosophical concept of sustainable development and global citizenship.

Relatively new

According to Professor Kazuhiro Yoshida of Hiroshima University, the idea of global citizenship and sustainable education has been in discussion for quite long, but the combined concept of global citizenship for education is relatively new. He also thinks it to be a new phenomenon to combine global citizenship education and education for sustainable development and feels the need to continue the endeavours that have been undertaken so far.

Commenting on the importance of global citizenship education within the context of education for sustainable development, Professor Yoshida said, “there has to be a natural choice in trying to find the areas of overlaps and to make sure the overlaps are nothing but to become a core of the fundamental message for future work of post 2015 education. I think, fortunately, ESD stands for fundamental foundation of the era of sustainable development goals. That’s why I mean that the definition or conceptualization of ESD has to be redone. It’s because so far we have been working within the boundary of education, how it should be interpreted and put into practice in your own community. But now it has to be done in a much broader context of development.”

Jinhee Kim of the (South) Korean Educational Devel-

opment Institute thinks that education for sustainable development and global citizenship are in the same range of global education agenda. “Social justice and equity are key dimensions applicable to both the concepts. We can say that education is a foundation for a sustainable society with global citizenship. So, the mindset of global citizenship is that, we can change the world in a more equitable, more peaceful or in a more sustainable way,” she said. The most important thing in global citizenship education, according to her, is re-conception of the understanding of citizenship. Global citizens should be educated in a way to apply the concept at world level, or being citizens of the earth.

Not until long back, the concept of global citizenship was seen by some as a western idea being implemented around the world; and newly independent states had been a bit suspicious of the real motive of those involved in global citizenship campaign.

However, with the passage of time that misconception or reservation has gradually been eroding, paving the way for global citizenship education to be accepted and implemented widely across the developing world as well.

At Nagoya conference, 76 ministerial level representatives of UNESCO member states gathered along with more than 1,000 participants from 150 countries. Among Education Ministers heading their country representations was Nurul Islam Nahid from Bangladesh. Commenting on global citizenship education, Nahid said, “Along with focusing on problems transcending national boundaries like global warming in school textbooks, we’ve also introduced a new textbook for primary level education which has been named ‘Bangladesh and understanding the world’. This new textbook focuses on global issues in the context of historical, cultural and traditional aspects of our country. Fostering global citizens is important at a time when many of our citizens are spreading around the world as part of the global workforce.”

With the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development coming to an end, the concept of global citizenship capable of tackling global problems in a more

meaningful way is no longer considered a utopian idea destined to remain a mere textbook concept. According to a participant, “Our interdependent world needs more of such citizens well prepared of tackling various issues to make the world a common abode of mankind in true sense. The Nagoya UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development has taken one more step forward to turn the utopia into a goal not unachievable.”

\*Monzurul Huq is a Bangladesh journalist, who has authored three books in Bengali on Japan and other subjects. He moved to Japan in 1994 after working at the United Nations Information Center in Dhaka and BBC World Service in London. He represents two leading national dailies of Bangladesh – Prothom Alo and the Daily Star – and contributes regularly to a number of other important publications in Bangladesh. He has written extensively both in English and Bengali on matters related to Japan and East Asia. He is also a visiting professor at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Yokohama National University and Keisen University, teaching subjects related to Japanese politics, Japanese media, the developing world and world affairs. He also works as a radio broadcaster for NHK. A member of the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan since 2000, he has served at the Board of Directors of the Club for two consecutive terms before being elected president of the Club.

November 14, 2014

# OPINION: Building a Sustainable Future - The Compact Between Business and Society

By Georg Kell

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) - Can we envision a day when a critical mass of companies is investing in a better world? Where business is delivering value for the long-term – not just financially, but also socially, environmentally and ethically? Over a decade ago, it was hard to imagine, but we can now say with confidence that a global movement is underway.

By the late 1990s, the need for action was unmistakable. In many ways, it appeared the rest of the world did not figure into the growth and opportunity associated with massive increases in international investment and trade. It was this fragile state of the union between business and society that led the U.N. secretary-general to propose that business and the United Nations jointly initiate a “global compact of shared values and principles, to give a human face to the global market.”

From 40 companies that came together at our launch in 2000, the UN Global Compact has grown to 8,000 business signatories from 140 countries – representing approximately 50 million employees, nearly every industry sector and size, and hailing equally from developed and developing countries.

Each participant has committed to respect and support human rights, ensure decent workplace conditions, safeguard and restore the environment, and enact good corporate governance – and then is reporting publicly on progress. An additional 4,000 civil society signatories play important roles, including holding companies accountable for their commitments and partnering with business on common causes.

We now have 100 country networks that are convening like-minded companies and facilitating action on the ground, embedding universal principles and responsible business practices. Networks serve an essential role in rooting global norms, issue platforms and campaigns within a national context, and provide an important base to jump-start local action and awareness.

It is clear that companies around the world are increasingly putting sustainability on their agendas. The reality is that environmental, social and governance challenges affect the bottom-line. Market disturbances, social unrest and ecological devastation have real impacts on business vis-à-vis supply chains, capital flows and employee productivity.

We also live in a world of hyper-transparency, with people now more empowered than ever to hold governments and the private sector accountable for their actions. There has been a fundamental shift as companies come to realise that it is no longer enough to mitigate risk, but that they are expected to contribute positively to the communities in which they operate.

More persuasive than the risks are the opportunities that come with going global. As economic growth has migrated East and South, more companies are moving from being resource takers, to market builders.

Now, when faced with complex issues – extreme poverty, lack of education, gender inequality, environmental degradation – responsible companies see themselves as equal stakeholders for the long run, knowing that they cannot thrive in societies that fail. This has encouraged business to collaborate and co-invest in solutions that produce shared value for business and society.

There is also a growing interdependency between business and society. Business is expected to do more in areas that used to be the exclusive domain of the public sector – from health and education, to community investment and environmental stewardship. In fact, five out of six CEOs believe that business should play a leading role in addressing global priority issues. This is extremely encouraging.

While we have seen a great deal of progress, there is much work to be done. Companies everywhere are called on to do more of what is sustainable and put an end to what is not. We need corporate sustainability to be in the DNA of business culture and operations. The priority is to reach those who have yet to act, and especially those actively

opposing change.

To reach full scale, economic incentive structures must be realigned so that sustainability is valued. Governments must create enabling environments for business and incentivise responsible practices. Financial markets must move beyond the short-term, where long-term returns become the overarching criteria for investment decisions. We need clear signals that good environmental, social and governance performance by business is supported and profitable.

This year, business will have an enormous opportunity to “make good” on its commitment to society as governments and the United Nations work to define a set of global sustainable development goals by 2015. This post-2015 agenda has the power to spur action by all key actors, with the private sector having a huge role.

These goals and targets could result in a framework for businesses to measure their own sustainability progress and help them establish corporate goals aligned with global priorities. This opportunity is significant to create value for business as well as the public good.

What will the future look like? The pieces are in place to achieve a new era of sustainability. The good news is that enlightened companies – which comprise major portions of the global marketplace – have shown that they are willing to be part of the solution and are moving ahead. Decisions by business leaders to pursue sustainability can make all of the difference. We can move from incremental to transformative impact, showing that responsible business is a force for good. (August 27, 2014)

Georg Kell is executive director of the United Nations Global Compact, the world’s largest voluntary corporate sustainability initiative.

Edited by Kitty Stapp

Image credit: DFAT CC BY-2.0.



# Filipinos Take to the Streets One Year After Typhoon Haiyan

By Diana Mendoza

MANILA (IPS) - People covered their bodies with mud to protest against government ineptitude and abandonment; others lighted paper lanterns and candles and released white doves and balloons to remember the dead, offer thanks and pray for more strength to move on; while many trooped to a vast grave site with white crosses to lay flowers for those who died, and to cry one more time.

These were the scenes this past Saturday, Nov. 8, in Tacloban City in central Philippines, known as ground zero of Typhoon Haiyan.

One year after the storm flattened the city with 250-kph winds and seven-metre high storm surges that caused unimaginable damage to the city centre and its outlying areas and killed more than 6,500 people, hundreds remain unaccounted for.

Nov. 8 marked the first anniversary of Haiyan, known among Filipinos as Yolanda, the strongest storm ever to make landfall in recorded history.

Thousands of stories, mostly about loss, hopelessness, loneliness, hunger, disease, and deeper poverty flooded media portals in the Philippines. There were also abundant stories of heroism and demonstrations of extraordinary strength.

Understanding the scope of the disaster

There may be some signs that suggest a semblance of revival in Tacloban City, located about 580 km southeast of Manila, but it has yet to fully come back to life – that process could take six to eight years, possibly more, according to members of the international donor community.

Still, the anniversary was marked by praise for the Philippines' "fast first-step recovery" from a disaster of this magnitude, compared with the experience of other disaster-hit places such as Aceh in Indonesia after the 2004 Asian tsunami that devastated several countries along the Indian Ocean.

In its assessment of the relief and reconstruction effort, released prior to the anniversary, the Philippines-based multilateral Asian Development Bank (ADB) said that while "reconstruction efforts continue to be a struggle", a lot has been done.

"The ADB has been in the Philippines for 50 years, and we can say that other countries would not have responded this strongly to such a huge crisis," ADB Vice President for East Asia and Southeast Asia Stephen Groff told a press conference last week.

Canadian Ambassador to the Philippines Neil Reeder echoed his words, adding, "The ability of the country to bounce back was faster than we've ever seen in other humanitarian disasters."

Experts say that Filipinos' 'bayanihan' – a sense of neighbourhood and communal unity – helped strengthen the daunting rehabilitation process.

"Yolanda was the largest and most powerful typhoon ever to hit land and it impacted a huge area, including some of the poorest regions in the Philippines. It is important that we look at the scale and scope of this disaster one year after Yolanda," Groff stressed.

He said the typhoon affected 16 million people, or 3.4 million families, and damaged more than one million homes, 33 million coconut trees, 600,000 hectares of agricultural land, 248 transmission towers and over 1,200 public structures such as provincial, municipal and village halls and public markets.

Also damaged were 305 km of farm-to-market roads, 20,000 classrooms and over 400 health facilities such as hospitals and rural health stations.

In total, the storm affected more than 14.5 million people in 171 cities and municipalities in 44 provinces across nine regions. To date, more than four million people still remain homeless.

Philippine President Benigno Aquino III has faced criticism from affected residents, who used Saturday's memorial to blast the government for its ineptitude in the recovery process.

Efleda Bautista, one of the leaders of People Surge, a group of typhoon survivors, told journalists, "We have felt a year's worth of the government's vicious abandonment, corruption, deceit, and repression, and have seen a year's worth of news and studies that confirm this situation."

Protesters burned a nine-foot effigy of the president on the day of the anniversary.

Early morning on Nov. 8 more than 5,000 people holding balloons, lanterns, and candles walked around Tacloban City in an act of mourning and remembrance.

The Roman Catholic Church declared the anniversary date as a national day of prayer as church bells pealed and sirens wailed at the start of a mass at the grave-site where nearly 3,000 people are buried.

Hundreds of fishermen staged protests to demand that the government provide new homes, jobs, and livelihoods, accusing government officials of diverting aid and reconstruction funds.

Filipino netizens recalled that they cried nonstop while helplessly watching on their television and computer screens how Tacloban City was battered by the storm.

They posted and shared photos of Filipinos who were hailed as heroes because they volunteered to meet and drive survivors to their relatives in Manila and other places as they alighted from military rescue planes.

"Before" and "after" pictures of the area also made the rounds on the Web.

'Billions' in international assistance

President Aquino in a visit to nearby affected Samar island before the storm anniversary said, "I would hope we can move even faster and I will push everybody to move even faster, but the sad reality is the scope of work we need to do can really not be done overnight. I want to do it correctly so that benefits are permanent." The Philippine government estimates the need for a 170-billion-peso (3.8-billion-dollar) master-plan to rebuild the affected communities, including the construction of a four-metre-high dike along the 27-km coastline to prevent further damage in case of another disaster.

Alfred Romualdez, the mayor of Tacloban City, told journalists two million people are still living in tents and only 1,422 households have been relocated to permanent shelters. As many as 205,500 survivors are still in need of permanent houses.

The recovery process was successful in erecting new electricity posts a few months after the storm, while black swaths of mud have now been replaced by greenery, with crops quickly replanted, and rice fields thriving once



more.

Government, private, and international aid workers also restored sanitation and hygiene programmes in the aftermath of the storm.

The ADB announced it was trying to determine whether or not to provide a further 150 million dollars worth of official assistance to Yolanda survivors on top of the 900 million dollars already pledged in grants and concessions at the start of reconstruction efforts.

The United States' Agency for International Development (USAID) is expected to provide a 10-million-dollar technical assistance plan to develop 18,400 projects across the country. These will cover other hard-hit areas outside

of Tacloban City, such as Guian in Eastern Samar, which will also receive 10 million dollars from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for rehabilitation programmes.

The Canadian government also offered 3.75 million Canadian dollars to restore livelihoods and access to water to the affected provinces of Leyte and Iloilo.

The Philippine government assured that the billions donated, offered and pledged by the international community would be safely accounted for, monitored, guarded and reported on with transparency.

Panfilo Lacson, a senator who was designated in charge of the rehabilitation programme, said that already he has confirmed reports that some bunkhouses in Tacloban and

Eastern Samar were built with substandard materials and that someone had colluded with contractors for the use of substandard materials to generate kickbacks.

"That's when I realised we have to monitor the funds," he said.

He asked Filipinos to share information that they know about irregularities on the management and administration of the billions of pesos from the national coffers and donor organisations for rebuilding communities.

November 10, 2014

Image credit: IDPs queuing for evacuation Tacloban Airport 15 Nov (Charles TP) DFAT CC BY-2.0.

# Commercialisation of Children's Media Hampering Global Citizenship

By Kalinga Seneviratne\*

KUALA LUMPUR (IDN) – Excessive commercialization of children's media, especially television, is obstructing efforts aimed at education and capacity building for global citizenship and raising awareness among children of the diversity of the world, according to experts.

Many of the speakers at the recent World Summit on Media for Children in Kuala Lumpur agreed with Dr Patricia Edgar, former director of the Australian Children's Television Foundation, that the majority of children's programmes are commercially driven and not educational.

"These less creative and cheaply produced programmes are made for entertainment with the intention to sell their merchandise," she told participants in the Summit September 8 to 10. "An effective educational programme is about good values, constructive messages and most importantly, contains local elements to help the social and emotional development of children."

Dr Edgar said it was important for children to understand the "real world" and to be taught the correct way to deal with problems rather than overprotect them and let them live in a fancy world.

Rosmah Mansor, the wife of the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, said that programmes for children should be designed to "teach valuable lessons that will shape beliefs, attitudes and behaviour" for living in a multi-racial and multi-religious community.

She argued that children's media should be seen as an educational tool rather than a commercial commodity. Educators needed to master the skill of using media as a teaching tool to foster reflective and critical thinking, and to encourage curiosity. In this endeavour, rather than de-regulating, government regulators and policymakers should address media content using legislation and incentives as effective tools to enhance the quantity and quality of educational and informational programmes.

"Children need to see human endeavour at its best, not just the side that produces conflict through stereotyping,

hate speech and bullying," argued Rosmah. "Good programming can help children cope with upsetting emotional responses to media content and to make critical judgments about violence on TV and advertisements."

The United Nations has set three priority areas for fostering global citizenship and all of these relate to education and intellectual development of children. This includes putting every child in school; improving the quality of learning; and making education a transformational process that brings shared values to life.

Critics of today's children's media argue that it is these shared values that are lacking, particularly in television programmes – unless you believe that these shared values are developing tastes for merchandise that is a by-product of the "fancy world" the programmers create for the children, in order to sell merchandise.

"If good global citizenship means a passion for global justice and compassion for the other, we have to develop children's stories in the form of cartoons and short films that will inculcate the right values in the young from a tender age," argued Dr Chandra Muzaffar, President of the Just World Movement.

He believes that global citizenship should be anchored in values that are universal. "All Western values are not necessarily universal. Neither are all non-Western values parochial," he noted. "On the contrary, there is a great deal in our own religious and ethical traditions, which are universal. These should be harnessed and articulated through local languages and art forms. In the process we would be strengthening local cultural identities."

Consolidating local cultural identities

Strengthening local cultural identities not necessarily means that one becomes nationalistic and inward looking. Quite the contrary argued Aldana Duhalde, Project Developer of IDIEM Media Research Institute in Argentina. Through a regional television project her team has developed a cross-border common identity she calls a "social kind of identity" that focuses on issues such as identifying with nature and the landscape, the desire to grow eco-

nomically and not be viewed as under-developed, and finding their own solutions to problems.

"Material things are not that important," argued Duhalde in an interview with IDN. "Expression of love is very important among us ... listening to each other. (Creating) strong discussion dealing with different points of view in open space not hiding our emotions."

Duhalde is of the view that new media technology and the spread of social media provides a lot of opportunities to produce programmes for children that could encourage better understanding and educate the young to become peaceful global citizens. "Our project is non-commercial and non-profit," she explained. "You need not have a lot of money to produce (but) if you trust kids they trust each other and kids will produce the programmes together (with us)."

Filmmaker Fredrik Holmberg from Sweden told IDN there was a need to launch a global campaign to revive public service broadcasting values. "It's different voices and we need more diversity," he argued. "Media is not just reaching out, it's also looking in. We have to be both global and glocal at the same time."

Holmberg believes that the media for children should be seen as a public investment. "We should not treat kids as consumers. Producing programmes for kids is expensive (but) we need to pay for it (from public purse)."

This was an argument that was frequently advocated by speakers from around the world at the Kuala Lumpur Summit. But no one seemed to be brave enough to question the government's priorities in public funding, especially enormous budgets allocated for buying arms that are rarely used.

IDN put this question to Moneeza Hasmi from Pakistan, President of the Public Media Alliance (formerly Commonwealth Broadcasting Association). She agreed that perhaps siphoning 1 percent of the defence budgets to public service broadcasting for children could make a big difference.

“We must talk about promoting public media for the public, so that we produce generations who are more balanced, more civilized, more aware of peace,” said Hasmi, adding, that “(they must also be) more tolerant and aware of the fact that there are other human beings who are not as fortunate as them (because they don’t have money).” She said that living in Pakistan she can see first hand why we need to create good global citizens. “These are very difficult times we are living in, this is not the world we grew up in, sometimes I feel very upset,” she said, arguing that our values have been destroyed by commercialization of everything and anything.

“It has become a commercial economy . . . economy based on making more money and more money and continue to make more money. There is no such thing as doing things because they should be done,” said Hasmi. “We let them (governments) make more arms and kill more people (but) there are sane and balanced people in the world, who must come forward to put money into public service media, so that we can make programmes for children to promote better (educated and tolerant) global citizens.”

\*Kalinga Seneviratne is IDN Special Correspondent for Asia-Pacific. He teaches international communications in Singapore.

October 5, 2014

Image credit: DFAT CC BY-2.0.



# Promoting Human Rights Through Global Citizenship Education

By Ravi Kanth Devarakonda

GENEVA, (IPS) - Amid escalating conflicts and rampant violations of human rights all over the world, spreading “human rights education” is not an easy task. But a non-governmental organisation from Japan is beginning to make an impact through its “global citizenship education” approach.

At the current annual meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council, which began on Sep. 8, two side events marked the beginning of what promises to be a sustained campaign to spread human rights education (HRE).

Alongside the first, the launch of the web resource “The Right to Human Rights Education” by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, a special workshop was also convened on HRE for media professionals and journalists.

The workshop was an initiative of the NGO Working Group on HRE chaired by Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a prominent NGO from Japan fighting for the abolition of nuclear weapons, sustainable development and human rights education.

“This is the first time that the NGO Working Group on Human Rights Education and Learning and a group of seven countries representing the Platform for Human Rights Education and Training have organised a workshop on human rights education for media professionals and journalists,” said Kazunari Fujii, SGI’s Geneva representative.

Fujii has been working among human rights pressure groups in Geneva to mobilise support for intensifying HRE campaigning. “Through the promotion of human rights education, SGI wants to foster a culture of human rights that prevents violations from occurring in the first place,” Fujii told IPS after the workshop on Tuesday (Sep. 16).

“While protection of human rights is the core objective of the U.N. Charter, it is equally important to prevent the

occurrence of human rights abuses,” he argued.

Citing SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s central message to foster a “culture of human rights”, Fujii said his mission in Geneva is to bring about solidarity among NGOs for achieving SGI’s major goals on human rights, nuclear disarmament and sustainable development.

The current session of the Human Rights Council, which will end on Sep. 26, is grappling with a range of festering conflicts in different parts of the world. “From a human rights perspective, it is clear that the immediate and urgent priority of the international community should be to halt the increasingly conjoined conflicts in Iraq and Syria,” said Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the new U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights.

“In particular, dedicated efforts are urgently needed to protect religious and ethnic groups, children – who are at risk of forcible recruitment and sexual violence – and women, who have been the targets of severe restrictions,” Al Hussein said in his maiden speech to the Council.

“The second step, as my predecessor [Navanetham Pillay] consistently stressed, must be to ensure accountability for gross violations of human rights and international crimes,” he continued, arguing that “impunity can only lead to further conflicts and abuses, as revenge festers and the wrong lessons are learned.”

Al Hussein, who comes from the Jordanian royal family, wants the Council to address the underlying factors of crises, particularly the “corrupt and discriminatory political systems that disenfranchised large parts of the population and leaders who oppressed or violently attacked independent actors of civil society”.

Among others, he stressed the need to end “persistent discrimination and impunity” underlying the Israel-Palestine conflict – in which 2131 Palestinians were killed during the latest crisis in Gaza, including 1,473 civilians, 501 of them children, and 71 Israelis.

The current session of the Human Rights Council is also scheduled to discuss issues such as basic economic and

livelihood rights, which are going to be addressed through the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, the worsening plight of migrants around the world, and the detention of asylum seekers and migrants, including children in the United States.

“Clearly, a number of human rights violations and the worsening plight of indigenous people are major issues that need to be tackled on a sustained basis,” said Fujii. “But it is important to raise the awareness of human rights education among media professionals and journalists who are invariably caught in the crossfire of conflicts.”

During open discussion at the media professionals and journalists workshop, several reporters not only shared their personal experiences but also sought clarity on how reporters can safeguard human rights in conflicts where they are embedded with occupying forces in Iraq or other countries.

“This is a major issue that needs to be addressed because it is difficult for journalists to respect human rights when they are embedded with forces,” Oliver Rizzi Carlson, a representative of the United Network of Young Peace-builders, told IPS.

Commenting on the work that remains to be done in spreading global citizenship education, Fujii noted that tangible progress has been made by bringing several human rights pressure groups together in intensifying the campaign for human rights education.

“Solidarity within civil society and increasing recognition for our work from member states is bringing about tangible results,” said Fujii. “The formation of an NGO coalition – HR 2020 – comprising 14 NGOs such as Amnesty International and SGI last year is a significant development in the intensification of our campaign.”

September 18, 2014



# 'Breaking Silence' on the Slave Trade

By A. D. McKenzie

PARIS (IPS) - The Oscar-winning film *12 Years a Slave* opened many people's eyes to the barbarity of slavery and fuelled some discussion about that period in world history. But the film is just one of the many initiatives to "break the silence" around the 400 years of the transatlantic slave trade and to "shed light" on its lasting historical consequences.

One of these – the Slave Route Project – which observed its 20th anniversary this month in Paris is pushing for greater education about slavery and the slave trade in schools around the world.

According to Ali Moussa Iye, chief of the History and Memory for Dialogue Section of UNESCO, the United Nations cultural agency, who directs the organisation's Slave Route Project, "the least the international community can do is to put this history into the textbooks. You can't deny this history to those who suffered and continue to experience the consequences of slavery."

The Project is one of the forces behind a permanent memorial to slavery that is being constructed at UN headquarters in New York, scheduled to be completed in March 2015 and meant to honour the millions of victims of the traffic in humans.

UNESCO is also involved in the UN's International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), which is aimed at recognising people of African descent as a distinct group and at "addressing the historical and continuing violations of their rights". The Decade will officially be launched in January next year.

"The approach is not to build guilt but to achieve reconciliation," Moussa Iye said in an interview. "We need to know history in a different, more pluralistic way so that we can draw lessons and better understand our societies."

He is aware that some people will question the point of the various initiatives, preferring to believe that slavery's legacy has ended, but he said that international organisations can take the lead in urging countries to examine their past acts and the results.

"People of all kinds suffered from slavery and people of all kinds profited from slavery just like so many people are now profiting from modern-day slavery," he said. "Racism

is a direct result of this monstrous heritage and we need to increase the dialogue about this."

According to UNESCO, the Slave Route Project has put these issues on the international agenda by contributing to the recognition of slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity, a declaration made at the World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001.

It has also been collecting and preserving archives and oral traditions, supporting the publication of books, and identifying "places of remembrances so that itineraries for memory" can be developed.

For many people of African descent, however, much more needs to be done to raise awareness. Ricki Stevenson, a Paris-based African-American businesswoman who heads a company called Black Paris Tours, focusing on the African Diaspora's contributions in the French capital, told IPS that there ought to be "national and international conversation about the continued effects of enslavement."

"We need to break the silence on how racism continues to hurt, not just Black people, but all people in any country that would kill, imprison, deny education and rights to individuals," she said. "The United States, France, and all of Europe made unimaginable money from the cruel, inhumane kidnapping and enslavement of millions of Africans.

"These nations grew rich, built their cities and economies on the enslavement of Africans, on the forced labour of Black people who were stripped of every basic human right, treated less than animals," she added. "Today we are learning that the wealth of Wall Street and so many major corporations, insurance companies, shipping companies, banks, private families, even churches, is still tied to slavery."

Stevenson said she knows that some find it hard to comprehend the legacy of slavery. "I doubt if anyone who has never lived in the United States can understand the overwhelming challenge of 'breathing while Black,'" she told IPS. "It is a horrible, daily fact of life every Black man, woman, child has faced or will face at some point in their lives."

In France, meanwhile, the rise of nationalism is leading

to a culture of exclusion as well as racism, according to political observers. Justice Minister Christiane Taubira, for example, author of a 2001 law bearing her name that also recognises slavery as a crime against humanity, has been the target of racist depictions on social media and in certain publications.

Speaking at the 20th anniversary ceremony of the Slave Route Project, Taubira described her battle against "hated" and said that the world's challenge today is to understand the global forces that divide people for exploitation. "We cannot accept this kind of inhumanity," she said, adding that the "anonymous victims" were not just victims but "survivors, creators, artists, cultural, guides ... and resisters", despite the immense violence they suffered.

Some individuals and municipalities in France have worked to highlight the country's active role in the transatlantic slave trade, through cultural and memorial projects. The northwestern city of Nantes, which achieved vast wealth through slavery in the 18th century, built a memorial to victims in 2012.

Historians say that more than 40 percent of France's slave trade was conducted through the city's port, which acted as a transshipment point for some 450,000 Africans forcibly taken to the Americas. But this part of Nantes' history was kept hidden for years until the move to "break the silence" cumulated in the Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery.

In England, the city of Liverpool has an International Museum of Slavery, and Qatar and Cuba have also set up museums devoted to this history, carrying out partnership projects with UNESCO.

Acclaimed American jazz musician Marcus Miller, spokesman for the Slave Route Project, is also using music to educate people about slavery. Prior to an uplifting performance in Paris with African musicians, Miller said he wanted to focus on the resistance and resilience of the people forced into slavery and those who fought alongside to end the centuries-long atrocity.

September 14, 2014

Edited by Phil Harris

# Global Citizenship: 'From Me to We to Peace'

By Joel Jaeger

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) - If a Silicon Valley existed for the culture of peace, it would most likely look to global citizenship as the next big industry shake-up.

"Global citizenship, or oneness of humanity [is] the essential element of the culture of peace," Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, former under-secretary general and high representative of the U.N., told IPS on the sidelines of the General Assembly's High-Level Forum on the Culture of Peace on Sep. 10.

The day-long forum included panel discussions on global citizenship and the contributions of women and youth to a nonviolent world community.

Ambassador Chowdhury took the lead in putting the culture of peace on the U.N. agenda in the late 1990s. The culture of peace concept was evolving in the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), but Chowdhury felt that it deserved to be discussed at an even higher level.

The U.N. needed "to shift gear" away from peacekeeping operations "to focus on individual and community transformation," Chowdhury told IPS.

In 1999, at the urging of Chowdhury, the General Assembly (GA) passed the milestone Resolution 53/243 on the "Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace." The resolution asserts that a culture of peace is a way of life based on non-violence, territorial integrity, human rights, the right to development, freedom of expression and the promotion of equal rights for women and men.

Article 4 of the resolution makes clear that "Education at all levels is one of the principal means to build a culture of peace." Governments, civil society, the media, parents and teachers are all called upon to promote a peaceful culture. The 1999 resolution also led to the observance from 2001 to 2010 of the U.N. International Decade for Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.

While its official decade may be over, the culture of peace continues to be relevant 15 years after Resolution 53/243 was adopted. Each year, the GA adopts a resolution reaffirming the commitment of member states to building a

culture of peace.

This year's all-day event built on the success of two past high-level forums in 2012 and 2013, giving member states, U.N. entities and civil society a chance to exchange ideas on how to best promote nonviolence, cooperation and respect for all.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon kicked off the day with an endorsement of the culture of peace.

"We need new forms of cultural literacy and diplomacy, between societies and within them," he said. "We need educational curricula to deepen global solidarity and citizenship.

"Every day, I see the need to build a new culture of mediation, conflict resolution, peace-building and peace-keeping."

Interactive panels focused on the keys to attaining a culture of peace.

Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, highlighted the role of women in building and sustaining the culture of peace.

Women "must be seen as agents of conflict prevention," she said.

"With women, mothers, grandmothers, other family members often being the first teachers of children, they have and can play a vital role in educating young people to the value of peace."

Women should bring their leadership and solutions to the peacemaking table, according to the panellists.

The youth population is also crucial to making a culture of peace a reality.

"Young people can be agents of peace," said Ahmad Alhendawi, the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth. "We must continue working together to ensure that the largest generation of humans is an opportunity, not a liability for our time."

Kathleen Kuehnast, director of the Centre for Gender and Peacebuilding at the U.S. Institute of Peace, received a round of applause when she proposed a new perspective on the culture of peace, invoking the analogy of creative, high-energy entrepreneurship.

"We need to incentivise peacebuilding," she said. "We

need to think about the culture of peace as a start-up operation. What we need is a Silicon Valley for nonviolent approaches to global problem solving."

Dot Maver, president of the New York-based National Peace Academy, identified emerging trends and concepts that herald the rise of global citizenship, such as the sharing economy, the global commons and bioregional dialogues.

As a human community, "We are making this shift from I or me to we," Maver said. Global citizenship is a pathway "from me to we to peace."

While the U.N. is a strong supporter of global citizenship and the culture of peace, it could do a much better job of spreading the message, according to Ambassador Chowdhury.

The "U.N. has been focusing and putting most of its money on hardware for peacekeeping," Chowdhury told IPS. It should be concentrating more on the "transformation of individuals into agents of peace and nonviolence."

Throwing money at educational infrastructure will not be enough, Chowdhury said, because there is no guarantee that it would go toward the right type of education. The U.N. must work more with communities and societies to build education systems that teach young people to be citizens of the world.

"It has to be a comprehensive approach," Chowdhury said. "It should be a transformational investment."

In her remarks, Dot Maver made the observation that "energy follows thought, and we know that whatever we choose to focus on, we will get more of in life."

Supporters of the culture of peace hope that the energy and ideas from Sep. 9 high-level forum will spread the message of global citizenship to the human community, leading to a true transformation.

September 10, 2014

Edited by Kitty Stapp

# SDGs Make Room for Education for Global Citizenship

By Joel Jaeger

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) - Civil society leaders and U.N. development experts gathered on Wednesday to discuss the role of education for global citizenship in the post-2015 development agenda.

The workshop, sponsored by Soka Gakkai International (SGI), was part of the U.N.'s 65th Annual Department of Public Information/Non-Governmental Organization (DPI/NGO) Conference.

Education "is linked to all areas of sustainable development and is vital in achieving all Sustainable Development Goals and targets," Hiro Sakurai, SGI's U.N. liaison office director, told IPS.

"Education for global citizenship deserves particular attention and emphasis in this regard as it helps link issues and disciplines, brings together all stakeholders, and fosters shared vision and objectives," he said.

Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, former under-secretary general and high representative of the U.N., gave the event's keynote address. He expressed his excitement at the increased prominence of global citizenship in development circles.

According to Ambassador Chowdhury, global citizenship requires "self-transformation" and can be a "pathway to a culture of peace."

Progress requires a "determination to treat each one of us as a global citizen," he said. "We are part of a bigger humanity."

Saphira Ramesfar of the Baha'i International Community also spoke to the transformative nature of global citizenship.

"It is not enough for education to provide individuals who can read, write and count," she said. "Education must be transformative and bring shared values to life, cultivating an active care for the world itself and for those with whom we share it. Education needs to fully assume its role in building just, unified and inclusive societies."

In the past, attempts to build global citizenship have focused on the young, but Ambassador Chowdhury argued for a more expansive understanding of the concept.

"I believe that education for global citizenship is for all

of us, irrespective of our age, irrespective of whether we are going through a formal education process or not," Chowdhury said.

Anjali Rangaswami of the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs explained how NGOs have actively participated in the crafting of the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Past years have set "a very high standard for civil society engagement," according to Rangaswami.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), set to expire in 2015, included a target of universal primary education. The SDGs, if adopted in their current draft form, would aim for universal secondary education as well.

Under target four, the SDGs specifically mention education for global citizenship, an issue left unaddressed by the MDGs.

The U.N.'s Global Education First Initiative (GEFI), which lists "fostering global citizenship" as one of its three main priorities, was influential in this new development.

According to Min Jeong Kim, head of GEFI's secretariat team, the initiative was launched by the secretary-general in 2012 because "at that point education had sort of stagnated after rapid growth following adoption of [the] MDGs."

After the panel speakers concluded, participants in the workshop broke into small groups to share their own perspectives on education for global citizenship.

The SDGs are an opportunity for a whole new outlook on education.

Education should be focused on developing meaningful lives, rather than focused on making a living, Ambassador Chowdhury told IPS.

So far the paradigm has been "if you get a good job, then your education is worth it, and if you do not get a good job, then your education is worthless," he said. "That has to change."

August 29, 2014

Edited by Kitty Stapp

# Israeli Peace Activists Grapple with Dilemma

By Pierre Klochendler

JERUSALEM (IPS) - “Strong together, we love Israel and trust the army” – while a tentative truce takes root, banners adorned with the national colours still dominate cities and highways across the country.

Calling for unquestioned patriotism and solidarity, the embrace is a bear hug in the minds of those who question the merits and morality of Israel’s latest onslaught on Gaza.

It is tough to subscribe to the credo of peace when nationalist emotions are exacerbated by plaintive sirens and the deafening sound of Iron Dome missiles slamming incoming rockets, when rational judgment is mobilised for the war effort and crushes rational assessment of the effect of war.

War is the antithesis of peace is a tautology. Challenged by war, Israeli peace activists grapple with dilemma.

A war, when launched, must be won. Yet this war results neither in victory nor defeat, is not a war to end all wars, but a war to avoid the next war by means of deterrence, maybe. In war, there is only loss, and losers, peace activists reckon.

If war will not have solved the conflict – it contains the seeds of the next round of violence – peace will, they assert.

But when the cannons roar, peace is silenced.

Stressing that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Peace NGO Forum called for a ceasefire and a resumption of the negotiations towards a two-state solution on Day 22 of the operation.

The Peace NGO Forum is an umbrella platform for Jewish and Palestinian civil society organisations dedicated to peace within a two-state solution to the conflict. The partner organisations, which include the women’s peace coalition Bat Shalom and the Combatants for Peace movement, partake in networking, capacity-building and joint demonstrations,

The belated statement generated by the Israeli wing of the forum exposed the dilemma: “Israelis reserve the right to self-defence and deserve to live in security and peace, without the threat of rockets fired at them and enemy

tunnels dug into their midst.”

And so, at its height, the war was justified, enjoying quasi-consensual approval ratings among Jewish Israelis. Social media brimmed with racist, intimidating, “Kill Arabs”, “Kill leftists” comments.

“No more deaths!” On Day 19 of the operation, 5,000 Israelis joined a rally organised by pro-peace civil society organisations. The emblematic Peace Now movement was absent, as was the liberal Meretz party. The protestors dispersed after rockets were fired at the Tel Aviv metropolis. Succumbing willingly to the 24 hours a day news coverage on TV, ordinary Israelis took refuge in the safety net of their emotions, seeking comfort in national anxiety, pronouncing moral judgment on the “sanctimonious” critics at home who contest the axiomatic assertion proclaimed time and again that “the Israel Defence Forces is the world’s most moral army”.

Left-wing Israelis counter that self-righteousness is intrinsic in such proclamation.

“How can you not identify with our national pain when we’re under threat” is a blame often levelled by right-wingers against fellow Israeli peace activists.

The Israeli public which, in its overwhelming majority, is at the centre and right of the political spectrum, charges that the country is falling victim to ‘victimology’, the victim-focused coverage of the conflict.

Supporters of the peace movement see respect for “human rights as our last line of defence”, as Amnesty International director Yonatan Gher put it in the liberal daily Haaretz on Wednesday. They object to the disproportionate reaction of the military. Israel must understand the weakness inherent in its own military might, they suggest.

The mainstream’s assumption is that peace activists too often give in to ‘the mother of all tautologies’ – that “war is hell” and “evil” and, in essence, a war crime. Any sign of soul searching that this war is not just is resented as vacillation and unwanted self-flagellation.

Peace activists hold Israel’s policies in the occupied Palestinian territories as the source of evil.

The 47-year occupation, most Israelis argue, reduces their predicament to a simplistic imagery, because the occupa-

tion does not justify the hatred of Israel professed by the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, and the repetitive cycle of violence. The occupation continues because peace is unattainable, they stress.

“Try,” retort peace activists, “We’ve proven enough that we’re strong enough to take a risk for peace.”

Israelis have been stuck in this perennial debate for 14 years.

During this time, they have experienced a flurry of conflicts with no end in sight: the 2000-2005 Palestinian Intifadah uprising, the 2006 Lebanon war against Hezbollah, onslaughts on Hamas in Gaza in 2006 (“Summer Rains”), 2008-2009 (“Cast Lead”), in 2012 (“Pillar of Defence”), and now.

Disillusion and despair are all the more potent that, during the years of the Oslo Accords, a process of mutual reconciliation engaged both Israelis and Palestinians towards tentative recognition of the other’s pain.

With the ensuing confrontations, both people quickly backpedalled to the existential, elemental, dimension of their conflict.

In adversity, it has become necessary for both Israelis and Palestinians not only to exclude any identification with the other’s pain but also to inflict pain on the other as the sole way to assuage one’s pain and deter the other from inflicting pain.

What, however, unifies the overwhelming camp of war supporters and the dedicated ranks of peace supporters is the acknowledgement that the reality is complex.

Mainstream Israelis realise that their argument that an assessment of the situation requires not being focused solely on the body count in Gaza is a lost cause.

Peace activists understand that the threat that triggered Israel’s operation is tangible, but also the direction in which its outcome might be leading, its consequences and implications for Israel, and, by correlation, for the Palestinians and for peace between the two peoples.

Their ideal of co-existence grinded by years of wars, peace activists reject the focus on suffering if it only serves the hackneyed precept that, on one hand, in war, the end justifies (almost) all means, or, on the other, that war cannot



be justified.

They draw fine lines between exercising a legitimate right of self-defence against an unwarranted act of aggression and ever greater use of force, and between the morality, rights and laws of war and the wrongs of the Occupation.

And now that the war seems over, they hang their hope on the realisation by their national leaders that they will urgently initiate a bold diplomatic move towards peace with the Palestinians, and will not let the same amount of time since the previous operation be wasted lest the same, recurring, reality blows up in both peoples' faces.

August 7, 2014

Image credit: Bernd Schwabe in Hannover - Own work. Licensed under CC BY 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

# Politics Complicates Education in Lebanon's Refugee Camps

By Shelly Kittleston

BEIRUT (IPS) - The Shatila Palestinian camp has no library, nor does adjacent Sabra or Ain El-Hilweh in the south. And, after recent statements by Lebanon's foreign minister, some fear that the thousands of Syrian refugee children within them will soon have even slimmer chances of learning to read and write.

The United Nations stated earlier last month that Syrian refugees would total over one-third of Lebanon's population by the end of 2014, and that at least 300,000 refugee children were not enrolled in school.

In early July, Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil said that no assistance should be given to Syrian refugees as "all this aid – be it food, shelter or health care – encourages Syrian refugees to stay in Lebanon, while what we want is to encourage their speedy exit."

"The overcrowded breezeblock camps are filled with school-age children from across the [Lebanese-Syrian] border, suffering from psychosocial disorders, nutritional problems and limited possibilities for enrolling in Lebanese educational institutes

During his time as energy minister in the previous government, Bassil had said that Syrians should be seen as a "threat to the safety, economy and identity of the country."

Tangled electrical wires droop dangerously low and posters of Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad are prominent alongside those of Palestinian 'resistance' leaders and 'martyrs' in the Lebanese capital's camps, where refugees are said to have initially been welcomed.

Lebanon's security forces do not enter the 12 officially registered Palestinian camps in the country despite withdrawal from a 1969 agreement granting the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) control over them.

Several Syrians told IPS they feel more comfortable there than they would in areas controlled by Hezbollah, which is fighting alongside the Syrian regime and whose political wing is part of the government.

With 10,000-20,000 having arrived since the conflict

began, refugees from Syria now outnumber the original inhabitants of Beirut's Shatila camp, set up in 1949 to shelter stateless Palestinians.

There the capacity of the public school system is the most obvious hurdle for refugee children, says Fadi Hallisso, co-founder and general manager of the Syrian-run NGO Basmeh & Zeitooneh which works in the camp, is that Syrian public schools teach in Arabic while their Lebanese counterparts use either French or English.

Destitute or missing parents leading to the need to work or beg to survive, transport costs and war-induced trauma are other factors at play, and the problem is compounded by nutritional deficiencies.

A UNICEF study found earlier this year that severe acute malnutrition had doubled in certain parts of the country between 2012 and 2013. It noted that almost 2,000 children under the age of five were at risk of dying if they did not receive immediate treatment, while even milder states of malnutrition stunt children's physical and mental growth.

Basmeh & Zeitooneh has set up a school in Shatila for about 300 students using the Lebanese curriculum taught by Syrians and Palestinians, who are paid between 400 and 700 dollars a month, according to Hallisso, "which no Lebanese teacher would be willing to work for."

The facilities have been newly renovated and are in a building with a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) clinic and dispensary on the second floor.

The organisation is trying to get funding for a small library where the children can come, read, consult reference works, use computers and find a space open to them with generator-powered electricity.

Maria Minkara, who works with Hallisso, told IPS that it would be open to both Palestinian and Syrian schoolchildren and that not a single library exists in the entire area housing tens of thousands of inhabitants.

Many of the children, she noted, live in dark, unhealthy environments, cut off from the power grid with no phys-

ical space in which to study. A walk through the crowded camps makes this obvious.

The Joint Christian Committee for Social Service in Lebanon, another organisation working with refugees, recently succeeded in obtaining permission for about 120 Syrian refugee children from its school in the Ain El-Hilweh camp near Sidon to return to Damascus for their 9th grade and Baccalaureate exams, Executive Director Sylvia Haddad told IPS. Over 83 percent of them passed, she said.

Haddad admitted that several students' families had refused to allow their children to go back to Syria out of fear of the regime, but said that "they are regretting that decision very much now."

Stressing that all politics and religion were kept out of the instruction of refugee children, Haddad said that questions on the curriculum being used by the group were referred to Abu Hassan, a Palestinian inhabitant of the camp who in the manner of militia fighters in the region uses an alias preceded by 'Abu' ('father of').

Abu Hassan said he had fought in the Palestinian 'resistance' in the past but declined to say with which faction, and denied that any pro-regime rhetoric was contained in the textbooks.

Abu Hassan was allowed to accompany the students to Damascus and back, but recent changes in Lebanese law make it harder for Palestinians fleeing Syria to enter Lebanon. Amnesty International published a report last month denouncing the restrictions, which require 'pre-authorisation' from the government or a residency permit.

Regulations regarding Syrian refugees also changed at the beginning of June, limiting entry to those coming from areas near the Lebanese border where fighting is under way and stipulating that refugees who cross back into Syria forfeit the right to return.

August 1, 2014

Image: Syrian refugee children in a Lebanese school classroom. Credit: DFID CC BY-SA 2.0.



# Interfaith Harmony Can Generate Development

By Valentina Gasbarri \*

ROME (IDN) - Worldwide, there is increasing recognition that faith and religion play a vital role in promoting peaceful and harmonious relationships within and between nations.

For more than half a century, the United Nations, the European Union and numerous other international and regional organizations have affirmed the principle of religious freedom. Journalists and pro-human rights organisations have reported on persecution of minority faiths, outbreaks of sectarian violence and discrimination practices against religious individuals and communities in many countries.

But until now, there have been few examples of quantitative contributions that review the positive impacts of faiths and religions to social wellbeing and on policies of national and international communities.

A study by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, published in January 2014, showed that 5.3 billion people – nearly 76 percent of the world's population – live under high or very high restrictions on the freedom of religion and beliefs. Some restrictions result from government actions, policies and laws.

This includes efforts by governments to ban particular faiths, prohibit conversions, limit preaching or give preferential treatment to one or more religious groups. In 178 countries (90%), religious groups must register with the government for various purposes, and in 117 (59%) the registration requirements resulted in major problems for – or outright discrimination against – certain faiths.

Others result from hostile acts by private individuals, organizations and social groups. This includes mob or sectarian violence, harassment over attire for religious reasons and other religion-related intimidation.

One example is the abuse of religious minorities by private individuals or groups in society for acts perceived as offensive or threatening to the majority faith of the country. Incidents of abuse targeting religious minorities were reported in 47% of countries in 2012, up from 38% in 2011 and 24% in the baseline year of the study.

In Libya, for instance, two worshippers were killed in an attack on a Coptic Orthodox church in the city of Misura-

ta in December 2012. This was the first attack specifically targeting a church since the 2011 revolution, according to the U.S. Department of State.

In Egypt, attacks on Coptic Christian communities went up during the year. In China, increasing numbers of Buddhist monks, nuns and laypeople protested government policies toward Tibet by setting themselves on fire. Also in Nigeria, there was rising violence between Muslims and Christians, including attacks by the Islamist group Boko Haram. In Burma (Myanmar), communal violence between Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists has resulted in hundreds of deaths and displaced more than 100,000 people from their homes.

The share of countries with a high or very high level of social hostilities involving religious restrictions reached a six-year peak in 2012, according to the study.

The highest overall levels of restrictions are found in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran, where both the government and society at large impose numerous limits on religious beliefs and practices. But government policies and social hostilities do not always move in tandem. Vietnam and China, for instance, have high government restrictions on religion but are in the moderate or low range when it comes to social hostilities. Nigeria and Bangladesh follow the opposite pattern: high in social hostilities but moderate in terms of government actions.

Among all regions, the Middle East-North Africa has the highest government and social restrictions on religion, while the Americas are the least restrictive region on both measures. Among the world's 25 most populous countries, Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and India stand out as having the most restrictions when government and social restrictions are taken into account, while Brazil, Japan, the United States, Italy, South Africa and the United Kingdom have the least.

Religious freedom and business

Will a religious-based approach make economic growth more productive, as “The Religious Market Theory” suggests. Brian Grim, president of the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation has in fact explained why religious freedom is good for business for several reasons.

First, religious freedom fosters respect by protecting

something that more than eight-in-ten people worldwide, 84 percent according to the study, support. Religious freedom ensures that people, regardless of their belief or non-belief, are accorded equal rights and equal opportunity to have a voice in society.

Second, religious freedom reduces corruption, one of the key impediments to sustainable economic development. For instance, research finds that laws and practices burdening religion are related to higher levels of corruption. This is borne out by simple comparison between the Pew Research Center's analysis and the 2011 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index. Eight of the ten most corrupt countries have high or very high governmental restrictions on religious liberty.

Third, research clearly demonstrates that religious freedom engenders peace by reducing religion-related violence and conflict. Conversely, religious hostilities and restrictions create climates that can drive away local and foreign investment, undermine sustainable development, and disrupt huge sectors of economies. Such has occurred in the ongoing cycle of religious regulations and hostilities in Egypt, which has adversely impacted the tourism industry.

Fourth, religious freedom encourages broader freedoms that contribute to positive socio-economic development. Economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, for instance, argues that societal development requires the removal of sources of “unfreedom.” Removing impediments to religious freedom facilitates freedom of other kinds.

Fifth, religious freedom develops the economy. When religious groups operate in a free and competitive environment, religion can play a measurable role in the human and social development of countries.

Sixth, religious freedom overcomes over-regulation that accompanies certain types of religious restrictions that directly limit or harm economic activity. A few current examples from the Muslim-majority countries – a set of countries with particularly high religious restrictions – are illustrative of how the lack of religious freedom contributes to worse economic performances.

One direct religious restriction impacting economic freedom involves Islamic finance. For instance, businesses



involved in creating, buying or selling Islamic financial instruments can find the situation that one Islamic law (sharia) board deems a particular instrument acceptable while another board does not, making the instrument's acceptance on stock exchanges subject to differing interpretations of sharia.

And seventh, religious freedom multiplies trust. Religious freedom, when respected within a company, can also directly benefit a company's bottom line. These include both lower costs and improved morale. An example of lower costs includes less liability for litigation. Moreover, Important business stakeholders include business partners, investors and consumers, and a growing segment of ethically sensitive customers tend to prefer companies that are responsive to human rights. Indeed, consumer and government preferences given to human-rights-sensitive companies may give a company an advantage in competitive markets and enable it to charge premium prices and land choice contracts.

The analysis by the Pew Research Center also implicitly applies the theory of religious markets, highlighting the main implications in the context of real economies. Indeed, as it occurs in every economy, the more the religious market is subject to regulations by the government of other public authorities, the more will be the social hostilities in the country. The degree of religious freedom is one of the three main factors, along with the average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate over the last 5 years and the stability of prices and monetary policy, which determine the economic success of a country.

Applying the 10th indicators of the World Economic Forum, which represent the competitiveness of a country (namely through the education system, infrastructures, communication and efficiency of labour market), the study shows that those indicators reported better performances when religious freedom and belief are guaranteed and social hostilities associated to religion are limited.

China and Brazil

An interesting comparison could address the relationship between religion and business in countries such as China and Brazil, under the common recognition of BRICS' economies (comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and

South Africa) but with diverse approaches to the economic, social and cultural development.

Over the past 50 years, China has developed the highest government restrictions on freedom of religion and belief. In the 1960s during the Cultural Revolution, all religions were suppressed and people who identified with a religion were subject to beatings and other forms of harassment. According to the Pew Research Center's study, today half of the Chinese population identifies itself with a religion but with a large number of formal and informal restrictions still enforce in the country. However, China has the largest Buddhist population in the world, the 7th largest Christian population and the 17th largest Muslim population in the world.

On the other hand, Brazil is an emerging economy with a widespread enthusiasm for businesses. It is among the 76% of countries recently identified in the Pew Research study with initiatives to lower religious restrictions and hostilities. For instance, on January 15, 2012, President Dilma Rousseff approved an agreement to include the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and other Jewish-related subjects, as well as racism, xenophobia, and intolerance, in the curricula of some schools, universities and other educational institutions.

Another expression of such support for religious freedom occurred in the spring of 2014 when the government of São Paulo – Brazil's commercial hub and the western hemisphere's most populous city at 20 million – declared The writer that henceforth May 25 will be "Religious Freedom Day". This declaration coincided with a multi-faith religious freedom festival that drew nearly 30,000 participants, including the participation of the Catholic archdiocese, leading politicians and celebrities.

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July 31, 2014

# Indigenous Communities Say Education, Funding Key to Fighting HIV/AIDS

SYDNEY (IPS) - Marama Pala, hailing from Waikanae on the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand, was diagnosed with HIV at 22. The news of her diagnosis spread like wildfire in her tight-knit Maori community.

That was in 1993 but even today, she says, there is a “shame and blame” attitude surrounding HIV, which disproportionately impacts the region’s indigenous population.

“If you are HIV positive, you are seen as ‘dirty’, as someone who must be a drug user or a prostitute. Our people are not seeking help because of this stigma, discrimination and criminalisation – the fear of being charged, hunted down, ostracised or put in jail,” says Pala, who, together with her Pacific Islander HIV-positive husband, runs the INA (Maori, Indigenous, South Pacific) HIV/AIDS Foundation.

The Foundation takes a cultural approach to HIV/AIDS awareness, education, prevention and intervention.

“In the past five years the number of new infections has [...] increased in the Pacific Island community living in New Zealand and especially among the Maoris because we are late testers. People who [engage] in risky behaviour [seldom] get tested until they are very, very sick,” Pala, a mother of two, tells IPS.

“Our women are dying because they are afraid to go on medication, partly because they are afraid of the stigma and discrimination. Antiretroviral drugs are widely available in our country and they should not be dying in this time and age,” says Pala, who is a member of the board of directors for the International Council of AIDS Service Organisations (ICASO).

With HIV and AIDS disproportionately affecting indigenous people across the world, there is a strong need for culturally appropriate programmes designed, championed and delivered by indigenous people, activists and experts say.

Many indigenous women are living in silence with even their immediate families not knowing that they have HIV. “There are 130 aboriginal women who are living with HIV in Australia, but apart from myself there is only one

other woman who speaks openly about living with HIV,” says Michelle Tobin, who contracted the disease at the age of 21.

She began dating a man who told her that he had HIV but “I was naïve and just believed that it wouldn’t happen to me,” she admits. “Within six months I was diagnosed with HIV. I had a baby so I focused all my attention on her.”

“In the early 1990s in Melbourne we weren’t offered treatments when we were first diagnosed. In those days we lost a lot of people in the early stage of the disease, including my late husband,” Tobin, who belongs to the Yorta Yorta Nation, tells IPS.

As a descendant of the Stolen Generation and an aboriginal woman living with HIV and now AIDS, she has experienced stigma and discrimination, especially from within her own family, who disowned her.

Some in her community still think she is contagious and don’t want to be near her, but her struggle has made Tobin a passionate and vocal advocate for indigenous women living with HIV/AIDS.

According to Tobin, chair of the Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance and a committee member of PATSIN (Positive Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Network), “Aboriginal women are a minority within the minority of the HIV epidemic. We need more resources and funding [to] enable women to speak out about prevention, treatments, isolation, confidentiality, housing and the whole spectrum of issues that impact us.”

In addition to endorsing targets set out in the United Nations Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS, Australia has also adopted the Eora Action Plan on HIV 2014, which sets strategic targets to bring greater attention to HIV prevention, including best clinical care for aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living with HIV.

The recent International Indigenous Pre-conference on HIV and AIDS hosted by the International Indigenous Working Group on HIV & AIDS (IIWGHA) in partnership with the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Organising Committee (AATSIOC), held in Sydney on Jul. 17-19, was themed ‘Our story, Our Time,

Our Future.’

It highlighted the need for increased epidemiological data with a focus on indigenous ethnicity. Lack of data about the level of treatment take-up amongst indigenous people living with HIV is posing a challenge for Treatment as Prevention (TasP) strategies.

“We have evidence in Canada that aboriginal people are getting HIV three-and-a-half times faster than the rate of the general population,” Trevor Stratton, IIWGHA Coordinator for the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN), tells IPS.

“We believe those trends exist all over the world, but we don’t have the epidemiological data. We are advocating for epidemiological evidence as that is what we need for the dominant cultures to recognise us as a key population at greater risk of HIV and AIDS along with gay men and sex workers, so governments can free up the money for us and we can create our own solutions,” he asserts.

Forty-nine-year-old Stratton, a citizen of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, Ontario, with mixed English and Ojibwe heritage, was diagnosed with HIV in 1990.

He believes that indigenous people are particularly vulnerable due to “colonisation, neo-colonialism, resource extraction, and assimilation amongst other similar issues” that push them down on social determinants of health and put them at higher risk of all poor health outcomes.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the rate of HIV diagnoses among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women was substantially greater than among Australian-born non-Indigenous women (1.5 compared with 0.4 per 100,000 population).

Between 2004 and 2014, 231 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were diagnosed with HIV. In 2013, the rate of newly diagnosed HIV infections was greater in the indigenous population (5.4 per 100,000) compared to the Australian-born non-indigenous population (3.9 per 100,000).

“We can’t just pretend that HIV/AIDS exists in isolation,” Stratton says. “The problem of social justice is systemic.



We have to be able to leverage international human rights mechanisms so countries can be held accountable.

“We have to encourage nation states to follow the recommendations from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous People and the International Labour Organisation’s Convention 169, which talks of how to engage indigenous people,” he concludes.

IIWGHA has been working at increasing knowledge and addressing the entrenched stigma of HIV and AIDS within indigenous communities and supporting indige-

nous-directed research and awareness initiatives.

Its mandate and strategic plan are based on the 2006 ‘Toronto Charter: Indigenous People’s Action Plan’ that acknowledges the right of indigenous peoples to autonomy, social justice and human rights.

Doris Peltier, Aboriginal Women and Leadership Coordinator with CAAN, has been working with women living way below the poverty line, some of whom had their children taken away when they were diagnosed with HIV.

Diagnosed with AIDS at the age of 44 while actively

using drugs in Toronto, Peltier believes systemic issues – such as the fear of losing one’s child to the authorities – act as barriers preventing people from discussing their condition.

“A social system that is supposed to be there to support women is actually the one that is putting barriers up for the women,” Peltier tells IPS.

When she decided to go home and reconnect with her family and her First Nations community in Wikwemikong, Ontario, some supported her but others remained reluctant to embrace her.

People wouldn’t let her use their dishes and asked her to clean the toilet after use.

“Soon rumours began to circulate and one of the words being used to talk about me was ‘Wiinaapineh’ (dirty disease). I stood my ground and became better with medication, and my family’s support and encouragement,” Peltier says.

“People have to know that there is help available, there is treatment and prevention and that

they can have a good quality life,” concludes Peltier, who is today a great-grandmother.

For her, one of the key responses to high rates impacting indigenous women is to empower them to tap into their inner strength and resilience, and break the code of silence to speak up about HIV/AIDS.

July 21, 2014

Image: Doris Peltier, Aboriginal Women and Leadership Coordinator with CAAN, was diagnosed with AIDS at the age of 44. Credit: Neena Bhandari/IPS.

# If You Cut One, Plant Two

By Amy Fallon

KAMPALA (IPS) - Olga Mugisa, 11-years-old, takes to the microphone in front of her peers, the Ugandan flag proudly draped behind her and green plants framing the stage. She has an important message to share with her fellow students: "If you cut one, plant two."

"I tell all of you here you to plant trees at school, at home, everywhere," she says in a loud and confident voice to participants at Africa's first International Children's Climate Change Conference held in the Ugandan capital at the weekend.

"If you plant those trees you will get air that you breathe in and (you) will breathe in oxygen as you produce carbon dioxide," adds the Primary 5 student at Mirembe Junior, an international school in Namuwongo, traditionally a slum area of Kampala.

Joining forces with Uganda's National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), Uganda's Little Green Hands NGO organised the International Children's Climate Change Conference, which brought together about 280 "child delegates", aged between five and 12, from 23 schools in four Ugandan districts, at Kampala's GEMS Cambridge International School. There were also students representing 35 countries including Spain, France and the United States.

Students performed skits, sang and recited poems, as well as posing questions and giving PowerPoint presentations in their own style. Everything revolved around the causes and effects of, and solutions for, climate change.

Children can bring hope, especially when it comes to climate change, says lawyer turned social entrepreneur, environmentalist and founder of Little Green Hands, Joseph Masembe. He is showcasing a "new form of environmental stewardship" in Uganda involving young people. According to The State of Uganda's Population Report,

released in February 2013, the east African nation has the world's youngest population, with over 78 percent aged under 30.

"A wise man once told me a child's mind is like wet cement -when you write on it, it's permanent," Masembe tells IPS. "So involving children at such a tender age in environment conservation means the future is ensured and it's guaranteed.

"Children are the future generation, but at the moment we are in this climate change quagmire because adults cut trees with impunity. We do not think twice ... we didn't plant them.

"But if we get these children to start planting trees at a tender age, by the time they grow up they will have sentimental value attached to these trees, so they won't chop them down," Masembe explains.

It's getting thumbs green that was the focus of the Little Hands Go Green Festival, an annual event created by Masembe in 2012. In December that year, more than 16,000 children flocked to Kampala's Kololo Airstrip, where they were given seedlings to take home and plant fruit trees. Masembe says "Africa's only green festival" was even "gate-crashed" by Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, after he heard about the large gathering of children. Out of it, sprang the ICCCC.

As highlighted in the The State of Uganda's Population Report 2013, Uganda has been identified as one of the world's least prepared and most vulnerable countries when it comes to the climate change. The study stressed that Global Climate Change models project the nation will experience an increase in average temperatures up by up to 1.5 oC in the next 20 years.

Hot days are increasing, cold days decreasing; glaciers on the Rwenzori Mountains are continuing to melt and almost all regions of the country are experiencing "intense,

frequent and prolonged droughts," the report said.

"You find that now the rains do not come as they used to come, the seasons are changing and it's a lot hotter," Masembe tells IPS. "The dry season takes a lot longer. Farmers are telling you their crops are being affected a lot. You have mudslides in Bududa (eastern Uganda) almost every other year."

Despite her age, Olga is all too aware of the impact of climate change on her country, which she notes is called the "Pearl of Africa" but which, because of climate change, "will no longer be the Pearl of Africa. Lake Victoria and (Lake) Albert will dry up... climate (change) is something that can destroy a country."

"The ozone layer is the layer that protects from the direct sunshine, so when it's spoilt we shall get the direct sunshine and the plants will dry up, drought will be there," she adds.

As she plants a tree at the end of the ICCCC, Olga says that she will encourage her mother, father and two siblings to do the same. "I'll keep encouraging people to plant trees ... They have a responsibility."

Olga is fortunate that she attends an international school where the study of climate change is on the curriculum. "In the international schools they teach it, in the local schools, which is the majority, they don't," says Masembe. "So we have to find other ways to sneak it in, through extracurricular activities for instance."

"The Green Festival (to be held on August 24) is one opportunity. And this conference, which will become annual, will become part of the way whereby children can use their voices and hopefully adults can start to listen."

July 15, 2014

Image: Students from Kisule Primary School in Kampala at the International Children's Climate Change Conference (ICCCC), July 2014, Uganda. Credit: Amy Fallon/IPS



# A Buddhist Nun Becomes A Role Model for Women Empowerment

By Kalinga Seneviratne\*

SINGAPORE (IDN) - By ordaining women into the Sangha (order of Buddha's disciples), Gautama Buddha 2500 years ago has placed women on an equal footing with men in India. But today in most Asian Buddhist countries nuns are fighting an uphill battle to be recognized as credible teachers of the Dhamma (Buddha's teachings). One Nepali woman may be unwittingly changing this perception by virtually singing the Dhamma.

"I never label myself into anything I just do what my heart wishes to do, with all the understanding and respect towards Buddha's teachings and his principles," said Nepali Buddhist nun Ani Choying Drolma, when I interviewed her just before she performed to a sellout audience at Singapore's premier concert hall, The Esplanade in April.

Ani Choying Drolma, who has made a name for herself in the world music scene, has been performing to packed houses in recent years in countries such as the U.S., Australia, Taiwan and Singapore. In the process, she has made a lot of money, which she invests in a foundation she has set up in Nepal to educate poor women and empower them in a conservative male-dominated society.

Born in the same country the Buddha was born, to a Tibetan refugee family in Kathmandu in 1970, she became a nun at the age of 13 basically to get away from an abusive father. She entered the Nagi Gompa, a Buddhist nunnery on the northern slopes of the Kathmandu Valley, where her education and spiritual training was supervised by the renowned meditation master Tulku Urgyen Rinponche, who was the head Lama of Nagi Gompa. It was his wife who taught Ani Choying how to sing the sacred chants. Her talent quickly became apparent and in the position of Chant Master for the Nunnery, she led all religious ceremonies and chants.

Ani Choying has come a long way from there and has today become a role model for women's empowerment in Nepal as well as across Asia. A fluent English speaker, she speaks regularly in international conferences around the world.

"We are conceived in the mother's womb in a similar way (as boys) with equal respect, equal joy and nourished in a similar way until we are out in the world," notes Ani Choying, and it is after that that different roles are assigned to boys and girls, which is a man-made culture, she argues. "I believe that's the wrong understanding, nature has never been biased."

"I believe in myself saying that I have equal potential to achieve enlightenment. I have equal potential to serve people. Why is that wrong if we believe in it?" asks Ani Choying. "I don't believe in criticizing people but look inside and say, yes I have potential and I must strengthen that and move forward."

When asked what motivates her to sing not only in Nepal but around the world, her response was: "What I sing is not tragic love songs or any worldly songs. I sing spiritual songs, meditation songs and the words of the Buddha are translated to a very simple poetic language which is transformed into a musical song. The main purpose of my singing is for me to be able to share the wisdom of the Buddha with simplicity that any person walking on the street can understand the meaning. So people who are able to listen to it at least enjoy a moment of bliss."

A talented singer without training

Her musical career began in 1994, when U.S. guitarist Steve Tibbetts during a visit to Nepal met Ani Choying and listened to her chanting. He was immediately impressed with her singing talents and eventually managed to record it on a cassette recorder in a small shrine room. The result was a collaborative album Cho, which was released in 1997 to critical acclaim.

"I never got technical training to become a singer and never pursued to become a singer. When you pursue a career in becoming a singer, your main ambition is that you want to become famous or you want to make a lot of money. But it has never been the case with me," Ani Choying said recalling the beginning of her musical journey. "What happened was this musician who came to the monastery and heard me singing some of the prayers.

He asked me to record something. Later he took it back to America and mixed with his music and sent it back with a proposal, asking if I be interested in making an album out of it".

She at first could not make up her mind whether to do it or not. "I went to see my teacher (and asked) what he thought. His answer was, okay whoever hears these mantras or spiritual songs, whether they are believers or non-believers they will all be benefited, it's okay. That was good enough for me to record," she added.

This decision has taken her into new vistas and perhaps opened up new avenues for Asian Buddhist nuns to get themselves recognized as messengers of the Dhamma.

Between 1997 and 2011, Ani Choying has released 12 CDs and contributed to music compilations including Buddha Bar and the sound track to the movie Milarepa. Following the success of her first concert tour in the USA, she began performing in concerts and at festivals all over Europe, North America, the UK, Singapore, China, Taiwan, and many other countries of Asia. She played a major part in popularising Tibetan Buddhist chants with western audiences.

In 2013, giving a whole new spin to the term 'world music', Ani Choying sang an inter-faith song with Jordanian singer Farah Siraj for MTV that was composed by Oscar-winning Indian musician A.R. Rahman with the Nepalese Buddhist hymn forming the base of the song, layered with a traditional Jordanian melody.

"I was singing a compassion Buddha mantra, the theme of that song is mother," explained Ani Choying. "Mr Rahman asked me if there is anything that represents the quality of a mother in your mantra tradition . . . when you think of the word mother the quality of the mother becomes compassion. I can think of the mantra of compassionate Buddha. So I said I can sing the mantra. (and) the Jordanian woman singing in Arabic praising mother"

With the funds coming to her from the blossoming musical career, Ani Choying was able to start supporting the education of girls and young women in Nepal from poor

areas.

In 1998 she established the Nuns' Welfare Foundation (NWF) of Nepal. By providing both secular and Buddhist education to nuns, they in turn would be able to serve the wider community. The flagship project of the NWF is the Arya Tara School, which opened in 2000. She also supports a number of humanitarian projects such as the Shree Tara Band (the first female instrumental band of Nepal), the building of a kidney hospital for Nepal, an early childhood development centre and a street dog care camp.

Ani Choying does not see a conflict between her vinaya principles as a nun and getting paid for her musical performances.

"In Asian tradition you get offering and in western tradition you get paid. Your time, your skill is respected in that manner," noted Ani Choying when the issue of vinaya rules was raised during the interview. "So when money comes in, then question comes what should I do with the money? May be now I can fulfill my wishes to see all the women and girls getting a chance to go to school and getting an education".

Thus she added, that she started a school for nuns where they can get a good academic education. "This money helped me to start this project and as it is not enough just to start (it) needs continuation (that) means more money. So then (my) singing continued . . . Whatever financial resources are generated, out of that I'm able to do so much good work in Nepal".

"It adds good meaning to my existence," argues Ani Choying. "I feel active. Feel like I'm blessed, at least I can reduce pain in somebody's life."

Kalinga Seneviratne\* Kalinga Seneviratne is IDN Special Correspondent for Asia-Pacific. He teaches international communications in Singapore.

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Image credit: Geraldstiehler~commons wiki CC BY-SA 3.0



# Berlin Launches A Visionary Project for Interfaith Dialogue

By Francesca Dziadek

BERLIN (IDN) - A leap of faith is on the agenda in Berlin where a visionary project for interfaith dialogue, launched as the House of One, hopes to bring Christians, Jews and Muslims to worship under one roof from 2018.

In a country where inter-religious dialogue has spun numerous initiatives for Christian-Jewish dialogue set up after World War II (1939-45) and post 9/11 – the time after a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks upon the United States in New York City and the Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001 – public opinion in Germany has yet to come to terms with how it was possible for six million Jews to be murdered by the citizens of a Christian nation.

Sharing a symbolic shoe-burying ritual in the sandy soil of an empty plot of wasteland in Berlin's historic centre, not far from the building site for new Humboldt Cultural Forum, an unlikely trio – a Pastor, a Rabbi and an Imam – stood side by side in June thanking the shared God of the three Abrahamic faiths they hope to come and pray to once the bold Church-Synagogue-Mosque in one building is completed.

Rabbi Tovia Ben-Chorin, Imam Kadir Sancı and Pastor Gregor Hohberg, the House of One's initiators, are poised to become Berlin's own "Tolerance Trio": a term which refers to the U.S. interfaith National Conference of Christians and Jews in the 1930s, whereby a rabbi, a priest, and a minister – the "Tolerance Trio" – were dispatched to cities around the country in order to facilitate interfaith understanding promoting the idea of an America built on harmony among Jews, Catholics, and Protestants.

When in 1943 a German U-boat torpedoed the USS *Dorchester* and it began to sink - a rabbi, a priest, and a minister - helped to distribute life vests until they ran out and finally gave up their own to save more soldiers. Survivors saw the men praying arm-in-arm as the ship went down.

Standing on firmer ground, the House of One's management board which includes Roland Stolte, House of One's Project Manager, Cebraıl Terlemez, Chairman of the Muslim Forum for Intercultural Dialogue (FID), – and Maya

Zehden have been joined by a roster of prestigious names including Walter Homolka, Rector of the Abraham Geiger College, and Dr Gideon Joffe, Chairman of the Jewish Community Berlin. Berlin's Senate Department for Urban Development and the Federal Ministry of the Interior are on the supervisory board.

Set up in 2011 as the association House of Prayer and Learning Petriplatz Berlin e.V. the Church-Synagogue-Mosque project is envisioned as a uniquely independent public venture, free from official sponsors and partisan donations. Backers and supporters, hope to raise 43.5 million Euros by 2016 through by collaborative crowdfunding encouraging anyone to donate - starting from a single, symbolic brick for 10 Euros. At least 10 million Euros will be required to complete a first phase of the project, which will not draw funds from the German church tax.

Spiritual foundation

The selected location, Peritzplatz, is none other than Berlin's spiritual foundation.

When excavations in 2009 revealed remnants of Berlin's earliest known Church, the Petrikirche and a Latin school dating back to 1350, the pastor, Gregor Hohberg became convinced that this coincidence, coupled with Berlin's increasing multicultural demography and a cosmopolitan terrain provide the right humus for a project of this magnitude.

"The decision to locate the House of One right on this archaic and sacred bit of soil sends a very strong signal and a message about the commitment to peaceful multi-faith dialogue in Germany," said Tim Renner, Berlin's State Secretary for Cultural Affairs to IDN.

And Berlin's interfaith team are confident that a new kind of shared covenant – and Promised Land – with God, Allah and Jehovah is possible in Germany.

"A place that has darkness in its past has the potential for peace in its future. As a Jew I associate Berlin with pain and deep wounds but that is not the end of the story," is how Ben-Chorin describes his commitment to the project.

"For me Berlin is all about remembrance and rebirth."

There is no denying Berlin's unique historical, political and cultural backdrop. The city's narrative – a sequence of destruction followed by visionary, monumental rebuilding – has often merged architectural design with bold political and spiritual dimensions.

Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum, completed in 2001 is one of the world's most striking emblems of reconciliation. Libeskind's own name for the Jewish Museum project 'Between the Lines' started with the vision of two lines, the first straight broken and fragmented, the other tortuous but indefinitely continuous. The building gave visual form to the elements of fragmentation coexisting with hope, continuity and connection between Jews and Germans, East and West, tradition and present.

The House of One embodies the same endeavour, one that now incorporates Muslim citizens and Islam in a "laboratory for developing mutual understanding and respect" as the House of One website defines it.

Berlin's Muslim community, 9 percent of the total population, counts approximately 160,000 individuals. 73 percent are of Turkish origin, and 7 percent stem from Bosnia-Herzegovina. 40,000 are naturalized German citizens, who have at their disposal 80 prayer centres and 4 Mosques, according to Berlin's Senate for Religious Affairs, which are mainly situated in the city's Kreuzberg and Neukölln districts where companies like Siemens contracted Turkish guest workers settled in the 1960s.

Berlin's Jewish population, which includes a recent influx from Israel jumped to an estimated 50,000 in 2008 from pre-war 200,000, worships in 11 Synagogues.

Kuehn Malvezzi, the local architects who won the 2012 international competition conceived a core design element allocating three equal spaces to the prayer areas conjoined by a communal, 32m-high domed space for talks, discussions, and study of texts sacred to each of the three religious traditions. Believers, individuals from all religious backgrounds, as well as non-believers will be welcome.

Founding members include the Jewish Community of Berlin, and Abraham Geiger College, as the Jewish partner and the Islamic partner, the House of One selected the



Forum for Intercultural Dialogue (FID), the Ahmaddiya community, which runs around a dozen Mosques in Germany and opened the first Mosque in East Berlin and is viewed favourably by the Ministry for the Interior which monitors more radical forms of Islam and the potential threat of Jihad preaching pulpits and video sermons.

The movement is led by a controversial, cosmopolitan Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen who is based in the U.S. and whose followers wield influence in Turkey's judiciary. He remains a controversial figure and an on and off persona non grata in President's Abdullah Gul's books, accused by the Erdogan government of using the internet to flare up dissent, while thousands protested in the streets against Internet restrictions.

From the social and political point of view, Germany continues to have challenges "integrating" its 3.2 million Muslim community and still frames multicultural relations in a broadly assimilationist discourse.

The NSU (National Socialist Underground) – an extremist right-wing cell's – trail of serial assassinations involving small Turkish shopkeepers was pursued by the authorities as mafia linked crime, as evidence pointing to the real culprits in neo-Nazi circles was ignored.

It revealed a troubling, racist, anti-Islamic blind spot and a new category of "anti-Islamic crime" is likely to be adopted to pursue criminal acts against Muslims in the same way as legal definitions protect and acknowledge victims of anti-Semitic and homophobic attacks. Gratuitous anti-Semitic attacks such as the beating of Rabbi Daniel Alter, as he walked home with his seven year-old daughter for wearing a Yarmulke skullcap as a visible sign of difference. This prompted the Jewish community to set up a databank for hate-crime incidents.

Interreligious experiments

If the House of One takes off – pending an achieved donation target of 10 million Euros – it would commit the reunited German capital to interfaith dialogue, locally and globally as examples of olive branch continue, around the world.

Increasingly interfaith dialogue is playing an important role on the world stage, and gaining ground as "foreign

policy by other means" as the tide of sectarianism sweeps across the middle east, fanning centuries of rivalries between Shiites and Sunnis and brutalising the pluralistic aspirations of civil rights and religious – as well as secular – pro-democracy Arab spring uprisings.

As violence between Israel and Palestine continues to escalate in the Holy Land, Pope Francis' visit in June spoke the softer language of symbolic interfaith diplomacy, building bridges through gestures, respect and prayer, placing a wreath on the grave of the founder of Zionism, removing his shoes to enter the dome of the Rock – the Noble Sanctuary to Muslims and Temple Mount to Jews escorted by a Rabbi and an Islamic scholar from Argentina.

In the UK where xenophobia and Islamophobia appears to be on the rise, an Orthodox rabbi, Nathan Levy, joined millions of Muslims around Britain in observing the month-long Ramadan fast, and hopes his unprecedented act will help to increase understanding of Islam within Anglo-Jewry.

It is perhaps due to complacency, and a general reluctance by political parties to publicly embrace the values of pluralistic multi-ethnic society, that Europe suffers bouts of intermittent amnesia about the extent to which the three faiths are interlinked. Often this leads to a slippery descent into hostility, prejudice and hate crime.

Friedrich the Great, Prussia's 18th century enlightened monarch – who held that "all religions must be tolerated for every man must get to heaven in his own way" – welcomed expelled French Huguenot Protestants, Jews and Muslims and built the first Mosque for Turkish soldiers in Potsdam, cradle of 18th diversity and multiculturalism.

Spain's Muslim Caliphate of Al-Andalus enabled peaceful multifaith coexistence, St Augustine preached the Christian Gospel in Tagaste, Algeria, a Roman city and Tunisia was a thriving centre of Jewish life whose ancient Ghriba synagogue from 586 BC is traced to a Jewish exodus following the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem.

European Jewry has been dealt the carrot and the stick for centuries on a spectrum from tolerance and civil rights to outright discrimination and persecution. Recently,

the Spanish government reached out to Sephardic Jews, who were expelled in 1492 Alhambra Declaration in an effort to repatriate them with new citizenship legislation yet failing to dish out equal magnanimity to the Muslim Moriscos community, expelled in 1614 as part of Spain's Christian Reconquista, built on the idea of mono-cultural ethnicity.

Lately the deaths of four people at the Jewish museum in Brussels, where the European Jewish Congress has its headquarters, sent shock waves of anti-Semitic fear around Europe. France's six million Muslims and 500,000 strong Jewish community are sensing a new tide of anti-Semitism spreading in Europe as anti-Semitic discourse becomes "normalised" when far-right parties gain support, as in May to the European Parliament. With a nationalist party in Hungary, a neo-Nazi party in Greece, migration to Israel is on the rise. In France in 2013 over 3,000 French Jews out of a population of 500,000 migrated to Israel, according to the Jewish Agency for Israel which coordinates emigration.

EU anti-racism agency's reports that 40 percent of all "hate crime" is committed against Jews.

The House of One's initiators and supporters are confident that now more than ever is the time for an initiative of this kind as a forum for reconciliation through dialogue to help shine a light on the futility of ongoing devastation engendered by hostile rivalry, prejudice and sectarianism reaching out to difference and diversity rather than combating it as a threat to be uprooted.

Starting with children, visiting the centre's learning project from Berlin's multicultural who might be delighted to discover that Jesus was indeed an "idiot" – at least in the Greek testament meaning of the word – a man without a profession.

"This house will be a home to equality, peace and reconciliation." said Pastor Hohberg.

July 10, 2014

# Faith Based Organizations Keen To Influence UN Development Agenda

By Kalinga Seneviratne\*

BANGKOK (IDN) - 2015 is expected to become a watershed year for shaping the global development agenda with the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development models and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) frameworks, all coming up for review at major UN conferences during the year.

Thus, the 6th Asian Ministerial Conference On Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) that concluded in the Thai capital on June 26 gave a taste of things to come with a lot of emphasis given to discussion on community based solutions.

The UN Secretary General's Special Representative for DRR, Margareta Wahlström said in an opening remark to the conference that an inclusive and participatory work model is needed where grassroots communities and local government authorities need to play a central role in DRR activity.

In February this year the Civil Society Forum – a group of 38 civil society representatives – that met in Geneva released a position paper on post-2015 Framework for DRR that called for a radical rethink and advocated a community based approach to the problem as well.

“It will involve systemically learning from disaster events about the relative strengths and weakness of current development pathways and provide leverage points to promote the resilience agenda” the paper noted, adding: “civil society has a crucial role in broadening citizens’ participation in formulating and implementing disaster risk management strategies”. This idea was also presented to the AMCDRR in Bangkok at a side event organized by civil society groups.

In an interview with IDN, Harjeet Singh, International Coordinator, Disaster Risk Reduction and Climatic Adaptation of Action Aid noted that the UN has now started to listen more to civil society groups and is opening up spaces for them at UN events. “They invited some of us to

join them in Geneva to contribute to this new framework coming up,” he pointed out.

During the five-day deliberations, a number of Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) were very actively promoting the inclusion of them in a more formal manner on UN’s development policy making frameworks.

FBOs held a number of side events and workshops including launching a statement during the Bangkok meeting saying that they are ready to commit to build resilient communities across Asia after a disaster. They argue that they could tap into a large reservoir of committed people at community level to assist in community rebuilding after a disaster.

Ye Win Tun of the World Concern – a Christian global relief and development agency based in Seattle, USA – said that FBOs are everywhere in Myanmar delivering disaster relief and they are the most respected and trusted aid agencies in the country. “Sometimes it is difficult to have paid staff (working on aid projects) but FBOs can mobilize volunteers quickly and work well with local authorities,” he claimed.

However in a country where Buddhists constitute about 89 percent of the population with many of them among the poorest in the Asian region, they have felt threatened by incursion of aggressive Christian evangelical groups claiming to deliver development assistance. While Ye Win did acknowledge that Christian groups face certain skepticism in the country, and was at pains to emphasize that they work with Buddhist monasteries as well, figures he presented to his local partners included 28 Christian churches and only five Buddhist monasteries.

Action Aid, which is one of the world’s largest secular development aid agencies in the world, Singh argued, also use humanist principles, and they are staunchly neutral when it comes to issues of faith (religion). “We work on a needs based principle,” he told IDN. “We look for partners on the ground who are trusted and acceptable to the local

community. They should not be in a charity mold. It’s not about being benevolent but empowering (the community).”

Christian aid groups

The most active among the FOB consortium members present in Bangkok were Christian aid groups such as Catholic relief organization Caritas Asia and ACT Alliance, a coalition of more than 140 churches and affiliated organizations. The only non-Christian member of the consortium was the lay Japanese Buddhist organization Soka Gakkai International (SGI), with members living in 192 countries and territories while there are 93 locally registered constituent SGI organizations.

Since Asia is predominantly a non-Christian continent, there were questions raised whether such a FOB coalition is best equipped to develop what was often mentioned during the conference as “multi-stakeholder collaborations”. It was pointed out that they need to be more broad-based by including Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and also more Buddhist groups since Asia is home to about 500 million Buddhists in addition to an equal number of Muslims, and Hindus.

Jessica Dator Bercilla, a Filipina member of Christian Aid said that as Christians when they deliver disaster aid they need to make God’s presence felt in the community and give people hope. But, when it was argued that since they work mainly with non-Christian communities in Asia that could lead to religious identity conflicts, her response was that “we don’t have to make excuses for our faith. It is because of our faith we do this work (and) we are able to give value to human life.”

When asked by IDN if such strong sentiments of faith could be counterproductive in building resilient and harmonious societies after a disaster, Mani Kumar, Coordinator of Dan Church Aid from Denmark in Myanmar responded: “We need to be very clear about our role as FBOs. We represent constituencies of right holders for

whom we are working. Its more about (being considerate about) values and ensuring dignity and lives of people”.

“Any person has a potential to overcome difficulties. Therefore, our approach is not simply ‘to give something’ to the victims,” said Nobuyuki Asai, Program Coordinator Peace Affairs of SGI explaining their Buddhist approach to disaster relief work, in an interview with IDN. “We try to encourage and empower them to develop and use their own inner potential to find and create their own solutions to the problems they face.”

“What we do is not any different from (what) secular organizations (do),” he acknowledged, adding that “most critical point is motivation of FBOs. It’s based on strong faith (in what we do)”.

Asai believes that the roles and function of FBOs are not appropriately recognized by the relevant public administration in case of disasters. “There should be a need to objectively assess the contributions FBOs can make and how they should be positioned in the scheme of disaster relief and recovery,” he argued. “The public administration and FBOs can reach a disaster management agreement so that they can cooperate effectively”.

Zar Gomes, regional coordinator of Caritas Asia argues that indigenous knowledge is sometimes very valuable in disaster relief work and in building risk reduction plans. This knowledge needs to be built into the plans of UN documents such as the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA2) adopted in Bangkok as the guide for regional action.

“We have brought in a number of community members from our network across Asia to get them to participate in these forums, so that their voices could be accepted into these frameworks,” he told IDN.

When asked, how they cope with the fact that many Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu communities across Asia are suspicious of the Catholic church of trying to convert them, he admitted that it is a challenge for them. “They

suspect us of trying to evangelize them. We don’t go to the community to preach to them. We need to get the trust of the community before we start our development work,” he explained. “When we start the work and they find that it’s not about religion but about development, then they embrace us.”

Pre-Christian and pre-Islamic tradition and culture Perhaps to prove that point, Caritas Asia flew to Bangkok three community leaders of the Subanon indigenous community in Mindanao in the Philippines. According to the Philippines National Commission for Culture and the Arts, Subanons are believed to be one of the few communities that have preserved the pre-Christian and pre-Islamic tradition and culture of the Philippines islands. One of their members, Victoria Cajandig, who spoke at a side event organized by Caritas Asia, described how they are fighting to keep control of the right to live in their ancestral land to which they have a spiritual connection.

Timuay Jose Anoy, Chieftain of the community speaking in the same forum thanked Caritas for creating the platform for them to bring their concerns to the international community. He explained how the government allowed mining to take place on their scared mountain Mount Canatuan. “We have our own traditional rules to protect us from natural disasters, today we need your help to protect us from a man-made disaster,” he appealed to the audience.

Most faith-based communities – whatever their religious affiliations – have a passion to help others, especially the dispossessed and the voiceless. All religions basically have common goals when it comes to concepts like social justice, self-reliance and compassion.

As Caritas demonstrated, when it comes to social justice for the Subanon people religious affiliation is not an issue. Even the Thai government was able to squeeze in the King’s Sufficiency Economics concept into the AMCDRR’s Bangkok Declaration, which is based on a Buddhist prin-

ciple of controlling one’s cravings and living a sustainable lifestyle that will not negatively impact on the environment and plunder other peoples’ resources to satisfy your greed. Thus, there is much room for FBOs to collaborate if they can see common principles within their teachings.

“Every human being needs to have the basic needs met in a way that enables him to live with dignity. Aid from outside is necessary, and the exploitation of natural and human resources in those countries has to be stopped. For this, we believe it is important that the attitudes of people in developed countries have to change,” Asai told IDN, apparently putting into context how FBOs could cooperate to reform the global development agenda.

“They have to be more tolerant and compassionate and try to understand the world from the viewpoint of a true global citizen. From such a perspective, we feel that the input we are best placed to make is the promotion of inner transformation to develop courage and compassionate action as well as public education.”

\*Kalinga Seneviratne is IDN Special Correspondent for Asia-Pacific. He teaches international communications in Singapore.

June 28, 2014

# When Faith Meets Disaster Management

By Kalinga Seneviratne

BANGKOK (IPS) - A consortium of faith-based organisations (FBOs) made a declaration at a side event Wednesday at the 6th Asian Ministerial Conference On Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR), to let the United Nations know that they stand ready to commit themselves to building resilient communities across Asia in the aftermath of natural disasters.

Hosted this year by the Thai government, the conference is a biennial collaboration with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), with the aim of bringing regional stakeholders together to discuss the specific challenges facing Asia in an era of rapid climate change.

A report prepared for the Bangkok conference by UNISDR points out that in the past three years Asia has encountered a wide range of disasters, from cyclones in the Philippines and major flooding in China, India and Thailand, to severe earthquakes in Pakistan and Japan.

In 2011 alone, global economic losses from extreme weather events touched 366 billion dollars, of which 80 percent were recorded in the Asia-Pacific region.

While the region accounts for 39 percent of the planet's land area and hosts 60 percent of the world's population, it only holds 29 percent of global wealth, posing major challenges for governments in terms of disaster preparedness and emergency response.

FBOs believe they can fill this gap by giving people hope during times of suffering.

"It's not about the goods we bring or the big houses we build," argued Jessica Dator Bercilla, a Filipina from Christian Aid, adding that the most important contribution religious organisations can make is to convince people they are not alone on the long road towards rebuilding their lives after a disaster.

The FBO consortium that drafted the statement – including Caritas Asia, Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and the ACT Alliance – held a pre-conference consultative meeting here on Jun. 22nd during which some 50 participants from various faiths discussed the many hurdles FBOs must clear in order to deliver disaster relief and assist affected populations.

The final FBO Statement on Disaster Risk Reduction drew attention to faith organisations' unique ability to work closely with local communities to facilitate resilience and peace building.

Given that an estimated one in eight people in the world identify with some form of organised religion, and that faith-based organisations comprise the largest service delivery network in the world, FBOs stand out as natural partners in the field of disaster risk reduction (DRR). A declaration enshrined in the statement also urged the United Nations to recognise FBOs as a unique stakeholder in the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (HFA2) to be presented to the 3rd U.N. World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) in 2015.

It also wants national and local governments to include FBOs when they organise regular consultations on DRR with relevant stakeholders, as FBOs are the ones who often sustain development programmes in the absence of international NGOs.

For example, since 2012 Caritas Indonesia has been working with a coastal community that has lost 200 metres of its coastal land in the past 22 years, in the Fata Hamlet of Indonesia's East Nusa Tenggara Province, to build community resilience to rising seawaters.

The agency helped community members form the Fata Environment Lover Group, which now uses natural building methods to allow seawater to pass through bamboo structures before reaching the coast, so that wave heights are reduced and mangroves are protected.

Collectively, the three partners to the declaration cover a lot of ground in the region.

Caritas Asia is one of seven regional offices that comprise Caritas International, a Catholic relief agency that operates in 200 countries. SGI is a Japanese lay Buddhist movement with a network of organisations in 192 countries, while ACT is a coalition of Christian churches and affiliated organisations working in over 140 countries.

All three are renowned for their contributions to the field of development and disaster relief. Caritas International, for instance, annually allocates over a million euros (1.3 million dollars) to humanitarian coordination, capacity building and HIV/AIDS programmes around the world.

"We would like to be one of the main players in the introduction of the DRR policy," Takeshi Komino, head of emergencies for the ACT Alliance in the Asia-Pacific region, told IPS. "We are saying we are ready to engage."

"What our joint statement points out is that our commitment is based on faith and that is strong. We can be engaged in relief and recovery activity for a long time," added Nobuyuki Asai, programme coordinator of peace affairs for SGI.

Experts say Asia is an excellent testing ground for the efficacy of faith-based organisations in contributing to disaster risk reduction.

According to a survey by the independent Pew Research Centre, the Asia-Pacific region is home to 99 percent of the world's Buddhists, 99 percent of the world's Hindus and 62 percent of the world's Muslims.

The region has also seen a steady increase in the number of Catholics, from 14 million a century ago to 131 million in 2013.

Forming links between these communities is easier said than done, with religious and communal conflicts plaguing the region, including a wave of Buddhist extremism in countries like Sri Lanka and Myanmar, a strong anti-Christian movement across Pakistan and attacks on religious minorities in China and India.

Some experts, however, say that the threat of natural catastrophe draws communities together. According to Dr. Anil Kumar Gupta, head of the division of policy planning at the National Institute of Disaster Management in India, "When there is a disaster people forget their differences.

"I have seen the aftermath of disasters, where religious leaders and volunteers from Hindu temples, Islamic organisations and Sikh temples work together like born brothers," he told IPS, citing such cooperation during major floods recently in the northern Indian states of Uttarakhand and Kashmir.

Loy Rego, a Myanmar-based disaster relief consultant, told IPS that the statement released today represents a very important landmark in disaster risk reduction.

"FBOs need to be more visible as an organised constituent-



cy in the roll-out of future frameworks,” he stated. Rego believes that the biggest contribution FBOs could make to disaster risk management is to promote peaceful living among different communities.

“Respecting other religions need not be done in a secular way,” he said. “It only happens when they work with other FBOs in an inter-faith setting.”  
June 25, 2014

Image: An old woman stands in front of her house, which was destroyed by flash floods in Sri Lanka. Credit: Amantha Perera/IPS

# From Religious Conflict to an Interfaith Community

By Kanya D'Almeida

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) - Holy men and their holy books have etched a trail of tears and blood in the annals of human history. From the depths of peaceful temples, mobs have been dispatched with flaming torches; from steeples and minarets messages of hatred have floated down upon pious heads bent in prayer. For too long religion has incited violence and fueled conflict.

But a new alliance is seeking to turn that tide by bringing adherents of different faiths together, to overcome – through dialogue – the chasm between ‘Your God’ and ‘My God’ in the hopes of achieving a truly interreligious international community.

“There is no such thing as a religious conflict,” Faisal Bin Abdulrahman Bin Muaammar, secretary-general of the intergovernmental organisation KAICIID, said at a media briefing in New York last Wednesday.

“Religion rejects conflict. Violence in the name of religion is violence against religion.”

Based in Vienna, KAICIID (the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue) is comprised of a Council of Parties made up of the governments of Austria, Spain and Saudi Arabia, with the Holy See as a founding observer.

Its board of directors includes religious leaders from five leading world religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism), who together seek to foster a bottom-up process of engaging and empowering local faith-based organisations and religious leaders in peace-keeping, conflict prevention and development.

The centre estimates that eight out of every 10 people in the world identify with some form of organised religion and most all of them are likely to classify themselves as peace-loving individuals.

Sadly, according to Bin Muaammar, politicians and extremists have ‘hijacked’ the inherently tolerant and peaceful nature of religious practice for their own – often violent and divisive – ends.

Only through sustained dialogue, he said, can people be empowered to overcome their fear of the ‘Other’, and work towards a more inclusive and tolerant world.

KAICIID’s entrance onto the global stage is highly opportune; according to a new study by the independent Pew Research Center – which covered 198 countries, accounting for 99.5 percent of the world’s population – social hostilities involving religion are on the rise in every continent except the Americas.

On Mar. 9, 2013, Muslim mobs torched the Christian neighbourhood known as Joseph Colony in Lahore. Credit: Irfan Ahmed/IPS

On Mar. 9, 2013, Muslim mobs torched the Christian neighbourhood known as Joseph Colony in Lahore. Credit: Irfan Ahmed/IPS

The report found that “the number of countries with religion-related terrorist violence has doubled over the past six years. In 2012, religion-related terrorist violence took place in one in five countries (20 percent), up from nine percent in 2007.”

Half of all countries in the Middle East and North Africa experienced sectarian violence in 2012, bringing the total global average of countries facing such hostilities to 18 percent, up from eight percent in 2007.

In a single year, between 2011 and 2012, the number of countries experiencing a very high level of religious hostilities went from 14 to 20. Six of those countries – Syria, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Burma – experienced relatively few hostilities in 2011 compared to 2012.

Things also worsened for religious minorities, according to the study, with 47 percent of the countries studied reporting incidents of targeted abuse of minorities, up from 38 percent in 2011.

“In Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka, for example, monks attacked Muslim and Christian places of worship, including reportedly attacking a mosque in the town of Dambulla in April 2012 and forcibly occupying a Seventh-day Adventist church in the town of Deniyaya and converting it into a Buddhist temple in August 2012,” the report’s authors said.

A bleak picture, but one that can easily be changed, according to KAICIID, whose secretary-general met with U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon last week to outline possible

collaborations between the world body and the intergovernmental group towards the goal of stemming religious violence.

On paper, the U.N. is already committed to the issue of inter-faith understanding and peace through dialogue. Agencies like its Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) have as their mission statement the goal of “promoting understanding between countries or identity groups, all with a view toward preventing conflict and promoting social cohesion.”

But high-level visions cannot become a reality without focused efforts to engage the grassroots, as KAICIID’s work has highlighted. Only in its second year of operations, the organisation already boasts tangible results, including a successful interfaith dialogue on the Central African Republic, where hundreds have been killed and over 500,000 displaced since the outbreak of a conflict in 2012.

“From May 8-9 we worked with religious leaders from CAR, putting them in contact with religious leaders in other African countries, while ensuring that we were working in tandem with other organisations doing similar work,” Hillary Wiesner, KAICIID’s director of programmes, told IPS.

“We work with religious communities from the inside, not as a secular institution from the outside,” she said, adding this approach helps foster a sense of trust between the organisation and local faith leaders.

This is crucial, she stressed, since “faith-based organisations collectively comprise the largest civil society enterprise in the world.”

According to the Katherine Marshall, executive director of the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), which attempts to bridge the gap between religion and secular development, “Between seven and 70 percent of healthcare services in sub-Saharan Africa are provided by faith inspired organisations.”

“These institutions represent the single largest service distribution system in the world,” she told IPS, adding that religious organisations are indispensable to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of poverty-reduction targets agreed upon by all 193 members of



the United Nations over a decade ago.

A 2008 World Bank study found that faith-based organisations across the continent of Africa filled gaping holes left by the state. For instance, an evangelic development agency known as World Vision had a 1.25-billion-dollar aid budget for Africa in 2002.

In Malawi the Christian Service Committee of the Churches was operating with an annual budget that outstripped the government's entire development portfolio. And in South Africa, the Catholic Church was providing more anti-retroviral treatment for those living with HIV/AIDS in 2012 than the state.

Too often, the huge potential of religious organisations is lost in tales of the negatives, which are dominating international headlines.

"The most flagrant examples right now of the negative side of religion include issues like the anti-gay bills in Uganda and Nigeria, not to speak of religious conflicts in CAR or Mali," Marshall said.

"This is why there needs to first be knowledge, and then religious literacy." She argued that too few people working in the field of development are educated on the intricacies of religious life, such as where the Conference of Catholic Bishops is being held, or the difference between a Sunni or Shi'a Muslim.

The other missing piece, she said, is the role of religious women in peacekeeping. "Women with religious links – be they nuns or Muslims – tend to be invisible [...] because they don't have formal positions but a lot of the work they do is the most important work for peace."

As Wiesner noted, "Religion is not reducible to a subset of culture; the religious and spiritual dimensions in the lives of individuals and society are much deeper than that. We need to promote responsible ways of living out these beliefs for the betterment of all people."

June 16, 2014

Image: Rohingya refugees flee violent mobs in Myanmar. Credit: Anurup Titu/IPS.

# Post-2015 Development Agenda – Will the Voices of the Hungry be Heard?

By Genevieve L. Mathieu

ROME (IPS) - The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will expire in 2015 and be replaced with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are intended to strengthen the international community's engagement with eradicating poverty and hunger. In the run-up to the drafting of the SDGs, the importance of food and nutrition security remains crucial.

"In a world that produces enough food to feed everyone, there is no excuse for anyone to go hungry," David Taylor, Economic Justice Policy Advisor for Oxfam International, told IPS.

Yet, the World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that there are still 842 million people who are under-nourished, representing one in eight globally.

While the first MDG "target of halving the percentage of people suffering from hunger by 2015 appears to be within reach, chronic hunger persists in many areas, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, with marked disparities in progress," Taylor remarked.

For these reasons, he believes that "major challenges in food and agriculture remain" and, consequently, "the post-2015 agenda must chart a new pathway towards a target of zero hunger."

The discussion surrounding the SDGs as a successor framework to the MDGs began in June 2012 at the Rio+20 Conference. Subsequently, in January 2013, "an Open Working Group (OWG) was established to steer the formulation of the proposal on SDGs," Dorian Kalamvrezos Navarro, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Post-2015-SDGs coordinator, told IPS.

On 2 June, the OWG, made up of member states from

all five continents, released the Zero Draft on SDGs with 17 proposed goals to be attained by 2030. The group is also supported by a U.N. System Technical Team, which comprises 40 U.N. entities.

Many of the targets of the OWG's Zero Draft are welcomed by Oxfam, said Taylor, "including the target to end rather than merely reduce hunger, and the emphasis on supporting small-scale producers, women and other marginal groups."

"If we're to have an effective framework we need to identify applicable indicators. This is very challenging," Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant Director-General for Economic and Social Development and FAO lead for post-2015, told IPS.

Previously, critics such as Olivier de Schutter, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, have argued that the 18 targets of the MDGs had been decided on the basis of the most easily compiled data available, neglecting the deeper causes of poverty and hunger.

Sundaram pointed out that in drafting the SDGs, the international community needs to identify suitable goals and targets that are easy to measure, for which we have available data and, of course, that are meaningful.

"A welcome step forward is the inclusion of goals on reducing inequality and on climate change – and of course on food security," Taylor noted.

This is especially important, he said, considering that "two major injustices continue to undermine the efforts of millions of people to escape poverty and hunger: inequality and climate change."

But "as member states discuss the next drafts and refine the number of goals and targets, the goals on inequality

and climate are at risk of being cut," he told IPS.

While the MDGs have succeeded in mobilising public and political momentum in supporting development effects, the aim of the post-2015 agenda is to strongly amplify it, explained Navarro.

The challenge is important because the level of Overseas Development Aid (ODA) is plummeting. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it fell by 4 percent in real terms in 2012, following a 2 percent fall in 2011.

Additionally, agricultural investment in developing countries has decreased dramatically over the last decades although it has been shown that it is positively correlated with food security and poverty reduction, according to FAO.

The intended shared responsibility of the SDGs could help keep the momentum going. "The MDGs were essentially targeted only at developing and least developed countries, while the SDGs will instead be universal, placed within a global agenda," Navarro told IPS.

Amid criticism that the design process of the MDGs was not inclusive enough, a "more engaged participation by, and effective partnerships with, the full spectrum of relevant stakeholders has been underlined as a key element of the post-2015 framework," said Navarro.

For instance, in an attempt to bridge the gaps between all stakeholders and favour global exchange and dialogue, "the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) organised a series of stakeholder consultations at national and regional levels as well as a set of 11 global thematic consultations," Navarro told IPS.

This is key according to Manish Bapna, Managing Direc-



tor of the World Resources Institute (WRI). Considering changing climate, rapidly increasing rates of urbanisation and changing demographics, the post-2015 agenda “must be a shared, universal [one] that leaves no one behind – one that elicits action from developed and developing countries, North and South,” Bapna told IPS.

As such, “food security is a perfect example of an area that can be universally relevant and a ‘triple win’ for [the post-2015 agenda] by integrating social, environmental and economic aspects,” he said.

Navarro explained further that “a new global partnership must emphasise triangular or South-South cooperation and focus on the exchange of good practices, institutional and otherwise,” in order to achieve worldwide food security.

An example of such a partnership is the Beyond 2015 coalition, of which Oxfam International is a member. Beyond 2015 is a global campaign mainly made up of civil society organisations from the North and the South that advocates a strong and legitimate post-2015 framework that is based on shared values, such as environmental sustainability, human rights, equity and global responsibility.

The U.N. Secretary-General is expected to report on the post-2015 agenda towards the end of 2014, taking into account the different contributions received throughout the process. The intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda, which will lead to a high-level Summit in September 2015, are expected to coincide with the unveiling of the final version of the SDGs.

June 13 2014

Image credit: Danilo Valladares/IPS





# Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity: Picture It!

By Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka\*

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) - Nearly 20 years ago, the world came together in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women. There, 189 governments adopted a visionary roadmap for gender equality: the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

More than 17,000 delegates and 30,000 activists pictured a world where women and girls had equal rights, freedom and opportunity in every sphere of life.

While much progress has been made in the past two decades, no country can claim to have achieved equality between men and women. It is time for the world to come together again for women and girls and complete this journey.

UN Women is launching a year-long campaign to re-energise the vision laid out at the Beijing Women's Conference. Our goal is straightforward: renewed commitment, strengthened action and increased resources to realise gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights. We call it: Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity: Picture It!

The Beijing Declaration laid out actions to address 12 critical areas of concern for women and girls across the globe. Governments, the private sector and other partners were urged to reduce women and girls' poverty, ensure their right to access education and training, safeguard their health – including their sexual and reproductive health, protect women and girls from violence and discrimination, to ensure that technological advances benefit all, and to promote their full and equal participation in society, politics, and the economy.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains the most comprehensive global agreement on women's empowerment and gender equality. If only it had been implemented!

Notwithstanding, today we can celebrate progress. More

girls are going to school. More women are working, getting elected, and assuming leadership positions. But in all regions of the world, and in all countries, women continue to face discrimination because they are female.

We see it every day. In pay inequity and unequal opportunities at work... in stubbornly low representation of women leaders in the public and private sectors... in the continuing scourge of child marriage, and in the pandemic of violence experienced by one in three women globally – a number greater than the population of Europe.

Perhaps even more startling is the fact that if the Beijing negotiations occurred today, they would likely result in a weaker agreement. We all have a responsibility to keep pushing ahead for full implementation, because every time a woman or girl is held back by discrimination or violence, humanity loses.

Since the Beijing Conference, irrefutable evidence has accumulated showing that empowering women empowers humanity.

Picture it!

Countries with higher levels of gender equality have higher economic growth. Companies with more women on their boards have higher returns to shareholders. Parliaments with more women consider a broader range of issues and adopt more legislation on health, education, anti-discrimination, and child support. Peace agreements forged by female and male negotiators last longer and are more stable.

Studies show that for every one additional year of education for women, child mortality decreases by 9.5 percent. Equalising access to resources and services for women farmers would boost output and eliminate hunger for 150 million people. A billion women will enter the world economy in the next decade. With equal opportunities, their impact on our future prosperity will be a global game-changer.

We can and must turn this picture to reality. Right now,

every country is working to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, and to define a new global development plan.

We must seize this once-in-a-generation opportunity to position gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment firmly at the centre of the global agenda. It is the right thing to do, and the best thing for humanity.

Men and boys, who have been silent too long, are beginning to stand up and speak out for the human rights of women and girls through initiatives like UN Women's #HeForShe campaign. We call on all men and boys to join us!

Nearly 20 years after Beijing, I believe the world is ready to implement its vision of equality for men and women.

Today we launch a Beijing+20 campaign that will focus on progress, highlighting champions and effective work being done for gender equality. Every country will produce a report on the state of their women and girls, 20 years on. The campaign calls upon leaders and ordinary people alike to recommit and act to turn the vision of the Beijing platform into reality.

From Sweden, where in June people will gather to protect the human rights of women and girls, to September's Climate Summit in New York, where women heads of State and activists will assert women's role in protecting our environment, to India, where men and boys will make a show of force for gender equality in November.

And on International Women's Day on Mar. 8, 2015, people in every country will make their voices heard for a better world.

Together we must achieve equality between women and men. There is no time to waste!

Empowering women, Empowering humanity. Picture it!  
May 19, 2014

\*Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka is UN Women's Executive Director.

Image credit: UN Photo/Loey Felipe.

# U.S. Religious Progressivism ‘Way of the Future’

By Michelle Tullo

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) - The future of religion in U.S. politics lies not with conservatives but rather with religious progressives, social scientists here are suggesting, with a faith-based movement potentially able to provide momentum to a new movement for social justice.

According to a new report from the Brookings Institute, a think tank here, the current religious social justice movement can be compared to the period of civil rights activism in the mid-20th century.

“There really is an opening now for a religious movement for social justice that is similar in many ways to the civil rights movement. We see it around issues of minimum wage, budget cuts, and immigration,” E.J. Dionne, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and one of the authors of the report, told IPS.

“On social justice issues, religion has long been a progressive force, and Pope Francis is challenging people’s assumptions that religion is an automatically conservative force ... After years of paying lots of attention to religious conservatives, religion by no means lives on the right.”

The United States has a strong history of religious groups in social justice movements, including in pushing for the abolition of slavery and the institutionalisation of civil rights, as well as the social welfare programmes put in place a half-century ago. Yet today, religion and progressivism are often seen as being at odds.

According to the report, for instance, just 47 percent of white Evangelicals in the United States think government needs to do more to reduce the gap between rich and poor. On the contrary, 85 percent of Democrats hold this belief.

This schism underscores two trends that have defined the U.S. religious landscape over the past two decades: a decline in those who regularly attend religious services, and a rise in the conservative “religious right”.

According to the report, these trends are interrelated, as “many young Americans were not turned off by faith itself but by the rightward trend they perceive among leaders. To young adults ... ‘religion’ means ‘Republican,’ ‘intolerant,’ and ‘homophobic.’”

Yet despite these trends of growing secularisation, Dionne said, “a religious voice will remain essential to movements on behalf of the poor and the marginalised and also on behalf of the middle-class Americans who are under increasing pressure at a time of inequality.”

Further, demographics indicate that this religious voice will not be from the conservative wing, Dionne suggests. During the last presidential election here, in 2012, the ages of the religious coalitions that voted for President Barack Obama versus his Republican rival, Mitt Romney were starkly different.

Of those who considered themselves actively religious, Romney voters were primarily elderly, while Obama’s supporters skewed far younger. “What’s clear,” the report suggests, “is that the religious right is not the way of the future.”

## Congregational decline

The Brookings researchers acknowledge steep challenges facing any incipient religious movement in the U.S. for social justice.

A primary challenge is congregational decline. In 1958, about 49 percent of Americans attended church services weekly, while today that number is down to about 18 percent.

This decline naturally decreases the coalition size and donor base available for grassroots work. In addition, this has often been accompanied by a decreased respect for religious groups, exacerbating divides between those who consider themselves religious versus secular.

Tensions also exist when religious groups try to engage in political issues without using morally ambiguous political methods. For example, many religious progressive leaders want to abstain from the “quid pro quo” nature of political deal-making.

Ideological divides within religious communities can threaten the work of social justice advocates, especially opposition from single-issue groups.

For example, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), which supports a spectrum of faith-based grassroots organisations, provided over nine million dollars in grants to over 214 groups last year. However, after

Catholic anti-abortion groups pushed the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to strictly regulate donations from Catholic coalitions, some CCHD grants were cut – even if the projects had only tangential connections to abortion or same-sex marriage.

Still, many groups have overcome such challenges.

Prominent examples in this regard include Circle of Protection, an alliance of Christian leaders who have banded together to try to protect pro-poor government programmes from budget cuts. Likewise, Nuns on the Bus, a group of Catholic nuns who travel the country lobbying for social justice reforms, played a role in the 2012 elections.

“One of the reasons religious voices are so important now is that, especially with the weakening of the labour movement, the churches are the only mass organisation representing many, many poor people,” said Dionne.

“Some research we did showed that, for example, in neighbourhood community development, the pastors are the only people who could get the attention of the banks.”

The report notes that these religious progressive groups are very active and often successful, but lack the fanfare that can receive broad public attention.

## Building coalitions

Another U.S. group, the Interfaith Centre on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), has focused on trying to influence corporate decision-making, both domestically and internationally, from an interfaith perspective for nearly a half-century.

“Frankly, those who are ideologically or politically divided can learn something from ICCR,” Laura Berry, the group’s executive director, told IPS. “There are some areas where the right and the left agree, after all, and finding those places to build coalitions are wonderful opportunities to reverse trends in inequality.”

Berry highlighted ICCR’s work following last year’s collapse of Rana Plaza, the Bangladeshi garment factory that killed more than 1100 people. Since then, ICCR has led a coalition representing over 4.1 trillion dollars in managed assets, pushing over 160 companies to have their overseas factories inspected, to hire and train labour inspectors,



and to adopt improved worker safety standards. According to Berry, ICCR's own experience elucidates several of the trends indicated by the Brookings report. "We've become increasingly driven by a broader coalition that includes increasingly secular progressive voices," she says. "First we were only religious. But now we include more secular members, like labour unions and asset managers."

ICCR is also facing many of the challenges outlined in the Brookings report, Berry says, particularly over ideological divides. Yet she notes that important areas of overlap and opportunity continue to arise.

"There are positive signs of improved coalition-building in human rights, like human trafficking, among Evangelicals and progressive Christians," she says.

"We're not going to let the ideological divide in the broad

Christian community prevent us from talking about inequality ... And we're starting to see some leaders like Pope Francis who are saying things out loud, and people are asking, 'Is that progressive? Is that conservative?'"

May 2, 2014

Image credit: Flickr TVNEWSBADGE CC BY 2.0

# Global Citizenship Starts with Education

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) - For peace to be embedded in culture and society, it starts with childhood education which leads to the creation of global citizens, according to a panel of experts.

Former Under-Secretary-General and High Representative of the U.N. Anwarul Chowdhury said fostering global citizens is important in achieving peace.

“Global citizenship requests transforming the way children think and act to forge more just, peaceful and tolerant societies,” he told the panel Thursday.

“The foundation for global citizenship is laid during childhood where they learn compassion and empathy.”

The concept of global citizenship is an individual’s awareness of the interconnected nature of the world and the need for a global focus for development.

Chowdhury said that to achieve such citizens there are four key elements – self-transformation, intergenerational dimensions, inclusivity and institutional support.

“Self-transformation links very closely with the concept of the culture of peace. It deals with the human mind. We are trying to change every individual into an agent of peace and non-violence,” he added.

Chowdhury’s leadership led to the U.N General Assembly’s adoption of the 1999 Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. Since then, he said that there has been a lot of interest from international organisations.

“[Since 1999] there has been a big mobilisation in civil society and the push for the global society. Since 2012 there has been a high level of focus on implementation,” Chowdhury told IPS.

“The member states and governments are a little slow as they have not yet put this agenda into their national policies but civil society is pushing hard and I believe there is a lot of interest now from international organisations.”

Chowdhury singled out the United Nations, the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNES-

CO) and the U.N. children’s agency UNICEF as organisations pushing for peace, education and sustainability.

“We are now seeing that this is the essential thing (education) for sustainability,” he added.

Vibeke Jensen, the director of UNESCO New York said that global citizenship education encourages people to become proactive contributors in promoting peace, tolerance and the culture of peace in a secure and sustainable world.

“Global citizenship education is a concept that articulates the purpose of education. It recognises the role of education in moving beyond the development of skills in order to promote social interaction.”

Jensen stressed that it is not sufficient to discuss the importance of this education but putting it into practice and monitoring it was essential too.

“It is not enough to talk about it or write about it in books or give knowledge. We need to go further to make sure that children and adults practice global citizenship,” she said.

She noted that although one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was achieving universal primary education by 2015, there are still about 57 million children who are not in school or do not have access to education.

“Monitoring figures have shown that 125 million children have spent more than four years in school but are still unable to read, write or do basic calculations.”

She added that universal global citizenship education could not be achieved unless all children have access to education.

“Peace cannot be gained by government actions alone. It’s individuals and communities that can sustain lasting peace. It rests on the persons capacity for non-violence and equality,” Chowdhury said.

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