

# UNA-SF Courier



The voice of the United Nations Association of San Francisco • una-sf.org • Spring 2008

## Human Rights Today and Tomorrow

UNA-SF Annual Meeting  
May 14, 7:30 pm, Free  
First Unitarian Church, San Francisco

We invite you to attend our Annual Meeting and this special program on human rights, and meet chapter and board members.

During all of 2008, and culminating on the December 10, the countries of the world are celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption by

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## Beyond the National Interest

The Future of UN Peacekeeping  
and Multilateralism in an Era of US Primacy  
Jean-Marc Coicaud, United Nations  
University Office, New York

Wednesday, May 7, 5 pm  
223 Moses Hall, UC Berkeley

Sponsored by the Institute of International Studies and co-sponsored by UNA-USA East Bay Chapter and the Young Professionals of UNA-SF. Dr. Coicaud addresses the extent and the limits of international solidarity, focusing on the limits. He discusses the UN as an international bureaucracy, the socialization of international life by international law, and the ambiguous role of key democratic countries, which are at the same time the underwriters and the underminers of the international system. See una-sf.org for more information.

## UN Conference Backs Organic Farming, Biological Diversity

On April 12, 2008, 57 world governments agreed in Johannesburg, South Africa, on a final report of the UN's *International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development* (IAASTD).

Recent reports of dramatic food shortages, riots, and unprecedented aerial toxic pesticide spray projects in Northern California and throughout the world underline the severity of problems arising from the current food production system and the urgency of finding solutions.

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## A New Relationship?

Ramu Damodaran, United Nations,  
Department of Public Information

I am delighted and honored to have this opportunity to contribute to the *Courier*, a journal I have long admired, particularly since it once published what my mother described as the most photogenic image she has seen of me! More immediately, I value the chance to share with you an idea we have been working to define in the United Nations Department of Public Information and to ask for your reactions and comments.



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## A New Relationship?

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For many years now, academic institutions—and individual teachers and scholars—have been important “multipliers” of the UN message. They integrate what we do, and what our Charter expects us to do, into their work with students and in research projects they undertake. But, unlike many other non-governmental entities, few have a sustained, direct relationship with the Organization.

In many ways it is we, at the United Nations, who are the losers. There is so much in terms of practical policy actions that creative academic enquiry and thought can suggest. Indeed, much of the scientific logic of the Millennium Development Goals derives from the precise scholarship that saw each of them as doable and their suggested timeframe workable. Yes, the doing and the working require more—not in the least common and concerted political will—but the premise has been measured, and it fits.

Picture that possibility magnified, where research and scholastic ingenuity suggest options that the United Nations and its Member States can adopt, or adapt, and in so doing enhance the quality of the lives of the peoples who determined the creation of the Organization.

Do we need something in the nature of a structured, but wholly voluntary, association between academic institutions and the United Nations? Would it be fair to expect each “associated” institution to undertake one specific and original activity each year that would contribute to the realisation of United Nations purposes and principles?

A research project, an environmental initiative on campus, field trips by students to parts of the world where they can make a contribution to local progress and development?

These are just immediate thoughts and I am sure many others would come to the mind of the many thinking world citizens who read this journal ... and I should very much value your sharing them with me at [damodaran@un.org](mailto:damodaran@un.org).

Many, many thanks!

— Ramu Damodaran

[Mr. Damodaran is Deputy Director, Outreach Division, United Nations Department of Public Information.]

## UNESCO to Host UN DPI Conference

Susan J. Zipp

For the first time in United Nations history the annual UN Department of Public Information Conference for Non-Governmental Organizations will be held outside of UN headquarters in New York. Long overdue renovations of the UN building have begun, with much of the staff having already relocated to rented offices around Manhattan.

From September 3 to 5, 2008 this international civil society gathering will be hosted at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The theme for the UN DPI/NGO Conference will honor the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly on December 10, 1948.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) headquarters is located not far from the Trocadero, the site of the Palais de Chaillot across the Seine from the Eiffel Tower where the Declaration was originally adopted to guarantee human rights to all people.

UNESCO, which encourages international peace and universal respect by promoting collaboration among nations, is participating with the entire UN family in the yearlong campaign launched by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in the 2007 kickoff toward the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Human Rights Day 2008. The theme of the campaign, “Dignity and Justice for All of Us”, reinforces the vision of the Declaration as a commitment to universal dignity and justice. UN organizations around the globe will use this year to focus on helping people everywhere learn about their human rights.

Ban Ki-moon praised the extraordinary vision and determination of the drafters to produce a document that for the first time set out universal human rights for all people in an individual context. Eleanor Roosevelt called the UDHR “a Magna Carta for all mankind”. The Universal Declaration and its core values—inherent human dignity, justice, non-discrimination, equality, fairness and universality—apply to everyone, everywhere, always.

Following its adoption, the General Assembly called upon all Member countries to publicize > 7

## Human Rights Today ...

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the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document has been translated into hundreds of languages, and is the best-known and most cherished international document by peoples in every corner of the globe.

The UDHR was drafted under the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt and the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration will provide an excellent juncture for reminding American leaders and citizens about the historic role of both the United States and the United Nations in the promotion and protection of fundamental freedoms and the need to restore US and UN leadership on human rights.

Over the past several years, the leadership roles of both the United States and the United Nations in the field of human rights have been weakened by widespread criticism.

US support for basic international human rights standards and laws has waned, including support for specific treaties that were created to strengthen the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Simultaneously, some in Washington have worked to criticize, discredit, and defund the UN Human Rights Council.

At the annual meeting, Rita Maran and Kirk Boyd will highlight current developments, positive and negative, surrounding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They will end by facilitating ways for the audience to send their opinions to Congress in support of ratification of two fundamental human rights treaties: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (known also as the Women's Treaty, or as CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

[By Rita Marin, Human Rights Lecturer, UC Berkeley, and Jette Winckler, Vice President, UNA-SF]

## UNA-SF in 2008

The Annual Meeting will review the public programs presented so far in 2008, and those to come—notably the celebration of United Nations Day on October 23.

At the meeting we will discuss and ratify the selection of board members and officers for the coming year.

# Working Together for a Stronger UN

## UNA-USA Annual Meeting June 8 to 10, Washington DC

[For the complete text of this article, and information on costs, hotels, and registration, see [unausa.org](http://unausa.org).]

In pursuit of its mission to encourage strong US leadership in the United Nations system, UNA-USA invites you to attend the Annual Meeting of UNA-USA's Council of Chapters and Divisions, June 8 to 10, 2008, in Washington, DC at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The overall theme of the meeting will be "Working Together for a Stronger UN: Advocacy in Action." This year, we are pleased to offer a [special](#) Intensive Advocacy and Communication Training session conducted by the Truman National Security Project that will help better prepare us for Day on Capitol Hill as well as provide vital information on advocacy at the state level.

### Day on Capitol Hill

On June 10, members will participate in UNA-USA's most important advocacy event of the year—UNA-USA Day on Capitol Hill. This year, Day on Capitol Hill will be held at a critical time, as the 2008 elections provide a unique opportunity for all of UNA-USA's leaders, activists, and supporters to help improve the US-UN relationship and raise awareness about the need to work collaboratively with other nations.

### YPIC Day

On Saturday, June 7, the UNA-USA Young Professionals for International Cooperation (YPIC) National Leadership Council will host the 2008 YPIC Day as part of the 2008 CCD Annual Meeting. This is your chance to focus on how to utilize local organizations to make a global impact and learn how to partner with organizations that address domestic issues related to the Millennium Development Goals. The evening wraps up with an optional soiree and the chance to mingle with young professionals from around the United States. The fee for YPIC Day will include lunch and refreshments. All UNA-USA members are welcome to participate.

Please be sure to register early at [unausa.org](http://unausa.org).

# Model United Nations in the Bay Area

JoAnn Aviel

One of the best ways to gain an understanding of the UN is by participating in Model United Nations, playing the role of an actual United Nations delegate or member of the UN Secretariat.

Students must research the background of issues discussed in the United Nations and the positions taken by the nations they represent so they can make decisions on these issues as would the actual delegates. They learn rules of procedure of the United Nations as well as the difficulty of drafting resolutions and attempting to gain a consensus among delegates with different interests and views on the issue. Students usually prepare for this by participating in Model United Nations clubs. University students often take special courses focusing on the Model United Nations.

At San Francisco State University, for example, in addition to optional courses on international organization and international law, students who wish to participate in the Model United Nations must take a special course on the Model United Nations which they can repeat since the countries they represent and the issues they research differ each year.

There are many Model United Nations held throughout the United States and in many other countries for both high school and college students. In the San Francisco Bay area the University of California Berkeley hosts the oldest high school Model United Nations in the US. Its 57th session was held February 27 to March 1, 2008 with over 1500 students from across the US attending. For the past ten years it has also hosted a smaller conference in March in San Francisco for college students. In both the chairs of the committees are undergraduate students

from UC Berkeley's Model United Nations Club.

One of the oldest Model United Nations in the US, the Model United Nations Far West, was founded in 1951. It held its 58th session from April 18 to 22, 2008 at the Burlingame Hyatt. Although the majority of the colleges whose students attended are located in the western United States, students from other areas of the US as well as from the Philippines and the Russian Far East also attended. Sessions are chaired by students from different colleges each session and representatives from each college attending cooperate in managing the simulation and planning for future sessions.

The conference opened with a keynote speech by the Consul-General of South Africa in Los Angeles, Jeanette Ndhlovu, a former Deputy Permanent Representation to the United Nations. The session had a special focus on Africa and students debated topics such as Addressing the Special Needs of Africa, Empowering Women, Protecting the Rights of the Elderly and Disabled, Ending Child Hunger, Safe Water, and Sanitation, and Cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union in sessions simulating the General Assembly and its Second and Third committees, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the African Union. The Security Council debated ongoing crises such as the Darfur crisis in the Sudan. The sessions ended with a banquet at which awards were given.

[JoAnn Aviel is Professor of International Relations at San Francisco State University and a member of the board of directors of UNA-USA.]

UN Conference ... < 1

"Business as usual is not an option," declared Robert Watson, Director of the IAASTD, referring to the fundamental changes in the world's agricultural systems that the IAASTD report says are required. A former chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Dr. Watson is also one of the many scientists who recently shared the Nobel Prize with former Vice President Al Gore for work on climate change.

**The IAASTD report concludes that small-scale, agro-ecological farming will be more effective at meeting today's challenges than the old energy- and chemical-intensive paradigm of industrial agricultural production.** Severe inequities within and between societies also must be reversed, and this requires grappling with the adverse impacts on the poorest countries of trade liberalization policies and Western government crop subsidies.

"This is a wake-up call for governments and international agencies. The survival of the planet's food systems demands global action to support agroecological farming and fair and equitable trade," said Dr. Marcia Ishii-Eiteman of Pesticide Action Network North America, speaking from Johannesburg on April 11.

The final report authorized by signing governments addresses one central question:

**What can and must we do differently to sustain productive and resilient farming in the face of environmental crises, overcome persistent poverty and hunger, and achieve equitable and sustainable development?** > 11

# UN BOOKSHELF

Recent books about the United Nations offer lessons, cautionary tales

Chris O'Sullivan

Stanley Meisler's new book, *Kofi Annan: A Man of Peace in a World of War*, reveals that in March 2003, at the very moment the Bush administration launched its war against Iraq, neoconservative activist Richard Perle wrote an op-ed piece in the British newspaper the *Guardian* titled "Thank God for the Death of the UN." Perle was convinced that America's victory in Iraq would be the first step in a global backlash against the United Nations, bringing about that institution's demise and, in its place, American global dominance. It didn't quite happen that way, as the five books under review demonstrate.

These recent books about the UN underscore its relevance in a troubled world. The books are united in their sympathetic exploration of the way the UN and its personnel have stood up to the challenge of an American administration not only convinced, as Perle was, that unilateralism and military intervention are the one size-fits-all answer to the world's problems but, in some cases, genuinely dedicated to the UN's destruction.

**Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (New York: Vintage edition, 2007).**

Kennedy's curious title comes from a 19th century Alfred Tennyson poem about the nations of the world uniting to prevent war. An historian interested in the big picture, Kennedy's many books have addressed topics as sweeping as the rise and fall of great powers, so it is noteworthy that he has written his latest book about the United Nations. This is an important work of intellectual history, as Kennedy has the historical skills to firmly establish the creation of the United Nations as the culmination of philosophical discourse on peace and war dating back to the Enlightenment thinkers.

Kennedy writes from a sense of urgency that the world is heading toward catastrophe unless we better utilize the UN's ability to prevent conflict. His chapter "A Troubled Advance to

a New World Order" reminds readers of the circumstances of the UN's founding at the end of World War II, and he warns of regressing to the early 20th century mindset prevalent among nations when they selfishly pursued their aims in conflict with one another — with catastrophic results. The author emphasizes what a profound development the UN has been since its establishment in 1945, owing largely to its universal legitimacy, and he illustrates how the UN holds the greatest potential for the attainment of Tennyson's quest for peace.

**Stanley Meisler, *Kofi Annan: A Man of Peace in a World of War* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2007).**

Meisler, who wrote a well-received history of the UN for its fiftieth anniversary in 1995, *The United Nations: The First Fifty Years*, returns to the subject with a sympathetic account of the life and career of former Secretary-General Kofi

Annan. Meisler knows his subject well, having covered the UN for a decade as a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*. The author explores Annan's rise, making connections between Annan's early life and his behavior and actions in a series of senior appointments at the UN. The author tells the compelling story of Annan's careful balancing act between an American administration determined to go to war in Iraq, and an international community that remained less than convinced by America's claims.

Meisler's chapter on Colin Powell's February 2003 speech before the security council reveals Annan's approach, as the Secretary-General knew Powell's claims about Iraqi weapons and links to terrorism were dubious, but Annan remained determined to avoid a complete break with the Americans. His assessment of US ambassador John Bolton's brief tenure at the UN makes for gripping reading, as Annan grew increasingly exasperated by Bolton's bullying tactics and stridency, yet the Secretary-General patiently avoided being taken in by Bolton's baiting. Meisler's exploration of Annan's life and times is a worthy companion to Brian Urquhart's classic biography of another significant Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, which is still in print (Hammarskjöld, New York: W.W. Norton, 1994).

**James Traub, *The Best Intentions: Kofi Annan and the UN in the Era of American Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2006).**

Traub's subject, Kofi Annan, is similar to Meisler's, but his fly-on-the-wall approach yields different results. The author is less interested in Annan's early life, but he nonetheless provides valuable insights into Annan's tenure

as Secretary-General. Traub demonstrates how Annan navigated the many challenges he and the UN faced during a perilous time for the institution. As Traub makes clear, Annan's second term coincided with an administration in Washington essentially committed, at the very least, to the UN's marginalization and, at most, to its destruction. Some members of the American administration openly expressed their desire to see the UN disappear. Yet, in the end, the durability of the UN was revealed, and Traub, like Meisler, sees the UN's very endurance as something of a vindication and affirmation of its legitimacy.

**Samantha Power, *Chasing the Flame: Sergio Vieira de Mello and the Fight to Save the World* (New York: Penguin, 2008).**

Many know Samantha Power only as a former Barack Obama advisor who was forced to resign after criticizing Hillary Clinton. That would be unfortunate because Power has written a thoughtful and, at times, unsparing account of the long diplomatic career of Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Iraq who was killed in Baghdad in 2003.

Following her Pulitzer Prize winning book *A Problem From Hell: America in the Age of Genocide* (New York: Harper, 2002), Power's telling of Vieira de Mello's life and career in East Timor and the Balkans is compelling. But it is her account of his tragic death in Iraq that is most harrowing and troubling. Vieira de Mello and twenty-one members of his staff were killed in Iraq's first major suicide bombing in August 2003. America's inability to effectively protect the UN mission, and its faltering and mistake-prone effort to rescue Vieira de Mello after he was pinned under debris for hours following the explosion, revealed larger problems of confusion and incompetence that would come to plague the American occupation of Iraq in the years ahead. Moreover, the destruction of the UN mission essentially disabled the UN in Iraq. While this may have elated the

administration's neoconservatives who believed the United States should act alone in Iraq without the interference of the UN, it was the UN, and officials such as Vieira de Mello, who might have provided Iraq with the kind of skilled and tested expertise at peacemaking, peacebuilding, and political negotiation that the American occupiers so obviously lacked. Someday, when the war in Iraq is finally over, readers would be advised to return to works such as *Chasing the Flame* to better understand how it all went so tragically wrong.

**M. James Wilkinson and Alison Broinowski, *Our Last Best Hope: Why the United Nations Stumbles and What the United States Should Do About It* (New York: I Universe, 2008).**

The most recent addition to the titles about the United Nations is a call to action. Written by two diplomats with extensive experience at the UN (Wilkinson is an American, Broinowski an Australian), *Our Last Best Hope* reads as a powerful call to future leaders or policymakers. While many of the other recent books on the UN look to the past, or offer insights into how the UN works today, Wilkinson and Broinowski offer a series of bold, yet achievable, policy recommendations. They also use examples from the UN's recent past to illustrate their points.

The authors emphasize that as long as American officials desire to see the UN fail, the institution's true potential for good will remain elusive. The authors make clear that the UN cannot address these many challenges alone. Rather, it requires a new American strategy that aims to use the UN in new and innovative ways. Unfortunately, America's overmilitarized foreign policy has lost its way, and is in danger of allowing its once-valued soft power capabilities to atrophy.

The authors demonstrate that the current US administration's policies on arms control, the environment, human rights and international law reveal an ideological rigidity that contributes toward seeing the world of today as

much like the world of the late-19th century. That's not only bad policy, as Wilkinson and Broinowski skillfully demonstrate, it's also bad history, as revealed by the accounts by Paul Kennedy and Stanley Meisler.

What these five books share is an understanding that the world has changed profoundly since the founding of the UN at San Francisco in 1945.

These works also remind us that the United Nations is primarily in the business of preventing crises. One reason authors often have found it difficult to praise the work of the UN is the same reason the news media has such difficulty: acts of prevention are difficult to assess and explore. After all, how do we discuss something that has been prevented? The news media is not in the business of producing headlines proclaiming "famine prevented" or "war averted" and authors have difficulty finding publishers enthusiastic about peacemaking, crisis aversion, and the prevention of war.

The UN, and UN personnel, have received eleven Nobel Peace Prizes (three during the current Bush administration alone) for efforts ranging from ending wars, peacekeeping, the protection of refugees and, most recently, bringing global attention to the climate change crisis. These Nobel Peace Prizes have illuminated the UN's many contributions toward alleviating the suffering of the world, but have also drawn attention to the organization's efforts to prevent crises. Works such as the five books here under review seek to achieve that same objective, and are worthy editions to any United Nations bookshelf.

[Chris O'Sullivan, a fellow at the Center for International Studies, teaches international history at the University of San Francisco, and is a member of the board of directors of UNA-SF. He is the author of *The United Nations: A Concise History* (2005, 2008) and *Sumner Welles: Postwar Planning and the Quest for a New World Order* (2007).]

# UNA-SF Welcomes ...

... our two new board members, **Andrea Hightower** and **Susan Zipp**, and our new Administrative Assistant, **Ted Andersen**.

**Andrea Hightower** attended Phoenix College in Arizona where she was introduced to the Model United Nations (MUN) and later became its Secretary-General.

Upon transferring to the University of San Francisco she assisted in reviving a Model UN team and proceeded to serve two consecutive terms as its Secretary-General. She also served as president of the Latin American Student Organization. She received her Bachelors degree in Latin American Studies and International Studies.

Andrea's interests and primary focus are centered on human rights, social justice, and Latin America. Her travels include Cuba, Mexico and Central America. She currently works with Global Exchange; a Human Rights Organization located in the Mission and volunteers regularly with CISPES, The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, and is active with the School of The Americas Watch.

**Susan Zipp** has more than 30 years experience with ongoing activities for global and humanitarian concerns, and continues to contribute to improving world affairs as an advisor to the Communications Coordination Committee for the UN, chair of the Global People's Assembly movement, and UN delegate for the Association of World Citizens.

Susan is a long-time member of the UNA Marin and San Francisco chapters, contributes to UNA publications, and was the keynote speaker with Dr. Robert Muller at a UNA-SF United Nations Day program in 2003. Susan is a broadcast journalist, speaks to groups around the world, and organizes conferences and local-to-global activities.

**Ted Andersen** has a Masters degree in International Relations from San Francisco State University, taught English as a Second Language, was an editor with McGraw-Hill Publishing, and was a trainer for immigrant job-seekers with Upwardly Global in San Francisco.

## The City College of San Francisco Offers



## Introduction to the United Nations

Jay Sayed, instructor • Course IDST 7

Open to the public  
City College of San Francisco  
50 Phelan Avenue, San Francisco

An introduction to the United Nations, including the UN Charter's mission to achieve international peace, and the function of the organization's six administrative bodies. In addition to studying the theory and practice of international diplomacy, students evaluate the successes and challenges of collective security, peace-keeping attempts, and technological cooperation. Instructional materials include a textbook, DVDs, films, and current articles.

City College of San Francisco has an open-door registration policy. Anyone interested in taking this class is welcome to sign in through the CCSF Admission Office at Conlan Hall, City College of San Francisco, 50 Phelan Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94112; 415-239-3000.

For more information see [ccsf.edu](http://ccsf.edu) or contact instructor Jay Sayed at [uncourse@yahoo.com](mailto:uncourse@yahoo.com).

# The UN in Action

Kimberly Weichel, President, UNA-SF

As supporters of the UN, we have many opportunities to learn about some of the ways in which the United Nations assists people each day around the world. Every time I travel overseas I hear stories about how the UN has helped people through the UN's many programs and initiatives that we rarely hear about in our media.

As the UN and global affairs correspondent for the *Positive Spin* TV show, I'm able to learn about some of these inspiring stories each month. They include:

- Rio De Janeiro's children have since long been struggling with unemployment in Rio's low income neighborhoods. A new after-school program set up by a group of Brazilian artists in conjunction with UNESCO and private companies seems to be the beacon of light in these children's lives. The Kaburn School gives training in media technology to help children acquire skills and secure a bright future.
- Farmers from Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority have partnered to overcome a series pest problem in the Arava Valley. UN agencies first helped to set up a pest control pilot project in 1998. Regular releases of sterile flies by air and on the ground have suppressed swarms of the wild 'medfly'.

- The message delivered by a group of Sudanese musicians and artists to the male population in Sudan is based on respect for women. Often women were subjected to abuses and other violent acts by their family members and other perpetrators. UNFPA, the UN Population Fund, has joined forces with other UN agencies and non-governmental organizations to curb violence against women and bring justice to innocent victims.

- As herbal medicine becomes popular, there is a growing rise in bio-piracy. The 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity calls for the protection of ownership of indigenous knowledge. An agreement with the Indian Kani tribe – that led to the commercialization of the herbal drug, "Jeevani" – has been hailed by the UN Development Program as a global model for benefit sharing.

We'd love to hear any UN stories you have. You can email them to [unasfo@gmail.com](mailto:unasfo@gmail.com).

## United Nations Day

This year's UNA-SF United Nations Day program on October 23 will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with a reception at the San Francisco War Memorial and Performing Arts Center honoring local organizations active in defending human rights! Save the date!

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### UNESCO Hosts UN DPI < 2

the text of the Declaration and "to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories." The Universal Declaration of Human Rights now holds the record as the most translated document in the world. Beyond the six official UN languages—Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish—the Declaration is available in more than 360 languages, a testament to its universal nature and reach. It has inspired the constitutions of many newly independent States and new democracies and has become a yardstick by which we measure respect for what we deem right and wrong.

The Declaration remains as relevant today as it did on the day it was adopted. By honoring its birthday, it becomes civil society's obligation to lead Govern-

ments to develop the political will to implement these international norms, and to reaffirm the principles that ensures fundamental freedoms for each one of us. Let us reflect upon our individual and collective opportunities to stand up against violence, racism, xenophobia, torture, repression of unpopular views and injustices of all kinds, and with unprecedented efforts advance human rights and the fulfillment of unlimited human potential, a promise at the heart of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

For the full text of UDHR, please google "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", or visit the website for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at: <http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/>

[Susan Zipp is a member of the board of directors of UNA-SF, and advisor to the Communications Coordination Committee for the United Nations.]

# THE ADVOCACY CORNER

Gail Karpinski Cornell

## **The US is once again in arrears with UN dues**

The US currently owes the UN \$2.8 billion for dues that are significantly overdue. Meanwhile, the Bush Administration is asking the UN to take on additional complex responsibilities in Iraq, Afghanistan, Darfur and Lebanon. The lack of necessary financial support complicates effective planning for peacekeeping missions, resulting in major consequences for international stability.

In a hearing before one of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee of the House of Representatives, Rep. Delahunt of Massachusetts stressed the financial savings to the US of having the UN undertake peacekeeping missions important to the US. He cited a Government Accounting Office (GAO) study that showed that unilateral US missions cost American taxpayers eight times more than the equivalent UN mission.

In addition, he noted that the estimate of US arrears for UN peacekeeping represents the cost of only three days of American operations in Iraq.

**Action Item:** On April 7, 2008, an e-letter was sent to Senators Boxer and Feinstein, as well as to House Speaker Pelosi urging their support in paying our overdue debts to the UN, as well as providing \$744 million for UN peacekeeping (See copy of letter attached to Advocacy Report).

## **China fails to meet Olympics goals on human rights, pollution**

China's 2002 Olympic Action Plan included a pledge to protect human rights and "be open in every aspect." Some observers believe that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has not held China to the human rights

goals the country agreed to uphold in their 2002 plan. An editor who tracks Olympic preparations states that "China is suffering from its policy of suppressing press freedom."

## **Soaring food prices threaten the world's poor**

For the last several months, the Advocacy Chair of UNA-SF has noted the growing threat to the poor that is posed by soaring food prices. The problem continues with increasingly serious consequences. John Holmes, the UN's top humanitarian official, warns that rising food prices could cause political instability worldwide. Food riots are being reported across the globe, most recently in Egypt.

Pakistan is another country that is suffering because of rising food prices. The World Food Program (WFP) notes that nearly half of Pakistan's 160 million people are at risk of being short of food. Clearly this fact poses not only humanitarian problems, but also political. The UN's Mr. Holmes notes that there has been a 40% average rise in food prices worldwide since mid-2007. Some of the causes of these increasing prices are extreme weather (due to climate changes) and higher fuel prices that greatly increase the cost of transporting food.

One expert notes that modern agriculture will have to change radically from the corporate model if the world is to avoid widespread social unrest stemming from out of control food prices.

## **World Food Program "faces a losing battle"**

The UN's World Food Program has made an "emergency appeal" to governments to donate at least \$500 million in the next month to avoid

having to ration food in their aid programs. The Food Program's funding gap is between \$600 and \$700 million. Reasons for the crisis include

- a 20% increase in food costs over the last month,
- a rise in oil prices to about \$100 per barrel, and
- a surge in shipping costs.

Moreover, the growing production of biofuels has diverted land that had been dedicated to raising food. Also, a sharp growth in a new middle class in China and India has greatly increased the demand for meat.

The US is the largest contributor to the fund, having donated over \$1 billion last year, mostly in food shipments. The Food Program provides food to about 73 million people in close to 80 countries.

## **Export of electronic waste poses threat to humans, environment**

Electronic waste (TVs, computers, cell phones, etc.) exported to countries such as India and China has contributed to serious health and environmental problems. Electronic waste is often very toxic, containing such dangerous constituents as mercury, barium, lead, and cadmium. Countries accepting this waste are eager to extract gold, silver, copper, and aluminum from the waste. However, the negative impacts of electronic wastes on humans and on the environment are of increasing concern to UN agencies.

## **Water: the source of future world conflict?**

Although water is a renewable natural resource, climatological differences throughout the world result in some areas being drought-ridden, while oth-

ers have an abundance. Moreover, there are enormous inequities in the price that people pay for water. In Dar es Salaam, slum dwellers pay the equivalent of \$8 for 1,000 liters of water. The wealthy in that area pay only 17 cents for the same amount of water. The same amount of water would cost 81 cents in England, while in the US, it would cost approximately 34 cents. Generally the poorest in the world pay the most for this essential natural resource.

Some experts propose that market forces must be implemented to fairly and realistically price water, and measures must be taken to ensure water is not wasted.

## **New proposal to expand Security Council**

Spearheaded by Germany, key members in the UN General Assembly has proposed expanding the Security Council from 15 to 22 members, leaving it up to the 192 UN member states to decide which countries fill the new slots. Of the proposed seven new Council seats, two would be allocated to African countries, two to Asian countries, one to Latin America and the Caribbean, one each to Western Europe and Eastern Europe.

The proposal was presented to the UN General Assembly President, with hopes of having a draft to vote on by September 2008. The issue of veto power is excluded from the proposal, leaving it to future negotiations.

In recent years, three separate proposals for expansion of the Security Council have been presented but have failed because of national and regional rivalries. These failed resolutions include:

- The “Group of Four” (Germany, Japan, Brazil and India) wanted permanent seats without veto rights.
- A group of “middle-ranking” countries (include Italy and Pakistan) wanted a 25-member council with 10 new non-permanent seats.

- The African Union (53 members) wanted 11 new seats, six permanent, including two for Africa with veto power, and five non-permanent seats.

Germany’s UN Ambassador is hopeful that this latest proposal will be given serious consideration. One positive note is that African nations are engaged in meaningful discussion of the new proposal.

## **West Bank poll: most Palestinians favor violence over negotiations**

A recent poll by a very reputable pollster of the Palestinian Center for Policy Research expresses support for the attack on a Jewish seminary in Jerusalem that killed eight young men. The responders also expressed strong support for shooting rockets on Israeli towns from the Gaza strip and terminating discussions with Israel. The pollster expressed shock, indicating that never before had a majority favored an end to negotiations.

Why the increasing hardening of attitudes? One hypothesis is that recent Israeli attacks on Gaza that killed almost 130 people, coupled with an undercover operation in Bethlehem that resulted in the killing of four militants and an expansion of several West Bank settlements, have led to rage and despair among Palestinians.

The American-backed Fatah group is increasingly popular. Three months ago, the Fatah President, Mahmoud Abbas, enjoyed a 56 percent approval among Palestinians. His current approval rating is 46 percent, to 47 percent for Hamas.

Three quarters of those polled consider the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority should be terminated, since they are leading nowhere. According to the pollster, the anger reflected in this poll is almost equal to that at the height of the second intifada.

## **Kofi Annan sees the UN as “overstretched” by global conflicts**

The former UN Secretary-General advises that the UN should resist assuming new responsibilities unless the major powers provide needed support. He stated “I don’t think the UN is in a position to go in and take over in Afghanistan; I don’t think the UN will get the resources to play a major and active role in Somalia. We are already struggling to get the resources in Darfur.”

Regarding Iran, he warned that taking military steps to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons would be a “real disaster.”

He cited the problems the UN has had in getting 26,000 peacekeeping troops into Darfur. He indicated that powerful countries will not get involved in a place like Darfur but will try to create the impression that they are taking action.

Annan is particularly incensed that no countries are stepping forward to provide any of the 24 helicopters to patrol the Darfur area.

## **US urges IMF to reform**

The US proposes cutting the number of executive directors for the International Monetary Fund and eliminating the rule that reserves positions for the US, Japan, Germany, France, and Britain. The Fund is urged to update its mission and governance structure.

[Gail Karpinski Cornell is the Advocacy Chair and a member of the board of directors of UNA-SF.]

The report notes that the most widespread forms of industrial agriculture have degraded the natural resource base on which human survival depends, and contribute daily to worsening water and climate crises. The final report documents the inequitable distribution of costs and benefits of the present agricultural sector, including the undue influence of transnational agribusiness, the growing impacts of environmental crises, and the unfair global trade policies that result in over half of the world's population not having enough to eat. This statement represents the same type of consensus that was achieved by the Climate Change Panel.

The radical shifts suggested by these findings will inevitably shake up the status quo. The IAASTD, for example, has rankled some participants, particularly the US government and the agrichemical and biotechnology industries who say that their pesticide and genetically engineered products are not adequately credited in the IAASTD reports. The US and Australia were unhappy with the criticism of the adverse social and environmental impacts on food security and poverty, attributed to their trade liberalization policies.

The IAASTD is precedent-setting also for its bold experiment in governance. Civil society groups played a key role, not only in the authorship of the report, but also in its oversight and governance. History shows us conclusively that governments and transnational corporations have not been successful on their own. The IAASTD's success has proven that civil society participation as full partners in intergovernmental processes is critical to meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

### Options exist

A central challenge we face today is how to strengthen the resilience of our food systems, rural communities and agroecosystems in the face of environmental crises.

The good news is that options exist: achieving sustainable and profitable agriculture is possible in our lifetimes. Accomplishing this transition will require concerted action at both the global and local levels, and from both public and private sectors. Successful actions will be guided by these findings:

- Improving agriculture is about much more than increasing yields: it requires attention to social, political, cultural and environmental impacts and benefits.
- The future of agriculture is agro-ecological farming practices and “triple-bottom-line” business practices that meet social, environmental, and economic goals.
- Reliance on resource-extractive industrial agriculture is dangerous and not sustainable; short-term technical fixes do not address complex challenges and often exacerbate social and environmental harms.
- Achieving food security and sustainable livelihoods for people in chronic poverty depends on protecting access to and control of resources by small-scale farmers.
- Fair local, regional and global trading regimes can build local economies, reduce poverty and improve livelihoods.
- Strengthening the human and ecological resilience of agricultural systems improves capacity to respond to today's environmental crises and changing environmental and social conditions. Indigenous knowledge and community-based innovations are an invaluable part of the solution.
- Better governance mechanisms, ensuring democratic participation by the full range of stakeholders in decision-making, is essential.

Of the 61 countries attending the Johannesburg plenary, only four have not signed on to the report. The four governments that announced they needed to check back with their capitals — Australia, Canada, the UK and US — should quickly endorse the innovative vision for the future laid out in the IAASTD and com-

mit to working closely with all segments of civil society to facilitate a transition towards more resilient and sustainable food and farming systems.

Just as the climate crisis is “an inconvenient truth,” the recommendations in the IAASTD report are likely to be considered inconvenient for the world's industrial agricultural establishment and the dominant economies.

The US government, the agrichemical trade association CropLife, and others who currently benefit disproportionately continue to argue against doing what needs to be done. Yet the outcome of the meeting in South Africa represents our best chance to apply the lessons of climate change to agricultural policy, and take a decisive step towards the productive, healthy and resilient farming on which our future depends.

[This article was abridged and adapted from Pesticide Action Network, *The Future of Food and Farming: UN Debate Concludes in Johannesburg*, available in full at [panna.org](http://panna.org).]

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The United Nations Association of San Francisco (UNA-SF) is the San Francisco chapter of the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA, [unausa.org](http://unausa.org)), a national, nonpartisan, and nonprofit organization.

UNA-USA is a center for innovative programs to engage Americans in issues of global concern, from education and HIV/AIDS to peace, security, and international law. Its educational and humanitarian campaigns, including teaching students in urban schools, clearing minefields, and providing school-based support for children living in HIV/AIDS-affected communities in Africa, allow people to make a global impact at the local level. UNA-USA encourages United States leadership in the United Nations and is a part of the World Federation of United Nations Associations.

UNA-USA has more than 175 chapters and divisions across the country and nearly 20,000 members. These members carry out programs and campaigns at the local level through events, educational promotions and fundraising. The Association also has a Student Alliance—a nationwide network of students, from elementary school to college, that makes students' opinions regarding global challenges heard amongst their peers, within their communities, across the nation, and around the world—and a young professionals network called Young Professionals for International Cooperation (YPIC) with more than 1,500 members. For membership information see [unausa.org](http://unausa.org).

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