



Newsletter No. 54

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DEAR READERS,

Welcome to the 54th Online Issue of the VIVAT Newsletter!

These past months the VIVAT New York office has weathered record-breaking heat. Just as the thermostat rose, so too did the pace of events at the UN, energized by continuing reactions to Rio +20, Arms Trade Treaty negotiations, the crisis in Syria, and the ECOSOC substantial session. Therefore, we found no shortage of topics to include in this session's issue.

First among this material, you will find two sterling examples of VIVAT members upholding the human rights of underprivileged populations. By opposing unjust policies of both government and business, these advocates stopped the exploitation of local communities by unscrupulous developers. In addition to these success stories, members articulate several calls for service in this issue's later articles. These worthwhile causes include the upcoming celebration of the International Day of Peace, continued advocacy on behalf of the Arms Trade Treaty initiative, and the need for greater youth participation in policy-making. Finally, to continue to reflect on the seminal Rio +20 conference, this issue also includes personal reactions from a variety of the conference's attendees. To start your exploration of these diverse topics, just continue reading!

You inspire us! We always welcome feedback, ideas, stories, and updates from our members! Please send us your comments and feedback to: viny@vivatinternational.org

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Defenders of the Meek: *Human Rights Advocacy in Action*

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights consists of thirty articles, each listing an irrevocable birthright extending to every individual regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, or other status. Included in this comprehensive list are fundamental rights such as the right of assembly, of a fair trial, and of freedom of religion. Presently, by virtue of their participation in the United Nations, all 193 member states uphold this declaration as the unquestionable international standard for human rights application. However, in spite of their theoretical obligation to uphold the declaration, not a single country fully adheres to all thirty articles. Even among human rights champions such as the United States glaring violations exist, for instance the water-boarding of prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay detention center. Observing this discouraging lack of respect for human rights the question arises, is the Universal Declaration simply unattainable rhetoric, unsuited to address the realities of human society?

The recent actions of human rights defenders in Peru and Brazil evidence that the answer to this question is a resounding *No*. Resisting the will of the powerful, these champions of human rights realized that oftentimes rights are abused simply because the weak lack a medium through which to give voice to their cause. By magnifying the voices of these populations and holding powerful actors accountable, these VIVAT members successfully preserved the rights of the oppressed.

In the forests of Northern Brazil, aggressive loggers and other extractive industries have

faced little opposition to their exploitation of the land. In this pro-business climate, the coal mining company Vale had decided to expand its railroad track to increase supply. This expansion would infringe on the land of hundreds of communities along the track, including the land of an almost-extinct Brazilian indigenous tribe, and increase environmental degradation. After engaging in a superficial semblance of

2nd the fruits of this action plan came to flower. A Brazilian judge ordered the halt of all railroad construction, citing environmental degradation and lack of community consultation. The voices of the underprivileged had triumphed over a profit-seeking company.

A similar story of empowerment played out in Brazil's smaller neighbor, Peru. As a

country encompassing the peaks of the Andes, Peru has often found riches by mining the earth. In recent years, many of these highly profitable mines have exploited local populations by offering only low-paying positions and heavily polluting the surrounding environment. Furthermore, these mines are often begun without the consent of local communities. Local residents have reacted angrily to these exploitive practices, protesting against the companies in the streets. Just such a protest

erupted in early July over the proposed \$4.8 billion Conga mine in the Cajamarca region of Peru. During the course of several days of protest, five participants died from various causes including stray police bullets. Reacting to this violence, the central government in Lima suppressed human rights in a highly partisan intervention by imposing a strict state of emergency in the Cajamarca region, restricting the right of free speech, restricting the right of assembly, and empowering police to act with impunity. The government had chosen to ignore the protestors' complaints.

VIVAT members, witnessing these injustices, mobilized to speak out against the government actions. After verifying the facts and communicating with individuals on the ground, VIVAT drafted a response letter.



A Young Boy Watches a Passing Coal Train along the Path of the Proposed Rail Duplication

community consultations, Vale moved ahead with railroad construction. Witnessing this injustice, organizations such as Justice on the Rails began to contact affected communities to assess the scope of the problem. It quickly became apparent that affected residents were distressed, fearing a lack of compensation and negative environmental effects.

Motivated by these grievances, Justice on the Rails moved ahead by forming a coalition with like-minded groups such as the Black Culture Center of Maranhão and the Indigenous Missionary Council. United against the railroad expansion, these organizations then decided to file a lawsuit against Vale after determining that legal action could be successful and completed in a reasonable timeframe. Finally, on August

This letter outlined not only the Peruvian government's immediate responsibilities, such as removing the State of Emergency and launching a fair investigation into the killings, but also offered suggestions for long-term reconciliation, such as obtaining the informed consent of the local community to continue development. Moreover, the letter contained references to Human Rights Treaties to which Peru is a signatory, treaties Peru was now failing to uphold. To add further weight to this letter, VIVAT invited out peer organizations to act as supporting co-signers and eighteen organizations collaborated to complete the letter. Finally, VIVAT representatives distributed the letter to relevant bodies, including both several organs of the Peruvian government itself and also other human rights bodies such as the UN Human Rights Council

who could contribute further pressure. VIVAT's involvement joined a growing global outcry against the Peruvian government's crackdown on mining protests, an outcry which influenced President Humala of Peru to fire his prime minister and reshuffle his cabinet. However, the situation in Peru remains unresolved as the restrictive state of emergency continues to be in place and dialogue has stalled between the stakeholders.

Looking to the future, the world's underprivileged populations will continue to require advocates who bring the grievances and suffering of their local community to the attention of high policy-makers. Just as these scenarios played out in Brazil and Peru, the will of a large company or government can be effectively stopped by a

motivated group of smart activists. With the continual facilitation of dialogue between the powerful and the meek, the future will hold greater respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and an empowerment of those on the edges of society who suffer in silence.

"We need to reconsider our model of growth. What we need today is a growth model that looks ahead - one that offers predictability, stability and that is, most of all, sustainable."

*Janet Potocnik
European Commission for the Environment*

Ringling For Peace: "Sustainable Peace for a Sustainable Future"

For the past 31 years near the United Nations headquarters in Midtown Manhattan, a clear bell has rung out and pierced the city's bustle on the morning of September 21st. The bell itself is the Japanese Peace Bell, first cast in 1954 from coins collected by children of 60 countries and housed in a small wooden structure of traditional Shinto design. The occasion for the bell's use is to herald the start of the International Day of Peace.

The United Nations General Assembly first conceived of the International Day of Peace (also known as World Peace Day) in 1981. Following a unanimous vote by all countries, the UN established the opening day of the UN General Assembly on the third Tuesday in September as the International Day of Peace. The day was then first celebrated in the following year, 1982. Therefore, as the UN gathers for another year of debate, all delegations are powerfully reminded of the organization's highest calling, peace. Almost twenty years later in 2001, a new resolution was passed, stabilizing the date of the International Day of Peace on September 21st.

Maintaining world peace has always been the principle goal of the United Nations. This mandate to cultivate peace is reflected by the first line of the UN's preamble, "we the peoples of the United Nations are de-

termined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." Contributing to this message, the International Day of Peace is designated to be accompanied by a 24-hour global ceasefire of all hostilities. Fur-

thermore, the day includes a minute of silent reflection, carried out at noon according to each respective time zone. This minute is intended to offer a platform for all people in the world to contemplate cultivating peace in both their own personal relationships and wider global society. Reflecting on the Day of Peace, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon states, "The day of peace gives us all a chance to reflect on the unconscionable toll – moral, physical, and material – wrought by war. Those costs are borne not only by us today, but by future generations as well."

Each year, many public events and rallies accompany the International Day of Peace, helping to further disseminate the message of peace and inspire a passion for peace in the hearts of participants. In the year 2011, Peace One Day, an NGO focused on spreading awareness of the International Day of Peace, held a large concert in honor of the day at the O2 Arena in London. At this concert, Peace One Day, announced that ceasefires had successfully been negotiated in Afghanistan and Iraq for the entirety of the day. For this year, the UN and partner organizations have broadened their scope, hoping to achieve a worldwide cessation of violence. The success of this ambitious goal will be announced at the annual Peace Day concert in Wembley Arena, London.



This Year's International Day of Peace Design Integrates the Recycling Symbol, 2012 is the International Year of Sustainable Energy

VIVAT members are also joining these growing global voices for peace. In Ireland, members have founded an organization named Instruments of Peace (IoP). The IoP group is dedicated to spreading the message of peace and since 2010 has coordinated yearly celebrations of World Peace Day. Sticking to the principle of working small, simply, and silently, IoP first organized a one-hour concert entitled the *Four Seasons of Peace*. Building off this success, in the following year the IoP pur-

sued a full-day celebration involving multiple speakers and hundreds of people. Participation was strong in this ambitious day-long festival, attracting the attention of peer organizations and the local community. Buoyed by these new collaborators, the IoP plans to host a whole week-end of celebrations for this year's festivities. As witnessed by this swift expansion, the doctrine of peace remains a compelling narrative for the general public. In a world still afflicted with war, the great

majority of people yearn to live in a conflict-free society. On this year's International Day of Peace, see if you can follow in the footsteps of IoP and coax out this universal desire for harmony. And don't forget to pause at 12 noon for the Minute of Silence along with people all over the world, drawing inspiration to stand up for peace. There is strength in solidarity and all too often the voices for peace are muffled, let your voice be heard.

2012 Peace program in Hiroshima

The anniversary of the atomic bombing was solemnly remembered in Hiroshima. Every year the host diocese of Hiroshima conducts a series of programs both at the memorial cathedral and in other places like the peace memorial park. I was there to witness some of the events on Aug. 5th & 6th. The program proper began on 5th in the afternoon with a symposium on the prospect of ending nuclear generation. Bishop Tani, the head of the Commission for Justice and Peace was the main speaker. The symposium also featured comments from a Korean resident of Japan who survived the bomb and from mothers who had been forced to flee Fukushima due to last year's nuclear accident.

In the evening around 500 people joined the peace march. We marched up the main street from Hiroshima peace memorial park to the memorial cathedral. This year I noticed during the march there was a group of noisy pro-nuclear activists who were trying to make their voices heard. But that did not disturb the peace march. It was good to see the youth from different dioceses with banners and placards that read "No to nuclear energy", "World peace" etc. joining the procession. Some had peace messages imprinted on their T-shirts! Some young men carrying guitars invited everyone to join them to sing peace songs in a loud voice. (I think we were noisier than the pro-nuclear activists!). For me to join the peace march

and to get soaked into that atmosphere itself was an experience. After the peace march reached the cathedral, a mass for peace was celebrated. The main celebrant was Bishop Maeda of Hiroshima.

On the 6th, the day Hiroshima was bombed, at 6:15 in the morning there was an inter-religious prayer service held at the peace memorial park. Clergy representing different religions offered incense and recited prayers for the victims of the A-bomb. At 8.00 am a "Memorial Mass for the Victims of Nuclear Weapons and all Wars" took place at the cathedral.

Personally, for me to be in Hiroshima especially the 6th August is something special. Every year when I go there I take time to listen to the stories of the A-bomb victims, watch some screen play on the bombing, listen to peace songs sung by different choirs and pray for peace. People offering flowers at the memorial monument, the smell of incense, the sound of the gong etc. puts you into a mood that cannot be explained by words. To be in that place the whole day and to be immersed in that atmosphere is a profound experience. I think I've got a special place for Hiroshima in my heart. That may be because I come from a war-affected country.

*"Think peace - and there will be peace.
Look for peace - and you will find peace.
Live in peace - and you will inspire peace.
Honor peace - and you will be blessed with peace"*

Edward M. Gilman



Prayers in front of the Atomic Bomb Dome

Curtailling Illegal Arms Trade

Progress and Frustrations in the Fight to End Global Weapons Trafficking

From July 2nd to 27th at the UN headquarters in New York, negotiators from all member states met to discuss a landmark treaty governing the international arms trade. To the great dismay of participants and observers alike, the conference failed to produce any outcome document or consensus. However, this setback has not ebbd the rising tide of support for such a document and the future prospects for a successful reduction in the world's arms trade look bright.



Apostle of Jesus Priest from Uganda, being interviewed during a Control Arms stunt at ATT in Dag H. Square

Photo: J.P. Pezzi, MCCG

A group of Nobel Peace Laureates, including President Arias of Costa Rica, first developed the concept for an arms trade treaty nearly ten years ago. Thanks to the work of civil society organizations, momentum for arms trade negotiations has been slowly escalating ever since this conception. The need for such a treaty is great. Currently 2,000 people are killed by armed violence everyday and 27.5 million people worldwide have been internally displaced as a result of armed conflict at the end of 2010. Despite these shocking statistics, the international trade in arms remains on average less regulated than international trade in bananas. Some countries, such as the United States, maintain a high level of scrutiny and regulation regarding arms transfers. However, most countries practice loose regulation and enforce few restrictions. These global inconsistencies in supervision result in significant loopholes that criminal organizations can exploit, helping to fuel conflict, increase poverty, and facilitate violations of human rights. Therefore, establishing common international standards regulating the transfer of conventional arms could greatly reduce the availability of illicit weapons and deprive human rights abusers of arms.

The first concrete movement towards such a treaty appeared in 2006, when the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 61/89 entitled *Towards an Arms Trade Treaty*. The movement, however, remained at a standstill for several years as numerous important

actors (most importantly the world's largest arms exporter, the United States) withheld support for a treaty. Breaking this gridlock, in 2009 the Obama administration reversed the previous US stance and supported a treaty. The UN surged ahead, establishing a timeline for the treaty's completion, gathering support from member states, and organizing preparatory committees.

All these events culminated in the July treaty negotiations. It is important to note that a treaty represents a legally binding document and is a strong method of enforcement. Furthermore, the treaty needed the consensus of all member states to pass (a prerequisite the US had insisted on, in effect giving each nation veto power). Challenged with this task, negotiators met for long hours in a packed UN conference room to hammer out the treaty. Throughout the process a variety of disagreements weighed down progress. Countries argued over the severity of rights abuses that would trigger a shut-off of arms supplies, disagreed over whether the treaty should include ammunition and small arms and light weapons, and contended whether preexisting regional agreements could be integrated into the treaty. Moreover, some countries insisted that in order for the treaty to go into effect it had to receive an unusually high 65 ratifications (as opposed to the customary 20-25). Ultimately, these disagreements remained unresolved and key actors called for more time to negotiate a treaty.

In the aftermath of such a disappointing outcome, many observers have declared the treaty conference an unsalvageable failure. However, examining the discourse surrounding the wider arms trade, radical changes have irreversibly altered the playing field. Most importantly, momentum for further action remains strong. In the closing moments of the conference, Mexico speaking on behalf of 90 nations articulated a strong statement calling for renewed efforts and negotiations. Moreover, in the conference itself the overwhelming majority of countries endorsed a strict outcome

document. This critical mass of international pressure cannot be silenced for long. Such a change in international opinion once again evidences the power of civil society to change underlying philosophies and reorient priorities over the long term. While progress may be slow, the rewards of peace and friendship are worth the exertion.

This session of the General Assembly represents the next opportunity for substantial progress on an arms trade treaty. The GA requires only a 2/3 majority, not an absolute consensus, to pass a resolution. Therefore, the majority of pro-treaty countries can overcome the stubborn few. A new resolution would be a strong step forward. Resolutions can be powerful tools for coercing governments to act and could lead to a binding treaty later. In order for the GA to vote on such a resolution, it must first be presented by member states. This presentation is a politically risky act as the United States and other anti-treaty powers have openly stated that they do not wish the arms treaty to be brought before the GA. Therefore, if you wish to support a future Arms Trade Treaty, lobby your government on the national level to ensure that they have the courage to defend such a worthwhile issue. While the discourse on the arms trade has made remarkable progress, renewed effort is needed to push this initiative to the finish. Feel free to be in touch with VIVAT for technical assistance or further consultation of how you can support this issue.

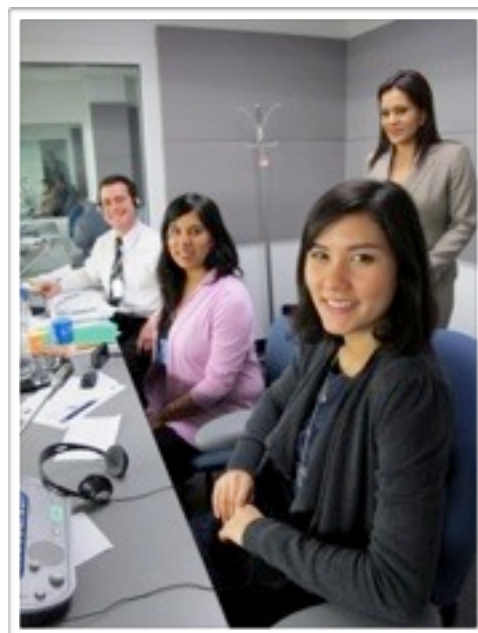
The Wisdom of Youth:

UN works toward greater integration of the world's youth

The typically grey heads of diplomats at the UN have been interspersed with decidedly younger faces as of late. This sudden infusion of youth does not signal some sort of mass retirement, but instead the progress of a UN-wide initiative to include the voices of younger generations in policy-making decisions. The inspiration for this initiative stems from the UN's democratic mandate to establish policies that accurately reflect all of society's needs. Oftentimes in policy-making, the concerns of the world's youth are left unheard, systematically overlooked by the overwhelmingly aged world of high government offices. This unequal representation should not be tolerated as the world's youth population, defined as all children under 15 years of age, currently sits at 1.8 billion. Compared to the total world population of 7 billion, youth constitute almost 25% of all people on earth. Therefore, in his five-year plan published on January of this year, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon called for an extensive overhaul of the current UN youth programs, the development of a new youth action plan, and the appointment of a new special advisor on youth.

The UN's greater interest in youth participation made a strong appearance at this year's seminal Rio+20 conference. Marking 20 years since the original Rio environ-

mental conference, Rio+20 brought together hundreds of world leaders focused on forwarding the cause of sustainable development. As the inheritors of the world's environment (and its growing dysfunctions), youth had a particularly strong stake in the Rio conference. Therefore, empowered with greater access to high-level panels by the UN CSD Major Group for Children and Youth, youth advocates voiced their opinions and contributed to the debate. Ultimately, the commitment-free Rio outcome document disappointed many youth participants. However, it is clear that in the future more youthful optimism and suggestions will be included in UN decision-making. As further plans for youth inclusion at the UN evolved, the secretary-general's office decided to identify principle areas of concern for young people. Therefore, the new action plan is tasked with focusing on the five thematic areas of employment, entrepreneurship, political inclusion, citizenship and protection of rights, and education. The world's struggling economy is the major reason for selecting employment and entrepreneurship as the two primary concerns. In struggling countries such as Spain, the youth unemployment rate has exceeded 50% in the past year. This tremendous waste of human capital is both a drag on current society and a curb on future opportunities as young



***Young volunteers assisting VIVAT
as interpreters for Civil Society
Forum at the United Nations***

people are deprived of critical job experience. Furthermore, with the other three categories the UN seeks to address the chronic youth problems of underfunded education, lack of political inclusion, and the violation of basic rights. The advancement of these five goals can prevent youth from falling into the trap of cyclical poverty that threatens to curtail so many of their achievements.

Rio+20 was the first global summit of the Internet age

More than 50 million people the world over participated electronically in the Rio+20 conference on sustainable development because of social media and greater access to the Internet and mobile technology, according to United Nations estimates. "I think that the success at Rio+20 had little to do with the final outcome document," writes Jacob Scherr of the Natural Resources Defense Council. "Instead, the success was found in the gathering of thousands of leaders, experts, and activists in Rio to focus on the common goal of a sustainable future."

Source: UN Wire

"I hope that Rio+20 will become the Tahrir Square of the global environmental crisis and that international public opinion will be able to tell leaders that they cannot brush off the science...They cannot lower expectations in the face of a crisis worsening every day."

Marina Silva, Brazilian environmental activist

"In life one has to be pragmatic and rather than look back at what one hoped for, wanted, or could have had, one has to work with what one has got and keep fighting in order to secure the future."

*Elizabeth Thompson, Executive Coordinator,
Rio+20*

"A more unstable climate, with rising temperatures and more frequent and intense weather events, could affect the most fundamental aspects of our shared security: food, water, trade."

*Edward Davey, UK Secretary of State for Energy and
Climate Change*

"Our actions and decisions, how we generate and use energy, what we consume, how we produce, all have consequences for the environment and for human well being."

*Sha Zukang, Under Secretary General for
Economic and Social Affairs*

Getting to Know the UN: UNESCO

The large acronym of UNESCO stands for the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (not to be confused with ECOSOC, the Economic and Social Council and UNESCO's parent organization). Officially created on November 16th of 1945, UNESCO is a continuation of the League of Nations' Committee on Intellectual Cooperation. At its conception, delegations foresaw UNESCO as an agency for peace, "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." Currently, UNESCO operates largely as an organ of the UN development program, working towards the eradication of poverty, sustainable development, and intercultural dialogue. To contribute to these larger goals, UNESCO focuses specifically on education, the sciences, culture, communication and information. UNESCO headquarters is located in Paris, France and the organization maintains 58 regional offices across the world.

Perhaps the most high profile responsibility of UNESCO is to designate important cultural locations (including historical buildings or even natural reserves) as World Heritage Sites. This designation increases available funds for these areas, but also institutes strict codes for upkeep and preservation. While designating heritage sites may be UNESCO's most conspicuous task, the organization currently lists the Millennium Development Goals as the underpinning motivation behind all UNESCO strategies and activities. Within these larger goals, UNESCO has selected Africa and Gender Equality as its two pressing global priorities, in addition to the previous stated objectives of supporting education, scientific inquiry, and cultural diversity. To further these goals, UNESCO is currently executing programs such as the harmonization of HIV/AIDS prevention curricula, providing greater educational access to women, and supplying technical assistance in the creation of national educational standards. Since its conception,

UNESCO has also been involved in multiple controversies between member states. On Oct. 31st of 2011, UNESCO approved Palestine as a full member of the organization. This action resulted in the termination of all American funding for the organization, a significant development as the US previously contributed 25% of all UNESCO funding. Faced with this future budget shortfall, UNESCO will doubtlessly begin to scale back its operations in the near future.



For more information visit <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/>.

Upcoming Events

October	November	December
October 11-21 1st International SSsS JPIC Seminar Steyl, Netherlands	November 17 <u>Universal Children's Day</u>	December 1 World AIDS Day
October 11 International Day of the Girl Child	November 20 <u>WHO World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims</u>	December 10 Human Rights
October 17 <u>International Day for the Eradication of Poverty</u>	November 25 <u>International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women</u>	December 18 <u>International Migrants Day</u>
October 24 United Nations Day	November 27-29 Advocacy Workshop - Philippines	