

THE GRAIL LINK TO THE UN NETWORK

UPDATE ON GRAIL AND UFER ACTIVITIES

Newsletter #3, November 15, 2010

“Women working together to bring about a world of peace, justice, equity and renewal of the earth”

(UFER) International Movement for Fraternal Union Among Races and Peoples Mouvement International pour l'Union Fraternelle entre les Races et les Peuples

UFER is a non-governmental organization (NGO) which has had consultative status with ECOSOC since 1953. The Grail was one of the founding members. UFER's headquarters are in Belgium and the Secretary General is in Montreal. The UFER membership represents many countries where The Grail is not (yet) present. Some of these countries were: Lebanon, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Switzerland, Rwanda, South Korea, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso.

Sharon Joslyn, Joy Garland and Alma Agolli, one of our interns, are the New York UFER representatives at the UN with Sharon being the main representative. Sharon attended the General Assembly of UFER which was held September 18 to 23 in Brussels, Belgium at a beautiful Conference Center.

Four Grail members attended. Sharon (NYC), Elly Konig and Ton Brower (Netherlands) and Gloria Lazzarini (Australia). The meetings were conducted in French, UFER's language of choice, with simultaneous translation for English-only speakers. During the business meeting an election for the board was held with three Grail women elected. They are Joy Garland (USA), Monica Maher (USA) and Elly Konig (Netherlands).

Presentations were on the topics of Migration, Trafficking and Religious Diversity. The keynote speaker on migration, Mme. Ndioro Ndiaye of Senegal, spoke on migration and its challenges.

Following are two examples of the presentations. If you want further information, contact Sharon at BronxGrail@juno.com.

- Bijay Singh, Director of the NGO Solidarity for Developing communities (SFDC), Orissa, India spoke of the caste system in India and in particular of the Dalit community of which he is a member. These are the “untouchables”, unrecognized by the government. He spoke of the importance of their presence at United Nations sessions to bring the fact of their existence to the table. Sharon is working with Bijay to bring two Dalit 16 year old girls to CSW-55 in 2011.
- Day 3 was on *Cultural Relativism and Universality of Human Rights*. The panelists were. Berhane Raswork, Executive Director of the Inter-African Committee (IAC) and. C.M. Eya Nchama, UFER representative at the United Nations in Geneva. The presentation focused on how to resolve the apparent conflict of traditional practices, such as Female Genital Mutilation and Child marriages, with the universal human rights directives. The role of the NGOs in bringing these issues to the light at the United Nations was emphasized.

LIEN in Portugal Maria Carlos Ramos from Portugal wrote that the LIEN Network is starting up again with university students. They made a connection with the group that produced the video “Girl Effect”. Their first official meeting on November 16th is focusing on girls.


View the video at www.girlsrights.org, the website of the Working Group on Girls or google the girl effect.

GIRLS AT CSW-55 November 3rd, Sharon and Mary Kay gathered at the Bronx Grail Center with representatives, staff and students, from 3 schools with which they worked closely for CSW-54. The meeting was part evaluation, part gearing up for CSW-55. The schools do a fantastic work with the

girls, and the girls are amazing. The future is in good hands! If you have girls who want to come to CSW-55, contact Mary Kay right away so she can register everyone by mid-December.


We're especially looking for girls to attend. We can house many participants from outside New York either at the Grail or our church convent. (Grail-IPT@juno.com)



 Mary Gindhart, Grail International President, announced at the April Link meeting that she would be moving to California in June. Other members piped in with lighthearted quips about the difficulties of moving, and the experiences yet to come. As someone who is new to The Grail, however, still trying to take in the unfamiliar names, member organizations, and international initiatives, Mary's departure prompts me to think about the wealth of knowledge that she will be carrying away with her other possessions; and of all the things I expect to learn from the Link meeting group she leaves behind.


Attendance at the CSW-54 has indelibly broadened my perspective. While listening to the reports of women from around the globe, what they are working for, what they have achieved thus far, and the seemingly insurmountable obstacles they continue to face, I realized that, despite having worked with NYC nonprofits for 8 years, my understanding of the work NGOs has been limited by a lack of awareness of the difficulties encountered by service agencies in other parts of the world. The letters and comments of the Girls' Groups who attended were truly inspiring, because their sense of the value of this opportunity and their willingness to share in the work to be done felt akin to my own experience.

Mary G, I would like you to know that, thanks to your input, among the things you are leaving behind in New York is a more thoughtful and worldly citizen.

 **HUMAN TRAFFICKING**—Grail Global Network Lenie Schaareman is the USA contact. (ls.grailville@fuse.net) She has an article in the November issue of GUMBO. Contact her if you would like more information. Internationally, Ton Brower is our contact: ajm.brouwer32@gmail.com.

 **Religions for Peace** From Mary Kay

Long before I started participating in the UN, the Grail was involved with: *Religions for Peace*—the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition—advancing common action among the world's religious communities for peace. *Religions for Peace* works to transform violent conflict, advance human development, promote just and harmonious societies, and protect the earth. The global *Religions for Peace* network comprises a World Council of senior religious leaders from all regions of the world; six regional inter-religious bodies and more than seventy national ones; and the Global Women of Faith Network and Global Youth Network. In recent years, Joy Garland and I have attended their meetings. During CSW-54, they had an excellent symposium. If they are present in 2011, I urge others to attend.

 **Commission for Social Development (CSocD)** Following is an excerpt from the Working Group on Girls presentation for **Commission for Social Development, 49th session, 9 - 18 February 2011**. (The Grail is one of the signers.)

Consistent with the Copenhagen Declaration and Platform of Action, we propose the following: Girls have the right to access education and training to prepare them for decent work, participation, cooperation and leadership as adults in society. High rates of unemployment and low rates of decent work expose girls to poverty, perpetuating vulnerability to exploitation, including commercial sexual exploitation, and the worst forms of labor. Sustainable social development requires that girls are educated and trained empowering them to participate fully and contribute to their community and society.

Girls have the right to freedom from exploitation as it is harmful to their health or to their physical, psychological, spiritual, moral or social development. The trafficking of children and girls violates their human rights.

Recommendation: Significant steps towards poverty eradication can be achieved by addressing girls education, ending child labour, discrimination and violence against girls and collecting disaggregated data.

If anyone would like to attend CSocD, contact Mary Kay (Grail-IPT@juno.com)

UN Women, is the new entity which combines the mandates of the four existing UN structures for women into one new, higher level UN organization with both policy and operational functions (GEAR campaign www.gearcampaign.org).

The four entities involved:

UNIFEM - United Nations Development Fund for Women

DAW - Division for the Advancement of Women

OSAGI - Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues for the Advancement of Women

INSTRAW - International Research of Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

The resolution was adopted on July 02, 2010: UN GA Res/64/589, after decades of advocacy on the part of civil society activists. It will enter into full operation on January 01, 2011. The GEAR Campaign, a network of 300+ women's, human rights and social justice groups have been engaged in ensuring that specific tasks will be taken up by this new agency.

In the past all the work done by women in formulating statements, platforms and organizing World Conferences could not be fully implemented because women voices held a low level of authority. With this new vision women will have power "at the table" when decisions are being made and will afford a mechanism for better coordination of operation.

United Nations Secretary General (UN SG) Ban Ki-moon has chosen Michelle Bachelet as Under-Secretary General (USG) of UN Women. Charlotte bunch, Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University stated: "This appointment is essential to the effectiveness of the new entity and the Campaign is pleased that the UN SG has selected a qualified and strong leader for this high level UN position that will envision the future of women's rights and advocate for women worldwide." (Grail members gathered in Italy for the Formation Program sent Ms Bachelet congratulations.)

On November 10, 2010 the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) elected 41 countries to serve on the Executive Board of UN Women: 10 from Africa, 10 from Asia, 4 from Eastern Europe, 6 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 5 from Western Europe and 6 from contributing countries.

Elected from the African Group were Angola, Cape Verde, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Lesotho, Libya, Nigeria and Tanzania.

Elected from among the Asian States: Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Republic of Korea and Timor-Leste.

Elected from the Western European States Estonia, Hungary, Russia and Ukraine were elected from among the Eastern European States, while Denmark, France, Italy, Luxembourg and Sweden.

From the group of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Council elected Argentina, Brazil, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada and Peru.

The Council also elected Mexico, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Spain, United Kingdom and United States from among the contributing countries.



Theresa Dardar and Rigoberta Menchu (Nobel Peace Prize Winner from Guatemala) The June issue of GUMBO has an article about Theresa's tribe in Louisiana Pointe au Chien, and an interview with Joy Garland.

Joy attends the monthly meetings of the Indigenous Peoples Forum. If you are interested in attending the 10th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 16-27 May, 2011, contact Joy so she can fill you in on the details and Mary Kay so she can register you.



Sharon Joslyn set the stage for me: we were going to the meeting of the creatively named “Third Committee of the United Nations,” but because of renovations in the UN building, the meeting would be in the ‘temporary building,’ a massive, 175,000-square foot structure. And, because the committees give every country (192 member nations!) two minutes to speak on whatever is the subject of the day, it was probably going to be a little ‘tedious’.

The Grail has been an officially recognized NGO (non-governmental organization) at the United Nations for many years, but this was my first trip. What an introduction.

For reasons beyond me, the UN has named its six main committees simply numerically – First, Second, etc. Our interest was in the Third Committee, whose subtitle is Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee. The meeting was in a vast room, filled with row after row of 12-inch wide tables. Donning headphones for the simultaneous translations, Sharon, Joy Garland and I took seats in the last row, behind hundreds of country and affiliated organization representatives, sitting face-forward, behind laptops, netbooks and the occasional paper tablet. But this day, they were riveted on a presentation by Catarina de Albuquerque, Independent Expert on the Issue of Human Rights Obligations Related To Access To Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation. In addition to her remarkable skills (she answered questions from the members in Portuguese, Spanish, English and French), it was the content of her report that mesmerized: She contended that by recognizing that the right to water and sanitation is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living, the UN Human Rights Council had in fact made such a right legally binding and must now be made into a reality.

Ms. de Albuquerque, a Portuguese lawyer specializing in water issues, was appointed Independent Expert in 2008. She has visited many countries, investigating the water and sanitation situation for citizens and the countries’ progress on the UN’s Millennium Development Goals. She said that in the coming year, she would be visiting the United States, among others, and in the back row, three Grail heads popped up.

Water? Sanitation? The U.S.? How could we connect her to the work of the Grail here on those issues – the effect of fracking on drinking water, the constructed wetlands at Grailville, living a theology of the land? She would bring knowledge, experience and visibility to the work Grail members are doing.

Sharon darted into the aisle to intercept Ms. de Albuquerque at the end of her speech; I tried friending her on Facebook with my phone; and Joy clambered over me while still attached to the translators’ headphones so she could talk with her! We were a sight! We came back with two business cards (no new Facebook friend, alas – yet!) and an idea. We’ll see where we can take it!

Joy Garland wrote about the day for the UFER Newsletter. The following is an excerpt:

Ms. de Albuquerque emphasized that human rights are essential for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but that the Goals alone are not enough. The example she gave was of a man in a semi-urban area near the capital of a country she visited. He turned on his tap water so she could see the water that flowed out. The water was black, unfit for drinking, yet it was counted towards meeting the MDGs. It met the criteria of the MDGs as “an improved water source” coming from a tap, but did not take into consideration the quality of the water as a human right. She urged that the actions to achieve the MDGs need to be redesigned to better meet these goals.

Her report acknowledged that human rights have “the potential to empower people, to challenge existing inequities and to transform power relations to bring about real and sustainable changes.”

She concludes that human rights must be integrated in the MDG implementation. After 12 months of person to person and regional visitations, she could not say that sufficient progress had been made, but called on the States to have the courage to recognize the existing challenges and find the political vision to overcome them.

A few facts: There are an estimated 884 million people still without access to an improved water source.

There are 2.6 billion people without access to an improved water source that protects water from human and outside contamination.

The poorest people pay the most for water and sanitation.