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Universal Declaration of Human Rights Celebration; It was Fun!

By Christiaan Morssink

On the morning of the December the 10th, Human Rights Day, I became a bit depressed. Not one of the local news outlets had an article on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. None of the local broadcasts or even the national ones mentioned this occasion. Only those who listened to BBC, to the Canadian CBC or a few of the Spanish channels were made aware that we as humanity had a momentous day ahead of us. It seems that our American and Philadelphian mainstream journalists prefer a utilitarian

approach to “report what is good for the masses”.



Later that morning my mother called me from Holland to see if I had remembered to burn a candle for Human Rights Day. Over there in that small country, the people who believe in humanism and in the United Nations as the main political platform to prevent world wars and to find solutions for global scale problems, they burn a candle as a private statement that in their homes, Eleanor Roosevelt’s legacy will be taken to heart.

Later, my mood lifted considerably when we started to prepare for our “event”. Volunteers from the Philadelphia Public Health Student Council showed up (Thanks John Donovan), manpower from The Ethical Society arrived and volunteers from PGWI came early to assist with decorating (Thanks Nalat). Shortly before the event was



about to start, friends Carol Jenkins and Michele Meltzer came to do their part and the ladies from WILPF brought their food contributions. Mike Felker of Vets for Peace came with his material on cluster bombs, and Adam Abdelgabar of the Darfur Human Rights Organization showed up with his team. Sharon Katz needed help with the heavy speakers and once set up, was eager to get the mood enticed. Meanwhile, Joanna Holsten and Anastasia Shown from YPIC manned the bar and made sure we sold enough drinks to break even.

Our list of attendees has over 88 names, in the upper part of our expectations. The small crowd fitted just about in the upper room of the Society. Sharon Katz played background, until we started with the real thing. High school student Emtithal



*Imagine Peace. It is not hard to do.
Happy Holidays to Each and All.*

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Mahmoud, in her young and soft voice, read two of her poems, reflecting how she uses this expression form to deal with the sorrows that flow from her Darfur nightmarish experiences. She was followed by Ella Torrey, who reflected on her early career moments when she worked directly with Eleanor Roosevelt.

This being Philadelphia, I made a few remarks about the big men in our city's history who have used the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and lived by those principles. It is always a proud moment to mention WEB Dubois, Paul Robeson and Leon Sullivan in the same paragraph when talking about human rights. Leon Sullivan's Principles, in 1999 expanded in collaboration with Koffi Annan to Sullivan's Global Principles, were highly instrumental in the internation-

al boycott of South Africa, which in turn was most instrumental in breaking the apartheid regime in that country.

And that brought the full attention to South African singer Sharon Katz, who has worked all her life for the abolishment of apartheid, using her music and the peace train organization as her venue. Sharon and Kethiwendy sang beautiful songs, paid homage to Miriam Makeba and Nelson Mandela and got the kids from Jubilee school out of their chairs.

We finished the evening with a round of toasts, all filled with hope and instructions for "OBAMA". A special note needs to be given to Enid Adler, who just returned from a workshop at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. She spoke to the eagerness in the world for the day that Obama will come to power and that the positive approaches towards inter-

national affairs and diplomacy can be restored. We are looking forward to a seminar of sorts on that topic.

The evening closed out with a sur-



prise performance by soprano Sarah Davis, who sang a capella a work that befitted the joyous occasion of celebrating the existence of a globally read document, that holds all governments and all people to the moral duty of respecting and uplifting the life of each of us.

And then we went home. Except for those who cleaned up.

Save the Date: February 5 Congressional Briefing

WHO: Senator Robert Casey and his foreign policy adviser Jofi Joseph will lead the program. Speakers will include Alyn Ware (International Coordinator of the Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament), Steven Starr (Senior Scientist for Physicians for Social Responsibility), Craig Eisendrath (Chairman of PNA), Ed Aguilar (Executive Director of PNA), and Emily Gleason (PNA intern and co-leader of Students for a Nuclear Weapons Free World).

WHAT: Topics for the Congressional Briefing will include the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, a treaty on the control of fissile materials, an agreement on the de-alerting of nuclear weapons, a treaty on the de-weaponization of outer space, fulfillment of our obligations under Article Six of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Pact, and steps toward a Nuclear Weapons Convention. PNA leaders will report on recent Geneva and Korea conferences with United Nations delegates.

WHERE: Russell Senate Building , room 418, Washington , DC 20510

WHEN: February 5th, 2009, 2-5pm

WHY: This is a time in which real progress can be made. With a new Administration in place, we will educate and urge members of Congress to action on important nuclear policy issues. We will appeal to key Congressional figures in the Senate and House, focusing on the following committees: Appropriations, Armed Services, Energy & Commerce, Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Relations. Members of the NGO community, as well as students, are invited to share ideas and partner in our work for a nuclear weapons-free world.

As a member of the peace and security community, we encourage you to invite your personal Congressional contacts. Further, we would be honored to have your group join us in sponsoring this event.

RSVP by January 10th by calling (215)-546-3030 and providing your name, organizational affiliation, the names and number of attendees, and sponsorship interest. You can also RSVP by emailing infopna@gmail.com with the same information. We hope you can join us for this momentous event on Capitol Hill.

Students of Jubilee School Make Own Declaration of Human Rights

Below is a Universal Declaration of Human Rights drafted by the Jubilee elementary school.

It is a hopeful sign that our children are engaging in a positive way about the concept of human rights. Each an Eleanor in his or her own right, the kids at the Jubilee school debated their own bill of rights fitting the year 2008 and their young perspectives.

1. God gave us the right to life, and no one should be able to take it away.

There should be no weapons on the earth. We should stop the fighting and wars.

2. Everyone has the right to clean water and food, because those are the two most important essentials for humans to survive, and not having them violates the first human right.

Governments should make sure there is enough food, and that industries, factories and nuclear plants do not pollute the water.

3. Everyone has the right to shelter and clothing because people need some place to be protected and covered.

The government's responsibility to make sure that everyone has a place to live and a job. It's people's responsibility to donate clothes and help others instead of depending on the government to help people in need.

4. Every person, party and nation has the right to be independent, and not subjected to control by others. Every individual has the right not to be owned like a piece of furniture or property. All nations have the right not to be controlled by other nations, but to control themselves.

The United Nations should step in on any form of slavery or colonialism.

5. Every child has the same right to knowledge and education. Everyone should be allowed to use their mind's full potential.

It's the government's responsibility to make sure that every child is able to get an equitable education.

6. Everyone is entitled to the same opportunity. Whether you are male or female, of any race or ethnic background, you should have the same rights.

The United Nations should stop any form of inequality in any part of the world. The United Nations has the power to make sure that everyone has the same opportunity as anyone else.

7. We all have the right to a pollution-free earth. If the earth dies, we will die.

Our responsibility is to use solar energy, to use less fossil fuel, and to cut down on energy sources that are not good for the earth. Our responsibility is also to make sure that too many trees aren't being cut down, and that the Rain Forest is left alone so that it can continue to be the home of many creatures, and it can produce the air we need to breathe.

8. Every citizen has the right to vote. No one has the right to deny one's right to vote because of their race, culture or candidate.

The government has the responsibility to make sure that the right to vote is protected, and all votes are counted.

9. Everyone has the right to speak their mind. No one should be silenced.

It's the government's responsibility to protect our right to free speech.

10. All people have the right to not be drafted into a war in which they don't want to fight.

The government's responsibility is to give people an option not to fight in a war.

11. All civilians have a right to be evacuated from war zones into safe places, and to have their everyday needs met.

Governments and volunteers should work together to make safe places for civilians from war zones.

12. Everyone has the right to freedom of religion. Every person has the right to choose their faith, and to make their own choices of worship without being persecuted.

People's responsibility is not to judge other's religion. The government's responsibility is to make sure that people have freedom of religion.

13. Every person has a right to a fair trial with a qualified judge and lawyer, and a jury of their peers.

The right to a fair trial should be an international right, enforced by the United Nations.

14. It is a people's right to feel secure in the place they live. All people have the right not to be around guns and drugs, because they injure families and communities and bring devastating effects.

The government's responsibility is to make laws that ban guns from civilians.

15. Everybody has the right to get treated by doctors when they're sick or hurt, including people who don't have enough money to pay the bills.

It's the government's responsibility to pay the medical bills for people who don't have enough money. It is hospitals' responsibility to treat people no matter what amount of money they can pay.

16. All people have the right to express their culture.

People need to stand up for their culture, and not be ashamed of it. No one has the right to sabotage or control your culture.

17. Human beings have the right not to be tortured in any way, shape or form.

People should report torture. The government's responsibility is to make sure no one is being tortured. The United Nations' responsibility is to make sure this human right is enforced.



Children from Jubilee School, Christiaan and Kethiwendy of The Peace Train dancing at the Universal Declaration of Independence Celebration.

From Christiaan's Desk:

When I was preparing for our celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights I came across a sad piece of the political reality in Washington DC regarding the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award. On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the UDHR President Clinton started this award, annually to be presented to Americans who have earned our respect in their pursuit of making these rights a human reality. The awards were given by President Clinton at white house ceremonies in 1998, 1999, and 2000 and by Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, in 2001. After that, nothing; until 2006 when American Rights at Work created their own version of the Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights. The White House simply did away with this award, seeing it probably as partisan, or even worse, as not relevant.

In the context of restoring the face and value of the USA in the international arena, it is very relevant to bring this award up for re-instatement at the White House level. I hereby ask the UNA-GP members, the other chapters of the UNA-USA, as well as our HQ, to write our representatives in congress and the president-elect, and urge action early on regarding our commitment to human rights as a central principle of doing the governments business, at home and abroad. The simple re-instatement of this award will have high symbolic value and will help tremendously in our strivings for better relations with the world.

In these days of hard times for many among us, it is going to be a sobering close-out of the year. I wish you all good cheer within the close circles of your families, with plenty of hope for each to share and with the realization that our willpower and vision do not depend on stock market mischief or Washingtonian machinations.

The Oslo Convention on Cluster Munitions

On December 3 and 4, the Oslo Convention on Cluster Munitions, the most significant disarmament and humanitarian treaty of the decade, opened for signature in Norway. Heads of State, Foreign Ministers, and senior government representatives from 111 countries have now signed this treaty aiming for a worldwide ban on the use, production, transfer, and stockpiling of cluster bombs.

Sadly, the United States is boycotting this convention, joining other countries like Russia, China, Pakistan, Syria, Israel and India, where the military lust for toys is matched with their capacity to control the mindset of their politicians. As with the landmine treaty, again we stand alone in NATO, as our closest military allies have recognized that the human costs of these weapons far outweigh their military utility. We seem to be living in a outer space of reality, where "collateral damage" is shrugged off, pertaining only to foreign civilians and children on foreign soils. As our president says: "so what?"

There is some irony in the fact that our allies signed this treaty. In all probability, our European and Asian

allies can, actually must, order the US bases located in their countries to remove cluster bombs and landmines from their stocks.

As a member of the Cluster Munitions Coalition and Chair of the US Campaign to Ban Landmines (USCBL), UNA-USA's Adopt-A-Minefield Campaign was in Oslo as a delegate

Support the *right to life* & the *right to security of person*.

Ban landmines & cluster bombs.

Stop small arms proliferation & gun violence.



at the signing. We have to take on the moral duty to force our politicians to confront their principles and their dilemmas. They need to stand up to the hegemony of our military in foreign affairs and understand the enormous political goodwill that can be gained when the USA signs treaties that make sense, saves lives, and saves money.

Members of the UNA-GP please support the US Campaign to Ban Landmines and write to President-elect Barack Obama now to urge him to sign these treaties in 2009! Goodwill gained with a stroke of a pen, yet no loss of tactical or strategies power to be feared. It should be a no-brainer, once you can think outside the box. Yes you can, Barack Obama, yes you can.

"This Convention will save lives and help prevent the unacceptable civilian casualties caused by cluster munitions. In the space of just over a year, the Oslo Process has succeeded in breaking the stalemate which has stopped progress over many years in Geneva."

– Disarmament Minister Phil Goff, New Zealand,