From Christiaan’s Desk:

March was so full of travel, illness and events that we simply couldn’t get our newsletter together. Coming back on the 23rd of March from Turkey, where Nalat and I, as well as fourteen others from the Philadelphia region visited the World Water Forum, we had to go immediately into high gear for the PGW 3rd Annual Conference on April 3 and 4.

Not only did we work on the International Women’s Day event at the International House (Thank you Anastasia), we also supported the presentation by Suraya Pakzad from Afghanistan (Founder of Voices of Women) at the Ethical Society (Thanks Nick Sanders). Just recently we heard again about the killing of prominent women in Afghanistan and worry deeply about the safety of our friend. I am afraid that while we are trying to make friends in Afghanistan and build rapport through the use of soft power, the way the military operate and confront “the enemy” is doing long term harm to any goodwill we create.

UNA-GP members did participate in several World Water Day events (Thanks Wayne and Karen). Water and sanitation seem to become big issues in the world, and the Philadelphia chapter may make this topic into something of a specialty among their brethren. The Philadelphia Water Department has actually a huge potential for becoming a showcase for the world and we should help promote that niche.

My 84-year-old mother called me from Holland the other day to express her deep gratitude that president Obama has used the G20 meeting in London to set the stage for a renewed effort to “do away with those atomic bombs.” Indeed, Obama’s trip was good, showed a world eager to do business and politicking in a more collaborative format. It was a pity that the UN and its many institutions were not mentioned, except for the IMF and that institution is not very well embedded in “The UN System.” Indeed, venues like the G7 or 8, the G20, the annual Davos conferences (for the world’s oligarchy) can actually undermine the efforts to reform the UN and its relevance in the 21st century. Multilateral is not a multitude of bilateral relations. It implies a global Hall of the People, where all can participate. It will not do away with the power dynamics and inequalities, but it will not allow exclusion. We need to stay...
vigilant on the need to keep focused on the bigger mission, while working on specialized issues, one by one.

As a public health worker I was also pleased with the report from the UN about the negative effects of the century-old “war against drugs,” starting with the opium trade issues long ago. According to the UN, and I myself agree very much with its conclusion, this war has created a worldwide network of organized crime, integrating it with slave trade, illegal weapon trade and a financial underworld. Most of the world has framed the prohibition of drugs in criminal and law enforcement terms, ignoring the venues of public health and so-called “cultural tolerance.” We are now witnessing the corruption and violence that accompanies this war on drugs along our border with Mexico. The violence is so intense and brutal, that it threatens the whole social structure of the Mexican State. I hope that the work at the UN on the war on drugs will be followed by a close, introspective, analysis at home about the current, non-working, strategy.

All in all, my travels, the Obama reception in Europe and the indication that most nations are cooperating, at least a little bit, on the global economic crisis, gave me hope and energy to go forward on the road to “globalize our citizenry.”

(Christiaan)

World Water Forum 2009

Philadelphia was well represented at the World Water Forum in Istanbul. The Forum, which is held every three years, has its protesters and defenders. The Forum is seen by many activists, and for good reason, as a front for some of the major multi-national companies that approach the world water and sanitation crisis as a venue for commercialization. Many communities and nations in the world hold strong beliefs that water is a human right and should not be subject to market forces. Agencies of the UN have proclaimed that it would be wise to expand the universal declaration of human rights and add the right to potable water.

The activists had their say at the Forum, but were definitely a sideshow compared to the wheeling and dealing that went on around the ministerial and multinational meetings. We on the side of the UN and the activists like the Food and Water Watch bemoaned the fact that the US delegation insisted on the wording “need for water” instead of “right for water” in the ministerial documents. It is sad to see that the Obama administration did not step up to the plate in this case. Three years from now, when the forum will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, we will see if better progress on the political front can be observed. For now, we need to educate, motivate and activate our communities around the pending world water crisis.

(Christiaan)
International

March 3rd was a day of celebration for women around the world. It was a day of appreciation for all mothers and wives. It was also a day to reflect back on the struggles that women had to endure when it came to possessing basic human rights and freedom. The reality, though, is that many women around the world are still struggling. In some cases, women carry the burden of gathering water for the family, caring for the old and sick, raising children, feeding their family. They have to do all of these tasks while in poverty.

Women can enable change. In Cameroon, a man who has a lot of wives receives respect from the community. A man who sends all his daughters off to marriage, also receives community respect. In order to change health and human rights trends, women need to be the target for change. They are the ones who know the needs of their family, the needs of their village. They can influence the men that they come across. If women were educated about health and hygiene, their knowledge will spread to the men and the whole community will benefit.

Suraya Pakzad is the Executive Director of the Voice of Women Organization in Afghanistan. She was married at the age of 14 and now a mother of six. She lived through the struggles that some Afghan women are going through, and she now helps them become self sufficient. The goal of the organization is to empower Afghani women and to help them strive for freedom. Gaining freedom, however, was a slow process. After seven years, there had not been much change for women in Afghanistan. This was due to the slow bureaucratic process between the government and NGOs that sometimes the project deadline is missed. In most cases, help comes from outside Afghanistan. The challenge is that most of the programs are also designed from outside the country which may not work in the local area of interest. Due to unlocalized programs, money, time, and opportunities are lost.

JUST IN: The Dutch and U.S. Administrations Will Shun DURBAN II

(taken from AP on Sunday, April 19)

The Dutch foreign minister announced Sunday he is boycotting a U.N. anti-racism conference because some nations are using it as a platform to attack the West. The Obama administration has also said it would not attend the meeting scheduled to start Monday in Geneva. There are fears in the West that the meeting will be marred by heated debate over Israel that cast a shadow over the last such anti-racism conference eight years ago in the South African city of Durban. In recent weeks, Dutch diplomats had worked feverishly behind the scenes to try to salvage a final statement that would be acceptable to all nations, proposing a number of alternative texts. But Verhagen described negotiations over the declaration as "grim" and said Western nations were subjected to political attacks. "The anti-racism conference is too important to abuse for political goals and attacks on the West," he said. "The Netherlands will not be a part of it." Verhagen said some countries were planning to use the summit to put religion above human rights and rein in freedom of speech. The U.S. pulled out of the conference "with regret" Saturday citing similar reasons. Verhagen said his boycott would in no way diminish Dutch commitments to fight all kinds of racism and discrimination around the world.

Hopes as expressed by the UNA are dashed again. Boycotting a UN conference has serious political implications, going way beyond irritated feelings during a cold and nasty dialogue, or even a heated shouting match. Shunning, boycotts, the building of walls, whether in Berlin, in Texas or on the West Bank, all these actions undermine the need to build bridges, to build market places of ideas and exchange. Too bad.

(Christiaan)
According to Aldo E. Magazzeni, founder of Traveling Mercies, the best way to implement change is from the local level. The “bottom-up” approach requires community members to work with each other to figure out what their needs are. Once that is established, they can make the connection with the government and persist in asking for aid. In one example, he and four community groups partnered with some local government engineers to build a water system. In fourteen days, they were able to finish the piping and water system for the village. This showed that when everyone had something to gain and worked together in solving an issue, the communities become empowered, and the issue can be solved quickly.

There are many international organizations that help women in developing countries gain their political voice, receive basic household needs and healthcare services. The help may alleviate some of the burden that women endure, but to instill a permanent change, the women in local communities need to communicate with one another and with the men of the communities. Without shared knowledge of what the issues are, long-term solutions may not be realized.

(Nalat Phanit)

3rd Priority Issue From the Strategic Plan
Adopted by the UNA-USA in December 2008

Detailed below are priority issues for UNA-USA chapters, leaders, and members to focus on in 2009. These are issues that ranked highly in our survey of different Association groups, including chapters, the Council of Organizations, the National Council, the Board, and national office staff, and which have tangible, relevant, and short-term goals that we can all work together to achieve. UNA-USA members and chapters are encouraged to educate their communities and communicate to their elected officials about these core issues.

# 3) Renewing the United Nations
The UN’s membership and responsibilities have changed dramatically over its sixty-plus years. Although significant reforms have been adopted over the years, the United Nations remains in need of institutional upgrades to enable the organization to successfully carry out its many new and complex mandates, and to maintain the support of its member states. A strong and capable United Nations, updated for the 21st Century, should be a priority for the United States.
While the U.S. has advocated numerous changes to the Secretariat and the General Assembly, it has been less eager to engage on Security Council reform. This is a major point of contention for many nations that place a priority on Security Council reform due to concern that the Council’s permanent membership has remained unchanged since the UN was founded. Some argue that the unrepresentative nature of the Security Council has damaged the legitimacy of its decisions and will need to be addressed before further UN reforms can be agreed upon.

To the extent that the high-profile Security Council is perceived as outdated and unrepresentative, it taints public views about the UN in general. A successful effort to update the Security Council can provide momentum for progress in other areas of UN reform, and constructive U.S. participation in such an initiative can help improve America’s flagging global standing.

Much like the actions of the Security Council, UN peacekeeping is one of the most visible and important manifestations of the organization’s work. The success or failure of peacekeeping operations has a considerable effect on American views about the UN. Currently, the United Nations does not receive adequate member state contributions of troops and equipment, and its capacity to effectively manage large and complex operations has not kept pace with the growth in peacekeeping mandates. As the demand for UN peace and stability operations continues to undergo an historic expansion, the strengthening of UN peacekeeping capabilities must be a particularly urgent component of any UN reform effort.

**Goals:**

- The President should work with other key world leaders to initiate a high-level diplomatic effort to reform the Security Council, including expanding its membership, and strengthen UN peacekeeping operations; and

- The United States should lead an active and urgent diplomatic effort at the UN to implement all of the recommendations of the 2000 Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations, establish a well-trained and -equipped UN rapid deployment force, and ensure that the new UN Peacebuilding Commission receives adequate resources and support.

**Action Items for UNA-USA Leaders and Members:**

- E-mail, write, and call the White House and Congress in support of a serious, intense, and high-level diplomatic effort to strengthen the capabilities and work of the United Nations, including the ability to deploy and manage its peacekeeping forces;

- Educate your community through public events, outreach and media about the need to renew and reform the United Nations; and

- Visit your legislators in their local offices as part of National Advocacy Week (to be held in spring 2009), and conduct appropriate follow-up throughout the year, to inform them about, and build support for, the valuable work of UN peacekeeping.
Next Board Meeting: Our next board meeting will be held on April 30th, at 5:15 PM. Due to the ongoing remodeling of the American Friends Service Center we will hold our meeting to 3401 Market Street, suite 202. On the agenda are a presentation of the web-site to be re-vamped, an interim report of the nominating committee, our plans for collaboration with the Free Library and a series of issues pertaining to setting an agenda for the next academic year. Members of UNA-GP are welcome to attend this and all board meetings.

Get Ready: Annual Membership Meeting is scheduled for June 11. Place and time and featured speaker to be determined.

News From HQ: Ambassador Tom Miller has accepted the position of President of UNA-USA. He will start his service on May 11th and will work closely with outgoing president Ambassador Luers for a few months during a transition period. After having worked in the state department as a career diplomat, lastly as ambassador to Cyprus and Greece, Tom Miller became the head of PLAN International, based in the UK in January 2005. This experience in the world of NGO’s will be very valuable in his new role with UNA-USA. During the conference call with chapter board members across the country, he certainly underscored the differences in worldview, style and operational strategies between the governmental and non-governmental entities in the diplomatic arena. Those of us in Philadelphia, who listened in, got a good feeling about our new head honcho.

Renew Your Membership!!!
Please take a moment to renew your membership by visiting www.unausa.org. Don’t forget to check off the UNA-GP as your chapter. Also, do you know that student membership is now free? Recruit the young ones to our cause. See who in your family, office of neighborhood could be interested in a membership. Be a recruit.

There are plans in the works to revamp, in collaboration with other organizations, something of a seminar series. We are looking for opinions regarding topics, potential speakers, preferred venues, etc.

Shoot us a line at info@una-gp.org with any of your thoughts and suggestions on this idea.