I was in Holland when the elections for the UN Human Rights Council took place and the USA received a substantial number of votes, so that now our country can participate directly and constructively in the promotion of Universal Human Rights. Behold, a really important turn around and something that the UNAUSA and many sister organizations have savored. Now we have the opportunity to really engage. One barrier broken, much work ahead.

Many more barriers need to be addressed. One of them is signing the treaty to ban landmines and cluster bombs. In this newsletter Mike Felker raises his voice again to keep pushing our politicians for signing that treaty and standing up to the military-industrial complex that President Eisenhower already warned us about and that yet has to be reigned in. Indeed, the marketing of the military mindset and the glorification of the military man goes unabated. In the Philadelphia Inquirer of Thursday, May 14th, Vietnam veteran John Grant laments how we spend millions of dollars portraying war as just a violent video game, as he comments on the activities of the Franklin Mills recruiting station. Indeed, where are the dollars for a large marketing plan and glorification of the Peace Corps, of the Doctors without Borders, the Army Corps of Engineers, Habitat for Humanity? In our country we can never celebrate a blue helmet or a blue turban. We don’t have a monument, paid for by the citizens, in honor of their peace keepers like in Canada. And it falls to our citizens, not our government, to stimulate the glorification of peace-making and paying tribute to those who do.

Would it not be nice if half of the recruiting budget of the Pentagon could be switched to the State department and used by such agencies as USAID? The UNAUSA has made budgetary contributions by the USA to UN peacekeeping operations a priority. Such contributions are essential, because they signal a constructive attitude. And whether or not the UN is efficient and/or capable of stemming violence and genocidal actions as in Darfur depends in large part on the attitude adopted by the USA.

What drives US policy regarding peacekeeping is sometimes a mystery, although many a cynic will have an explanation based on racism, political convenience and/or cold war sentiments, but most of the time it is based on cold-hearted, calculated neglect. Becoming involved in the work of the UN Human Rights Council must mean that the USA is going to apply human rights, universal human rights, to its overall foreign policy. It must mean that we do away with the paradoxes of doing good while selling weapons everywhere, doing good while considering civilian casualties “collateral damage”, doing good in Thailand, while ignoring Haiti or Darfur. It must mean signing those treaties, it must mean participating and engaging in that ugly, often unpleasant and rowdy family of nations. Peace making is applying soft power; lots of soft power. Soft power is relatively cheap. Signing treaties is relatively cheap and gains enormous goodwill. No more hesitation. Let’s join Mike Felker in his zeal for a less traumatic future for mankind.

“Our hesitated in Rwanda, in the Congo, in Darfur. We did not in Bosnia and Kosovo.”
Eliminating Weapons of Individual Destruction: Landmines, Cluster Bombs & Guns

FACT CHECK

10,000 deaths a year due to landmines— the deadly garbage of war.

$3 vs $1000 the cost to produce and clear a landmine.

There are tens of millions of landmines in the ground in 78 countries. The most contaminated places are Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Cambodia, Chechnya, Colombia, Iraq, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

30-40% of mine victims are children under 15 years old.

The United States is one of only 13 countries left that refuses to halt the production of landmines.

11,000 cluster bombs were dropped on Iraq during the US invasion, leaving behind thousands of unexploded bomblets which kill and maim Iraqis and our own troops.

640 million the number of guns in the world; 8 million guns are manufactured every year, along with 10-14 billion units of ammunition, enough to kill everyone on earth twice each year.

1,000 deaths globally each day due to the use of hand guns. In the United States each day over 80 people, 8 who are under nineteen, die due to gun violence.

1. The Problem?

There are too many weapons in the world. Weapons that kill and maim; weapons used needlessly to settle international and personal conflicts, conflicts that could be settled with less deadly means. Weapons of war, weapons on our streets - too many weapons, too many casualties, too much mourning.

2. The Damage

With cluster bombs, landmines, and other unexploded remnants of war there is no warning – the victim triggers a sudden explosion and destruction. Tissue, bones, and muscles are destroyed, nerves severed. With horrific force the concussion thrusts fragments of the weapon, debris, dirt, and bone splinters into the body, causing severe injury or death.

3. The Solution

Educate ourselves and others about the deadly consequences of landmines, cluster bombs, and small arms proliferation/guns.

Join and support local, national, and international organizations which work to reduce the number of landmines, cluster bombs, and guns.

Support assistance programs for victims of landmines, cluster bombs, unexploded remnants of war, and gun violence.

Demand that our Administration join and support

The Mine Ban Treaty
The Cluster Bomb Treaty
The Cluster Bombs Civilian Protection Act of 2009
The Small Arms Trade Treaty

RESOURCES

M I K E  F E L K E R
Veterans for Peace
Former medic for Marines in Viet Nam
“We are working against the horrors of war and violence. We are working to building a safer world for all citizens. We are working for peace. Please contact me re: how we can eradicate this man-made epidemic of weapons, an epidemic that sweeps from the paths of Cambodia to the streets of Philadelphia.”
mfelker@cis.upenn.edu

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO BAN LANDMINES
www.icbl.org/

CLUSTER BOMBS COALITION
www.stopclusterbombs.org

CONTROL ARMS CAMPAIGN
www.controlarms.org/en

BRADY CAMPAIGN TO END GUN VIOLENCE
www.bradycampaign.org/

PENNSYLVANIANS AGAINST TRAFFICKING HANDGUNS (PATH)
www.pathcoalition.org/
In the Know on your Human Rights

US Elected to Human Rights Council; Administration Vows to Strengthen Council’s Performance

May 14, 2009

On May 12th, the United States was one of 18 countries elected to serve on the UN Human Rights Council, marking a dramatic shift in American policy toward the Council and US participation in the United Nations. In securing a three-year term on the 47-member Council, which replaced the historic Human Rights Commission in 2006, the United States won 167 votes in the General Assembly, far exceeding the absolute majority of 97 required for election (though seven countries received more votes). The United States was one of five countries elected to the Council for the first time, along with Belgium, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, and Norway.

Obama Policy Makes Sharp Break from Bush Administration Practice

Just three years ago, the Bush Administration joined Israel, the Marshall Islands, and Palau, as the only countries among the UN’s 191 member states that voted against the creation of the Council. The Bush Administration never ran for a seat on the Council, citing its poor performance and narrow focus on Israel. Last summer, the administration announced that it would only engage as an observer when “there are matters of deep national interest before the Council and we feel compelled.” Conversely, the Obama Administration participated as an observer at the Council’s 10th session in March and then announced on March 31st that it would seek election to the Council in order to engage with others to improve the UN human rights system.

Rice Says US Will Work from Within to Improve Council, Points to 2011 Review

In remarks to the press following the election, US Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan E. Rice said the administration was “gratified by the strong showing of encouragement for the United States to again play a meaningful leadership role in multilateral organizations, including the UN, on the very vitally important set of issues relating to human rights and democracy.” Noting that the administration recognizes the Council “has been a flawed body that has not lived up to its potential,” Rice said she was “looking forward to working from within with a broad cross section of member states” to strengthen the Council. She said the administration would not have run for election if it thought the Council could not be effective, and pointed to the upcoming 2011 General Assembly review of the body “as an important opportunity to strengthen and reform the Council,” including assessing its procedures and the substance of its actions.

US Pledge Says No Country Immune from Human Rights Scrutiny

As part of the Council’s election procedures, candidates are asked to provide voluntary pledges and commitments for promoting and protecting human rights, to be used by UN member states in deciding how to vote. The United States submitted its pledge in late April, committing “to working with principled determination for a balanced, credible, and effective UN Human Rights Council to advance the purpose of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” In addition, the United States pledged to “promote universality, transparency, and objectivity in all of the Council’s endeavors” and to participate actively in the 2011 review. The United States committed itself, as well, to work with its “international partners in the spirit of openness, consultation, and respect and reaffirms that expressions of concern about the human rights situation in any country, our own included, are appropriate matters for international discussion.”

UNA-USA Calls US Election an “Important Step Forward”

In a statement issued shortly after the vote, UNA-USA president Thomas Miller called the election of the United States “an important step forward in our country’s recommitment to the promotion of ideals first championed by Mr. Eleanor Roosevelt in her groundbreaking effort to secure General Assembly adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights more than 60 years ago.” The statement notes that membership will enable the United States to work in partnership with others to develop and propose changes to enhance the effectiveness of the Council. In the statement, UNA-USA calls for the appointment of a full-time ambassador to serve as the US representative on the Council. “Through such full diplomatic representation,” the statement says, “the United States can hope to play a large role in improving the Human Rights Council’s work and its record of success in advancing human rights.”

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Building International Consensus on Climate Change

Climate change is one of the world’s most pressing and far-reaching challenges. Any effective solution will require intensive diplomatic, economic, scientific, and technological cooperation among all members of the international community.

The United Nations is uniquely positioned to provide the most effective platform for jointly addressing this threat. Under a UN framework, the international community has begun the process of drafting a new global climate agreement.

The goal of these negotiations is the establishment by the end of 2009 of a widely-accepted comprehensive international agreement for preventing catastrophic climate change.

The UN will also play a central role in helping the developing world adapt to climatic changes by promoting measures such as the adoption of clean energy technologies that will enable economic progress with minimal emissions of greenhouse gases. The U.S. and other developed countries should work with and through the UN to help provide developing countries with the financing and technology needed to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Goals:

• The United States should play a leading role in building international consensus in support of an agreement on a new global climate change protocol by the end of 2009

• UNA-USA should help raise awareness about the UN’s central role in global climate change negotiations as an example of the unique and invaluable work of the United Nations.

• Establish regular contact with Members of Congress to inform them of the UN’s critical work on climate change

• Partner with like-minded organizations in your area to hold public programs on climate change and the UN’s climate change activities

• Organize a letter-writing campaign, call-in day, or other public events for World Environment Day, celebrated on June 5 (for ideas, visit www.unep.org/wed).

(Times of India) Leaders of the world’s largest cities, which together produce more than two thirds of its greenhouse gas emissions, met in Seoul on May 19th hoping to reverse the trend. Executives from the 40 largest cities are attending the C40 Large Cities Climate Summit, the third such event since 2005. The issue of how cities “find a way to continue to thrive and prosper while reducing greenhouse gas emissions is one of the central questions in the whole struggle,” Bill Clinton told a press conference. He said his initiative focuses on creating “communities that can both provide a greater quality of life and generate more clean energy than they use.”
Check it Out

This lively series from BBC FOUR captures the daily lives, concerns and personalities of young Africans and their teachers in the Ugandan town of Masindi. Coupled with the extraordinary enthusiasm and openness of the pupils and teachers, the series gives an entertaining, refreshing and up-lifting insight into understanding what life is really like in Africa today. Learn about the many issues that shape the UN agenda and the global community. [http://www.linktv.org/africanschool](http://www.linktv.org/africanschool)

African School premieres on Link TV on Tuesday, May 19th, at 7:30PM ET/4:30PM PT! Episodes air every Tuesday at 7:30PM ET/4:30PM PT, and every Wednesday at 11:30PM ET/8:30PM PT.

Send your email if you have one

There is a remarkable uptick in the communication from UNA-USA headquarters in New York City and Washington DC, albeit all of it electronically and internet based. We can get that communication to you fast and for free if we have an email address. MAKE BETTER USE OF YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

Please consider a donation

We have a few projects under consideration, such as the library project, and although much can be done with volunteers, we do need cash to keep operating. Our share of the membership fee of UNA-USA is very small and most of that is spend on mailings of newsletters and administrative expenses. Your donations will be used to launch our projects and pay for the website upkeep.
You are Cordially Invited...

Annual Membership Meeting

Wednesday June 10th

Featuring: President UNA-USA
Ambassador THOMAS MILLER

The Ethical Society
1906 Rittenhouse Square
5.00 PM to 7.15 PM

The Agenda

3.30 to 4.30 Preparation and set up (volunteers are needed)
4.30 to 5.00 Board meeting and briefing.
5.00 to 5.30 Cocktail hour and socializing.
5.30 to 5.35 Welcoming words and introductions
5.35 to 5.55 Ambassador Thomas Miller, president UNA-USA
5.55 to 6.10 Jessica Hartl, Coordinator of the Council of Organizations, UNA-USA.
6.10 to 6.15 Break
6.15 to 6.30 Report of nominating committee and thanks to departing board members
6.30 to 7.15 a. Report from Christiaan Morssink, chapter president
   b. Report from Damon Kletzien, treasurer
   c. Perspectives for the upcoming year
   d. Membership questions and suggestions.

7.15 Adjournment. Social networking.

Members who would like to be considered for election to the UNAGP Board of Directors should contact Christiaan Morssink president@una-gp.org The nominating committee will finish its work on the 2nd of June.

In the last year, the UNA-GP has adopted a strategy of working closely with other sister organizations in the pursuit of a more cosmopolitan thinking Philadelphia. This local networking seems now to be supported by a strategic shift in the work of the Council of Organizations, a long standing entity in the UNA-USA structure. Jessica Hartl will highlight this shift and illustrate how our local chapter stands to gain.

RSVP can be sent by email to info@una-gp.org

Christiaan Morssink