Philadelphia and Afghanistan

Over in Great Britain Johann Hari Op-ined in *The Independent* that “Yes, there is real risk in going [forward with more troops...] – but it is dwarfed by the risk of staying. A bloody escalation in the war is more likely to fuel jihadism than thwart it. If Obama is serious about undermining this vile fanatical movement, it would be much wiser to take the hundreds of billions he is currently squandering on chasing after a hundred fighters in the Afghan mountains and redeploy it. Spend it instead on beefing up policing and intelligence, and on building a network of schools across Pakistan and other flash-points in the Muslim world, so parents there have an alternative to the fanatical madrassahs that churn out Bin Laden-fodder. The American people will be far safer if the world sees them building schools for Muslim kids instead of dropping bombs on them.” (*The Independent*, October 21, 2009)

Here in Philadelphia, we have a great example of just how important that civilian approach is for building good relations. Aldo Magazzeni of *Travelling Mercies* has worked with men from more than 28 villages in Afghanistan to install clean drinking water systems. His message is simple, his effect extraordinary. He is welcomed with great smiles, his nickname is “Mister Water.” He makes peace by being a global citizen and working in his own way on the UN-MDG. We are proud to have him as a member. No better way to beat terrorism than with goodwill, empathy, respect and dignifying. Assisting in creating healthful, economically independent and spiritually meaningful lives is the best strategy for America’s and the world’s peace.

Dr. Hans Blix was in Philadelphia to speak on Nuclear Issues and receive an award from the Project for Nuclear Awareness. UNA-GP sponsored the event and had a large contingent at the dinner on Monday night.

3 Members of the UNA: Marco Salerno (UNA-GP), Hans Blix (UNA-SW), Elias Okwara(UNA-GP)
The HALO Trust

The Adopt-a-Minefield Committee of the UNA-GP has decided to direct the last of the funds collected for the clearance of landmines to the HALO trust. (www.halousa.org)
The UNA-GP will stay involved with the work to get the USA to sign a treaty to ban landmines and cluster bombs. The committee as such has been dormant for a while and is not planning any activity in the near future. The UNA-GP will still accept donations for landmine clearing, keep up the sale and distribution of holiday cards, and we may engage in fund-raising for landmine clearing in relation to banning mines and cluster bombs.

The nightmare of Afghanistan will leave mental scars for decades to come.

Weapons, weapons everywhere, not a place seems safe. The event will start with the showing of an award-winning documentary from the Philadelphia-based group Women in War Zones (www.womeninwarzones.org) followed with a short talk by Dr. Nzanzu Akin who trained and works in Eastern Congo. The evening is meant to raise awareness about the plight of the civilian population in eastern Congo and to alert the audience to the many ways help can be steered towards local NGOs working in that region. Light refreshments will be served.
From Christiaan’s Desk

This newsletter is late. I couldn’t get pen to paper for a while, and then I decided to wait until I could report to you on the outcome of several wonderful events. For example, on Monday the 26th and Tuesday the 27th Philadelphia hosted Dr. Hans Blix, who was invited by the Project for Nuclear Awareness. The Philadelphia mass media seem to be reluctant to report on events and issues where the city and its citizens make a gallant effort to be cosmopolitan and think and act globally, hence the paucity of reporting about this visit by a truly great, international civil servant. The UNA-GP, as a sponsor, occupied three tables at the dinner in honor of this former president of the World Federation of UNAs. Our member, Soprano Sarah Davis, performed a serenade of five songs during the reception and you will find a picture elsewhere about the evening.

On Saturday, UN DAY, we performed our duties as global citizens and roamed Rittenhouse Square to convince any passersby that action is needed on global warming. The rain and stormy winds prohibited much interaction and we stopped around 2 PM, beaten by the elements. On Sunday, our board member Marietta Tanner and I presented the UNA-GP chapter and its goals for the interested at the Unitarian Church on Lincoln Drive.

Given the amount of other things to tell, I will “park” the major developments around President Obama’s visit to the UN; you all have heard and read about it. Important aspects from the board meeting in September are the appointment of Mary Day Kent to the board, the decision to donate funds from the adopt a minefield campaign, and ideas for several “pipeline” projects (ICC, Small Arms, World Water Day, UNESCO celebration and International Women’s day). The leadership of YPIC has to be revived, since its president has left for India. Board members Shown and Faustin will take the lead on the YPIC.

Our board member Albert Momjian arranged for a lunch meeting on October 21st between UNA-GP and the Consular Corps of Philadelphia. The meeting focused on possible collaboration between the two entities. Going forward, there was a strong sense of opportunity for working together on a few events, in particular regarding the library project and the idea of an annual gala around the founding father of Philadelphia and the first multilateralist, William Penn. Meanwhile, the two students chapters- in-embryo (Drexel and UPenn) have expressed interest in having some of the consuls speak at their recruiting events.

Through our relationships with the Philadelphia Global Water Initiative we connected with Mrs. Baron from Lambertville, NJ, who donated more than twenty boxes of stamps, including a large amount of UN First Day Covers. Mindful of our library project and our links to the schools, I am looking for ways to use this stamp collection for our educational and awareness raising work. With Benjamin Franklin as our first postmaster, it makes sense for the Philadelphia chapter to take this on. I have written to the American Philatelic Society in Bellefonte, PA for some guidance. If you have any interest or ideas about this, please let me know.

Of course I am forgetting many an issue, but so be it. Space, time and loss of energy require a full stop for now.

Christiaan

“We just got news that an effort is underway to create a new museum, the ‘EnvisionPeace Museum’ here in Philadelphia. More about it in the next newsletter.”
Old News, Still LARGE Expectations Worldwide: Obama Wins Nobel Peace Prize

President Barack Obama won the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize on Friday for "his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples," the Norwegian Nobel Committee said, citing his outreach to the Muslim world and attempts to curb nuclear proliferation.

"Only very rarely has a person to the same extent as Obama captured the world's attention and given its people hope for a better future," Thorbjørn Jagland, chairman of the Nobel Committee said. "In the past year Obama has been a key person for important initiatives in the U.N. for nuclear disarmament and to set a completely new agenda for the Muslim world and East-West relations."

He added that the committee endorsed "Obama's appeal that 'Now is the time for all of us to take our share of responsibility for a global response to global challenges.'"

"The exciting and important thing about this prize is that it's given to someone ... who has the [political] power to contribute to peace," Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg said.

UN Day and 350Philly

On UN Day 2009, Saturday, the environmental activists tried something new with the goal of prodding countries to get serious about reaching an international climate accord: a synchronized burst of more than 4,300 demonstrations, from the Himalayas to the Great Barrier Reef, all centered on the number 350. Their goal: kick the politicians out of K-Street, march them all to E-Street, which happens to be in Copenhagen, and lock them in the conference room until they have signed the action documents necessary for our grandkids to have a life.

We did our work on this front at Rittenhouse Square, where wind and rain made the efforts all the more inspiring. Around 2PM the volunteers of the Ethical Society and the UNA-GP called it a day. Next year, expect another effort. Meanwhile, start thinking about your carbon footprint.
The following talking points are intended to inform chapter leaders and members across the country on what President Obama’s first visit to the General Assembly and Security Council accomplished, particularly with regard to the mutual interests of the US and the UN.

In his speech to the General Assembly on Sept. 23, the president conveyed the US’ commitment to working with UN member states. Interrupted 12 times by applause from leaders and delegates, the president’s assertion of a renewed US role in the world and the UN’s embrace of it are fundamental steps forward to improving America’s standing in the world.

The US raised disarmament and non-proliferation to the top of the international agenda at Obama’s speech to the Security Council on Sept. 24, where he reinforced the US’ role as an integral, collaborative partner in confronting global problems. The US’ decision to devote its Security Council presidency to addressing these issues underscored the significance of the threat of the use of nuclear weapons and reasserted the UN as the “pivotal” forum for tackling hard security questions. This step served to define the Security Council as an authority to not only take on such thorny issues but also find solutions to them. As a result, the Council, including the permanent members Russia and China, unanimously adopted a US-drafted resolution that strengthens export controls on proliferation-related materials, among other measures to reduce global nuclear dangers.

In meeting with 13 leaders who provide the often-ignored troops critical for UN peacekeeping operations, the US acknowledged these leaders’ roles in preventing wars, monitoring peace agreements, helping to restore the rule of law and establishing democratic institutions. President Obama’s remarks that America “is ready to do its part” in this capacity bolstered the image of the US in the crucial arena of UN peacekeeping efforts, backed with recent decision to pay off its significant arrears to the UN for this purpose.

The US offered momentum for pre-Copenhagen negotiations earlier in the week at the UN’s climate change summit and specific discussions among the G20 leaders in Pittsburgh at the end of the week on climate financing and eliminating subsidies for fossil fuels. While many domestic hurdles still await the administration on global warming, the president’s presence at the UN climate summit nonetheless reaffirms that the US will lead in building international consensus in support of an agreement in Copenhagen this December.

The president’s meeting with 25 sub-Saharan African leaders last week in New York also demonstrated that, although “Africa's future is up to Africans,” the US is eager to begin an inclusive sustained dialogue with officials from this region. The Administration also stressed that the dialogues will include civil society and private sector actors as well, and that the focus of discussions will center around creating jobs and fighting corruption.

The president co-chaired the first summit-level session of the Friends of Democratic Pakistan group during his week in New York, working alongside Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the UK and President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan, as well as 18 other nations and six major international organizations. The event mobilized support to expand on an investment and aid strategy to stabilize a region where US interests are at stake and militants maintain an active presence.

The Security Council meeting on sexual violence in conflict zones, which took place on Sept. 30, was chaired by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. It focused the world’s attention on the use of rape as a tool of war and efforts to fight sexual brutality in conflict zones. A U.S.-sponsored resolution, unanimously adopted by the Council, calls for the appointment of a high-level UN envoy to advocate to end the “impunity” wrought on civilians in conflict zones by taking steps to prosecute perpetrators and to ensure a better flow of information from UN workers and officials in the field to the Security Council sanctions committee.
present

“Drain the Ocean, so that the Fish Cannot Swim”

DIARY OF THE BURMESE UNDERGROUND:
The untold stories of illegal Burmese migrant workers, refugees, and internally displaced people.

Hong Truong & Sagar Shah

November 16th, 6:00PM,
Ethical Society
1906 South Rittenhouse Square

This summer, four young Philadelphians traveled to Thailand and Burma (Myanmar) and documented the agony of a people trampled by a blind dictatorship, exploited by the Thai elite and forgotten by the world. With renewed determination to introduce the world to these seemingly invisible people, Hong and Sagar will take you through one day in the lives of each of the victims of hatred, ignorance, and exploitation they met in Thailand. The cast of characters includes victims of landmines, torture, and slavery; child soldiers and political prisoners; and sex workers and other forced laborers. But they will go beyond simple exposing cases of human brutality; amidst the darkness and indifference to suffering that is so endemic to Burmese society, there is hope for change, and Hong and Sagar will suggest many tangible solutions to problems that have existed for over sixty years. They will show that small amounts of support – when targeted specifically to a population’s needs – can significantly enhance people’s lives and, simultaneously, harvest a newfound sense of hope in a generation that has never tasted it. Please come and listen to the voices of the Burmese underground so that together, we can make a difference in their lives.
Letter to Members

From Erich Bilal, Work Study volunteer and Membership Outreach Coordinator:

In an effort to become more efficient and focused in our membership recruitment methods, we would like to hear from current members regarding their involvement with the United Nations Association - Greater Philadelphia chapter. If you are a current member, we would love to contact you to gain a greater understanding of your visions, goals and interests as a member of the UNA-GP. Your initial reasons for joining the UNA-GP would also serve as invaluable information as we look to grow and strengthen our membership. It is our intent to phone and email a sample of you directly to ask you some open ended questions and ask for suggestions to expand our membership. On behalf of Susan Liu and Zoe Freckleton, I thank you in advance for your participation in making the Greater Philadelphia chapter of the United Nations Association better and more effective in our goal to engage the citizens and communities of Greater Philadelphia in strengthening the United Nations.

New Board Member: Mary Day Kent

We are pleased to announce that Mary Day Kent has joined our board. She is going to specifically address issues of advocacy training, maintaining open communication channels with the representatives in our region and she will work on proposals how to get the policy ideas that are formed in chapters like ours onto the agenda of the national UNA-USA.

Mary Day Kent is the Mid-Atlantic Field Coordinator for CARE. She formerly was Executive Director of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, US Section. She has been on the AFSC staff and a member of the International and Peace executive committees, as well as their respective Latin America panels. She has a broad interest in foreign policy issues, but is most involved in human rights issues, especially around work and labor related migration.

NEXT BOARD MEETING

Please be advised that the next board meeting will be on November 11th, from 5:30 to 7:00PM at the Friends Center, Room 21. Regular members are invited to attend.