

Holy Wisdom

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From the Editor's Desk

Hope springs eternal, friends and Spring is in the air! There is a lot to be joyous for as the darkness of winter lifts its head and the glorious sunshine descends upon all of us. This issue of Holy Wisdom sees a lot of promise, like the celebration of Women's equality and European action on Climate Change but there is still a good deal to pray for out there like the release of the Italian prisoner in Afghanistan. As the weather turns from snow to warmth, remember those who suffer and pray for the United Nations and Peace, Justice and Equality in this world!

Christians and Muslim Indian join hands to fight bigotry

New Delhi (ENI) Defying some perceptions of widening divisions between Christians and followers of Islam, hundreds of Muslims have joined a sit-in in the Indian capital organized by Christian groups fighting discrimination meted out to Dalits, considered by many in the country still to be "untouchable" citizens. "Give us equal rights," shouted the protesters including senior church leaders and Muslim activists at the sit-in demanding and end to the discrimination against Christian and Muslim Dalits.

UN Envoy on Children in Conflict Hails Progress in Burundi But Says More Needed

New York

The Central African State of Burundi has made progress in protecting children from the ravages of armed conflict, but more still needs to be done, especially to improve detention facilities for minors charged with belonging to armed groups, the top United Nations envoy on children and armed conflict said today. "Most of the minors detained on charges related to their involvement with armed groups seem to have been released but efforts still need to be made to improve conditions of detention for minors." Ms Coomaraswamy welcomed Burundi's revised penal code, which stipulates that the recruitment of children under 16 years to fight in armed conflict is a war crime, and expressed the hope that parliament would soon adopt it to allow the legislation to be implemented.

World church group urged to broker end to Indian Orthodox feud

New Delhi (ENI).

A section of the Orthodox Church in the southern

Indian state of Kerala has appealed to the head of the World Council of Churches to mediate in a decades-old church dispute that in recent weeks has spilled over into street clashes and violence. The appeal was made to WCC general secretary the Rev. Samuel Kobia by leaders of one of the factions of the Orthodox Church, which split in 1912. It has remained divided since then except between 1958 and 1971 when it achieved a fragile unification.

Centre for terminally-ill shows role of Indian churches in health

Shantigiri, India (ENI). A new Christian palliative care centre inaugurated in the southern Indian state of Kerala has highlighted the role played by churches in offering medical facilities in a region that has one of the country's highest cancer prevalence rates. "No one who approaches the centre will be turned back," said the Rev. K. P. Sabu, director of the hospital at Shantigiri near Edathala, 20 kilometres from Kerala's commercial capital of Kochi.

Gender Equality: Promoting Women's Rights

International Women's Day is celebrated every year on 8 March. The 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women, is taking place at UN Headquarters from 26 February to 9 March 2007. Women's rights have been at the centre of the United Nations agenda.

MESSAGE BY H.E. SHEIKHA HAYA RASHED AL KHALIFA THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN 'S DAY

Violence against women and girls is widespread in all societies. The United Nations Charter affirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women. The right to live without fear of violence is a basic human right for all people, including women and girls. The right to seek equal

justice, without discrimination, is a basic human right. We have a moral and political duty to uphold these rights. The comprehensive study on violence against women issued during the 61st Session of the General Assembly includes strong recommendations that can end the impunity of violence committed against women. We have made huge advances in setting global standards to prevent, punish and eradicate these heinous crimes. Our efforts have gone far to reverse what used to be the traditional lack of response. But progress in ending violence and impunity remains insufficient and inconsistent in all parts of the world. States have binding obligations and can be held accountable. The failure to comply with international standards or to exercise due diligence is a violation of the human rights of women. States cannot abdicate their international obligations to punish perpetrators and prevent violence against, and the exploitation of, women and girls. Neither can they hide behind cultural and religious reservations to international treaties condemning this violence. We must demonstrate by our actions that we intend to keep our promises.

Girls Speak Out for Their Rights at U.N. Backed Forum

New York

Girls from around the world -- including a former child soldier from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), an HIV-positive rape victim from Zambia, and a child-labourer from Nepal – have come together to share the experiences that made them activists at an event at United Nations Headquarters. The poignant voices of these and other girls at Friday's event, called "Girls Speak Out" and moderated by CBS News anchor Katie Couric of the United States, drew an emotional response from those attending, including delegates to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, whose two-week session ends on the 9th of March.

End impunity for violence against women, say UN and churches

Geneva (ENI). The escalation of violence against women cannot be separated from the prolific levels of violence unleashed by powerful global forces, says the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in its annual International Women's Day message. The church alliance message for the day backs another one by the director general of the World Health Organization, Dr Margaret Chang. She notes that: "This year's International Women's Day is devoted to ending impunity for violence against women and girls".

UN IN LIBERIA REPORT SHOWS DECLINE IN SEX ABUSE ALLEGATIONS; ENVOY SAYS SOME PROGRESS

As part of continuing efforts by the United Nations to stamp out sexual exploitation and abuse wherever it occurs, the UN Mission in Liberia today released its latest report on the problem which shows a fall in the number of allegations against its own staff last year compared to 2005. Thirty allegations were reported last year compared to 45 a year earlier, according to the report, which is released annually as part of UNMIL's efforts to

implement the world body's policy of keeping the public informed about efforts being made to eradicate any incidents of such abuse by UN personnel. "We have made some progress in our prevention efforts and we will continue our efforts to reinforce the UN's zero tolerance policy, because even one incident of sexual exploitation and abuse is one too many," says the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Alan Doss, who is also the head of UNMIL.

ON ITS 1ST ANNIVERSARY, \$376 MILLION PROVIDED BY UN FUND FOR EMERGENCIES

Today marks the first anniversary of a landmark United Nations fund which has significantly reduced the time in which aid is delivered to those most in need, and to date, \$376.1 million has been distributed in 40 countries through almost 400 projects, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) announced. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), managed by was established last year to speed up relief operations for humanitarian emergencies and make funds available quickly after a disaster, when people are at most risk. Previously, it took up to four months for funds to reach areas affected by disasters. CERF funding for aid programmes is made available within 72 hours in emergencies such as the armed conflicts in Lebanon and Timor-Leste, allowing UN agencies on the ground to provide immediate assistance.

WELCOMING EUROPEAN MOVES ON CLIMATE CHANGE, BAN KI-MOON URGES AMBITIOUS ACTION

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the European Union (EU) decision to establish targets for energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources in the battle against global warming, saying the moves can help put the world's energy systems on more sustainable footing.

"In the face of rising greenhouse gas emissions, committing to a substantial decrease for the next decade is ambitious," Mr. Ban, who has frequently called action on climate change one of his top priorities as Secretary-General, said in a statement issued by his spokesperson.

"But ambition and leadership are just what is needed to respond to climate change, one of the greatest challenges facing humankind," he added.

UN AGENCY STEPS UP EFFORTS TO AID 2 MILLION UPROOTED IRAQIS IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

With an estimated 2 million Iraqis now seeking shelter in nearby countries and another 1.9 million internally displaced, the United Nations refugee agency is sending a senior official for a week-long mission to the region to strengthen its protection and assistance programmes.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Director of International Protection George Okoth-Obbo will leave tomorrow on a visit to Syria, which shelters an estimated

1 million Iraqis, Jordan with an estimated 750,000 and Lebanon with an estimated 40,000.

“UNHCR is stepping up its work and its support for the uprooted as well as the host countries that have assumed such an enormous burden,” agency spokesman Ron Redmond told a news briefing in Geneva today.

“As our head of international protection, Okoth-Obbo’s mission will be focused on the ongoing effort to ensure that Iraqis fleeing their homeland receive international protection; that the required systems are in place, including efficient registration procedures and the ability to identify the most vulnerable; and that there are programmes for the provision of assistance and solutions, including resettlement of the most vulnerable,” he said.

MILITIA IN DARFUR SURROUND CAMP FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE, HUMANITARIAN WORK SUSPENDED: UN

Hundreds of Arab militia in Sudan’s strife-torn Darfur region recently surrounded a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) after abducting two civilians from inside the camp, forcing the temporary suspension of humanitarian work there, the United Nations mission to the impoverished country said today.

On Wednesday, Arab militiamen swept through Ardamata IDP camp in west Darfur, capturing two civilians in connection with the killing of one of their relatives, the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) said in a press release, adding the two suspects had then been taken to the Government police station but the militia refused to allow the officers to investigate. Later, they handed the two suspects over to the Military Intelligence/Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) camp in Ardamata.

KOSOVO: UN ENVOY PRESENTS REVISED PROPOSALS ON FUTURE STATUS

The United Nations envoy for the status of Kosovo has submitted revised plans after reporting that Serbia and the ethnic Albanian-led government remain diametrically opposed over the future of the

Albanian-majority Serbian province, which the world body has run since Western forces drove out Yugoslav troops in 1999 amid ethnic fighting. The parties are currently considering Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari’s revised proposal ahead of a meeting of both sides and major international partners in Vienna on Saturday, spokesperson Michele Montas told a news briefing at UN Headquarters in New York today. Serbia rejects independence, a goal sought by many Albanians who outnumber Serbs and others by 9 to 1 in the province, and both sides interpreted Mr. Ahtisaari’s initial plan as meaning independence supervised by the international community.

UN RIGHTS EXPERT URGES IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF ITALIAN JOURNALIST HELD IN AFGHANISTAN

A United Nations human rights expert today issued a strong appeal for the release of Italian journalist Daniele Mastrogiacomo and his aides, who are reportedly being held captive by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

“Mr. Mastrogiacomo, who works for the daily “La Repubblica”, is a distinguished journalist known for his reports from different areas torn by fighting, in which he has chronicled the tragedy of war, its root causes and dire consequences with impartiality, compassion and a great sense of professional responsibility,” said Ambeyi Ligabo, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, in a statement.

India's ruling Congress party denounced on anti-conversion law

Bangalore, India (ENI). Christian groups have condemned the Indian National Congress, which heads the national ruling coalition government, after the enactment of anti-conversion legislation in northern Himachal Pradesh state, which the Congress party also rules. Christian leaders in recent weeks have sent protest letters to Sonia Gandhi, president of the Congress party and chairperson of the federal government's United Progressive Alliance coalition.

This followed the passing of an anti-conversion bill by the state legislature in December. The law was fully approved in February by the federally appointed state governor.

UNICEF SEEKS ENTRIES FOR CHILDREN’S TELEVISION AWARD ON AIDS AWARENESS

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the International Academy of Television Arts & Sciences called for entries for the 2007 International Children’s Day of Broadcasting (ICDB) award honoring broadcasters for programming best reflecting the theme Unite for Children, United against AIDS. Submissions will be judged on not only the quality of work, but also for broadcasters’ dedication to bolstering participation by youth in media, in connection with the theme Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS, which is the name of a campaign launched in 2005 by UNICEF, the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and other partners to alert the world to the fact that children are missing from the global AIDS agenda.

SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS FIGHTING POVERTY REQUIRES INTERNATIONAL AID, NATIONAL EFFORT

Emphasizing the importance of reaching global anti-poverty goals, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said this will require international support coupled with national efforts, citing the example of his native Republic of Korea.

The Economic and Social Council is putting on an event whose theme is “Eradicating Poverty and hunger- Joining forces to make it happen”. This event is taking place on 2 April 2007 from 9:30 a.m.- 1 p.m. at the ECOSOC Chamber in the United Nations HQ. In preparation for this year’s first Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council on the theme of “Strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development” an informal preparatory meeting will be held at UN Headquarters in New York on 2 April 2007. The event will be chaired by **H.E Mr. Dalius Čekuolis**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the

United Nations and President of ECOSOC. An opening address will be delivered by **H.E. Mrs. Asha-Rose Migiro**, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, and a keynote address will be made by **Mr. Wang Zhongyu**, President of the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AESCSI).

The DPI/NGO Section is holding an event entitled

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Opens for Signature (30 March) **15 March 2007 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.** at the Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium **Background**

Information: On 13 December 2006, the General Assembly adopted the first new human rights treaty of the twenty-first century. Adopted without a vote, the Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities guarantees the same rights to disabled people currently allowed to the rest of the population. It recognizes persons with disabilities as rights holders and active members of society

60th Annual DPI/NGO Conference

Climate Change: How It Impacts Us All

United Nations, New York, 5-7 September 2007

United Nations, NY, March 2007 - More than 2000 Non-governmental Organization (NGO) representatives and other civil society partners from more than 90 countries are expected to gather at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 5-7 September 2007, to discuss ways and means for strengthening collaboration between local communities and global institutions. They will meet during the 60th Annual DPI/NGO Conference, entitled *Climate Change: How It Impacts Us All*. The three day gathering of NGOs is organized by the Department of Public Information (DPI) in partnership with the NGO/DPI Executive Committee and the participation of its associated NGOs as well as NGOs which have consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

The Conference aims to build on what has already been accomplished by greater NGO and civil society participation in many of the debates taking place at the United Nations. This year, an international network of climate scientists has concluded for the first time that global warming is “unequivocal.” Human activity is the cause, “very likely” responsible for most of the rise in temperatures on the planet since 1950. The report was released in February 2007 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a joint venture between two UN agencies: the World Meteorological Organization and the UN Environment Program. Unless we act now, there is a great risk that the earth’s environmental systems will cross a “tipping point” of no return.

