

INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST NEWS

International Humanist and Ethical Union

June 2006
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Humanism and Education Nepal: Birth of a Secular State

INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST NEWS



June 2006

IN THIS ISSUE

News	3
Education Sonja Eggerick	4
Outgoing President's Report Roy Brown	5
We Must Make a Fist Sonja Eggerickx	6
Putting Ideals to Work: The Ethical Culture Fieldston School Howard Radest	7
SummerHill School Michael Newman	8
The Humanist Institute Robert Tapp	9
Nepal: Birth of a Secular State Babu Gogineni	11
Laicité in the Democratic Republic of Congo Yav Katshung Josep	14
Global Bioethics Conference Ana Lita	16
Why Markets in Non vital Human Organs should be Legalised James Stacey Taylor	17
But the Logic is Not Always Right Sonja Eggerickx	19
USA – A Civilisation in Decline Norwegian Humanist Leaders	20
Proposed Concordat Violates Rights in Slovakia Jenoff van Hulle	21
The Hirsi Ali Affair: A Scandal for Europe Caroline Fourest	22
IHEYO Conference	22
IHEYO in 2005 Gea Meijers	23
Esperanto and Humanism Dominique Simeone	24
Governance in NGOs Suresh Lalvani	25
Islam at the Human Rights Commission Roy Brown	26

Front cover: A Sadhu, a Temple, Mount Everest and Protests in the Street in Nepal. Courtesy: Culture Focus. Back Cover: Unseating Vishnu.

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Views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the viewpoint of IHEU.

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From the Editor

Democrats applaud the fascinating developments unfolding in Nepal for the last two months. A people's movement with the strength of a tsunami struck the establishment with some very positive results: the Nepalese people are back in the saddle, women are assured 33% representation in all public positions, government will concentrate its energies on social development and safeguarding Human Rights, peace talks are being held with Maoist rebels, the autocratic King has finally been de-fanged, and Nepal has been declared a secular state (page 11). In an age where politicians and technocrats seem to consider people irrelevant, the reassertion of their sovereignty by the people of Nepal is of great significance.

The galaxy of bioethicists who gathered in April at the IHEU-Appignani Humanist Center for Bioethics to participate in its second annual conference is a testimony to the relevance of the Humanist view point in the field (page 16). New developments are taking place in the field, and we need to have our say. An efficient market in human organs may have a compelling logic and an appeal (page 17) – but only until the human factor is introduced into the argument (page 19).

IHEU's outgoing President Roy Brown presented to the IHEU's General Assembly a bilan of what the organisation achieved in the last three years (page 5). IHEU is truly an example of how much can be done with so few resources. After leading IHEU into newer directions for the last three years, Roy will continue to be active in IHEU as the Chairperson of its Growth and Development Committee. It is Growth and Development of organised Humanism that will be the focus of the new IHEU, and availability of funds and resources and training will be crucial. Happily, IHEU is entering into a new contract with HIVOS which will enable IHEU to contribute nearly USD 100,000 annually for International Humanist projects (page 15). This is but the first step. IHEU is aiming to get its member organisations actively involved in the emancipation of Dalits, or the so-called untouchables in the Indian sub-continent: this will be the theme of the next IHN.

Humanist education is the area of expertise of IHEUs new, and first, woman President Sonja Eggerickx (page 4). What is the role of Humanists in schooling and in creating leaders for society? Schools like Summerhill (page 8) play a vital role in providing alternative visions of education, as are schools more closely linked to the organised Humanist movement like the Ethical Culture Fieldstone School (page 7). We need schools too for creating a new generation of well informed Humanist leaders, a task that the Humanist Institute performs admirably (page 9). I am writing this from Kampala where IHEU is discussing Uganda Humanist Association's plans to start a Humanist School.

The primary task of the organised Humanist movement will however be to school society in the values of Humanism.

Babu Gogineni

INVITATION FOR ARTICLES

- IHN welcomes original, previously unpublished, non-academic contributions on subjects of interest to the worldwide community of Humanists. Articles should be around 1000 words.
- It is IHN's policy to use the word HUMANISM without adjectives or qualifications where the 'secular approach' is intended.
- IHN aims to be a source of reliable information – authors should ensure accuracy of facts and figures.
- Articles in IHN are widely reproduced or translated in various Humanist magazines all over the world. Articles submitted for consideration may not be submitted to other magazines before a decision is conveyed by IHN. A decision will be conveyed generally within three months of submission, but articles cannot be returned.
- Contributions should preferably be word processed and sent via email text, but not as attachments, because of virus complications. Photographs and illustrations are welcome.
- Contributors should include a complete address as well as a telephone and fax number where possible, along with a three-line biographical note.
- Contributors should note that articles published in IHN can be freely reproduced, but the IHN requires that the source and the author's name be acknowledged.

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News

Sonja Eggerickx is President of IHEU

Sonja Eggerickx was elected unopposed as the new President of IHEU at the General Assembly held in April in New York City. IHEU's first woman President, Sonja was also recently elected President of IHEU's Belgian member organisation UVV. Fluent in Flemish, French, German and English, Sonja edited the Flemish journal *Mores* for many years. Professionally Sonja is a Senior Schools Inspector.

Larry Jones (US) is now First Vice President and Rob Buitenweg (Netherlands) was re-elected as a Vice President at the General Assembly. Joining the IHEU Executive Committee is Roar Johnsen who was elected a Vice President. Roar has been active in the Norwegian Humanist Association since 1979 and is President of the Norwegian Humanist Association. Roar has participated in four IHEU Congresses, and has organised the successful Oslo 1986 IHEU World Humanist Congress. Professionally Roar is a consultant specializing in IT Service Management.

Outgoing President Roy Brown has since been elected Chairman of the IHEU's Growth and Development Committee which has a new member: Christer Stumark, the Chair of the Swedish Humanist Association.

The new Executive Committee now consists of:

Sonja Eggerickx (President), Larry Jones (First Vice President), Jack Jeffery (Vice President), Rob Buitenweg (Vice President), Roar Johnsen (Vice President), Roger Lepeix (Treasurer), Babu Gogineni (International Representative, ex-officio) and Suresh Lalvani (Director of Operations, ex-officio).

A Fund Grants Committee which is a Sub-Committee of the IHEU Executive Committee has been created with Larry Jones, Roar Johnsen and Roger Lepeix as members.

The Growth and Development Committee consists of:

Roy Brown (Chair), Babu Gogineni (Secretary), Larry Jones, Levi Fragell and Christer Stumark.

IHEU's GA set the stage for a radically new direction for the organisation as IHEU's future Growth and Development work would focus on South Asia and Africa where projects of significant size would be taken up directly or through IHEU's member organisations.

The GA thanked the New York Society for Ethical Culture for their generous hospitality, and accepted with thanks the invitation from the Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands to hold the next IHEU General Assembly in Berlin in 2007.

The Human Angle

A regular column by Babu Gogineni with commentary on, and analysis of, important international developments as well as events within the Humanist world has been introduced on IHEU's website. The latest article will be available on the homepage at www.iheu.org and the entire list of articles can be consulted online at www.iheu.org/humanangle. A select few articles will also be reproduced in International Humanist News.

The articles are free to reproduce either in the original or in translation, provided the source and the copyright are acknowledged.

Informations Humanistes Internationales

The first issue of the annual French language version of International Humanist News has been published in April 2006. The magazine addresses the growing need for Humanist literature in various francophone countries and builds a direct bridge between Humanists in those countries and IHEU.

With an Editorial Committee consisting of Sam Ayache, Christian Eyschen, Catherine Le Fur, Roger Lepeix and Roy Brown, and Babu Gogineni serving as Editor in Chief, this issue provides francophone readers with a selection of articles that have been published in IHN and includes

- a general presentation of IHEU
- main speeches and decisions from the 16th World Humanist Congress held in Paris in July 2005
- articles showing different aspects of IHEU activity

Please send your orders to the IHEU office at 1 Gower Street, London WC1E 6HD, UK (Telephone +44 (0) 20 7631 3170). Remember to provide your mailing address and include payment with your order. Cheques should be made payable to IHEU.

Costs including postage and packing are as follows:

- For one copy: ₣6 (£4)
 - For 5 copies: ₣25 (£16)
 - For 10 copies: ₣45 (£30)
- Three-year subscriptions:
 One copy per year: ₣15 (£10)
 5 copies/year: ₣70 (£45)
 10 copies/year: ₣125 (£83)



Defending Secularism

Nigerian Humanists' Anniversary Conference

IHEU member organisation Nigerian Humanist Movement will host an international conference to mark its 10th anniversary

Date: June 20th – 21st 2006

Venue: Banquet Hall, University of Benin, Edo State

Humanist leaders from around the world are expected to participate, including Norm Allen, African Americans for Humanism, Hugo Estrella, Center for Inquiry and Prof. Fadel Niang from Senegal. Babu Gogineni will represent IHEU at the Conference, and speak on the role of IHEU and its member organisations in defending Secularism worldwide.

President's Column

Education

I used to be a teacher. And I know that the ideal situation is when pupils attend school to learn. This may seem an obvious reason, but in practice it is different. This is true at least in the Western world, but I guess that kids are kids, youngsters are youngsters, anywhere in the world!

Of course, a lot of them do work and learn and succeed. Some of them are encouraged by their parents to succeed so that they can earn their own living. Others may have had no choice in the matter of the education they received. But in the pursuit of livelihood, it seems that in general the most important reason for obtaining an education is taking a back seat!

Education gives us knowledge to understand the world, to understand how to live together, to know what is going on... we can lose all our belongings in a fire, a war ... But what we learnt belongs to us, so we have to take care of it. I once heard an Auschwitz-survivor who said: 'they took everything but my mind; my thinking and my knowledge remained with me' and in this sentence you can find the ultimate reasons to learn, to educate oneself!

The Purpose of Education

Of course, the systems of education are very different throughout the world. And so is the content of what is learnt and what is taught in the context of the family or in the school environment. In some parts of the world children do not even learn to write or read properly; in other parts children have all the facilities. But even there a lot of them do not succeed, and we can still find people who are not capable of distinguishing facts from fiction, who are unable to use critical intelligence in their daily lives.

As Humanists we should keep in mind that every child has the right to go to school, to learn about society, about the origins of the world, about life, about differences between people, and about tolerance. We do have the obligation to create and sustain school systems where pupils are prepared to take up responsibilities for their own lives, and in everything they do.

Pupils can do this only if they learn well. Children are curious about the world, about life, about society: we have to teach them sciences so that they know that thunder and lightning is not a divine punishment; that the myths and stories about the origins of life are jewels in the history of human culture, trying to explain what was not known at the time, but no more than that. But we have to teach them practical skills: so they can read and understand contracts, laws, ... as otherwise we wouldn't know how to live with others, we wouldn't know how to react if we disagree.

A Humanist Education

A Humanist education will teach us how to respect others, how we have to listen to others, how we have to tolerate different opinions. It will help us understand how humans are part of a bigger world and therefore help us understand why we should respect nature and not destroy it for commercial reasons. Education means that we learn how to discuss, how to disagree, how to come to a compromise. It does not mean that we have to learn by heart the so-called holy texts, whatever their origins are! To make children recite by heart the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is stupid, and certainly so when they are punished if they make mistakes.



Sciences are a valuable tool in the struggle against witchcraft and superstition. It would be good to focus on this and to look for good didactic methods to teach them. The theories are important of course, but more important is the practice. And one should always remember to explain that science is a never-ending story, a continuing evolution ...

There is no necessity for all of us to become physicians, biologists, chemists, engineers ... It would already be a real progress if education provided children all over the world with the intellectual tools to understand the difference between illusion and reality! I do respect people who find comfort in a religion as long as they do not tell the others that their religion is the only truth, or that theirs is the only way of living a dignified life. It is not wrong to be amazed by the complexity of the world, nor to admire it. All we have to do is to encourage the curiosity to explore what is behind...

To learn about and understand the importance of learning is of the highest importance for Humanists. This is so because education is not enough – think of the religious schools where creationism is taught, or the Quranic schools where boys recite verses by heart in a language unknown by them. Our education should be to create open minds. We should never forget the wise saying: 'Minds are like parachutes, they only function when open'.

It is important to start with the young minds of the children. We must encourage them to explore. We must give them the tools, and we must teach them the importance of looking for and handling complex answers!

Thank You!

I would like to thank everyone who congratulated me on the occasion of being elected President of IHEU. Don't forget that IHEU is YOU.

Sonja Eggerickx

Report from Outgoing President Roy Brown

Presented to IHEU's General Assembly on 20 April 2006

IHEU's Mission

It is usual on these occasions for the President to report on the past year's activities, but since this is my last General Assembly as President, I thought I should perhaps review what IHEU has achieved during my watch, over the past three years.

IHEU has a three-fold mission:

- To represent the Humanist community internationally, and at institutions such as the United Nations.
- To organise thematic and regional conferences, and the triennial World Humanist Congress
- To help in the growth and development of Humanism and Humanist organisations around the world.

At the International Institutions

At the United Nations in New York we have a strong team, and last year one of our representatives, Matt Cherry, was elected president of the NGO group on freedom of religion and belief – the first non-religious person to hold the post. In Geneva, we have been well represented by a team of five at the Human Rights Commission (now replaced by the new Human Rights Council) and have been very active both in plenary sessions and in organising parallel conferences. At the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, after over 20 years of sterling service, Marius Dees de Sterio handed over the leadership of our team to Sylvia Geise, who has since been elected vice-president of the Council of Europe NGO liaison committee.

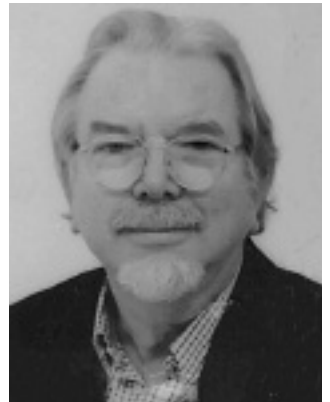
In November 2003, we hosted an important women's conference in London, and in 2004 we held the first GA meeting ever in Africa, in Kampala, Uganda, and launched the African Humanist Alliance. We also co-hosted two conferences at the Palais des Nations in Geneva in 2004 and 2005, in parallel with the annual meetings of the Human Rights Commission. And finally, in 2005, we held the 16th World Humanist Congress in Paris – a remarkable event, hosted by our French member organisation, the Federation Nationale de la Libre Pensee.

As well as our own conferences, Babu Gogineni, I and other members of the Executive Committee participated in numerous conferences, seminars and debates, including the 5th World Atheist Conference held in Vijayawada, India in January 2005.

Our Bioethics Center

When you look at the key tasks that IHEU has set itself, they all share a common theme: to increase awareness of Humanism and Humanist values around the world, and to bring a human-centered approach to the social,

political and economic debate. So one of our most important innovations over the past three years has been the opening of the IHEU-Appignani Center for Bioethics here in New York City. This coming weekend we will be hosting a major conference: "Is there a Global Bioethics?" which I know most of you here will be attending. It is a great tribute to Ana Lita, the Executive Director of the Center, that she has been able to bring together such an illustrious panel of speakers. It is also a great tribute to the vision of Lou Appignani and the Appignani Foundation that we have already been able to make an impact in this rapidly changing field.



Communications

Increasing awareness of Humanism and Humanist values is, above all, about communication. Our principal means of communication for many years has been International Humanist News. But when I joined the Executive Committee publication of IH News was, to be kind, somewhat sporadic. So one of the first steps we took was to appoint a professional editor, Latha Menon, to help us lick it into shape. Since then IH News has appeared regularly every quarter, with a wide range of articles from around the world, and with regular reports from our international delegations and from the youth organisation, IHEYO. For the past 18 months the editorship has been in the capable hands of Babu Gogineni. Although we are now in the age of the internet, not all of our member organisations, let alone individual members, have access to the internet. We decided that despite the very significant cost of producing a quarterly magazine, publication of IH News was worth the cost, and should continue. And I am delighted that thanks to our colleagues at the Libre Pensee Francaise, this month has seen the appearance of the first French language edition of Informations Humanistes Internationales.

Website

But we are indeed in the internet age. Our website, www.iheu.org, has undergone two important upgrades during the past two years. It is now very easy to use. It incorporates a Google search engine so any of the more than 2500 articles on the site can be easily located by title, author or content. The articles cover the past ten years of IHEU activity and, more importantly, the site is regularly updated. We are also now sending out a monthly e-news letter highlighting the events of the preceding month. The proof of the relevance of any web site is of course in

its readership. I am therefore happy to report that growth in our readership has been little short of phenomenal. The number of visitors to the website has quadrupled over the past year and last month we recorded 134,000 visitors. Furthermore, each visitor is now accesses two or three times as many pages as a year ago. We are currently running at a rate of over 10 million page reads a year.

Giving Credit

I want to thank the Executive Committee for the support they have given me, IHEU, and the cause of international Humanism over the past three years. And there is one person in particular I want to thank – a man without whose efforts and contribution hardly any of our recent success would have been possible. He, and his organisation, the Institute for Humanist Studies, have provided funding to enable us to employ a full-time director of operations, Suresh Lalvani; they have funded the expenses and operating costs for both our New York office and for our international representatives at the UN; and have provided a professional web-hosting service not only for IHEU but for a huge number of other Humanist organisations. Their motto is “You can achieve anything if you don't mind who gets the credit”. Well, it's time Larry Jones got the credit he so richly deserves. Larry, thank you very much indeed for all you have done, and continue to do for IHEU and the cause of Humanism!

Growth and Development

I come now to the issue of growth and development which, for me, is one of our most important responsibilities within IHEU. I would encourage all of you to look beyond your own local problems however overwhelming they may seem at times. I can assure those of you who live in the western democracies that your problems pale into insignificance compared to the difficulties faced by our brothers and sister in the developing world. Some of you are already doing a great deal and to great effect. The \$76,000 you so generously provided for the victims of the tsunami was a wonderful example. But to those organisations who have no current international activity, I would say this: Please seriously consider making a regular contribution to the development of Humanism in developing countries. When you have \$10,000 in the bank you won't miss \$100. But \$100 – or even \$10 – can mean the difference between life and death to someone in Africa or in parts of Asia.

If you would like to help either as an individual or through your organisation, any member of the growth and development committee: me, Larry Jones, Levi Fragell or Babu Gogineni will be happy to help you find a project or organisation that matches your objectives.

Finally, a heart-felt thank you for the support you have given me over the past three years, and that I know you will continue to give to my successor in the years ahead.

Roy Brown

Time To Make That Fist!

I want to read two quotes of Jaap Van Praag, from his speech in Amsterdam 1952:

If we are convinced of the necessity to shape humanism and ethical culture as a positive and constructive philosophy of life, we cannot do without an international institution that answers this conviction

And also:

One must first have a hand before making a fist. Our first task is to give international humanism hands now. (...) So our first duty is to develop our national movements and to gather the scattered sparks of humanism all over the world

We do have the hands, though not everywhere. It is perhaps time to make that fist!

We have to fight witchcraft, we have to fight religions where they try to control life and thinking for all ... think of the attack on Darwinism, not only by creationists pur sang, but also by the intelligent design people – they are far more dangerous to humanist, logical thinking! We have to show that we **do** have values ... IHEU should be a forum. Sharing ideas, discussing them and collecting information is one of our core activities. We – and I mean all our members all over the world – should be able to think, to communicate, to discuss the challenges on hand and draw conclusions.

Of course, solidarity is absolutely necessary, of course we do need your expertise and your financial support. Of course, only when we work together can we achieve whatever, wherever. IHEU needs all your help, so please do tell IHEU your needs, your expectations. Do tell us what is bothering you. Do tell us what you expect from us and what we can expect from you.

There are humanist awards and I cannot give one to each of you. But at the same time I will! Take it with you in your heart. It looks so normal that we meet every year but it isn't. Without your precious time and great commitment, IHEU wouldn't be that organisation that we need. Thank you for your commitment.

We miss this time Wolfgang Soos, delegate from our Austrian Member Organisation, the Austrian Freethinkers of Austria. He died not so long ago. I wanted to mention this because I sometimes miss the personal touch in our gatherings.

Of course humanists should be rationalist but please: don't forget to be happy and laugh! Emotions are important! It may be good to remember always that we are human beings, with reason **and** emotions.

Text of Sonja Eggerickx's acceptance speech at the IHEU General Assembly after her election as President of IHEU

Putting Ideals To Work: The Ethical Culture Fieldston School

Howard B. Radest

The School

For 12 years, from 1979 to 1991, I had the honor and the responsibility of directing the Ethical Culture Fieldston School. Now retired and living in South Carolina, I do manage to keep up with what is happening. For example, when I left, computers were just becoming a regular part of the curriculum. Today, they are as necessary as books and laboratories and as omnipresent. With new needs today's School is in the midst of a building program that will provide new opportunities for younger teen-agers in 7th and 8th grades in what we call in the US a "middle school."

Located in Manhattan opposite Central Park and in Riverdale (the Bronx) where the city touches the suburbs, the School serves more than 1500 students from 4 year olds through high school graduation or what in the US is called pre-kindergarten though 12th grade. Students come from many ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds. A large and well-trained faculty of about 300 includes classroom teachers, specialists in the arts, sciences, the social sciences, and physical education. Just about all of the School's students go on to college.

The School is "private" or what is called here "independent." It receives no financial support from the state. It depends on tuition and fund raising for meeting its expenses. Fortunately, too, since its founding in 1878, thousands of generous and committed members of the Ethical Society, student's families, and alumni have contributed to a growing endowment whose income meets some but by no means all of the School's needs. Despite a multi-million dollar annual budget, maintaining high educational standards, offering the varied program that a modern school must, and meeting its costs was for me as for my predecessors and successors a continuing challenge. We managed but it was hard work.

Finally, the School is not "parochial" or as one might say in Europe, "confessional." To be sure, it reflects the Ethical Culture and Humanist tradition in which it was born. Of course, it has a commitment to democratic polity and to social service and social reform. But, it does not engage in doctrinal teaching, not even Humanist doctrinal teaching. Indeed, the diversity and variety of students, families, and staff is an educational resource and an expression of the ideals that led to the School's founding and that still guide its existence.

Felix Adler's Free Kindergarten

It was in 1878 that Felix Adler, the founder and pioneering leader of the Ethical Culture Society, established a "free kindergarten." Motivated by the needs of poor working families and by the emerging progressive tradition in education, this first step became within two years what was called "The Workingman's School." Over the next decades it grew grade by grade. It was among the first to provide science laboratories, art



Ethical Society School

studios, music and drama as well as traditional academic subjects. Discoveries in the psychological development of the child led to a more and more sensitive curriculum. By the 1890s, it would be fair to say that the Workingman's School (Fieldston would come later) was indeed a "model" of what education could achieve when attention was paid to how children grow and learn. And indeed, others did model themselves after its program.

In the early 1890s, many of the families in the Ethical Culture Society whose support had helped create the School complained that it was unfair for their children to be excluded simply because they were not "workingmen's" children. Consequently, the School changed its name and in part, at least, its mission. As a condition of the change, it was agreed that there would always be a significant scholarship program so that those who could not afford the school's fees could still attend.

Many experiments followed including an open-air school on the roof of the building, a summer camp, the organization of parent study groups, a teacher-training program, and an arts high school. In the 1920s, Adler who was nearing 80 and his colleagues conceived the idea of a new high school, one where students could benefit from a rigorous academic program and, at the same time, be active participants in the arts and sciences, in vocations, and, not least of all in school governance. With support from the Ethical Society and some of its wealthier members and with a grant from John D. Rockefeller Jr., the property in Riverdale was purchased, the school built, and opened in 1928. By the mid 1930's an elementary school was established on the site as well.

The School then, much as it does today, consisted of two pre-Kindergarten through 6th grade units, a middle school (Grades 7 and 8) as part of the Fieldston School and a high school (Grades 9-12). The roster of alumni is rich with individuals who have excelled in the arts, the theater, the sciences and in business and the professions as well. Adler's vision of educating "reformers," modified

by the realities of an urban industrial culture has been realized over and over again as the School passes its 130th birthday.

Continuing the Ethical Culture Tradition

To be sure, Ethical Culture Fieldston must live in a world of academic requirements, college admissions, balancing budgets, rewarding teachers, etc. It is no longer officially tied to the New York Ethical Culture Society. At the same time, it continues to reveal the mark of its founding and its tradition. Let me highlight three of them. First, the School from the earliest grades through the graduating year maintains an ethics teaching program, an ethics faculty, and includes regular ethics classes in the on-going schooling of every student. Second, in order to give reality to the ideas studied in the ethics classes and to the ideal of the School, every student in the middle and high school and every class in the elementary

schools is expected to perform regular community service. Students work in health care and social work agencies, community organizations, child-service programs, etc. Third, the School maintains a scholarship program costing several millions of dollars a year (about 15% of the annual budget) and supporting in whole or part the attendance of about one in every four students.

In short, the ideals of the reformer, of the workingman's school, and of the moral democrat live on in the School despite the pressures of a busy diverse society, the complexities of offering an inclusive modern curriculum that grows more complicated each year, the demands of the colleges, and the economics of a costly industrial society.

Howard Radest was Co-Chair of IHEU from 1975 to 1986 and is a leader of the Ethical Culture movement.

Summerhill School

Michael Newman

The School's Principles

As a teacher and a long time Humanist involved in the education debates of the last twenty years an important question to me is what would a school based on Humanist principles be like? Our state schools have the problems imposed on them of religious education and school assemblies that are supposed to be of a mainly Christian nature. And our education system, far from being a planned and designed affair has been inherited from the past of class distinction, testing and classifying children and training them for work. In many ways the language of the education debates now has lost its grounding in philosophy, the question of why we teach and learn, and instead flounder with questions of efficacy, measurement and effectiveness.

A.S. Neill created Summerhill School in 1921. He had been a journalist and a teacher. The school he created was international, at a time between the wars when there was a lot of anger towards Germany. The school was mixed and had a public philosophy of seeing sexual play as a natural part of child development. It had no religious instruction although there were lessons in history and philosophy, as well as the usual academic subjects. The basis of the school was to give space to children to develop and learn; to allow them to have responsibility for themselves and their community. The children could choose to attend lessons or not. They met to create or change the school laws, and to respond to daily problems such as stealing or name-calling. Decisions were made through a direct democracy, everyone, a child of six to Neill himself, had one vote.

Summerhill is based on the idea that children learn hatred, prejudice, intolerance and obedience from the adult authority figures and institutional structures around them. It has a positive view of human beings, as animals naturally caring, inquisitive, playful and loving. That these qualities are destroyed or inhibited to fulfil adult expectations of what children should be like and



Summerhill

what they should become. Religion, as the most powerful institution that creates an authority over the individual and requires obedience to the messages of its God (s) and/or prophet(s), is one of the greatest threats to the development of the child. Parents and teachers, who see their role as active moulders of the child are also a threat.

Is this Humanistic?

The question remains, is this humanistic? I think the concept that we are freethinking individuals who create our values through social interaction within a community, through empathy with others, through acting as moral agents is a fundamental principle of Humanism. That there should be no external authority arbitrarily imposing values on us that we must be obedient to, even replacing God and the priest with the mother and father, is not only an anarchistic concept but a Humanist one.

Summerhill is an extreme example. It was set up partly to show the world that a school based on children's rights would not only survive but would allow

children to develop as moral, self-respecting, happy people who actively take part in their communities. It is ironic that now, some 85 years later, the UN, UNESCO, the European Commission, countries around the world, including the UK with its 'citizenship education' are exploring giving children rights, of the importance of children participating in their communities, of children developing values by being given the responsibilities that cannot be divorced from rights.

Summerhill students are actively taking part in the present debates. Reminding both adults and children that there is no need for a God, or Ten Commandments, or a central value of obedience for human beings to develop as respecting social animals.

What if Children had Rights?

I urge the Humanist community and its organisations to recognise the importance of places like Summerhill.

There are similar schools throughout the world, and to join our campaign to have them respected, researched and protected. Without them how else will we and our children answer the questions "what if children had rights?"

I know there are Humanists who have a negative view of humans, and they will aggressively disagree with Summerhill and what it represents. My response is that our conception of ourselves is a part of what we are. Children will behave and see themselves partly as the system they are within treats them. My one hope is that the 'negative' view of our species does not control our schools ... For they will ultimately and fatally 'prove' themselves right.

Michael Newman works at Summerhill School and is a Humanist activist.

The Humanist Institute

Robert Tapp

Fifteen members of the Adjunct Faculty of The Humanist Institute gathered in New York City to critique each other's papers on Education. The intent was to publish volume 17 of Humanism Today, a series that began in 1985. Robert Tapp writes about the important work of the Humanist Institute.

North American Committee for Humanism

North American Committee for Humanism
In 1982 individual Humanists from North America's major competing Humanist organizations formed the North American Committee for Humanism with Sherwin Wine as the founding president. A major outcome of this meeting was building an educational venture.

The Humanist Institute, with Howard Radest as founding dean, began a three-year post-graduate curriculum for leaders and spokespersons that would involve intensive study and coming together 3 times each year. Over 100 students have graduated by 2006. The assumption was that recapturing common heritages would increase cooperation. Since that 1982 founding, Humanistic Judaism, Ethical Culture, and the Center for Inquiry have all instituted programmes that draw from the same student pool.

A necessary aspect of the Institute was the recruiting of an adjunct faculty to mentor and participate in classes. From the beginning, this faculty took on the responsibility of being a think-tank to develop the Humanist traditions and address contemporary problems. An annual colloquium was the result. In 1985, the first volume of their series appeared. Subsequent volumes have addressed ethics, aesthetics, the sciences, education, the search for meaning, New Age thinking, postmodernism, the status of reason, multiculturalism, ecohumanism, the fate of democracy, and bioethics. The first 13 volumes may also be read online at www.humanistinstitute.org. Subsequent volumes have been published in hardcover by Prometheus Books. Tables of contents are on the web site.

The 2005 Colloquium

Looking around and ahead at the 2005 colloquium, the faculty decided that it was time to revisit the current educational situation in the United States. Many changes had been instituted in five years of conservative government. In particular, the pragmatic tradition of John Dewey had been a primary target for the political right. The allied religious right had renewed efforts to overcome a series of court decisions that upheld separation of church and state. And, at university levels, varied forms of postmodernism and multiculturalism had attacked the Enlightenment tradition.

Polls showed a vast popular ignorance of national history in terms of the secular values of the "founding fathers" and the reasons for their attempt to separate the new government from domination by any of the varied religions of the time. Also evident was an even vaster ignorance of world history.

In the more popular spheres, entertainment had increasingly come to dominate media. Printed newspapers were losing out to television, and in the attempts to compete, were becoming trivialized.

A clear signal of these changes was the success of fundamentalist versions of Christianity. Mainstream religions were losing members and being replaced by megachurches that, while theologically fundamentalist, attracted membership by downplaying theology and narrowing ethical issues to abortion and homophobia. Having lost the struggle against evolution in the courts, conservative religionists exploited popular scientific ignorance by working within local and state school boards. The result has been a growing scientific illiteracy.

Although racially-segregated schools were ruled illegal



in Brown vs. Board of Education in 1948, the historic patterns have been preserved by the fact of residential segregation coupled with an emergence of “charter” schools that used public funds to create schooling for special clientele. Along with this, private “academies” were created, usually with sectarian linkages, to preserve the older patterns. Most effective of all was the “white flight” from many inner cities that weakened chances for serious multicultural schooling and, equally serious, undercut the tax base necessary for truly democratic education. Added to these negative factors was a long-unacknowledged dropout rate for Native American, Hispanic, and African American minority youth.

These sociological factors link to the financial picture: under-funding for innercity schools, high teacher turnover, many teachers with emergency credentials and under-preparation, increased bureaucratic staff and salaries, large classes, high cost special-education costs. Children of millions of illegal immigrants are entitled to schooling but represent only small additions to tax revenues.

Politicization of Public Education

Politicization of Public Education

Equally depressing is the politicization of public education fostered by a conservative government. An important slogan of the Children’s Defense Fund, “No child left behind,” has been turned into a poorly-supervised competition for scores on uniform tests – despite all the evidence around the world of the deadening effects of test-based teaching. An example of the ideologized thinking has been the slogan used to weaken evolution as a foundation of biology. From the President down, critics have called for “teaching the controversy.” Darwin is only controversial to those who, for sectarian reasons, support creationism and “intelligent design.”

More recently, as test data shows US students performing below most other developed countries on math and physics, we have seen crash programs to recruit teachers in those areas.

Realization of these complicating factors appeared in every discussion during the adjunct faculty’s weekend meeting. Our normal process each year had been to

make revisions in the papers we had drafted for the critique sessions and then publish. As we discussed each other’s work this time, however, we became aware not only of gaps in our coverage but of many instances where we had to review and update date and background. We adjourned with the plan to meet again in one year with more papers, more participants, and more research. The topic is too crucial, and the need too great, for hasty or incomplete coverage.

Our writing so far has addressed the crucial role of universities in developing new knowledge and building ever-more-critical and objective views of the national past. The structures of higher education are the training ground for cultural and political leaders. They are also the place where we develop teachers of our young. Humanists must continue to play a central role in protecting academic freedom and insisting on vital and comprehensive education at all levels. Continuing pressures to vocationalize schools must be resisted. This means, as well, recruiting bright and committed students to become teachers.

Technological education in such developing countries as India and China are already testing the competitiveness of US students. Humanists will want to insist upon the use of technology to expand human rights. This will mean attention to moral education at all levels.

The coming year will tell whether The Humanist Institute, through its adjunct faculty, can produce an educational manifesto that restores and expands the values of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Reason, science, freedom, responsibility, equality, happiness, democracy as universal goals – in this world and in this life.

Powerful forces array against that vision, and only universal education can tip the balance. The alternative – absolutism based on arrogance and ignorance, submission to authority based on violence, freedom and happiness for some self-chosen or divinely-anointed few. Those alternative have constituted most of the human past.

Robert B. Tapp is Dean Emeritus and Faculty Chair of The Humanist Institute.

Secular schooling – the way ahead

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Nepal: Birth of a Secular State

Babu Gogineni

For long the world's only Hindu Kingdom, Nepal recently declared itself secular. This is not just a symbolic move, but the culmination of a silent People's Revolution aiming to restore democracy and the rule of civilised law in the land. Babu Gogineni, who inaugurated the Humanist Association of Nepal in 1997 in Khatmandu, looks at the latest, exhilarating developments in the Himalayan Kingdom. Is a People's Democratic Republic far away? And will the People's Revolution last?

Royal Impunity

The current Nepalese monarch King Gyanendra assumed Nepal's throne on 4 June 2001 as the beneficiary of his brother King Birendra Shah's suspicious assassination. For almost five years since then it seemed as if the new King's illegal panchabali – sacrifice of a buffalo, a sheep, a goat, a duck and offerings of fruits – at India's Kamakhya temple for his, and his royal family's well being served its purpose. Otherwise, how could the notoriously aggressive Crown prince Paras go unpunished for his wayward behaviour and criminally irresponsible driving? More importantly, how could the businessman-turned-King steadily march his country towards an absolute monarchy without much international opprobrium?

In May 2002 he dissolved Parliament. In October 2002 he dismissed the pliable Prime Minister Deuba and his Council of Ministers for 'incompetence'. In the same month he postponed indefinitely the general elections that were to be held later that year. He has since appointed three governments on whim, and cynically and illegally sacked them all. On 1 February 2005, he imposed a state of Emergency in the country invoking Article 27(3) of the Nepalese Constitution which enjoins the King to "preserve and protect this Constitution by keeping in view the best interests and welfare of the people of Nepal."

Gyanendra did not hesitate to destroy Nepal or Nepal's Constitution in order to 'protect' it! The Constitution that Gyanendra left in tatters had come into being in 1990 during the reign of the assassinated King Birendra Shah, and was the basis of the general elections of 1991, 1994 and 1999. Unfortunately, elections brought no political or economic stability and the country saw nine governments in 10 years. This period also witnessed a Maoist insurgency that threw economic life in Nepal into serious disarray, created a sense of fear and insecurity throughout the land, and gained control of nearly 80% of Nepal's territory. The violent activities of the insurgents, and savage reprisals by the Royal Nepalese Army have caused the death of an estimated 13,000 Nepalese so far.

At the time of his coup in 2005, Gyanendra pretended that he wanted to bring back peace to the kingdom. Nothing of that sort happened, and the situation only got worse since when he usurped executive power. Even though he revoked the illegal Emergency on 29 April 2005, his despotic rule continued. His was a tyrannical regime marked by hopeless governance, incompetent administration and unaccountable actions. Intimidation

of Human Rights activists, restrictions on the media, and brutal repression by the Royal Nepalese Army became the ingredients of every day life.

Red Alert in Shangri-La

The developments in Nepal did not go completely unnoticed. In early 2005 the Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontières posted a red alert on the Human Rights situation in Nepal. In July 2005, 8 UN experts described the situation as "extremely serious" because of secret detentions and widespread use of torture in the country. In October 2005 Human Rights Watch raised the alarm over a new Code of Conduct introduced for the media: under this new Code, FM radio stations were banned from broadcasting either news or any criticism of the royal family. Radio Sagarmatha the first community radio in South Asia was shut down by the government on rumours that it was going to broadcast an interview with Prachanda, the supreme leader of the Maoists. As a result of the Government's new policy, Kantipur FM, the country's largest FM radio news network, closed: ironic again since it was Nepal which pioneered Asia's community radio revolution. In November 2005 the government introduced another Code of Conduct, this time targeting "social organizations." The Code established a government-appointed Social Welfare Council to 'oversee' the work of NGOs and made all employees of NGOs criminally responsible even for activities that they were not directly involved in. The Code also barred NGO staff from having political affiliations. Hina Jalani, a U.N. Special Rapporteur, expressed serious alarm over the future of human rights workers in Nepal, as the Code's provisions were not in tune with international legal protections for freedom of expression and freedom of association.

That Nepal was a member of the then active UN Human Rights Commission made no difference to her domestic commitment to Human Rights.

If in the first quarter of 2006 it appeared that there was a relaxation in Gyanendra's relentless assaults on the people of Nepal, it was because – on the advice of astrologers – he had gone on a long diplomatic tour to Burundi and South Africa – two countries Nepal has no real diplomatic links with. At the end of this trip there was also to be a two-month holiday for His Highness, away from the Capital and 'close to the water'. Gyanendra's advisors were sure that this would assure the continued happiness of the King.

19 Days that Shook Nepal

But the Janandolan – the people's movement clamouring for restoration of democracy – forced the superstitious despot to cut short his holiday and rush back to Khatmandu on 12 April 2006. Discontent and tremendous anger that was simmering for many years in the hills and the plains of the kingdom exploded, and several hundreds of thousands of Nepalese defied Gyanendra's ineffective curfews and shoot-at-sight orders to gather in Khatmandu and in other towns to express their democratic solidarity with each other and to demand a restriction in the powers of the King. The Seven Party Alliance made of political parties demanding

restoration of democracy and Parliament, as well as the outlawed Maoists were behind the protests. And in just 19 days, the King was brought to his knees.

Gyanendra was forced to restore Parliament and to invite the Seven Party Alliance of political parties to name a Prime Minister. The King was refused admission to the very Parliament he had restored. As a further blow, the octogenarian royalist Prime Minister B.P. Koirala who was the choice of the Seven Party Alliance refused to join Gyanendra's Raj Parishad or Royal Privy Council. At its first meeting, the 205-member Parliament unanimously proclaimed that the King would be stripped of his powers and that the military would henceforth be brought under civilian authority – the King would no longer be the Supreme Commander of the Armed forces. The Royal Nepalese Army which in recent times was supplied with 20,000 M-16 rifles from Washington, 20,000 Insas rifles from Delhi, 100 helicopters from London and 30,000 Minimax guns from Belgium was renamed Nepal Army. His Majesty's Government has been renamed Nepal Government. The National Anthem which comically hails "May glory crown you, courageous Sovereign" and which equates worship of the King to patriotism was scrapped. The King will henceforth be subject to taxation, will no longer enjoy legal immunity and will be unable to name his heir to the throne.

Rejecting the King as the symbol of Nepalese unity, the people and Parliament broke the link between the State and the Religion in whose name the King reigned. Nepal, the world's only Hindu state, was declared a secular country by Parliamentary proclamation.

In just 19 days, the people of Nepal – one of the poorest peoples on the globe – rose to inspire all the democratic forces on the globe. They demonstrated how a peaceful revolution could be conducted, and how the people could reclaim their sovereignty against all odds.

Shameful and Pathetic Reactions

In this their hour of glory the people of Nepal did not have the governments of the US, the European Union or India cheering by their side, united as these governments were in their anti-Maoist solidarity. Like the cunning King, the foreign powers failed to understand either the aspirations of the people or their demands. They continued to assert that Nepal's welfare depended on the twin pillars of the monarchy and Parliament. Their hollow analysis did not explain that the monarchy was not a condition of the welfare of the Nepalese people.

Narayanhi Palace responded to these rapid developments by organising 5 sacrifices at the Dakshinkali temple in Nepal, aimed at increasing the strength of the worshipper and sapping the power of his foes.

Until recently ordinary Nepalese were not allowed to even look at the King's face. And now this institution is reduced to resorting to black magic to save itself! What a pathetic fall for the King of Nepal who was propped up as the embodiment of Lord Vishnu for the last 238 years when Nepal was in the grip of the Shah and the Rana dynasties!!

Hindu Kingdom in Nepal

The seeds of Nepal's institutional problems were sown in 1768 when King Prithvi Narayan Shah, King of the Gorkha principality who unified Nepalese territory by conquest, proclaimed Nepal to be the 'pure land of

Hindus' and 'a garden of four varnas and thirty-six Jats'. This official patronage of Hinduism and its primitive social structure was even more rigidly enforced during the time of the Ranas who ruled from 1846 to 1951. Jung Bahadur Rana who founded the Rana regime is quoted by Krishna Hachhethu in *Nepal: Confronting Hindu Identity* as saying "In this age of Kali, this is the only country where Hindus rule". He proclaimed the Civil Code of 1854 which provided a legal footing for the ancient Vedic organisation of society, and the customary practices of different jats. The dharmasastras – the Hindu texts – were the basis of law for nearly one hundred years.

Rana's 1854 Civil Code classified people into three broad categories in the following descending order:

- (a) Tagadhari (sacred-thread wearing, twice born castes like the Brahmans and Chhettris)
- (b) Matwali (alcohol drinking castes and ethnic groups) and
- (c) Sudra (impure but touchable) and Acchut (impure and untouchable castes).

Developments in the 1950s

In 1950 when King Tribhuvan and his family were in exile for a few months, the Present King Gyanendra – then a three-year old child and Tribhuvan's youngest grandson – was appointed King – but this was not recognised by any international powers. When Tribhuvan returned to Nepal, the 1951 the Interim Government of Nepal Act was passed. There was no mention here of Nepal being a Hindu state. Nor was Nepal declared a Hindu state in the Constitution of 1959.

However, when King Mahendra seized power from his father King Tribhuvan through a royal coup in 1960, he ended the multi-party democratic system and introduced a party-less panchayat system. The Panchayat Constitution of 1962 declared Nepal as a Hindu state, but thankfully the Civil Code of 1963 formally withdrew the state's support to the Hindu caste system.

When the 1990 Constitution was adopted, it reaffirmed Nepal's identity as a Hindu state closely associated with the monarchy. Cow slaughter was banned, and the absolute ban on religious conversion was reconfirmed. Safeguarding the tradition of Hindu supremacy and promotion of the Sanskrit language was considered a duty of the state.

The Nepal-India Hindu Connection

While Nepal is a small kingdom, neighbouring India has 800 million Hindus, whose far right leaders the King wooed: indeed the head of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (the World Council of Hindus) which terrorised the minority Muslim communities in India was one of the first guests of the King after he took over Nepal. The 7th World Hindu Conference, held in Gorakhpur (India) in February 2003, passed a resolution to protect the Hindu Emperor in Nepal – and when Nepal was declared a secular state, it seemed as if there was more sadness expressed in India than in Nepal. Jaswant Singh, leader of India's Hindu right-wing political party BJP and former minister of External Affairs in the Central government, spoke with anguish: and said that he felt diminished by these developments. Those who are not deceived by the BJP's public profession of 'positive secularism' might notice that the BJP claims it wants secularism in India, but that they would not want it in

neighbouring Nepal!

Hinduism has done Nepal no good. Nepal is one of the poorest nations in the world, ranked 140th in the 177 nations listed in the Human Development Index with one of the worst social hierarchies existing. The rigid social structure in Nepal is underpinned by Hinduism. The Dalits (untouchables) and the adivasis (hill tribes) live in such atrocious social and economic conditions that their plight is similar to that of the untouchables in India a hundred years ago. Nepal continues to be the world's largest exporter of (Hindu) women to neighbouring countries for prostitution. In this nation Hindus constitute 80.6% of the population while Buddhists constitute 10.30%. The rest are the janajatis – minorities like tribes people, Christians and Muslims, all of who are marginalized.

The Hindu state that came into existence in Nepal was an abhorrent one.

The Long Trek Ahead

Half-baked western scholarship explains the problems of South Asia as being a result of fatalism. The people of Nepal gave the lie to this by becoming masters of their destiny. But their job has only just begun. Now the task of nation building needs to be taken up in right earnest.

Abject poverty remains the plight of a majority of Nepalese: over 9 million out of the 26 million Nepalese live on less than the equivalent of one dollar a day. Half the population does not have access to either clean water or to electricity.

The restored Parliament's resolution to reserve 33% of all Government posts for women should be turned into a law as soon as possible – neighbouring India is still unable to move a similar law through Parliament, demonstrating how progressive the political forces in Nepal are. Some 118 laws have been identified by a Nepalese rights group as violating women's rights. These must be scrapped or modified as appropriate.

Peace must be re-established, for which the Army must be reigned in, and the Maoists have to be integrated into the mainstream. Unless peace is made with the Maoists, satisfactory elections to a Constituent Assembly and to a new Parliament cannot be guaranteed. The new Cabinet has dropped the charges of terrorism against the Maoists and Interpol has been asked to withdraw arrest warrants and red corner alerts against them. But alarming reports are coming in of the Maoists failing to observe their ceasefire, and making new threatening demands for unofficial taxes from industry. Nepal is a nation heavily dependent on tourism and foreign aid, and has hardly any industrial activity. If the situation prevails that would be disastrous for an economy that is already in a bad shape.

The insurgents wanted a secular republic and their interim goal is a bourgeois democratic system. The secular state has been secured. At a recent Hindu ceremony in which the King participated, there were 1000 Nepalese. On the same day the Maoists held a peaceful rally that attracted over 180,000 people. It is obvious the King is on his way out and the political forces should respect the will of the people.

The Supreme Court

Nepal's other institutions have to be strengthened too – for example the courts have a progressive role to play in

modernising Nepal's society. Except when in January 2005 the Supreme Court refused to entertain a bid to restore Parliament, the Supreme Court has impressed in many ways:

- On August 10, the Supreme Court stayed the government's order closing down the private radio station FM 91.8.
- In September 2005 the Court ruled that the practice of keeping women in cow sheds during menstruation be stopped.
- In November 2005 the Supreme Court ruled that women under 35 years of age could apply for passports without permission from parents or husbands.
- In December 2005 the Supreme Court asked the government to scrap a discriminatory rule that required women to seek permission from family members if they intended to sell inherited property. The Supreme Court also asked the government to review the provision under which a daughter has to return any inherited property to her paternal home after getting married.

A number of other features bode well for Nepal in the period ahead: the existing rules prohibit political parties named after religions or castes. This means that it should be possible to encourage secular parties whose agenda would be people's development rather than exploiting differences in society. The new government should take care that now that Nepal is no longer a Hindu state, the Christian and Muslim evangelical vultures from abroad do not land with their sack loads of money to exploit the people's ignorance and convert them to their own brand of superstitions. The government should introduce educational programmes for all Nepalese which will impart modern knowledge and cultivate critical intelligence.

Jab Taaj Uchale Jayenge

Above all, the triumphant people of Nepal have demonstrated that they can be creators of their own history. They have shown themselves to be capable of creating a silent and responsible revolution: they will be both the architects and the custodians of the new Nepal they desire. And today, as Kanak Mani Dixit, the respected editor of Himal magazine, wrote from detention, they can sing in Urdu with Faiz Ahmed Faiz (the Pakistani poet who defied the dictator Zia ul Haq of his own country):

**Hum dekhenge ...
Jab takth giraye jayenge
Sab taaj uchale jayenge***

*** We shall (live to) see ...
When the thrones will be demolished
When the crowns shall be toppled**

We, the rest of the world, shall see how, once the song and dance and jubilation is over, the rejuvenated Nepal will handle the task of nation building. As of now, it appears that Nepal is on the right track.

Laïcité in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Yav Katschung Joseph

Union of Three Principles

Laïcité is the union of three principles: the liberty of conscience, the equal treatment of all citizens irrespective of their beliefs, and the idea that the law should have no other objective than the common good. Like in other countries, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is governed by a number of texts, the most basic of them being the Constitution. Article 4 of the transitional constitution of the DRC declares that the state is independent, sovereign, indivisible and secular.

Constitutionally, the DRC is secular and laïcité is also the 1st article of the proposed new Constitution which would govern the 3rd Republic from 2006. While these constitutional provisions determine and assure the freedom to choose one's religious affiliation, the separation of religion and state in DRC is a real challenge.

Laïcité in action: an example

As per the decree issued on 5 July 1948, couples who contracted an exclusively religious marriage could get it recognised officially by fulfilling the necessary formalities, and obtain a legal status for their previously contracted religious marriage. Since 1997, the family code through its article 330 has emphasised the civil character of marriage. Henceforth, the code specified, purely religious marriages would not be recognised by Congolese law. This step was taken keeping in view the principle of separation of Religion and State: the DRC being a secular state, it was necessary to dissociate the official rules concerning marriage, and the rules formulated in this regard by religious groups. Unfortunately, in practice some Churches continue to celebrate exclusively religious weddings. Worse still, for the past several years, the proliferation of sects in Congolese society has been increasing, resulting in several negative developments. Many matrimonial homes are being destroyed because of revelations about some clergy men's activities. Adherents are being cheated and divine authority is frequently invoked for economic, financial and political ends.

Religious interference in politics

Since the official end to the war, and the setting up of a transitional government in 2003, the Church has once again taken on itself the task of being the moral guardian of the political powers. Organisations like the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (Cenco) and the Ecumenical Council of Congo (COE) today play a definitive role in the political affairs of the DRC. They invoke their supposed moral and political authority and claim that they are working within the framework of their institutions which they say have social and political responsibilities. They claim to be interlocutors for the general public – if not indispensable partners – vis a vis their interaction with the political authorities. The Churches affirm that they respect the principle of separation of the temporal and the spiritual as well as the secular nature of the state, while at the same time remaining an important actor in the nation's political life. They keep a watch on the defects and the deficiencies of the State in the social, educational and economic sectors. All this indicates how the Church implicates itself in

political and public affairs. As a consequence, several institutions are guided, or led, either directly or indirectly, by Church officials or their nominees, be it at the Independent Electoral Commission, the Senate, or the Truth and Reconciliation Committee etc.

The Future of Laïcité in the DRC

The draft Constitution which has been accepted at the referendum on 18 December 2005 and which will come into effect in 2006 proclaims the secular character of the DRC. But unfortunately, this Constitution curiously appears to be contrary to the very values and principles that it intends to promote. In fact, the Preamble as well as Article 74 of the Draft Constitution make explicit reference to God. On the one hand the people of Congo are to declare their responsibility "before God, the Nation, Africa and the World"; and any Congolese elected President of the Republic is expected to take the oath of office "solemnly in the name of God and the Nation" (article 74). On the other hand this same draft Constitution's 1st Article provides that "The DRC is a state governed by law, democratic and laic, and that all persons have the freedom of thought, conscience and religion". "Every person has the right to manifest his religion or his convictions, subject to respect for the law, for public order, for morality and for the rights of the others" (article 22).

Reading these different provisions in the draft constitution one notes a forced marriage between the noble idea of constructing the Republic around the concept of laïcité with the obligation for all future presidents of the Republic to accept their office in the name of God. This imposition of God on all Congolese leaves one perplexed. Such a step is injurious to the fundamental right of all persons to believe or not to believe. Even if we were to concede that the majority of the population is pious, it is an undisputable fact that not all Congolese are believers; amongst them we also find non-believers, agnostics, atheists etc. This, from the perspective of Human Rights and laïcité is discriminatory.

A secular regime ought to, ipso facto, imply that religion or faith should cease to be a tool or a criterion in the hands of the administration.. The proclamation of the principle of secularism ought to, in principle, bring in a clear distinction between political matters and religious beliefs, in order to render to all citizens the freedoms of thought, conscience and religion guaranteed by the draft constitution.

A Secularism proclaimed but not practised

Secularism in the Democratic Republic of Congo appears to be more a theoretical pursuit than a practical one. Even if it exists in legal texts, it is not encountered in the daily life of the Congolese and one could go to the extent of saying that secular culture is non-existent in the country. Even if the political slogans affirm that 'the DRC is a Secular country' and that 'There is no State religion'.

Yav Katschung Joseph is a Human Rights lawyer and Lecturer at the Faculty of Law, University of Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo.

King Leopold II and Congo



King Leopold II of Belgium (1835 – 1909) commissioned the explorer Henry Stanley to help him secure nearly 2 million square kilometers of Congo basin as his private estate. The world was desperate for Congo's rubber and along with this precious material Leopold's brutal army and administration also sapped the life blood of Congo's people.

In 1876 Leopold founded the International African Society which was the humanitarian front for his criminal activities. In 1884 when the European powers met to carve up Africa at a 14 delegation Conference in Berlin (only one of the 14 attendees had ever been to Africa!), Leopold called Africa "that magnificent African cake." Leopold was responsible for what Joseph Conrad once called 'the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience.'

Leopold sold his Congo Free State, to the Belgian state after perpetrating a holocaust whose victims are estimated to be 10 million Africans. When the Belgians finally left Congo in 1960 despite the fact that several missionaries established schools and hospitals, Congo had only 27 university graduates.

And in 2002 Belgium finally admitted its complicity in the assassination of the first Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba within months of his assuming office.



Democratic Republic of Congo in 2006

IHEU-HIVOS Cooperation

IHEU's Dutch Member Organisation HIVOS is an NGO and a Humanist Funding Agency whose work is supported by the Dutch government, the European Union, several foundations as well as the general public. HIVOS is one of the world's most respected development agencies.

With headquarters in the Hague, and regional offices in Costa Rica, Harare, Bangalore and Jakarta, HIVOS was founded in 1968 by IHEU member organisations the Dutch Humanist League and Humanitas, along with Vereniging Weezenkas (United Orphans' Fund).

In 2004 HIVOS gave 66 million Euros in all? 41% went to Civil Society Building and 29% to Direct Poverty Alleviation. Human Rights received nearly 12 million Euro, and Gender, Women and Development 8.6 million Euro. Africa received 20 million Euro and Latin America 18.5 million Euro while Asia received 15.8 million. A total of 825 organizations received support in 35 countries.

IHEU is pleased to report on recent, very encouraging discussions with HIVOS as regards future cooperation in the light of IHEU's new plans for Growth and Development.

During discussions that IHEU's International Representative Babu Gogineni has had with HIVOS Director Manuela Monteiro, it was agreed that HIVOS would explore ways in which HIVOS could help IHEU in its new growth strategy for organised Humanism in South Asia and Africa.

As a first step in this new phase of cooperation, a new three-year funding programme is being instituted by IHEU and HIVOS. Under this programme, HIVOS will make available to IHEU 75,000 Euro annually for the next three years. A maximum of 10,000 Euro will be available per project annually, and only organisations (and individuals exceptionally) from HIVOS-funding-eligible countries (mainly African, Asian and Latin American countries) will be able to apply for funding under this new programme.

Full details regarding this, as well as procedures for application will be announced soon on IHEU's website and through e mail alerts. Please register at www.iheu.org to receive the latest information by e mail.

Global Bioethics Conference

Ana Lita

The second Annual Conference on Global Bioethics was held on April 21-23, 2006 in New York. It was organized by the IHEU-Appignani Center for Bioethics in NYC and sponsored by Genetics Policy Institute and the Alden March Bioethics Institute of Albany. About 150 people attended the cocktail reception, among them UN missions, representatives of the IHEU member organizations from all over the world, diplomatic missions in the US, and humanist activists and academics. Approximately 70 people attended the conference sessions on Saturday and Sunday.

Taking a broad and cross-disciplinary approach to addressing medical and bio-technological issues in contemporary society, conference session topics included such topics as: stem cell research, genetic engineering and human dignity, reproductive and sexual rights of women, the United Nations as a forum for bioethics, ethical issues in infectious disease control, and the challenge of evolutionary theory.

Friday, 21 April 2006

Our keynote speakers at cocktail reception at the Turkish Consulate General were professors Art Caplan and Paul Kurtz.

Professor Art Caplan is one of the world's leading bioethicists, Paul Kurtz is one of the most successful Humanist leaders in the world. Prof. Caplan's address was an amalgamation of predictions and prophecies of controversies that lay over the horizon for bioethics and bioethicists – delivered in his trademark plain-speak, charismatic style that has made him the “natural” in the U.S. for media-outlet and public bioethics commentary. Caplan disclosed that a vaccine for cervical cancer would soon become available. Sounds like an unquestionably great advance in science, right? Not so, argues Caplan, who rightly noted a host of problem associated with this new drug. First, he says, there is the omnipresent problem of resource distribution and affordability; the new vaccine will cost \$ 200, if not more and may be unaffordable for the women who could benefit from it most. Public provision of the vaccine is an option in theory, but in fact would bankrupt most city and state departments of health. Likewise, there is the issue of making the vaccine available to women in the developing world, where cervical cancer plays a leading role in morbidity and mortality but whose citizens are least able to afford it. Caplan concluded by reminding the audience that bioethics must stay abreast if not ahead of science if bioethicists are to have any meaningful, practically useful contributions to make.

Saturday, 22 April 2006

The importance of being regional: in defense of the American federalist system of state experimentation as a model for bioethics: Professor Glen McGee made the first presentation by reviewing the developing area of investment and regulation by the U.S. states in biotechnology and medicine, and arguing that ultimately, while certain matters such as abortion rights are better

served by debates at the national level, there is room for regionalism both political and moral in the world of bioethics in the U.S. and the world.

The first panel discussion of the conference was an invigorating debate between Professors Marcy Darnovsky, James Hughes, and Steven Levick regarding the future intersections between biotechnology and society. The subsequent panel discussion was almost entirely a contrast between Hughes and Darnovsky's opposite views. The former is an optimist about trans-humanist science and the latter a pessimist about its propensity to detract attention from today's real world problems.

Following Darnovsky, Professor Adrienne Asch argued in her talk that foreseeable reproductive technologies, e.g. those centered on the ability to select for or against certain genetic traits, may in fact cause harm to families and societies by creating undue and unwarranted expectations of children conceived by such artificial means. Though explicitly discouraging any sort of ban on these technologies, Asch tried to carve out a middle ground – a world where healthcare professionals highlight and potentially discourage use of such technologies to minimize perverse expectations and thwart harm to children, their parents, and society.

The same day of the conference, Professor Bernstein analyzed the recent UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights within a social contract framework, particularly focusing on the inadequacies of the declaration with respect to the moral demands of Rawls' theories of distributive justice and the obligations of modern developed states to assist lesser developed countries in their quest to secure and maintain a basic portfolio of human rights.

An excellent panel on women's rights ended the first day of the conference, Marin Gillis, Taina Bien Aime, Laura Purdy and Bonnie Spanier were the leading figures of the panel.

Professor Laura Purdy talked about a new “culture of life” imposed by the Religious Right on the U.S. It holds that intentionally killing humans is always wrong, except perhaps in self-defense. It precludes euthanasia, abortion, embryonic stem cell research, although not capital punishment, war, or weakening of life-saving public health measures. It also requires that any sex act be open to producing new life, ruling out contraception. Implementing this principle is leading the Religious Right to promote abstinence-only sex education, and to limit information about and access to contraception (condoms, in particular), with harmful consequences to women, gay men, and children.

Professor Spanier's focus was on U.S. government efforts to curtail reproductive and sexual rights particularly by using bogus science to support the far right's political position against women's autonomy.

Marin Gillis talked about how religious conservatives have sponsored “disinformation campaigns” regarding

“Plan B” which prevents a fertilized egg from implanting. Pharmacists don’t deal well with ambiguity. Their profession is based on being precisely accurate. Legislators in some states are changing the rational landscape by legally defining pregnancy as conception. Even when facts and definitions are on your side, Dr. Gillis argues, new findings in science can change the landscape of that ethical debate in the future.

Taina Bien-Aime, Executive Director of Equality Now, an international human rights organization that works for the protection of the rights of women and girls, gave a graphic list of horrendous abuses faced by women around the world today. Examples of genital mutilation, rape within marriage, and wife obedience laws result of increasing social restrictions placed on women in recent years. These examples do not seem to concern the United States that much which has not even signed on in support of international laws against the abuse of children.

Sunday, April 23, 2006

James Stacey Taylor argued against one of the most common complaints that is offered against the view that we should solve the shortage of human transplant organs by legalizing markets in them (see accompanying article).

The third important panel discussion was held on Sunday, whose protagonists were Professors: Janet Dolgin, Louis M. Guenin and Stephen E. Levick.

Professor Dolgin attempted to analyze the current debate over human embryonic stem cell research (ESR)

as a natural extension of the abortion debate, what she termed the “etiologic cause” of the ESR debate.

Stephan Levick asked the audience to “empathically imagine the blastocyst.” His presentation was geared toward understanding a conservative stance against ESR in which blastocysts are indeed ascribed moral importance and significance as human beings – a position which many on the other side of the debate routinely treat with contempt and little regard.

Coleen Lyons then talked about the potential opportunities for collaboration that exist between private international co-operations and poor countries with emerging markets who are struggling to meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Lyons believes that the private business sector alone has the practical expertise and discipline to both generate and distribute the funding necessary to meet the MDGs. She argues that the government-focused current system is wrought with corruption and inefficiency, and that private businesses themselves have a greater economic incentive to ensure the stability and growth of emerging markets in the developing world, which in turn means providing the basic staples of living as outlined by the MDGs.

More details about the conference can be obtained from www.iheu.org/bioethics

Ana Lita is Director of the IHEU-Appignani Humanist Center for Bioethics.

Why Markets in Non-Vital Human Transplant Organs Should Be Legalized

James Stacey Taylor

Shortage of Human Organs

There is currently a widespread shortage of human organs available for transplantation. In the United States alone, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, eighteen people on the transplant waiting list die each day as a result of this shortage. And this is only the tip of the iceberg of human suffering that this shortage of organs causes. For every person who dies while waiting for a transplant, many more have to continue to suffer painful and debilitating treatments while they endure their macabre wait for someone else to die and have their transplantable organs harvested.

This terrible situation has not gone unnoticed. There have been many suggestions as to how this shortage of organs could be alleviated, ranging from encouraging donation to conscripting person’s transplantable organs after their deaths. But one way to alleviate this shortage has received almost universal condemnation: legalize markets in human transplant organs, in which a vendor sells his organs while he is still alive. It is clear why such a market would be widely condemned. After all, it conjures up the ghastly specter of the poor being forced by their economic desperation to sell their organs to the rich. Worse yet, we might worry that allowing such a market might lead the desperate poor to be driven to sell

not just their non-vital organs, such as a single kidney, but those needed for their very existence, such as their hearts.

This condemnation of markets in human organs typically coalesces into two major objections: that allowing such markets would lead people to commit suicide for pay, and that such markets would enable the economic plight of the poor to subject them to coercion. Yet despite the popularity of these objections neither of them can withstand scrutiny. Before showing why this is so, it would be sensible first to outline why allowing markets in human transplant organs might be a good idea. After all, if there is no reason to allow such markets in the first place, there would be no reason to spend time showing why these two objections to them are mistaken.

Two Objections

The most obvious reason why allowing markets in human transplant organs taken from live vendors is an appropriate response to the current shortage is that it would increase the supply of transplantable organs. The current prohibition of such markets and the reliance on donation has failed to produce anywhere near enough organs to meet the demand for them. But if people

could be paid for their organs then many who would not donate them would sell them. This isn't just a theoretical point that relies on the basic economic claim that to increase the supply of a good one only has to increase the price paid for it. It is also supported by empirical evidence. For example, since Iran instituted a system of payment for transplant kidneys from live vendors it has eliminated its waiting lists for kidney transplants. The second reason why legalizing such markets is an appropriate response to the current shortage is related to the first: that they would increase the availability of high-quality transplant organs. Patients who receive organs that are taken from live people typically have a far better prognosis than patients who receive organs taken from persons who are legally dead, for the organs they receive are typically of better quality. Furthermore, since the number of organs that would become available for transplantation would increase dramatically were markets for them to be legalized, transplant surgeons would have more options as to which organs they would choose to transplant into their patients. They would thus be less often faced with having to offer their patients only "marginal organs", such as those taken from elderly people, drug users, or the morbidly obese.

Legalizing a market in human organs in which people can sell their organs for transplant to others while they are still alive is thus likely to result in both more and better organs becoming available for transplantation. We thus have good reason to legalize such a market. But what about the objections to such markets that were outlined above: that they would lead to the poor being driven to commit suicide for pay, and that it would lead to them being coerced by their poverty into selling their organs? The view that allowing a market in human organs would lead to the poor committing suicide for pay (by, for example, selling their hearts) can be dismissed immediately. Even if one believes that the sale of her heart by a living person is immoral, one could still favor markets in other body parts from living vendors, such as blood, ova, liver lobes, or kidneys. Advocating allowing a market in such non-vital body parts does not commit one to advocating a market in vital organs such as whole livers or hearts.

The second objection to markets in non-vital body parts is harder to dismiss – although on close examination it too can be seen to be misguided. This objection is that allowing markets in non-vital human body parts, such as kidneys, would result in the desperate poor being coerced into selling such body parts by their poverty. Since such coercion would compromise the autonomy of the poor, and since autonomy is one of the preeminent moral values of the secular West, respect for autonomy should lead us to oppose allowing markets in such body parts. To make their case the proponents of this objection first note that if a person is coerced into selling something she will suffer from a diminution in her autonomy with respect to that sale. For example, if you coerce me into selling one of my prized possessions by threatening me with violence it's really not me who is directing myself to sell, it's you. To the extent that this is so, then, I will lack

autonomy, I will lack self-direction, with respect to my sale of my possession to you. With this point in hand the proponents of this objection to markets in transplantable non-vital human body parts note that since the typical seller of, for example, a kidney, would sell only because of her dire economic circumstances, it makes sense to claim that these circumstances have coerced her into selling. Thus, they conclude, since a person's subjection to coercion compromises her autonomy, and since allowing markets in non-vital body parts would enable persons' poverty to coerce them into selling, then if we are really concerned with respecting autonomy we have good reason to continue to prohibit markets in non-vital human body parts.

Coercion and Autonomy

Despite its popularity among those who oppose legalizing markets in human body parts this objection is fatally flawed. To see why, we should look more closely at how subjecting someone to coercion compromises her autonomy. Let us consider in this regard a classic case of coercion: that of a highwayman who coerces his victim into giving up her purse by offering her the choice of "Your money or your life!" Thinking carefully about this case, it's not as obvious as it might seem at first sight that the highwayman's coercion of his victim compromises her autonomy, her self-direction. After all, it is she, and not he, who decides what course of action to pursue. Yet it would seem strange to claim that a person who is subject to coercion is fully autonomous, fully self-directed. As the proponents of the coercion-based objection to allowing markets in non-vital human body parts not, a person who is coerced does seem to be directed by something external to her: her coercer. When we look at the relationship between autonomy and coercion more carefully, then, we are faced with a puzzle. On the one hand, we want to say that the person who is successfully coerced still does direct herself, and so is fully autonomous. On the other hand, we want to say that a person who is successfully coerced into performing certain actions does so under the direction of another, and so lacks autonomy with respect to them. There is, however, a way to resolve this puzzle – and one that will enable us to see how it is that the claim that markets in non-vital human body parts would enable persons to be coerced by their economic situations is terribly mistaken. First, we should recognize that a person who is successfully coerced decides to allow her coercer to tell her what to do. This person, then, directs herself to submit to her coercer. She is thus autonomous with respect to her decision to submit. This explains why it is that we think that a person who is coerced retains her autonomy as she still directs herself to choose how to respond to her coercer's threat. However, in deciding to allow her coercer to tell her what to do, she has decided to abdicate control over her actions to him. It is thus he, and not she, who will direct what actions she is to perform. To the extent that this is so, then, she will suffer from a diminution in her autonomy with respect to her actions. This account of the relationship between coercion and autonomy enable us both to say that a person who is coerced is still fully autonomous with respect to her

decisions (this captures our first intuition, above), and yet suffers from a diminution in her autonomy with respect to her actions (this captures our second intuition about cases of coercion, as expressed above). Our puzzle concerning the relationship between autonomy and coercion is now solved.

So, how does this account of the relationship between autonomy and coercion undermine the above objection to allowing markets in transplantable non-vital human organs? Very simply: it shows that for a person to suffer from a loss of autonomy as a result of being coerced she must give up control to another person who will direct her actions for her. As such, a person can only be coerced by someone who can tell her what to do. She cannot, then, be coerced by her economic situation, for this cannot tell her what to do. Rather, she guides and directs her own actions in the light of the choices that are available to her. Allowing markets in human body parts will thus not enable the poor to be coerced into selling by their economic plight.

Markets in transplantable, non-vital human body parts would thus be likely to produce more and better organs, and would do so without leading to a situation in which the poor would commit suicide for pay, or be coerced by their economic desperation into selling their organs. The case for legalizing markets in such organs is thus a strong one. This case can be further strengthened by

recognizing, as Mark J. Cherry does in his book *Kidney for Sale By Owner*, that legalizing such markets is also supported by the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to this Declaration, "Everyone has a right to life, liberty, and security of person." This supports allowing markets in transplantable non-vital human organs in two ways. First, by increasing the supply of available non-vital transplantable human organs markets in them would enable many persons who would otherwise die while waiting for an organ to continue to enjoy their right to life. Second, since such markets consist of voluntary transactions between consenting adults, the continued ban on them infringes upon persons' rights to the liberty to trade with each other in cases (such as organ markets) where such trade is beneficial to all who are party to it, and harmful to no one. Thus, if we are truly concerned with the well-being of those who need transplant organs and their families and friends, with the autonomy of the would-be buyers and sellers of organs, and with the rights to life and liberty as enshrined in the United Nations' declaration, we should legalize markets in transplantable, non-vital, human organs.

James Stacey Taylor lectures in the Department of Philosophy at the College of New Jersey. This is the text of his paper presented at the Global Bioethics Conference organized by the IHEU.

But the logic is not always right...

Sonja Eggerickx

Widespread Misery

There is currently a widespread shortage of food to feed millions of humans in the so-called developing countries. This terrible situation has not gone unnoticed.

There is currently a widespread incidence of death of healthy young men in wars. This terrible situation has not gone unnoticed.

There is currently a widespread incidence of death of young and not so young human beings due to car accidents. Many of these deceased are citizen of the U.S. This terrible situation has not gone unnoticed.

Does this mean that we shouldn't help patients in need for a healthy kidney? Of course we should. I just want to point out that shortage of non-vital transplant organs is just one of the many huge problems.

Logic, yes. But Justice?

The reasoning about being an autonomous person while deliberating about selling one's kidney follows a logical way of thinking, but not an objective one! It follows the logic of the free market: everything is to buy, as long as you have money. But I do have my doubts as a Humanist about the justice of it.

If I have enough money to live properly, to feed my children, to educate them ..., I can deliberate whether to sell my kidney or not (best would be if I decide to just give it away). If I am poor, my children are starving, and there are no prospects of getting a better life, it is rather an act of despair, not an autonomous decision!

Humanists should be concerned about justice in the world, justice towards all living beings, disregarding their social status. Of course selling a kidney to be able to buy food for your children could be an act of great love for them. But with a close relative or friend waiting for a kidney transplant, you could show your great love and concern for his or her well-being by donating your kidney. Mind: in a modern hospital, in the best conditions and with excellent care after the operation. On top of it: the chance to live as healthy as possible in this world, healthy food, a healthy house, etc ... And all we need is 16 loving human beings in the inner circle around the patient. And the donated kidney can be transplanted from one operation table to the other: no planes, no transport, and without delay, immediately, as fresh as can be!

It is important for Humanists that some aspects of life should be kept away from free market rules, as far as possible: Amongst others, I am thinking of medicine and schools, as everybody should have the right to be cared for and educated properly. Being treated for illness or being trained in schools may not depend on your social status, not on your wealth nor your misery. Every political system wins by having healthy and trained and schooled individuals!

It could be good to read John Rawls, and surely Amartya Sen. Maybe we can learn from them what is the best way to get justice and happiness not only for the happy few, so that we can try and – who knows maybe succeed – to change the world.

USA – A Civilisation in Decline

The Norwegian Humanist Association has taken the lead in protesting the rapid fall of the United States of America from a defender of Human liberties to one that is threatening them. The following powerful statement issued by the current and all the former Secretary Generals of the Norwegian Humanist Association has been printed in the Aftenposten in Norwegian.

The Constitutional State

Through the development of the constitutional state in the 20th Century, a wall has been built against barbarism and important steps have been taken towards the development of an international legal order. This legal system may contribute to closer relations between states and a safer world for the global population, and in this connection Human Rights are a vital element. However, the world has also experienced serious setbacks in recent years.

Through the Declaration of Independence, the United States of America has contributed as a model state in the historical development process. The Declaration states: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." And further more: "That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, – That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

On this basis, the USA has established a legal system protecting individual rights and rule of law, and contributed to the UN's Declaration of Human Rights. It is thus with great worry and regret that we observe the USA undermining its finest contributions to human society. The USA is not at present following the values and ideals of a constitutional state. USA, once a model state by its contributions to the trials against the Nazi criminals in the aftermath of World War II, is today struggling to undermine and be exempted from the International Criminal Court.

We are Troubled

We are troubled and scared by the fact that people are imprisoned incommunicado and without sentence, and are exposed to deeply offensive torture – within the USA; on the Guantanamo base on Cuba; in the Abu Ghraib-prison in Iraq; and on the Baghram-base in Afghanistan. Just as serious is the infringement caused by the kidnapping and transporting of prisoners across borders in order to be handed over to torturing units. The evidence suggests that such incidents are the results of a systematic weakening of US traditional legal guarantees, international human rights and the international legal system, and important American officials and politicians are responsible. The claim that these methods are necessary in the fight against terrorism cannot be validated. If the values and ideals of civilisation are set

aside, we will all suffer – as the enemies of human rights, democracy and freedom are strengthened. Civilisation is best defended by obeying its values in practice.

We deeply regret the fact that the USA through its policies contributes to the decay of civilisation. We are in line with large groups of the Americans people when we demand that the USA changes its policies and practice so that the norms of the constitutional state again are respected. For many years, the USA has been one of Norway's closest allies. American values have also been an ideal, but there is a growing awareness in the Norwegian people that this is no longer the case. We therefore implore Norwegian authorities to confront the USA with its crude violations of individuals and international law.

Norway and our allies must uncompromisingly defend the values of our civilisation. It is our duty to confront our allies when they violate basic human rights and harm the efforts to reach international understanding, respect and cooperation. We expect a response from Ambassador Benson K. Whitney and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jonas Gahr Støre, to this challenge.

Signed by Kristin Mile, Secretary General, and Fredrik S. Heffermehl, Levi Fragell, Kari Vigeland, Lars Gunnar Lingås, Tove Beate Pedersen and Lars Gule, all former Secretary Generals of the Norwegian Humanist Association

1st Baltic Humanist Conference

State, Secularism and the Humanist Challenge

Stockholm

Friday 10 Nov – Sunday 12 Nov 2006

Session Themes include *Secularism and the Modern State; World Value Survey and the Baltic Sea Region; State and Church in Northern Europe; Secularism, Tolerance and the Freedom of Speech; Humanism and the Media; The Struggle for Moral Education without Religion; The Meaning of Humanism, Secularism, Religion and other Life Stance related concepts.*

Participation from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden.

Conference speakers to include Ministers, Politicians, Academics and Humanist Activists.

Conference co-organised by the Swedish Humanist Association (Humanisterna), Norwegian Humanist Association (Human-Etisk Forbund), European Humanist Federation (EHF) and International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU).

For further details and to register, write to Staffan Gunnarson at humanist@norway.online.no

Proposed Concordat Violates Rights in Slovakia

Jenoff Van Hulle

An EU Report on Concordats

Different NGOs, including the European Humanist Federation, asked the All Party Working Group on the Separation of Religion and Politics of the European Parliament to examine the issue of concordats in Europe. The parliamentary group asked for a legal report on the impact of concordats on European legislation. As a result the EU Network of Independent experts on Fundamental Rights has deposited a report, titled *The Right to Conscientious Objection and the Conclusion by EU Member States of Concordats with the Holy See, which focuses especially on the Draft Treaty between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See on the Right to Objection of Conscience* (see: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/cfr_cdf/doc/avis/2005_4_en.pdf). According to the Network, the Treaty is in contradiction with fundamental laws, which the Slovak Republic has signed as a member state of the European Union

In March 2003 the Holy See and the Slovak Republic started negotiations on the Treaty. Once ratified, the text will have the status of a treaty under international law. Therefore, as I argued before (IHN Concordats and International Law), even if the Treaty is legal from a formalistic point of view, its content also has to respect fundamental rules of international law. As we read in Article 53 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, "A treaty is void if, at the time of its conclusion, it conflicts with a peremptory norm of general international law. For the purposes of the present Convention, a peremptory norm of general international law is a norm accepted and recognized by the international community of States as a whole as a norm from which no derogation is permitted and which can be modified only by a subsequent norm of general international law having the same character."¹

The Proposed Concordat with Slovakia

And that is where the shoe pinches, according to the Network. For it notes that the Draft Treaty currently under consideration by the Slovak Republic may lead to 1. the State violating its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and 2. a violation of the obligations of the Slovak Republic under Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services.

The biggest problem resides in article 4 (b) which states that The right to exercise objection of conscience shall apply to performing certain acts in the area of healthcare, in particular acts related to artificial abortion, artificial or assisted fertilisation, experiments with and handling of human organs, human embryos and human sex cells, euthanasia, cloning, sterilisation or contraception. In paragraph 2 of the same article they add that The Slovak Republic undertakes not to impose an obligation on the hospitals and healthcare facilities

founded by the Catholic Church or an organisation thereof to perform... one of the just mentioned activities.

Human Rights vs. Freedom of Religion

It cannot be excluded in principle that certain religious organisations have a right not to perform certain activities, where this would conflict with the ethos or belief on which they are founded. This idea is not unknown to either the European Convention on Human Rights or to European Community law, both of which recognize that not only individuals, but also organisations, may invoke freedom of thought, conscience and religion to protect the inner faith and the external manifestations of this inner faith, as it translates into words or acts (article 9 ECHR).

However, it is important that the exercise of this right does not conflict with the rights of others, including the right of all women to receive certain medical services or counselling without any discrimination. When we know that approximately 70% of the population in the Republic of Slovakia is Catholic, then there is a risk that the recognition of a right to exercise objection of conscience in the field of reproductive healthcare will make it in practice impossible or very difficult for women to receive advice or treatment in this field, especially in the rural areas. Even if article 6 (2) of the Draft Treaty states that The exercise of objection of conscience must not endanger human life or human health, it is doubtful that this will be interpreted to imply the legal liability of health care practitioners which would refuse to counsel women on how to interrupt their pregnancy or on contraceptive devices, where they seek to shield themselves from such liability by invoking Article 4 (1) (b) of the Draft Treaty.

In conclusion we can say that this report constitutes a first but important finding on the problem of concordats that was an achievement for the Humanists, thanks to the support of European Humanist Parliamentarians.

Jenoff Van Hulle is International Relations Officer of European Humanist Federation (www.humanism.be)

17th World Humanist Congress

Washington DC, 2008

The American Humanist Association (AHA) will host the next World Humanist Congress in Washington DC. Plans are now afoot to make the Congress the most successful World Humanist Congress ever with higher levels of attendance and participation from all over the world.

More details of dates and venue will soon be available from IHEU as well as from AHA.

Meanwhile, please write to suresh@iheu.org to register your interest.

¹ Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969), Article 53

The Hirsi Ali Affair: A Scandal for Europe

Caroline Fourest

Victim of female genital mutilation and forced marriage, obliged to live surrounded by bodyguards since she wrote the screenplay for the short TV production "Submission" filmed by Theo van Gogh, threatened with death, accused of Islamophobia by the Dutch left because of her struggle against Islamism, and forced to leave her home because her neighbours were disturbed by her security arrangements, Ayaan Hirsi Ali could now lose her Dutch citizenship because of xenophobic laws against immigration.

Hirsi Ali has always admitted that she had used an assumed name, and that she had said she came directly from Somalia in order to be treated as a political refugee. The background facts are that she fled to Holland to escape a forced marriage after a life passed in learning the Quran, wearing the veil, respecting the traditions and having been genitally mutilated. She had actually arrived via Kenya and Saudi Arabia. Where is the crime in that?

A squalid and vengeful TV documentary, designed to make her pay for her opposition to Islamism, accused her of having lied about her forced marriage. The proof offered? The testimony of her husband (the man she had fled) and members of his family – the very ones who would oblige her to accept her marriage and respect Islamic values!

The "useful idiots" of Islamism are rubbing their hands in glee. In *Libération* for example, Pierre Marcelle could not help himself from ironic comment over the "duplicity" of Ayaan Hirsi Ali (as opposed to Tariq Ramadan, for example?). After having been vilified as an "Islamophobe" for having had the courage to speak out

against horrors committed in the name of Islam at the cost of her own safety, she is pilloried as a fraud.

This whole sickening campaign is symptomatic. Ayaan, who I have the honour to know, appeared broken at a press conference in Holland. Anyone would be. She will undoubtedly go to live in the United States, where a conservative think-tank has offered her asylum and the American government has guaranteed her protection.

Who is to blame if Europe loses the bravest of its citizens? The anti-secular left, and on the right the racist populists. Together they confuse the questions of immigration and fundamentalism. Ayaan is a progressive woman and a convinced European. We live in a Europe that votes for xenophobic laws that close the door to immigrants fleeing patriarchy, medievalism and Islamism because they must lie to survive, while the Islamists easily obtain the status of political refugees. On the other hand, certain individuals, accomplished liars, are co-opted as advisers in the struggle against "Islamic extremism".

Poor Europe. Racism and fundamentalism have a bright future here.

Caroline Fourest is a secular intellectual and activist in France.



Ayaan Hirsi Ali.
Courtesy: Der Spiegel

5th IHEYO International Conference *Critical thinking and Free inquiry in education*

28 October – 4 November 2006
Atheist Center, Vijayawada, India

Humanists recognize the importance of critical thinking and free inquiry in education. There are formal courses for this in the Netherlands, US, India, Germany, Belgium, Nigeria, etc. and non-formal educational activities in other countries, as in Russia, Nepal, East Africa, the Scandinavian countries, Italy, Australia and Peru.

This conference will

- provide training for using educational methods in critical thinking and free inquiry.
- initiate collaboration between young humanist groups and individuals worldwide.
- give young humanists a better understanding of humanist thinking and the problems in India
- provide an opportunity for networking with like-minded international organizations.

The Conference will be a unique activity with a global and national impact and is being held in collaboration with IHEU's member organisation, the well-known Atheist Center, Vijayawada, India.

E Mail us for details at india2006@iheyo.org

To attend, please fill-in the Application Form at: <http://www.iheyo.org/activities/conferencean.htm>

IHEYO in 2005

Gea Meijers

The International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation (IHEYO) had an interesting 2005. IHEYO organised an invigorating conference on 'Interculturalism, Active Citizenship and Humanism', represented Humanist youth concerns at several international events, campaigned against the funding of the European Union for the World Catholic Youth Days, doubled its membership of organisations and formally joined IHEU! Gea Meijers writes about a full year!

Conference

Our annual conference was not a one-off event, but a continuation of past activities and a stepping stone for new ones. Based on IHEYO's lessons of previous conferences, the 2005 event was a mix of key note speeches, practical training, workshops and interesting in-depth debate.

The conference had a European focus, being co-sponsored by the Council of Europe's Youth Foundation. Extra effort was made to involve French, Spanish and Italian young Humanists, but this had no results. We hope to increase our contacts with Humanists in these regions.

IHEYO is in favour in increasing dialogue among different life stances. It is good and even necessary to be critical of some of the politics and ideas of religious groups. At the same time, it is also good to meet with people belonging to these religions, to find out also what good it brings to people and to discover our commonalities.

Other Activities

IHEYO's international internship programme has been in existence since 2000. In this programme, a young Humanist leader stays for a month at a Humanist organisation in another country to gain experience and contacts. There was no internship programme in 2005, but IHEYO started to prepare its next internship for a Ugandan Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights activist to help them start a newsletter. IHEYO is currently raising the funds for this internship and we hope to raise funds for more internships in 2006 and 2007.

Representation and Networking

IHEYO was present at the UNESCO youth forum, the Council of Europe's INGO-meeting, and several other international conferences and trainings. IHEYO urged the European Union's Commission and Parliament not to grant money to the World Catholic Youth Days. Youth days of other life stances are not given any money, and by granting money to the Catholic youth days, the EU gives up its stand of neutrality. IHEYO submitted a formal complaint at the European Commission and wrote to several members of Parliament. Some of our member organisations did the same. IHEYO coordinated its protests against this granting of funding with other groups like the Catholics for Free Choice and the European Humanist Federation. The protests did not result in withdrawal of the grant nor was there any

promise of similar grants to other life stance groups, but it gave out a clear signal for the future about our stand.

IHEYO joined three international networks: BWPP, United, and A Civic Europe. The BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) is dedicated to reinforcing the norm against the weaponization of disease, and acts as a global civil society that tracks governmental and other behaviour under the treaties that codify the norm. More at: www.bwpp.org. UNITED is a cooperation of more than 560 organisations from 49 European countries working together – united in the biggest anti-racism network. More: www.unitedagainstracism.org. IHEYO partnered with CIDEM in order to work together in the fields of education, citizenship and civic participation in the construction of Europe. Together with 100 national, regional and local associations and NGOs from 21 European Union countries engaged in their respective countries on matters relating to citizenship and civic education, IHEYO signed the resolution "For a civic and popular appropriation of Europe", and became a member of the European Civic Forum. More: www.forumciviqueuropeen.org.

Communication

The website was updated throughout the year and an interactive forum was added. Four issues of the e-newsletter, 'YouthSpeak', were published, a brochure was published and widely attention has been created for IHEYO through the internet, Humanist magazines and some mainstream media. Two e-mail lists are operational. IHEYO had around 7500 visitors on our website.

Organisation

IHEYO finalised in 2005 some of its organisational processes. It became finally recognized under Belgian law as an international NGO; IHEYO got a nice letter from the King of Belgium. Also, IHEYO joined IHEU as full member.

In the first half of 2005, IHEYO was assisted by a full-time officer who handled conference organisation and administration. The officer also produced a new brochure, the e-newsletter 'YouthSpeak' and maintained our web site. If IHEYO wants to keep up its level of activity, a staffed office is a necessity.

2005 meant an increase in membership: from 18 to 36 member organisations. But not all Humanist youth organisations in the world are yet members of IHEYO – many more groups could join IHEYO and it costs almost nothing!!

There are many reasons to join IHEYO. Maybe the most important one is that in a world that is getting more globalised we need our movements to be internationally active to have some influence on the process. There are many issues that affect young people, in which the voice of the Humanists is needed. We challenge you to join us in any way you can.

Find our full Annual Report at www.iheyo.org!

Gea Meijers is Executive Director of IHEYO

Esperanto, a way to Humanism

Dominique Simeone

The year 2005 marked not only the Centenary of the French Law on Separation of Religion and State but also the centenary of the First International Esperanto Congress. Historically many Humanists supported Esperanto as the new world language. Dominique Simeone, writes about the language.

Some History

Louis-Lazare Zamenhof (1859 – 1917) who proposed Esperanto as a world language was born in Poland. He learnt Greek, Latin and English and also spoke French and German. After leaving school he learnt more languages because there were Russian, Polish, and Jewish communities in his hometown. From early childhood, Zamenhof became sensitive to violence and differences amongst people.

Zamenhof thought that the reason for misunderstandings amongst people was the absence of a common language. In 1887 he wrote in Letter about the origin of Esperanto “I was educated as an idealist: I learnt that all men are brothers, but at the same time on the street and in the court yard, I feel that humans do not exist – only Russians, Poles, Germans, Jews and so on. This fact troubled me throughout my childhood; but a lot of people laughed at my distress, caused in fact by the world”.

First Congress

The main rules about Esperanto were decided in 1905 at the first International Esperanto Congress in Boulogne-Sur-Mer, France. We celebrated in 2005 the centenary, and on this occasion the Esperantists continue to advance the cause of this unique language in a peaceful, friendly and fraternal way. Esperanto inspired hopes for the future in many hearts. In fact Esperanto means hope!

In 1901 a Swedish blind man named Thilander proposed to propagate Esperanto among the blind. As a consequence, in 1906, blind persons participated at the Geneva Esperanto Congress and published a booklet in Braille. At the same time, Bayol published a book for the Red Cross on how to treat the wounded and in 1921, the Red Cross recognized Esperanto. In 1902 the International Antimilitarist Congress of The Hague voted a resolution in favor of Esperanto.

The positive feelings and optimism that was reigning amongst Esperantists of the age made E.Boirac say

“Esperanto will be the Latin of democracy”. After the creation of Universala Esperanto Asocio in 1908, Zamenhof said “When people understand each other, they would stop hating each other ... Esperanto gives them the means to communicate without any hegemonical relations”. But this humanist movement was hurt by the wars and the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. Ulrich Lins wrote a book about it in his *The dangerous language at the end of the 20th Century*.

2005 Conference

The Centenary Conference of the Esperanto Association was held in Zagreb (2 – 9 July 2005), at the same time as the IHEU Congress! The Conference issued a Declaration which

- Condemns all acts of terrorism such as the ones in London, and all wars.
- Demands the use of dialogue and negotiation as the means to solve conflicts, and application of the Geneva convention to all prisoners, including those at Guantanamo Bay
- Insists again that countries that have not already signed the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer or Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction
- Opposes slavery and the use of women and children as goods.
- Defends human rights for everyone, including imprisoned Esperantists.

The Declaration demonstrates the continuity in the movement, from the beginning to the present times: an engagement with peace and a just world order free of divisions. The French Freethinkers Congress of July 2005 also voted a resolution in support of Esperanto. The resolution highlighted the huge possibilities of this language for the free world and for free thought.

After a hundred years since the first Esperanto Congress, Esperantists, freethinkers and humanists are still on the same wavelength. And Esperanto remains the unique international language that was designed to be a vehicle and a bridge to the new democratic and peaceful world that we all aspire to.

Dominique Simeone is head of Commission for Esperanto of IHEU member organization the French Freethinkers.

IHEU's Statement to the 2006 April Esperanto Congress

Humanists believe that we are all united by our common humanity and by our common destiny as inhabitants of our planet, irrespective of the country we live in. Humanists are convinced that humanity can find a way of progressing in a peaceful manner and offer the human values of freedom, democracy, reason, science and peace as the basis for building a new world order. Humanists are continuing their world-wide fight and resistance to the religious fundamentalism that is engulfing the world and campaigning for the strict separation of religion and state everywhere in the world. We believe that Humanism would be the solvent

of the divisions in society.

Esperantists who have been inspired by Zamenhof's vision of one language which can unite all the peoples of the world too are working towards the establishment of a peaceful world order and universal culture. I believe that if Humanism needs a language other than reason and reasonableness, then it would be Esperanto; and that if Esperanto needed a philosophy other than that of Dr. Zamenhof's vision, then it would be Humanism.

May we work together to create an equitable world order and achieve our common goals in this fast globalising world.

Babu Gogineni

Governance in NGOs (Non Profits and Charities)

Suresh Lalvani

Non profits and charities are governed by Trustees who have general control of their organisation. The governing document (constitution, by-laws) will explain how trustees are appointed, how long they can serve for and how they should conduct themselves. When trustees are recruited, consideration should be given to the balance of skills on the trustee board. Some of the most successful boards are those that recruit its members from diverse communities. It is important that new trustees are aware of the responsibilities of charity trusteeship, and are given a proper induction.

Primary responsibilities of non profit/charity trustees:

- 1) Trustees are responsible for the proper administration of the charity.
- 2) Trustees must accept ultimate responsibility for everything the charity does (the trustees are responsible for the vision, mission and management of the charity. They are accountable if things go wrong).
- 3) Trustees have to act reasonably and prudently in all matters relating to their charity.
- 4) Trustees must safeguard and protect the assets of the charity.
- 5) Trustees have a duty to act collectively.
- 6) Trustees must act in the best interests of their charity.
- 7) Trustees must avoid any conflict between their personal interests and those of the charity.
- 8) In all the above matters, trustees must comply with the law.

Governance structure:

For many people, any structure is perceived as being inhibiting and bureaucratic. However an organisation needs a governance structure that will enable strategic thinking to take place, as well as the implementation that puts the flesh on the strategic framework. The structure should be such that governance, accountability, and openness are always linked.

Delegation:

Trustees are ultimately responsible for their organisation but they may delegate to staff and sub-committees depending on the nature and size of the organisation. In larger non profits and charities day to day management is carried out by paid staff under a Chief Executive. It is the interface between trustees and paid managers that can sometimes cause problems. Research in the US and UK have identified many barriers which prevent trustees from realising their full potential. They include friction with paid staff, the unwillingness of many trustees to offer firm direction to their organisations, and confusion about the ways in which a non profit/charity is accountable to its many stakeholders. Therefore it is important that trustees review periodically the skills and personal qualities they bring to their organisation and how they interact with staff.

Liabilities of Trustees:

Explore and be aware of your potential liability before you agree to become a trustee.

The potential liabilities of charity trustees to third parties depend to a great extent on the legal form of the charity. There are essentially three main legal forms used by a charity: Company, Trust, and Unincorporated association.

Problems with Governance:

American governance guru Barbara E Taylor urges trustees in non profits and charities to add value to their organisations. Most trustees are selected on the basis of demonstrated ability and achievement, and yet, as Taylor points out, most boards under perform, attending to operations rather than strategy, immediate concerns rather than long-term challenges and individual activity rather than collective action.

Taylor has explained the five interrelated approaches through which the Board adds value:

- Help senior management determine what matters most – Effective boards, with executive staff, identify the most significant organizational issues that require trustee and management attention.
- Create opportunities for the Chief Executive to think aloud – create situations in which the Chief Executive can reflect and ruminate with the board. Begin each board meeting with a 'Chief Executive's hour' – an executive session in which the chief executive can share with trustees the concerns that are uppermost in his or her mind.
- Encourage experimentation – A board should act as a stimulus for change by thinking creatively with the chief executive and staff about challenges and opportunities, by setting policies that require conscious choices or explicit tradeoffs.
- Monitor progress and performance – as they review plans and proposals, trustees should ask how results will be measured and reported.
- Model the desired behaviours – boards should model the behaviour they expect in others.

Developments in Governance:

The National Center for Nonprofit Boards (NCNB) is a leading organisation in governance based in Washington DC, USA dedicated to increasing effectiveness of governing boards and promoting change, innovation, solutions and tools to improve board performance worldwide. The NCNB along with a number of governance gurus such as Barbara E Taylor has developed the New Work of the Non Profit Board. Traditionally governance has been viewed as strategic, i.e the environment for policy and decision – making, and management is about implementation. In the new work, the board and management work together on both policy and implementation. Historically, the practice of most well established non-profits has been to recruit stars as board members. The assumption was that a collection of exceptional individuals would equal an exceptional board. The new work of the board cannot be done by a powerful inner circle. Instead all trustees must get involved. That will set off a chain reaction: the more trustees are involved in meaningful work, the more they know; the more they know, the more they can contribute to the team; and the more they contribute to the team, the more likely the stars will form a constellation. To function as a team, board members need equal and timely access to information. A mentoring programme that matches a seasoned trustee with a new trustee provides another way to foster fellowship and to engage newcomers faster.

Making use of available resources

It has become increasingly apparent that trustees have lost ground to professional staff. Therefore it is important that trustees make use of the growing number of resources available to them including training opportunities, books, and best practice guides. In the UK a leading charity specialist firm of lawyers Bates Wells and Braithwaite (BWB) has created a separate governance unit 'BWB on Board' which provides training, advice and support for mission-led development. BWB and the UK National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) are actively collaborating with American Gurus such as Peter Brinckerhoff and Carol Weisman to help develop good governance practice in the UK. The Centre for Charity Effectiveness at the Cass Business School in London's City University and the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) provide Governance related seminars, training and qualifications. Another very useful resource in the UK is the practical bi-monthly 'Governance' magazine from Plaza Publishing, which can also be accessed on line.

Suresh Lalvani is IHEU's Director of Operations.

Islam at the Human Rights Commission

Roy Brown

Islam and Human Rights

The UN Human Rights Commission was created 60 years ago as a forum in which human rights abuse in any country could be exposed, and the abusers condemned. But by 2005 this dream had become a nightmare and had led to the abolition of the Commission which, in the words of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, had become "too political and selective in its work". For several years the Islamic states at the Commission had refused to accept any condemnation of human rights abuse in their countries.

The problem dates back to the Iranian revolution of 1979. Shortly after the revolution the Islamic Republic of Iran described the 1948 Universal Declaration as "a Western secular concept of Judeo-Christian origin and thereby incompatible with the sacred Islamic shari'a". An Iranian representative at the UN General Assembly stated: "... my country will not hesitate to violate its provisions, since it has to choose between violating the divine law of the country and violating secular conventions."

In 1990, after several years of debate, representatives of the Islamic states adopted the "Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam". It established shari'a law as "the only source of reference" for the protection of human rights in Islamic states, thus giving it supremacy over the UDHR.

The Cairo Declaration has been strongly criticized by many human rights experts as threatening the inter-cultural consensus on which the international human rights instruments were based; for introducing, in the name of the defence of human rights, discrimination against women and non-Muslims; and for legitimising practices which attack the integrity and dignity of the human being.

In 1994, a UN Special Rapporteur on the Sudan, Gaspar Biro, was accused of a "vicious attack on the religion of Islam" for suggesting that the government of the Sudan bring its legislation into accordance with international instruments to which it is a party." His proposal was excised from his report and he was publicly threatened by the Sudanese Minister of Justice. Other Special Rapporteurs and NGO representatives have been variously accused of blasphemy, sacrilege and defamation of religion by daring to speak out against human rights abuse in Islamic states. The law of an Islamic country it is deemed an integral part of the Islamic faith, so to criticise any aspect of the law is an attack on Islam, "the most perfect religion".

The Cairo Declaration received official UN recognition in 1997 when it was published in the UN's Compilation of International Instruments. No-one has ever explained how such a distorted view of human rights ever received the UN seal of approval without a vote by the General Assembly.

Defamation of Islam?

In 1997, Special Rapporteur Maurice Glélé-Ahanhanzo from Benin reported that "Muslim extremists are turning

increasingly to their own religious sources, first and foremost the Qur'an, as a primary anti-Jewish source." He was accused of "defamation of our religion Islam and blasphemy against its Holy Book Qur'an." The Commission then "Expressed its indignation and protest at the content of such an offensive reference to Islam and the Holy Qur'an". For the next seven years the Special Rapporteur omitted from his reports any reference to anti-semitism in Arab countries, in Iran, and elsewhere in the Muslim world. Even quoting the Qu'ran is now considered blasphemy at the UN!

Many of these incidents are described in detail in the book "The Myth of Islamic Tolerance", edited by Robert Spencer and published by Prometheus.

In 1998, the Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi called for a "revision of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Later the same year, the Geneva Office for Human Rights jointly hosted a seminar which affirmed the divine origin of the Sharia and its binding supremacy over all legislation or UN Declarations and Covenants. One observer asked: "Are we going toward a new Universal Declaration of Human Rights? .. this seminar could constitute support for political attitudes totally in contradiction with the founding principles of human rights."

In 1999, the OIC began lobbying for the adoption of a Commission resolution against "Defamation of Islam", citing "the emergence of a new manifestation of intolerance and misunderstanding and misconception of Islam and Muslim peoples" and because "It has already been claimed that Islamic scriptures incite Muslims to violence". Yet "it was Islam which gave the world the first Charter of Human Rights in the Holy Qur'an" ...

The same year, the Sudanese delegation managed to muzzle a charismatic African leader, the late Dr John Garang. He was twice stopped on a 'point of order' before he could ask this question:

"In 1992, the regime in Khartoum declared Jihad .. against the people of southern Sudan and the Nuba mountains. Since then, Jihad has been declared again and again. I ask this very important question: is the Jihad a religious right of those who declare and wage it? Or is it a violation of the human rights of the people against whom it is declared and waged?"

A day later the former Sudanese Prime Minister Al-Sadiq Al-Mahdi affirmed that "the traditional concept of Jihad does allow slavery as a by-product."

Women and Non-believers

No mention was possible within the Commission of the restrictions that Islam places of the human rights of women and non-believers. To do so would be silenced as "defamation of religion". A Sudanese delegate even privately justified the chopping off of hands for theft; the stoning of women accused of adultery on the grounds of the freedom of religion protected by article 18 of the UDHR!

Deferring to Islam

The extent to which the Human Rights Commission deferred to Islam can be judged from the 2002 statement of then High Commissioner Mary Robinson:

“No one can deny that at its core Islam is entirely consonant with the principles of fundamental human rights, including human dignity, tolerance, solidarity and quality”.

The rules of conduct imposed by the OIC and accepted by many States give the “representatives of Islam” an exceptional status at the UN that has no legal basis and no precedent. These rules give cause for grave apprehension. Will discussion about political issues within the Islamic States be prohibited at the new Human Rights Council? To do so would be in clear contravention of “the right to freedom of opinion and expression” enshrined in article 19 of the UDHR. But the signs are not good.

The ‘Danish Cartoon Affair’ has revealed just how powerful Islamism has become when the depiction of a prophet can cause greater outrage than televising the beheading of innocent hostages.

In February this year, the Secretary-General of the OIC stated: “It is the common sense that Islamophobic acts, which are also against the internationally promoted common values, can not and should not be condoned in the pretext of freedom of expression or press”.

In discussions leading up to the creation of the new Human Rights Council, the Islamic States then called for “governments to demand that the U.N. adopt a clear resolution or law that categorically prohibits affronts to prophets – to the prophets of the Lord and his Messengers, to His holy books, and to the religious holy places.”

The UN’s Inadequate Response

To increase the pressure on the UN, they even discussed the possibility of setting up a break-away organization. The OIC summit meeting in Mecca in December 2005: “called for considering the possibility of establishing an independent permanent body to promote human rights in Member States as well as the possibility in preparing an Islamic Charter on Human Rights in accordance with the provisions of the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam and interact with the United Nations and other relevant international bodies.”

The response of the UN was to note in the preamble to the new Council charter that the news media and NGOs have “an important role to play” in promoting respect for religion. One can well imagine how this will be used in the Council to stifle discussion of human rights abuse by those who claim religious justification.

In almost the last act of the now defunct Human Rights Commission, the Special Rapporteur on racism, Doudou Diene, issued a report which even by the now tarnished standards of the Commission will stand as a model of partiality and bias. The report condemned the Danish cartoons but made no mention of the far worse anti-semitic cartoons which appear almost daily in the Arabic press; it (rightly) condemned abuse of Muslims but made no mention of any provocation by Muslims; it criticised the linking of Islam to terror – not by the terrorists who carry out their attacks in the name of Islam, but by those who report on these incidents! In the topsy-turvy world of the Commission, Islamic violence and extremism simply do not exist.

It is time for all who care about human rights to make it clear that the UDHR and its binding conventions are paramount; that Islamic law does not apply to non-Muslims; that Sharia law is unacceptable to free peoples in free countries; and that nothing can be allowed to stifle criticism of human rights abuse, wherever it may occur.

IHEU will continue to work with other NGOs in Geneva to try to ensure that the ideals enshrined in the UDHR are not completely lost in the swamp of submission to Islam, or any other religion.

Roy Brown is IHEU’s past President and Head of IHEU’s UN NGO Delegation at Geneva. He is also Chair of IHEU’s Committee for Growth and Development.

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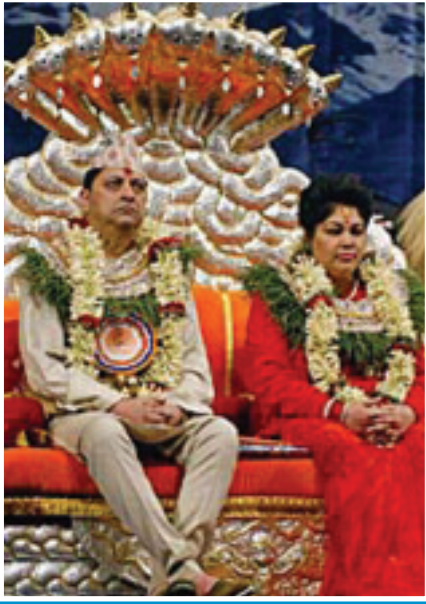
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