

# SERVAS AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Servas, as part of its commitment to peace, has NGO (Non Governmental Organisation) status at the UN. As such there are Servas representatives at the UN. Here are parts of their reports about what is happening. Members wishing to visit the UN should contact our reps to discuss what is most constructive for a visit.

## **Sub-Commission On Promotion & Protection Of Human Rights Fifty-sixth session (Geneva, 26 Jul – 13 Aug 2004)**

The Sub-Commission consists of 26 Experts from five regional groups; it undertakes studies and makes recommendations to the Commission on Human Rights. The Commission must approve all its resolutions and decisions. The agenda included issues such as questions related to the administration of justice, the right to drinking water, economic, social and cultural rights, prevention of discrimination and protection of indigenous peoples and minorities, women, slavery, corruption and its impact on the full enjoyment of human rights, terrorism.

Nearly hundred States Members of the United Nations were represented by observers. More than 100 NGOs attended the session.

Addressing the Sub-Commission at the opening of its session was United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour who said that the Sub-Commission played an extremely important role within the United Nations in the promotion and protection of human rights, providing the Organization with useful recommendations on the promotion, protection and prevention of violations of human rights.

During this fifty-sixth session, 53 resolutions and decisions were adopted. These are some:

- A resolution concerning the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the unlawfulness of arbitrary, summary or extrajudicial killing of an individual in all circumstances.
- Regarding economic, social and cultural rights, the Sub-Commission decided the theme of the next Social Forum in Geneva in 2005, would be "Poverty and economic growth – challenges to human rights".
- Under specific human rights issues, the Sub-Commission adopted texts concerning human rights and the human genome; harmful traditional practices affecting health of women/girls; World Programme for Human Rights Education; Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery; and others
- On the situation in Iraq, the opinion was that cases of violations of human rights were by Governments but also non-State actors engaged in acts of annihilation violating human rights. Hope was expressed that Iraqi people would find sovereignty, and respect for human rights to which they were entitled.

The Chairman proposed that the fifty-seventh session of the Sub-Commission would be held from 25 July to 12 August 2005. Consultations were to be held on this issue.

And... One Servas traveller took the opportunity to attend.

*Hilda Burer, Geneva*

## **Annual Conference of NGO (DPI/NGO) 57th Session (7 to 11 Sept 2004, New York USA)**

The Topics being: The Millennium Development Goals:

Like many of our members who are aware of the United Nation but never had the opportunity to see the inner circle of the UN in action or just being an observer at such functions. This led me to submit my name to the delegation selection committee. Further my curiosity was driven through my Christian Peacemaker and MDS Disaster Response activities.

The eight main topics were:

1. Eradication of extreme Poverty and Hunger
2. Achievement of universal primary Education
3. Promoting Gender equality and empowering women.
4. Reduction of Child mortality
5. Improvement of Maternal Health
6. Combat-mend of HIV / AIDS, and other Diseases
7. Ensuring of Environmental Sustainability
8. Development of Global Partnerships for Development

The Opening of the Conference by Mr. Kofi Annan, the United Nation's General Secretary, left me with the impression that the UN's Assembly chose him for his knowledge, wisdom, sincerity, and ability to execute the Assembly's resolutions in a statesman manner.

Mr. Annan gave the conference delegates the mandate to explore and make resolutions on the issues before them and to present these findings to his or her Country's Government leaders. His inspiration and endorsement charged the delegates in a positive way. This energy could be felt through out the conference.

My morning started in the main cafeteria with a breakfast network session, followed by main discussion sessions of which I attended six. In addition I participated in the midday workshops, chaired by NGO members of various countries who's knowledge of the subject was superior.

During the closing session the chair suggested that from the results of the individual meetings the present goals deadline were set too fine and unachievable. The group's response was for the NGO committee to revise the deadline to 2015. In all due respect some of the issues should be achieved ahead of the set target date.

Further it is requested, that we (Servas International) review our delegation process as a Global Organization. From the information presented I conclude that Servas should be able to send a minimum of 15 to 20 delegates. I suggest that our members at large plan their USA / New York, City vacations to be coincide with the next NGO conference. This would give you the members an actual inside view of the UN organization and helping us (Servas) to delivering our requirements as an NGO partner.

*Harald Matthiessen, Ontario, Canada*