

# PASSIONISTS INTERNATIONAL

March 2007



Secretary-General Kofi Annan (left), General Assembly President Haya Rashed Al Khalifa (centre), and Secretary-General-designate Ban Ki-moon after Mr. Ban took the Oath of Office, at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

## Leaders Change; Message Continues

*"Where there is no vision the people perish". Proverbs 29 v 18*

December 31st 2006 saw Secretary General Kofi Annan take leave of the UN, reminding us of the three great challenges facing us – an unjust world economy, world disorder and widespread contempt for human rights and the rule of law – global challenges that demand a global response. His farewell words: "I yield my place to others with an obstinate feeling, a real obstinate feeling of hope for our common future".

January 1st. 2007 saw Secretary General Ban Ki-moon enter with the message: "The UN is needed now more than ever. The world's peoples will not be fully served unless peace, development and human rights – the three pillars of the UN – are advanced together with equal vigour".

The things that occupy your minds and hearts in your daily ministry find their way onto the agenda of the UN.

## Uniting to make a Passionist Difference

So far this year, as Passionists International, these are some issues I, Kevin Dance, have worked with:

- The Social Development Commission and the struggle to eradicate poverty. Poverty is as unnatural as was human slavery and the colonial domination of countries. So, poverty need not last forever as indeed slavery or colonization did not. Eveline Herfkens, head of the Millennium Campaign says: "We are the first generation that can eradicate poverty and we refuse to miss this opportunity"
- Exploring with the United Religions Initiative how interfaith partnership can work to promote the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) for the benefit of the poorest people in the world.

- The Commission on the Status of Women with its theme, *‘The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child’*. This flowed into the International Women’s Day with the theme of ending impunity for violence against women. Educating and empowering women and girls gives us a short cut to better health for the whole family, more stability, better living standards.

- Meetings to understand the ongoing tragedy in Darfur and take steps to pressure governments to step in to stop the slaughter of thousands of innocent people.

- Supporting the Indigenous Peoples Caucus in lobbying governments to vote for the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the General Assembly.

- Preparing for the Spring meeting with the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation and the UN around issues of trade, aid, debt cancellation and more voting power and representation of poorer countries at decision-making levels of these institutions.

- Preparing to take an active part in an inter-faith celebration of the International Day of Water

- As well as - Migration, HIV/AIDS, human rights, peace issues with Israel/Palestine....

With the coming of summer Sister Mary Ann Strain will be freed to work more actively in our mission

at the United Nations. This will be a welcome addition to the amount of time and energy we can give to our commitment to global justice.

Each day, as you serve your brothers and sisters, you put real faces on the anonymous problems that come to the UN for attention.

### Where to from here?

Our various Chapters seem to be calling us all to renew, to restructure, to find new ways of solidarity as we share in the transforming power of God’s Spirit. This leads me to ask: How can you and we work together to be faithful to that Passion for Life calling us to stand with our sisters and brothers in their struggle for dignity, hope and development.

Being part of a religious community offers us a wonderful resource. If we learn how to use it we become an amazing network with links all over the world. There is probably no other group of people with as much potential as we have: We are present in every sort of situation in the world; many of us are highly educated; we make up a global network.

Our members work among the poorest of the poor, the crucified, those left to rot at the edges of life. But we are also in situations where we have the power to make our voices heard by the rich and the powerful as well. As a group, our power to speak for the poor is probably without equal. The question is what are we doing with this power and this possibility?

We have received a call to greater solidarity. Will we use the expertise and the networks that exist among

us to make our voice heard on behalf of justice, peace and the integrity of creation as Passionists servants of the 21st. century?

What do you want us to advocate for in this global body?

From your contact with people, what are the most urgent concerns you recognise?

We would love to hear from you with any creative suggestions for making the link between the local and the global as men and women with a passion to make a difference.

Fr. Kevin Dance, C.P.  
Sr. Mary Ann Strain, C.P.



Between 75 and 80 per cent of the world's 27 million refugees are women and children.

A Vietnamese mother with her child in a refugee camp on Koh Paed Island, Laeom Sing, Thailand.

## THE 45th. Session of the COMMISSION for SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



OPENING OF 43RD SESSION OF COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### Theme: "Full Employment and Decent Work for All"

The Commission for Social Development (CSocD) met from February 7-16 2007 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. This year, the first of a 2-year cycle, aimed at gathering information on the state of employment around the world as a way of improving the lives of all the people of the world. Next year the Commission will decide on policies that can help to address the challenges it found.

Passionists International follows this Commission because it has the task of creating policies to eradicate poverty and to ensure that development is pro-poor and people centred. Economic progress alone is not enough. Every person is entitled to live with dignity and in basic security. This will help to build a world of greater harmony and peace.

Despite a time of unprecedented prosperity, the world still suffers 'exploding inequalities,' The last ten years saw global wealth grow by 3.8% a year. Global unemployment grew by 22% in the same period – a

total of 195 million people. So 9 out of every 10 people live in countries where the gap between poor and rich widens. International solidarity is desperately needed.

What we see is that profit has detached itself from job creation. Economic growth happens at the expense of the social agenda. Those worst affected are the young, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous persons and migrants.

H.E. Mehdi Danesh Yazdi (Iran), Chair of the Commission, said "Social Development is not merely a desirable option, it is a necessity." Achieving full employment and decent work demands a closer relationship between social and economic policies, with macroeconomic frameworks that address the welfare of people and also profit.

Globalization has increased interdependence among countries. This leaves governments with little policy space to create jobs on their own. If decent work is to be achieved in a world marked by liberalization of

economies, by labour market flexibility and deregulation, better coordination between countries on macroeconomic policy must happen and soon.

Many speakers insisted that job creation should not only be a central goal in national policymaking, but should also be pursued through coordinated strategies between countries at a global level.

Social and economic objectives should support one another. Labour market policies should help to match labour supply and demand in view of changing market trends and work restructuring. Youth make up almost half the unemployed in the world. It is urgent that they are equipped with the skills, including information and communication technologies, to thrive in today's global economy.

The issue of social protection also needs to be addressed, as improved social security systems are key elements of a comprehensive approach to eradicating poverty.

*Passionists International* was actively involved in preparing a background document on Full Employment and Decent Work. From this was drawn the NGO statement to government members of the Commission. Kevin also moderated a workshop on the impact of labour practices on Indigenous Peoples.

## ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE - WSF 2007

“People’s struggles, People’s Alternatives”



In January 20-25 peace activists, social movements, and groups from all over the African continent converged on Nairobi to welcome people of similar mind and heart from Asia-Pacific, Latin America, the Caribbean, North America, and Europe. World Social Forum 2007 gathered nearly 60,000 people together. They came to the 7<sup>th</sup> WSF to keep alive their belief that “Another World is Possible”, underlining “The African Experience”.

The WSF first happened in 2001 in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. It grew in opposition to the World Economic Forum (WEF) which meets at the same time in the exclusive resort town of Davos, Switzerland. The WEF brings together the richest business and political leaders from around the globe; the WSF brings together the ordinary folk, local peace activists, academics and all who care passionately about the earth.

The WSF opened with an ecumenical gathering chanting the praises of God and expressing the yearnings of the people of Africa. Bishop Desmond Tutu offered the key reflection. In his unique way he stressed that the war on terror will never be won “as long as there are dehumanizing poverty, disease and ignorance.” He cried out, “God weeps and says: *‘who will help me so we can have a different*

*kind of world, one in which the rich know they have been given much, so they can share and help others?’*” He spoke of creation that is ‘very good’, but it has ‘turned into a nightmare’. He reminded all that it is part of our very being to be bound to one another. The only way to regain our dreams, instead of living the nightmare, is working united as one. “*Not even the only superpower can be totally self-sufficient; it needs other nations.*” This call to hope and to celebrate our common humanity was strengthened by the presence of Muslim leaders and leaders of other Christian Churches.

The religious service flowed into a procession and ended in a peaceful rally in Uhuru Park, close to the City Centre, which welcomed speakers from all walks of life. The next four days were filled with workshops, panel discussions, films on current issues, problems, good practices, everything. Every matter that affects our presence on the earth found its supporters – issues of land, housing, employment, health, environment, politics, trade, economics. There were moments when the cultures of Africa erupted into spontaneous song and dance. The rhythms of African drums were always there. Demonstration marches, with chant and song that gave voice to the longings of different groups just ‘happened’ at various times of the day in the grounds of the forum. The final day was a big marathon event that reached a climax in Uhuru Park with speeches, songs, music and dance. The five days of the Forum confirmed the solidarity of people from all other continents with the struggles of our African brothers and sisters. The Forum confirms the need we have to network, to stand up, to walk united in our commitment that another world is possible, when we act locally but with a global vision.

With a long march from Kasarani to Uhuru Park the World Social Forum 2007 is brought to an end



## Awakening to the Sacredness of all Life

“Sacredness belongs to the whole of which we are a part without which we do not exist. To see the world as whole is to see it as mystical. We have been shaped to see only certain words and places as sacred”

*Gregory Bateson*

Today we are more and more conscious in our industrialised world of being on a search for a deeper sense of meaning in our lives. One major reason for the loss of meaning is our sense of disconnectedness from our universe and our planet. This in turn is resulting in the destruction we see all around us.

In our time we know more about the universe than any people ever knew, we have more command over the functioning of earth than ever before and yet we are less intimate with the universe than peoples of previous times. Why is this the case?

In our globalised village where economy is king we are told in hundreds of ways that our buying power defines our worth, that consuming and owning will make us happy. Our surging world economy worth trillions of dollars delivers an

ongoing cosmological sermon telling us that our planet is just a collection of objects to be turned into products for human consumption. The belief underpinning this consumerist mindset is that the earth is a limitless resource to be exploited by us humans for our own wellbeing. This mentality, and the systems of our commercial/industrial culture which have produced it, have led to a serious disruption of the life systems of earth and of its biological, chemical and geological functioning. This relationship of “use” with earth on the part of humans in turn leads to a sense of alienation from our earth home and even a sense of anguish among many.

We are so immersed in this materialistic culture that it is difficult for us to remember that beauty and ecstasy are at the very root of our existence, that



wonder and awe are in our very DNA. Or if we do remember this sometimes, it is likely to be as a momentary consciousness quickly overtaken by the harsh reality of the pressures of life. Because we have lost our sense of the whole context, our sense of being embedded in the whole community of life in our universe and our planet, we can no longer connect to the truth of who we are: one species within the whole community of life. Consequently we have no initiation into our true role in this universe to which we belong. The dramatic consequences of this are becoming more and more evident.

How might we reconnect to this whole context? In the evolutionary story what distinguishes us as humans is the gift of self reflexive consciousness. The human is that being through whom the earth becomes conscious of herself. We actually participate with earth in the creation of diversity. In order to grow into this awareness and enter into our true role as humans in the life of our planet and, indeed, to put an end to the destruction we are currently wreaking, we need to re-member ourselves and recover certain capacities with which we have lost touch.

We need to open ourselves to the evolutionary story of the universe and of earth, to its mystery, creativity and wisdom in the knowledge that it has had a psychic/spiritual dimension from the start. This is good news for our time and will give us a new, larger context in which to situate ourselves and out of which to act creatively for the future of our planet.

We need to cultivate a passionate absorption in the world and a

capacity to be overwhelmed by the beauty of our home planet, to shudder at its sheer magnificence. Contemplation of this kind will help us to rediscover a sense of communion with the other species with whom we share a home and on whom we depend for life. One way to do this is by living more consciously in our own place, by getting to know its geology, its ecosystems, its trees, birds, animals and other life forms and by understanding the threats to species and climate from environmental damage.

We need to expand our sense of the sacred to include the natural world. St Thomas Aquinas in the 13<sup>th</sup> century talked about two books of Revelation, the book of the Scriptures and the book of Nature. In recent centuries we have certainly lost sight of the second of these. This expanded sense of the sacredness of all life challenges us to a more inclusive sense of the sacred. Because the universe, and our earth home, are indeed a revelation of the divine in our world, any loss of life forms or species represents a loss of modes of divine presence in the world. Each has its own form of interiority and is what Thomas Berry describes as “ensouled”. They form part, with us, of the interconnected community of life which is rather a communion of subjects than a collection of objects. The diminishment of this capacity for inner presence to other modes of being is one of the most important losses of recent western civilisation and yet we don’t even recognise our loss.

Overall Earth is coded for compassion and is calling us to be

a more compassionate presence in our world. She is our teacher and we can learn how to care in a compassionate way for the whole of life. We can learn to live in a mutually enhancing way with the natural world. We can become instruments of interconnectedness, recognising that there is no separation between the personal and the planetary, and that there is a direct link between the systems which cause social injustice and those which cause planetary devastation.

Our Earth has taken about 4 billion years to evolve to its present state of flourishing and beauty. It is a one time endowment that will not come again. We know that earth is primary and that the human is derivative, yet now human activity is endangering the life systems of Earth for all species. The crisis is upon us and the choices we make will decide the future. Christopher Frye’s words may spur us to action:

*“Thank God our time is now. Affairs are now soul sized, the enterprise is exploration into God.*

*But what are you waiting for? It takes so many thousand years to wake.*

*But will you wake? For pity’s sake”.*

Sr. Anne Harnett, C.P.



Kevin Dance (Australia - UN in New York) reported on his work in instituting a Passionist relationship with the United Nations at the General Chapter.



Among the 10 areas of priority for our attention over the next six years named by The Passionist General Chapter held in Rome in October 2006, a commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation featured strongly as number 5.

Commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. (JPIC)

“This commitment is profoundly rooted in our charism. Our Constitutions express our desire “to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected...” (Const.#3). We believe that the power of the Cross offers us the strength to discern and to alleviate the burden of suffering experienced by the poor and the marginalized of our world. The preferential option for the poor has a central role in the process of Restructuring, guiding us to channel and utilize our resources.

Furthermore, the ecological crisis of the world in which we live invites us to be concerned about the safeguarding and the protection of creation.

The commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation that is already present in various areas and apostolates of the Congregation should be integrated into all levels of planning in the Provinces, Vice-provinces and Vicariates including the area of initial formation. With this goal in mind, we must avail ourselves of the good use of available contacts and networks within the Congregation.

We profess our trust in the faithful and provident care of God for our Congregation. God blessed Saint Paul of the Cross with the wonderful gift of the Memoria Passionis. We believe that God will continue to pour out his gifts upon us and the people whom we serve. This confidence gives us a spirit of profound hope about the future of Passionist life and ministry.

Kevin Dance gave a report to the Chapter on the work of Passionists International in promoting JPIC in the name of the Passionist Family at the United Nations. You can read it at:

[http://www.passiochristi.org/Pxi2/index\\_e.htm](http://www.passiochristi.org/Pxi2/index_e.htm)

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