



International Humanist News

November 2002

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IHEU 50th
Anniversary Congress

International Humanist News



November 2002

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

IHEU HEADQUARTERS & EDITORIAL OFFICE

47 THEOBALDS ROAD
LONDON WC1X 8SP, UK
Tel: 00 44 20 7831 4817
Fax 00 44 20 7404 8641

President: *Levi Fragell*
Email: fragell@human.no
Executive Director: *Babu Gogineni*
Editor: *Latha Menon*
Design: *Shirley Dent*
Email: editor@iheu.org

Website: www.iheu.org

From the Executive Director

I am pleased to introduce to you Ms. Latha Menon, the new editor of INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST NEWS. Latha has eighteen years of experience in the UK as an editor of books, magazines, and CD-ROMs; most notably she has directed for eight years the intellectual development of the World English Edition of Encarta Encyclopedia, the international bestseller. We are very pleased that someone of Latha's background and dedication to humanism will take on the task of producing the IHN regularly.

If you were among the 350 humanists from 34 countries who assembled in the Netherlands to celebrate 50 years of the IHEU, or if you had followed the live broadcast of the Congress on the Internet, or if you had watched the three TV broadcasts on Channel 1 of Dutch national TV, you will of course know how exciting it was to be at the IHEU's 50th anniversary Congress. Several contemporary issues were discussed and debated, as the Congress report in this magazine - as well as the more detailed version on the IHEU's website - will show.

The IHEU has a unique role to play in the modern world, and the IHEU's new Executive Committee met in the thousand-year-old *Château de Beduer* in the South of France in October to brainstorm ways and means to strengthen the only international umbrella organisation for humanists, rationalists, atheists, secularists, agnostics and ethical culturists. Several targets have been drawn up which include acquiring an international permanent headquarters for the IHEU. At this first such international meeting to be held in the Château's impressive Grande Salle since 1410, IHEU's Action Plan for 2003 was drawn up, and our five-year Strategic Plan Document was updated: these will soon be circulated to the the IHEU General Assembly which will meet in mid-May 2003 in Washington DC hosted by the American Humanist Association.

Since the Congress, the IHEU has also firmed up plans for its Humanist News Portal on the Internet, worked on the relaunch of social work activities, and also continued its lobbying work for Dr. Shaikh's release. There has also been a prestigious International Colloquium organised by the French Freethinkers under the aegis of the IHEU on the theme of 'separation of religion and state'. This Colloquium effectively kicked off the preparation for the 2005 World Humanist Congress in Paris, which will also be principally on the theme of separation of religion and state.

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 1200 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 the 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 as e-mail text, but not as attachments, because of virus complications. Photographs and illustrations are welcome.
- Contributors should include a complete address as well as a phone and fax number where possible, along with a three-line biographical note. Contributors should note that articles published in IHN may be freely reproduced, but the IHN requires that the source and the author's name be acknowledged.

Contacting the IHEU

General:
IHEU Office (supporters, donations, change of address' etc.)
International Humanist News (articles, letters to the editor)
IHEU Campaigns
IHEYO
IHEU Funding Programme

humanism@iheu.org
office@iheu.org
editor@iheu.org
campaign@iheu.org
youth@iheu.org
funding@iheu.org

NEWS

Dr Shaikh Case Update



Following a hearing in September the judgement of Dr. Shaikh's appeal has been indefinitely postponed. In late September an IHEU representative visited Dr. Shaikh in his death cell, and spent an hour with him. The representative carried campaign updates for Dr. Shaikh, as well as some reading material. Following the barbaric murder in June of Yousf Ali, a blasphemy convict in Lahore prison, by a fellow inmate, security has been tightened for Dr. Shaikh. He has a cleaner and more comfortable cell compared to the atrocious conditions under which he was being held until recently. While he remains in solitary confinement, we are gratified to learn of his unbroken spirit, his good cheer and optimism.

In May, and as reported in the July issue of INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST NEWS, IHEU President Levi Fragell issued a warning about anonymous, malicious and unfounded rumours aimed at undermining our campaign to save the life of Dr. Shaikh. At Dr. Shaikh's express wish, the IHEU has carried out an investigation to identify the source of these rumours. We can now report that the source has been identified and the IHEU has written to the culprit, confronting him with the evidence and asking for an explanation. We await a satisfactory reply.

The IHEU needs constructive criticism. If anyone has genuine concerns about the way in which the IHEU is carrying out its functions they should raise them in the General Assembly or directly with the Executive Committee. All complaints and suggestions will be seriously considered. Fraudulent misrepresentation, sending anonymous emails, and making unfounded attacks on IHEU and its officers, brings discredit on no one but the perpetrators.

Matt Cherry elected to UN NGO Committee



IHEU is pleased to announce that Matt Cherry, a member of IHEU's UN NGO Delegation at New York, has been elected secretary of the United Nations Non-Government Organizations (NGO) Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief. In this position, he will work within the United Nations system to monitor, explore, implement and advance the fundamental human right to freedom of religion or belief.

The NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief, which consists of seven members of different faiths,

Sonja Eggerickx and Larry Jones Elected to IHEU's Executive Committee

Sonja Eggerickx

Sonja Eggerickx became involved in the Flemish part of the Belgian humanist movement through her work as a teacher of "non-confessional ethics", and is currently a school inspector responsible for the ethics course in Belgian schools in two provinces. She is a National Board Member of the Flemish Humanistisch Verbond, and chief editor of MORES, a humanist magazine for teachers. She is also one of two Vice-Presidents of Unie Vrijzinnige Verenigingen, and Treasurer of CCL-CVR, the organization uniting the Dutch- and French-speaking Belgian humanists. Sonja became interested in international humanism by participating in several IHEU conferences. Belgium has strong traditions in humanism. The rights of humanists are protected alongside those practising religions, and there is a long tradition in the teaching of humanist ethics and in humanist ceremonies. Sonja brings the valuable experience of Belgian humanism, and more generally the perspectives of an educator, to the Executive Committee.

Larry Jones

Larry Jones is the founder and President of the Institute for Humanist Studies (IHS), an international educational organisation based in Albany, N.Y., that promotes humanism, provides educational courses online, and supports humanist projects across the world. The IHS is a Specialist Member Organisation of the IHEU. Larry was Executive Director of the Capital District Humanist Society in Albany, serves on the board of the Center for Inquiry, and is treasurer of CSICOP. A full interview with Larry appeared in the 50th Anniversary Commemorative Issue of IHN, Volume 9, July 2002.

meets sixteen times a year at the United Nations in New York. Its activities include eight monthly speaker meetings where political, religious and human rights leaders and experts explore issues pertaining to religious freedoms.

Matt Cherry is currently the executive director of the Institute for Humanist Studies (IHS) in Albany, N.Y. and has been for a dozen years a professional leader in the humanist movement in the UK, the Netherlands, the US, and in the IHEU. With his new volunteer responsibilities at the UN NGO Committee, Matt Cherry will bring greater visibility to the IHEU and to the humanist perspective on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Already he has established valuable contacts in the US to help advance the campaign for Dr. Shaikh.

Church and State in Post-Communist Poland

by Andrzej Dominiczak, Polish Humanist Federation

In 2001, the IHEU held a Conference in Bratislava to evaluate the current status of non-denominational citizens and NGOs representing these groups in Central Europe. The Conference addressed humanist concerns in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary. The present article, which was presented as a paper at this Conference, is being reproduced in INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST NEWS as a mark of solidarity with our Polish humanist colleagues at a time when they are organising a debate on 25 October at the Polish Parliament on 'The Future of Europe - Human Rights and Freedoms in the Constitution of the European Union' (keynote speaker Babu Gogineni, Executive Director of IHEU). On 26 October, the EHF as joint organiser of the events in Warsaw will host a humanist platform on 'Co-existence of different life stances - Discrimination'.



Introduction

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, "The relationship between the State and churches and other religious organisations shall be based on the principle of respect for their autonomy and the mutual independence of each in its own sphere, as well as on the principle of cooperation for the individual and the common good". The truth, however, has little in common with these solemn declarations, particularly as regards the relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. In today's Poland there is no "mutual independence" of State and Church. Only the autonomy and independence of the Church has been respected over the last decade, probably far beyond the standards observed in most democratic states. The Catholic Church in Poland has been to a large degree beyond any democratic or legal control. At the same time the Church has constantly and without any self-restraint violated the autonomy of the State, as this article will show. The Church has significantly reinforced its political and economic power since the collapse of the Communist regime, and today there is practically no public authority or other organisation that would dare to criticise or oppose its activities or aspirations. Even the media, which used to be critical in the beginning of the nineties, now condemn those who oppose the idea of turning Poland into a religious state.

However, this political and economic success has not been without significant cost. The fact that the Church is primarily seen as a political power has weakened its moral authority and lowered its social status. Polish religiosity has become even more selective and superficial. It has also resulted in a fall in the number of the faithful, particularly among teenagers. A survey conducted in 1999 by the Statistical Institute of the Catholic Church among students of secondary schools (15 to 18 years of age) shows that more than 21 per cent of young Poles are indifferent to religion, while only 10 per cent describe themselves as deeply religious. This phenomenon has been recognised by the Church authorities as so serious that they have decided to

introduce evangelisation of the unfaithful into school curricula. One should be relieved, however. The authors of the Church's Committee for Dialog declare that they do not encourage the conversion of young people by force: "Non-believers should be approached with love, respect and understanding - not only for tactical reasons [!]").

Another study, recently conducted by one of the highly respected public opinion research centres, and published by the quality weekly *Polityka* (Politics), gave an interesting picture of the religiosity of the Polish adult population, 93 per cent of which still declare that they are believers. Yet only 69 per cent believe in resurrection and eternal life, and a mere 41 per cent in the existence of Hell. The survey reveals remarkable ignorance of the principal Catholic dogmas: when asked the names of the Holy Trinity, a common answer was The Father, Joseph and Mary. Likewise, there appears to be little influence of Catholic teaching on people's attitudes to contraception (accepted by three-quarters of the population), premarital sexual contact, and the legalisation of certain forms of euthanasia. Most young people do not accept the idea that there is no religion without the Church. According to the Catholic sociologist, the Reverend Wladyslaw Piwowarski from the Catholic University in Lublin: "Two thirds of Poles are in fact unaware heretics, who do not understand the content of Catholic faith."

How, then, if Polish religiosity is so superficial and social support for the Church so weak, has the clergy been able to establish and exert such all-pervading political influence? To answer this, we must outline the history of the first decade of the Polish democratic state; in particular, the relationship between the State and the Catholic Church with regard to human rights and freedoms in Poland.

Poland under Democracy

Many in the West, particularly in the United States, consider Poland as a praiseworthy example of the

successful transformation from a centrally planned economy to a free market economy, and from an authoritarian Communist regime to democracy. In fact, Poland has been inexorably heading towards becoming a religious state.

This situation cannot be explained by traditional Polish religiosity: these developments have occurred against the will of a majority of our society. It is, however, supported by the new, so-called post-Solidarity political elite, which eagerly satisfies the political ambitions of the Catholic Church in return for its full political backing. Such political agitation commonly takes place during religious gatherings and in the growing number of the media owned or controlled by the Church. In 1997, this led to the electoral victory of the ultra-conservative coalition called the Electoral Action "Solidarity". Soon after their coming to power the newly elected authorities rewarded the Church by adopting several laws to its advantage and assuring the clergy that the future governmental policies would satisfy their economic, ideological and political aspirations in Poland and abroad. One should remember that, according to the present Pope, Poland should become a source of inspiration for the so-called "re-evangelisation of Europe", which would in reality lead to the Catholic Church regaining the status of the only repository of truth as regards worldview and social morality. Regardless of whether this vision with respect to Europe is realistic or not, Poland itself is being ardently adjusted to the requirements of this scenario.

The Control of Church over State

One of the important consequences of these aspirations is the large body of legislation that turns some aspects of Catholic doctrine into national laws and reinforces the position of the Church in social life. The first such legislation legalised religious instruction in public schools (initially introduced against the law) and ensured that catechism teachers are paid by the State which, however, has no say whatsoever as regards the content of such instruction. Another example of such legislative acts is the law enforcing respect for "Christian values" in television and radio programmes, which resulted in a practical ban on broadcasts that might not be accepted by the Church.

In 1996, at the demand of the Church, whose representatives took part in the work of the Constitutional Committee on equal terms with the members of parliament, the provision on the separation of Church and State was replaced with an enigmatic wording providing for their "mutual impartiality". Another constitutional provision obligated the government and parliament to regulate relations with the Church in an international law concluded with the Vatican, the so-called Concordat. The Concordat was finally ratified in 1998, in a manner and form which was the source of a heated controversy. This agreement sanctioned and extended privileges thus far obtained by the Church and in some cases provided for additional prerogatives. Numerous provisions of the Concordat violate constitutional guarantees of freedom and equality before the law. Moreover, since the agreement devolves certain powers to the Church it should, according to the Constitution, have been adopted by a two-thirds

majority of votes. It was, however, ratified by a simple majority of votes in both chambers of Parliament.

Another example of the Church's unconstitutional role in Polish politics and public life is its influence on some verdicts of the Constitutional Tribunal, an institution established in order to decide independently on the conformity of laws with the Constitution. In 1997 we were provided with striking evidence of such influence: the Tribunal - clearly without any legal grounds - decided that the relatively liberal law on abortion was not in conformity with the Constitution and with the principles of the State governed by the rule of law. This verdict was used by the conservative majority in parliament to reintroduce the ban on abortion on social grounds.

The above examples show that the Church is treated by Polish authorities as a source of law and at the same time as an institution whose interests are above the law. There are numerous cases of the clergy violating laws with impunity: insults hurled on disobedient MPs, racist and anti-Semitic speeches, and infringements of financial regulations, even though public authorities diligently help to keep them from the knowledge of the general public. Institutions dealing with the administration of justice abstain from prosecuting in such cases and those few individuals who try to instigate legal proceedings against clergymen are punished by their superiors.

State authorities also provide increasingly generous assistance to the ideological expansion of the Catholic Church. They support a large number of religious publishing houses, grant almost unlimited presence of the clergy in the public media, sponsor the Pope's travels, activities of the Papal Theological Academy and theological seminaries. By openly declaring the Catholic identity of Poland and authenticating these declarations by symbolic acts (such as hanging the cross in the parliamentary plenary sittings room or organising a pilgrimage of MPs to the religious centre of Poland in Czestochowa), they contribute to the growth of religious fanaticism in Poland. This phenomenon can best be illustrated by the support granted to Catholic television and radio stations, even if they advocate anti-Semitism, religious fundamentalism, intolerance and xenophobic nationalism. The government's educational policy has also been partly shaped by the Church. Following its recommendations, the Minister of Education decided to withdraw sex education from schools. For the same reason, parliament rejected a proposal to remove the grades for religious instruction from school certificates (the presence of such grades violates a constitutional guarantee and contributes to discrimination of non-believers, thus exerting psychological pressure on them to participate in religious instruction). Similarly, the Minister of Defence has failed to respond to the complaints of soldiers who are forced to practise religion while serving their military duty.

Another important issue is the question of legal and illegal financial privileges of the Church and clergymen. Some of those privileges originate from Communist Poland, whose authorities tried to buy the support of the Church; a great majority of them, however, have been introduced after the political transformation.

Despite being a relatively wealthy social group, Polish clergy are encumbered with minimal income taxes, while their real earnings remain unknown. The Church has been granted numerous tax allowances, reductions and exemptions from customs duties for imported goods without proper control of the way such goods are used (many of these goods, particularly cars, are being sold in the open market for huge profits). The most extreme and socially noxious privilege is the Church's right to participate in the so-called "regulatory proceedings" where its claims for the restitution of property rights are decided. Such claims are often made for real property lost a long time ago (sometimes centuries ago) and of important public utilities (such as hospitals, schools, student houses, etc.). Such property is frequently returned to the Church by arbitrary decisions, issued either by individual state officials or by the so-called "Property Committee", one half of which is composed of state officials and the other half of representatives of the Episcopate. The committee's decisions are final - they are not subject to appeal to any higher authority, nor are they subject to any form of social control. This way of proceeding is in contradiction to the basic principles of the democratic state and the rule of law. In no other post-Communist country is the Church granted property in such a way and on such a grand scale. To our knowledge, for example, in the Czech Republic and in Hungary decisions with respect to each individual claim are made by the respective parliaments.

The Concordat has sanctioned and broadened this practice - incompatible with the Constitution - by giving the Church the opportunity to share in decisions about its financial relations with the State; all decisions concerning these relations are made by a joint commission appointed by the parties to this agreement, so no privileges of the Church can be revoked.

The strong position of the Catholic Church in Polish politics has also had adverse effects on members of sexual minorities. Recent opinion polls show that homosexuals are the least tolerated minority, even among young people. This attitude is being entrenched by prominent senior officials of the Catholic Church who have made numerous public statements in which they have voiced prejudiced and homophobic opinions by claiming that homosexuality is a form of moral deficiency or a disease.

The anathematic social attitudes reinforced or even produced by the Church have their counterpart in state legislation. Due in part to the Church's influence, the newly adopted Polish constitution, which came into force in 1997, fails to proscribe against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, even though a stipulation to this effect had been considered in an early draft. Furthermore, while the constitution explicitly defines marriage as the union of man and woman, Polish law fails to provide for any form of legalised partnership between persons of the same sex, thus penalising same-sex couples in areas like tax, pension schemes, and property inheritance. In practice, same-sex partners are also not allowed to adopt children. Efforts by homosexual citizens of Poland to influence the course of politics and to win public support for their causes are

met with obstacles. In 1998, the Lambda Group in Warsaw was refused permission to hold a gay pride parade, in apparent deference to "family values" as propagated by the Church.

Policies Towards Women and the Family

It is in the area of women's rights, however, and especially with regard to violence against women, that the joint policy of Church and government is widely perceived to be most strikingly at odds with the standards of the rest of Europe. Women are seen by Polish authorities predominantly in the family context, as wives, minders of the sick and, above all, as reproductive units without individual freedoms and rights; policies affecting them are presented in the context of the family.

The government's approach has been based on the Pro-Family Policy Program, devised and developed by a group of ultra-conservative Catholic experts from The Electoral Action "Solidarity". Explicitly based on the Vatican Family Rights Charter, this document defines the family as a basic social unit and a natural relationship more fundamental than the State or community. According to the Program, no law may infringe on the inalienable rights of the family, the fundamental unit of Poland.

The real meaning of this vaguely phrased definition emerges when the goals of the programme are analysed. Its authors propose, *inter alia*, to introduce the institution of separation (the substitute of a divorce based on Canon Law), ban abortion, enforce Canon Law marriages, restrict minority churches, withdraw sex education from schools, and censor the media, as well as grant family benefits and tax deductions to families with children, particularly those with many children.

The ultra-conservative Catholic model of the family promoted in the Program has no regard for the individual rights or freedoms of family members, as it ignores their needs and interests. The family is understood as a monolithic collective whose abstract interests, defined in practice by the Catholic Church, are considered superior to individual interests, particularly those of women.

Public statements made by its main proponents have reinforced the document's language. The most controversial of them was the previous Minister for Family Affairs, Kazimierz Kapera, the former head of the Catholic Families Movement, who was once dismissed from a ministerial position because of his offensive public declarations about the gay community. On numerous occasions, Kapera defined the institution of marriage as an unbreakable bond, which cannot be terminated in any circumstances. In a series of interviews, he expressed the opinion that abortion cannot be allowed, even in the case of a 12-year-old girl rape victim. The former minister provoked public outcry over his critique of the campaign against domestic violence. He said that "the problem [of violence against women] has been exaggerated and [that] such campaigns should not be supported, as they might dissuade young women from marrying".

The Program's formal language and the public declarations of ultra-conservative politicians became one of the most visible parts of governmental policy, particularly with regard to measures intended to curtail women's rights. The then Prime Minister (1997-2001), Jerzy Buzek, announced the importance of such pro-family policy in his statement in November 1997. Polish women didn't have to wait long for concrete steps to be taken to put the Program's provisions into practice. A programme to halt violence and work towards equal opportunities was suspended; governmental subsidies of contraceptives were scrapped; and in July 1998, a "Report on the Situation of Polish Families", presented as an objective analysis but in fact a form of propaganda promoting the traditional model of the family, was adopted by the Council of Ministers. The Report expressed concern over the divorce rate and claimed a close correlation between crime and increasing numbers of single-parent families. Domestic violence against women was regarded by the authors as an exaggerated problem, given an inappropriately high profile by the women's press, while the issues of child abuse and incest were ignored.

A section on the Vatican Family Rights Charter constitutes an integral part of the Report. Although the authors admit that the Charter is not a binding international document, they argue that it may be considered a draft proposal. However, even a basic analysis of the Report and the Charter leads unavoidably to the conclusion that the Vatican Family Charter is, in fact, treated as fundamental law and the real basis for Polish legislation and the government's family programme. Concurrently, the Report neglects to mention the 1995 Platform for Action adopted at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, nor do they refer to the Polish government Program of Action on Behalf of Women 2000.

In 1999, a further document, the "Pro-family Policy of the State," in similar vein but concentrating more on demography (the need to encourage marriages and larger families) and family health, was adopted by the Council of Ministers. Identifying an economic factor in the decline of marriages and reduction in the number of children, it proposed financial incentives such as tax deductions and affordable housing programmes to reverse the trends. Once more, there was no mention of domestic violence. The long-term goal of this policy is clear: it promotes an authoritarian conservative model of society in general, and of the family in particular; a model according to which the family is seen as an unbreakable unit, superior to the individual dignity and freedom of its members.

The authors of the Program complain in its Introduction that international documents lack direct legal protection of the family and that the family itself is a notion not uniformly understood in the legislation of various European Union member states. Indeed, the Polish government does not try to disguise its discriminatory attitude to women and its critical opinion of EU policy promoting gender equality. Recently, at the 45th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the representative of the Polish government



refused to endorse the statement by Margareta Winberg, who spoke on behalf of the European Union and Associated States, calling on governments to ensure that women enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Church in the New Millennium

The first years of the new millennium have seen considerable reinforcement of the Church's political and economic position. New laws discriminating against non-believers have been adopted and the Church's privileges have been strengthened, often in striking contradiction with democratic principles and the laws of Poland. For example, in June 2001, the infamous law on radio and television was amended by introducing new provisions concerning the so-called "social broadcasters". Various social organisations, including churches, may now be granted a broadcasting licence, free of charge, if they meet certain conditions, including the requirement to respect Christian values. Such laws form a convenient basis for discriminatory practices. In May 2001, the media and various social bodies, including the Council of Ethics in the Media, called on the president of the State television channel to dismiss the Director of News because he referred to the Pope by his real name, Karol Wojtyła, in a business letter. Although he was not in the end dismissed, he was harshly reprimanded and forced to declare himself in the wrong. Since the beginning of this year the Church has continued to improve its economic situation, mostly on account of generous donations granted by local governments, mainly in the form of landed property or building lots, whose value often amounted to millions of Polish zlotys. A new

commercial TV station, controlled by the Catholic Church, was to a large degree financed by the state-owned company, Polish Copper.

Despite the highly publicized efforts of Polish bishops to influence the results of the last parliamentary elections, held in September 2001, by calling on Catholics to vote for candidates defending "Christian values", the openly religious League of Polish Families received just 7.87 per cent of the vote, while the left-wing election coalition won over 41 per cent of votes and over 216

Seym seats. The Church's influence on the choices made by ordinary people is minimal, while it still exerts strong influence on the politicians and state authorities. Why? The answer is relatively simple. Polish democracy is still in a very early stage of development. Polish politicians do not understand that their primary obligation is to protect people's rights and freedoms, and - as regards the relationship, in a democracy, between State and Church - to protect the autonomy of the State, so that all can be equal, regardless of their religion or philosophical worldview.



**IHEU General Assembly 2003
Mon 12 & Tue 13 May, Washington DC, USA**

The GA is open to official representatives of IHEU member organisations. Annual and Life-supporters of IHEU may attend as observers, but need to register with the IHEU headquarters by 10 April 2003 at the latest.

The GA will follow an IHEU-American Humanist Association International Symposium on 'Humanism - Engaging the World - Confronting Injustice'

For details of GA and Symposium write to office@iheu.org

IHEU President to Visit Humanist Organisations in Africa

IHEU President Levi Fragell will visit Humanist organisations in Uganda, Ghana and Nigeria in Nov./Dec. 2002. Levi Fragell will address public meetings, meet with Humanist leaders and, especially in Nigeria, ask for the abolition of Sharia law.

Celebration of 50 Years of International Humanism



Report from the 15th IHEU Congress, Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands, 3-6 July 2002

This is an adapted version of the full report, which can be seen on the IHEU Website, together with the full text of the keynote speeches.

Report: Sandra Langendijk and Claudia Dekkers.

Photos: Ilya van Marle

Opening Day

Wednesday, 3 July 2002

The 15th Congress of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) began on the evening of 3 July 2002. For four days, humanists and guests from all over the world would get together to discuss issues from a humanist perspective. This first evening of the Congress was dedicated to the celebration of 50 years of international humanism and to the presentation of the Van Praag Award, a biennial award for contributions to humanism presented by the hosts of the Congress, the Dutch Humanists.

At an evening reception, Yvonne Breuk, Managing Director of the Dutch Humanist League and Chair of the Congress, welcomed IHEU members and guests and introduced Henk Manschot, head of the University of Humanistics in Utrecht, and Levi Fragell, President of the IHEU, who both gave short welcoming speeches. Henk Manschot stressed the human diversity and the different perspectives on humanism reflected in the IHEU, which represents more than 95 member organizations, and the need for trust and solidarity. Levi Fragell welcomed all participants to this special 50th anniversary Congress on behalf of the IHEU. He thanked the hosts, the Dutch Humanist League, for organising the Congress and arranging such a broad programme of events. "For some," the President declared, "this is the first world congress. Others have been to most of the congresses since Sir Julian Huxley declared the first one open in 1952."

"During more than two decades I have spoken about nothing else other than the identity of humanism - or the identity of humanists," continued Mr Fragell. He stressed the importance of having a common name and a common symbol to identify IHEU as a world movement instead of diminishing our visibility with a hundred different names and symbols.

Fragell wondered whether our humanism sometimes becomes so politically correct that we feel guilty about being happy in a world with so much misery. "In the wide range of 'humanisms'- scientific, evolutionary, ethical, radical, secular, etc., which of course are all valid expressions of parts of humanism - we sometimes leave out the inspiring existential ideas from Jean Paul Sartre and Erich Fromm about humanism as a constitutional part of being human."

This was not to say that the serious issues faced by the world should not be of prime concern to humanists. "The challenge of poverty and injustice has priority above anything else. But we are allowed to attack problems with optimism, with hope, and even with a smile - sometimes. I am not ashamed of being a happy man and a happy humanist. And I am not ashamed to show the world that I belong to the international humanist movement."

The first speaker during the dinner was Howard Radest (USA), former president of IHEU, who reviewed 50 years of the organization: "After World War II we wanted a better world and therefore we thought we needed a new foundation. This appears not to be true. Things do not happen because of organisations but because of what happens to people. Feminism, human rights, cloning were some of the things that did not exist fifty years ago. The world today is another place." He shared his memories of the energy, excitement, and humour that characterized his involvement with the IHEU, and expressed the challenges facing humanists today, above all how to create an effective humanist community.

After the dinner, Frits van Vugt (the Netherlands), Chairman (a.i.) of the Dutch Humanist League, introduced the presentation of the Van Praag Award. Professor J.P. van Praag was a philosopher, writer, and committed humanist and one of the founders of the Dutch Humanist

Ethical Union in 1946, of which he was chairman for many years. The Van Praag Award was instituted in 1971, and is awarded biennially. Van Vugt declared the winner of this year's award to be Dr Adriaan van der Staay, the former director of the Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands, who, from 1991-1999, also held the Socrates Chair at the Faculty of History and Art at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. Joop Doorman (the Netherlands), Chair of the jury of the Van Praag Award, presented the award to Dr van der Staay.

In his acceptance speech, Dr van der Staay spoke of the diversity of cultures, how cultures are learnt, how they evolve over time, and how their strength can mask our common humanity. The diversity of cultures was immensely enriching, but cultural relativism was dangerous. "Cultural relativism is a trap. It abolishes intellectual and moral commonality with the Other." He developed the idea of cultural invention and its transmission and evolution with time: "The individual is the indispensable transmitter in time and space of a repertoire of cultural inventions. The future of humanism would be greatly helped by a cultural Charles Darwin." Yet much cultural

founder of the feminist publishing house of Kali for women, India; Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, Professor of Law at Emory University, Atlanta, USA; and Mr. Rob Buitenweg, University of Humanistics, Utrecht, the Netherlands.

Fifty years of IHEU

As the longest serving member of the IHEU Board, Paul Kurtz presented the first copy of the commemorative book *International Humanist and Ethical Union 1952- 2002* by Bert Gazenbeek and Babu Gogineni to the Dutch Prime Minister, Mr. Wim Kok. To a man with the highest humanist values, Kurtz declared "As humanists we believe in global ethics. That is exactly what you represent. Your decision to visit Bosnia has deeply impressed us. It is a unique project we applaud you for." Wim Kok was warmly applauded by the congress. In a brief acceptance speech, Wim Kok congratulated the IHEU on its 50th anniversary. "I would like to pay tribute to the important contribution you have made to the international world. We are in the middle of the process of globalization. We must pay attention to neglected groups of people and to neglected values." Rethinking our values is a necessity, he

''In the wide range of 'humanisms'- scientific, evolutionary, ethical, radical, secular, etc., which of course are all valid expressions of parts of humanism - we sometimes leave out the inspiring existential ideas from Jean Paul Sartre and Erich Fromm about humanism as a constitutional part of being human.''

- Levi Fragell, President, IHEU

exchange was at a relatively superficial level - that of cultural products alone. "I would suggest that much of the confusion and conflict in present-day public opinion is caused by the discrepancy between the quick transmission of cultural products and the slow assimilation of reproduction skills and the still slower understanding of the cultural insights and values that underlie them." Humanism, he said, needs to recognize the importance of cultural diversity. And to understand the deep underpinning ideas of culture, we must forge links with the past. "If I were to counsel Europeans on a conversation with the past I would give Herodotus a place of honour. Herodotus was born in Asia, lived in Athens and died in Italy two and a half thousand years ago. This man talks to us about his personal enquiry into his world, about the long history of cultural differences, of a world that he travelled in as far as the Tigris and up the Nile. He prefigures my future humanist in his encompassing ambition to understand."

The evening was concluded with lute music by Mr Robert Favery.

Human Diversity, Human Rights and Humanism Thursday, 4 July 2002

The morning began with a dance performance by Wilson Pico from Ecuador, on the theme of the drudgery of the life of many women across the world. The speakers at the morning plenary session were Mr. Jan Pronk, Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, former Minister of Development of the Netherlands and chair of the 2001 World Climate Conference; Ms Urvasi Butalia, writer and

said: "We cannot stop the course of the world, but we can influence its course. What you have been doing for the past 50 years has had an influence. I want to say, continue on the same basis as you did before."

Jan Pronk: 'Globalization needs global values and global ethics.'

With the World Summit in Johannesburg imminent, Mr. Jan Pronk spoke of globalisation and sustainability. Despite the opportunities presented by the end of the Cold War, the world is riven by many conflicts; many continue to suffer in poverty; and globalisation, the force that has developed during this time, has both positive and negative effects. Many feel excluded. If the opportunities are not grasped, they will turn their backs on it, when globalisation could be a force for good, enabling people to work together on issues such as climate change, sustainability, and social policy. He hoped that a global system of ethics could be built, a shared system of values to guide future decision-making, and make societies resilient in a world of change. Gatherings such as the IHEU Congress play an important part in the forging of a global system of ethics.

Urvasi Butalia: 'Every society finds its own level of violence towards its women.'

Ms Butalia's talk focused on violence against women and women's rights. Her speech reflected the urgency and passion of a feminist activist coming from a region that had just been on the brink of war. Why was it, she asked, that violence was increasingly acceptable in so many societies? Why have we allowed violence to become an important

way both of asserting difference and suppressing it? No one knows better what it means to live with violence than women. Violence against women is worldwide, and not restricted to domestic violence. "It is my belief - a conclusion I have come to after many years of working on women's issues - that every society in the world finds its own level of violence towards its women, and that those levels are in line with the cultural mores of that society. Whether it is domestic violence or the violence caused by anorexia nervosa, these different forms continue to keep women in a state of oppression." She spoke of the need to find ways to retain the differences that enrich society, while preventing them from being manipulated into causes for conflict. A recognition and respect for different cultures might hold the key; but perceptions of superiority of one culture over another - especially that of the West over the others - was still rife. She ended her speech by reflecting on the closeness of humanism and feminism: "Before I came to this Congress I was asked if I was a humanist. I responded by saying that I was - and am - a feminist. To me, feminism means recognizing the right of every human being to live with dignity and security. As a woman, I have always done this, and have always expected it in return. If this is

critical role in shaping values, and this must be acknowledged by humanists. The upholding of values can only occur through accountability - of the United Nations, the European Union, or national governments. "After all, how can a superpower like the United States have a foreign policy so irresponsible except through the failure of the American public to hold its government accountable." An-Na'im ended his speech on a note of turning inwards: "...ultimately for me, as a Muslim, as a believer, the challenge is to my own religion, to my own tradition. What you can do is support me in that challenge and to undertake your country's challenge to your respective demons. We all have our demons."

Rob Buitenweg: 'Secular humanism is the foundation of human rights.'

After the Second World War, hope pervaded the world that a new international order could be established to promote a humane world. Yet now, fifty years on, fundamentalism appears to be growing, genocide and armed conflicts continue to plague the world, and the gap between rich and poor is widening. What can the IHEU offer this world



humanism, then feminism and humanism are close cousins. Together we can create a world which rejects violence and works for peace."

Abdullahi An-Na'im: 'Every single person has to act, every single person counts.'

Professor An-Na'im's speech was on the power of difference and the difference of power. He argued that ways must be found for all to contribute to the humanisation of the world from their respective positions: "Because we cannot expect people to abandon who they are, and where they come from, what they represent, and what their life means, in order to join our shared cause." This, he said, was the challenge he posed to all fundamentalisms, "including humanist fundamentalism". An-Na'im spoke of September 11th and questioned the appropriateness of the American response. As a Muslim, he said, the question for him was how to challenge both Islamic fundamentalism and an American exceptionalism which was undermining international law. All individuals should act at all levels from local to global, with special responsibility for those with more powerful voices and resources. The choices made should, he believed, be guided by a recognition of the reality and power of difference, and of differences in power which apply between East and West, North and South, women and men. "Affirmation of shared values is a step in that direction." Action should involve upholding these values - of respect for humanity, and respect for difference. "That's why I challenge fundamentalist humanists who claim that religion cannot have a voice in the shaping of those values." According to An-Na'im, religion, for believers, plays a

in the twenty-first century? Buitenweg perceived a two-fold task for organised humanism: to make a stand against religious fundamentalism, and unmask the irrational illusions of dogmatic religions; and to promote humanism and the rights of humanists. "Our ideal is a humane world with universal human rights." Despite lip service to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and later international declarations, human rights are not wholeheartedly supported. Many Western countries embrace freedom rights, but neglect socio-economic rights such as the right to adequate housing. The reverse occurs in a number of non-Western countries. How can a situation be achieved where all human rights are accepted wholeheartedly by all people? This is where humanism comes in. "Secular humanism," said Buitenweg, "is the foundation of human rights." In a direct response to the arguments of the previous speaker, Buitenweg declared: "Can we expect people of other life stances or religions to accept the humanism of human rights, whereas at the same time maintaining that humanism is an alternative life stance to religion? I think we can." He spoke of the humanist tree having two branches - an existential branch concerned with the meaning of life and the morality of a good and meaningful life; and a socio-ethical branch focusing on the morality of a humane society, on how people from varied life stances might enable one another to lead a dignified life. "This socio-ethical humanism is the moral foundation of human rights." While these two branches of humanism are congenial, it is through

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Roy Brown's Introduction to the Amsterdam Declaration



The following is an extract of the speech given by IHEU Vice President Roy Brown in presenting the Amsterdam Declaration 2002 to the IHEU 50th Anniversary Congress in Noordwijkerhout, Netherlands, on 6th July.

At the founding Congress of the IHEU in Amsterdam in 1952, our founding fathers thought that it would be a good idea for the Congress to issue a simple one-page statement on the principles of Humanism. That document became known as the Amsterdam Declaration. It achieved its objective of summarising the fundamental principles of Humanism on a single page, but it was a child of its time. It defined Humanism in relation to religion: Humanism is not... Humanism does not ... And there was a strong emphasis on democracy as opposed to totalitarianism - hardly surprising in the early days of the Cold War.

In the lead up to the 50th Anniversary Congress the Executive Committee thought it would be a good idea to update this document. The objective remained the same: a short, clear definition of the fundamentals of Humanism - but presented as what Humanism stands for rather than what it is opposed to. In the words of the old song: accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative.

In January this year we embarked on the revision process - and it turned out to be far from simple. I was asked by the EC to canvas ideas and to produce a revised draft. Apparently my main qualification for this task was that I could read and write. I am not a philosopher and these ideas are not mine, they come from our founding fathers, from our philosophers and indeed from all of us. Between January and June this year I prepared no less than 14 revised drafts, involving an ever-widening circle of

people who commented and made suggestions. I apologise now to all of you who would have liked to have been involved in this process but were not. But time was of the essence and we needed to finish the process in time for the Congress.

The declaration that we have now produced defines Humanism in positive terms. Unlike the earlier version it recognises our dependence on, and responsibility for, the natural world. It also recognises that we are more than just rational beings, that art and creative imagination play an important part in our lives. It also answers some of the criticisms often levelled at Humanism as being "soulless" and "amoral".

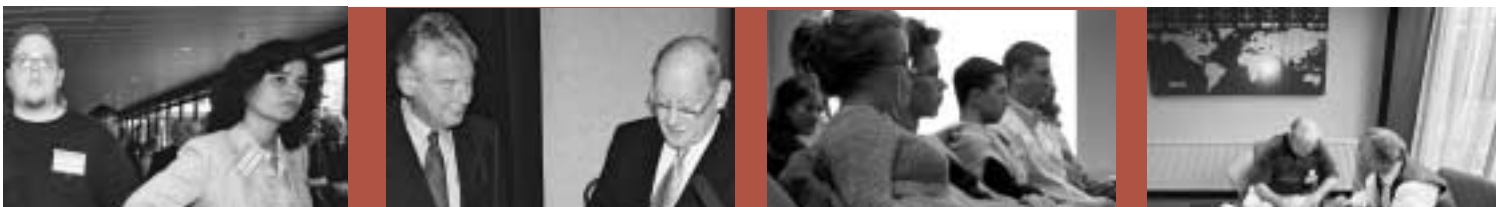
I must add a few words about what the Amsterdam Declaration is not. It is not a manifesto. Nor is it a plan of action. It is purely and simply what it claims to be: a simple statement of fundamental principles, of guiding principles from which we hope position papers, plans of action and manifestos can be developed.

At the General Assembly meeting on 3rd July I presented the then final draft and asked delegates for suggestions for amendments. I want to thank all of you who responded. I must also thank the many people who contributed to the process of preparation. The final proposals for amendments were considered by the drafting committee last night and a number were incorporated into the final draft that you have in front of you.

One final point. Although this Congress is being held in Noordwijkerhout we felt that "Noordwijkerhout Declaration" didn't have quite the same ring as the "Amsterdam Declaration" so we have retained the earlier name. I believe that the Amsterdam Declaration 2002 will meet the needs of humanists around the world for a clear and simple statement of the principles of Humanism. I recommend it to the Congress.

The motion to recommend the Amsterdam Declaration 2002 to the General Assembly was passed unanimously by the conference. The General Assembly later voted unanimously for Amsterdam Declaration 2002 to become an official document of the IHEU.

Opposite is the final agreed text in full.



The IHEU Amsterdam Declaration 2002

Humanism is the outcome of a long tradition of free thought that has inspired many of the world's great thinkers and creative artists and gave rise to science itself. The fundamentals of modern Humanism are as follows:

1. Humanism is ethical. It affirms the worth, dignity and autonomy of the individual and the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others. Humanists have a duty of care to all of humanity including future generations. Humanists believe that morality is an intrinsic part of human nature based on understanding and a concern for others, needing no external sanction.

2. Humanism is rational. It seeks to use science creatively, not destructively. Humanists believe that the solutions to the world's problems lie in human thought and action rather than divine intervention. Humanism advocates the application of the methods of science and free inquiry to the problems of human welfare. But Humanists also believe that the application of science and technology must be tempered by human values. Science gives us the means but human values must propose the ends.

3. Humanism supports democracy and human rights. Humanism aims at the fullest possible development of every human being. It holds that democracy and human development are matters of right. The principles of democracy and human rights can be applied to many human relationships and are not restricted to methods of government.

4. Humanism insists that personal liberty must be combined with social responsibility. Humanism ventures to build a world on the idea of the free person responsible to society, and recognises our dependence on and responsibility for the natural world. Humanism is un-dogmatic, imposing no creed upon its adherents. It is thus committed to education free from indoctrination.

5. Humanism is a response to the widespread demand for an alternative to dogmatic religion. The world's major religions claim to be based on revelations fixed for all time, and many seek to impose their world-views on all of humanity. Humanism recognises that reliable knowledge of the world and ourselves arises through a continuing process of observation, evaluation and revision.

6. Humanism values artistic creativity and imagination and recognises the transforming power of art. Humanism affirms the importance of literature, music, and the visual and performing arts for personal development and fulfilment.

7. Humanism is a life stance aiming at the maximum possible fulfilment through the cultivation of ethical and creative living and offers an ethical and rational means of addressing the challenges of our times. Humanism can be a way of life for everyone everywhere.

Our primary task is to make human beings aware in the simplest terms of what Humanism can mean to them and what it commits them to. By utilising free inquiry, the power of science and creative imagination for the furtherance of peace and in the service of compassion, we have confidence that we have the means to solve the problems that confront us all. We call upon all who share this conviction to associate themselves with us in this endeavour.



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recognition of the distinction between them that we can expect people of other lifescapes to accept the humanism of human rights, while at the same time maintaining that humanism is an alternative lifescape to religion. "We do accept that they believe in God. But we hope that they are prepared to accept the values of the socio-ethical branch of the humanist tree, the humanism that underlies human rights." Humanists should take the lead in initiating this debate, and in reaching universal agreement on these values. "We have a special responsibility we cannot neglect. After all, it is humanist values that underlie human rights."

To be taken seriously in such a dialogue, humanists should be prepared to reflect on our existential values. It may be that too much emphasis on the values of autonomy and freedom is detrimental to other values such as solidarity and well-being, while too much

how countries as well as humanitarian programmes should invest in people rather than in infrastructure."

Distinguished Service Award to Humanism 2002

The jury presented the Distinguished Service Award to Humanism 2002 to Mr. Phil Ward for his Humanist Millennium Walk. "Humanists are good at promoting our views by talking, very few do it by walking," commented Mr Levi Fragell, President of the IHEU. Two years ago, Phil Ward walked from Belfast to Jerusalem and talked to people about humanism. Halfway his feet could not take any more but he continued on a bicycle. Through this remarkable effort and perseverance, Ward has promoted humanism to many people in many countries, the jury declared. "It was a fantastic journey," said Phil Ward. "I had to bring down humanism from an intellectual level and talk to ordinary people,



emphasis on equality may be detrimental to diversity and the specific needs of particular groups. "We should know that the opposite of equality is not diversity but inequality, and that the opposite of diversity is not equality but uniformity."

Humanism In Action

Friday, 5 July 2002

The plenary session of the third day of the Congress focused on humanism in action. Four short films showed humanists at work in education, the community, the armed forces, and at the end of life. Each film was followed by an opportunity for Congress participants to question members of a panel. The members were Mr Giampiero Alhadeff, Solidar, Belgium; Ms Sylvie Durán, InCorpore, Costa Rica; Mr Chenjerai Hove, writer and poet originally from Zimbabwe now living in France; and Dr Mikhail B. Konashev, Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute for the History of Sciences and Technology, St Petersburg, Russia. (For further details on the films, see full report online.)

International Humanist Award 2002

The jury announced Professor Amartya Sen as the winner of the Humanist Award 2002 for his contribution to the issue of poverty. The Indian economist and winner of the Nobel Prize 1998 for Economic Sciences has developed an alternative way of measuring poverty that focuses on the quality of life of people, rather than focusing on economic definitions. "A man who asks himself questions," said Mr Roy Brown, member of the IHEU Executive Committee. "His work shows

most of whom had never even heard of humanism. Hundreds of people listened to me, gave me a place to stay, carried my rucksack. I am very grateful for that. During the walk I have been interviewed many times and now I have written a book. I sincerely hope this ethos may steer the world in the right direction. We need to wake the sleeping giant. Humanism is the giant."

Facing the Challenges - The Next 50 Years

Saturday, 6 July 2002

Humanism in the future: what are our aims for the next 50 years? That question formed the focus for this last morning of the Congress, during which the recommendations of the workshops were presented and discussed, and the new Amsterdam Declaration was presented to the assembly. Mr. Harry Kunneman, chairman of the Dutch Humanist Alliance and vice-chancellor of the University for Humanistics, Utrecht, the Netherlands, gave the final keynote speech, and young humanists reported on the IHEYO conference.

Workshop recommendations

Yvonne Breuk, chair of the congress, welcomed the assembly and invited participants to consider the recommendations of the workshops that had been held during the past two days, which had been written out on large sheets of paper and placed around the beautiful rotunda. Members of the Congress were asked to indicate their approval or disapproval by placing green and red stickers (and yellow for 'don't know') against the individual recommendations. The chair then invited

Mr. Babu Gogineni, Executive Director of the IHEU, and Mr. Marius Ernsting, of Humanitas to comment on the recommendations, as well as the Congress.

A number of workshop recommendations were discussed by the commentators and the Congress. What follows is a small selection of recommendations and comments.

Social Inclusion

'It is important to know about the values and cultural aspects of social exclusion in different countries in order to develop effective ways of approaching excluded groups and persons and to develop effective programmes of intervention to obtain full participation in society.' Sixty per cent of the assembly agreed to that recommendation. "We know

rights and human values. Rob Buitenweg, as a member of the Congress, fully agreed. "Last evening I watched a programme of the Humanist Broadcasting Corporation. The reporter interviewed people on the street. She asked them to name five human rights. I was astonished to observe that most young people couldn't name five. So education is very important."

Humanism and Islam

A key recommendation of the workshop on Humanism and Islam was that Sharia law should be abandoned. It also proposed that communities of religion and faith should develop a notion of sharing the world; the idea of any faith commanding the world should be abandoned. A majority of the Congress agreed; yet there had been some red stickers marked against the proposal to abandon Sharia. This caused

“I would like to pay tribute to the important contribution you have made to the international world... What you have been doing for the past 50 years has had an influence. I want to say, continue on the same basis as you did before.”

-Wim Kok, Prime Minister, The Netherlands

little about inclusion," commented Gogineni. "What is the standard? What are the objective figures? Does a person feel excluded when we think he is? It is very possible that authorities cannot reach a group of people, but that they are in fact socially included. We should be careful about intervening."

Reception of Refugees

The workshop on refugees recommended starting practical relief projects like SAMAH and advised more cooperation and alliances between development organisations, refugee organisations and humanist organisations. Most of the members of the congress agreed.

"What struck me is that in a world we call global, when it comes to people there are so many boundaries," commented Ernsting. "Secular countries like Holland consider refugees as a separate group," said Gogineni. "In the past, when the economy needed them, people were allowed in. That is hypocritical. If our economy needs people, we should make different arrangements." He also commented on the fact that many African humanists were denied visas to participate in the IHEU conference.

Human Rights, Human Values, Humanism

All recommendations of this workshop had been rewarded by green stickers and a few yellow ones. The workshop pleaded for the promotion of humanist values, which strengthen both human rights and humanist organisations. It also recommended education in human

astonishment among the speakers at the workshop and among a number of people in the assembly, especially those from Islamic countries. It produced a swift and sharp response from Babu Gogineni. "Clearly there are people in this room who approve of lashes, amputation of limbs, and stoning to death. Perhaps they would care to stand up?" Some participants defended the reluctance to endorse the recommendation to abandon Sharia: "The difference between the letter of the law and practice of the law is a double-edged issue," one member of the assembly declared. "We might disapprove, but for other people Sharia law might be a deep source of inspiration." Supporting the speakers of the workshop, who included first-hand victims of Sharia, Gogineni remarked: "I am shocked and disturbed that anyone could not agree to abolish Sharia law. There should be a clear distinction between religion and State. There should not be any religion in legislation."

Gender

The workshop on poverty, population, gender equality and human development came with recommendations that were questioned by a number of Congress participants. Red stickers appeared on recommendations such as equal representation of men and women in the IHEU and on the shortlist of humanist prizes, and a gender-sensitive jury. Ernsting commented that he did not understand how anyone could put a red sticker on such recommendations. A member of the congress responded: "I do not want a job simply because I am a woman." She was applauded. Gogineni commented "We need to be cautious about trying symbolically to equate the numbers in terms of

gender, because in this symbolism the real struggle of women is lost." "But if you do not pay specific attention to gender quality all the time, we'll easily get into a situation in which women are being discriminated against," remarked another Congress participant. "I do not want a job because I'm a woman, someone said. I agree. But I can give other figures, about numbers of educated women and men. In some countries that ratio is fifty-fifty. In my country 75 per cent of the women are illiterate. As a literate woman I feel I deserve the chance to be selected as a woman to the job, because I went through so much trouble to get educated. This way I can show other women, all the 75 per cent, that it is worth the trouble to get educated."

Closing Comments

Marius Ernsting and Babu Gogineni closed the session with a few observations. "Humanism in practice means you try to find areas in which humanism is relevant in day-to-day life, which means trying to develop practices for ordinary people in day-to-day life," Ernsting commented. "Humanism then gains influence. Humanism is not only about rights for the individual, it is about the capacity for every individual to build meaningful relationships with others. You don't have to be a professional worker to establish that." Gogineni agreed. "This Congress is a nice snapshot of what the movement is all about. Discussing, disagreeing, arguing, agreeing. Humanism has a perspective to offer on humanity, on the globalizing world. Our challenge is to work internationally. What is humanism when it is not international? A gathering of humanists from all over the world, this dialogue, I believe that is what humanism is about. We stand for the universality of our values."

The Amsterdam Declaration 2002

Mr Roy Brown then presented the Amsterdam Declaration 2002 on Humanism to the assembly. In a formal count the members of the Congress voted unanimously in favour of the Declaration. (See pp.12 - 13 for text of Declaration and Roy Brown's introductory speech.)

Harry Kunneman: 'Humanism cuts through our private and professional lives.'

Praising the inspiring nature of the conference, Kunneman proposed his own four-point agenda for the movement for the next ten years, as a supplement to the Amsterdam Declaration, to help realise the full potential of humanism. He argued for further internationalisation and feminisation of the movement and increasing emphasis on sustainability; for the recognition of contributions to practical morality from religious as well as secular sources, while continuing the struggle against dogmatic forms of religion; a general move from theory to a focus on practical humanism; and reworking of concepts such as freedom and autonomy to recognise the

interdependence of society, while also broadening ideas of free enquiry and rational debate to include recognition for other forms of understanding and insight. Humanism should be an open quest embarked upon by people of very different cultures and all parts of society, sharing the same hopes for humanity. It was to be hoped that some of these principles will have been realized over the coming ten years.

Report from the IHEYO Conference

A delegation of four young humanists was welcomed on to the stage: Mr Vincent Lloyd from the USA, Ms Gea Meijers from the Netherlands, Ms Gosia Minta from Poland and Mr Andreas Palmqvist from Sweden. They represent their countries in IHEYO, the International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation, and they reported on the IHEYO Conference that had been held in Utrecht the week before (see IHEYO Report, opposite).

Close of the Congress

On behalf of the French Federation of Freethinkers (*Libre Pensée*) Mr Roger Le Peix invited the general assembly to the next IHEU Congress in 2005 in Paris. "When we proposed organising the conference, we had in mind that it would be exactly a hundred years after the very important year of 1905," he said. "That was the year when the lawful separation between Church and State was voted in by the French parliament. The French Federation of Freethinkers took a large part in that important event. We are proud of that date and we would like to have you all come to commemorate with us. See you in Paris in 2005."

Yvonne Breuk, chair of Congress, announced the closing of the Congress. Harry Kunneman then thanked the people whose efforts had made the Congress a success. Ed Huijg, Sandra Wüst and Ingrid Ernsting were applauded and presented with flowers. There were special thanks for Jaap Dijkstra, representative of HIVOS, which had funded the trips of many participants of the Congress. Kunneman thanked the organising committee, the incomparable Roy Brown and, last but not least, Yvonne Breuk.

Yvonne Breuk thanked the Human (Humanist Broadcasting Corporation) and Human Media Support. "We didn't see them, but they worked with a big crew and made three programmes and HMS made sure that there was also a Congress on the Internet. The President of the IHEU, Mr. Levi Fragell, ended the Congress with a few final words. He complimented the organisers on the programme of the Congress. "The content has been marvellous. It was so interesting. I have enjoyed it, I think everyone has. Thank you very much."



International Humanist Youth Conference

by Gea Meijers and James Walker



The first International Humanist Youth Conference in several years, with 45 participants from 16 countries, marked the relaunch of IHEYO (International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation), IHEU's youth wing. The IHEYO Conference was held parallel to the IHEU World Congress and dealt with the theme 'Empowering Youth in the Humanist movement'.

It was the start of further international cooperation among youth and youth organisations. Besides this main goal, this conference offered an enriching experience where participants discussed and learned more about humanism, humanist organisations in other countries, and about how to organize or campaign for humanist youth activities. It was an opportunity to meet people from other cultures, make new friends and start new relations of information-sharing and cooperation.

There were 45 participants representing 16 countries. Most of the participants were linked with a humanist organisation, as an active volunteer, member of a board, employee or member. There were young humanists from humanist youth organisations as well as from national humanist organisations that offer specific activities for youth. Unfortunately, several youth from the Global South were unable to attend due to the refusal by Dutch Embassies to grant visas despite the IHEYO's and the participants' efforts to obtain them.

The conference began with dinner at Youth Hostel Bunnik on the evening of 1 July, followed by the introductory session. Gea Meijers (Dutch), year-long intern at IHEU and primary organizer of the conference, introduced Vincent Lloyd, international coordinator, IHEYO and citizen of the USA. The other organisers of the Youth Conference were: V.B. Rawat of Social Development Foundation in India, Patricia van Wickeren of Jonge Humanisten Netherlands, James Walker from the United States and month-long intern at IHEU. In addition, the group was addressed by Babu Gogineni, Executive Director of IHEU, who was delighted to see the forty-five gathered participants but also reminded them to carry their enthusiasm back with them to their homes. Gea explained the context of the conference and its objectives to start future cooperation amongst the groups. A small-group session to discuss participants' thoughts on what humanism is and what it means to them personally established a tone of sharing and openness for the whole conference.

The conference itself was held at the University of Humanistics in Utrecht. On the first day, there were presentations about IHEYO and the European Youth Programme, followed by some imaginative exercises and games to explore questions regarding values and issues. Participants prepared and gave a presentation about their own organisations, and there were workshops on conflict in a multicultural society, introduced by V. B. Rawat, and on the boundaries of humanism and IHEYO's role - resulting in some heated discussions, especially on attitudes to religions. This latter workshop produced plans for a structure of national and continental coordinators for IHEYO which were presented to the conference. The second day involved valuable training sessions on topics such as Conflict Resolution and Youth Celebrations as well as European funding and resources for groups. A brainstorming session produced many good ideas for activities to build a vibrant youth humanist movement. The IHEYO conference participants joined those attending the World Humanist Congress on 4 July, building bridges with other parts of the humanist movement and contributing their own perspectives as young humanists.

Throughout the conference a group of volunteers had been working on preparing resolutions to present at the World Humanist Congress. Following speeches by Levi Fragell, Roy Brown, and Matt Cherry on 5 July, these resolutions were discussed. The first was on the important role of youth in IHEU, and the second on education and humanism; both were passed after some reworking. Plans for the future were firmed up, with a planning group established for the IHEYO conference to be held in Germany next year, and a network of people established for effective communication. This ended the youth conference, and many participants went on to join the rest of the World Humanist Congress.

A full report from the IHEYO conference and the resolutions passed can be found on the IHEYO Website, www.ihyu.org/youth

The Silent Holocaust

by Azam Kamguian

Azam Kamguian is a writer and activist from Iran, and organizer of the Committee to Defend Women's Rights in the Middle East. What follows is adapted from the moving speech she delivered at the session on Islam at the IHEU World Congress 2002. A powerful indictment of Islam, and an appeal to all humanists – all decent human beings – to stand up against the brutalities perpetrated by Islamic regimes, it forms the first of what will be a regular thread in future issues focusing on the battles being fought by women across the world against the tyranny of patriarchal religion.

What I am going to talk about is Islam; contemporary Islam in Iran. I will describe some episodes of Islamic carnage and pass you briefly through what happened and still is happening in Iran. I will talk about those who have nurtured Islamic movements or have tried to justify Islam. I will conclude by emphasizing the urgency of achieving the victory of humanity over Islam and the practical steps that should be taken to achieve this.

The final decades of the 20th century witnessed another holocaust - an Islamic one, in which millions have been and continue to be shot, decapitated and stoned to death; in which people have been slaughtered and displaced by Islamic states, political Islamic movements and Islamic terrorists in Iran, the Sudan, Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Central Asia, and now in America. The robe, turban and Koran continue to victimise people. Any voice of dissent or freedom has been silenced on the spot. The oppression maintained by Islamic movements primarily takes the form of opposition to the freedom of women, by crushing women's civil liberties, by curtailing freedom of expression in the cultural and personal domains, by enforcing brutal laws and traditions, and by the mass killing of people from young children to the elderly.

“The very statement that an Islamic republic exists somewhere means that brutal violence exists within it.”

Essentially, Islam is a set of beliefs and rules that militate against human prosperity, happiness, welfare, freedom, equality and knowledge. Islam and a full human life are contradictory concepts, opposed to each other. Islam under any kind of interpretation is and always has been a strong force against secularism, modernism, egalitarianism and women's rights. Political Islam, however, is a political movement that has come to the fore against secular and progressive movements for liberation, and against cultural and intellectual advances. Violence and disregard for human dignity are inherent in the manifestos of political Islamic groups.

After political Islam took power in Iran, creating an Islamic Republic, this movement came out of the margins in other Middle Eastern countries. It was in Iran that political Islam first organised itself into a government and thus turned into a

considerable force in the region. In Iran, under an Islamic state, violence has had another dimension: one that is based on Islam. The very statement that an Islamic Republic exists somewhere means that brutal violence exists in it. The mere fact that people are forced to abide by laws based on something some god is believed to have said somewhere, or that some prophet has said, itself represents a form of violence. If anyone protests against such laws, they are subject to punishment and suppression. Islam means the worst and the most ferocious kind of violence. Iran is the most transparent picture of what Islam is capable of. I will try to pass you briefly through this period of violence, atrocities, and misogyny - a bloodbath committed by Islam in power.

In Iran, I lived through thousands of days when Islam shed blood. Since 1979, a hundred thousand men, women and children have been executed in the name of Allah. I have lived through days when I, along with thousands of men and women throughout the country, looked for the names of our lovers, husbands, wives, friends, daughters, sons, colleagues and students in newspapers which daily announced the names of the executed. Days when the soldiers of Allah attacked bookstores and publishing houses and burned books. Days of armed attacks on universities, killing students all over the country. Weeks and months of bloody attacks on workers' strikes and demonstrations. Years of assassination of opponents inside and outside Iran. Years of suppression and brutal murder of atheists, freethinkers, socialists, trade union leaders and activists, Marxists, Bahais, women who resisted the misery of hijab and the rule of sexual apartheid, and many others who were none of these, who were arrested in the streets and then executed simply because of their innocent non-Islamic appearance. And to the hundred thousand murdered in Iran must be added the millions who have died in Algeria, the Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere. A silent holocaust about which the civilised world does nothing.

I, along with thousands of political prisoners, was tortured by order of the representative of Allah and Sharia; tortured, while the verses of the Koran about nonbelievers were played in the torture chambers. The voice reading the Koran was mixed with our cries of pain from lashes and other brutal forms of torture. They raped women political prisoners for the sake of Allah and in expectation of his reward. They prayed before raping them. Thousands were shot to death by execution squads while Koranic verses were recited. Prisoners were awakened every day at dawn to the sound of gunshots aimed at their friends and cellmates. From the numbers of shots you could work out how many had been murdered that day. The killing machine did not stop for a minute. The fathers and mothers, husbands and wives who received the bloody clothes of their loved ones had to pay for the bullets. They created an Islamic Auschwitz. Many of the best, the most

passionate and progressive people were massacred. The dimensions of the horror are beyond imagining.

From that time, love, happiness, smiling, any free human interaction was forbidden. Islam took over completely. This is what happened to my generation. But it was not limited only to my generation, it had bloody consequences for our parents' generation and for the next generation. During those years, millions of children were brainwashed and manipulated. The crimes committed by the Islamic Republic of Iran and political Islam in the region are comparable to the crimes committed by Fascism in the 1930s and early 1940s, and to the genocide in Rwanda and Indonesia. Yet these are events that humanity around the world has been largely unaware of. A holocaust which, if humanity knew of its dimensions and intensity, would certainly cause it to weep.

The aftermath of September 11 exposed some of the reality of what is happening to people living under the constant terror of Islam. It exposed something of the tragedy that befell women under the Taliban. It revealed, to some extent, the true substance of Islam. But it became plain to see that this carnage is Islamic. It became evident that it is all about Islam.

'' The rights of freedom of expression, equality of men and women, and a secular state apply to people in the 'Third World' too. Isn't it shameful that we have to argue about it? ''

When I came to the West in the beginning of the 1990s, I was faced by the fact that the majority of intellectuals, the mainstream media, the academic world, and many feminists, in the name of respecting other cultures and religions, were trying to justify Islam by dividing it into fundamentalist and moderate, progressive and reactionary, Medina's and Mecca's, folksy and non-folksy, poisonous and edible. For people like me, first-hand victims of the Islamic holocaust, it was suffocating to listen to and to have to refute endless tales to justify this terror, atrocity and misogyny. Parallel to this Islamic carnage, apologists for Islam try to divert people's righteous loathing for Islam and for the political Islamic movement, to limit it to a hatred of 'fundamentalism'. They attempt to reduce the anti-Islamic struggle to anti-fundamentalism. They keep telling us that what we loathe is fundamentalism, not the 'true', the 'real' Islam. They pledge 'reform in Islam' and the application of a 'positive interpretation of the Koran' to women's rights by 'linguistic turn'. They raise the idea of Islamic feminism and try to attach a human face to the monstrous face of Islam against women.

The truth should be spoken. We shouldn't let apologists for Islam play with people's lives any more. We should say clearly and loudly that it is all about Islam. What we have seen is the

reality of Islam in power. The fact is that Western liberal and left-wing intellectuals feel guilty about past colonial history and are apologetic to the 'Third World'. They consider the 'Third World' a given entity, where people are keen to suffer under the rotten rules of Islam, where people are happy to be deprived of the achievements of human civilization in the 21st century. According to them, women desire sexual apartheid, girls love to be segregated from boys, and people hate civil rights and individual freedom. In their view, people are the allies of Islamic movements and Islamic governments. This is indeed a distorted image of the realities. This is an inverted colonialism. In this picture, people who are fighting for civil rights, secularism and against political Islam do not exist. This self-centred mentality in which everything should revolve around the guilt of Western pseudo-intellectuals is appalling. The rights of freedom of expression, equality of men and women, and a secular state apply to people in the 'Third World' too. Isn't it shameful that we have to argue about it?

Contrary to this view, there is a fight going on - and it has been going on for over 20 years - between progressive movements in the Middle East and in the West on the one side, and political Islam on the other. The records of the daily struggle of people and the non-Islamic opposition in Islam-ridden countries, and the news of the daily resistance of the youth and women in Iran, demonstrate the reality of peoples' demands in the 'Third World'. Since 1979, Iranian society has changed dramatically and deeply. The movement for secularism and atheism, for modern ideas and culture, for individual freedom, for women's liberation and civil liberties has been widespread and deep. Disgust for religion and the backward culture of those in power is immense.

Secularism must be defended actively and resolutely in Muslim countries. Universal human and civil rights must be the standard. Secularism is not only realizable, but also, after the experiences of Iran, Afghanistan, the Sudan and Algeria, is an urgent and pressing need and demand of the people of the region. The demand for secularism must push for absolute and complete separation of religion from the State; complete separation of religion from education; freedom of religion and atheism; laws free of religious content; and for religion to be declared the private affair of individuals. A conscious struggle must be conducted against the power of organised religion. All religious denominations and sects should be officially registered as private enterprises, subject to regulations and laws.

To realise these ideals and demands, we need a massive joint force. Despite the struggles of the non-Islamic opposition in the Middle East and in the West in the past decades, all that has been visible has been occasional reports of the barbarity of political Islam and the reactions of Western governments, media and 'intellectual' apologists for Islam. But, there is a third force, a sleeping giant who can turn the situation around. The ranks of civilised humanity form a massive force that has, so far, sadly been silenced. It can come to the fore. For the future of humanity, it must come to the fore. Otherwise, the stage is left open to terrorism and barbarism. I finish my speech with the hope that in the coming years of the 21st century, we will witness the victory of humanity over Islam. All freedom-lovers and secularist forces around the world should come together in a joint effort to combat political Islam; to promote secularism, egalitarianism and freedom, in the societies that Islam oppresses.

Defending the Separation of Church and State at the Sorbonne

Colloque International : 1802-2002
L'heritage Universel de Jefferson

This September La Libre Pensée Française organised a successful International Franco-American Colloquium. Intended to mark the bicentenary of Jefferson's famous letter on the Wall of Separation between the Church and State, supported by the prestigious Sorbonne university and organised under the aegis of IHEU, this important event was the third in a series of International events organized by the IHEU and its Full Member organisation in France.

Erudite but simple presentations, animated discussions, debates, humour and comparing notes on the contemporary status of the Separation of Religion and State in various countries marked this bilingual International Colloquium with participants from France, United States, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom, Tunisia and Switzerland. Among the over 250 Academics and freethinker activists were renowned expert on Jefferson and Madison Prof. Robert Alley from the University of Virginia (Keynote speaker: Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and the First Amendment to the United States Constitution), Rob Boston from Americans United for Separation of Church and State (Knocking down the Wall: The ongoing attack on Thomas Jefferson's legacy of Church-State Separation), Prof. Olivier Frayssé (Abraham Lincoln and Religion: Public and Private spheres in American political life), IHEU Vice President Roy Brown (who read out a note from Ibn Warraq: No to Sharia: For a Separation of Mosque and State) and Mohamed-Cherif Ferjani (Is Secularism French, Western or Universal?).

An American delegation from Atheist Alliance International was led by Bobby Kirkhart. The American freethought activist and academic Fred Whitehead, victim of bigots at the University of Kansas, spoke on The Freethought struggle in the US during the 19th century. Henri Laberge, President of Mouvement Laïque Québécois (Laïcité in Québec and in North America) and Richard Thain from the Canadian Humanist Association regaled the audience with their fine humour while reporting the state of affairs in their country. Mme. Ulrike Tietze from Bund Gegen Anpassung spoke of the situation in Germany for atheists. A special focus on Latin America was possible through Bolivar et les Libertadores, a presentation by Freemason Jacques Lafouge, past Grand Maître of the Grand Orient de France.

Selected presentations at this Colloquium (ably assisted with volunteer simultaneous interpretation) held with Prof. Olivier Frayssé as Scientific Director and Babu Gogineni as President, are available from IHEU's website at www.iheu.org. Colloquium proceedings will be published in 2003.



In the Old Continent, like in the New World, people of the Enlightenment took hold of the ideas of democracy, republicanism and freedom of conscience to turn them into real facts. Philosophers from the Enlightenment in Europe showed the way, our peoples went along the path. Fundamentally, the French Revolution went further by the eruption of the masses on to History's stage, where their destiny was settled. Formally, the American Revolution went further in its formal conquest of democratic institutions.

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the USA formulated and realised the fundamental principles that have brought humanity out of the dark night of the ancient monarchical and clerical regimes. Let us once again read the first article of the American Bill of Rights of December 1791: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances".

In just these few words, a democratic programme was written. It will stir up peoples and nations in the centuries to follow. It is neither American nor French: it is Mankind's heritage. From now on, there will not be a rebellion, nor a revolution, nor an act of decolonisation that will not draw from this democratic programme the theoretical weapons to move forwards along the path of complete emancipation.

We can find the political formulations of the First Amendment in the work of the French Revolution, in the 1793 French Declaration of Human Rights and in the great laws of liberty of the Third Republic. It took 15 years for the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 to lead to the Bill of Rights of 1791; France would need nearly a hundred years to follow on the same path.

1789, 1830, 1848, 1871, 1882, 1884, 1886, 1901, 1905 are milestones in the history of France. One by one, the French people, calling the whole world to witness, were to conquer the right to petition, the right to assemble, universal franchise, the freedom of the press, the freedom to establish free political parties, the intangible right to establish independent labour unions to fight for workers' rights and the separation of Church and State.

Each time the people rose to defend their rights and liberties. The battle for economic emancipation (an end to exploitation of the one by the other) becomes consubstantial with that for political emancipation (equality of citizens in law) and that for the flourishing of complete liberty of conscience (laïcité). Today, in fact, it is one single fight: that for the emancipation of Humanity.

Christian Eyschen, Secretary General of La Libre Pensée Française, speaking at the IHEU Colloquium at the Sorbonne

A Wall of Separation between Religion and Science: A French Declaration

In September 2000, the Libre Pensée Française organised the prestigious conference 'Intrusions Spiritualistes et Impostures Intellectuelles en Sciences' (Spiritualist Intrusions and Intellectual Impostures in Science) attended by Scientists of repute like Jean Bricmont, Belgium, Prof. Ian Plimer, Australia and Patrick Tort, Director of the Institut Charles Darwin International, France. Held at the prestigious Musée National de l'Histoire Naturelle, the conference issued a Declaration signed by a number of eminent scientists. Some extracts follow.

“... the method applied to the development of scientific knowledge relies on material explanations, and makes no appeal to the transcendental. The scientist, whatever be his or her personal, metaphysical or religious beliefs, rejects all supernatural and transcendental explanations. Scientific knowledge is the common heritage of humanity - it is verifiable by all as it is founded on rational explanation and on experiments which can be replicated.

On the contrary, religious belief is an act of faith based on revelation. This is by definition non-verifiable, and it is totally different from scientific knowledge.

Giordano Bruno was burnt alive by the Catholic Inquisition for having proposed the theory of multiple worlds. Michel Servet was burnt on the order of Calvin for theological reasons - because he looked into the human body and made the first discoveries about human blood circulation. Galileo had to recant in front of the Inquisition, summoned for having turned his telescope towards the unknown cosmos and for having produced partial proofs in support of the Earth orbiting the Sun, making the Earth no longer the centre of the universe. Then there was the condemnation of the immensely important work of Darwin who laid the basis and the framework for understanding the living world on the basis of material causes - natural selection - to explain the evolution of life. These historical facts are a brutal reflection of the implacable antagonism between science and faith.

These historical condemnations of science and of scientists by the Church should throw light on the real significance of the Catholic Church's call for a dialogue with scientists - a dialogue interrupted since the trial of Galileo, the Church claims! Today the Church says it has rehabilitated Galileo. But Galileo never lost his honour, or the esteem of humanity, he did not need to be rehabilitated. The Church has never admitted that it had no business to judge Galileo in the first place.

Herein lies the crux of the problem. Are religions qualified to intervene in the advancement of knowledge? The dialogue between science and religion serves no purpose, nor is it of any real interest on the plane of scientific methodology.

The nature of the Scientific Method, as also the history of the Church allied with State power - be the Church Catholic or Protestant - demonstrate the necessity of a complete separation between science and faith. Should we not be concerned when the Church at its jubilee meeting of scientists declares through the Pope 'No more separation of faith and reason'? Should we not look with alarm when the Pope exhorts Catholic scientists to

'participate in the elaboration of a cultural and scientific project which would always allow for the presence and providential intervention of God'? Does this not indicate that the Church desires the right to pre-approve and pre-judge the subject of scientific investigations? Will this not lead to the condemnation of scientific research on religious criteria? Atheism as well as religious beliefs belong to the private sphere and are guaranteed by the liberty of individual conscience.

The authors of this appeal are one with Galileo's conception which demanded the total independence of scientific thought, and its clear separation from religion. When this separation fails, scientific knowledge will be put on the same plane as the religious, with consequences like the introduction of creationist dogma in biology classes as in Kansas (USA) under pressure from sects and communities linked to the Protestant Church. At the same time we should not forget the infamous Lysenko affair which illustrated dramatically the effect of the power of a state in the domain of science.

We reaffirm that scientific research and the transmission of knowledge should be free to develop fully, safely and sheltered from all claims of political or religious ideological authority.

The frontiers of human knowledge are where metaphysical speculations are the easiest to make. The broadcast media is often fond of questioning scientists on matters which lie on the fringe of human knowledge. While one can develop a personal metaphysical stance on these matters, this could be a source of confusion for members of the general public who may not necessarily distinguish between the scientist's science and his or her personal positions - metaphysical or religious. Considering the prestige and the impact that statements by scientists can have among members of the general public, considering that scientists are the repositories of knowledge which is our common human heritage, the undersigned appeal to their scientist colleagues to maintain the greatest vigilance as regarding separating science and personal faith, and to particularly refrain from endorsing public events which use science for the promotion of religion.

The undersigned, irrespective of their philosophical or religious views, be they believers, agnostics or atheists, deem it necessary to maintain an absolute separation of science and religion. They reject the claim of religions and sects that they can influence the choice of scientific research programmes and (interfere) in the teaching of science.”

translated by Babu Gogineni

Report from the un

Hopes and Disappointments in Johannesburg

by Dr Sylvain Ehrenfeld, a Population Studies expert and co-leader of the IHEU's UN NGO delegation at New York and Phyllis Ehrenfeld

A vital issue facing the world today is the question: Can coordinated international effort reduce poverty by promoting development, while still preserving the Earth's natural resources? The recent Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg is the third conference to confront this difficult problem. Not surprisingly, the meeting, attended by many world leaders and ignored by President Bush, was highly contentious. The most heated issue was the setting of firm timetables for reducing oil and gas consumption and greenhouse gas emissions from oil and coal. The world is facing the risk of possibly devastating climatic change, mostly induced by the industrially developed countries. The US, Canada and Japan, and the oil-producing countries, the heaviest polluters, successfully blocked efforts to set timetables for the conversion from oil and gas to renewable sources of energy. There was some good news, however: Russia and China will ratify the Kyoto Treaty, setting restrictions on the release of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping greenhouse gases. This assures that the Kyoto Climate Treaty will go into effect, although much weakened by US non-participation, as the US produces 25 per cent of the world's greenhouse gases. The US has aroused considerable anger and concern by resisting the Kyoto Treaty, claiming that it only applies to industrialized countries. The problem is made more difficult because non-industrialized countries need to use resources for development. However anti-pollution devices, which the US is a leader in producing, are too expensive for their economies.

The Summit achieved one important result: a promise by the attending nations to help supply affordable energy to some 2 billion people who have no access. Regrettably, there was no defined timeframe, and not much support for the effort to boost renewable power. Another contentious issue was trade. Colin Powell, the US Secretary of State, repeated in his speech the usual

mantra that trade is the engine of development. However this is notably self-serving since the US and the European Union are under no obligation to phase out their massive subsidies for agriculture and certain industries, subsidies which make many Third World exports non-competitive, worsening their economies and promoting poverty.

Some progress was made on the immediate basic needs for improvement in primitive sanitation and impure drinking water, conditions which presently produce great numbers of illnesses and preventable deaths. The Summit agreed on several goals: halving the number of people without sanitation, presently 2.4 billion, by 2015; minimizing harmful effects from chemical production by 2020; halving decline of fish stock by 2015; and significantly reducing the number of endangered species by 2010. The latter is important both as a measure of the total health of the planet and a reflection of the health of the people who inhabit it.

Confronted by the disappointment of environmentalists on issues such as renewable energy, the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, responded that in spite of excessively high expectations, the world's agenda had moved forward. Emerging from these conferences with their heated divisions and inevitable conflicts of interest, the question has to be put: are they a waste of time? The answer must be no. Conferences are useful for several reasons. First, the persistent reiteration of these vital global issues is necessary to bring about real action. Secondly, they energize the groups promoting these issues, on whose advocacy the world's well-being may depend. Thirdly, many leaders are persuaded into commitments which can be monitored if efforts for improvements are not maintained. Finally, where else in the public realm can world issues be discussed with so much passion and knowledge?

Farewell to Mary Robinson

Over the past five years, as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson has pushed human rights to the forefront of international attention. In her UN role, she has given a voice to groups previously unheard, and sought out innovative practical ways to resolve conflicts.

Robinson, a former President of Ireland, is now leaving because she has been too outspoken. Her farewell speech at a conference on rebuilding societies recovering from conflicts, in which she emphasised the

role of local leadership, civic society and NGOs, was greeted with a standing ovation. The UN's special rapporteurs have investigated and helped alleviate human rights abuses in many countries over the past few years. For information on their work, see www.unhchr.ch. Mary Robinson said that she leaves with a feeling of serenity, gratitude and enormous pride in her colleagues. Their work will continue.



Meeting a Founder

by Babu Gogineni

Thanks to Jane Wynne Willson's and Harry Stopes-Roe's help and initiative I was able to accompany them on their periodic visit to Harold Blackham's house, on Ballingham Hill, some 30 minutes away from Hereford. Hereford is three hours by train from London, but do note that London is eight hours on your return... Whoever said only socialism produced good quality fiction forgets the marvellous contribution of the privatised British railways in the form of their published timetables.

I was pleased to fulfil on behalf of the EC the responsibility of the IHEU to report to one of its founders on progress at the IHEU (raised eyebrows at the present membership and the number of countries where we have member organisations!) and of its 50th Anniversary Congress: Blackham is perhaps the only surviving IHEU official from those founding years - he was Secretary General of IHEU till 1967. As author of the much-translated textbook *Six Existential Philosophers*, he is well known among humanists in India.

Now he is nearing a hundred, and I was delighted to see his warm welcoming smile, and pleased to hear his clear and distinct speech. He retains a remarkably lucid mind for his age, even if at the end of the two-hour visit he was rather tired and began forgetting things, including the fact that he had received the IHEU's International Humanist award in 1974.

His memory was sharper at the beginning of the meeting, and the names of Dr Indumati Parikh and Tarkunde (both had visited him), and of M N Roy, brought ready recognition to his face. He also asked why the Roy campus project in Bombay was not progressing. He agreed that Africa was where humanism most needed to grow and approved of the point that humanists should expand the agenda to address new concerns.

Dr Blackham lives alone but has some lovely neighbours who visit three times a day to see how he is doing. He climbs the stairs himself to his first-floor bedroom and study full of books. Until not too long ago - when he started falling down - he also grew vegetables!

He was quite pleased with the IHEU's Jubilee book. Seeing his own picture inside, he admitted that he could not deny it was him, when Jane presented the evidence of the 'big nose' - at which point Harry made the pertinent philosophical point that he could of course deny it but definitely not refute it!

Very much alive to the world around him, he pointed with delight to the wonderful view from the house - and also enjoyed the nice meal prepared for us by his son Paul, who was also visiting.

It was a real privilege to meet one of our founders!

IHEU Jubilee Book

"This book is a valuable resource...It should open windows to the wider Humanist world for the atheist who feels isolated or whose only contact with others of like mind is with their local Humanist group. It can provide a unifying force, encouragement and inspiration for national organisations overwhelmed by their own struggles. The story of IHEU so far shows that it can be done." - Jane Wynne Willson, Humanist News

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"Does God Exist?" A Spanish language Video (DVD and VHS format) in the 'Logos' series, produced with IHEU assistance.

The Video programme has been produced by IHEU's member organisation in Peru, the Revista Peruana de Filosofía Aplicada.



The RPFA also produced a Spanish language booklet "¿Qué hay acerca de los dioses?" (What about gods?) aimed at a young readership.