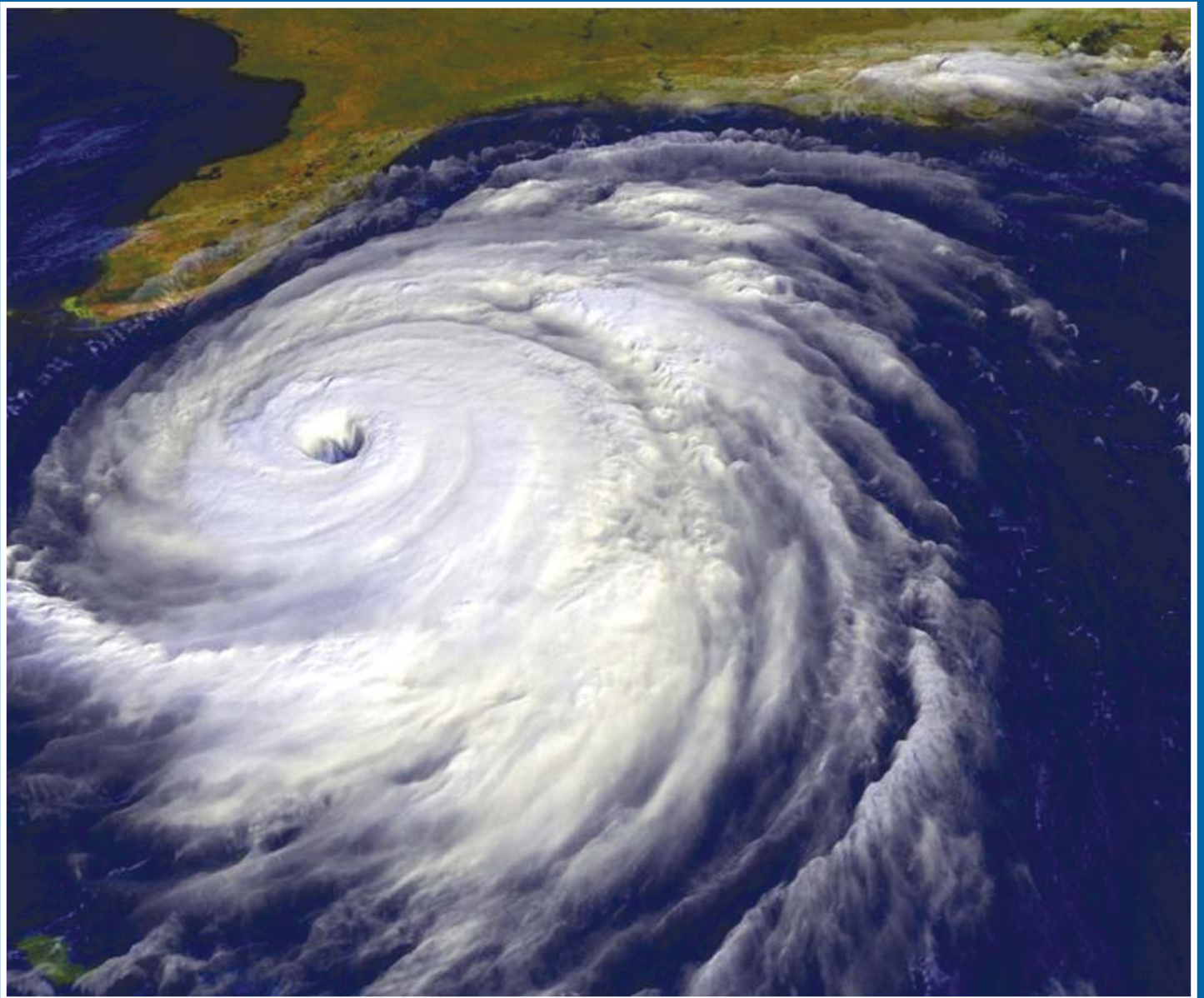


INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST NEWS

International Humanist and Ethical Union

November 2005
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The Tyranny of Ignorance
Untouchability

INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST NEWS



November 2005

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Front cover: A NASA picture of Hurricane Floyd shows the awesome power of nature. Floyd was responsible for the largest peacetime evacuation in the history of the US.

Back Cover: Dance4Life, AIDS Awareness Concert, Amsterdam 2004. Courtesy World Population Foundation. Photo by Sjef Prins

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IHEU Headquarters & Editorial Office

1 Gower Street, London WC1E 6HD, UK
Tel: 00 44 20 7631 3170 Fax: 00 44 20 7631 3171

President: Roy Brown

Email: president@iheu.org

Executive Director: Babu Gogineni

Email: babugogineni@iheu.org

Director of Operations: Suresh Lalvani

suresh@iheu.org

Editor: Babu Gogineni

Email: editor@iheu.org

IHEU-Appignani Humanist Center for Bioethics at the UN

Director: Ana Lita

P.O. Box 4104, Grand Central Station

New York, NY 10162, USA

Phone + 1 212 687 3324 Fax + 1 212 661 4188

E Mail: analita@iheu.org

Website: www.iheu.org

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From the Executive Director

The mind-numbing tragedy of the Asian tsunami, the devastating hurricanes in the Americas, the terrible floods in Asia, and the horrible earthquake in Kashmir – we have had ample reminders of nature's awesome power (see cover photo) in recent months. IHN pays tribute to the resilience of the tens of millions of victims who are rebuilding their lives with determination, and to the world community which so generously stepped forward to help victims of these natural disasters.

If victims of natural disasters are in the tens of millions, in the Indian sub-continent victims of a human disaster called the caste system number at least 170 million, and that is counting only the Dalits or the so-called untouchables (see page 19). That some people are considered untouchable and denied their human dignity is terrible. It is a moral obligation for the world community to get involved, and IHEU will do its bit to help – details will be announced soon. If South Africa could get rid of its wretched system of apartheid, so can the Indian subcontinent get rid of its shame.

Public policy should be guided by knowledge, reason and compassion, but when the ignorant are in charge, the results can be dramatic (see page 5). The US has today the ignominy of being led by an administration that has no regard for scientific knowledge and only contempt for global responsibility. Be it its policies on women's reproductive rights, on global warming, on military action in Iraq, or on the UN, the US has been the object of much opprobrium. A recent study establishes some tentative links between religiosity and social dysfunction (see page 12). Never has the US seemed to be more guided by religion and religious doctrine than today, and one wonders if this could be an explanation for the problems of a once great nation?

How is one to handle the pressures of multi-culturalism in a globalising world? Canada's Ontario province has finally rejected demands for faith-based laws (see page 16) and set new standards for western governments. Multi-culturalism cannot take precedence over considerations of Human Rights, nor should it, it seems, take precedence over common sense. How is one to judge the decision by a bank in the UK to discontinue production of piggy banks (see page 8) on the grounds that representation of pigs offends Muslims?

In its new orientation and focus (see page 4), IHEU will need to concentrate on the restoration of common sense, on the promotion of basic scientific knowledge and on the defence of Human Rights and Human Values.

Babu Gogineni

INVITATION FOR ARTICLES

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

Contacting IHEU

IHEU Office

(supporters, donations, change of address, etc.)

International Humanist News

(articles, letters to the editor)

IHEYO

generaloffice@iheu.org

editor@iheu.org

youth@iheu.org

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From February 2006 complimentary copies of IHN are being cut down. If you wish to receive the magazine please fill form (or photocopy) on page 27 and return with payment by 31 December 2005.

Secularist of the Year

IHEU congratulates Maryam Namazie who is the first recipient of the UK National Secular Society's NSS-Irwin Secularist of the Year award. The £5,000 annual prize, sponsored by Dr. Michael Irwin, was presented by Guardian columnist Polly Toynbee at a lunch at the Montcalm Hotel in London.

Namazie is a well known campaigner for secularism and refugee and women's rights, and against political Islam. She is host of TV International, a Central Council member of the Organisation of Women's Liberation, and director of the International Relations Committee of the Worker-communist Party of Iran. She has campaigned against stoning and executions in Islamist societies, has opposed Shari'a laws, defended the banning of religious symbols from schools and public institutions, opposed the incitement to religious hatred bill in the UK, and called for secularism not only in her native Iran but in Britain and elsewhere.

Accepting the prize, Maryam said "We need an uncompromising and shamelessly aggressive demand for secularism, but this is only a minimum if we are to ensure that human values are safeguarded".

IHEU General Assembly 2006

IHEU's General Assembly 2006 will be held in New York City in April. An exciting program of associated events is also in the offing, so please mark the dates in your diaries and make advance travel arrangements. It is peak season, so book early to obtain cheap flights.

Along with the General Assembly, a day Seminar on Public Relations and Media Relations, a two-day Bioethics Conference, and a one-day visit to the Institute for Humanist Studies, Albany are planned.

Wednesday 19 April 10.00 am – 5.00 pm **Day seminar on PR and Media Relations**
 For IHEU member organisations and their Representatives.

Thursday 20 April 10.00 am – 5.00 pm **IHEU General Assembly 2006**
 For registered delegates (representatives of IHEU member organisations, IHEU international representatives, IHEU Officers, paid-up IHEU individual supporters and invitees).

Friday 21 April 10.00 am – 1.00 pm **IHEU General Assembly 2006**
 General Assembly concludes.

Friday 21st April 6.00 pm onwards **Evening reception for IHEU Bioethics Conference delegates**

Saturday 22nd April 10.00 am – 5.00 pm **IHEU Bioethics Conference**

Sunday 23rd April 10.00 am – 5.00 pm **IHEU Bioethics Conference**

Monday 24 April **Optional one-day visit to headquarters of the Institute for Humanist Studies, in Albany, New York**

The events of 19 – 23 April will take place in New York City. Exact venues will be announced on IHEU's website, and also in the next issue of IHN.

The day visit on 24 April is to Albany which is New York State's capital. It is a picturesque 3-hour train ride from New York City.

Registration forms for the events will be available from IHEU's website from 1 December.

For more details please e mail generaloffice@iheu.org

Nigerian Humanists call for Abolition of the Death Penalty

On 10 October, 'Abolish the Death Penalty Day', the Nigerian Humanist Movement (NHM) called on the Nigerian government to abolish the death penalty. The death penalty is an act of "morbid cruelty, unjustifiable and counter productive, every time, every where and to every one concerned. Those who support the death penalty argue that it helps deter and eradicate criminal behaviour. But nothing could be further from the truth. There are no scientific facts and figures to show that the death penalty has ever helped to stop crimes" said Eze Ebisike, Chair of the NHM.

"The death penalty is not just inhuman and antihuman, it violates human rights and the basic principles of Humanism. Abolishing the death penalty is critical to ridding the world of destructive and dehumanizing tendencies," stated Leo Igwe, Executive Secretary of the NHM.

A new focus for IHEU

The raison d'être of IHEU, indeed the primary justification for its existence, is to serve its member organisations. By providing a voice for international Humanism at the UN and other international forums, by organising World Humanist Congresses and regional conferences, and by providing support, guidance and leadership to individual, often struggling Humanist organisations around the world, IHEU has for over 50 years amply fulfilled its role. But, as our members frequently remind us, we could do more, and could do it better.

From its creation in 1952 until 1997 IHEU was based in the Netherlands, and was supported by the Humanistisch Verbond who provided premises and secretarial help. Presided over by Jaap van Praag until his death in 1978, IHEU acted as the glue that held the world movement together. The banner was picked up later by two other charismatic leaders, Paul Kurtz and Rob Tielman, and with the creation of the Endowment Fund, and an annual grant from the Dutch Humanist Development Agency HIVOS, IHEU began to play an increasingly active role in support of Humanist groups in developing countries, and to significantly broaden the scope of its operations.

With the appointment of Babu Gogineni as the first full-time Executive Director in 1996, the move to London in 1997, and the election of Levi Fragell as president in 1998, IHEU took another significant step forward. Despite our modest resources compared to the billions of tax-free dollars available to the churches, and the billions provided by Saudi Arabia for the promotion of radical Islam, IHEU has still been able to make the voice of Humanism heard. But we have become more aware over recent years that to fight the ever-louder voices of fundamentalism we need to be more visible and more vocal ourselves.

In September this year, the Executive Committee held its annual strategic planning meeting in Martha's Vineyard at the home of IHEU vice-president Larry Jones. It was by far the most successful such meeting of the last five years and set a new and clear agenda for the future development of IHEU. The key outcome of the meeting was a decision to focus particular attention on those areas of the world where humanist values are under the greatest threat and organised Humanism is weakest – in particular, Africa and South Asia. Within the next few years, IHEU will open major regional offices in India and Africa, each with full-time staff, to enable IHEU to play a more active role in the development of humanist organisations and projects in those regions. The first step will be to open an IHEU regional office in India. Babu Gogineni has agreed to relocate to India with specific responsibility for development of IHEU-assisted programs in South Asia and Africa. IHEU administration will remain in London, and we shall be shortly relocating the IHEU-Appignani Center for Bioethics to larger and more suitable premises in New York City.

These new plans will need new funds, and we shall be calling on member organisations to dig deeper into their

pockets to enable IHEU to finance this important work. We also plan to be more proactive in soliciting funds, both from within the Humanist community and from external sources, in support of member organisations' own projects.



Death of the American Dream?

The American dream imploded in September as the reality of George W Bush's "caring conservatism" was exposed to the world. Can we hope, in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma, that Americans will now pay more attention to the plight of the the 60 million of their fellow citizens who lack access to decent health care and living conditions, and whose children have a mortality rate higher than Malaysia's – worse even than the poor of South India and Tadjikistan?

For many non-Americans, the strange and extreme form of Christianity beloved by so many in the Bible-belt seems indistinguishable from the worship of Mammon. "God helps those who helps themselves" seems to carry far more weight than "Love thy neighbour". The biblical literalists seem obsessed with the vengeful god of the Old Testament rather than the compassionate Jesus of the New.

In a broadcast interview on CNN in September, Bill Clinton said that the proudest achievement of his presidency was that more Americans had been lifted out of absolute poverty than ever before in history. But that trend was rapidly reversed under George W Bush, as his government of big business, re-elected by pandering to the dubious "morality" of primitive Christianity, cut both taxes for the rich and spending on the poor.

The deadly combination of fundamentalist Christianity and personal greed falls far short of the Humanist ideal of reason in the service of compassion.

The Tyranny of Ignorance

The problem with both biblical and koranic literalism is not simply that they are unable to change in the light of new discoveries, but that they are obliged to deny the discoveries of science in order to survive; to use weasel words to keep their followers from any knowledge or understanding of deep space and deep time, of the facts of evolution, and of the overwhelming evidence that our minds and consciousness are artefacts of our physical brains and will die with us.

If religion had any basis in fact, believers would not need faith.

In this issue of International Humanist News we publish a series of short reports that examine the cult of unreason that is increasingly dominating political action worldwide, and show how the denial of reason is leading to a tyranny of ignorance.

*Roy Brown
IHEU President*

The Tyranny of Ignorance

Only someone close to George Bush's inner circle could say whether the misguided policies emanating from Washington are the result of the president's "deadly combination of faith and ignorance", or of his deliberate pandering to the ignorant in order to hang on to power.

This article looks at several examples of ignorance at work: in the deeply flawed US policies on global warming and AIDS prevention, and in the way in which religious lobbying has been able to create confusion about evolution in the public mind. But America has no monopoly of ignorance, and in another article in this issue (*Creeping Jihad* p 8), we look at how Islamic ignorance and intolerance are making increasing inroads into western society.

The war in Iraq, global warming and AIDS prevention are just a few examples of what has become a guiding principle on the part of many governments: to keep their people in a state of ignorance, to spin defeat into victory, and lies into an alternative reality. Few governments – from Washington to Beijing, from London to Riyadh and from Moscow to Teheran – seem immune from this temptation.

The Lost War

Few Americans seem aware that the war in Iraq has been lost. The grand idea, to install democracy by force as an example to the rest of the Middle East, has ended with an Iraq that is physically devastated; in financial ruin following the corruption of the interim government and the "no-bid" contracts given to vice-president Cheney's business cronies; on the brink of civil war; with a constitution that guarantees that the country will become an Islamic theocracy; and with the world-wide forces of Islamic Jihad stronger than ever.



But this is not what Americans are being told by their government and its co-conspirators, the symbiotic conservative media. Both government and media overplay every small success and downplay every disaster. If Iraq be success, how shall we measure failure?

Global Warming

The destruction of the city of New Orleans and with it much of the America's oil refining capacity by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita – among the most powerful ever to hit the Gulf Coast of America – were almost certainly due to recent warming of the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, a warming until now denied by the oil industry. As recently as May this year, the International Policy Network, a nominally independent think tank heavily funded by the oil industry, described climate change as "a myth". Poetic justice rarely comes so swiftly. But as is so often the case, it was the poor, the weak and the innocent who paid the highest price.

In February this year a scientific conference called by the British government to inform the Gleneagles G8 summit, warned of impending "dangerous climate change", while in June, an unprecedented statement from the world's leading academies of science called for urgent action on global warming. In the words of *New Scientist*, the response from Gleneagles was a disgrace. The scientists' concerns

were simply brushed aside by Bush, Blair and their colleagues.

As long ago as 1992, at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, George Bush senior had agreed that "increasing levels of greenhouse gasses result in global warming". Yet 13 years later, with our vastly increased knowledge of the reality of global warming, the best that his son could manage was that greenhouse gasses were "associated with" global warming, with no recognition that cuts in greenhouse emissions have become an urgent necessity. In July, an Asian-Pacific partnership of six nations including the US, China and India did agree to co-operate on technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but most scientists doubt whether any purely technical fix can prevent global warming from ultimately triggering climatic disaster.

Ignorance in the absence of information may sometimes be excusable, but wilful ignorance in the face of overwhelming evidence is surely incomprehensible – unless, of course, one is motivated less by the future of the planet than by the short-term interests of the oil industry.

Abstinence-only AIDS Prevention Programs

At the risk of sounding like a geriatric obsessive, I have to return again to the infamy of the US Administration policy on AIDS prevention. All of the evidence available from scientific and medical sources, from sociologists, NGO workers and field surveys makes it overwhelmingly clear that the policy of preaching abstinence as the way of preventing the transmission of HIV/AIDS in Africa has totally failed. Yet the Bush administration continues to insist that the promotion of abstinence must form the major part of any US-funded AIDS prevention program.

Uganda was at the centre of the AIDS pandemic during the 1980s and the first country in Africa to seriously tackle the disease. As a result, the HIV prevalence rate dropped from over 15% in 1990 to under 7% in 2004. But things have now taken a decided turn for the worse. A deliberate change of policy based on religious dogma has led to a condom shortage and to the promotion of abstinence, supported among others by the evangelical Christian wife of President Museveni. The president himself attacked the widespread use of condoms at an AIDS conference in Bangkok last year. The massive shortfall in the supply of condoms is wreaking havoc with the Ugandan AIDS prevention program. Where billboards used to advertise condom use: "for the best protection", now they promote simply Abstinence. The problem is compounded by U.S. government policy which provides support for AIDS prevention programs "only when there is an emphasis on abstinence and when condoms are provided only for high-risk groups such as prostitutes and the military". Stephen Lewis, Kofi Annan's special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, has said: "There is no question that the condom crisis is being driven and exacerbated by the extreme policies of the U.S." (*Time Magazine*, Sept 26, 2005).

By spending millions of Dollars preaching abstinence to young women and girls in no position to abstain, while cutting back on the supply of urgently needed condoms, the American government is revealing to the world the dark side of its Christian ethic: "Do nothing that will enable the promiscuous to escape God's punishment!" It is difficult to see the difference between such Christian

bigotry and the behaviour of the Islamists who stone young women to death for the "crime" of being raped. Well, of course, there is a difference. Only a few girls have been stoned to death for being raped. Untold thousands of women in Africa are dying after being unnecessarily infected with AIDS.

Abstinence-only programs have been well dubbed "Ignorance only".

The Christian Right is obsessed by the concept of evil. They see it everywhere – except it seems in their own backyard. For any Humanist, the idea of promoting policies known to fail is, by any definition, an evil act. And it is a sad and awful fact that it is the Christian bigots and their bumpstously ignorant president who are the source of this evil.

A president who hears God's voice telling him to rule by faith, not fact, should be unelectable in any civilised society.



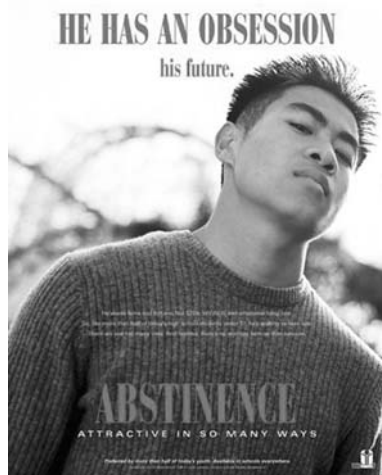
“Let them starve”

The World Food Program estimates that between 2 and 2.5 million people are in danger of dying of starvation in the African state of Niger. A combination of drought, locusts and government mismanagement has brought the country to its knees. Niger is at the bottom of the UN Human Development Index, and one in four of its children will not live to see their fifth birthday. An appeal

earlier this year by the World Food Program for \$16 million for emergency food supplies was completely ignored by the international community. It was only when reporters started beaming back their pictures of starving babies that the WFP was finally able to raise \$10 million; too little, too late. Yet in all this, one country with a substantial grain surplus that could have provided real help chose not to do so. The Bush administration has blocked aid to Niger because that country supports the International Criminal Court and has refused to grant *carte-blanche* immunity from prosecution to any American serviceman who might hypothetically be guilty of a crime in Niger.

One of the major issues confronting the UN Human Rights Commission is the climate of impunity that exists in many non-western countries when military personnel, police, government officials and high-ranking politicians flout the law. The International Criminal Court was designed to be part of the answer to this problem; to prevent any tin-pot dictator ever again waging genocide against his own people. To its great credit, Niger's constitution prohibits the giving of immunity to anyone, so Niger was unable to comply with America's request.

Unbelievably, Niger is only one of some 50 countries, mainly in Africa and Latin America who have been threatened in this way. In the words of Nicholas Kristof, writing in the International Herald Tribune (17 October



2005): "It looks like the ideologues in Congress and the Bush administration who backed this legislation are already hurting America more than the International Criminal Court ever could. And aside from the damage to our own image and alliances, we're taking the children of countries like Niger hostage by threatening: Unless you give us an immunity agreement, those kids will die."

Kristof concludes with what he believes to be a rhetorical question:

“Come on, President Bush! Is that really what your administration stands for?”

Don't ask, Mr Kristof.

Intelligent Design Theory

Massive, well-funded campaigns are underway in several American states to allow the teaching of Intelligent Design Theory (ID) in science classes as an alternative to evolution.

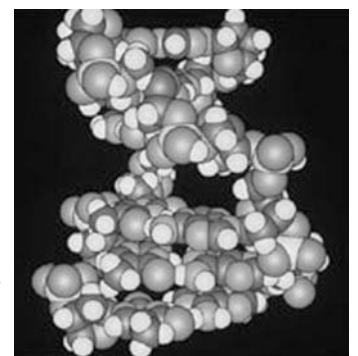
Intelligent Design Theory (ID), the modern successor to Creationism, is promoted as an alternative to Darwin's Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection by those who feel uncomfortable with the idea that life on Earth could have evolved through natural processes without the need for a divine creator. But there is no equivalence between these two "theories". ID is not a theory in the scientific sense, it is merely speculation, unsupported by any evidence. ID proposes that the living forms we see around us are so complex that they "must have been" created by some intelligence, either in the form we see today, or, if they did evolve, through evolution guided by some supernatural intelligence. But for ID to be classed as a scientific theory it would need to postulate the mechanism by which life was created. It does not, claiming instead that it is impossible to speculate as to what that mechanism might be (but making it clear nevertheless that divine intervention is strongly suspected).

Proponents of ID also claim that evolution is "just a theory". Wrong. Evolution is fact. The evidence for evolution from palaeontology, biology, genetics, and a myriad of other scientific disciplines is overwhelming. In the words of the US National Academy of Sciences, "Evolution is as well established as any other body of knowledge in science".

The *theory* of evolution, however, is a scientific theory, originated by Charles Darwin in 1856, that all complex living organisms evolved by a process of mutation and natural selection from earlier, simpler forms. Since Darwin's day this theory has been constantly revised as our knowledge of the processes of evolution has grown. It was above all the discovery of DNA that brilliantly vindicated Darwin's insight by showing the mechanism by which life is transmitted from generation to generation, and by which evolution occurs.

We should no more confuse the theory of evolution – the explanation of how evolution occurs – with the irrefutable evidence that it does occur, than we should confuse the theory of gravity with gravity itself. Evolution, like gravity, is a fact.

Objections to the theory of evolution are based on a misunderstanding (deliberate or otherwise) of the nature of both evolution and scientific discovery.



For example "gaps in the fossil record" have been cited as "proving" that evolution has not happened, rather than being understood to be exactly what one would expect when searching for evidence of events that occurred tens, or even hundreds of millions of years ago. The ID cupboard is full of such red herrings. Another is so-called "irreducible complexity". The eye, we are told, is so complex that removing any single feature from the eye will render it useless, so it must have arisen as a whole – and therefore required a designer. Yet the biological evidence shows that eyes have arisen independently dozens of times in widely different creatures, because the survival value of sensitivity to light is so great that even *some* sensitivity is better than none at all.

ID clearly has appeal among the scientifically uninformed because it seems intuitively obvious. Yet common sense also tells us that the Sun goes round the Earth. We can see it with our own eyes. For centuries this was so obvious to the Church that our ancestors would have been risking their lives to suggest otherwise. Common sense also tells us that the Earth is flat. But neither common sense nor theology discovered that the Earth is round, or that it orbits the Sun; we owe these discoveries to science. Just as it was science that discovered that all living creatures have evolved through a process of variation and natural selection.

Yet what does ID offer as an alternative explanation to evolution? Nothing at all. ID presents no evidence for its claims and proposes no process to explain how life arose, other than "the intelligent designer did it". Don't ask how he did it because "we have insufficient evidence to speculate". Yet a perfectly natural explanation exists that requires no designer other than natural processes. Wouldn't it actually be simpler to accept the natural, scientific explanation?

IDers have also argued on grounds of fairness and freedom of expression, that schools should "teach the controversy". Perhaps, but not in science class. There is no controversy regarding the facts of evolution among scientists. The facts are established beyond all reasonable doubt. But by all means teach the controversy in Current Affairs or Social Science – as a case study of the way in which well-funded, politically motivated pressure groups can cloud the issues and confuse the public about scientific facts.

Belief in God adds nothing to our knowledge of the Universe. There can be no room in the science classroom for theology, however subtly packaged. Intelligent design? As Laplace might have said: "We have no need of that hypothesis".

Unfortunately simply explaining the overwhelming evidence of evolution will not win the debate – the debate isn't actually about science. The agenda of the IDers is political, and they are using political means to achieve their ends. All they need are a few superficially plausible arguments, endlessly repeated, to persuade a majority of voters that there is something wrong with evolution. And herein lies another problem. In a society where scientific facts are at the mercy of political opinion (as we see in the United States and increasingly in Blair's Britain), that is enough to undermine science itself. The success of Creationism and the ID campaign can be judged by the fact that more Americans believe that the Earth has been visited by aliens, or that the "rapture" is near, than believe in evolution.

Homophobia

Those of us whose physical form aligns with our genetic, hormonal and emotional dispositions are the lucky ones. As Jim Herrick, former editor of the *New Humanist* has said: "Do you think anyone would willingly choose to be gay, given the vicious treatment homosexuals receive from much of society?"

The overwhelming weight of medical evidence points to the fact that there is no "normal" sexual orientation. Human sexuality covers a spectrum from the extreme feminine to the extreme masculine with somewhere in between those of either physical type those who have no interest in sex at all.

Homosexuality is not confined to human beings but is common throughout the animal kingdom. All mammals are known to exhibit homosexual behaviour. Yet so far out of touch with reality is most religious opinion that we have even seen claims that "No Sikh could possibly be a homosexual" and that "Homosexuals should repent".

Within most Christian and Muslim communities homosexuals are still treated with contempt and abuse – even death, because for the devout, holy texts trump scientific knowledge every time.



Unfortunately homophobia is not confined to the devoutly religious. Tabloid journalism – ever ready to exploit the yuk factor – thrives on demonising those who are in any way different.

Sadly, we have seen this lack of understanding even among some Humanists. A new website has just published a "Humanist" manifesto which calls, inter-alia, for denial of equal treatment for homosexuals.

No doubt many "straight" individuals find the idea of homosexuality unpleasant. Some might even have doubts about the idea of "gay rights" if it meant special rights rather than simply equality for gays. But all Humanists surely accept that homosexuals are human, not "subhuman" or "animals", and are fully entitled to respect for their human rights. And Humanists must surely have greater respect for homosexuals than for religious bigots. Religious bigotry, unlike homosexuality, is a matter of choice.

Compiled by Roy Brown

Creeping Jihad

Anti-Semitism

Western civilisation is founded on the ideas of tolerance, democracy and human rights. But a major cultural change is underway in Western Europe, fuelled by differential population growth, immigration and religious intolerance.

Anti-Semitism is seeping into mainstream politics under the guise of "being fair to the Palestinians" (which, of course, we should), and by demonising Jews (which we should not). One of the more notable features of the defeat of Una King by George Galloway in the UK General Election in May 2005 was the vicious campaign of lies and anti-Semitism that contributed significantly to Galloway's win. Among the wilder rumours was that King, who is "half black, half Jewish" was using her parliamentary salary to pay the Israelis to bomb the Palestinians. Utterly laughable it may be, but in the cloistered hot house of London's Muslim ghettos, widely believed. It was Goebels, Hitler's propaganda chief, who famously claimed that "the greater the lie, the greater the number that will believe it". The Islamists have learned their lessons well.

'Death to Israel, Death to the Jews'

In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini called for a demonstration on the last Friday of Ramadan for the "liberation" of Jerusalem (Al-Quds) and the destruction of the state of Israel. This year the Iranian government and its radical Muslim supporters again called for demonstrations in Teheran, Lebanon, Berlin, London, Jakarta, Toronto and elsewhere. These Al-Quds-Day demonstrations fuel hatred against Jews and strengthen the power of the Islamic dictatorship in Iran and its supporters worldwide.

An Al-Quds demonstration has taken place in Berlin every year since 1995. In the early phase of the Al-Quds movement, slogans like "Death to Israel" were calling directly for the destruction of the Jewish state. After increasingly vocal public protests, the organisers of the Al-Quds demonstrations had been trying to use more neutral slogans but the temperature was raised again this year when the new Iranian president called for Israel to be 'wiped off the map'.

Al-Quds-Day is not a "peaceful demonstration against Israel", it is the expression of pure hatred, a public manifestation of Anti-Semitism and an attack on the universal values of freedom, equality and emancipation.

Islamism

Islamism, the ideology of political Islam, has become a vehicle for the spread of Anti-Semitism within every-day Muslim culture in Europe. Through it, children and young people are being intentionally indoctrinated. Anti-Semitism is only one aspect of this aggressive Islamist thinking. Other forms of this totalitarian mentality include sexual apartheid and sexual discrimination, homophobia, honour killings and support for stoning.

Three brothers are currently under investigation in

Berlin for killing their sister, motivated by a misogynist code of honour. Their crime is considered normal behaviour in the social model of Islamism, which stigmatizes personal autonomy as "profane", "westernized" and "decadent" and furthers a climate of violence among young Muslims in western society.

Neither ignoring the issue on the grounds of well-meaning multiculturalism nor adopting a racist position, urging the deportation of all foreigners, can be the right answer to this worrying development. Fighting political Islam means first and foremost solidarity with its victims.

Everyone who dares to resist the radical Muslims' understanding of society is in danger. The terror acts in Madrid, London, Istanbul, Bali and Baghdad have been a clear demonstration of the reality of this threat. They have also demonstrated the close link between the thinking of political Islam on the one hand and the criminal conduct of its proponents on the other.

The Muslim Brotherhood

In France, the no-doubt well-intentioned idea of the government to create a Muslim body that would speak for all French Muslims has backfired. Recent elections have resulted in a takeover of the French Muslim Council by the Muslim Brotherhood, a radical organisation whose 1928 Charter includes the chilling phrase: "Jihad is its path, and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes."

In Britain, Finsbury Park Mosque in London, scene of scorching hell-fire sermons by the radical cleric Abu Hamsa, and widely condemned for promoting violence, now proudly announces that it is under new management. And who are the new management? The Muslim Brotherhood. It is a straw in the wind that in Blair's Britain the BBC now speaks of the "moderate" Muslim Brotherhood.

Arise, Sir Iqbal!

In a recent article in The Times, Salman Rushdie said that Tony Blair's decision to knight Iqbal (Death is too good for Salman Rushdie) Sacranie, and to treat him as the acceptable face of moderate, traditional Islam, "is either a sign of his Government's penchant for religious appeasement or a demonstration of how limited Mr. Blair's options really are". The advisory group to which Sir Iqbal was appointed was supposed to provide guidance to the British government on issues of importance to the Muslim community. It is a telling indication of where their priorities lie that their first recommendation was to rename Holocaust Day "Genocide Day", "because the present name gives undue prominence to one example of genocide while downplaying the Israeli genocide against the Palestinians". According to the Palestinian Red Crescent, the total number of Palestinian deaths from violence since the present intifada began on 29th September 2000, numbers 3,663, not all of them at the hands of the Israelis.

The Whole Hog

On 4th October 2005, the London Daily Telegraph reported that, following a complaint by a Muslim employee, Dudley Borough Council had decided that all work pictures and knick-knacks of novelty pigs and "pig-related items" will be banned – including one employee's box of tissues because it features a representation of Winnie the Pooh and Piglet. For Muslims, pigs (even pictures of piglets apparently) are unclean. A local imam defended the action on the grounds of "tolerance towards Muslim sensitivities".

Burger King recently agreed to change the design on the lid of their ice-cream cartons because the whirly design when turned sideways "looked like" the word Allah in Arabic. A Muslim had threatened a "jihad" against Burger King unless the design was changed. The design did not actually spell the word Allah, it merely looked something like Allah – as does any random pattern of swirls – but nevertheless, Islam had spoken, and Burger King obeyed.

Incredibly, two British banks have now decided to no longer offer free piggy banks to their young customers. Piggy banks have been the favourite moneyboxes for British children for at least a hundred years. Yet another cultural icon bites the dust. Examples like these can be found almost every day in British newspapers.

For the Islamists, tolerance is a one-way street. Perhaps someone should explain three simple facts to the Islamists and to those in British Muslim community who support this intolerance. First, Miss Piggy, Piglet and piggy banks are not real pigs, nor are they made of material derived from pigs, they are treasured cultural artefacts. Secondly, no one is insisting that they or their kids watch Miss Piggy on TV, use one particular brand of toilet tissue, or accept a gift of a piggy bank. And thirdly, and most importantly, in a free society no one has the right not to be offended.

It is important to realise that these complaints are not silly isolated incidents on the part of a few Muslim extremists, but form part of a well-orchestrated campaign by the Islamists to "sensitise" western society to Islamic values. The Blair government, in its misguided quest for Muslim votes seems keen to acquiesce in the censorship of British culture.

The government is, for example, pressing for new laws against incitement to religious hatred, laws which in the view of many leading members of the judiciary are entirely unnecessary and which incidentally fail to define what constitutes "incitement". Before long someone will surely be found guilty of inciting religious hatred by drinking tea from their Miss Piggy mug.

Goodbye Miss Piggy. Goodbye liberal western values.

Religion of Peace?

Apologists for Islam are quick to assert that "Islam is a religion of peace". The greater Jihad, they claim, is a personal struggle within oneself: "an attempt to create a better, harmonious society; the lesser Jihad is military warfare when it is pursued in self-defence". This statement denies the Koranic injunction, supported by the Shi'ite and all four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence, that Jihad – in the form of armed struggle – is incumbent upon every Muslim in order to convert the infidel. It was not the strength of their arguments but the strength of their armies that converted large parts of the world to Islam.

The creeping Islamisation of European society is deeply pernicious. We should surely remember Karl Popper's warning: If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them. We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant.

Europe learnt from the terrible destruction of the Second World War the dangers of appeasement. Yet European governments both national and local, banks and other commercial enterprises seem hell-bent of a supine acceptance of the dhimmi status of European culture and values in the face of political Islam.

"Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them" – Santayana.

Contributors: Mohammed Rafi, Elif Kayi, Roy Brown

Dance 4 Life

In total contrast to the blinkered US government approach to AIDS prevention (p 5), a young Dutch organisation has launched an international campaign to teach young people about the risks of HIV infection through dance and pop culture. The campaign, supported by the Dutch Stop AIDS Now! campaign and World Population Foundation held its first pop dance festival in November 2004 (photo, back cover). Simultaneous events were held in South Africa and Indonesia involving more than 50,000 school kids. 43 schools in Indonesia and South Africa participated. The aim of the program is to involve young people themselves in learning about the risks of HIV/AIDS infection, adopting for their motto the words of Confucius:

Tell me and I will forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I will understand.

A second Dance 4 Life festival is planned for November 2006. So far 13 countries have signed up to participate. We wish them well.



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Though Difficult, a Humanist Approach to Cloning is Imperative

Ana Lita

Some Questions

The sustained growth of biotechnology has reinforced bullish projections of its potential impact upon humanity. The diversity of biotechnological applications and the speed of their development are continually increasing the efficacy, range, and number of biomedical options. New possibilities for reshaping our lives, our procreative practices, and even our society are becoming less a question of "could we?" than "should we?"

The current intensity of religious-conservative politics has contributed to the upsurge in bioethical interest and debate. Matters are additionally complicated by the novel character of many bioethical issues, among them cloning, which raises doubts about the adequacy of both our traditional modes of ethical analysis and the very concepts upon which they are constructed. Considering the power of biotechnology, the myriad objectives that it can serve (or can be prevented from serving), it is imperative that Humanists reflect upon and engage in the philosophy and politics of bioethics. The humanist perspective includes several principles that are particularly fitting for bioethical reflection: defending free scientific inquiry, supporting ethical universalism or cosmopolitanism, and providing a reasoned alternative to religious analysis.

What should be the proper response of the IHEU Centre to the following issues?

Is nuclear transfer technology, or cloning, morally objectionable at all times? For research purposes? For reproduction? With sentient animals? For humans?

Would extensive applications of projected biotechnological capabilities lead to unprecedented breakthroughs in human well-being? A "Brave New World" style dystopia?

Reproductive and Therapeutic Cloning

The applications of cloning technology that are politically most relevant are reproductive cloning and somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) research, the latter is also referred to as "therapeutic cloning" or "research cloning." While there is vast international support for prohibiting reproductive cloning, this support has not translated into a legally binding United Nations prohibition. This is because bio-conservative countries have insisted on attaching a prohibition of SCNT research to any prohibition of reproductive cloning. Supporters of this approach include the United States, the Vatican, Costa Rica and sixty other countries. Supporters of a legally binding prohibition of reproductive cloning that would not prohibit SCNT research include: the U.K., China, India and at least thirty other countries. After reproductive cloning had

been on the General Assembly agenda for several years, in late 2004, the two camps were still unable to reach a mutually acceptable compromise. As such, the General Assembly gave up trying to pass a legally binding prohibition of reproductive cloning, and in May 2005, settled for a non-binding declaration, which passed by an 87 to 34 vote (with 37 abstentions). Many pro-SCNT countries opposed the declaration because they found that its language could be easily interpreted as prohibiting SCNT; they stated that they did not consider themselves bound by the document and it would not impact their SCNT research. Some SCNT supporters charged that the intransigence of the bio-conservative countries prevented the passage of a much needed binding prohibition of reproductive cloning. Some supporters of the declaration explicitly stated that they considered it to be a step towards a binding prohibition of all cloning.

States Respond

On the international level, approximately thirty-five countries ban reproductive cloning and some also ban SCNT research, while others do not. Countries without any cloning prohibitions have generally not felt the need to pass such legislation, which should not be construed as support to cloning. No country favours or protects reproductive cloning. It should be noted that in many countries, cloning policy is currently in flux. There are some notable trends in national cloning policy. Countries in which the Catholic Church has substantial influence are more likely to have highly prohibitive policies. Communist countries (e.g. China) tend to have more liberal policies and many African nations favour total cloning prohibition. The countries with the most prohibitive policies include Italy, Ireland, Costa Rica, Austria, and Germany, which ban all cloning and embryonic research, including research upon embryos that are to be discarded by fertility clinics. The countries with the most liberal cloning policies include: the U.K., China, South Korea, and Singapore. Cloning legislation developments in the U.S. resemble those in the UN, in that Congress has been unable to pass a prohibition of reproductive cloning, despite overwhelming agreement, because social conservatives have insisted on attaching a prohibition of SCNT to any prohibition of reproductive cloning.

Opinion of SCNT research, even amongst general scientists, is often confused. Approximately 65% of Western scientists hold the contradictory positions of favouring therapeutic cloning (SCNT research) and at the same time considering the creation of human embryos for research unethical. However, most stem cell

researchers consider the use of human embryos to be ethically reasonable.

Panel Discussion

Given the controversy over the issue of cloning, (therapeutic and reproductive), the IHEU-Appignani Centre for Bioethics held its first panel discussion: *Bioethicists Reconsider the Terms of the Debate about Cloning at the UN*, on Monday Sept. 26, 2005. Prominent speakers were invited by the Centre to debate the present and future of cloning. The purpose of the panel was to present a variety of views on the ethics of cloning since the topic is so timely and controversial, in the wake of the South Korean announcement that they have cloned a human embryo and extracted stem cells.

Professor Glenn McGee is Director of the Alden March Bioethics Institute, at the Albany Medical Center (www.bioethics.net). He discussed possible answers to the questions above and the nature of the political and bioethics debate we can expect in the coming decade.

Professor Schuklenk is Chair in Ethics in Public Policy and Corporate Governance, Glasgow Caledonian University and is also Co-Editor Bioethics and Developing World Bioethics. (<http://www.udo-schuklenk.org/>) He talked about some of the ethical issues involved in efforts to develop cloning techniques for reproductive (human) purposes.

Professor Stuart Newman is a specialist in Cell Biology and Anatomy at New York Medical College, Valhalla, NY, and has testified before Congressional committees on issues ranging from patenting of organisms to human stem cells and cloning. (<http://www.nymc.edu/sanewman/>). His main point during the debate was that we should not focus on the scary Frankenstein (the cloned), but rather the introspective Frankenstein. We should be reluctant to create beings with a radically ambiguous nature and moral status. There is little pressing need for such beings and only fringe groups were advocating their creation.

Senator Liz Krueger was first elected to the New York State Senate in a Special Election in February 2002 and is currently the Chair of Minority Program Development. She talked about how to formulate public policy while balancing ethical, societal and medical considerations. She insisted that human embryo cloning is an important part of a research agenda and business model for producing cells customized for specific disease entities or individual patients. Public policy on stem cell research, the Senator stated, should be crafted to ensure that researchers have the tools necessary to fulfil the promise of stem cell research. New York state supports stem cell research as an avenue for the development of affordable and accessible treatments for these varied public health threats. New York state will regulate this important emerging technology to protect society from known risks. According to Senator Krueger, human reproductive cloning poses risks that far outweigh its benefits.

Our Approach

Our approach focuses solely upon a true dialogue, based on respect for universally shared values such as compassion and respect for the rights of patients. The key thrust of our strategy is to raise awareness of the benefits for humanity of science and biotechnology, which requires a critical consideration and ethical reflection on such developments and their benefits. It is therefore necessary for Humanists to be active on the issue of embryonic stem cell research in order to realize its potential to help so many.

The IHEU-Appignani Centre for Bioethics will pursue a cloning agenda that emphasizes rational analysis of the issues in the interest of human welfare. There is a considerable need for a humanist perspective given the substantial strength and resources of the religious conservative bioethics movement. The Centre's work in this area will consist primarily of policy development, outreach, and lobbying, and in April 2006, we will be hosting a joint conference, most likely at the United Nations, with the Genetics Policy Institute, a leader in defending SCNT research.

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

Diluted Credibility

In August this year the *Lancet*, the respected UK-based medical journal published its conclusions about homeopathy after examining findings from 110 homeopathy trials and as many trials of conventional medicine. "There was weak evidence for a specific effect of homeopathic remedies, but strong evidence for specific effects of conventional interventions – this finding is compatible with the notion that the clinical effects of homeopathy are placebo effects."

The study's lead author and statistical analyst Matthias Egger of Switzerland's University of Berne wrote "We acknowledge that to prove a negative is impossible, but we have shown that the effects seen in placebo-controlled trials of homeopathy are compatible with the placebo hypothesis."

In its editorial *Lancet* urged doctors to tell their patients about the absurd dilutions on which homeopathy lays its claims (the weaker the solution the more effective the medicine is claimed to be), and the lack of benefits of taking homeopathic medicines. The editorial also recommends that doctors take more time to connect with patients rather than just prescribing and forgetting.

Reuters News Agency reports that the 200-year old system of alternative medicine has been showing increased sales. In Britain alone, sales of homeopathic medicines have grown by a third in the past five years to £32 million pounds in 2004.

God on Your Side?

Benjamin Franklin said over two hundred years ago "religion will be a powerful regulator of our actions, give us peace and tranquillity within our minds, and render us benevolent, useful and beneficial to others". In 1880 the religious moralist Dostoyevsky warned "If God does not exist, then everything is permissible".

It has been an unexamined assumption amongst the general public that both religion and God are necessary for a society's healthy functioning. So when newspapers around the world recently carried prominent reports about a study published by palaeontologist Gregory Paul (Baltimore, Maryland) entitled *Cross-National Correlations of Quantifiable Societal Health with Popular Religiosity and Secularism in the Prosperous Democracies*, many people sat up and took notice. Published in the academic Journal of Religion and Society which is owned by the Catholic Creighton University, the study concludes that religious belief can cause damage to a society, contributing towards high murder rates, abortion, sexual promiscuity and suicide.

While some questioned the credentials of a palaeontologist working on a subject matter better dealt with by sociologists (the Journal does not provide Paul Gregory's affiliation), others pointed out that the study considered only prosperous countries. However, the author's focus and intentions are very clear: Paul Gregory points out that this is a first, brief look at an important subject, and that his primary intent was to present basic correlations of elemental data. He clarifies that his study is not an attempt to present a definitive study that establishes cause versus effect between religiosity, secularism and societal health.

Paul Gregory's work is a survey of 17 first-world countries using data from the International Social Survey Programme, Gallup, UNDP statistics (societal health and dysfunction) and other research bodies, to compare the social performance of relatively secular countries, such as Britain and Japan, with the US. Social indicators such as murder rates, abortion, suicide and teenage pregnancy have been compared.

"The study shows that England, despite the social ills it has, is actually performing a good deal better than the USA in most indicators, even though it is now a much less religious nation than America."

"Japan, Scandinavia, and France are the most secular nations in the west, the United States is the only prosperous first world nation to retain rates of religiosity otherwise limited to the second and third worlds. The least religious nation, Japan, exhibits the highest highest acceptance of evolution, the lowest level of acceptance is found in the most religious developed democracy, the US."

Pointing out that many conservative evangelicals in the US consider Darwinism to be a social evil, believing that it inspires atheism and amorality, Paul Gregory writes

"Western nations are likely to return to the levels of popular religiosity common prior to the 1900s only in the improbable event that naturalistic evolution is scientifically overturned in favour of some form of creationist natural

theology that scientifically verifies the existence of a creator. Conversely, evolution will probably not enjoy strong majority support in the US until religiosity declines markedly."

The study concluded that the US was the world's only prosperous democracy where murder rates were still high, and that the least devout nations were the least dysfunctional. "The widely held view that a Godless citizenry must experience societal disaster is therefore refuted."

Babu Gogineni

Sea of Confusion

According to the *New York Times* on September 21, the US Justice Department has told a Texas court that it must dismiss a lawsuit accusing Pope Benedict XVI of helping cover up several instances of sexual molestation by a seminarian. An assistant US attorney said the suit should be dismissed because the pope enjoys immunity as "head of State of the Holy See" and the suit would be "incompatible with the United States' foreign policy interests."

Oh, my, again confusion over the identities of the Holy See and Vatican City, confusion that is surely intentional.

Vatican City is a sovereign microstate (about 43 hectares) inside Rome. It came into existence in 1929 as a result of a deal between Mussolini and the Holy See. But while Vatican City is a statelet, it does not have diplomatic relations with other States. The Holy See, however, is not a State but is the administrative machinery of the Catholic Church. However, the Holy See pretends to be a State when convenient, enjoys permanent observer status at the UN General Assembly (as no other religious body does) which it uses to impede progress on women's rights, reproductive rights, and population problems, and maintains diplomatic ties to over 150 countries, including the US. This confusion of Holy See and Vatican is deliberate and deleterious to the interests of religious liberty and the best interests of every country.

As a member of the General Assembly of the International Humanist and Ethical Union several years ago I urged, along with the UK's Keith Porteous Wood, the IHEU to support the See Change project led by Catholics for a Free Choice to get the Holy See expelled from the UN. Today that project is supported by nearly 1,000 organizations around the world (including the IHEU), representing a wide spectrum of religions and lifestyles. I also testified at the US congressional hearings on President Reagan's proposal in 1984 to have the US grant diplomatic recognition to the Holy See, the church qua church, and not Vatican City. After Reagan got his way I was one of a number of plaintiffs in an unsuccessful effort to get the US Supreme Court to declare the arrangement unconstitutional.

Edd Doerr is immediate past President of the American Humanist Association and President of Americans for Religious Liberty

Humanists at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Jenoff Van Hulle

This year the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE www.osce.org) celebrates the 30th anniversary of its basic treaty, the Helsinki Final Declaration. Jenoff van Hulle writes of a recent Humanist initiative at the OSCE.

The OSCE was created as a security organization. The context of that time explains the considerations of its founding fathers. The Cold War and the Cuban missile crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. Although the two superpowers managed to step back from the edge of catastrophe, the stakes were too high to risk a repeat, and the idea of détente – the gradual easing of tensions between East and West – soon gained ground.

However, the OSCE does not deal exclusively with military security, disarmament and border issues. The OSCE considers security to be more than merely the absence of war and, based on this broad concept of security, it deals equally with human rights. It was the intention of the OSCE participating States to create a comprehensive framework for peace and stability in Europe. The Helsinki Final Act acknowledges as one of its 10 guiding principles the "respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief". This constitutes a milestone in the history of human rights protection. For the first time, human rights principles were included as an explicit and integral element of a regional security framework on the same basis as politico-military and economic issues. This acknowledgement has been reinforced by numerous follow-up documents. It is therefore now well established and beyond question.

There is no hierarchy among these principles, and no government can claim they have to establish political or economic security before addressing human rights and democracy. According to the OSCE a free society allowing everyone to fully participate in public life is a safeguard against conflict and instability.

In OSCE terminology, *human dimension* is used to describe the set of norms and activities related to human rights and democracy. The term also indicates that the OSCE norms in this field cover a wider area than traditional human rights law.

To assist participating States with the implementation of human dimension commitments, the OSCE has established a number of permanent institutions. One of them, the most important, is the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, (ODIHR) in Warsaw. The 1992 Helsinki Document set the ODIHR's mandate to help OSCE participating States "ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and ... to build, strengthen and protect democratic

institutions, as well as to promote tolerance throughout society".

In order to structure its human dimension activities, the ODIHR organizes regular meetings that take stock of OSCE human dimension commitments and recommends follow-up. The last meeting, called *Human Dimension Implementation Meeting*, took place in Warsaw from 19th till 30th September. A big Humanist delegation was present: Suzy Mommaerts (Unie Vrijzinnige Verenigingen, Belgium and Treasurer, European Humanist Federation), Vera Pegna (Unione degli Atei e Agnostici Razionalisti, Italy and Vice-President, European Humanist Federation), Julien Houben (Unione degli Atei e Agnostici Razionalisti, Italy), Adam Cioch (Fakty i Mity, Poland and International Relations Officer, European Humanist Federation). It was our mission to speak with representatives of ODIHR about the resolution, adopted in 1989 at the Vienna conference, by the participating States of the OSCE, that called on States to take effective measures to guarantee the individual freedom of religion and eliminate all forms of discrimination between believers and non-believers. To emphasise this commitment, the European Humanist Federation organized a side-event on *The Status of Non-Believers in Europe* on Wednesday 28th September. After an introduction by Vera Pegna, Suzy Mommaerts talked about *Diversity in Europe Today*. The side-event finished with an intervention of Jenoff van Hulle on *The Freedom and Limits of Thought and Religion*. In addition, the European Humanist Federation took the floor in the plenary meeting. On several occasions the EHF intervened on discrimination against non-believers in general (Vera Pegna) and in the Polish media in particular (Adam Cioch). The OSCE was pleased by our presence and assured us that the European Humanist Federation would be taken up as an official interlocutor in the future. For us, this is a successful foray that clearly set Humanism on the agenda of the OSCE.

Jenoff van Hulle is International Relations Officer of the European Humanist Federation

They who would give up an essential liberty for temporary security, deserve neither liberty nor security.

– Benjamin Franklin

Join Us – Defend Laïcité!

The Secular State and the Secular School are under attack on all fronts in France.

While the French law relating to the Separation of Churches and the State prohibits the recognition of any religion by the French Republic, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy who already organised the French Islamic Council is putting in place a Commission to modify the 1905 Law to satisfy the demands being made by various religions.

Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin has declared his opposition to any modification of the 1905 Law – because, for him, this law can be violated with impunity and with no need to modify it! This is how the present government is continuing the permanent dialogue between the State and the Catholic Church established by Lionel Jospin in 2002!

This is no longer a regime assuring the Separation of Churches and the State. We are on the way to concluding concordats with all religions!

The proposed European Constitution was rejected in France on 29 May 2005 but anti-secular provisions favouring religions are being put in place silently. The 'crime' of blasphemy is the latest to afflict all of France. The courts now do not allow either parody or criticism of religion.

In violation of institutional neutrality, in 2005, 400 million Euros have been diverted from the state educational budget to fund private catholic schools. Thus, an equivalent of 200,000 school jobs (including social costs) have been stolen from the secular state. In 2002, educational allocation was Euro 105 per public school pupil as against Euro 332 for a pupil from a private school.

Because of the clerical status of the region of Alsace Moselle, thousands of priests, pastors and rabbis are paid out of public funds every month. The Archbishop of Strasbourg is paid Euro 4484 per month, and the President of the Protestant Directoire receives Euro 3150 while the Grand Rabbi of Strasbourg is paid Euro 2916 from public taxes.

In all of France, a clerical and religious regime is being installed under the influence of a Vaticanised Europe.



Whichever be the government, the anti-secular provisions of the Vichy Régime (the Laws of 5 February 1941, of 8 April 1942 and of 25 December 1942) continue to be implemented. Amazingly, ministers of today and yesterday speak of "their attachment to *Laïcité!*".

For safe guarding *Laïcité!*, there is but one solution: the defence and restoration of the Law of Separation of Churches and State.

That is why more than 3000 well known secular personalities of the French Republic, and 34 associations have supported the initiative of the *Comité de Liaison de l'Appel aux Laiques* which is calling for a national demonstration

- For the defence and promotion of the 1905 Law
- For the abrogation of the Clerical status of the region of Alsace Moselle
- For respect for the principle "State Funds for the Public School Alone"
- For abrogation of all Anti-Laique Laws
- For a *laïcité* without qualifications

The French National Association of Freethinkers calls on all secular organisations, democratic associations, trade unions, parties and political groupings to demonstrate collectively on 10 December at Paris for the defence of Laïcité.

Saturday 10 December at 14.30 hrs

At Place de la République, Paris

Bioweapons Prevention Project



The 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) and the 1925 Geneva Protocol comprehensively prohibit biological weapons but they make no provisions for monitoring or verifying compliance. The BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) is a new global civil society activity that aims to strengthen the norm against using disease as a weapon. It was initiated by a group of non-governmental organizations concerned at the failure of governments to act.

BWPP aims to help by monitoring implementation of the legal and political obligations never to develop, produce or use biological weapons. The project will also track the actions that governments and others take to reduce the bio-weapons threat and to suppress exploitation of biotechnology for hostile purposes. BWPP will also monitor relevant developments in industry and report on advances in science and technology.

More information can be obtained from <http://www.bwpp.org>

IHEYO at the UNESCO Youth Forum in Paris

Frederik Dezutter

From 30 September to 2 October 2005, more than 200 young people from around the world gathered at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris for the 4th UNESCO Youth Forum. There were 184 official delegates, and 45 NGO-representatives were present with observer status.

The theme of this year's Forum, held in connection with the 33rd session of the UNESCO General Conference, was *Young people and the Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations – ideas for action in education, the sciences, culture and communication*.

There were three thematic working groups:

- *All different, all unique*: celebrating cultural diversity through dialogue
- *Safeguarding the future*: practising dialogue for sustainable development
- *Learning to live together*: promoting dialogue for peace and reconciliation

IHEYO's representative Frederik Dezutter participated in the first working group and in the plenary sessions – this was the first time IHEYO was represented at the UNESCO forum. Since this was just the 4th forum there were still some teething problems. Formal procedures such as the election of the presidency and the rapporteurs took a whole day, and the time available to discuss the final recommendations/resolutions was too short. But despite these shortcomings the youth representatives, coming from all over the world, succeeded in formulating concrete operational projects for UNESCO and the Member States to work on. These concrete steps are in contrast to the sometimes noble but non-committal talks that international conferences tend to produce.

Although IHEYO had only observer status we were nevertheless able to convince UNESCO Member States to broaden the concept of religion to include philosophical convictions. In that way we tried to open a door to include convictions (such as Humanism) that cannot be primarily seen as religions.

Needless to say, many young representatives are concerned with education. This resulted in the following statements and recommendations related to education:

1. Concerning All different, all unique: celebrating diversity through dialogue

- Education is the key to cultural diversity: most civilizations can only be protected if the people are actually able to read and write and therefore learn to protect their heritage. Therefore, it is very important for all young people to have real access to education and be given the same opportunities regardless of ethnicity, origin, background, conviction and religion, nationality, gender or economic position.
- The media and education complement each other and constitute the pulse of society. Efforts must be made by all countries to deploy a media and educational strategy to combat any kind of intolerance.
- The Ministry of Education or the appropriate body in the Member States should include in the curriculum of every school the Model of the United Nations programme. Further, governments should ensure special workshops for educators, to train them to work in situations where any kind of discrimination exists, or when there are cultural conflicts among the students. NGOs working in this area should be supported by UNESCO.

It will take time to create an environment of cultural harmony but we must work together to enhance the appreciation of cultural diversity.

2. Concerning sustainable development

The forum recognized that sustainable development is the biggest challenge of the 21st Century, and acknowledges the gap between talk and practice.

- *Institutionalizing youth participation* in the formulation and implementation of sustainable development awareness programmes.
- *Peer-to-peer education for sustainable development* is the most likely way to achieve result in behavioural change. As such, we should encourage peer education within the formal education system.
- *Introducing education on sustainable development* at an early age with a focus on educating young women and girls as well as out-of-school youth and other marginalized youth.
- *Facilitating inter-regional and inter-cultural discussions* on sustainable development at international, regional and local levels throughout the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development.

Local, indigenous and informal, non-formal knowledge must be on an equal footing with formal education. The forum requested UNESCO's assistance in:

- Facilitating the development of educational curriculum to be undertaken to cover the value and importance of local, traditional and indigenous knowledge and take into account the formulation of sustainable development projects.
- Facilitating a youth-generated magazine, for sharing youth experiences of integrating local, traditional and indigenous knowledge into all forms of education.

Sustaining youth: support of youth-led initiatives for our sustainable future. The forum recommended:

- The development of knowledge and skills through informal, non-formal, extra-curricular and voluntary activity. UNESCO should encourage its Member States to officially recognize such personal development within their education systems.

3. Concerning learning to live together: promoting dialogue for peace and reconciliation

- The commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) should be re-affirmed by all the countries and this, together with human rights/civic education should be an integrated part of the school curriculum.
- The creation of opportunities for exchange, allowing people from conflicting parties to get to know each other and to define their commonalities should be encouraged, and a database of best practice in conflict resolution and conflict transformation should be created and made available to schools, and NGOs and youth parliaments in order to exchange information and evaluate actions.
- UNESCO should promote the dissemination of information on international conventions, declarations and United Nations decades at schools, amongst student organizations and at the community level.

UNESCO's youth forum sent a clear and welcome invitation to the NGOs to get involved. IHEYO gladly accepts the invitation and will try to contribute to realising the goals set out. There is definitely a role to play within UNESCO youth for IHEYO.

Frederik Dezutter is Treasurer of IHEYO.

Why Premier McGuinty is Right

Babu Gogineni

Welcome Decision

Human rights activists worldwide who, like me, were supporting, and participating in, *The International Campaign Against Shari'a Court in Canada* welcomed the September 11 decision by Ontario's Premier Dalton McGuinty to end all religious arbitration in his province. "There must be one law for all citizens, and religious arbitrations threaten our common ground", said the Premier in a surprise reversal of policy, setting to rest over two years of acrimonious debate in the province.

The controversy arose in 2003, when the Toronto-based Canadian Society of Muslims proposed creating an Islamic Institute of Civil Justice. As per the proposal, Muslim arbitrators would be appointed to deal with disputes in Muslim families, and would handle matters involving family and personal laws governing marriage, divorce, custody of children and inheritance. The decisions made by the arbitrators would be guided by the *Shari'a* and would be legally-binding.

The 1991 Arbitration Act

The proposal by the Canadian Society of Muslims was based on Ontario's Arbitration Act of 1991 which allows faith-based arbitration for all religious groups in the province. At the time of its introduction the Act was widely seen by its proponents as reinforcing Canada's Charter of Freedoms viz. Section 2 a) which provides for "freedom of conscience and religion," and Section 27 which assures "preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians." Aboriginals, ethnic and private citizens have traditionally used their own arbitration tribunals, and this Act sought to formalize the situation.

The Arbitration Act allows for mediation, where parties involved agree to a settlement. It also allows for arbitration, in which both parties agree upon a process and then an arbitrator decides on a settlement, based on a set of legal ground rules. These arbitration rulings are strictly voluntary, and subject to Canadian law. Further, if either party disagrees with the ruling, they can abandon the process and take their appeal to court within 30 days. Business disputes as well as family matters can be resolved under its provisions using religious principles.

Both the Jewish and the Catholic communities have made use of the Act's provisions since 1991. Catholics have been able to get their personal issues decided upon as per Canon Law and Orthodox Jews used the system to obtain a 'get,' i.e. a divorce under Orthodox laws that only a Jewish court can issue. Records show that only a small number of family law cases have ever reached the rabbinical courts – so researchers suggest that most couples must be resorting to either civil court, or private arbitration that is not faith-based.

Arrangements that were now being considered by the government for the Muslim community would enable Muslims to benefit from faith-based arbitration – it was simply extending to the Muslims what was already available to Jews and Catholics in the province for over ten years. They would be able to obtain divorces, and obtain decisions in inheritance and custody matters that would also be recognized by Muslim countries, apart from by-passing the acrimony and expense that accompany litigation.

Hue and Cry

Why, then, was there such a hue and cry about extending faith-based arbitration rights to the Muslim population of Ontario?

Part of the answer is in the original proposal by the Canadian Society of Muslims. Syed Mumtaz Ali, the author of the proposal for *Shari'a* Arbitration Courts argued that it was a religious duty for Muslims to settle disputes in Muslim courts. This meant that Arbitration was not voluntary; it was an obligation. Secondly, Mr. Ali said that his long-term aim was that both secular and Islamic laws should run in parallel in Ontario. This meant that he aimed to set up a parallel system of justice, rather than an alternative dispute resolution mechanism.

In addition, the Canadian Bar Association denounced the multiple problems in the arbitration system: the secrecy of procedure, the absence of compulsory written records of the proceedings, and the power of discretion to the arbitrator. Despite former Attorney General Boyd's report recommending that faith-based arbitration be extended to the Islamic community, there were serious worries about Muslim women in the province. After all, over 60% of Canada's 650,000 Muslims live in Ontario, and many of them are immigrants. Would an immigrant woman living within a patriarchal family structure even be able to withdraw consent to the arbitration process?

Shari'a

There was also alarm that *Shari'a* would be the basis of arbitration. *Shari'a* law is based on four canonical books written in the 10th and 11th centuries and several interpretations of *Shari'a* law exist today, each claiming to be 'the right path'. Whichever the interpretation, *Shari'a* law conflicts with modern values, and falls far short of the universal standards of human rights in many areas. *Shari'a* law in Muslim countries affects the judicial system, the rules of evidence, the role of women in society, and all other human rights. Under Islamic jurisprudence, a woman's worth is half that of a man; women are to be under a man's supervision, usually that of a father, a brother or a husband and women get half a man's inheritance. More often than not, men are more likely to get custody of children, particularly boys, in a divorce. Across the Muslim nations, *Shari'a* negatively impacts religious freedom and freedom of conscience, disadvantages the status of women, and denies equality before the law². How could this system – or parts of it tailored to address civil matters – created by a 10th century mindset be considered appropriate for the 21st century?

Deeply Flawed

It would be wrong to stereotype the over one billion Muslims in the world. While several Islamic texts and many fundamentalist *Mullahs* are very clear about the low position of women in society, a recent poll in Indonesia shows 67 percent support for *Shari'a*, but only 7 percent objecting to a woman head of state. Another poll in Iraq indicated that 80% of those surveyed supported *Sharia* while 80% also supported equality of men and women. Since it would be subject to Canadian Law, and because

Islam in Canada is of a liberal kind, it can be, and it has been, argued that a Canadian version of the Shari'a would be a benign one and not what obtains in Pakistan or Nigeria or Saudi Arabia. Even if this were the case in Ontario, the larger question is whether it would be right to allow religious arbitration in a country? Was it right, in the first place, to give an official sanction to faith-based arbitration for Jews or Christians?

It is true that in the western world, several countries are struggling to balance the demands of multi-culturalism with a state's obligation to ensure human rights for all. Human beings are worthy of the highest respect, and it is the dignity and moral worth of all human beings that is the source of law, not a particular religion. In this context it is appropriate to note that the new Constitution for Iraq unfortunately proposes religion as the source of law, throwing open the job of interpretation to clerics, rather than to judges trained in modern law and well versed with modern conceptions of human rights. Allowing private courts where religious laws can be applied is a deeply flawed policy, whichever the religion and irrespective of whether it is in civil or in criminal matters.

Ontario's intentions were honorable – the province wanted to treat all the communities of Ontario equally and therefore extend the rights available to other communities also to Muslims. But to legitimise religious tribunals or Islamic Institutes of Civil Justice is to set up and support the principle of unequal rights, in the name of 'multiculturalism' and the 'right to be different'.

While Ontario was busy debating the issue, in May this year, Quebec's parliament unanimously rejected the use of Islamic tribunals in family matters. Now, with Premier McGuinty's decision the immediate danger of *Shari'a* making an appearance in the judicial system of Canada seems to have receded.

The Way Ahead

The desirable approach in such a situation – and one that those of us who supported the *International Campaign Against Shari'a Court in Canada* have repeatedly urged – would be to focus on citizens rather than on communities; on individuals rather than on groups. All men and women, irrespective of the religious or non-religious community they belong to, should be subject to the same laws and offered the same privileges and opportunities.

There are some other problems relating to equality of treatment in Ontario. For example, the provincial government finances Catholic parochial schools to help the French-speaking minority, but Protestant and Jewish schools do not get any state support. This unequal treatment of sections of society is undesirable. Parochial schools are not the best way of ensuring a well assimilated society. But if they have to continue, then these schools must do so without state support. After all, a philosophy or a worldview which needs the strength of the state to survive, and which cannot flourish on the strength of its own persuasive power loses all its ethical qualities.

Having come out successfully in favour of the rule of law and of universal human rights, Canada today has the possibility to lead the Western nations out of the confused multi-culturalism which was at the heart of the present problem.

Shari'a Courts and Fatwas in India

Unlikely Litigant!

The Indian Express of 19 August 2005 reported the case of a Hindu approaching an unofficial *Shari'a* Court in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Puranbhai Shah, a Hindu businessman found it difficult to recover money from Zariful Hasan, a customer to whom Puranbhai had supplied marble.

At the suggestion of a friend, Shah then approached the *Shari'a* court on 4 August 2005. On August 8, as settled at the *Shari'a* court, he got a cheque for Rs 30,000 from Zariful Hasan. This swift 'justice' is rarely possible through the traditional courts in the Indian sub-continent and was welcomed by the petitioner. An indication that a failing system encourages alternative means that may ultimately weaken the system further. The 'court' was set up nearly a year ago by the unofficial All India Personal Law Board and is headed by Mufti Abdul Qayyum Jaipuri. Of the 128 cases referred to it so far, it has settled 46.

A Fatwa on Fatwas

On 16 August, 3 clerics from the Darul Uloom Deoband seminary in North India ruled that women should not contest elections, and that if they had to do it, they should do it under veil. This led to widespread protests from Human Rights activists and liberal circles in the country, including some Muslim clerics themselves. The seminary has now decided to impose a ban on issuing religious edicts or *fatwas* on political matters. "All muftis have been directed not to issue any *fatwas* and not to interact with the media," Vice-Chancellor of the Islamic seminary Maulana Marghoobur Rehman said.

'No Legal Sanctity'

In the light of these developments, India's Union Law Minister H.R. Bhardwaj clarified in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha – India's Upper House of Parliament – that *fatwas* issued by Islamic institutions are not valid in the eye of the law. He clarified that the procedure to be followed by courts in criminal cases are set out in the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 and that *fatwas* issued by Islamic institutions do not have legal sanctity.

Fatwa Arrest

The Pioneer of 18 Nov 2005 reports that in Indore the police arrested Mohammad Rafiq Qasim, a mufti, for allegedly issuing a *fatwa* in a divorce decree by a court. The mufti's *fatwa* was issued on the ground that the judge was a 'non-muslim', therefore, the judgement was not acceptable under the Islamic Shariat.

This follows a recent law suit in the Supreme Court of India seeking to restrain Muslim organizations from establishing a parallel Muslim judicial system. The petition sought an order from the court instructing the organizations to refrain from interfering with the marital status of Muslim citizens and passing any judgment, remark or *fatwa* as well as deciding matrimonial disputes among Muslims. The petition, filed by advocate Vishwa Lochan Madan, urges the court to decide whether Article 25 of the Indian Constitution guaranteeing religious freedom includes the right to administer justice based on faith.

"Progress for Women is Progress for All"

World Summit Commits to Universal Access to Reproductive Health by 2015

The largest ever gathering of world leaders resolved in September to achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015, promote gender equality and end discrimination against women, at their three-day 2005 World Summit.

They adopted the Summit Outcome recommended by the General Assembly and will integrate the goal of access to reproductive health into national strategies to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to end poverty, reduce maternal death, promote gender equality and combat HIV/AIDS.

Recognizing that HIV/AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases hampered development and threatened the world, the leaders pledged to increase investments to improve health systems in poor countries. The aim was to provide sufficient supplies, health workers and facilities.

The leaders committed to measures to increase the capacities of adults and adolescents to protect themselves from HIV infection, according to the Summit Outcome. They would also provide stronger leadership; scale up a comprehensive response to achieve multi-sectoral coverage for prevention, care, treatment and support for those threatened by HIV/AIDS; and mobilize more

resources to fully implement the commitments in the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. Substantial funding, they pledged, would be given to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS and to the anti-HIV/AIDS work of United Nations bodies, according to the agreement.

Turning to women's rights, the world's leaders agreed to promote gender equality and eliminate pervasive gender discrimination with several measures. They would include:

- Eliminating gender inequalities in schools;
- Guaranteeing the free and equal right of women to own and inherit property;
- Ensuring equal access to reproductive health;
- Promoting women's equal access to work;
- Eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls; and
- Promoting increased women's representation in government decision-making bodies.

They declared: "We remain convinced that progress for women is progress for all."

Based on UNFPA Press Release

Women Parliamentarians: Rwanda Leads

No country in the world has more women than men in its national parliament, the recently released Inter-Parliamentary Union survey reveals. To Rwanda goes the credit of leading the list of 183 countries surveyed: an impressive 48.8% of Rwanda's parliamentarians are women. Nordic countries dominate the top positions, with 39.9% of their parliament seats being occupied by women. Sweden (45.3%), Norway (38.2%), Finland (37.5%) and Denmark (36.9%) follow Rwanda, while Iceland, Netherlands, Cuba, Spain, Costa Rica and Mozambique occupy the top positions.

While Rwanda is constitutionally committed to sending at least 30% women to parliament, India which ranks 134th with 8.3% in the national parliament (Lok Sabha) has been unsuccessfully trying for the last several years to get a similar commitment passed through the national legislature. In contrast, in Pakistan because of a 2002 law which reserves 17% of the seats in the national assembly for women (60 out of 342), the parliament has 21.3% women, which places it 40th in the list, ahead of many western countries.

Reserve your right to think, for even to think wrongly is better than not to think at all.

– Hypatia (370-415, Egypt)

Probably the prevailing opinion, that woman was created for man, may have taken its rise from Moses's poetical story; yet, as very few, it is presumed, who have bestowed any serious thought on the subject, ever supposed that Eve was, literally speaking one of Adam's ribs, the deduction must be allowed to fall to the ground; or, only so far admitted as it proves that, from the remotest antiquity, found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion, and his invention to shew that she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because the whole creation was only created for his convenience or pleasure.

– Mary Wollstonecraft, 1790

Untouchability in India – An Overview

Babu Gogineni

In an article in International Humanist News (May 2005) we gave a graphic account of the situation of the millions of Dalits, the 'Untouchables' in India, and of IHEU's efforts to bring their plight to international attention. In this article we provide an overview of the historical and religious roots of the problem and suggest what now needs to be done to help the Dalits help themselves.

Untouchability is not unique to India; it was practised in parts of Europe until a few centuries ago, and Japan still has a large number of 'untouchables', called the *burakumin*. But it is in the Indian sub-continent that this despicable system survives in its worst form, closely bound with culture, religion, history and contemporary politics. Today over 170 million men, women and children in the India are considered untouchable, and improvement in their lot has been slow despite legal safeguards and government programs.

The Indian Caste System

There are four castes in Hindu society and each caste has assigned duties, responsibilities and privileges. The Brahmins are the learned, the Kshatriyas are the warriors, the Vaishyas are the traders, and the Sudras perform menial tasks and physical labour. Brahmins are on the highest rung of the social hierarchy, and Sudras are on the lowest. For thousands of years the relations amongst the castes and their sub-castes have been governed by religious and moral laws – the most influential of them is a compilation called *Manu Dharma Sastra* or the *Manu Smriti*, believed to have been written around the beginning of the Common Era.

The *Manu Smriti* says that the first part of a Brahmin's name should denote something auspicious, that a Kshatriya's name should be connected with power, and that a Vaishya's name should denote wealth. The first part of a Sudra's name should express something contemptible and the second part should denote service and humility, because of the Sudra's low origin. According to Hindu practice, only the upper castes have the right to study the Vedas. The upper castes alone have the right to the thread ceremony which is performed as a rite of passage, allowing them to be termed twice-born.

'If the Sudra intentionally listens for committing to memory the Veda, then his ears should be filled with molten lead and lac; if he utters the Veda, then his tongue should be cut off, if he has mastered the Veda his body should be cut to pieces' says the *Manu Smriti*. In the epic Ramayana, subsequent to Lord Rama's assumption of the throne of Ayodhya after his return from exile, a Brahmin accuses him of causing the death of his son by his toleration of Shambuka, a Sudra who recited the Vedas. In order to redress the situation, Rama finds Shambuka and slays him. The Brahmin boy comes back to life ... In *Manu Smriti* different punishments are reserved for the same 'crime', depending on the culprit's caste.

The 'Untouchables'

If this is the lot of the Sudras, what is the treatment reserved for the 'untouchables' who are outside the caste system, and placed even lower than the Sudras in society? In the 1500s, during the rule of the Marathas and the Peshwas in today's Maharashtra state, 'untouchables' were

not allowed within the gates of the capital city Poona between 3.00 pm and 9.00 am. The reason was that during this time their bodies were likely to cast long shadows, with the attendant danger that the shadow of an 'untouchable' might fall on a Brahmin and pollute him. An 'untouchable' had to carry an earthen pot around his neck so his spittle may not pollute the earth. In Maharashtra an 'untouchable' wore a black thread either in his neck or on his wrist for ready identification, while in Gujarat a horn had to be worn for identification.

The 'untouchables' constitute 15% of the total population of the sub-continent and have been referred to as Depressed Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Local names for the 'untouchable communities' vary in different parts of India: *Bhangi, Pakhi, Chandala etc.* Mahatma Gandhi called them *Harijans* or children of God. Now they are called *Dalits*, which means broken people.

Purity and Pollution

There are many theories about how there came to be 'untouchable communities'. One theory is that the warrior-like Aryans came in from Central Asia via Iran and that they conquered the more peaceful and better settled indigenous inhabitants of the sub continent. The conquered became slaves, and later untouchables. Another theory speculates that the off-spring born of relations prohibited by the caste system were considered untouchable. Since the Aryans were fair skinned and the Dravidians were dark skinned, the *Varna* system – or system of colour – came to be established as the basis of graded inequality.

Concepts of purity and pollution have had a role to play – for example, a washer man who handles items polluted by blood or human waste, a leatherworker who works with animal skins, a weaver who creates cloth, a person who cremates or buries the dead, a manual scavenger, a carrier of the night soil, an executioner who implements a capital punishment, fisherfolk in some parts of the country are all considered untouchable. Some 'untouchables' eat beef, others eat rats and snakes – a dietary habit considered disgusting by the rest of the population.

The 'untouchable' is not expected to occupy or practice jobs and skills reserved for those belonging to a caste. In the epic Mahabharata, Ekalavya, a tribal boy knows he would never be accepted as a student by Dronacharya, the royal teacher. So he practises in front of a statue of Dronacharya and soon becomes the best archer in the realm. When Dronacharya comes to know of this, he exacts his 'fees' from the autodidact in the form of Ekalavya's thumb – thus rendering him incapable of archery anymore.

Social Reform

Many people attempted to change the system: Buddhism condemned both the caste system and the practice of untouchability. In South India, the Hindu religious leader Ramanuja (1017–1137 CE) condemned untouchability and adopted many 'untouchables' as his disciples. In Andhra Pradesh Veera Brahmendra Swamy (10th Century CE) condemned the practice while Minister Sri

Basaveswara of Mysore State (1131–1167 CE) fought it with great vigour. Minister Brahma Naidu of Palnadu (14th Century, CE) in Andhra Pradesh condemned the practice and appointed an ‘untouchable’ named Chenna as his army chief. The monotheistic Sikh religion was born in 1496 partly as a reaction to casteism – but soon fell victim to it. Vemana (circa 15th CE) the deist rationalist poet sneered at the practice of untouchability and admonished the people to respect the ‘untouchables’. So did Jyothirao Phule (1827–1890 CE) and Ranade (1842–1901) in Maharashtra, and Narayanaguru (1856–1928) in Kerala. Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) who was born into the third caste supported the caste system, but wanted to eradicate untouchability to save Hinduism.

Atheist and Humanist reformers like Periyar (1879–1973) and Gora (1902–1975) fought against the indignity of the caste system and introduced inter-dining – thus trying to break one of Hinduism’s biggest taboos. ‘Untouchable’ poets like Gurram Joshua (1895–1971), as well as Humanist writers like the recently departed Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004) exposed the people to the gravity of the problem. Humanists like Tripuraneni Ramaswamy (1887–1943) questioned the morality of the Gods in Hindu mythology and created new drama that caught the imagination of people, thus inaugurating a new era of rationalism in literature that flourished between the 1930s and the 1980s.

Legal and Political

The Constitution of India has special provisions dealing with the abolition of Untouchability. Central Legislation exists in the form of the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989. In colleges and universities and in state employment positive discrimination exists and a percentage of seats and jobs are reserved for those from the socially and economically backward sections of society.

But the practice of untouchability continues and Dalits continue to live outside villages, excommunicated from society. They are denied entry into temples, they are not allowed to share community wells, they are forced to drink water from separate glasses in some rural cafes, and they are frequently attacked or abused if any sign of defiance is shown. When they cross an upper caste house they routinely alight from their bicycles and push the bicycle rather than ride it. When walking in front of a powerful upper caste man’s house, they take off their footwear till they clear the exclusion zone. The police are reluctant to register their complaints or investigate cases filed by them. Some decade-old massacres of Dalits have not yet reached the prosecution stage.

Strangely, the Sudras or the so-called backward castes have become advocates of political Hinduism or *Hindutva*, and have emerged as the biggest threat to Dalit rights. The backward castes have progressed economically over the past century, and being peasant communities, their interests clash with those of the landless Dalits.

The Dalit Response

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is one of the most famous Indians of the last century. Father of the Indian Constitution and one of the greatest Indian intellectuals and political agitators, Dr. Ambedkar was born into an ‘untouchable’ caste. After 2000 years of Manu’s anti-human laws when

India needed a new lawgiver, she turned to one who was born an ‘untouchable’.

In 1956 Dr. Ambedkar, along with half a million other Dalits, converted to Buddhism – Dr. Ambedkar’s interpretation of Buddhism is a modern and humanistic one. Such is the intensity of the problem and the yearning for dignity that many Dalits are converting to Christianity, and thereby foregoing the meagre advantage of educational and job reservations for Dalits (see Surepally Sujatha’s article on page 21) but denied to those who convert to Islam or Christianity.

Dalits themselves have begun to organise themselves politically. Several political parties exist today: Republican Party of India, Bahujan Samaj Party, Dalit Panthers etc. Ill served by its leaders, the Dalit movement has been reduced to asking for more reservations in educational institutions and jobs in governments, whereas they should be asking for reform in society. NGOs play an important role in creating awareness – but unfortunately many are religiously inspired and tend to push sectarian agendas. Important work is being done by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, the secular Dalit Social Forum etc. Organisations like the Centre for Dalit Studies and other Ambedkarite organisations make information available about the various government schemes for the advancement of Dalits.

The government has appointed numerous commissions of inquiry, like the Justice Punnaiah Commission, to find out more about the status of the Dalits in the country and to explore remedial measures. The recommendations stress the vital role that education can play, and the need for an active role for the Police and the District Administration.

What Should Be Done?

Both upper castes and the lower castes need liberation from the oppressive religious ideology which is at the heart of this terrible situation. The Dalits themselves need economic self-sufficiency without which they will be unable to survive. Any long-term solution to this deeply entrenched problem will require a social, cultural and moral transformation of society.

The basis of everyone’s rights lies not in their religious identity or affiliation but in their humanity. Dalits need education and training in Human Rights. As victims of superstition, they need exposure to rational thinking. The succour and superstition of another religion will do little to change the lot of the Dalits. The problem of untouchability is more than an issue of law and order – it is a deep rooted, millennia-old malady that afflicts society. Unless the Dalits have belief in themselves and are empowered to assert their own humanity, unless they themselves discover their inherent human dignity, they will continue to be where they are – on the extreme margins of society. But empowerment of the Dalits will only happen when their fractured movement unites on the basis of democratic principles.

Emancipation is a personal achievement, and the victim needs to enact his or her own emancipation. Others – be they Humanists or Hindus or Christians or Muslims – can only help as facilitators. And the facilitators must remember that the Dalits need education, not pity, justice, not charity.

The Status of Dalits

Surepally Sujatha

The United Nations recently appointed two special rapporteurs to prepare a comprehensive study on discrimination based on work and descent. The problem of Dalits – the so-called untouchables who constitute over 15% of India's population – is bound to be an important focus for this study. This note is based on a submission made by Surepally Sujatha to the 11th Session of the Working Group on Minorities of the UN Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in June 2005. It is a tragedy that despite all the constitutional safeguards, even after Dalits leave Hinduism, discrimination against them continues.

Whether it is slavery, poverty, detention, discrimination, displacement, religious conversions or communal conflicts, it is the Dalit community in all the regions and religions that is affected the most. Sadly, Dalit women are worse off, as women are first victims of any exploitative system.

The Indian Constitution: Neither the Indian Constitution nor any other statutory document in India defines the word 'minority' in the way it is used in the contemporary international context. Minorities in India have been recognised only on the basis of "religion or language", while UN Human Rights documents define minorities as groups based on race/ethnicity/nationality/religion or language. The Indian Constitution guarantees equality, freedom, justice and human dignity to every citizen and Article 14 specifically assures an Indian citizen's right to equality. While Article 15 prohibits any discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, Article 17 of the Indian Constitution specifically takes into cognizance the heinous practice of untouchability against the Dalits and forbids its practice.

But caste and untouchability are encountered in all spheres of life in the Indian subcontinent, and no one is exempt from it. The constitutional safeguards are of course important, but Dalits continue to face multiple problems – in whichever religion they are.

Dalits in Hinduism: The Indian National Human Rights Commission noted that Dalits continue to live in segregated settlements, and work in inhuman conditions despite decades of attempts to redress the situation. Dalits are not allowed to enter temples, or to celebrate festivals like the other Hindus. They cannot drink or dine along with the caste Hindus. Most of the atrocities against Hindu Dalits are committed by members of the dominant castes, but not necessarily the upper-most ones. During communal conflicts Dalits always carry a double burden – they are discriminated against by caste Hindus, and at the same time they are easy targets of others who consider them Hindus!

Dalits in Christianity: Many Dalits converted to Christianity as a result of work by missionaries. In fact, more than 50% of India's Christian population is of Dalit origin. Unfortunately, the caste system and associated discriminatory practices exist in the Christian religion too. Almost everywhere Christian Dalits are forced to have separate churches, and untouchability is practised within the religion.

Dalits in Islam: Indian Muslims are broadly divided along caste lines or into caste-like groups, despite Islam's claim to equitable treatment of all its members. Most of today's Muslims in India are Dalit in origin. 'Low caste' converts to Islam are called *Ajlaf* which means 'base' or 'lowly'. The group All India Backward Muslim Morcha raises the issue of Dalit Muslim Rights and leads the 'Dalit Muslim' movement in India. Muslims are not a homogenised lot and are not represented properly in the Government and other services.

Converts: In India religious conversion of Dalits into Christianity and Islam takes place due to discrimination and suffocation within the Hindu religion. Other factors like economic benefits as well as a genuine desire to find 'the true faith' play an important role too. But since a convert carries his or her social and economic disability into the new religion too, there is a case for recognising *Dalits* among all the religions equally.

In this context it must be noted that the Indian Constitution defines 'Scheduled Castes' under Article 366, and the Presidential Orders of 1950 provide Scheduled Caste status to the Dalits. Scheduled Caste status was further extended to Sikhs in 1956 and to Buddhists in 1990, giving them the right to avail special provisions in education, employment and other benefits from the Government. But the Dalits in Christianity and Islam were not given such status, for they are no-longer Hindus. This strategy of denying Scheduled Castes status to such groups not only denies rightful entitlements but also creates animosity within Dalit communities.

Considering the overall situation, the following needs to be done in the very least:

1. Government should encourage secular intellectuals and NGOs to provide training and information to people on Human Rights. People must be encouraged to examine religion from a Human Rights perspective. Through national Human Rights bodies, and through the National Commission on Minorities or the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes welfare departments, the Government should hold regional workshops and encourage Dalits to be aware of their rights.
2. Government must strictly implement the provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995.
3. Most school text books have lessons that teach dominant Hindu beliefs like Caste, Karma, rebirth etc. Some of the Dalit intellectuals are already initiating the process for reforming text books and this must be given a boost.
4. Reservations (positive discrimination in college admissions and in jobs) should be extended to all Dalits, which ever religion they are in. This action could help the Dalit communities in future to unite and to fight for their rights.

5. There is a need to strengthen the UN's Working Group on Minorities. It must set up a body to undertake studies on different religions and Government policies in different countries. The body thus created must pressurise Governments, inform activists, academicians, and NGOs monitoring the situation through regular meetings, reports and workshops.
6. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights must encourage the Working Group by providing sufficient funding to take up Minority related activities efficiently, and to take up studies regarding the status

of Dalits in all the religions in the Indian sub-continent. Such a step will lead to equal treatment of all the disadvantaged, and help build a strong united Dalit alliance.

7. Govt must consult with civil society on ways to reduce discriminatory practices on the basis of birth and descent.

Surepally Sujatha is a Sociologist and a secular Dalit, active in the Dalit Social Forum, Hyderabad, India. She has represented the Dalit cause at various forums both in India and abroad.

Humanists Fight For Dalit Rights in Nepal Ganga Prasad Subedi

In 2003, IHEU supported a Dalit Empowerment project implemented by the Humanist Association of Nepal (HUMAN). Ganga Prasad Subedi, the project's coordinator writes about the work carried out.

Background

Nepal is the only Hindu State in the world. Nepal's society is caste-based, and the ideological superstructure for this is provided by Hinduism – the caste system is reinforced by the Code of Manu, who was the chief architect and custodian of Hindu religious laws.

Broadly, the various castes in the country can be grouped into the upper castes and the lower castes. The Brahmin, and the Chettri are the upper castes; the rest are the lower castes, viz. the Sudras. Then there are the communities of people known today as the Dalits. The Dalits are treated as untouchables, and it is estimated that the total Dalit population in Nepal is about 15 percent of the total national population of 25.2 million.

The social and economic condition of the Dalit communities is very bad, even by the lowest standards of socio-economic indicators. The condition of women within the community is even more pathetic. Male literacy rate is about 7%, while that of women is about 3%. Most of the Dalit men and women are not familiar with, and have no access to, basic health care services. Infant and child mortality rate is more than double the national average. Knowledge of the existing law and their basic legal rights is almost non-existent in the community. Even after the advent of democracy, the condition of the untouchable castes in Nepal has not changed.

How to Empower

Unless a change in the social behaviour of the so-called upper caste Hindus, and a corresponding attempt on the part of the so-called untouchables to organize themselves is effected through Humanist and right-based education campaigns, it would be impossible to integrate the socially marginalized untouchable castes into the socio-economic and political processes. Dalit castes have been the victims, and will continue to be the victims of irrational and superstitious practices unless a strong awareness raising campaign is initiated. It is for this reason that HUMAN proposed to use humanist education, and legal training as instruments in the process of Dalit community empowerment. Such

activities would be the first steps in empowering the socio-economically marginalized and deprived Dalit communities in general and Dalits women and children in particular.

The Project

Since its inception in 1997, the Humanist Association of Nepal (HUMAN) has been active in the area of literacy and legal training of marginalized communities both at the grass roots and at advocacy levels. In the past, with IHEU's help, HUMAN had conducted a community development project for the Satar community, one of the critically marginalized communities of Nepal. In the light of this experience, IHEU helped HUMAN implement a Dalit Women and Children project in 2003, in the Jhapa district.

Jhapa district is inhabited by a number of Dalit indigenous communities, particularly the Biswakarma (Kami), Damai/Dholi, Chamar, Sarki, Harijan/Ram and Dom castes. The project was envisaged as an integrated approach to address the needs and the problems of these communities, especially the needs of Dalit women and children. Rights-based awareness raising non-formal education, income generating and skill development activities, and reproductive health & sanitary education campaigns were seen as the urgent need. We therefore conducted 4 Humanist educational campaigns and 4 Dalit empowerment training (legal awareness and Dalit rights) workshops. In addition 8 literacy promotion events, health education activities and 3 income generation training programmes were also organised.

Beneficiaries and Outcome

Approximately about 1000 Dalit women and children have directly benefited through the activities conducted. Indirectly, there was a heightened awareness in the community as a whole as regards the need to improve their own lot. The purpose of this project was to help the process of social integration of the socially oppressed castes. The project created a socially enabling environment for the untouchables, an indication of which is the fact that some Dalits are able to sell milk and milk products as well as other food – one of the most important taboos of high-caste Hindu society had thus been broken.

Ancient Indian Wisdom

Dr. Ramendra

IHEU's 2005 Paris Congress Declaration refers to the Humanist ideas of the Charvakas of ancient India. Dr. Ramendra, presents the salient features of the philosophy of the Charvakas, developed 600 years before the Common Era. This philosophy is also known as Lokayata and appears surprisingly contemporary in some of its aspects.

Ancient Wisdom

Ancient Indian wisdom is quite often equated with "spiritualism" of one kind or the other. However, real ancient Indian wisdom is to be found, in my opinion, in the teachings of the Lokayata or Charvaka school of philosophy. Sadly, no work of the Lokayata school has survived at present. Some popular verses with philosophical contents have, however, come down to us through the writings of its opponents.

Ironically, the most significant collection of such authentic popular verses (*pramanik lokagatha*) has been collected by Madhava – an orthodox Sanskrit writer of fourteenth century A.D – in his compendium of Indian philosophy titled *Sarva-darshana-sangraha*. Here are some extracts from the verses collected by Madhava:

While life is yours, live joyously;
None can escape Death's searching eye:
When once this frame of ours they burn,
How shall it ever again return?
The pleasure which arises to men from contact with
sensible objects,
Is to be relinquished as accompanied by pain – such is the
reasoning of fools;
There is no heaven, no final liberation, nor any soul in
another world,
Nor do the actions of the four castes, orders, etc., produce
any real effect.
there are four elements, earth, water, fire and air;
And from these four elements alone is consciousness
produced –
The fire is hot, the water cold, refreshing and cool the
breeze of morn;
By whom came this variety? From their own nature was it
born.
The Agnihotra, the three Vedas, the ascetic's three staves,
and smearing oneself with ashes –
Brihaspati says, these are but means of livelihood for those
who have no manliness nor sense.
If a beast slain in the Jyotishtoma rite will itself go to
heaven,
Why then does not the sacrificer, forthwith offer his own
father?

In Modern Language

We may paraphrase, and logically rearrange the ideas expressed by the Charvakas in simple and contemporary prose:

Happiness is the highest end in life. There is no soul and no life after death. There is no world other than this world. Heaven and liberation from the so-called cycle of birth and death are imaginary ideals. Everyone will inevitably die. No one will be reborn. Therefore, one should make the best of one's life and live happily as long as one lives.

It is irrational to suggest that one should give up pleasures of life because they are mixed with pain. It is just like saying that we should throw away our finest grains because they are covered with husk and dust.

Earth, water, fire and air are the four elements. Consciousness, too, arises from these four elements only; just like intoxicating power arising from mixing together certain ingredients which themselves do not have intoxicating power.

There is no soul apart from body. When we say "I am fat" or "I am lean" attributes like fatness reside only in the body. Phrases like, "my body" are only significant metaphorically.

The hotness of fire and the coolness of water etc. are all natural attributes. Everything behaves according to its own nature and the variety in things comes from nature alone.

The Vedas are not revealed. Their authority should not be accepted. The authors of the Vedas were devoid of intelligence and honesty. Vedic sacrifices, ceremonies for the dead (shraddha), gifts to priests and other related rituals are useless and bear no fruit anywhere. They were created only as a means of livelihood for Brahmin priests.

The Lokayata Philosophy

First and foremost, we find in Lokayata philosophy a total rejection of supernaturalism (soul, other world, heaven, gods, etc.). It is a completely this-worldly or secular philosophy. Secondly, it is a hedonistic philosophy. In other words, it regards human happiness as the highest ethical end. It rejects imaginary ethical ends like attainment of heaven and moksha or nirvana and clearly asserts that one should not run away from life just because pleasure in life is mixed with pain. The basic idea of Lokayata philosophy is: *this world is the only world, this life is the only life and one should make the best of it*. This basic idea is shared by contemporary Humanists – therefore, Lokayata is humanistic.

There is no doubt about Lokayata being materialistic and naturalistic. Its doctrine that earth, fire, air and water are the only elements is similar to that of ancient Greek materialist Empedocles, just as its hedonism is similar to that of ancient Greek hedonists, Aristippus and Epicurus.

In the Indian context, Lokayata rejects the authority of the Vedas, the Vedic rituals and the *varna-ashrama dharma* (the caste system). Thus, there is a clear and strong rejection of Brahminism. It may even be called anti-Brahminism. The naturalism and materialism of Lokayata and its rejection of Vedic rituals as merely means of livelihood for Brahmin priests, implies rejection of the gods. Thus, Lokayata is atheistic. In fact, Lokayata is the only school of ancient and medieval Indian philosophy which is atheist (nastika) in all the three senses of the term. It rejects the soul and the so-called other-world. It rejects gods as well as the authority of the Vedas.

To sum up, Lokayata is a secular and nastika philosophy. We find naturalism, hedonism, humanism, materialism, atheism and anti-Brahminism in Lokayata. Thus, from a rational, humanist point of view it may be described as the genuine wisdom of ancient India.

Dr. Ramendra teaches Philosophy in Patna, and is President of the Bihar Rationalist Society.

Developing a Strategy for Sustainable Fundraising

Suresh Lalvani

In the May 2005 issue of IHN, Suresh Lalvani provided guidance on 'writing funding proposals, using a full cost recovery approach. Here he points out that it is a mistake to think about fundraising simply in terms of raising money. While Humanist organizations need money for on-going projects, future projects, development work, and especially for infrastructure (free funds) to secure their future, successful fundraising has implications across the organization and involves delivering essential resources, communicating "the cause", creating a relationship with members and supporters and enabling an organization to plan for its long-term future. This article looks at how Humanist Organizations can develop a strategy for 'Sustainable Fundraising'.

How to Fundraise?

Step 1: Develop effective tools with which to fundraise:

- Develop your website.
- Produce a short but sharp leaflet outlining your vision, mission, achievements and projects. The leaflet can be used to target prospective donors/funders by direct mail or at donor/funder gatherings.
- Use your journal as a vehicle to ask for funds.

Step 2: Create a point of entry for potential donors.

Then allow time for donors to become educated, inspired and involved before asking them for money. Your approach should be mission based which honours your donors' true commitment to your work.

Before attending any gathering of donors you should have agreed clear objectives:

- Clearly state what your organization is
- Specify what your organization wants
- Articulate what your organization wants
- Explain why the funder should support your organization
- Demonstrate knowledge of the funder's criteria for support and make a suitable match for your organization's projects.

After the gathering, produce a report, and be clear about how you should follow up.

Step 3: Publicize your organization's major recent project successes

In this way these projects have helped to identify and project your organization's Unique Selling Points, and have laid the basis for a fundraising drive. These successful projects will underline your organization's capability to start and manage important projects.

Step 4: Costing your projects – full cost recovery

Your projects should make a contribution to your organization's core costs, and also enable it to recover all

direct costs. Your fundraising proposals should incorporate this. Please refer to my article "Writing funding proposals – a full cost recovery approach" in the May 2005 issue of IHN.

Step 5: Funding your Mission

Funders realise that NGOs need a strong core base to service their projects effectively. Don't hold back from fundraising for core costs.

Step 6: Attracting donors/funders who give regularly

Question: Why should anyone give donations or grants to your organization, and how can you make sure that happens on a regular and continuing basis ?

Answer: Identify and project your organization's Unique Selling points. Explain that your organization makes a small amount of money go a long way.

Planning for a Sustainable Future

What makes/can make your organization sustainable?

- Clear Mission
- Healthy relations with other sectors
- Committed board/staff/constituents/members/volunteers
- Ability to adapt, be flexible
- Clear, realistic, strategic plans
- Sufficient financial resources
- Strong leadership
- Effective, high quality work/programs
- Valuable, useful results/impact
- Accountability
- Enabling legal, political and social environment

Sustainable Thinking

Sustainable thinking means that you are doing long-term planning on what funds and means you need to do your work, achieve your goals, run your projects, or expand your current programs and how you are planning to get those funds/means.

Answer the following questions:

What are your organization's plans for the next 12 months

What financial resources do you need to meet these plans ?

What are your organization's plans for the next five years?

What areas of fundraising are we relying on to deliver these resources?

In a future article, I will advise you as how to run a successful, cost effective fundraising event.

Suresh Lalvani is IHEU Director of Operations

Effective Fundraising

The Golden Rules for fundraising are:

- everything begins with strategy
- successful fundraising based on clear strategic thinking and integrated into your overall plan.
- always think long term
- sustainable planning at the heart of your organization's fundraising
- don't lock yourself in – don't stretch yourself thin
- diversify your fundraising options but do not over-reach yourself
- always consider the legal and ethical implications of your organization's fundraising
- take advantage of the tax reliefs – make the most of tax-effective giving in your country
- be creative:
- the best fundraising is driven by imagination, creativity and passion.

Analysing your organization's fundraising base:

- your organization needs a clear understanding of its current fundraising base and how this might be developed. Questions you need to ask and answer are:
- what is the overall structure of your funding and where does fundraising fit into it?
- what types of income are you receiving?
- is this income spread across a range of sources or are you heavily dependent on a limited number of sources?
- who are the donors you depend on most and how long do you expect to retain them for?
- how much of the income you receive is "restricted" and how much is "free".
- are you making the most of tax – effective giving
- are you building-in contingency plans when developing your strategy.

Do you have the right funding strategy?

In considering whether your organization has the right fundraising strategy, you should consider:

- Your current position – strengths and weaknesses, past fundraising experience, existing fundraising strengths and resources.
- future fundraising needs
- overall funding strategy
- proposed new sources of income
- suggested methods to meet fundraising targets
- resources & actions required to do this

Fundraising income sources

- Governments & European Union
- Trusts and Foundations
- The National Lottery
- Corporate
- Members
- Supporters
- Major donors
- Committed or regular donors
- One-off fundraising
- Community
- Board members personally and through their contacts

Suresh Lalvani

Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2005

North Korea, Eritrea and Turkmenistan are the world's "black holes" for news, according to the fourth Annual World Press Freedom Index released by Reporters Without Borders. The report covers 167 countries and brings out several interesting facts.

At the top of the Index are northern European countries Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Iceland, Norway and the Netherlands: the top 10 countries are all European.

Half the countries in the bottom 10 of the Index are in Asia. North Korea which is the worst offender continues to operate a repressive regime where secret police continued to hound those listening to foreign radio stations and journalists are reportedly still being held in concentration camps for professional errors or deviating from the official line. While some media privatisation has happened in China (159th), the government's propaganda department monitors the media, which were forbidden to mention dozens of sensitive subjects in the past year. If Hong Kong ranks 39th it is because of self-censorship by journalists so as not to annoy the Chinese authorities. While South Korea (34th) and Taiwan (51st) are improving remarkably, India which claims to be the world's largest democracy is at 106. Afghanistan ranks at 125, Saudi Arabia at 154, Iraq at 157 and Iran at 164.

While African and Latin American countries (Benin 25th, Namibia 25th, El Salvador 28th, Cape Verde 29th, Mauritius 34th, Mali 37th, Costa Rica 41st and Bolivia 45th) are improving, some Western democracies slipped down the Index. The United States (44th) fell more than 20 places, mainly because of the imprisonment of New York Times reporter Judith Miller and legal moves undermining the privacy of journalistic sources. Canada (21st) also dropped several places due to decisions that weakened the privacy of sources and sometimes turned journalists into "court auxiliaries." France (30th) also slipped, largely because of searches of media offices, interrogations of journalists and introduction of new press offences.

Significantly, the Report points out that countries that have recently won their independence or have recovered it are capable of preserving democratic freedoms. Nine states that have had independence (or recovered it within the past 15 years) are among the top 60 countries – Slovenia (9th), Estonia (11th), Latvia (16th), Lithuania (21st), Namibia (25th), Bosnia-Herzegovina (33rd), Macedonia (43rd), Croatia (56th) and East Timor (58th).

The Index also addresses the excuses made by repressive regimes that economic development is a vital precondition for democracy and respect for human rights. The top of the Index is heavily dominated by rich countries, but several very poor ones (with a per capita GDP of less than \$1,000 in 2003) are among the top 60, such as Benin (25th), Mali (37th), Bolivia (45th), Mozambique (49th), Mongolia (53rd), Niger (57th) and East Timor (58th).

Report from the UN

Attacks on the UN Continue

September was both a turbulent and an important month at the UN. The US administration's attack against the UN continued, most noticeably by the orchestrated publicity against the Oil For Food Program. In addition, the new ambassador John Bolton's last minute manoeuvres strongly affected the final agreement for the major 60th anniversary summit at the UN. The media coverage of these events was both inadequate and misleading.

The \$64 billion Oil For Food Program was extremely complex, one of the largest humanitarian efforts in history. Firstly, and most importantly, did the program accomplish its mission? What has passed unnoticed and unappreciated is that the program was very successful. Enough food was imported to adequately feed all 27 million Iraqis. In addition, as a response to the great concern for the effects of the sanctions on children, malnutrition of children under the age of 5 was sharply reduced, dramatically cutting child mortality rates. The program contributed to a national vaccination plan which reduced childhood disease and eradicated polio.

Who was responsible for overseeing the program? It was the UN Security Council, via a Security Council Sanctions Committee composed of diplomats of 15 nations including the US. This committee monitored all contracts. The policing of smuggling was the task of the US navy. By agreement of the Security Council Committee and Iraq, sanctions were lifted for oil shipments to Turkey and Jordan.

Finally, did the UN raise concerns about the pricing of contracts? It did so, twice, during the year 2000. The outline of roles and responsibility between the UN management and the Security Council Committee were not always clear. Kofi Annan has accepted responsibility for some management shortcomings. Benon Savan, the former director of the Iraqi program is alleged to have illegally gained \$147,000 over a 4 year period. Also, undoubtedly, Saddam Hussain siphoned off money in the pricing of the contracts.

Given the role of the national interests of the governments in the Sanctions Committee, the enormous size of the \$64 billion program, and its success in mitigating the serious plight of Iraqis, particularly children, one could say the Program was largeky successful. For more details and answers to questions, see (www.oilforfoodfacts/faq.aspx)

60th Anniversary Summit

The next major event was the high level 60th anniversary summit. Diplomats struggled for many months to hammer out an agreement on the Millennium Development Goals, and on reforming the structure of the UN. However in came John Bolton, US representative, pressuring for major changes in the document. As a result, in conjunction with other countries who had agreed, although reluctantly, with its commitments, the final document was weakened, and

became a disappointment to many, for different reasons.

There was no agreement on the composition of the Security Council to make it more representative. Also missing was a restructuring of the discredited Human Rights Commission. US objection to any mention of the duty of nuclear powers to disarm, prevented any agreement on nuclear proliferation – a big disappointment.

What we found most disturbing was the absence of a clear definition of terrorism. Kofi Annan presented a definition, backed by the Western powers, stating that violence and attacks on civilians for political reasons is totally unacceptable. This definition was blocked by Islamic governments' sympathy for the Palestinian cause.

However, there was some good news among the disappointments. There was a reaffirmation, though weakened, of the Millennium Goals on curing disease and halving the incidence of the world's grimmest poverty by 2015. A Peace Commission to help nations emerging from conflict was created. This is new and could be important enough to prevent countries from relapsing into civil war, and the devastating flow of refugees.

Finally, and in our view very important – in spite of the regrettable dilution of the language by the US, the international community acknowledged responsibility to protect civilians from genocide and ethnic cleansing. Under international law a country cannot hide behind sovereignty to commit genocide on its citizens. The 1948 Genocide Convention had already agreed to this. It is nevertheless extremely important to reaffirm this basic moral imperative.

Kofi Annan has often stated that in our increasingly interrelated world critical problems have a habit of crossing national boundaries. Solutions need joint action. The ever growing community of non-governmental organizations is promoting this larger vision. Although many nations have a narrow and short-sighted view of their interest, governments are being pushed to form regional as well as international agreements to solve problems. The times demand it.

Sylvain Ehrenfeld is co-leader of IHEU's 5-member NGO representation to the UN at New York, and Phyllis Ehrenfeld is American Ethical Union's National Service Conference Representative to the UN.

The United Nations is a place, a stage, a forum and a shrine... a place to which powerful people can repair when they are fearful about the course on which their own rhetoric seems to be propelling them.

– Conor Cruise O'Brien, Irish Historian

From Rationalism to Humanism

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For Registration, Programme and other details, contact:

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