



INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST NEWS

VOLUME 9, JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2002

Formerly International Humanist

HUMANIST SUCCESS AT UN CONFERENCE

In 1998 the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief invited the IHEU to participate in the UN's *International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation with Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Non-discrimination* to be held in Madrid 23-25 November 2001. The IHEU was also invited to nominate potential delegates to the Conference from among whom the UN would make a choice. This important Conference which was being held halfway through the *United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education* and at the beginning of the *International Decade for a Culture of Peace and non-Violence for the Children of the World*, also marked the 20th

anniversary of the UN's General Assembly *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion and Belief*.

The Humanist presence at the Conference, and IHEU's involvement right from the beginning is recognition that the IHEU is now considered by the UN as a natural representative and a serious dialogue partner on behalf of the community of religious non-believers. The IHEU delegation was also able to influence the final declaration which for the first time recognized explicitly in a UN main document the rights of religious non-believers.

Continued on page 19

“freedom of religion or belief includes theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief”

- from Conference Declaration



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

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50 years of IHEU: *Humanist Archives* to write IHEU's history

When, in July 2002, IHEU will celebrate its 50th anniversary with a jubilee World Humanist Congress in Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands, Congress participants will receive a book mainly dedicated to the half-century of IHEU's history. The book, edited by Bert Gasenbeek and Babu Gogineni, will have sections on IHEU's history as well as perspectives on the future. The history is being written at *Het Humanistisch Archief* (the *Humanist Archives*), a unique specialized archival institution in Utrecht, The Netherlands.

The *Humanist Archives* was founded in November 1996, by four major Dutch humanist organizations: the *University for Humanist Studies*, the *Dutch Humanist League*, *Humanitas* (the humanist organization for social work), and the freethinker organization *De Vrije Gedachte*, all members of the IHEU.

Though not yet five years old, the *Humanist Archives* have already collected some sixty archives, both from national and local institutions, and from distinguished humanist individuals. One of these is the IHEU archive, measuring some 50 meters shelf length. IHEU has in the summer of 2000 formally appointed the *Humanist Archives* to be keeper of this archive. Because of the importance of this archive, the *Humanist Archives* has pledged to perform its work on IHEU-archives free of charge.

As keeper of the IHEU archives, the *Humanist Archives* is pre-eminently equipped to write the history of 50 years of IHEU. Last year, the *Humanist Archives* therefore drew up a proposal for a jubilee publication. This proposal was accepted by IHEU, and now a large part of our time is dedicated to tasks connected with IHEU-archives. Jan Loman and Pieter Edelman are busy inventoring, while Bert Gasenbeek and Hans van Deukeren are studying the documents and are writing the history part of the book.

This will be an entertaining concise outline of IHEU history, with plenty of interesting and informative sidesteps. Themes to be treated include the several strands of humanism in and outside IHEU, dialogs with Marxists and Christians, IHEU as an NGO at international institutions such as the United Nations and UNESCO, human rights and development activities, portraits of eminent IHEU activists and predictions from the past of what IHEU should have reached in 2002. Since the book is also to include statements on the present status as well as visions for the future of IHEU, this should make the book interesting reading for the historians at the 2052 centenary. Reserve your copy early!

www.uvh.nl/archief/

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Staff of the Humanist Archives

INVITATION FOR ARTICLES

- IHN welcomes original, previously unpublished non-academic contributions on subjects of interest to the world-wide community of humanists. Articles should be around 1200 words.
- It is IHN's policy to use the word HUMANISM without adjectives or qualifications where the 'secular approach' is intended.
- IHN aims to be a source of reliable information – authors should ensure accuracy of facts and figures.
- Articles in the IHN are widely reproduced or translated in various humanist magazines all over the world. Articles submitted for consideration may not be submitted to other magazines before a decision is conveyed by IHN. A decision will be conveyed generally within three months of submission, but articles cannot be returned.
- Contributions should preferably be word processed and sent as e-mail text, but not as attachments, because of virus complications. Photographs and illustrations are welcome.
- Contributors should include a complete address as well as a phone and fax number where possible, along with a three line biographical note.
- Contributors should note that articles published in IHN can be freely reproduced, but the IHN requires that the source and the author's name be acknowledged.

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“Living among the believers”

On November 28 Dr. Shaikh sent a letter to Babu Gogineni, signing on the envelope ‘Living among the believers’. His dramatic fate, the experience of living in the shadow of death for over a year, and going through a kangaroo court trial has not altered his positive view of life or his conviction in Humanism. He will perhaps qualify as the bravest man in today’s Pakistan!

Edited extracts:

September 11

I hope this letter finds you in the best of your health. I am well and trying to keep fit. Well, the 11th September US tragedy brought a lot of grief for the loss of valuable American lives. Indeed, it was a great loss for humanity and civilization. Religious barbarism struck a blow and awakened the world to the horrors of religious dogmatic beliefs and practices; as well as it stressed the need for humanism, liberalism and secularism. I wrote a letter to the US Embassy here, as well as, sent a message expressing my grief to Prof. Paul Kurtz and American humanists.

As you might remember, my paper ‘*Deeni Madaras and Rise of Taliban*’ presented at IHEU’s Mumbai Congress fringe was on this topic. Indeed, globalization of the world village exposed even the most developed societies to the religious barbarism of most backward societies. And here intensely arises the question of developing and morally supporting the third world liberal persons, associations and governments. Mere slogans of democracy are not enough. Globalization of Humanism, Liberalism and Secularism is necessary not only for the good of the third world countries but also for the ‘spiritual’ and physical defence of the developed and civilised world.

My Case

Now about myself: on 18.08.01 Capital Punishment was pronounced against me, though the case did not merit this.

1. On 1 October 2000 I attended a meeting of South Asian Union addressed by an ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) Brig. Shaukat Qadir (retd.) also running a religious-political association of *Jamait - I - Islami*. I asked a couple of questions

about South Asian peace and Kashmir which offended him and he returned a threat. There were foreign office policy makers and newsmen sitting there.

2. Within 48 hours, a foreign office employee who was also my student at the medical college where I used to lecture at the morning time, prepared an application against me, alleging blasphemous remarks in their class and gave it to a cleric, who improving upon the complaint, accused me of a specific instance of 2-10-2000 in the class of IInd year male students and registered the case with the Police.

- The Court set aside the cleric’s evidence as hearsay.
- The student who wrote the application was found to be absent from the college on the day of the alleged incident, so his evidence was set aside.
- Two other students gave evidence that they heard the alleged blasphemous remarks on 2-10-2000 at 12.15 noon in a lecture that lasted between 12.00 to 12.45 noon.
- In my statement, I informed the Court that on 2-10-2000, I did not take any lecture from 12.00 to 12.45 noon, and therefore there was no incident of uttering blasphemous remarks at 12.15 noon. In support of this I presented the college timetable before the court, which confirmed that my timings at college were limited from 9.30 am to 12.00 noon only.
- Therefore neither the incident took place, nor the prosecution proved that the alleged sentences were blasphemous.
- During the trial, the religious students of the claimant clerics of *Deeni Madrassa* used to demonstrate against me wearing the Taliban style headdress & uniforms, my solicitors were threatened so much so that the court had to be moved to central Jail, Rawalpindi.
- The Court held *in camera* at Central Jail, Rawalpindi, sentenced me to Capital Punishment, despite the flimsy and uncorroborated evidence against me, and despite documentary evidence in my favour, against which our appeal has been launched.



“My convictions for the truth of our life stance are indeed unshakeable and unbeatable”

- People here designed the blasphemy law 295/c Pakistan Penal Code as Religious Terrorism with Law Code.

Thanks to friends like you, I am in good spirits and waiting for decision on my appeal. I am also thankful to IHEU, Amnesty International and other individuals and groups for their support.

As per news here, the American and Allied Forces have taken most of Afghanistan from the shackles of Taliban religious Terrorism; it had lots of influence on Islamabad administration, so hopes are rising for some liberal atmosphere.

My convictions for the truth of our life stance Humanism are indeed unshakeable and unbeatable. And I am most thankful for the sympathy and support from the Humanist Family of the World.

My regards to all Humanists, individually and collectively.

Yours in Humanism

Dr. M. Younas Shaikh
Death Cell

Babu Gogineni participated in a 15 minute BBC World Service discussion on Blasphemy (on 16 January 2002) where he highlighted Dr. Shaikh’s case. The IHEU is relaunching the campaign for Dr. Shaikh. A communication has been published in The Times, UK, and further efforts are on the way. For latest details visit www.ih.eu.org or send an e mail to campaign@ih.eu.org

No Man's Land - The Green Fields of France

Well how d'ye do Private William McBride,
D'ye mind if I sit here down by your grave side,
And I'll rest for a while in the warm summer sun,
I've been walking all day and I'm nearly done

And I see by your gravestone you were only nineteen
When you joined the glorious fallen in nineteen sixteen,
Well I hope you died quick and I hope you died clean,
Or Willie McBride was it slow and obscene?

Refrain

Did they beat the drum slowly did they sound the fife lowly,
Did the rifles fire o'er ye as they lowered you down?
Did the bugles sing the last post and chorus
Did the pipes play the "Floors o' the forest"?

And did you leave a wife or a sweetheart behind,
In some faithful heart is your memory enshrined?
And though you died back in 1916,
To that loyal heart are you always nineteen?
Or are you a stranger without even a name?
Forever enshrined behind some glass pane,
In an old photograph, torn and tattered and stained,
And fading to yellow in a brown leather frame.

The sun's shining now in these green fields of France,
The warm wind blows gently and the red poppies dance,
The trenches have vanished, long under the plough,
No gas and no barbed-wire, no guns firing now,
But here in this graveyard it's still no man's land,
The countless white crosses in mute witness stand;
To man's blind indifference to his fellow man,
And a whole generation who were butchered and damned.

And I can't help but wonder now Willie McBride,
Do all those who lie here know why they died?
Did you really believe them when they told you the cause,
Did you really believe that this war would end wars?
Well the suffering, the sorrow, the glory, the shame,
The killing, the dying, it was all done in vain.
For Willie McBride it's all happened again,
And again and again and again and again!

Eric Bogle

Eric Bogle is Australian Humanist of the Year 2001. Originally from Scotland, he is today one of Australia's best known and most decorated songwriters and performers.

**VISIT WWW.IHEU.ORG
TO READ REPORT FROM DURBAN
WORLD CONFERENCE BY IHEU
REPRESENTATIVE PROF. DESAI**

2001: A Humanist Odyssey

Prof. Paul Kurtz makes a partial listing of activities of the Center for Inquiry, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), all headquartered in Buffalo, New York.

The *Center for Inquiry* is committed to the application of reason, science and free inquiry to all areas of human interest. CSICOP deals with paranormal and CSH with religious claims.

- *Free Inquiry* magazine, edited by Tom Flynn, had the highest circulation growth in its history – its most recent winter issue is up 18% to approximately 37,000 circulation. *The Skeptical Inquirer*, edited by Ken Frazier, has approximately 50,000, for a total of 100,000 readership.

- The new headquarters of the *Center for Inquiry-West* on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles was officially opened on December 15th.

- The *Campus Freethought Alliance* held an annual convention in Amherst, N.Y. in June; and continues to add significant new campuses to its roster.

- The *Center for Inquiry* sponsored (in cooperation with CSICOP and CSH in November) its first conference on "Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?" Some 500 people attended this lively conference (in spite of apprehension of air travel). There were over 50 speakers.

- CSICOP participated in two international conferences: The European Council of Skeptical Organizations in Prague in September, and it cosponsored with the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow a special conference on "Science, Antiscience and the Paranormal" in October. The key organizer was Professor Valerii Kuvakin, head of the *Center for Inquiry, Moscow State University*. (See report in this magazine).

- CSH hosted a meeting at the *Center for Inquiry* in Amherst (in November) of dissident Muslims, including people from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Iran. They formed a new organization called *Freedom from Religious Oppression*. In attendance was Ibn Warraq, the well-known Muslim critic. Armen Saginian organized "New Horizons," designed to provide a secular alternative for Iranians.

- CSH mounted a campaign to reply to the attacks upon it by the Religious Right. In particular it has responded to Tim LaHaye and David Noble's attack as outlined in the book *Mind Siege*.

- Two television series are underway: *The Discovery Channel* produced and aired 10 five-minute shorts, *The Skeptical Inquirer Presents*, and they are producing another ten one hour specials. *The Humanist Perspective*, moderated by Joe Beck, continues to produce half-hour shows, which are viewed in up to 29 stations nationwide.

The year 2001 was the year of greatest growth for the Center for Inquiry, CSH, CSICOP, and affiliated organizations. We look forward in 2002 to a whole series of exciting new programs and conferences!

New law on circumcision in Sweden

The Swedish Humanist Association does not support it as a final solution

Background

Circumcision on boys is performed in the Anglo-Saxon, African, Jewish and Muslim cultures. The two last-mentioned perform the operation fairly extensively in Sweden. The Jewish tradition establishes – by virtue of the Old Testament – that boys should be circumcised the eighth day from birth. The Muslim tradition is not founded on the Koran and has no general rule on age, but circumcision is usually performed when boys are between 2 and 14 years. About 100 Jewish and 3000 Muslim boys are circumcised in Sweden each year.

Despite the fact that more operations are performed among Muslims, Jewish advocates of circumcision appear more frequently in the media.

Until this date there has been no special laws or regulations governing male circumcision. Female circumcision – as it was called before the more appropriate term female genital mutilation was introduced – has, however, been banned since 1982. The ban is utterly uncontroversial and by most people seen as very natural. Decidedly fewer people, however, seem to be able to draw a parallel from this to male circumcision. Female genital mutilation is – with good reason – seen as a violation and a crime against the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, but the male equivalent is often seen as a natural part of certain cultures and religions. The difference in surgical trauma between the operations is confused with an alleged difference in essence.

Government bill

In 1998 the Government created a group with members from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. The group was given the task of making a proposal for regulation of circumcision of boys. This resulted in a Government report, which in 2000 was sent to authorities and organizations for consideration.

The report proposes that circumcision may be performed on boys with consent from the parents, but that it may not be performed if it is against the will of the boy (that is, if such a will can at all be expressed!). Pain relief will be compulsory, and a fully qualified medical doctor should perform the operation. On boys under the age of 2 months non-medical personnel are also allowed to perform the operation.

The considerations were heterogeneous and presented many different views. It can generally be said that little essential criticism was produced – the critics were too cautious. The *Child Ombudsman* and the *National Swedish Association for Sexual Information* were among the few that stated that circumcision is a violation of the child. Such statements, however, were surprisingly rare, and organizations such as for instance the *Save the Children Fund* demonstrated a surprising lack of courage.

The Government transformed the report into a bill that was presented to the Swedish Parliament. There were several members' bills on circumcision in the Swedish Parliament, in conjunction with the Government bill. One members' bill suggested that circumcision should be performed on boys from the age of 16 with their own and their parent's consent, and on adults with only their own consent. Another bill suggested a time limitation of the validity of the law, and yet another that

only medical personnel should be allowed to circumcise boys. After the consideration process, the Committee on Health and Welfare made a report on the Government bill and after that it was up to the Swedish Parliament to make the final decision.

Debate and discussion

An article by Professor Yngve Hofvander was published in *Dagens Nyheter*, a leading Swedish daily paper, in March 2001. Professor Hofvander is former head of the International Child Health Care at Uppsala University. The article had the caption "Even male circumcision is a mutilation", and it was widely recognized and discussed. Although critical voices had been heard before, few people had openly demanded a ban on circumcision on boys. Professor Hofvander did, however, just that. He mentions articles 19 and 24 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, stating that "States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence [...]" and that "States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children". Professor Hofvander writes that it would be unrealistic to demand an immediate ban on the operation. Yet, he suggests that it should at least be stated that circumcision is a crime against the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and that the law should have a time limitation while awaiting a change in attitudes.

Another forceful critic of the operation is the lawyer Stefan Ivarsson, who is circumcised himself and a director on the board of Attorneys for the *Rights of the Child*. He has, naturally, emphasized the legal aspects of circumcision. Ivarsson and Professor Hofvander have been among the most active participants in the debate in daily papers and medical journals, as well as on television and radio.

The advocates of circumcision have claimed it to be a matter of freedom of religion. Those who are critics of the operation have, however, used this argument frequently also. The first-mentioned group claim freedom of religion for the parents, while the latter claim the very same for the children. Advocates of circumcision have also claimed that the operation is harmless, and that small children are unable to feel pain. Yet, both common sense and scientific researches say that this is simply not true.

The Swedish Humanist Association takes a stand

Some 50 authorities and organizations were invited to consider the proposed bill, but the *Swedish Humanist Association* was unfortunately not among these. Genital mutilation is mentioned in the idea and action programme of the association, being one of the phenomena in the world that we object to. Nevertheless, the situation was slightly unclear, as it is usually the female form that is intended when the expression 'genital mutilation' is used. With the intention of forming a clearer stand specifically on male circumcision, a motion was proposed to the annual meeting of the association in April this year. The motion suggested that the *Swedish Humanist Association* should take a stand against male circumcision performed without consent. It was also suggested that the law should forbid this operation, and that the association should work in moulding public opinion in that direction. A change in the idea and action programme was also proposed.

The board and the annual meeting supported the general view in the motion. It was decided that the board, together with the proposer of the motion, should compose a letter to the Committee on Health and Welfare, presenting our basically critical view on circumcision. It was also decided that changes in the idea and action programme must wait until a later revision. The most essential parts of our argumentation in the letter* were:

- *Male circumcision is obviously not as harmful to the child as the female form. Nevertheless the former is also a violation of the rights of the child, and there is no difference in essence.*
- *The Convention on the Rights of the Child and other similar documents explicitly state that inequality before the law on account of for instance gender is unacceptable. The legislation of today is, however, clearly discriminating.*
- *Freedom of religion is not only for the parents, but also for the children. Parents must not violate the rights of their children. To cut off healthy parts of the sexual organ on small boys unable to give their consent is not a 'right' of parents or minority groups. The child is marked for life.*
- *Even though we are very critical of circumcision on boys, and want this to be banned in the future, we think that the solution now chosen by the Government and the Committee on Health and Welfare is in the short view the most realistic. Compulsory pain relief and the utilization of medical personnel mean improvements, and the proposal of the committee is a step in the right direction. It should, however, not be allowed to be the final solution. A deliberately inflicted physical injury can never be justified.*

The final decision and the future

The new law is now in force since October 2001. The *Swedish Humanist Association* has taken a reformist stand, accepting the new law at least for a limited period. We hope that this way is the right one, but there is of course a risk that the new law will be used to 'justify' circumcision also in the future. The Committee on Health and Welfare stresses that the Government should carefully follow the effects of the new law and after four years return with a broad account of the experiences from this. It is unfortunate that the demand for a limitation of the law's period of validity was not agreed upon, but we hope that there will be a new debate in four years.

The *Swedish Humanist Association* will continually bring up circumcision in its information activity. In nr 1 2001 of *Humanisten* – the association's magazine – there are articles on the issue. In the spring was a seminar on circumcision arranged. The coming years must be used for discussions and moulding of public opinion. In a future not too far away, law must prohibit such a violation of the physical integrity of the child, as circumcision indeed is.

*The Full text of the Association's letter to the government is available on the IHEU website at www.iheu.org

Carl Drott is a deputy member on the board of the Swedish Humanist Association. He was behind the motion on circumcision on the annual meeting, and participated in writing the letter to the Committee on Health and Welfare. He is a Youth leader.

Gea comes to London!



Gea Meijers is leader of the Dutch Humanist Youth based in Amsterdam and will work at the IHEU office starting January 2002. As preparation for her move to London she already obtained website related training at Humanist Media Support, Hilversum.

Hello, I'm Gea Meijers. Working in London at the IHEU means for me a whole new work opportunity, a new (very big!) city and a new country. I'm a student of sociology at the University of Amsterdam. I've been involved in the humanist movement, especially the youth humanist movement.

Humanism for youth interests me, so I'm pleased that one of my main tasks at the IHEU headquarters office in London will be reinforcing the IHEYO, the youth wing of the IHEU. The other main tasks I'm going to take up are media, especially website-maintenance, and tasks related to the administration.

I'm excited about working at the IHEU. In this year I'm hoping to learn more about the diverse faces humanism has around the world. And I also hope to meet a lot of new people in London, and also people connected to humanism. Maybe I'll meet some of you this year, either when you visit the IHEU office, or at the forth-coming 50 anniversary IHEU-congress!

Gea may be contacted at office@iheu.org

Calling all women!

Women interested in organising a Humanist Women's International Network are invited to volunteer by emailing to women@iheu.org
The purpose of the network would be:

- To promote women's rights, empowerment and development within the UN system and the international community
- To challenge women's subservience within the world's religions
- To promote and encourage humanist women to participate in their national women's lobby and governmental agencies
- To put gender on the agenda of humanist organisations
- To promote and encourage women to take leadership positions within their national humanist organisations

The vision is for an international network of individual humanist women, communicating via the IHEU website and discussion groups. But it could develop into an organisation – with democratically elected national and/or regional leaders.

Be in at the beginning and influence the development. Register your interest NOW! Send an e mail to women@iheu.org

Two English Humanists in America

A visit (before September 11) to friends in Indiana led Eddie and Marie Bush to meetings with Humanists in Minneapolis and Boston. Their experiences range from visiting the unique *Museum of Questionable Medical Devices* in Minneapolis, to meeting believers in Indiana who had never heard of Humanism, to joining in a celebration at a Unitarian Universalist church.

Minneapolis

Our meeting with representatives of the *Humanists of Minnesota* and *Minnesota Atheists*, each of which has about 200 members, was particularly instructive, and we learnt that American Humanism has as many, if not more, factions than our own in the UK. There are the *University of Minnesota Atheists and Humanists*, the *Humanist Centre*, the *Secular Student Alliance*, the *Society for Humanistic Judaism*, *Friends Free of Theism*, the *Red River and Lake Superior Freethinkers*, and the *First Unitarian Society*, making up a further membership of some 800. However, the Humanists and Atheists do have regular joint meetings (in fact they share a president) and make common cause whenever possible.

One of the issues uniting all the various factions is the current attempt by the Evangelical Christians to breach the separation of Church and State, as laid down in the American constitution, by attempting to bring prayers into state schools and even into football games. So far, the Humanists, acting together with the *Society for the Separation of Church and State*, have succeeded in squashing these attempts. The *Minnesota Atheists* have, however, been unsuccessful in their suit against the Federal Government's funding of religious non-medical care, e.g. Christian Science nursing.

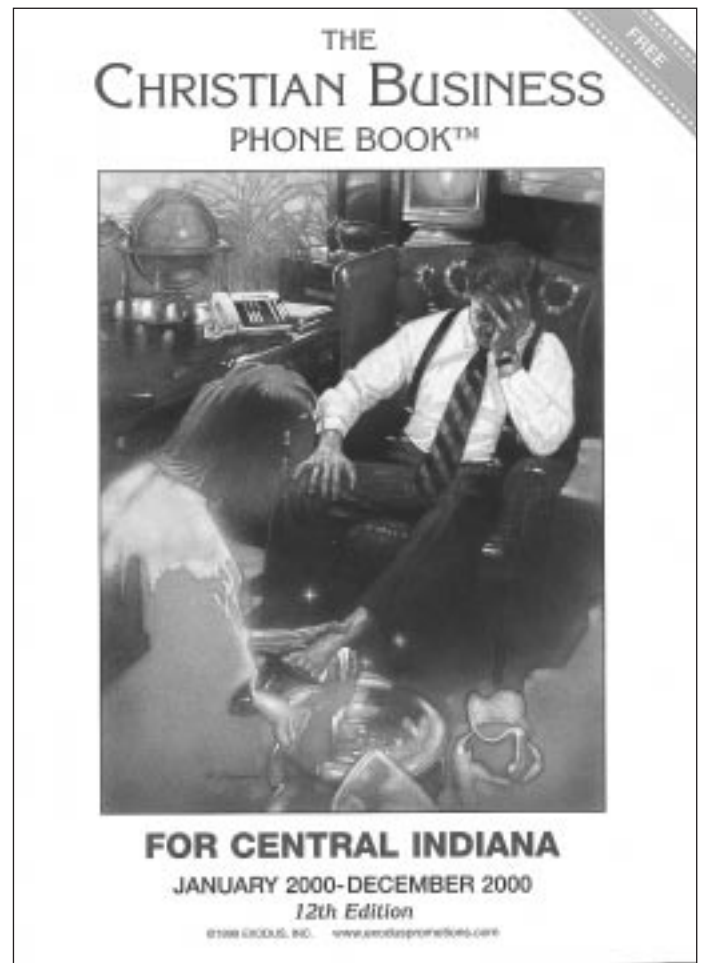
Humanists maintain a profile on Minneapolis cable TV with two half hour programmes a month, at 7.30 pm, at an annual cost of about £2000, with Atheists using a further two half hour slots. In addition there is the monthly edition of *Humanist News & Views*; The *Minnesota Atheist* is the atheist counterpart, a slightly smaller bi-monthly publication.

Jesse Ventura, the present Governor of Minnesota, although not officially connected with the Atheists, has some quite strong views on religion himself. He has been quoted as saying "Organised religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers". This is pretty tough stuff for a region which takes in the Bible-belt, and one can only assume that he kept these views to himself until after his election! In fact, Sunday morning's TV channels were bristling with Evangelical fervour and salesmanship, a reminder of the far greater percentage of believers in the USA – some 70% compared with 30% in Britain.

The writer Sinclair Lewis, another famous Minnesotan, once proclaimed in Church that he was a non-believer, and challenged God to strike him dead within ten minutes. He survived, but had to ride the storm of public outrage. In his novel 'Main Street', he interpreted America not only for Americans but also the rest of us, and gave it, dare I say it, a soul!

Columbus and Louisville

Our visit to Columbus, Indiana, a small company town (Cummins Diesel Engines) gave us access to middle America with a capital 'M'. It is endowed by the wealth of the philanthropic founder of the company, and can boast public buildings, including 4 churches, designed by some of



The Christian Business Phone Book

the worlds most prominent architects, but surprisingly not a single theatre or concert hall.

Humanists are not in evidence in Indiana. Certainly there are no organisations affiliated to the *American Humanist Association*. At a *Womens' Society Group* meeting Marie was asked which church she belonged to. On informing the questioner that she was a Humanist, she was asked, with genuine interest and no trace of malice, 'does that mean you don't care about other people?'

In spite of the American Supreme Court ruling that praying in public schools must be private, the local press reports that student-led prayers and Bible studies occur in Columbus High Schools. On a cautionary note, the religious pages ask "is financial success always a sign of God's favour" – a question quite frightening to us simply for being asked. Social life is dominated by the churches, and even business life is infiltrated by religion. In many shopping malls the 'Christian Business' phone book for central Indiana, circulation 40,000, which has Jesus Christ listed on its editorial board, was in evidence. Most of the businesses listed carry a cross or fish symbol, and many have testified that '.... I am a Christian who loves and serves Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Lord of my life, and I affirm that I conduct my business, to the best of my ability, according to Biblical principles'.

Our next investigative visit took us to the Southeast Christian Church outside Louisville. This circular glass and steel construction holds a

congregation of 9000, with two balconies and associated escalators, and a gigantic monitor screen which projects an image of the speaker to all parts of the auditorium.. Only a few days before it had hosted more than 8000 women for a two day bible study and worship event addressed by revivalist preacher Beth More.

The *Southeast Outlook Newspaper* (19000 circulation), which contains at least 50% advertising, reported that the Southern Baptist Convention refuted charges made by the Chicago Interfaith Commission that the Southern Baptists plan to send 100,000 missionaries into the city in the summer would undo progress made toward interfaith dialogue, and could even lead to violence against members of minority religions.

Massachusetts

And so on to Boston and Concord, where we met Joe Gerstein, President of the *Humanist Association of Massachusetts*. A physician by profession, he had hoped to work on uniting the many humanist factions into one movement, but now spends all his spare time officiating on behalf of 'SMART', the humanistic counterpart of Alcoholics Anonymous, but covering all forms of addiction. He told us that Tom Ferrick, the local group executive director, an ex-Catholic priest, was now acting as Chaplain to the Harvard Humanist chaplaincy which has been endowed by a wealthy patron.

Joe took us on a visit to Walden Pond, some 2 miles outside Concord, and to the site of the cabin where Thoreau, the 19th century pantheistic naturalist and writer, lived as a recluse for a couple of years in order to get closer to nature by having to fend for himself. The results of his observations could be seen as the founding of the science of ecology.

However, the story goes that whenever he became desperate for a square meal, he would leave his cabin for the hospitality of his sister's table all of half a mile away!

A strong individualist, Thoreau was opposed to the war with Mexico, and in keeping with his principles on Civil Disobedience, refused to pay his taxes. Eventually he had to go to prison for this, and one day his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson caught sight of him there and exclaimed 'What on earth are you doing in there?' only to be challenged with 'What's more to the point, what are you doing out there?'

The *Unitarian Universalists* in Boston were our last port of call, and their 'Summer Sing' proved to be fairly universalist, the audience having been informed that all parties including atheists, gays and lesbians and any mix of these were welcome. It was certainly a happy-clappy occasion, amplified by the local choir of over 100 singers, and incorporated amongst other works a civil rights medley, although the audience was predominantly white.

The Universalist Church professes to be based on an amalgam of wisdom from the world's religions incorporating Jewish, Christian and Humanist teaching with many references to 'Spiritual' and 'faith'. It includes worship in its programmes, and so could be classed as a religious humanist movement. In its environment it would be difficult for any non-believer to feel threatened, on the other hand those who are disinclined to worship and praise the Lord would feel out of it.

Not far from the Universalist church, but on a scale more reminiscent of St Peter's in Rome, stands the *First Church of Christ Scientist*, founded by Mary Baker Eddy. Mark Twain once lambasted this cult as a sham, but it still has a wide following to this day. Since we were suffering from nothing worse than tourist fatigue, we decided to give this one a miss.

Our American experiences left us with an overwhelming sense of the differences between our two cultures. European scepticism is now

widespread, and the churches are fighting a rearguard action. Humanist teaching is increasingly available in schools as an alternative to religious instruction in several countries of the European Union. In Britain, however, where there is still no separation of church and state, Humanism is not much better understood by the general public than in America. Nevertheless, it is perhaps still more socially acceptable to be an atheist in Britain, on the basis that atheists here are regarded more as harmless eccentrics than a danger to the fabric of society.

One can only hope that the various American humanist factions will attempt to make more common cause to enable them to effectively combat their powerful religious establishment.

Eddie Bush is a retired company director, committed Humanist and inventor. He is a part-time journalist on environmental and humanist issues and has been active in the Dr. Shaikh campaign.

THE MUSEUM OF QUESTIONABLE MEDICAL DEVICES

The Museum door had a notice announcing that on Tuesdays it opened from noon which was when I had to be at the airport! We took a chance and called the curator to check if we could still have access to the Museum exhibits? It was! The genial Bob McCoy, proprietor, showed us around the impressive museum and towards the end further surprised me with the information that he was once President of the *American Humanist Association!*

Bob McCoy is a veritable encyclopedia of the world's most inane and useless information about how to cure and/or comprehend what may ail or puzzle the human body. In this picture he is getting a 'phrenology' reading (the machine measures the size of bumps on the head). The reading lets him know how he's doing on any of 35 personality characteristics like intelligence, spirituality, suavity and chastity (all the bumps can be mapped). Visitors to the museum can have their bumps measured too. The 'Phrenology Machine' is like a dentist's chair with a helmet incorporating adjustable probes which are pressed down on to the subject's skull and can print out their character analysis on the spot. There are machines that claim to increase virility and cure prostrate problems, there are foot powered breast enlargers, there are weight reduction glasses. All you have to do is stand in front of lights flashing prismatic colours that guarantee health and well-being.

As the publicity brochure says, the Museum is the world's largest display of what the human mind has devised to cure itself without the benefit of either scientific method or common sense. It has collections on loan from *The American Medical Association, The US Food and Drug Administration, The National Council for Reliable Health Information etc.*

Visit www.mtn.org/quack and get cured!



Bob McCoy gets a Phrenology reading

Babu Gogineni

Fighting Anti-Science in the New Russia

Thinking, or more accurately, critical thinking, was the underlying theme of a conference on Science, Pseudo-science and Anti-science held in Moscow from 3rd to 6th October 2001. The conference was held at the Russian Academy of Sciences, joint sponsors of the event with the Department of Philosophy, Moscow State University, IHEU's Russian member organisation the Russian Humanist Society, and the Council for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) which is a cooperating member organisation of the IHEU.

Spiritual Vacuum

Since the fall of communism things have not gone well for science or rational thinking in Russia. The collapse of communism created not only a political and economic vacuum but a spiritual vacuum as well – and one that the Orthodox Church has been quick to fill. Hundreds of old churches have been restored, church buildings confiscated by the state over half a century ago have been handed back, and new churches seem to be springing up on every street corner. 90% of the population now profess a belief in God, a figure not dissimilar to that for the United States, although only 10% of Russians attend church regularly.

The spiritual vacuum has also been a rich feeding ground for every kind of pseudo-science, New Age cult and the newer religions from Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons to Scientology.

An October Conference

The October conference signalled the beginning of the fight-back by science and rationalism. It attracted many of the most active and popular Russian critics of anti-science and paranormal beliefs. Academician Edward Kruglyakov (Chairman of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Committee against False Science and Falsification Of Scientific Data) said that "pseudoscience is becoming dangerous for both science and society". The past 10 years have seen the appearance of about 120 "academies", most of them self-proclaimed pseudo-scientific organisations. They openly attack science, insisting that "scientific paradigm is withering hopelessly away". Organised false science has well established connections with the high bureaucracy in Russia and with certain secret military institutions, which help it avoid independent scrutiny. Kruglyakov gave a number of examples showing how presidential, governmental and parliamentary structures give organised charlatans access to funds from the national budget.

Academician Garry Abelev (of the Russian Academy of Sciences and a world authority on the immunochemistry of cancer) focused on the differences between the false science and mistakes in scientific research. He also stressed that the greatest danger for science is the expansion of ideology and popular beliefs into science. False science begins when ideology, power, illegal money, and public ignorance start to interfere in the scientific enterprise.

The positive role that science has played in cultural progress was the theme of Professor Yuri Efremov (an astronomer from Moscow State University and the leading Russian opponent of astrology) who also showed the reactionary intentions of the proponents of false science, religious fundamentalism and postmodernism.

Professor David Dubrovskii (Institute of Philosophy of Russian Academy of Sciences, and a pioneer of the scientific investigation in Russia of claims of the paranormal), analysed the sources of the paranormal beliefs, two being the insufficiency and uncertainty of empirical data.



Revival of interest in religion in Russia

Roy Brown

Prof Sergey Kapitsa is a popular TV showman and for many years ran the most popular scientific program on T.V. He argued that anti-science in Russia is so powerful that it is time to talk about a new kind of organised crime. If unchecked, it will lead inevitably to a new barbarism and to the disintegration of culture.

In his talk on 'Science and Humanism', Valerii Kuvakin pointed out that the danger is rather greater for society than for science itself. A scientific worldview is not enough to resist charlatanry and irrationalism. We need a unity of basic human values. Modern Humanism provides a free and open platform for the alliance of science and reason with moral and civil values.

One highly visible participant at the conference was an Orthodox priest, magnificent in his black robes and huge gold cross, looking, he said, for common ground with the scientific community in the struggle against paranormal nonsense. Unfortunately, he turned out to be a Creationist. One presenter whose blatantly pseudo-scientific subject was "the continuum between the material world and the spiritual" jerked me awake when he used the phrase "knowledge beyond science". A member of the audience bluntly suggested that he was at the wrong conference. "Oh no!" he replied, "I was invited by the organising committee." His institute is state-funded.

Moscow

Moscow itself is now a bustling western-style city. In marked contrast to the recent past, you now enter Red Square to the sounds of church bells and a heavenly Russian choir emanating from a near-by church. The entire left hand side of the square is still occupied by the baroque magnificence of GUM, but now housing the top western designer boutiques and elegant even by the standards of Fifth Avenue. Facing you is the baroque masterpiece of St Basil's, like so many churches, currently undergoing a major restoration. To the right the massive red brick walls of the Kremlin with, at its centre, the dark marble of Lenin's tomb. Lenin is now more distant in history it seems than Catherine the Great. The Communist Party is still supported by 30% of the electorate but is hardly the Communist Party of old. The new communists are falling over themselves to find favour with the church, their leaders missing no

Continued overleaf

opportunity to confess their newly-found faith in the church of Mother Russia.

In such a climate it is hardly surprising that every kind of pseudo-science and New Age nonsense is flourishing. Books on Creationism, UFOlogy, clairvoyance and spiritualism are best-sellers. What can Rationalists and Humanists do in the face of such a massive lurch to the transcendental? At the conference, at least, the objectives were clear: to oppose any further encroachment of religious dogma into education; to defend the secular constitution and the separation of church and state; to encourage the teaching of critical thinking; and to build as rapidly as possible a network of Skeptics, Rationalists and Humanists able to take on the claims of the transcendentalists wherever possible in this vast country.

A Milestone

The conference will almost certainly prove to have been a milestone in the fight back by rationalism in Russia. Among the foreign visitors were a number of the world's leading Skeptics and Humanists including Prof Paul Kurtz, founder and chairman of CSICOP, Joe Nickel, senior researcher at CSICOP, Prof Lee Nisbett, Prof James Alcock, Ms Jan Eisler, a vice-President of IHEU, and Amardeo Sarma, president of the European Skeptics. All gave stimulating presentations that were not only highly entertaining but full of advice and good sense about how to approach the pseudo-scientific claims that surround us.

Better teaching of science is a priority, with an emphasis on science as a process of observation and discovery rather than the acquisition of a set of facts. Also needed is a recognition that critical thinking and free inquiry are not limited to the hard sciences but are needed in the social sciences, economics and politics as well.

Russia lacks any tradition of critical examination. The feudal system of the Tsars was replaced by the totalitarian Soviet state and there is no doubt that many Russians yearn for the comfort of a new authoritarianism in which the church would play a key role. But if religion is to be taught in schools it must be taught as part of Russian history and culture, not as fact.

The Russian Humanist Society is now established as a national organisation. They have five branches and about 300 members and are keen to open further branches in every major city where support can be found. They have just published the 22nd issue of *Common Sense*, their authoritative and well-respected magazine, and have translated and published a number of key works, including Paul Kurtz' *The Transcendental Temptation* and *The Courage to Become*. The RHS lobby politicians on key social issues. They are currently hoping to raise the few thousand dollars they need to buy some office space in Moscow rather than being forced to work as now either from home or from an office shared with other staff at the University.

As the only apparent opposition both to the spread of every kind of New Age nonsense in Russia and to the growing influence of the church, they deserve our support.

If you would like to support the work of the Russian Humanist Society in however small a way, please email Prof Valerii Kuvakin at: v.kuvakin@mtu-net.ru

Roy Brown is a Vice President of the IHEU, and Chair of the IHEU's Growth and Development Committee

RUSSIAN HUMANIST SOCIETY (RHS)

Member of the IHEU, the *Russian Humanist Society* is a nonprofit, cultural, educational, voluntary organisation. It carries out scientific investigation and dissemination of the ideas and principles of Humanism in Russia. It defends humanistic moral values, reason, and free-thinking and opposes all kinds of irrationalism in science and education. Russian Humanists support the open democratic society, welcome humanist



Common Sense Magazine

trends in domestic culture and social relations and the humanization of the political and psychological atmosphere in Russia. To carry out these objectives the RHS builds educational programmes on the basis of humanist philosophy and psychology, scientific skepticism and critical thinking.

The organisation publishes the periodical *Zdravyy Smysl* (Common Sense); supports the teenager's newspapers *Naskvoz* (Breakthrough) and *Chelovek Dumaushchii* (The Thinker); and distributes booklets and books written by Humanists and Freethinkers. The RHS works in close collaboration with Centre for Inquiry, Buffalo.

Russian Humanist Society: 119899 Russia, Moscow, Vorob'evy Gory, Moscow State University, Philosophy Department, *Russian Humanist Society*

Tel: + 7 095 939 2408 and + 7 095 392 5247

Fax: + 7 095 939 2208

E Mail: rhs@log.philos.msu.su

Website <http://log.philos.msu.su/rhs/index.htm>

RUSSIAN ATHEIST SOCIETY

The Russian Atheist Society is an anti-clerical organization. Read an article on Russian Atheists '*Backlash of Faith Shakes Atheists*' in the Guardian, UK, at

www.guardian.co.uk/russia/article/0,2763,418835,00.html

The Russian Atheist Society maintains an English language website at <http://atheism.netfirms.com/indexe.htm>

E Mail u10642@dialup.podolsk.ru

Defending *Laïcité*, Promoting Reason and Science

News from the French National Freethought Federation “La Libre Pensée”:

The French Freethought Federation has been very active in 2000 and 2001.

Successful Conferences

First of all, at the national level, we have organized four important conferences:

In July 2000, we held a big international conference, with more than 300 people, in Avignon. Held inside the magnificent Cityhall close to the Palace of the Popes, the Conference had the provocative title: “No, Jesus-Christ never existed. After 2000 years of darkness, Free Thinking is the hope for Humanity”. Apart from examining proof for existence of the legendary character and central actor of Christian mythology, the conference mainly discussed, during two full days, the history and activities of the Christian church. All religions, and Christianity in particular, have been against any progress, and civilisation happened despite the priesthood. Now again, in the present time, the Church of Rome is the main accomplice to all the governments of the European Union, for putting in practice their plans of social regression.

In September 2000 we organized in Paris a scientific conference, with about 150 scientists and researchers from Universities. The Conference examined how irrationality is being introduced into the domain of science, and denounced the use of impostures against science. At this conference the French Free Thought Federation was back in its historical role, fighting for independent and free thinking in scientific bodies, and for the complete separation between science and religion. A widely supported appeal (see box item in this magazine) was issued by scientists attending the conference.

Two items are the major focus of our activity: the defence of equality of rights of all citizens, and the defence of the law of 1905, which guarantees the Separation of Church and State. So, early March 2001 saw almost 500 people meeting in Nantes at a national conference called in defence of our republican heritage: the French republican heritage includes secularism and equal rights for all citizens. A few other associations have been involved in the preparation of this conference, showing that the process of pooling together our strengths in defence of democratic rights is actually succeeding. In France, for historical reasons, social and democratic rights are based in the nation. We are therefore fighting against the European Union in Brussels, which wants to use regions against nation, and also against social and democratic rights.

Towards the end of March 2001, our *Institute for Research and Studies on Free Thinking*, recently created by our Federation, organized its first national conference, by inviting many people from Universities, mainly historians. Our Federation is very proud of its own history, and of the important role French Freethinkers have played in obtaining democratic rights, in particular their instrumental role in obtaining support for the law of Separation of Church and State of 1905. On the occasion of this conference we enabled public access to our library in Paris, where all people interested in the history of Free thought can now come and work.

These conferences have all been very successful, with enthusiastic

support and collaboration from other organisations. The success was also because of the quality of speakers and discussions, and above all in attendance and even press coverage. They have shown that the French Freethought Federation is growing and cannot any more be ignored in the fight for defence of secularism and republican rights. We work together with others for the defence of the republican heritage and of the separation law: to defend what we in french call ‘*laïcité*’.

We are very grateful to IHEU for their help in the success of some of these events.

Lobbying

Conferences are naturally only a part of our activities. We have been invited by several ministries and officials, and we explained to them formally, and publicly, why we disagree with some decisions taken there, when they were against secular principles, or in violation of the 1905 law. Governmental decisions in violation of secular principles are now more common, under permanent pressure of the European Union.

Our Federation is vigilant and continues to exert pressure through petitions, delegations, public initiatives aimed at defending the 1905 law, public and secular schools, and democratic rights.

In 2001 we organised a big conference in Paris on June 24th, in defence of instruction in public schools, and against public funding to private schools.

In December 2001 we organised a successful conference in Strasburg, (under the aegis of the IHEU) demanding the extension of the law of Separation of Church and State to the Alsace-Moselle part of France (which currently is exempted because of historical reasons), and against the extension of its present clerical status to the whole country, which we fear is the hidden objective of the government.

The separation of Religion and State is our central and universal objective, and we think that it is also one of the objectives of the IHEU. We have therefore to join our efforts, and also to ask all associations in all countries to work in this direction.

Future events

We are going to organise in September 2002 an international conference under the aegis of the IHEU to mark the bi-centenary of Thomas Jefferson’s famous letter on the wall of Separation between Church and State. This will be a prestigious Conference and will be held in the Sorbonne. Famous Jefferson scholars and well-known activists will participate from the US, Canada and France.

In the longer term, we have proposed to host in Paris the 2005 Congress of IHEU, and we are very proud that IHEU has accepted it at the last General Assembly in Oslo. We are now prepared to organize a great event, in the year when we mark the centenary of the 1905 French law of Separation of Church and State, and for extending to all parts of the world, the secular way of life.

Roger Lepeix is past-President of the French Freethought Federation and is currently a member of its National Committee.

The Light of A

On 10 December 2001, Levi Fragell was invited as President of IHEU to the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony conducted in the
on the grand occasion of the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Civil Confirmation Ceremony in Norway. Levi Fragell

Your Royal Highness,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
and Honoured Confirmands,

In January of this year, 15-year-old Benjamin Hermansen from Holmlia in Oslo was murdered by racists and neo-Nazis. He died because of the colour of his skin. We remember him here today because he has become a symbol for one of the fundamental causes uniting humanists in Norway in this fledgling millennium – the fight to put an end to racism. And we remember him because he was confirmed here in the civil confirmation ceremony in Oslo City Hall just a year ago, sitting dressed in his finest where you are sitting now. His death was a terrible tragedy, but amidst all the pain, this sad episode has shown us something wonderful about young people, young people of many different colours in Norway – something we perhaps had not fully realized. We saw that young people with different beliefs, different dietary customs, different modes of dress and different family traditions, can hold one other and weep. We saw that they can mobilize thousands of people in a torchlight march against violence. I am a resident of Holmlia, and this experience will stay with me for the rest of my life.

We know that each minute, somewhere in the world, people's lives are being taken from them simply because they are different from others. We know that it can happen again, here in our own country.

This is why the civil confirmation ceremony, again and again, will seek to shed light – the light of all our torches – on the cause of this, the greatest of all the moral failures of human civilization. And each of you must spread this light to your parents and grandparents. Teach them, teach us all, that being different is not evil or dangerous, but one of the gifts of nature.



A Memorial for Benjamin in Holmlia

Babu Gogineni

'I am not different'

Accepting our differences is only the first step, however. It is the means to an end, but not the end itself. Back in the 1970s, in an article I wrote for the *Dagbladet* daily newspaper about the denunciation of homosexual love, I used the cliché "those who feel differently" to describe homosexuals. Later, I received a letter from a lesbian woman. "I don't feel differently," she wrote, "my feelings are just the same as yours. I am myself, not something different."

It must be our goal to create a culture that truly acknowledges each individual's right to be him or herself. One day, the notions "different" and "from a foreign culture" will not be used to describe other people.

Today we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the civil confirmation ceremony, and I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that, historically, confirmation in Norway has also been a means of limiting young people's right to be themselves, to think their own thoughts, and to make their own choices. Until 1911, confirmation was required by law in



'Donating Organs, Opening Eyes'

When my wife and life partner Aruna died in October at the age of 55 of a non symptomatic but deadly brain tumour, all we could do for her was to implement a family decision taken ten years ago at lunch when we had decided to donate our mortal remains for science and human welfare at the appropriate moment. After all, great people like Louis Pasteur, Alexander Fleming and Marie Curie risked their own successful lives and those of their beloved for the sake of discovering cures for medical ills, and for advancing human knowledge. The least we could do as grateful beneficiaries of their contributions to humanity, and as humanists, was to at least donate our dead bodies. When my own mother died at 90 a few years ago, we donated her eyes too.

Aruna spread happiness and cheer to all those she came in contact with, reflecting in her personality the grace and beauty of the life that she was in love with. And it was a commitment to that principle of life that

All Our Torches

the magnificent settings of the Oslo Town Hall. On 6 May 2001, in the same Hall, Levi Fragell's own speech was delivered. Levi's speech, as well as the Civil Confirmation Ceremony was transmitted on Sunday prime time television in Norway.

Norway. In his classic novel, *Poison*, published in 1883, Alexander Kielland wrote of Abraham Løvdahl, an upper-class boy who probably could have chosen not to be confirmed, if he had dared. But in practical terms, breaking a social convention like that would have been impossible for most people. All paths onward were blocked if one was unconfirmed. Osmund Sauamyra, in the same novel, was not even allowed to muster onboard a ship. No captain wanted an unconfirmed sailor, and Osmund tried to learn his catechism with the minister year after year, shaming his family and himself, until finally, at the age of 18, he was examined and confirmed. I hasten to add that confirmation in the church today is far more sensitive, and is open to all who feel natural ties to the church and its beliefs.

The affinity to tradition

Civil confirmation was introduced to provide a choice for young people who sought to preserve the best of a long-standing tradition, but who did not feel it was right to take part in a religious rite. Tradition is also important to humanists. Traditions bind us together with the people we love – as well as to those for whom we have no love. The latter is, in fact, one of the most important functions of traditions.

But traditions also pose a challenge to the individual's right to be him or herself. Sometimes, our need for personal freedom comes into conflict with the beliefs and customs passed down through our families for generations. In the future, the civil confirmation movement will need to focus its efforts on supporting young women and men who wish to mark their independence in relation to traditions that, up to now, have been less well known within our borders. We pay tribute to Kadra, who has helped to generate awareness regarding the mutilation of young women's bodies.

However, we must take care not to jump to arrogant conclusions regarding the superiority of the morals of Norwegian society. Only a few decades ago – during my own childhood – an unwed mother was branded an outcast in this country. There are probably far more women from my generation who have been harmed by illegal abortions and the remedies of "wise women" than there are circumcised immigrant women in Norway.

made us persevere over two days, while keeping her artificially alive, contacting in vain various hospitals in our home town of Hyderabad, India, to see if her body and her organs could save any lives. An organ donation law is in force in the state of Andhra Pradesh, but donation of corneas is how far it usually went, and no doctor or hospital was really familiar with the law dealing with cadaver transplants. This was an excruciating experience at a time when we were shattered completely, for we were willing to donate the organs at our own expense, and yet hospitals were not geared to accept them – and this in a country where there is a huge market for kidneys stolen from unsuspecting patients, and where there is a flourishing trade of body organs ...

Finally with the help of the Kamineni Hospital and the LV Prasad

The public moral debate of recent months also gives cause for concern. Certain actors and media have used traditions as a basis for demanding a new moral stratum separating public figures from the rest of the population, with different, more stringent requirements for King Solomon as opposed to Ralph the hat-maker. The right to be one's self must apply to everyone, whether they live in a cabin or a palace. Just as the obligation not to harm or exploit others must apply across the board. We do not want an inflated, unmonitored elitist morality for an insulated upper class and a popular morality for the rest of us. A double standard is hardly twice as constructive.

She was Norwegian!

So let us strive for an open society, where we with energy and enthusiasm can both swear and pray, where we can march to the beat of our individual drummers, and where we can celebrate all of our differences, large and small alike. The world ahead of us is diverse indeed. A diverse Norway. I envy you – you have your futures before you as you now embark on your journey into this new universe. A few weeks ago I visited EPCOT Center at Disney World in Florida in the USA, which showcases the fabulous technology of the future.

Norway has its own pavilion in the complex, and it is a very popular place to visit. There was a long line of Norwegian-Americans and others who were waiting for a glimpse of what Norway has to offer. Several young Norwegians, blond and blue-eyed and clad in colourful folk costumes (bunads), were helping to direct the line. When I reached the entrance, I did a double-take when I saw the young woman at the counter; the face above the bunad had dark eyes, olive skin and raven-black hair. Clearly, her genes came from Eastern Asia. But she was Norwegian. It was an important message, without words or drama – an image of the future carrying far greater impact than Disney's technological fantasies. Maybe some of the guests from Minnesota or Wisconsin thought there was something not quite right about that image. In that case, I invite them to visit me in Holmlia. We can take a few moments together to contemplate the stone that marks the site where Benjamin fell.

Eye Institute we could ensure that her corneas gave sight to two blind people, and her kidneys saved two dying patients. As news of this spread, there was intense television coverage and media interest and many ordinary people came forward to do like wise while the Telugu Academy offered to publish a book on organ donations. *The Indian Express* called Aruna's desire to donate her body as not just giving eyes, but rather opening them. *The Hindu* called it 'Her way of life after death'.

After the organ transplants were completed, the body was donated to the Kamineni Medical College. Even this was a difficult moment, for friends and relatives wondered whether it was alright for a body of a

Continued overleaf

beloved to be dissected and cut open. We had to explain to them that if buried, a body was eaten by worms and microbes, if cremated it was simply incinerated. Neither of these ways of treating a beloved's body was any kinder or dignified by those standards. The most dignified way was to help advance human knowledge.

In view of the cultural resistance we discovered existed institutionally, and in view of the ground swell of spontaneous support and volunteering from many religious and non religious people to do the same when the time was appropriate for them, we have decided to set up a foundation to advance the cause of organ donation and cadaver transplants. At a memorial meeting we distributed the following pledge card, which I will encourage Humanist organisations and activists to popularise. Unless people committed to this display the pledge card prominently and therefore announce publicly their intention to donate their body, and unless they prepare their family and friends in advance of tragedy, it is a difficult thing to implement.

While our grieving will be for a life time, the pain is slightly alleviated as we were able to meet with those whose lives were saved through Aruna's organ donation – at a press conference that the hospital organised. For us who are left only with tears and memories, there is the lasting consolation that Aruna who gave birth to our only son also gave life to four others.

Guru Babu Gogineni

E mail kukkapilla@hotmail.com

MY PLEDGE TO SAVE LIVES

I am committed to advancing human welfare both during and after my life.

Even after death, a human body may be the source of heart, kidneys pancreas, lungs, intestines, corneas, heart valves, skin and bone marrow which can save valuable lives through organ transplants and tissue grafts. Bodies donated for research purposes can advance human knowledge and help save many lives in the future.

I believe that the good one does can continue to live long after one's death, and I hereby instruct all my family members and friends to ensure that after death my body will be used in any or all of the above ways. There will be no greater satisfaction to me than the knowledge that at the end of my life I will save the lives of several other human beings.

This is the living memorial I desire for myself.

I hereby instruct my family members/friends _____ and _____ to ensure my mortal remains will be used as per my above instructions.

My religious or non-religious views are not an impediment for this donation, and I have discussed this with all my immediate family members.

Name Signature Place

Date Name of Hospital Telephone No.

IHEU's INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SERIES ON SEPARATION OF RELIGION AND STATE

1802-2002

*L'héritage universel de Jefferson:
actualité de la séparation
des Eglises et de l'Etat*

organised by

La Libre Pensée Française

To mark the bicentenary of Jefferson's 1802 letter on
Separation of Church and State

Participation from USA, Canada and France

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Freethinkers, Atheists and Humanists

**Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 September 2002
Paris, Sorbonne University**

For registration and programme details write to
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Jefferson on Separation of Church and State

On January 1, 1802, in response to the letter from the Danbury Baptist Association, Thomas Jefferson wrote:

Gentlemen:

The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which you are so good to express towards me, on behalf of the Danbury Baptist Association, give me the highest satisfaction. My duties dictate a faithful and zealous pursuit of the interests of my constituents, and in proportion as they are persuaded of my fidelity to those duties, the discharge of them becomes more and more pleasing.

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God; that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship; that the legislative powers of the government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church and State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore man to all of his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection and blessings of the common Father and Creator of man, and tender you and your religious association, assurances of my high respect and esteem.

Thomas Jefferson

The IHEYO: A New Wave of Youth Humanism

Whether they identify themselves as ‘humanists’ or not, millions of young people around the world – from the established democracies of Western Europe to the theocracies of the Middle East – share humanist values of giving meaning to one’s own life, working towards the creation of a humane world, and free inquiry. In fact, one could argue that these characteristics are inherent in young people: the youth of a society are always questioning the old order, reformulating for themselves the established order, and thinking and acting in ways outside of the conventional patterns. From the Young Turks to the French protesters of Spring ‘68 to the current anti-globalisation activists, youth have a historical role of questioning the established order.

So, with all of these young people with humanist ideas and ideals, it seems as though the only question is how to mobilise them, let them know that a larger, international humanist movement – in line with their principles and providing connection with others who share those principles – exists. To do this, two critical elements are necessary: local enthusiasm and international coordination. Of these elements, we have seen that the local enthusiasm is present, it simply simmers (occasionally boiling over) undirected and isolated.

In order to capture and enhance this energy, this steam, compounding its power and potential, the International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organization (IHEYO) exists. As the youth component of the IHEU, the IHEYO is firmly rooted in the international humanist movement, and has the institutional resources of the IHEU, including expertise in coordination of national humanist movements. The IHEYO uses the IHEU model of providing information, maintaining open communication channels, and helping coordinate resources for local humanist movements: in other words acting as a proactive facilitator rather than a local organiser.

The IHEYO works to fulfill this mission in several ways. By providing a location for the sharing of information on the successes and shortcomings of youth humanist movements and projects in different parts of the globe on the IHEYO web site (www.iheyo.org). The organisation seeks to promote resource – and idea-sharing, networking, and helps keep the lines of communication open, both between groups encountering similar issues and groups encountering unique challenges, so that all can be more aware of these situations.

Additionally, the web site will soon offer a comprehensive database of youth humanist organisations in different parts of the world with detailed contact information.

In addition to its international coordinating staff, the primary structural component of the IHEYO is its network of ‘Continental Coordinators’. These individuals, one or two from each continent, serve as a link between the international humanist youth world (specifically the IHEYO’s London office and the youth interns there) and the grassroots humanist movements on each continent.

These Coordinators keep local humanist youth (and ‘adult’) groups informed about international-level humanist youth activities and projects, keep the IHEYO on an international level informed about the goings-on of local humanist activities, and (perhaps most importantly) respond to the numerous inquiries the IHEYO receives on a daily basis from individual, unconnected youth humanists around the world seeking community and connection at the local level.

Major Initiatives

Over the past year, the IHEU has launched a number of major initiatives. Firstly, a listserv has been launched which allows young humanists to communicate in an open e-mail forum with one another. On this listserv, questions concerning pressing issues facing youth humanism are posed and discussed, and ideas are shared. As this forum grows, it will provide an even more valuable resource for ongoing communication and coordination. (To subscribe, send a blank e-mail message to: iheyo-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

Summer 2001 saw the launch of the IHEYO’s first annual Internship Exchange Program. After receiving nearly two dozen applications from interested young people from diverse locations for two summer internship positions at the American Humanist Association (Washington, DC) and the International Humanist and Ethical Union (London), a young woman from Kansas, USA and a young man from India were selected to participate. They worked in varied capacities at these organisations, but both helped in some ways with the initiation and implementation of youth humanist activities. This internship program is designed to give young humanists – the future leaders of the international humanist movement – valuable experiences working with humanist organizations in a country other than their own. In future years there will be a greater variety of host organisations, providing even more varied experiences.

IHEYO Congress

Perhaps the most significant upcoming event for the IHEYO is the 50th Anniversary Congress of the IHEU, at which time a parallel Youth Congress will take place (details and a preliminary Congress program can be found at www.iheyo.org). With the goal of including youth participants from every continent, the Youth Congress will see the official relaunching of the IHEYO and will invigorate the organisation and attendees with energy, enthusiasm, and vision. Activities planned include formal and informal discussions, cultural sharing activities (including a movie night and international food fair), speakers, and coordinated activities with the ‘adult’ Congress. Funding will be available through continental coordinators to subsidize the costs associated with the Congress including travel and accommodations. Already a Dutch Humanist Youth leader Gea Meijers has started in January her twelve-month internship in the London office to help with Youth work among other things. Gea has already attended the Congress planning committee meetings in the Netherlands and will soon have information about the Youth Congress programme, camping and sporting possibilities etc. Keep visiting the IHEYO website!

In addition to IHEYO-initiated activities, the organisation plays a role in the campaigns of the IHEU by mobilising youth humanists, a recent example being the campaign to save Dr. Shaikh. In all these activities, the IHEYO has established and is developing to an even greater extent a network of youth humanists, providing the framework for rapid expansion of the youth humanist movement and, by extension, humanism in general. The number and diversity of interest that individual humanists and humanist organisations have expressed in the IHEYO is truly astounding, and certainly indicative of a bright future.

To ensure this, even more participation is needed: every voice counts. Please take a minute to visit the IHEYO web site, www.iheyo.org, to read about the possibilities for involvement. To realize the great potential that exists for the next generation of humanists, we need your help!

**Vincent Lloyd is the International Coordinator of IHEYO
Shannon Culek recently interned at the IHEU office in London.**

AN IHEU APPEAL FROM CENTRAL EUROPE

In the end of September, an important Seminar was organised by the Prometheus Society of Slovakia under the aegis of the IHEU. This important Seminar brought together Humanist leaders from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland and also involved those from Hungary. An appeal prepared at the Seminar has now been forwarded to officials of the European Union, Human Rights organisations and important political leaders in Europe.

Appeal by representatives of Central European humanist movements to the European Commission, to member states of the EU, and to Human Rights Organisations.

September 29, 2001

The delegates of humanist organisations from Czech republic, Poland and Slovak republic convened – under the aegis of the International Humanist and Ethical Union – on September 27–29, 2001 in Bratislava, in order to evaluate the situation of the communities of citizens claiming no religious belief (non-denominational citizens) in their particular countries and to propose measures to national and international bodies for improving their position and the enjoyment of their legitimate social, cultural and legal rights.

After a comprehensive analysis of the current situation in each particular country – with reference to article 1.) of the UN Resolution 53/144. Declaration on the Rights and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (8 March, 1999) we are forwarding to governments of the aforesaid nations and to international bodies this

SUBMISSION

Considering the fundamental principle in the practical policy of every democratic state to treat all of the citizens equally as incorporated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10.12.1948), in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (16.12.1966) and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)

Remembering the tragic events in Northern Ireland, in the former Yugoslavia and in numerous other countries all over the world, which have been partly caused by the fact that the relevant governments did not manage to implement PARITY in treating and in enjoyment of equal rights, opportunities, freedoms and advantages to all communities in their states,

Aware that the international bodies did not manage to exert sufficient pressure for implementing preventive measures, capable of averting mutual tensions between communities and the consequent violent confrontations,

WE APPEAL

1) To the governments of the Central European transforming democracies, asking them to observe strictly their duties to RESPECT, to PROTECT and to FULFIL the cultural rights of their communities of non-denominational citizens in accordance with the injunctions of “Maastricht Guidelines on Violation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights “ (January 22,1997)

2) To the governments of the said countries to adjust their legal texts (insofar as they have not yet done so) to accommodate the above-mentioned obligations with the object of securing a full equality in state policy with regard to the treatment of the needs of their non-denominational communities of citizens – both institutional and for financial support – in accordance with the “Resolution of NGOs having consultative status with the Council of Europe, issued in Strasbourg on April 24, 2001. “

3) To all international bodies monitoring the observance of basic human rights in the transforming Central European democracies, to closely follow up PARITY in the practice of state policy in relation to non-denominational communities of citizens – similarly to the way that they have done so in relation to other communities – such as national and ethnic minorities including the Roma minorities. (Comment: the currently disadvantaged non-denominational communities in these countries constitute by far the largest “minorities” – but nevertheless the human rights organisations have so far ignored their problems)

We propose that the human rights monitoring organisations INCLUDE in their agenda monitoring and reporting about the situation of non-denominational communities in each country, and assess their standard of treatment by state authorities in comparison with the treatment of religious communities and organisations, and to report about the extent of the observation of PARITY in the treatment of both communities in accordance with international laws and conventions.

4.) To the Council of Europe and all the member states of EU – with reference to art.13 of the Amsterdam Treaty – asking them to follow steps for averting any form of discrimination against non-denominational communities of citizens in the transforming Central European democracies which aspire to membership of the EU, and to adopt as a condition of their acceptance in the EU the same standards in the treatment of both religious and non-religious communities as are prevalent in the majority of EU member states.

Representatives of Central European humanist movements

Czech republic:	Dr. Jozef Haubelt
Poland	Andrzej Dominiczak
Slovak republic	Prof Ladislav Hubenák & Prof Alexander Reháč
Executive Director, IHEU	Babu R.R. Gogineni

ROLE OF RELIGION IN INTERNATIONAL POLICY MAKING

The role of religion in international policy making was the subject of a seminar held at the European Parliament in Brussels on 28 November 2001. Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the UK's National Secular Society represented the IHEU at this important event.

Vatican's role examined

Reflecting the concerns of the global humanist community, particular concern was expressed by many of the delegates to the Seminar about the extent of the Roman Catholic church's influence over the policies of secular institutions, especially in policies covering women's reproductive rights and contraception. The Vatican's influence over the United Nations already impedes measures to reduce deaths in the developing world from AIDS and from childbirth through its resistance to the provision of condoms or other forms of contraception.

In Europe, on the other hand, the RC church's message on 'chastity', contraception and homosexuality is being routinely ignored, even by the majority of the RC laity. Yet, rather than encouraging more realistic policies, this dismissal seems to have spurred the Vatican into enforcing its inflexible and often inhumane message by other means. The Vatican is infiltrating areas of influence in order to impose its hard line on

Catholics and non-Catholics alike. It is pushing to infiltrate the media, the diplomatic corps and governmental agencies including the European Parliament. Many influential positions are already held by those who deliberately keep silent about their links with arch-conservative Catholic groups such as *Opus Dei*. Another manifestation of this sinister infiltration is the Vatican's race to sign concordats with the many (generally small) new eastern European states, so that when they join the European Union the Vatican's influence there will be greatly increased. The object of this activity runs counter to the hopes for greater openness and liberalisation on sexual matters arising from the 2nd Vatican Council.

The current Pope has spent his entire papacy blocking such liberalisation. The appointments he has made and the institutions he has empowered will ensure that his intransigent policies outlive him.

Timely Seminar

The seminar was therefore both crucial and timely – especially coming so soon after September 11. The overwhelming tone of the seminar was pro-secular, recognising the need to generate a much greater awareness about the importance of separation of church and state. Without it, the freedoms and tolerance for which we have fought so hard will be rapidly eroded. It has never been more important for secularists throughout the world to step up the fight for absolute separation of church and state. This is no less important in supra-national organisations than in national ones. The seminar was sponsored by three Dutch MEPs: Lousewies van der Laan (the principal chair), Joke Swiebel, and Elly Plooij and each spoke eloquently. They are to be congratulated both for initiating debate in the European Parliament on this vital issue as well as for organising the meeting itself.

Another prominent speaker was Frances Kissling, President of *Catholics for Free Choice*, whose withering attack on the Vatican would have impressed any secular audience. CfFC campaigns for the removal of the RC representation from the UN.

Humanists take the Floor

I spoke twice. Just as the debate was being wound up I encouraged those within the RC church to continue their fight to liberalise the Church, noting that such reform could only come from within. But I emphasised that such efforts must not be allowed to distract us from fighting for the complete separation of religion from our state and public institutions. This sentiment seemed encapsulate the mood of the meeting, attracting applause.

The *European Humanist Federation* was also represented with Secretary General Georges Leonard also contributing effectively to the debate. There were many more speakers providing examples of the undue influence of religion in politics.

Officially at least, the Vatican declined to send a representative to the meeting, perhaps not wishing to recognise its legitimacy. Instead, John L. Allen Jr., Vatican correspondent for the (US) *National Catholic Reporter*, had been invited to articulate the non-secular position. He argued that if British Petroleum has the power to lobby the EU, why shouldn't the Catholic bishops? One speaker from the floor, very much in the minority, argued against the ordination of women. The seminar is to be welcomed as marking a growing (albeit belated) awareness of the urgency of organising active resistance to the encroaching influence of religion in the EU, but much more needs to be done. I hope that readers will urge secular European politicians to make contact with the seminar's sponsors to lend their support. Were a secular EU parliamentary group to be established it could spearhead such work. It would be helpful if an email group were established to enable interested parties to communicate and exchange intelligence.

In closing the seminar, Ms van der Laan MEP expressed the hope that there would be further seminars on the topic with the next one probably to be in 2002. Concern was expressed by several speakers about the plight of women in Islamic countries and Ms van der Laan anticipated that the next seminar would concentrate more on Islam and less on the RC church.

IHEU itself has been sponsoring world-wide debate through international conferences and seminars on the theme of 'Separation of Religion and State', and is in discussion with my own organisation, the National Secular Society, about the possibility of a conference in the UK towards the end of 2002.

Keith Porteous Wood kpw@secularism.org.uk

National Secular Society Website: www.secularism.org.uk

Catholics for Free Choice: Website www.seechange.org

'Thou Shalt Not Suffer a Witch to live ...'

IHEU's Member Organisation in Nepal HUMAN continues its fight against witchcraft.

HUMAN is concerned with reform of traditional, irrational and religious superstition prevailing in Nepalese society, and it has been active in highlighting social crimes perpetuated through superstitious practices. Witchcraft is a social disease not only in the Hindu world since times immemorial.

On August 2001, in the district of Mahottari, Simardahi VDC, 1500 rural Nepalese women were badly and inhumanly treated (several of them seriously injured), thousands more were insulted, humiliated, abused and tortured in the name of a so-called 'witch identification ceremony'. It all started with the coming of a so-called healer from Bihar, India, who claimed he could identify witches. The healer was hired by the family of 16 year old Sanjay Saha who died suddenly (in fact due to an epileptic fit) to identify the 'culprit'. To the beats of leather drums women were ordered to attend the ceremony; heavy monetary penalties of fifty thousand rupees were announced for those failing to attend. Ten thousand hapless women attended, several of them walking long distances. At the ceremony many women were named witches at random, many of them beaten brutally while the district administration remained indifferent.

This wound on our humanity had hardly healed, when a more cruel and brutal incident took place in Belaekadara VDC of the same district,

Mahottari. An old woman of 61 years age, Malechhia Devi, was killed on Wednesday the 26th of September 2001 by murderers who accused her of killing a three-year old child by casting a spell. According to the fact finding report prepared by HUMAN, the culprits were the Mr. Nawal Kishor Yadav, Bijo Yadav, Jeetan Yadav and Tularchan Yadav who brutally beat her unconscious and poured human excreta into her mouth. She died because no timely medical aid was available.

HUMAN's report has now been submitted to the government as well as to the IHEU. The IHEU forwarded the report to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. HUMAN also submitted a memorandum to Nepalese parliamentarians about the issue. Even though the Parliament took note of the matter and the Parliament's Speaker ruled that the government should take immediate action against the culprits. He also asked the government to provide immediate relief and compensation to the victims of the incidents. Unfortunately, till now the government has not yet acted on the Speaker's directive.

HUMAN appeals to all Humanists world-wide to help rehabilitate some of the traumatized and brutalized victims of these terrible crimes.

Ganga Prasad Subedi is General Secretary of HUMAN and a population studies expert

Humanist Education Radio Programme in Nepal



Nepalese Radio Station now broadcasts Saturday morning programmes on Humanism

In 1998 IHEU funded the Research Academy for Humanism 'RAFHAJ' to help it establish a presence in Nepalese society, and to produce resource material on Humanism. As a result, the organization was able

to set up two branch offices: one in Nepalgunj and another in Jhapa, and also create promotional materials which further enabled the RAFHAJ to apply for funding from other donors. RAFHAJ draws its inspiration from the Nepalese Humanist thinker Jai Prithvi. Jai Prithvi established a Humanist club in Bangalore in 1929, and corresponded with the American Ethical Union.

RAFHAJ has now obtained 8000 US Dollars in funding from UNESCO which will be used to produce 26 brief weekly transmissions on Humanism. The programme will consist of opinions, interviews, music, humanist songs, radio drama and children and youth programme. A team of Nepalese Humanists led by Min Bahadur Singh act

as the advisory board. The organization is now seeking funding to purchase FM broadcasting equipment, and efforts are also on to spread Humanism through community Humanist clubs.

HUMANIST SUCCESS AT UN CONFERENCE

Continued from page 1

Meet Yourself in the Other!

A thousand people were present at the impressive inauguration: Ministers, Ambassadors, Human Rights activists, representatives of Belief Communities and UN officials, all of them gathered to agree a strategy for the prevention of intolerance and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief. This conference was prepared over five years following the UN's General Assembly and UN Human Rights Commission resolutions on the subject. This was not a theological conference nor a conference devoted to pedagogy, but a Human Rights Conference, aimed at supporting Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and advancing universal Human Rights especially those of Freedom of Religion or Belief, clarified Prof. Abdelfattah Amor, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

While Prof. Amor's speech referred to Al Biruni and to Voltaire, His Highness Real D. Felipe de Borbon, Principe de Asturias, who represented the host Spanish State, said that it was Humanism which provided the space for meeting of religions. Mrs. Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights delivered Secretary General Kofi Annan's message: 'We can cherish what we are, without hating what we are not. Dialogue should triumph over discord; the world's peoples are united by their common humanity far more than they are divided by their separate identities. Intolerance is a learned behaviour, and can therefore be unlearned. None of us is born intolerant of those who differ from us in the God they worship, or who do not worship any God'. What a delightful start for the Conference which so clearly recognised Humanism's role and Humanist beliefs and non-beliefs!

Introducing the Conference, Federico Mayor, former Director General of UNESCO pointed out eloquently that 'to meet the other is to meet ourselves' and added that the path leading to the awareness that 'the others are us' is full of snares. Tolerance implies harmony of differences. But ignorance of a culture combined with lack of programmes and curricula aiming at explaining the others, their cultures and their religion and beliefs will make the school a breeding ground where discrimination will be reinforced. UNESCO had earlier recommended 'Study of different cultures, their reciprocal influences, their perspectives and ways of life, in order to encourage mutual appreciation of the differences between them'. An international perspective and a global dimension is imperative for education in a globalising world.

Humanist presence and influence

In all, at least ten Humanists were present at the three day Conference: Prof. Nimrod Aloni, head of Network of Humanist Educators of Israel, Edd Doerr, President of the American Humanist Association, Margaret Downey leader of the Anti-Discrimination network in the US, Luc Devuyt, leader of the UVV in Belgium and Church State separation activist, Ms. Liesbeth Mulder, former IHEU Vice President, David Pollock, Executive Committee member of the British Humanist Association and Babu Gogineni, Executive Director of IHEU. The last three of these were invited as experts – a status which gave them the very useful right to intervene in the discussions and negotiations leading to the final Conference declaration.

79 nations were represented at the Conference, and all main speeches were delivered in the auditorium at plenary sessions, of which two were delivered by David Pollock and Babu Gogineni (see inside for text of speeches).

In a smaller room the Drafting Committee worked to get consensus on the final document. IHEU delegate Liesbeth Mulder reports: 'The third

concept of the final document (containing over 20 considerations leading to 19 statements) was presented with about 1 to 6 amendments for every paragraph. All official delegations of states and all experts were allowed to make contributions to the discussion. As at least three people of the IHEU delegation were invited as experts, we took the opportunity to make a clear contribution from our humanist point of view.

'Whereas in the auditorium heaven on earth seemed to be nearby if you listened to most of the statements full of beautiful words telling us about the willingness of everyone to be tolerant and non-discriminating, to work on a worldwide dialogue, and to promote a respectful attitude through school education, in the room of the drafting committee the real work had to be done. There one could see that there are still a lot of obstacles to be overcome. To mention a few:

- Some countries, like Egypt, Iran and Pakistan, did not want to have statements about pluralism in the document, and tried to weaken all statements that made explicit what tolerance means when you practice it.
- It took us some trouble to get an extra explanation in the document about the fact that there should also be respect for those who choose to have no religion.
- When it came to stating that it is crucial that especially teachers of religion should teach respect for other religions while giving the formative religious education, many countries opposed. Most remarkable was the opposition of the US: whereas they pretend to be one of the most solid defenders of pluralism, the US delegation was absolutely intolerant as regards this statement. The excuse they used was that the constitution did not allow the government to interfere with school education in private schools.'

Humanist delegates had also to be watchful that in the French language version of the Conference Declaration the words 'conviction' were not replaced by 'croyance', as this alteration in language could have serious implications for the interpretation of the UN document. 'Conviction' is more akin to belief, while 'Croyance' would imply religious belief.

Also present at the Conference were Humanists Dr. Pekka Elo representing the Finnish government and Bente Sandvig, representing the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief delegation. Bente Sandvig who is head of the Education department of the Norwegian Humanist Association writes about the Conference, and the importance of a Humanist presence at such major meetings:

"First of all – we have important contributions to offer. In pluralistic communities our experience in dialog from a minority non-theistic point of view is useful when dealing with matters connected to education and teaching. And of course we have a lot to learn as well. The religious communities and the state parties seem very self content with the way things are – religion is seen only as a positive factor and not as something that in itself challenges human rights and the limits of tolerance and respect. I find it interesting that apart from the humanists and actually the Norwegian bishop Gunnar Stålsett, hardly anybody challenged the ambiguity within religions and certain religious communities when it comes to human rights. I think that is a role we as humanists have to take: How to be part of a dialog as well as be critical towards the ideas that our dialog partners present. To me respect and tolerance also includes challenging the other – taking their points of view seriously."

The IHEU Humanist delegation certainly played this role very effectively at Madrid.

Visit <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/7/b/main.htm> for the **Final Conference Declaration and its recommendations.**

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF or FREEDOM FROM RELIGION and FREEDOM FROM MAKE-BELIEVE?

Mr. Chairman,

The glaring insanity of Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan; the barbaric blasphemy laws in Pakistan; the newly resurgent Hindu cultural nationalism, the religio-tribal conflicts in Africa and in Eastern Europe, the sectarian divisiveness of Northern Ireland, the present Roman Catholic Pope and others who cannot accept homosexuals on an equal footing with other human beings: all these examples represent clear dangers for the flourishing of Human freedoms. Humanists deplore the retreat from reason and the degrading irrationality in some belief systems which makes such a situation possible.

The reason I mention this state of affairs is that in many parts of the world, cultural nationalism, religious tribalism and enslaving superstition continue to find breeding grounds in the school system, and help create unjustified foundations for injustices inflicted by birth, sanctified by religion and glorified by tradition.

Silence, in such contexts, is a crime against humanity.

And yet, as we all, State parties, representatives of religions, Human Rights activists and experts come together to discuss the problems, it appears from some interventions that we are even denying that there are problems! In this depressing context then, in spite of the presence here of so many committed to the freedom of religion or belief, I permit myself to ask aloud whether a viable foundation for the concepts of freedom of religion or belief needs to be found outside religion, not within it, because of the very nature of religion which never renounces privileges or association with power.

Sample this question in a mathematics exam paper in Hindu-BJP ruled Gujarat state in India: "If demolishing just one Babri mosque required 600,000 *karsevaks* or religious zealots, how many *karsevaks* would be needed to demolish two mosques?" Perpetuating communal differences through mathematics, tampering with school textbooks, giving history a communal and sectarian colour ... this is not unique to India's religious people – after all, the Taliban itself started as a student's movement which bred in the festering backwaters of the Islamic schools of Pakistan. Wherever state power and religion were allied, religion and religious intolerance seeps into school syllabi, destroying the foundations of freedom of religion or belief.

In today's world of new sanctimonious utterances, in bewilderment and disbelief Humanists watch the cynical exploitation of religion in the public and private arenas. Both politicians and religious leaders are the guilty beneficiaries of this cynical violation of the moral codes of religion. After all, is not religion meant to be a spiritual force? And if it plays a role other than a spiritual one, can it retain its dignity?

In the UK there is a state religion unfortunately. In the field of

education, the National Secular Society and the British Humanist Association are fighting the expansionist proposals of the Church of England to establish a hundred new church schools and to take over 250 other publicly-funded local authority ones. These faith based schools funded by the state and controlled by religious bodies will give them the opportunity to discriminate in favour of their own denominations in selecting pupils, staff and governors. Norway and Argentina have been particular violators of the liberties of non-religious children and parents. In 1997 Norway introduced a new compulsory syllabus for primary and secondary schools where children are educated overwhelmingly about Lutheran Christianity. Non-Christian minorities are denied the right of exemption. Humanists maintain that schools are meant for education, not "indoctrination" in the majority culture, and have asked for the right to non-denominational alternative education. Now the dispute will be taken all the way to European Court of Justice in Strasbourg because one cannot accept this 'imposing of the freedom of religion or belief' which is an excuse and a disguise to impart religious instruction!

How can schools which deny freedom also be reasonably expected to promote it? How can religions or ideologies which require state power to flourish and prosper still retain their ethical character? My arguments are about creating a neutral public space for people of all faiths and those with none, not about bringing in atheism into the public arena. Those states which imposed atheism in the past are guilty of causing grievous harm to the principle of freedom of religion and belief. States have no competence to judge Truth claims: religious or non religious.

Humanists whole-heartedly support freedom of religion for others. But as equal partners in society it is also important for themselves to have freedom *from religion* in the education sector as also elsewhere in public life. Equally importantly, while Humanists extend their fullest support to the freedom of belief, for themselves, they also claim freedom *from make-believe*. For long, those who believed in particular myths imposed their faith on others, and ruthlessly eliminated all dissenters.

Who dared in the past to oppose the myths about virgin births and divine revelations?

The propagation of myth as knowledge continues to this day and the danger is as serious in today's contemporary world. American fundamentalist Christians would want all American school children to learn the Bible story of Genesis as a scientific account of creation! Creationism is rooted in religious doctrine, and therefore immune to change when confronted with opposing evidence. It is not only a Humanist position that it is the obligation of the state to present, in adequate pedagogical form, the most solidly based, i.e. scientific,

Continued overleaf

knowledge to the pupils. Of course, as part of their training in the scientific methods, pupils should also be made aware of the fallibility, revisability and un-dogmatic character of scientific knowledge which is its strength, not weakness.

Superstition is not mere harmless illogical belief: it can have dramatically tragic effects: Voltaire warned us, “those who believe in absurdities also commit atrocities”.

Humanists hold that the values embodied in international law and human rights conventions are binding on every state in the contemporary world, and have a compelling moral worth that need not derive from anywhere else. This point I address to the many religious states present here, trying to defend their positions. No state or individual can escape this global, even universal, obligation. States have a duty to foster positive values – and these should be the values of the universal human rights, not Christian or Hindu or Muslim values as some have advocated here.

Education is transmission of civilisation and preparation of children for complex responsibilities in a multicultural and pluralist world. A multi-traditional and open approach that can contribute to a culture of

tolerance implies that schools evolve non-confessional and impartial educational syllabus, and teach **about** religion, providing children with objective information and empowering them to make their own choices. Teaching **about** religion and religious **instruction** are not the same

The minimal value system that all states today are bound by are those underpinning the international human rights regime. Let us teach children these values.

Let us also protect Religion and State from each other, and ensure the strictest separation of religion and belief, which is the true institutional guarantee for the freedom of conscience for all individuals – believers or non believers – and which will then also protect and ensure that the school becomes the crucible where the positive human rights based attitudes that we so dearly cherish will be nurtured.

This speech draws on collaborative work done by Babu Gogineni and Lars Gule, Secretary General of the Norwegian Humanist Association

ACCOMMODATION – David Pollock at the UN Conference

In the interest of promoting understanding, mutual appreciation and cooperation, we oppose confessional schools and any form of education biased towards a particular religion. We see the danger in these of fostering a narrowness of understanding and sympathy.

Unfortunately in England today, despite the fact that only 7.5% of people go to church on an average Sunday and about 30% say they have no religion,

- 1 in 3 publicly-funded schools is a confessional school run by the churches or (a tiny number) by other faith groups.
- In the other two-thirds of schools the law requires a daily act of religious worship and the religious education given excludes non-religious ethical traditions. There is a possibility (little used) for parents to have their children excused from these religious activities. Moreover the Government has proposed an expansion of the number of religious schools. This policy, motivated in part by a wish to correct the imbalance between Christian religious schools and those for the religions of the ethnic minority communities, has proved very unpopular. (a poll found 80% opposition and only 11% support, and even leaders of the minority religions have spoken against it as being socially and ethnically divisive).

(To resolve these difficulties) The British Humanist Association proposes that the mainstream publicly funded schools should offer ‘accommodations’ – changes designed to suit the religious minorities – so that they are suitable for everyone and none can reasonably argue the need for confessional schools.

These accommodations would include:

(a). for all pupils:

- an end to the daily act of worship
- religious education to become ‘Belief and Values Education’, covering all relevant religious and non-religious alternative life stances with a strictly educational approach.

(b). as options for those who would want them:

- additional confessional religious education
- acts of worship and facilities for (for example) Muslim prayers
- protection for those wishing to wear the veil or other items of religious significance
- halal and kosher school meals
- recognition of key holy days of all relevant religions, by schools closing on those days or by other means.
- other such accommodations as may be desirable.

With such changes in place, we argue that the religious schools should be brought into the mainstream.

We believe that such arrangements in schools would be of value not only to those whose religious beliefs were so acknowledged but also to the main body of pupils, who would be better able to understand and appreciate the religious beliefs of their fellow pupils.

David Pollock david.Pollock@virgin.net

NEWS IN BRIEF

Wheels for Palliative Care



The Flemish Humanist League turned 50 in 2001 and to celebrate, the Humanist League's President Mme. Marianne Marchand decided to tour through Flanders on bicycle, stopping at each place where one of the organisation's dynamic divisions is active. Mme. Marchand was joined on the trip by local companions. The complete 16 day trip covered a total distance of 830 kilometres.

The intent was to set up very informal, amicable meetings with all the volunteers, who, during the years, have been the pillars of the organisation's activities (and still are): people engaged in promoting the ideas of freethinking humanism in order to having it gradually accepted by a general public and the entire society.

The bicycle trip was also used as a means for fund raising and the entire proceeds (US Dollars 8000) were donated to the palliative care units of the Universitair Ziekenhuis Middelheim in Antwerp (Dr. Raymond Mathijs) and the VUB Universitair Ziekenhuis in Brussels (Dr. Wim Distelmans).

A New Humanist organisation in Lebanon

IHEU recently assisted the establishment of an Association for Democracy in Lebanon. Founded by Freethinker Georges Saad, to start with, the Association aims to provide a unique focal point for humanists in Beirut. The organisation's recent activities included preparation and distribution of a tract during the globalisation summit at Qatar and examining the violation of the rights of foreign domestic servants working in Lebanon. A website has been developed, and future plans being made include organising an IHEU seminar, publishing of a booklet in Arabic on IHEU, International humanism and other related subjects as well as establishing links with development agencies working in Lebanon. Website www.multimania.com/democliban/index.htm

Hanne Stinson is the British Humanist Association's new Executive Director:



After a degree in physiology, Hanne did research with the Institute of Psychiatry. This was followed by a stint as a teacher of English, and as a German-English translator. Hanne then joined the Red Cross where she worked for fifteen years. Her work at the Red Cross involved programmes dealing with young people, drugs and HIV education and anti-discrimination training. At the UK national headquarters of the Red

Cross she took on the job of developing, implementing and managing an education programme, mainly for staff and volunteers, about the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

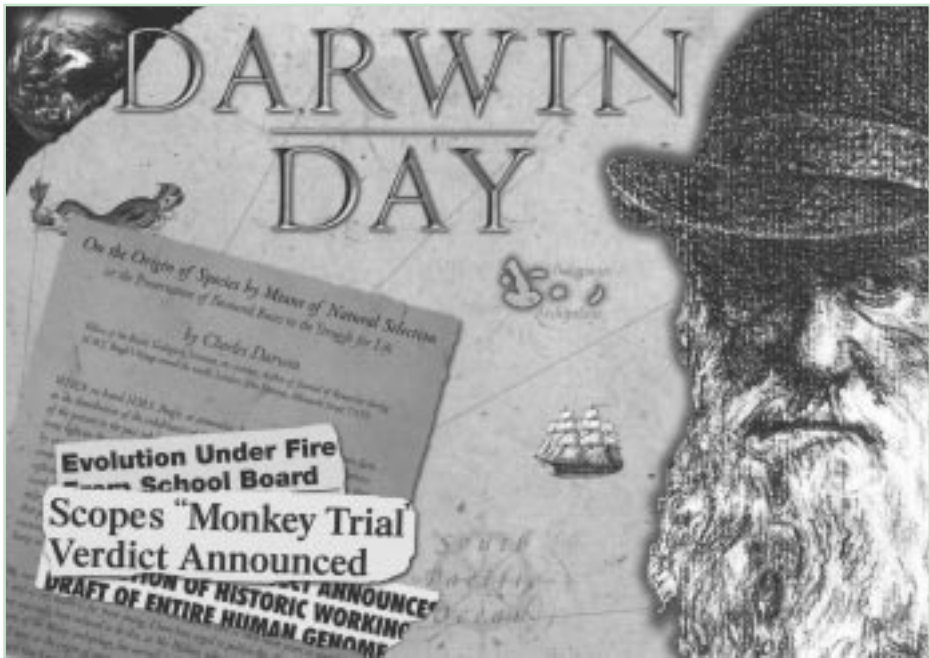
Hanne aims to help the BHA gain a higher profile, make the lobbying more effective and the education and media side of the work more effective, in addition to building a strong financial base.

New Team of IHEU UN Representatives at New York

Following a decision by the IHEU's Executive Committee, IHEU's voting member organisations in the US have been involved in the process of restructuring the IHEU's UN NGO New York representation. IHEU is very pleased to welcome the new team consisting of Ambassador Carlton Coon (formerly US Ambassador to Nepal), Mrs. Margaretha Jones (AEU leader), Dr. Sylvain Ehrenfeld (Population Studies expert), Matt Cherry (Exec. Director of Institute of Humanist Studies) and Jan Eisler (IHEU EC representative to the delegation). The new team has held its first meeting on 12 January in New York with Babu Gogineni attending. Margaretha Jones and Dr. Ehrenfeld have been elected protem joint leaders of the delegation.

**IHEU - HIVOS Humanist
Networking and Development
Funding Programme 2002**

**Please watch the IHEU website for funding
announcement in the coming months**



12 February Celebrating Science and Humanity
 Visit www.darwinday.org

NOTICE

IHEU General Assembly 2002

Venue Golden Tulip Conference Hotel Leeuwenhorst
 Noordwijkerhout
 The Netherlands

Dates Tuesday 2 July 2002 (afternoon)
 Wednesday 3 July 2002 (morning)
 Saturday 6 July 2002 (evening; to examine/ratify
 Congress resolutions)
 (Exact timings will be confirmed through GA mailing)

As per IHEU's By-Laws:

- IHEU Member Organisations should send the names of their official delegates to the IHEU's London headquarters **latest by 1 June 2002 in the prescribed form**. Individual supporters who wish to attend the GA (as observers) should also intimate the office **latest by 1 June 2002 in the prescribed form**.
- Proposals for Resolutions need to reach the IHEU office in London latest by 1 May 2002.

The IHEU's EC meets Tuesday 2 July (morning) and briefly after Saturday 6 July GA

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- Donor to the IHEU's Endowment Fund (for securing IHEU's future)
- Donation to the IHEU's campaigns (Rights of Humanists, Religion-State Separation issues)

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 - Transfer to IHEU Account No. 50958840 Barclays Bank (sort code 20-41-41), Holborn, London.
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 (Please note that for international payments an International credit card may be the cheapest and most convenient way to pay. Transfers through banks may attract charges which may be high).
- Mail form/photocopy to IHEU,
 47 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8SP, UK
 Fax + 44 20 74048641 or + 44 20 7430 1271**



HUMAN DIVERSITY, HUMAN RIGHTS and HUMANISM



“ALL DIFFERENT, ALL EQUAL”

Wednesday 3 July to Saturday 6 July 2002

**Golden Tulip Conference Hotel Leeuwenhorst, Noordwijkerhout
near Amsterdam-Schiphol airport, the seaside and The Hague**

Diversity and differences are at the core of the human condition: diversity in traditions and values, differences in social and economic opportunities and capacities. How to integrate economic, social and cultural diversity into the classical notions of humanity and human dignity?

The overall theme of the Congress: **Human Diversity - Human Rights - Humanism** addresses this question. Come and share your ideas and experiences, in particular in the fields of education and schooling, social development and community building, moral counselling and scientific research. If there is one Congress you are going to in 2002, this should be the one!!!

Congress Fees

- Full participant: Euros 250, including lunch, dinner; excluding hotel
- Accompanying participant: Euros 150, incl. lunch, dinner; excl. hotel
- Student: Euros: 120, incl. Lunch, dinner, excl. hotel accommodation

Accommodation

Conference Hotel Euros 84 – Euros 100 per night per person including breakfast.

Limited Bed and breakfast (Euros 30 per person/night); also camping facilities.

More Information?

Visit IHEU website at www.iheu.org. E Mail updates available from Congress@iheu.org

IHEU Congress Secretariat 2002, Postbus 75490, 1070 AL Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Tel. 0031 20 5219000, Fax. 0031 20 5219080, E-mail: hv@euronet.nl

IHEYO CONGRESS

The International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation will also hold its International Youth Congress during these days. Excellent opportunities for social interaction, recreation, serious discussions on humanism. Join the international Humanist youth community. For details on how to register, where to find cheap accommodation, and for assistance with travel funding, write to youth@iheu.org

**Monday 8 July and Tuesday 9 July 2002, Univ. of Humanist Studies, Utrecht
Academic Conference ‘Empowering Humanity. Work in Progress’**

Humanism in local contexts: theories and practices; Humanistics as a new academic discipline; Equality and diversity; Quality of life and well-being. For costs and full details www.uvh.nl or www.iheu.org E Mail updates Congress@iheu.org