

## Report on NGO meetings attended in Geneva related to the work of the UN

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On April 28th Katherine Carré and Amalia Rasheed attended the UN NGO Committee meeting on Spiritual Values and Global Concerns (CSVGC); on the 29<sup>th</sup>, joined by Sharifin Gardiner, they also attended the Committee on the Environment. One of the WSA Forum's programmes is to prepare potential participation of Subud members in the UN Earth Summit 2012 and so it was recommended and agreed that SDIA become a founding member of this newly formed Committee on the Environment. Sharifin is now one of four vice chairs. Vita de Waal, of PACE and GAIA, chairs both these committees. She has meanwhile prepared a draft for a statement to be presented at the 14th Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC): 2010 is the year of Biodiversity, so making a link to the environment and cultural and spiritual values is envisaged, and we are invited to review the statement and sign in support. At the first meeting, Amalia was asked to give a short talk on the Parliament of World Religions which was received with interest. This was followed by a talk on the Golden Rule, by Olivier du Roy and Jeffrey Wattles where the interactive discussion afterwards highlighted the importance of a universal spiritual approach to life that transcends all religions. At the Environment Committee meeting, apart from dealing with formalities related to it being newly founded, there was a clear commitment also in this committee towards making a statement for the upcoming HRC in June. The management of water and land resources as well as ethical, cultural and spiritual values were the areas most NGOs expressed an interest in.

On May 3rd, 2010, Amalia and I then met with the steering committee of the Coalition in Support of a UN Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace, and other member NGOs. The WSA was invited to join this coalition back in 2009, and Amalia and I had already participated in a meeting with them in Melbourne, immediately prior to the POWR at the beginning of December, 2009.

The steering committee is chaired by Stein Villumstad, who is also deputy Secretary General of Religions for Peace (RfP) (note: WSA was invited to attend the RfP Conference in Kyoto in 2006, and was represented by myself as chairlady at the time). Stein put us up to speed in the progress being made to get the UN General Assembly (UN GA) to approve and launch the Decade in question. Unfortunately, political relations between the countries make it difficult for consensus (as opposed to a majority vote) to be reached, and while some countries are very interested, none have as yet stepped forth as committed champions. UN Agencies (such as UNESCO, UNICEF, etc.), on the other hand, do support the idea of the Decade, as does the Alliance of Civilisations.

It was interesting to learn that, though in principle the potential of religious and spiritual communities' contributions is recognised, at the GA level, the role of religion is still controversial. Europe, in particular, is very wary of anything related to religion. Faith based organisations (FBO) is a term that is now more easily accepted and there is a willingness in principle to work with NGOs that are faith based or faith inspired.

At this point, we were told, the earliest resolution that could be hoped for would come in 2011, meaning the decade would begin in 2012 – already a year behind the original plan. Consequently, the steering committee is looking at other vehicles and means to move the initiative forward. Though the aim is still to cooperate with the UN, the committee is also considering if the vision of this coalition can be achieved without a UN resolution. They will be sending us their report and conclusions quite soon.

Dirk Ficca, Executive Director of the Council of the POWR, spoke of the need to translate the decade vision from ideas into concrete activities, to collect momentum and experiences that

could demonstrate the possible outcome of a decade. This could be done through the collaboration of religious, values and spiritual-based organisations, making a difference on the ground. Faith-based/faith-inspired NGOs are encouraged to show this aspect linked to their members' work in the field so that it becomes clearer that faith /religion/spirituality has much to offer the UN in achievement of its goals. Gerardo Gonzalez, the secretary of the steering committee, confirmed that ongoing activities, ideas and information can be shared between coalition members to energise the coalition, but also through the Committee on NGOs (CONGO) website.

Prior to the meeting, I had been in touch with Fernando Fatah, chairman of Subud Mexico, who had organised a first Conference on Education for Peace in Puebla last December. He confirmed that he would be delighted if future Conferences could somehow be connected to this Decade Initiative. Consequently, I shared this at the meeting as an example.

Gerardo also thanked Amalia and myself for the detailed information we had submitted on various very successful collaborations between Subud members' projects or work with UN Agencies. Specifically, Lailah Armstrong (International Child Development Programme - ICDP), Bardolph Paul (Global Mercury Project, Yayasan Tambuhak Sinta – YTS) and Livingtson Armytage (Centre for Judicial Studies), had given us impressive facts that we could share. At a later moment, when speaking to Dirk Ficca, he said that, from his point of view, these kind of projects that interact with UN agencies are the ones to share with other Coalition members who may be interested in working with them. On an aside, Dirk also expressed great appreciation for Murray Clapham – who he knows to be a Subud member – and his support in various aspects of the organisation of the POWR in Melbourne.

After the meeting per se, we had time to interact on a more casual basis. Many attendees recognised us from the Melbourne meeting, and some knew Amalia from various UN /NGO committee meetings such as the recent ones which she had attended. Dr. John Taylor, Representative in Geneva, International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), whom I talked to at the reception after the meeting, has known Katherine Carré from her many years as SDIA UN representative in Geneva, and seemed to have an appreciation and openness towards Subud that was refreshing. In fact, all round we felt well integrated and accepted into the discussions, and it is interesting to realise the rather unique position that Subud has through WSA, SDIA and SICA, in so far that, while spirituality is at the core of our experience, we include people of all religions and beliefs and do not follow one specific dogma.

At the end of the evening we were driven back to our hotel by David Fernandez from Barcelona, who works for two NGOs, the Spanish Association for International Human Rights ([www.aedidh.org](http://www.aedidh.org)) and Unesco Etxea (Basque country). He turned out to be the driving force behind an NGO coalition aimed at getting the UN GA – that adopted language such as the 'sacred right of peoples to peace' in 1984 – to now move to promoting wider implementation and accepting 'Peace' as an individual human right. He will send Amalia information about this initiative, and we may consider if WSA might join it. He also mentioned a meeting that will take place in Santiago de Compostela in December, alongside a meeting of Nobel Peace Laureates, a meeting of the Alliance of Civilisations, and others. It felt like this unexpected connection with David could have some purpose or significance.

All in all, our experience in Geneva shows that, if we move forward carefully and in an attentive manner, we will gradually come to find the most useful place and way for Subud to be active and interact with other NGOs, UN Agencies and International Fora, as part of our intention to join the world community in looking at and dealing with the challenges of our times.