



International association for

## Religious freedom

Belief with integrity

Religious Freedom Young Adult Network (RFYN)

IARF RFYN Newsletter

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### THE UN INSIDER

#### The Human Rights Council and Universal Periodic Review

Pursuant to the UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251 and the most talked UN Reform, the Human Rights Council was established on the 15 March 2006 replacing the Commission on Human Rights. Consisting of 47 member states, the General Assembly mandated the Council to

*“ undertake a universal periodic review, based on objective and reliable information, of the fulfilment by each State of its human rights obligations and commitments in a manner which ensures universality of coverage and equal treatment with respect to all States; the review shall be a cooperative mechanism, based on an interactive dialogue, with the full involvement of the country concerned and with consideration given to its capacity-building needs; such a mechanism shall complement and not duplicate the work of treaty bodies. ”*

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is one of the innovative mechanisms that the Council has instituted. It involves assessing the human rights records of each of the 192 member states of the UN. Chaired by the current Council President Doru Romulus Costea, the 1<sup>st</sup> UPR will take place at Palais de Nation in Geneva from 7-18 April 2008 and will look into human rights records of 48 countries. The first 16 countries to be examined during the first session are: Bahrain, Ecuador, Tunisia, Morocco, Indonesia, Finland, UK, India, Brazil, Philippines, Algeria, Poland, the Netherlands, South Africa, Czech Republic and Argentina. The exercise will take the form of three-hour debate on each country, out of which is the formulation of recommendations to the state concerned or a resolution to the Council.



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#### Editors:

Anbumani Arumugam

&

Clayton Welwood

#### Special Rapporteurs Country Visits completed for 2008

The **Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief**, Ms. Asma Jahangir visited **Israel** and the **occupied Palestinian territory** from 20 to 27 January 2008.

The **Special Rapporteur on the adverse effects of the illicit movement and dumping of toxic and dangerous products and wastes on the enjoyment of human rights**, Mr. Okechukwu Ibeanu, made a press statement at the end of his mission to the **United Republic of Tanzania** from 21-30 January 2008.

#### First session of UPR working group

Bahrain Monday 7 April:	10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.
Ecuador Monday 7 April:	3.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.
Tunisia Tuesday 8 April:	10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.
Morocco- Tuesday 8 April:	3.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.
Indonesia Wednesday 9 April:	10.00 a.m. to 1.p.m.
Finland Wednesday 9 April:	3.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.
UK Thursday 10 April:	10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.
India Thursday 10 April:	3.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.
Brazil- Monday 14 April:	10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.
Philippines Monday 14 April:	3.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.
Algeria Tuesday 15 April:	10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.
Poland Tuesday 15 April:	3.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.
Netherlands Wed 16 April:	10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.
South Africa Wed 16 April:	3.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.
Czech Republic Thu 17 April:	10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.
Argentina Thurs. 17 April:	3.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.



The objective of the mission was to gather information on the impact that mining activities are having on the environment and on human rights. In addition, Mr. Ibeanu also wanted to study the movement and use of chemicals and the waste management system for both industrial and domestic waste in the country. The Special **Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance** visited **Mauritania** from 20 to 24 January 2008. The mission - the first one in the country by a special procedure mandate holder - was motivated by the need to include the question of ethnic and racial discrimination in the current democratic process that the country is experiencing.

#### Visits scheduled to take place in the coming week

From 4 to 13 February 2008, the **Special Rapporteur on violence against women**, its causes and consequences, Ms. Yakin Ertürk, will conduct an official visit to **Saudi Arabia**, at the invitation of the Government.

#### Visits postponed

The **Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment**, Mr. Manfred Nowak, announced in a press statement that his visit to **Equatorial Guinea**, which was scheduled to take place from 30 January to 8 February 2008, has been postponed.

#### World Directory on Minorities and Indigenous Peoples

Minority Rights Group International is pleased to announce the launch of the first online directory of the world's minorities and indigenous peoples, on February 27th 2008. The World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples <<http://www.minorityrights.org/directory>> covers 220 of the world's countries and dependent territories, and features profiles of about 700 minorities/indigenous peoples. It is a unique resource for policy-makers, governments, journalists, academics and all those with an interest in the growing field of minority rights. To access the directory, go to <http://www.minorityrights.org/directory>.

The World Directory is being launched in conjunction with our annual Peoples under Threat ranking, which seeks to identify peoples or groups that are most under threat of genocide, mass killing or systemic violence repression in 2008. This year's survey reveals that over half of the top twenty countries in the world where people are most under threat of genocide or mass killing are in Africa.



#### ***By Morse Flores***

(IARF Representative, UN Office in Geneva/ IARF International Council Member and RFYN President)

***Indigenous (Philippines/Switzerland)***





## **1001 Actions for Dialogue**

'1001 Actions' is a major campaign initiated by the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures ([www.euromedalex.org](http://www.euromedalex.org)) and its network of over one thousand civil society organizations, for the mobilization of people and actions dedicated to the promotion of mutual knowledge and respect in the region.

The campaign runs throughout 2008, which has been designated the Euro-Mediterranean Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and aims to promote the role of intercultural dialogue to:

- Fight racism and xenophobia as well as any form of discrimination
- Challenge extremism from all sources and origins
- Rediscover common roots and heritage, and develop the idea that we all share a common destiny

"We believe that we can promote our values and key messages best through our action.

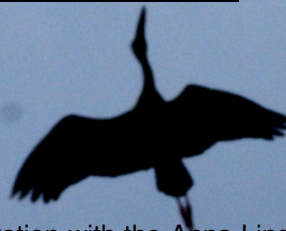
Throughout the twelve months actions for dialogue will take place across the Euro-Mediterranean region, from Morocco and Portugal to Lebanon and Turkey, from Latvia and Poland to Greece and Egypt". Actions will be diverse in terms of size and thematic but will all focus on promoting knowledge of the other.

The key event of the campaign will be the Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue Night on 22 May 2008. The event, which will be held in synchronization in thirty-seven countries, will be an opportunity for people of the Euro-Med region to unite in one common voice for dialogue, for more information about the 1001 Actions, please visit

[www.1001actions.org](http://www.1001actions.org)



### **Hands in the Air – 1001 Actions web-**



Our organization the Youth Spirit Center in cooperation with the Anna Lindh Foundation and the Youth Supplement at Addustour Newspaper are organizing a pioneer project within the 1001 Actions for Dialogue. The project called "Euro-Med Bazaar" and its compound from two main activities:

#### **Media "Gate to Europe":**

Starting from med of March until 22nd of May in cooperation with our partner Addustour Newspaper – Youth Supplement (<http://www.addustour.com/Supplements.aspx>) the second largest newspaper in Jordan, we will start publishing articles visiting a different country every week to talk about its culture and youth situation in that country. Also we will encourage journalists to write about cultural dialogue. Every week we will have half – page in the newspaper, which will contain an article written by a youth from that country, some basic information, and a report about a youth organization or a youth interest from that country, such as education, media or employment.

#### **The second part we called it Euro-Med Bazaar:**

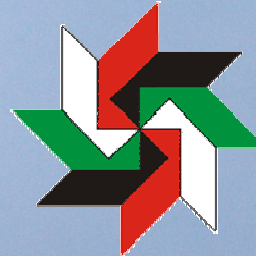
Under the same roof on 22nd of May 2008 we will bring together the families of diplomats from the different Euro-Med embassies, each country will be given a table to present their food and culture, music and movies from the different countries will be played on the background. People will be invited to experience the culture of the different participating countries.



The Youth Spirit Center is non-profit Jordanian NGO, Its members believe in interfaith dialogue and social work and whose mission is to promote their concepts and importance through the community. YSC believes the culture of Peace and non-violence as language for dialogue and understanding. YSC also help in building bridges of understanding between youth from different cultures and religious background, to break stereotypes and to promote the Jordanian example on coexistence and diversity.



Cup of Good Hope – Hamburg 2006



Youth Spirit Center

The YSC implemented several projects together with its partners around the Euro-Med countries; we hope in coming additions we can allocate some space for some of these projects.

**By Anas Alabbadi,**

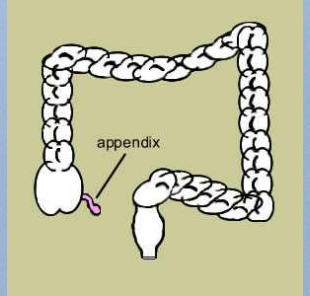
*(President, National Forum for Youth & Culture: Jordan Youth)*





## THE APPENDIX

The appendix used to be thought of like nipples on men, an evolutionary leftover with no purpose. Worse than that, it was so upset about its low status, that it would occasionally swell with rage, and demand some attention, threatening to go on a suicide mission if its demands weren't met. And in such cases, it isn't surprising that surgeons chose to cut it out. Recently however, researchers discovered a possible function of the appendix. The discovery follows other research that shows that the human body is an ecosystem, full of microbial life. Our guts especially are covered with benign or beneficial bacteria that help us digest our food and perform other services for our bodies (I've heard Jessica Snyder Sachs' book "Good Germs, Bad Germs" covers the topic quite well). But if we get diarrhea, all those good bacteria get flushed out of our system. Since we need them to stay healthy (part of their function is to coat our guts completely so that invasive bacteria can't get a foothold), how do we get them back? Well, we could do like toddlers and eat dirt, but even then it would take many months to restore the ecosystem. Here's where the appendix comes in: it repopulates the digestive tract with the different kinds of bacteria it kept safely tucked away—a little storehouse of diversity ready to rebuild after an ecological disaster.



I wonder if nature has come up with other repositories of genetic variety that serve the same function. That's probably what the tropical rainforests are; after the ice ages they sent forth weeds and herds to colonize the new northern flatlands. If so, it seems like a bad idea to be cutting them down at the rate we are. But what about us humans? I mean, do we have appendices to safeguard our diversity? Well, there are some seed-saving projects that are doing a decent job of preserving some of our agri-cultural heritage, but on the whole it looks pretty grim. Take language, for instance: there are over 6000 languages spoken in the world today, but most of them are in decline, and many of them will likely be gone within couple decades. Some of these are certainly doomed; they just don't have the critical mass of speakers needed to keep the language alive. But there are plenty of others that might live on if some appropriate measures are taken. Unlike a seed bank, however, a language/culture can't be frozen and stored in a vault, at least not without losing what makes it worth keeping: its vitality and creativity. It might be worthwhile to do so for academic purposes, but saving a culture that way won't give it much ability to breathe new life into the surviving societies.

So what are people to do? Well, we must accept the fact that no culture or society can last forever, but there is a good case to be made for reducing the rapid loss of diversity. There are aboriginal peoples all over the world who are struggling for survival, to have their existences and cultures recognized, and to gain access to means to make a living, and they often need cooperation from people in the dominant societies. A necessary step in that direction is for the leaders of those dominant societies to admit that they did try to wipe out the cultural diversity that aboriginal people represented, and apologize for that. The Australian PM did so a couple months ago, and last year's UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples goes a step further in proclaiming their right to existence and their culture.

But the example that came to my mind when digesting this analogy was that of Taiwan and its relationship to the People's Republic of China. In the last century, mainland China has been through some serious traumas: the overthrowing of an ancient imperial system, a war with Japan and a civil war, peasant riots and a Communist revolution, a savage cultural purge, and unimaginable economic growth. I wasn't witness to any of this personally, but when I went to Dalian a couple years ago, I talked to an old lady on the beach. She waved her hand behind her and said, "A few years ago, none of this was here." She was referring to the factories, apartments, and glass towers of a city of 6 million that only a couple decades ago just a small town. To witness such rapid growth, not as a kid, but as a middle-aged adult must have been bewildering, I thought. She asked where I lived, and I said Taiwan. Then she pointed in front of her to an outcropping of rock about 20 meters from shore. "You see that?" she said. "The shore rock is like China, and the outcropping is like Taiwan," and she held her hands close together to emphasize the point. I didn't get it at first, but I soon realized that she was emphasizing the proximity of the two countries, not just physically, but culturally. If these two neighbours are so similar, I wondered, how come there's so much animosity? Why does Beijing keep threatening to annex, and Taipei keep threatening to rupture? Well, they both have understandable reasons for doing so, which are easy enough to see. China's leaders see Taiwan as part of their body falsely claiming a



separate existence. In Taiwan, many people can accept and enjoy their position in the body (far from the head) and the freedom that brings, but can't deal with being considered a 4<sup>th</sup> tier organ, and the lack of attention to their bullying by big bad Beijing. "Why does the heart (xī[n] zàng) get all the attention? We might not have the Dalai Lama, but we have vibrant and colourful religious traditions. Where're our celebrity saviours?" Taiwan, though known mostly for making Barbie dolls and semiconductors, is indeed a storehouse of traditional Chinese culture (along with Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang province, and other out of the way places). But I guess the world doesn't answer their pleas because they're too concerned with pandering to prosperity in Beijing and the world's new factory towns.

Every part of the earth's creatures, ecosystems, and civilizations serves some kind of purpose, even if we can't see it at any particular moment in time. And a variety of forms is often beautiful, like a well-stocked aquarium. But diversity also exists in places that not everyone considers so beautiful, like dirty chaotic markets, and the nook in the side of your colon. As a species and as members of a web of life that is far too complex for us to fully understand, credit is due to all our organs, no matter how unsightly or insignificant they seem, because they are probably helping us in more ways than we know.

**By Clayton Welwood**  
*(Editor of an educational magazine)*





## TOLERANT HOLLAND – WHAT’S THE DEBATE EXACTLY ABOUT?

Some capital headlines in the Turkish Daily News the past six months:

*“DUTCH LAWMAKER WANTS WOMEN JAILED FOR WEARING BURQA” (July 13),*

*“DUTCH RIGHTIST CALLS FOR BAN ON KORAN” (August 9),*

*“ANTI-ISLAMIC RHETORIC SPARKS IDENTITY FEARS IN EUROPE” (August 16).*

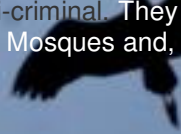
What is going on in Holland? What is the debate exactly about?

It seems that three things are being confused both on the street and in the media and politics.

First, there are problems with migrants, especially (2<sup>nd</sup> generation) migrants from Muslim countries. High crime, low job rates. In 2000 the well-known leftwing writer Paul Scheffer published *The Multicultural Drama*, an essay in which he wrote about the immigration problems facing the Netherlands. Scheffer's argument was that unemployment among immigrant communities was bringing the Netherlands' welfare system to a point of crisis, and that the country's failure to integrate large numbers of new citizens was turning cultural diversity into a social problem. At the time, he was widely dismissed as a racist by the political classes of the then ruling Labour party. Since the publication of the essay all parties, starting with the right wing and ending in 2005 with the left wings, do now acknowledge the problems with immigrants. In the newspapers, the number of times the Dutch word 'Allochtonen', having a meaning similar to (2<sup>nd</sup> generation) non-western-migrants, was used rose from 866 in 1998 to 2274 in 2004.

Then, the migrants who participate the least in Holland are migrants from Morocco and Turkey, both Muslim countries. And that is exactly what is confusing the debate, because soon the “stupid migrants who don't work, live on welfare and steal” become the “stupid Muslims who don't work, live on welfare and steal”. Ofcourse there is no direct link between being a Muslim and not having socio-economic success, but a lot of people suppose there is a link.

The third problem is the fundamentalistic, orthodox Islam, which is prominent in the media in Holland. An Imam saying he doesn't shake a woman's hand, another Imam saying he 'understands' terrorists, an Islamite school saying that boys and girls can't swim together. Ofcourse, this is not mainstream Islam in The Netherlands. But it seems that there is no, or just a small, reaction from mainstream Islam saying 'hey, that is not our religion'. So for the average Dutch a Muslim is poor, fundamentalistic and semi-criminal. They fear that Muslims, or migrants from Muslim countries, will harm their daughters, will 'sing' from their Mosques and, eventually, want to turn Europe in Eurabia. And in this atmosphere the following happened:



*“On November 11, Theo Van Gogh, a prominent Dutch film-maker who had made a movie attacking Islam's attitude to women, was murdered on the streets of Amsterdam. And this was not any old street killing. Mr. Van Gogh was dragged from his bike, shot six times and his head was nearly sliced off by an Islamic radical, who then impaled a five-page letter attacking the enemies of Islam on the chest of his dying victim. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Dutch politician of Somali Muslim origin who was repeatedly threatened in the letter, is also in hiding and, unlike Mr. Wilders, has not re-appeared in parliament. Other prominent politicians and even some journalists now have permanent armed protection. Mr. Van Gogh had outraged Muslims by broadcasting pictures of verses of the Koran scrawled on a naked female body and referring to Muslims as "goat-fuckers.”*

**By Arne Mosselman**



Three weeks later Geert Wilders launched a new political party, demanding a halt to non-western immigration to the Netherlands for five years and a tougher line against Islamic radicalism. Last elections, November 2005, Wilders' party was chosen in the parliament with 9 out of 150 seats. All the Dutch intellectuals, maybe even Wilders' himself, know that this is not a solution. Islam has become a part of Holland, and it will be. Headscarfs, maybe even a burqa or ten, will be a part of the Dutch streets. But, this Islam should be a different Islam than the Islam in Morocco, Turkey or Saudi, because Islam is here not the dominant factor in political, cultural and religious life and should fight for freedom of speech and religious freedom.



## CALENDAR OF YOUTH EVENTS AROUND THE WORLD

### **8 March: International Women's Day**

For more information and to join or create events in your local area please see <http://www.internationalwomensday.com>.

### **25-26 March: United Nations Meets Web 2.0**

For more information, please see

<http://www.un-gaid.org/fr/node/1347>.

### **31 March-6 April: Act! Speak! Build! Week**

For more information, please see

<http://www.habitat.org/youthprograms/actspeakbuild>.

### **2-5 April: XX IAVE World Conference**

For more information, please visit

<http://www.iave.org/>.

### **16-18 April: VIII Infopoverty World Conference**

For more information, please see

<http://www.infopoverty.net/>

### **17 -20 April: EuroMUN 2008**

For more information, please see

[http://www.euromun.org/index.php/euromun/un\\_youth\\_delegates](http://www.euromun.org/index.php/euromun/un_youth_delegates).

### **25-28 April: Global Youth Service Day**

For more information, please see

<http://www.gysd.org>.

### **27-30 April: Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting**

For more information, please see

<http://www.thecommonwealth.org/news/152865/174311/140108cymm08.htm>

### **31 May: World No Tobacco Day**

For more information, please see

<http://days.takingitglobal.org/13>

### **5 June: World Environment Day**

For more information, please see

<http://www.unep.org/wed>.

### **10-11 June: UNGA High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS**

For more information, please see <http://www.un-ngls.org/un aids/en>.

