



AVSI-USA is part of the [Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale \(AVSI\)](#) International Network

Headquarters: 420 Lexington Ave, Ste 2754-55
New York, NY 10170-0002
Tel/Fax: (212) 490-8043

DC Office: 1000 Connecticut Ave NW, Ste 403
Washington, DC 20006
Tel/Fax: (202) 429-9009

Email: avsiusa@avsi.org
Website: www.avsi-usa.org

President: Mr. Ezio Castelli
Editor: Mrs. Jacqueline Hamm Aldrette

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AVSI-USA Mission: To support the AVSI network by leveraging resources and contacts in the U.S. in order to enhance and broaden the achievements of member organizations in promoting human dignity in developing countries.

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The United Nations at the Crossroads: Which Direction for the Future of World Governance?

April 4, 2005

In response to the recent and ongoing debate over reform of the United Nations, and the March 25th release of the UN Secretary General's statement on the issue, the Crossroads Cultural Center of New York and AVSI-USA organized a panel of prestigious speakers to debate the topic of the United Nations and the future of international governance. The panel and audience brought a wide range of voices and experiences to the table, which contributed significantly to the success of the event.

The audience of roughly 100 individuals, who participated in the April 4th event at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in the center of New York, included numerous diplomats, among them the Iraq representative to the UN and other representatives from country missions to the UN, including Peru, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Portugal, and Italy. University students, NGO representatives, and many others demonstrated their interest in UN politics and international relations by attending the event and engaging in a stimulated dialogue.

A first round of presentations by each of the panelists led into a lively debate and dialogue sparked by several questions from the floor. This engagement with the audience offered the panelists the opportunity to deepen their respective arguments and elaborate on the wide range of perspectives which the panelists brought to bear.

The remarks by Professor **Edward Luck**, an experienced and competent scholar, were particularly clear and appreciated because of his ability to address nuances within the political complexities under debate.



Ketty Opoka, (right) director of AVSI partner NGO Meeting Point Kitgum, in the war-ravaged region of northern Uganda, received the honor of being named a Bridge Builder by **Harvard University's International Bridge Builder's Conference**. Ketty attended a week-long conference at Harvard, where she shared her experiences with grassroots leaders from developing countries, students and faculty. More information at: www.bbconference.org.

Panel on Sustainable Development at the UN, Co-Sponsored by AVSI-USA

On March 3, 2005, AVSI-USA, New Humanity and Pax Romana co-sponsored a side-event organized by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations within the Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting of the 13th session of the **Commission on Sustainable Development** at the **United Nations Headquarters** in New York.

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United Nations Panel on Sustainable Development, *Continued*

Focused on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, the event was also an occasion to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Vatican Council II Pastoral Constitution “*Gaudium et Spes*” (“The Church in the Modern World”).

In the early afternoon, Mr. Oscar De Rojas, Director of the Financing for Development Office at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), opened the session. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN, introduced the main speaker, the Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin and former Permanent Observer at the UN in Geneva. Archbishop Martin’s experience includes having served as a member of the Holy See Delegation to World Conferences, namely the conference on Population and Development (Beijing, 1995) and on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002).

In his speech, Archbishop Martin recalled the Christian anthropological framework, including the relationship between the human person, society and the cosmos. In particular, the Archbishop stressed the principles of the dignity of every individual person, the unity of the human family, and therefore the universal destination of the goods of creation, and care for the environment. These three principles, he emphasized, are not ideological, static and separable from each other. Rather, we are challenged to find a way to foster all three together in the varied situations in which we find ourselves. Archbishop Martin exemplified how these principles, taken together lead to specific ways of relating with the person living in poverty, and offer a more comprehensive understanding of the unresolved issues of the world today, such as trade rules, intellectual property, migration, the debt burden, conflict, and pro-poor investment. He proposed that an unlikely concept as “gratuitous love” is a powerful instrument to frame a radically different architecture of international relations in the face of the current utilitarian, liberal economic and political models. In conclusion, Archbishop Martin referred to the anthropology of “*Gaudium et Spes*” which considers the effects of sin on the history of humanity, as an essential dimension to understand the misery of the human person, vividly evident in the horrors of war and genocide, human trafficking and economic exploitation.

The second half of the event took place in the Auditorium of the Church of the Holy Family, just across the street from the UN. Three presentations highlighted the experiences and the ideals lived by the organizations which co-sponsored the event, with a focus on the dimensions necessary for truly sustainable development. Professor **Amelia J. Uelmen**, director of the Institute on Religion and Law at Fordham University’s School of Law, spoke on “Brotherhood as a Political Category” as it has been recognized and developed within the “New Humanity” movement. Dr. **Joe Holland**, executive Director of Pax Romana Center for International Study of Catholic Social Teaching at St. Thomas University in Florida, developed the theme of the interrelationship between ecology and human life in postmodern Catholic social thought.

The third presenter, **Christopher Bacich**, a history and philosophy teacher at Xaverian High School and President of the “Risk of education” Youth Center, both in Brooklyn, NY, spoke about the fundamental need of quality education for sustainable development. He elaborated on the educational principles and method, inspired by the teaching and living example of Fr. Giussani, which guides the educational activities that AVSI implements and supports in more than 30 developing countries. As his starting point, Mr. Bacich recalled a definition of education as *the introduction to reality in its totality: in other words, to offer, through the communication of one’s self, a response to the questions one lives*. This method puts into play the person and the community and points out that loyalty to one’s tradition is the source of certainty. This understanding stresses the need for an existential proposal that is an authority, but which has to be personally verified through the continuous involvement of one’s freedom. The risk that is implied is the challenge of any educational path. In the end, Mr. Bacich showcased AVSI’s educational projects in various countries, and explained how this approach has been an effective cornerstone for sustainable development because it brings about the formation of persons who are aware of their human identity and potential, and thus are able to construct a truly human environment even in the most distressful situations.

Future of International Governance, *Continued*

Some highlights from the discussion:

The proposed UN reform, promoted by the Secretary General (SG) in his recent report: “**In Larger Freedom: towards security, development and human rights for all**” (A/59/2005), should mark new momentum for change, culminating the September opening of the 60th General Assembly of the UN. At this time, the UN will also celebrate five years since the Millennium Declaration was signed, and will take the occasion to assess the progress made toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals. All panelists stressed that the reform proposal appears, as has always been the case, to be a process rather than a one-time event. Sufficient time, it was stressed, will be required to build a collective consensus among the 191 members of the world’s governing body. **Amb. Baali**, from Algeria, pointed out some stumbling blocks, namely the definition and common understanding of some key terms like *terrorism*, and *terrorism of the state* and concepts such as the *right to the use of force*. Amb. Baali also stressed the imperative need to address the root causes of terrorism, which he outlined broadly as frustration, violations of human rights, and underdevelopment. He pleaded for reform of the Security Council in order that it provide for adequate regional representation, recalling that since 60% of the Council’s workload regards Africa at least two permanent seats at the Council should be reserved for African countries.

Archbishop Migliore painted a broad picture of the recurrent challenges in international relations. He recalled the strong interest of the Holy See in the UN reform provided that the process not be restricted to an adjustment of operational methods or a mere redistribution of power. What is at stake, according to the Holy See, is global governance. Central to this debate is the question: is the world governable? And if so, according to what understanding and under which rules? Recalling the principle of one human family, Archbishop Migliore insisted that the subject under debate is a matter of “moral” reform which cannot spring from the institution of the UN itself, but must come from the political will of states. It is the responsibility of the state to choose to give priority to a participatory manner of exerting political authority with transparency and accountability. How many decisions and resolutions, asked rhetorically by Archbishop Migliore, have been respected and effectively implemented so far? He also pointed to the link between security, not to be understood as only a military matter, and socio-economic development. A renewed commitment to and practice of a system of international solidarity is urgently needed.

Mr. Dugan, representing the US, stressed the strong support that his country wishes to give the UN and the willingness to stay engaged. Many questions touched upon the issues of the relationship between the UN and civil society. Within this period of reform, another document needs mention: “We the peoples: civil society, the United Nations and global governance,” prepared by a panel of 12 eminent individuals and presented in June 2004. This document was followed up by a report from the Secretary General which offered suggestions to improve the relations between the UN and civil society.

Bardazzi, the representative of Crossroads Cultural Center and moderator of the debate, brought the panel to a conclusion, expressing his satisfaction for this inaugural event which was an example of the mission and concerns of Crossroads.

Panelists
(from left to right):

Mr. Dugan, Archbishop
Migliore, Mr. Bardazzi,
Amb. Baali, Prof. Luck.



Tsunami Relief Funds collected by AVSI-USA Directed to Thailand

April 25, 2005

In generous response to the December disasters that impact the lives and well-being of thousands of people in South East Asia, the supporters and friends of AVSI-USA contributed significant resources to the reconstruction effort, joining other NGOs in the AVSI network including CESAL, AVAID and AVSI Uganda.. After numerous field-visits and conversations with local partners met in Thailand and Sri Lanka, AVSI has decided to implement four projects. AVSI-USA has chosen to direct the support from our friends in the United States to support a project in Thailand.

Of the total cost of \$130,000, AVSI-USA will contribute over \$12,000. The project, *Emergency Aid and Support to the Populations of the Villages of Surat Thani, Southern Thailand*, will support the children of the 440 families in this region whose lives have been marked by poverty and vulnerability. Dependent on seasonal agriculture, these families have had minimal opportunities for quality education and economic opportunities are scarce. The average income of 150 Bath per month, or about three dollars, is absolutely insufficient for the average six-person family. The government school system is weak and suffers from poor teacher preparation and motivation, as well as inadequate supplies. AVSI's project, to be implemented by a local organization, aims to foster the human and educational development of these children, offering them the chance to attend the a private school in Somwang for the six-years of the compulsory educational cycle. Additional educational and recreational activities will complement the schooling and help the children and their families to resume and enjoy a normal life. Through this project, AVSI hopes to enhance the mental and physical growth of these children while also strengthening family cohesion.

The other projects to be supported by AVSI include:

- Community support project in Takua Pa region in the South-Western region of Thailand. In collaboration with the Salesian Sisters, this project will provide for the building of new homes, provision of new boats, wells, and a new power generator, in order to assist the communities in regaining a dignified life. The project will also support children's education and will include vocational training courses for adults.
- Vocational training program in Krabi, in the region of Takua Pa. In collaboration with the Krabi Technical College, a vocational training school with some 200 students, AVSI will provide for the rehabilitation of the damaged school buildings and the construction of a technical laboratory.
- Educational support for disabled children and adults in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, through the construction of a center for disabled children. In Jaffna, a region affected by presence and activity of the Tamil guerillas, AVSI will support the renovation of four day care centers.

Crossroads Cultural Center, New York

A meeting place where education takes place; that is where one may learn to look with openness, curiosity and critical judgment at every aspect of reality; reality, people as they are, with their own background; reality as an event versus ideas.

www.crossroadsnyc.com

