

UNITING for PEACE

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SPECIAL 1st ISSUE

“There is no way to peace. Peace is the way” Mahatma Gandhi



World peace is not a Utopian dream. It can be realised by overcoming forces of destruction, violence and warmongering. Uniting for Peace is a civil society organisation helping to do just that.



“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”

UNESCO, Declaration of a Culture of Peace

In 2009 two peace organisations – Action for UN Renewal and World Disarmament Campaign – voted to unite, to take forward more effectively their common agenda of promoting peace, disarmament and a stronger UN. In 2010 the new organisation – Uniting for Peace – was publicly launched at the Spring Conference and Erskine Childers Memorial Lecture events. This is the first edition of its magazine, incorporating the Act UN Newsletter and World Disarm! publications.



UNITING for PEACE

Incorporating: Action for UN Renewal & World Disarmament Campaign

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EUROPE'S GENOCIDAL CENTURY

In 1990s the ferocious violence and intense hatreds unleashed in the Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia amid break-up of federal Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, shocked the world. Long-suppressed nationalisms and revenge for World War Two atrocities are cited as explanations, yet such recent mini-genocides (including Rwanda) must be set within the total grim panorama of the 20th century as an era of genocides, of which the Nazi Holocaust was the most horrific expression.

Such reflections are prompted by Cathie Carmichael's landmark study, showing that "far from being isolated and impulsive instances of prejudice, genocides have formed part of a general historical phenomenon" in Central and Eastern Europe since the 19th century, one firmly established before the rise of Nazism. The latter's horrors consciously continued this lethal tradition: "Who now remembers the Armenians?" Hitler remarked, believing that once wiped out, the Jews would likewise be forgotten.

'Modernising' Europe according to the national principle caused the break-up of the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, while Imperial Russia's fall led to huge population displacements under Stalin. In pursuit of political and racial homogeneity, 'whole civilisations vanished', with atrocities frequently wreaked on religious and national minorities by dominant national groups driven by a new 'eliminationist' credo. The empires themselves committed atrocities to quell rising nationalisms: the 1870s' Ottoman massacres of Bulgarians were the most notorious, while Romanov expansion into Caucasus caused dispersion and death among huge numbers of Muslims. (Two million Circassians were reduced to 200,000, with half-a-million deported to Turkey and over a million deaths).

Christian communities in the Near East were virtually wiped out. "Armenian Christians, subject to widespread massacres in 1890s and 1909, were effectively obliterated in Anatolia during the First World War...about one million Armenians died." (Turkey still refuses to acknowledge the great 1915 Armenian genocide.)

Jews in Imperial Russia, Balkan Muslims, Ottoman Christians and Habsburg Serbs in Bosnia and Serbia, all faced huge pressures on their very existence from 1870s to 1918. Serbia lost some 800,000 people, one-quarter of its population, in the First World War, from starvation, disease and war injuries, with over 60% of Serb men aged between 15 and 55 perishing 1914-18. (World War Two levels were almost as horrific). The 1919-22 Graeco-Turkish War saw atrocities on both sides. Eliminationist programmes against Jewish communities, from Czarist Russia's pogroms to massacres in nationalist Ukraine (1918-19), helped create the moral degradation and psychic climate which made Nazi extermination camps possible.

The author cogently argues the collapse of Central and Eastern Europe's great empires and consequent power vacuum, "was one of the primary causes of the Holocaust, as the National Socialists attempted to

reorder Eastern Europe into a new 1000-year Reich." (p.116). It is difficult for British readers, whose national experience pre-1914 had been spared mass killings, to grasp that by 1914, genocide, massacres and atrocities had been the experience of millions across Central and Eastern Europe and Near East. Suddenly from 1914, the reality of mass slaughter engulfed the British, French and German nations in the First World War trenches. Yet these European powers, and Western states such as Belgium and Holland, shared a dark history of colonial oppression which included genocide: Belgian atrocities in the Congo reduced its 25 million population of 1891 to 8.5 million in 1911, while Germany had committed mass killings of Africans in German South-West Africa (Namibia). Nazi genocidal practice was unique in its mass industrial methods and political-philosophical rationale, but not otherwise, and anyway also used well-established 'traditional' techniques – mass shootings by its forces and those of client states, and death by disease and exhaustion

from labour in intolerable conditions. (The author reminds us that while nearly 6 million Jews were killed in extermination camps and massacres, 3.2 million Soviet prisoners of war perished amid the harsh conditions of German army camps).

Referring to the 'genocidal crisis of 1912-1923', the author states "it is a great paradox (it) occurred when desire for universal human rights had significantly increased," (p.26), and "outrage at genocide and other extreme abuses of human rights was one of the intellectual building-blocks leading to the creation of the League of Nations and the United Nations." Already, humanist and religious concerns had achieved the Hague and Geneva Conventions, but until the mid-1940s, social Darwinism, and "the real-life narrative of struggles between races and the inevitable extermination of the 'weakest'...remained dominant in much of Europe. It permeated European life at every level, putting whole groups outside...human responsibility and obligation." (pp.57-8). The author could have added that in destroying Fascism, the major political structure of this narrative, the Allies morally degraded themselves by descending into mass killing of civilians from Dresden to Nagasaki.

Post-1945, "it became obligatory for signatories of the UN treaty to accept the necessity for intervention to prevent genocides from occurring...the signing of a Genocide Convention represented both a significant repudiation of previous years and the catastrophic failures of eliminationism." (pp.157-9). The author does not assess how far UN states have honoured these obligations (appalling failures such as Rwanda come to mind), but offers both grim history and ever-relevant warning against ruthless powers and sectarian forces using nationalist and religious extremisms for lethal ends. Rigorous legally-enforceable, national and UN human rights structures, safeguarding of minorities, ready human compassion and necessary courage, all under-girded by moral value-systems of tolerance and respect, political commitment and constant public vigilance, offer best protection.

Cathie Carmichael: Genocide Before the Holocaust (Yale University Press £25.00 pp.244, ISBN:978-0-300-121179).

Reviewer: BRIAN COOPER

PROMOTING SEPTEMBER 2010 'PEACE DAYS'

Uniting for Peace is promoting three days in September 2010 as 'September Peace Days' – September 19, 20 and 21. This observance follows the 2009 switch from the end-of-January 'Weekend of Services and Vigils for World Peace and Disarmament', promoted for two decades by World Disarmament Campaign, to the September days derived originally from initiatives by World Council of Churches and United Nations.

September 20 has been designated as the International Day of Prayer for World Peace, and is observed by Christians and those of other faith traditions in many countries. The World Council of Churches invites participation in this concluding year of its 2001-2010 decade to Overcome Violence Programme, and some major UK Christian denominations, such as the Baptist Union, Methodist Church and United Reformed Church, are also promoting it among their congregations. As September 20 falls on a Monday this year, many churches may prefer to observe it on the Sunday, September 19, and Uniting for Peace has accordingly extended its 'Peace Days' to include that day.

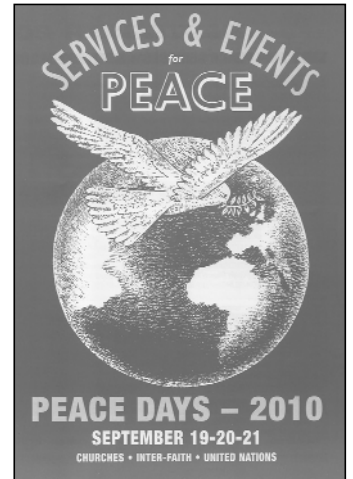
An overnight Sunday through to Monday morning peace prayer and information vigil, can be an imaginative way to link the two days – especially for the younger age-group! Information sessions, poetry, music, DVD and other visual presentations, can all feature in prayer-for-peace vigils. The aim is informed prayer and reflection leading to a specific locally-based, internationally-related peace action or project.

UN officially designated September 21 as its International Day of Peace, which has become celebrated in many countries worldwide with events "commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace within and among all nations". In the UK the day is increasingly marked by civil society bodies – local UNA branches; peace & justice and environmental groups; churches and other faith communities. OVERCOMING CONFLICT can be a key theme, as UN urges the international community to observe September 21 as a 'Day of Global Ceasefire' in conflict zones. Faith-based groups can hold a single event, uniting both days' concerns, and/or join with local secular bodies for a UN-focused event.

The inter-faith dimension is especially significant and timely. Many conflicts around the world today are fuelled by religious intolerance and violent misuse of faith. Yet all religious traditions uphold 'THE SACRED GIFT OF LIFE' and should be promoting peace, locally and globally. It is vital people of different faiths come together to affirm common commitment to building peace – by overcoming divisions, working for economic and social justice, and supporting disarmament and reconciliation processes – and creating a harmonious global human community. INTER-FAITH EVENTS FOR WORLD PEACE, with statements, readings from sacred scriptures, meditation and

music, can strongly affirm this purpose. Can you arrange such an event in your locality?

In recent years, various local bodies (churches, UNA branches, etc.) have held September 20-21 events. 2009 faith-based ones included services, prayer-/meditation vigils, inter-faith forums, pilgrimages, drama and music. For 2010, UfP urges members and affiliated bodies to hold local events or co-arrange with other groups. UfP 2010 events so far notified include at Brechin, Cambridge, Chelmsford, Chester, Chislehurst, Hinckley, Leicester, London, Malvern, Port Erin (Isle of Man), Redditch, Rochester. (UfP Edinburgh for details). Stroud events (Gloucester Diocese), contact: linkear@freeuk.com & Oxford Peace Plaque ceremony: djfpeace@aol.co.uk.



Resource pack – £5.00 – from: Peace Services, WDC, PO Box 28209, Edinburgh EH9 1ZR. (Cheques to 'Peace Services').



Rev. John Johansen-Berg, UfP Vice-President & International Director Community for Reconciliation (left) at Dahanu Tazuka, Maharashtra, India, with activists in local development and peace/justice projects.

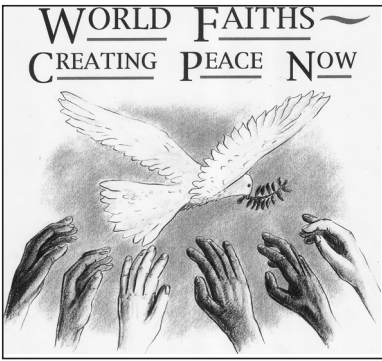
He commends observation of the September Peace Days. "In a world of conflict and war, it is fitting and essential that Christians and people of other faiths strive together to advance God's purpose and human yearning for a world of peace and justice. Without vision the world and its people will perish. With vision the earth and its inhabitants will be renewed. Please join this effort by holding an event in your area".

REV. BRIAN G. COOPER Churches & Inter-Faith Secretary

SEPTEMBER 'PEACE DAYS' – MAKE IT HAPPEN!

SEPT. 19 – PEACE SERVICES • SEPT. 20 – WORLD PEACE PRAYER DAY • SEPT. 21 – UN PEACE DAY

EDINBURGH INTER-FAITH PEACE EVENT



Global and grassroots activities for peace by faith communities were highlighted at the 2010 annual summer Edinburgh Inter-Faith Peace Event (July 1) on the theme 'World Faiths – Creating Peace Now', attended by fifty people. Rev. Brian Cooper, Churches & Inter-Faith Secretary, said: "The coming together of

different faith groups to advance the cause of peace is particularly relevant and significant at this time when, in some parts of the world, religion is being exploited and sometimes directly contributing to divisions and conflict, in denial of the core faith truth to 'hallow the sacred gift of life'. This was echoed by Rev. Mary Catherine Burgess (Edinburgh University Chaplaincy) who reported on the Parliament of World Religions (Melbourne, December 2009). Its theme, 'Make a World of Difference' – upholding the value of difference within a common humanity – affirmed a vital factor in lasting peace-building.

To avoid conflicts and create global harmony, 'We must share!', stressed Mr. Amrit Lal (Edinburgh Hindu Temple). A just sharing of the world's food, resources and wealth, and 'mutual service' as basis for society, were essential to create peace, according to the 'light of truth' from the ancient Hindu scriptures and other world religions. Pointing in like direction is the worldwide Baha'i

'Arising to Serve' programme, said Maureen Hunter (Edinburgh Baha'i Community). Her visually illustrated report gave an exciting glimpse of 41 across-the-globe conferences of some 120,000 Baha'i members, and linked local welfare actions. Christian Peacemaker Teams are 'on the front line' of non-violent peace action in Middle East. Maureen Jack reported on her CPT work at Al-Tuwani, a Palestinian village in South Hebron often threatened by militant Israeli settlers. "We go in Christ's way, in 'active pacifism', putting ourselves between those on either side of the conflict, standing with the oppressed Palestinians against the Occupation violence, but never supporting any violence against Israelis."

On 'Peace in the City', Nahid Aslam (Annandale St. Mosque) discussed the Muslim Women's Group of Edinburgh's growing contribution to inter-faith relations and community cohesion. Harumi Currie, Chair of Women's Federation for World Peace (Scotland), brought the global dimension by reporting on a visit to North Korea with WFWP's aid programme for its poor families (UN reports one in three under-fives in North Korea are malnourished). This scheme is supported by WFWP women worldwide, including in Scotland.

Maureen Hunter's beautiful peace music, especially her harp recital, was an inspiring feature of a memorable evening deemed 'informative and uplifting'.



ELIZABETH MARSHALL

ADVANCE NOTICE • UNITING for PEACE CONFERENCE

November 19 2010 ~ 2.00-4.30pm & 6.00-8.30pm • House of Lords • Room 4a

“Britain in the World & the Peace Movement’s Role in the New Coalition Era”

An opportunity to explore priorities for Britain in the world, and the contribution of the Peace Movement, in the post-election political context.

Dr Frank Barnaby (former Director, SIPRI) • Simon Hughes MP (tbc)

Tony Kempster (Vice-President, IPB) • Lord Peter Archer Q.C.

Dan Plesch (S.O.A.S) • Moeen Yaseem (Global Vision)

For registration and advance booking: (please send at least £6):

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