

Geneva Reporter

Quaker United Nations Office - Geneva

Armed Violence and the Millennium Development Goals

The Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Ki Moon, has called upon world leaders to attend a Summit in New York 20 – 22 September 2010 to review progress on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to accelerate action over the coming five years, (see www.un.org/en/mdg/summit2010). In preparation for this important meeting, many steps are underway by actors around the world, including by States and organizations wishing to have the relationship between the realities and impacts of armed violence and action for development be recognized at the Summit as a key cross-cutting dimension.

This is a central feature of current activities by the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence & Development (see www.genevadeclaration.org). In addition, the Government of Norway and UNDP have undertaken a special effort in this regard. At a conference in Geneva on 12 May 2010 more than 60 countries met and addressed the relationship of armed violence and development. The “Oslo Commitments on Armed Violence” which the conference produced commit states to implement a number of concrete measures to prevent and reduce armed violence. Systematic

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Recent Publications

A briefing paper on Children of Prisoners is attached with this Geneva Reporter.

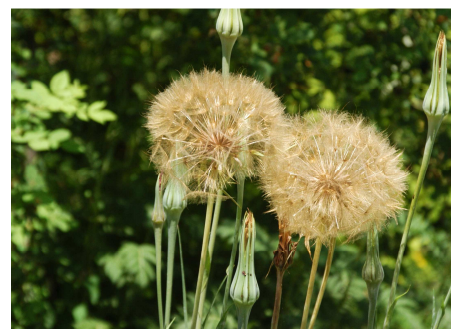
UPOV, Intellectual Property and Food

The International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) is a 68 member intergovernmental organization in Geneva, established by the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants in 1961. The objective of the Convention is to grant intellectual property rights to breeders who develop new varieties of plants.

UPOV says its mission is ‘to provide and promote an effective system of plant variety protection, with the aim of encouraging the development of new varieties of

plants, for the benefit of society.’

Why then is UPOV the subject of criticism? The main reason is that it promotes a system of intellectual property protection for seeds that many consider unsupportive of today’s food challenges. Amongst these challenges are the need to reduce poverty and improve food security. Another central challenge will be to feed a growing population in a changing climate, including through agricultural innovation. Genetic and biological diversity will be essential to provide a resilient, diverse base from which new plant



Credit: Wikipedia Commons

varieties can be developed to respond to disease or changing soil or climatic conditions.

Currently there are two ways in

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Armed Violence and the Millennium Development Goals *(cont)*

monitoring and measurement of armed violence, integration of efforts to combat armed violence into development plans at all levels of government and recognition of victims' rights are key elements. The declaration text, list of endorsers, national statements and four very practical background papers are available at the official conference site: www.osloconferencearmedviolence.no

The coming of the Oslo Commitments conference brought many signs of increased recognition by civil society organizations of armed violence and development linkages. QUNO's own involvement in this has been substantial.

“Armed violence and development are closely linked. An environment of fear and insecurity can undermine human, social and economic development. At the same time, persistent inequality and a lack of development are among the underlying causes of armed violence. We are convinced that development efforts that address the risk factors for armed violence can help to prevent and reduce its incidence and enhance the prospects for development. From “The Oslo Commitments on Armed Violence: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals”

QUNO will be participating in and reporting on developments as they occur in the coming months.

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“Faces of Violence”, a short film (9 minutes) prepared for the “Oslo Commitments” conference is now available for general viewing. This film captures vividly and forcefully the importance of armed violence reduction initiatives to the achievement of the MDGs.

It can be found on:
www.vimeo.com/conspiraconcept

UPOV, Intellectual Property and Food *(cont)*

which farmers access seeds: through informal, traditional systems where seeds are saved from one year to the next and exchanged locally, and the commercial system in which industrially-bred seeds certified by public authorities are sold to farmers or provided by subsidized schemes. The majority of the world's farmers still depend on informal systems, but the commercial system risks crowding these out. A key reason is that the protection of intellectual property (IP) rights are strengthening commercial seed systems and contributing to corporate concentration, which in turn gives private companies the power to shape what seeds are available and on what conditions. Commercial seeds can be costly. In addition, they often require chemical inputs, making it harder for subsistence farmers that buy such seeds to eke out a livelihood. Farming by its nature is site-specific. Being produced industrially, commercial seeds are often not

suited to local conditions. Moreover, commercial seed systems are contributing to reduced diversity of seeds available. Private companies need to make profits, so they tend to only focus on a handful of potentially lucrative seed varieties, to the detriment of diversity, and with little concern for the needs of the world's poorest farmers. As with medicines, a crucial issue is whether and how intellectual property (IP) protection can help promote research and innovation relevant to the needs of developing countries and poor people. Whilst some say that IP is essential for innovation, others dispute this. Even voices from within the seed industry are increasingly saying that increased IP protection is not encouraging – and may even be hindering – innovation. UPOV itself has recognized that IP protection will encourage development of new plant varieties where there is commercial viability, but in cases where there is no commercial market, an IP system

should not be expected to encourage development of new varieties. Besides, we must remember that farmers have been developing new plant varieties for millennia – well before the advent of IP regimes! Whilst there is space for the commercial seed system to exist alongside informal seed systems, we must ensure that it doesn't crowd out traditional systems. This is important for small-scale farmers' ability to derive a livelihood from farming, as well as for all of us – whose survival in the future will increasingly depend on maintaining biological and genetic diversity. UPOV is only one piece in a larger puzzle of global trends towards stricter IP protection, but it is one place where the debate about how to ensure a balanced co-existence between traditional and commercial systems could take place.



NPT Review Conference Concludes on Positive Note

The month-long Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) conference to review progress on disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons ended with agreement to move forward in a number of areas. QUNO followed proceedings.

A breakthrough came when states agreed to convene a conference in 2012 aimed at achieving a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, with the hope that it will be attended by all states in the region. Arab states and the Non-Aligned Movement of more than 100 countries, led by Egypt, had made it clear that progress on this issue was essential for a successful conference.

In the area of disarmament, the five officially recognised nuclear weapons states – Britain, China, France, Russia, the US - agreed “to undertake further efforts to reduce and ultimately eliminate all types of nuclear weapons,” but they succeeded in removing references to a timetable for doing this.

The outcome document also included calls to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty banning all nuclear explosions, and to begin negotiating a treaty to ban the production of the fissile material used in nuclear weapons.

After the last meeting in 2005 collapsed without any substantive agreements, the ability of the 189 state parties to the Treaty to reach consensus on a



compromise 28-page outcome document meant that this year’s conference was widely seen as a success. As well as observing the negotiations, QUNO hosted a packed reception for global peace organizations at Quaker House, that included a number of Friends from as far away as New Zealand.

This article and photo were contributed by Joe Thwaites, QUNO, New York

A longer version appeared in The Friend, 11 June 2010

New UN Ruling on Conscientious Objection to Military Service

The position of conscientious objectors to military service has been reinforced by a unanimous decision of the Human Rights Committee.

In April, the Committee issued its second decision on individual complaints under the First Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights confirming that conscientious objection to military service is protected under the Article 18 of the Covenant. Three years ago, in a landmark decision, the Committee ruled for the first time that conscientious objection is a protected manifestation of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. On that occasion two Committee members dissented.

An important feature of the current

case, *Eu-min Jung et al v Republic of Korea* (Communications Nos. 1593 to 1603/2007), is that the conscientious objectors included a Buddhist, a Catholic and a number of non-religious objectors. (The first case, *Yoon and Choi v Republic of Korea*, concerned two Jehovah’s Witnesses). In its ruling, the Committee made no distinction between the different beliefs on which the objection was based. This is consistent with the Committee’s long-standing interpretation requiring no discrimination in relation to the religion or belief on which conscientious objection is based. Although the decisions on individual cases apply directly only to the State against which the complaint was lodged, they have broader application as they demonstrate the scope of Covenant

protection. Currently, 165 States are parties to the Covenant, including all the States who are also parties to the European Convention on Human Rights. This is significant, since the Grand Chamber of the European Human Rights Court has agreed to consider the case of *Bayatyan v Armenia* in which a Chamber of the Court had held that conscientious objection to military service was not protection under the European Convention’s provisions which are virtually identical to those of the Covenant. It is to be hoped that the Grand Chamber will take note of the interpretation by the Human Rights Committee.



Staff News

In April **Rachel Brett** and **Holly Mason-White** travelled to Salvador, Brazil to participate in the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Crime Congress. During the week-long conference the Human Rights and Refugees programme hosted a

well-received ancillary meeting on children of prisoners, participated in a panel on the draft Supplementary Rules on the Treatment of Women Prisoners, and presented an oral statement on children of prisoners at one of the major workshops held during the Congress.

David Atwood attended the UN Habitat “World Urban Forum” in Rio de Janeiro in March, where QUNO co-organized with UNDP and the Geneva Declaration Secretariat a workshop on “Urban Violence Reduction: From Local to Global.” The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, where QUNO is a founding member, has organized a number of events in recent months as a part of the review of the UN Peacebuilding Commission. David Atwood was a keynote speaker at Netherlands Yearly Meeting in May, where he spoke on the theme “How can we as (a)

small people influence big world problems?” (copies available from David on datwood@quno.ch). **Tom Richardson** and **David Atwood** attended the 4th Biennial Meeting of States on small arms and light weapons in New York, 14 – 18 June.

In other staff news, **Oliver Robertson** has been appointed as Programme Officer to work with the Human Rights & Refugee and Global Economic Issues programmes. Oliver has already commenced work on the COPING project, and will join the Geneva office in August.

Lana Robinson joins us for the month of June, coming from studying an undergraduate degree in global studies in Vancouver Island University. She hopes that her time here will enable her to deepen her understanding and appreciation for the ways in which Friends engage the international community.

Update from QUNO New York

A large part of QUNO’s work in New York involves facilitating dialogue and connections between actors on the ground and the UN community. In the past few months we have hosted two delegations from the non-governmental organisation *Conciliation Resources*. Both visits were very successful, providing experts from the London-based organization the opportunity to meet with member states, UN staff and NGOs. They held briefings on increasing public participation in peacebuilding, diplomatic engagement with armed groups, and peacemaking in Somalia, which all met a receptive audience.

Vacancy Announcement: QUNO Geneva Director

Owing to the impending retirement of David Atwood in June 2011, QUNO is recruiting for the position of Director. All information about the post and how to apply is available on the QUNO website www.quno.org and the Britain Yearly Meeting website www.quaker.org.uk.

Recent QUNO Publications

Children of Prisoners, 8 June 2010, oral statement delivered by Rachel Brett to the 14 Session of the Human Rights Council

Children of Prisoners, 14 May 2010, written statement submitted by FWCC for the 14th session of the Human Rights Council

Conscientious Objection to Military Service, 14 May 2010, written statement submitted by FWCC to the 14th session of the Human Rights Council

Children of Prisoners and (Alleged) Offenders: Draft Framework for Decision-Making, Holly Mason-White, Introduction by Rachel Brett, April 2010

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