

# Notes & Resources

## UN REFORM AGENDA

*At a time of global crisis, in a world where borders are no longer significant barriers against common threats, to what end does the US administration see fit to leave the UN financially bankrupt?*

*It is time for serious discussion in Congress on the role of the UN... So let's get real about this institution ...*

*Funding the institution will not solve every problem, but sending a message that we have confidence in the process of reform would go a long way to begin a healing of the rift that has divided the US from the world at a dangerous time in our history.*

- **Johanna Mendelson Forman**, Senior Associate at CSIS and co-chair of the Real Security Program of the White House Project, speaking to the UNA of the National Capital Area, 9 June 2006

*I think it is possible to reform the UN particularly in the development area.*

*But it is a very long way to an egalitarian and transparent system because the permanent members will continue to wield power.*

- **Nafis Sadik**, a member of the UN high-level panel on threats and challenges, former executive director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

**David Birenbaum**, former US Ambassador to the United Nations for Management and Reform, has completed a study that reviews the results of the reform agenda launched in 2003 by then Secretary-General Kofi Annan. *UN Reform: Progress, Prospects and Priorities* finds that the results so far have not met Annan's goals but are "more impressive" when viewed in relation to previous reform efforts. Birenbaum, a member of UNA-USA's National Council and a Senior Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, concludes that "there is no mistaking the need for much more reform". His report draws on a series of programs co-sponsored by the Wilson Center and the United Nations Association of the National Capital Area. It can be downloaded at [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/UN%20Reform\\_Birenbaum2.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/UN%20Reform_Birenbaum2.pdf).



Last November, Kofi Annan's high-level UN reform panel endorsed a suggestion by **Stephen Lewis**, then the UN special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, to merge UNIFEM (the UN Development Fund for Women), the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues into creation of a well-funded influential agency that focuses solely on women. The three existing UN entities are to be "consolidated into one enhanced and independent gender entity" that would have a stronger role in establishing principles for women's rights and equality and would be "fully and ambitiously funded", with an undersecretary-general at its head. "This is the most dramatic step forward in decades for women," said Lewis. "... It holds the prospect of transforming the lives of women, removing the worst pov-

erty and oppression, [and] saving lives in the midst of the AIDS pandemic and other massive health problems."

**Noeleen Heyzer**, then executive director of UNIFEM, said of the plan: "We strongly hope that Member States will show their commitment to a strengthened operational presence and make the necessary resources available."

The panel's recommendations on women "were the result of a year-long lobbying process by more than 90 international advocacy groups," reported Olivia Ward in the *Toronto Star* (10 November 2006). Mr Lewis has told the *Star* (1 & 9 July 2006) that the idea is "to whip the UN family into shape, to bring substance and know-how to the business of gender mainstreaming, to involve women in every facet of life from development and trade to culture to peace and security, to lobby vociferously and indefatigably for every aspect of gender equality. ... I am completely consumed by this. For 20 years I've felt that the rights and needs of women in the UN system were largely unattended. They make up more than half of the world's population but efforts to address their problems have been a travesty."

On International Women's Day this year, **Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon** urged the UN to approve the proposed new body that "should be able to call on all of the UN system's resources in the work to empower women and realize gender equality worldwide. It should mobilize forces of change at the global level and inspire enhanced results at the country level" (Reuters, 8 March 2007). Mr Ban also suggested that the General Assembly discuss the problem of violence against women and girls once a year and that the Security Council establish formal monitoring of that violence.



## MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL #5

**UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid** constantly reminds everyone that "there can be no safe future without safe motherhood. ... Maternal health can be improved through strengthened

political commitment and the dedication of increased resources. Life or death is a political decision.” The United Kingdom responded in mid-October with a pledge of £100 million to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to achieve universal access to reproductive health so that maternal deaths and unwanted pregnancies can be reduced worldwide.



## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**Ban Ki-moon** on International Women’s Day 2007: “Most societies proscribe violence [against women & girls] — yet the reality is that too often, it is tolerated under the fallacious cover of cultural practices and norms, within the walls of the home. Or it is used as a weapon in armed conflict, condoned through tacit silence and passivity by the state and the law enforcement community.”



On 23 October 2007, when the Ghanaian Presidency of the **Security Council** convened another open debate on Women, Peace and Security, briefings were delivered by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Mr Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; Ms Rachel Mayanja, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women; Ms Joanne Sandler, Ad Interim Executive Director of UNIFEM; and Ms Gina Torry, Coordinator of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security.

In the Security Council discussion of pervasive violence against women during armed conflicts — in some situations, “systematic” at “appalling levels of atrocity” — the Secretary-General warned that violence against women also has reached “hideous and pandemic proportions” in some countries trying to recover from conflict. At the end of the day-long open meeting, the Council’s statement stressed “the need to end impunity for such acts as part of a comprehensive approach to seeking peace, justice, truth and national reconciliation”. Mr Ban urged, “Together, all of us need to strengthen our collective and individual response . . . This is essen-

tial if we are to reverse the damage done by conflict, and to build more inclusive, accountable and cohesive societies, underpinned by viable democratic institutions.”

**Assistant Secretary-General Rachel Mayanja** urged all governments, parliaments, international organizations and civic groups to join a worldwide campaign on violence against women and girls that Ban will launch later this year. “Impunity for perpetrators and insufficient response to the needs of survivors are morally reprehensible and unacceptable,” she said. “Sexual violence in conflict, particularly rape, should be named for what it is: not a private act or the unfortunate misbehavior of a renegade soldier, but aggression, torture, war crime and genocide.”



## VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Last October, the UN presented in grim detail its first global study of violence against children. Its author, **Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro**, told BBC News: “This is the moment to recognise children as being protected by rights, as full citizens, and not as mini-human beings or the property of their families.” The UN has recommended that every nation should now have a national strategy to prevent violence against children.

*A Long Way Gone* is **Ishmael Beah’s** eloquent memoir of his experiences as a child soldier in Sierra Leone.



## QUESTIONS OF JUSTICE

*Claiming Rights, Claiming Justice: A Guidebook on Women Human Rights Defenders*, from the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development <[www.apwld.org](http://www.apwld.org)>, aims to “help women human rights defenders name the specific risks, violations and constraints they face in their work. It presents a practical discussion of the useful mechanisms developed by the state and also the civil society to provide redress and remedy, and to protect women human rights defenders. It is intended to be used by organisations

to further a gender perspective in the monitoring and documentation of human rights.” The guidebook was produced by APWLD in collaboration with individuals and organizations that have participated in the international campaign on women human rights defenders since 2005.



**UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour** has distinct views on the vexing debate about peace and justice allegedly interfering with each other as priorities. In a *Le Monde* interview by Natalie Nougayrède (7 February 2007, translated for Truthout by Leslie Thatcher), she was asked, in relation to Afghanistan, “Must we not surrender the immediate imperative of justice in the interest of a return to peace?” She replied: “Certainly not by granting amnesty. An amnesty is permanent; you can’t go back on it to revisit the past. It allows people who have committed atrocities to keep power. At a minimum, safeguarding a space for justice requires that no amnesty be granted. Ideally, legal mechanisms centered on justice should be launched immediately. However, if people worry that this might imperil international personnel on the ground or reconciliation processes, I would say: don’t move too quickly, but don’t pardon anything before the facts have been established.

“Within the UN system, we often have that debate about the sequence of priorities. Some say: peace, first; justice afterwards. I’ve never heard anyone say: justice first, peace later. To subjugate justice to political processes is to compromise it. When we begin to say that ‘justice must come into play at the right time’, we are, by definition, manipulating it.

“We’ve never really tried justice first. We tried a little bit in the Balkans: the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was established before the Dayton accords. Would the situation that resulted from that peace agreement have been better or worse without the legal effort? We’ll need twenty-five years before we can bring a calm historic perspective to that question.”

Concerning situations such as Afghanistan, Nepal and Sudan, she warned about

mixing political speculation about possible outcomes with decision-making in the legal sector, which “has its own demands, its own constraints”.

When Ms Nougayrède persisted, asking, “Couldn’t the price for peace in Darfur be to defer charges against Sudanese officials?”, Ms Arbour responded: “All that is highly speculative. When I charged Milosevic, the majority of NATO opinions held that a bill of indictment would be catastrophic, that Milosevic was going to dig in. As for me, I decided that I would bring charges at the time that was legally appropriate. Eight days later, the conflict was over. I don’t want to suggest that the indictment put an end to the conflict, but one must not assume the consequences of a legal gesture, especially when it is a gesture that has its own integrity. The law has its reasons that political reasoning is unacquainted with.”

*Le Monde*: “You are suggesting that indictments could facilitate a settlement of the Darfur crisis ...”

Arbour: “No. I would not speculate one way or the other. To bring charges of genocide, of crimes against humanity, is a very serious gesture that has significant consequences for the victims, for the accused, and for the international environment. I have become the advocate of this extreme position because no one else is. Everyone else talks about compromise, but I think we must dissociate the different agendas. Besides, let’s be frank: this political agenda in the Sudan has not produced fabulous results. What is it, this political agenda, to tell us to go easy with justice and the law?”

Just as peace and justice must be pursued simultaneously, a variety of justice systems may operate in a complementary manner. While it is important not to expect that the ICC and ad hoc or hybrid international tribunals can be the whole solution, it also is important not to over-romanticize or over-extend the capacities of local traditional methods such as Rwanda’s restored gacaca, based on reconciliation, where reduced sentences, including community service, are offered to

those who confess and are forgiven. This may be less threatening to witnesses in some circumstances, or it may put them in greater danger of reprisals, recent studies have shown. And for victims of enforced child soldiering or of rape, living with the gacaca results can be terrifying. According to Binaifer Nowrojee, director of the Open Society Initiative for East Africa, traditional justice mechanisms do not treat rape as a serious crime, nor do they include women in the process as judges.

See “**International Justice failing Rape Victims**”, a study by the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (5 January 2007).



Eric Stover’s *The Witnesses: War Crimes and the Promise of Justice in The Hague* (University of Pennsylvania Press), received the 2005 Best Book in Human Rights Award from the American Political Science Association. According to the APSA citation: “Eric Stover’s study constitutes an important contribution to the growing literature on international justice and accountability. Written by a scholar with considerable field experience, *The Witnesses* examines a relatively neglected area of the international judicial process: the role of victims and witnesses who have testified before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Drawing vividly on their testimony, Stover adeptly reveals a hidden side of international tribunals. *The Witnesses* also challenges conventional wisdom about truth-telling and justice, suggesting that politics always mediates this complex relationship. In addition, the book raises many other critical issues, in particular questions relating to the rights and entitlements of witnesses, as well as to the nature and extent of the obligations of international and hybrid tribunals towards them. In his concluding remarks, the author offers a series of sensible suggestions on ways to ensure that the needs of prosecution and defense witnesses, before these tribunals, are better met. This is a timely and provocative book, a prime example of how analytically informed human rights scholarship can capture the humanity of its subjects, while being attentive to power considerations.”

“In conflict, there is a nature of permissiveness where combatants are allowed to do what they want,” says **Binaifer Nowrojee** of Harvard Law School.

“Sexual violence is part and parcel of conflict ... a way to terrorise communities and implement a political tactic.”

“The culture of neglect and denial [about violence against women] exists everywhere,” says **UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres**, and “refugee populations are in the front line of those difficulties,” he told staff in Geneva last year. “The key question, at the level of the UN system, at the level of an organization, at the level of the refugee camp, is the empowerment of women, and that must be one of the central objectives of a modern, democratic system and a tolerant society.”

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## JUSTICE WITHOUT BORDERS

Produced by AIUSA and award-winning Skylight Pictures, "Justice Without Borders" explores the current landscape of international justice through the stories of survivors and the legal cases they are pursuing in Peru, Chile, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, The Hague, Guatemala, and Spain. For more information and to sign up to host a film screening visit [amnestyusa.org/international\\_justice](http://amnestyusa.org/international_justice).

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## POVERTY

In conjunction with the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October), four International Women's Tribunals on Poverty — at the United Nations in New York, in Cairo, Egypt, Lima, Peru, and in Delhi, India — presented testimony on worsening conditions of women worldwide and discussed strategies to tackle the causes. On the Day itself, more than 720 events of various kinds — ranging from "rallies and concerts to gatherings in school assemblies, town halls, and refugee camps", according to the IPS — took place in over 100 countries. "The Economist [magazine] estimates that over the past decade, women's work worldwide has done even more to fuel the global economy than has the stunning growth of China," said Joanne Sandler, UNIFEM's acting executive director. "We know what is possible when women are recognised as agents of change," she said. "To realise this vision we must remove obstacles such as discriminatory ownership and inheritance laws to help women embark on asset building."

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## 2006-07 UNIFEM ANNUAL REPORT

The Annual Report documents UNIFEM's work to strengthen women's economic security, eliminate violence against women, reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS among women, and achieve gender equality in democratic governance. The report also commemorates the 10th anniversary of the UNIFEM-managed UN Trust Fund

to End Violence against Women with examples that highlight the achievements of grantees over the past decade.

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*Toward a Compassionate Society* (edited by Mahnaz Afkhami and including work by Elise Boulding, Charlotte Bunch, Mahbub ul Haq, Uma Narayan, Arati Rao, Aruna Rao, Arvind Sharma) is an anthology "focusing on women's roles in conflict resolution, peace building, and democracy in a culturally and politically diverse world". It emphasizes "the importance of cultural pluralism and women's role in promoting peace in the rapidly globalizing world of the 21st century. The issues are examined from a variety of gender-focused cultural and inter-disciplinary perspectives including sociology, anthropology, human rights, philosophy, and religion." Isabella Waterschoot, Gender Advisor for Knowledge Management, UNDP, says: "As a gender specialist working within the UN system, for the first time in my life I have found a book that elaborates on peace with a gender perspective. *Toward a Compassionate Society* strengthened my conviction that women are agents of change." The book may be ordered from the Women's Learning Partnership [www.learningpartnership.org/publications](http://www.learningpartnership.org/publications).

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## CLIMATE CHANGE

June Zeitlin, executive director of the New York-based Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO) told IPS' Thalif Dean that gender perspective was mostly missing in the UN climate change debate in early August, even though women & children are more likely than men to die during disasters, partly because women are the majority of the world's poor, largely responsible for securing food, water and energy. Noting that women always have been leaders in community revitalisation and natural resource management, Ms Zeitlin said: "Yet women are so often barred from the public sphere and thus absent from local, national and international decision-making related to natural disasters and adaptation."

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## FAO REPORT - ENERGY & GENDER

Meanwhile, a Food & Agriculture Organization report on "Energy and Gender" acknowledged that women have been nearly absent in decision-making processes, and their roles in environmental management often are overlooked. "There has been little reference to gender in the international climate change discussions," the study said.

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## UNEP ENVIRONMENTAL OUTLOOK

When the UN Environment Program issued its latest Environmental Outlook, on 25 October 2007, its executive director, Achim Steiner, told the *International Herald Tribune* that "the human population is now so large that the amount of resources needed to sustain it exceeds what is available at current consumption patterns". The report states that many of the problems identified by the Brundtland Commission two decades ago are even more acute now. (Among the gloomy predictions: a global collapse of all species being fished by 2050, if fishing around the world continued at its present pace.) Mr Steiner is calling for "an accelerated effort on a far wider range of environmental issues to build the same sense of urgency as shown on climate change over the past year to address the worsening situations of biodiversity, land degradation, fisheries and freshwater" (IHT, 25 October 2007).

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## WATER WEBSITE

The United States National Academy of Sciences and the Global Health and Education Foundation — along with academies of science, engineering, and medicine worldwide — are offering a new Web resource [www.drinking-water.org](http://www.drinking-water.org) to "provide international decision-makers with peer-reviewed scientific and technical information about the options available to enhance the safety and availability of drinking water supplies around the world".

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## UNESCO HYDROLOGY

For more information about the UNESCO urban water management symposium held in Paris in September 2007, organized by the agency's International Hydrological Programme, visit <[www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)>. The International Hydrological Programme is "designed to help countries improve their knowledge of the water cycle so they can better manage and develop their water resources and protect the environment".

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## HYDROPOLITICS & CLIMATE

*Minerva* contributor **Elizabeth Burleson** doesn't just write about rivers ("Equitable and Responsible Use of Water Within the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin", *Environmental Law Review* and *Minerva* #28, February 2005); she recently swam across the Missouri River (about 4 miles in roughly 3 1/2 hours) to establish a public interest grant for students at the University of South Dakota, where she teaches environmental law and property law. After representing UNICEF at the Bali climate conference, she is heading to China to teach international environmental law. Her recent publications — accessible at <[www.elizabethburleson.com/Publications.html](http://www.elizabethburleson.com/Publications.html)> include:

"Middle Eastern and North African Hydropolitics: From Eddies of Indecision to Emerging International Law," 18 *Georgetown International Environmental Law Review* 385 (2006);

"Tribal, State, and Federal Cooperation to Achieve Good Governance," 40 *Akron Law Review* 207 (2007);

"Multilateral Climate Change Mitigation," 41 *University of San Francisco Law Review* 373 (2007).

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## PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Despite the grim reports issued by the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that he chairs, **Rajendra Pachauri** reportedly is optimistic that improvements can be

made, even just with already available technologies. At an 18 October press conference in Japan, he added that, although the United States may seem hesitant to adopt aggressive environmental policies, many American communities and companies are implementing sound environmental policies. "I think all of this in a federal structure, in a democracy, will definitely influence the position of the federal government," he said.

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## AFRICAN FEDERAL UNION?

Almost half a century ago, the first president of independent Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, pleaded for a pan-African government: "The emergence of such a mighty stabilizing force in this strife-torn world should be regarded ... not as a shadowy dream of a visionary, but as a practical proposition which the peoples of Africa can and should translate into reality. ... We must act now. Tomorrow may be too late."

Now the unity project is back, reports London-based independent journalist **Gwynne Dyer** (*Bangor Daily News*, Maine, 10 July 2007), although "there is no shortage of Africans who argue that it is merely a distraction from urgent and concrete problems such as Darfur and Zimbabwe. Maybe they are right, but what if those crises are just symptoms of a deeper African problem?"

It seldom is remembered, comments Dyer, that "[a]t the time most African countries gained their independence in the 1960s, they had higher average incomes and better public services than most Asian countries. Kenyans lived better than Malaysians; people in the Ivory Coast were richer than South Koreans; Zimbabweans were healthier, longer-lived and better-educated than Chinese. And there were more and worse wars in Asia, than in Africa. Now it's all dramatically the other way round, but why? Individual Africans are no less intelligent, hardworking or ambitious than individual Asians, so the answer must lie in the system. And the most striking characteristic of that system is the sheer number of independent states

within Africa: 53 of them, in a continent that has fewer people than either India or China."

Dyer argues that it's pointless to keep complaining about arbitrary borders drawn by old colonial powers, when "at least half of the 53 African countries have greater ethnic diversity within their borders than all of China. It is not possible to draw rational borders for Africa that give each ethnic group its own homeland. Even if you refused that privilege to groups of less than half a million people, you'd end up with more than 200 countries. So the old Organization of African Unity decreed that the colonial borders must remain untouchable, because the only alternative seemed to be several generations of separatist ethnic wars."

Many such wars have happened anyway, obviously, while many other African countries, to avoid that fate, became tyrannies ruled by someone from one of the dominant ethnic groups. "There are more than 200 ethnic groups in Africa that have over half a million people, and NONE (except the Arabs of North Africa) that amount to even 5 percent of the continent's population. ... [M]aybe the national state (or, rather, the pseudo-national state) is not the answer there," concludes Dyer.

"The African federalists imagine a solution that jumps right over that problem: a single African Union modeled on the European Union, but where no ethnic group is even 5 percent of the population. Then politics stops being a zero-sum ethnic competition (at least in theory) and starts being about the general welfare. And also, in theory, the continent starts to fulfill its potential. We will all be a good deal older before the [new] African Union, or whatever it will eventually be called, becomes more than a dream, but in the end it may. As Alpha Oumar Konare, former president of Mali and head of the African Union, said at the start of the [July 2007 AU] summit: 'The battle for the United States of Africa is the only one worth fighting for this generation — the only one that can provide the answers to the thousand-and-one problems faced by the populations of Africa.'"

## ~ EUROPEAN UNION

The revised constitutional treaty, now cautiously referred to as the “draft treaty amending the TEU and the EC Treaty”, resulting from the IGC established in July of this year, is now available ([www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3\\_fo/showPage.asp?id=1317&lang=en&mode=g](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?id=1317&lang=en&mode=g)). The EU Presidency submitted it to the Member States on 15 October and the draft treaty was featured as the main point on the agenda of the Summit meeting in Lisbon three days later. Amnesty International and others had expressed concerns about the draft, particularly regarding the protocol (and declarations) on opt outs for the UK and Poland from the Charter of Fundamental Rights at a time when it finally seems that the Charter will be afforded legal status.

In a 16 October open letter sent to European leaders, AI disagreed with the opt-outs:

“Ahead of the informal European Council due to settle the new reform treaty, Amnesty International appeals to Heads of State and Government to prevent the creation of double standards in the area of fundamental rights.

“In practice, any ‘opt-outs’ of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights would create inequality in Europe, with some countries offering less protection than others. This would undermine the notion of European citizenship as enshrined in the EU treaties, and puts in question how genuine the EU’s commitment to human rights really is.

“The protection and promotion of human rights are part of the founding principles of the EU. As such, allowing any exception in this domain is not only inconsistent but it undermines the very basis of a union of values.

“To the outside world, it sends a poor signal of the importance the EU attributes to human rights. By accepting different standards in this area the EU would seriously compromise its credibility and undermine the effectiveness of its human rights policy as a whole.

“At a time when Europe’s leaders have yet to provide an answer to the

cases of kidnappings, torture and enforced disappearances that occurred with European complicity as a result of CIA illegal activities, the discussion should be about how the EU can collectively reinforce human rights protection – and not about Member States trying to circumvent their obligations.

“At the moment when the EU Charter is to gain legal status, Amnesty International calls on the Heads of State and Government not to jeopardise progress achieved since the solemn proclamation made in 2000 in Nice by accepting opt-outs from what they have collectively declared to be the fundamental rights of the European Union.”

On 22 October, after the Civil Platform (PO) won the general elections in Poland, party vice-chair Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, president of the European Parliament’s foreign affairs committee, said that the new government will opt out of all the derogations from the Charter of Fundamental Rights negotiated by outgoing Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski. His press release stated: “The new Polish government will ratify the EU Reform Treaty as soon as possible, including the provisions regarding the Charter of Fundamental Rights.” This would leave the United Kingdom as the only EU member state where the treaty would not apply fully. Prime Minister Gordon Brown reportedly is under considerable pressure from the opposition and within his own party regarding various aspects of the treaty and whether or not there will be a referendum on it. Mr Brown argues that the referendum promised earlier (on the defunct EU Constitution) is no longer necessary as the new treaty introduces “no fundamental change” to the UK and “because at every point we have safeguarded the British national interest”, so “detailed parliamentary debate will be sufficient”. The ratification vote is expected in Parliament in April or May 2008 ([www.euractiv.com/en/future-eu](http://www.euractiv.com/en/future-eu)).

Complaining that “after three years of reflection, nothing new has been introduced”, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, the former chairman of the European Convention that drafted the earlier Constitutional

Treaty reacted promptly to the Lisbon decision, welcoming agreement but regretting the loss of continental political union as an objective. “That the heads of state and government have agreed on the text is, clearly, a good thing,” he said. “If the text is ultimately ratified, we will be able to get back to the subject after the hiatus caused by the ‘no’ votes in the referendums in France and the Netherlands.” But, while “the proposed tools remain intact” and “the European Union will be able to work better”, the treaty text is “a step backwards, giving up the constitutional notion contained in the Laeken Declaration and the European symbols ... which citizens had taken on board”. He commented that “the changes are of greater advantage to Great Britain, which will have a very particular status: it has opted out of monetary union; it does not apply the Schengen Agreement; like Ireland and Poland, it is not constrained by the Charter of Fundamental Rights; and it can pick and choose in certain legal areas.”

## ~ ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT

In a March 2007 the Women’s Learning Partnership interviewed **Ms Amat Al Al-eem Ali Alsoswa**, director of the UN Development Program’s Regional Bureau for Arab States. Educated in Cairo and Washington DC, Ms Alsoswa is Yemen’s former Minister for Human Rights and former ambassador of Yemen to Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands. She directs 500 UNDP staff covering the 17 country offices in the Arab Region, as well as the country office representing the Palestinian territories. Responding to questions about system failure in “attempts to advance women’s issues”, she says:

“The latest Arab Human Development Report takes on board the realization that Arab women have indeed taken great strides over the last few decades, and yet more effort is needed for the comprehensive and full realization of their rights and human development simultaneously. Arab women have a legacy of achievements ... that should not be forgotten even when

noting important remaining challenges .... The Report contends that even against immense odds, women remain catalysts for reform in Arab countries” and in the Arab Diaspora, which “today includes women who have reached key decision-making posts in important political, economic and cultural institutions around the world.... [T]he women in the Diaspora are evolving agents of change and the stronger their contributions and imprint, the larger the probability of constructive engagement between the countries they live in today, and the countries they (or their families) originated from.”

Noting the Report’s outline of varied legal, economic, and cultural obstacles to the advancement of women, Ms Alsoswa recommends to Arab governments that “in line with the calls in previous Reports for comprehensive, rights-based societal reforms, the rise of Arab women entails:

- Total respect for the rights of citizenship of all Arab women;
- The protection of women’s rights in the area of personal status and family relations;
- Guarantees of total respect for women’s personal rights and freedoms, especially life-long protection from physical and mental abuse; and
- The temporary adoption of the principle of affirmative action in expanding the participation of Arab women to all fields of human activity according to the particular circumstances of each society.”

She avows that security requires confronting reductions in women’s personal liberties by “inculcating an understanding that violence against women in all forms is a degradation of their humanity. It extends to the enactment of laws that criminalize violence against women and the provision by states and civil society of safe sanctuaries for women victims of violence”.

At the regional level, “clearly, ending the conflicts and ensuring that women are included in the negotiations processes and their specific needs and interests secured in post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation, in line with relevant international treaties and norms, are all equally important considerations.”

Ms Alsoswa observes that deficits in women’s empowerment in Arab countries, as in many other parts of the world, are not so much about religion as religious culture — “not based on scripture per se but actually based much more on customs and traditions which are zealously guarded by certain male authorities, and which ingrains and perpetuates a discriminatory perspective and treatment of women”.

For the Arab world, the Human Development Report’s recommendations include:

- “Affording girls and women full opportunities to acquire essential capabilities in health and knowledge on an equal footing with boys and men” — particularly “in the area of education, [with] the pivotal importance of reform in Arab education systems guarantee[ing] opportunities for girls to acquire knowledge and to utilise it, within and outside the family”;

- “Enabling girls and women to participate in all types of human activity outside the family on an equal footing with their male counterparts”;

- Recognizing “the appropriate social value of women’s role in the family as an indispensable contribution to the establishment of a sound social structure capable of supporting a project for the renaissance of the Arab world”.

And the Report calls attention to the “need for specialised scholars to revive the interpretive traditions in the true spirit of Islam”.

### WOMEN’S ISLAMIC INITIATIVE IN SPIRITUALITY & EQUALITY

Last November, 120 Muslim delegates from 25 countries met (in New York, to the chagrin of some) to lay the groundwork for a controversial first international advisory council for women, intending to ensure that other interpretive perspectives on Islamic law are heard in deliberations. Council members are to be well-versed in Islamic law of diverse schools, and there are plans to provide scholarships for more women to pursue advanced training around the world- in order to broaden the qualified pool. “Women’s rights often get debated in the press or they get debated

among scholars who are not women,” said **Daisy Khan**, executive director of the American Society for Muslim Advancement. “We feel there are many Muslim women who are coming of age who have the scholarly background to be able to speak authoritatively about it” (BBC News, 19 November 2006). “Islam is a religion of law, and it is important to express the principles of social justice within the framework of Islamic law” (*Christian Science Monitor*, 21 November 2006). **Kecia Ali**, assistant professor of religion at Boston University, was quoted by the CSM as observing that, although many Muslims — particularly, but not exclusively, women — feel that Islamic jurists are out of touch, the council’s undertaking is “going to be a tremendously challenging task because religious authority, even scholarly authority, has always been contested. It is in matters related to women, marriage, sexuality that Muslim intellectuals on both conservative and modernist sides of the spectrum have chosen to wage their epic battle.”

Professor Kecia Ali and others have advanced study of women’s roles in Islamic law and history, but even more attention to this is being prompted by the recently revealed work of **Mohammad Akram Nadwi**, a Sunni religious scholar at the Oxford Center for Islamic Studies, who has researched a 40-volume biographical dictionary of female hadith scholars — 8,000 of them, dating back 1,400 years (he had expected to find 20 or 30 women neatly fitting into one volume). He is being criticized for this, of course, as London-based journalist Carla Power reports (*New York Times*, 25 February 2007), although his authoritative credentials cannot easily be ignored. He counters that ignorance of history increases cultural insecurity and damages Muslim interests, and he links the erosion of women’s education in recent times to “decline in every aspect of Islam”. He observes, “Our traditions have grown weak, and when people are weak, they grow cautious. When they’re cautious, they don’t give their women freedoms.” Power writes that “[t]o persuade reluctant Muslims to educate their girls, Akram employs a potent debating strat-

egy: he compares the status quo to the age of *al jahiliya*, the Arabic term for the barbaric state of pre-Islamic Arabia. (Osama Bin Laden and Sayyid Qutb, the godfather of modern Islamic extremism, have employed the comparison to very different effect.) Barring Muslim women from education and religious authority, Akram argues, is akin to the pre-Islamic custom of burying girls alive. 'I tell people, "God has given girls qualities and potential",' he says. 'If they aren't allowed to develop them, if they aren't provided with opportunities to study and learn, it's basically a live burial.'"



One strong supporter of the Islamic Advisory Council initiative is **Zainah Anwar**, head of Sisters in Islam (Malaysia). Her regular columns in the *New Straits Times* and elsewhere often deal vividly with cultural/religious issues that were the focus of *Minerva* #30. One of them describes a June 2007 visit to Malaysia by **Karen Armstrong**, whose work was mentioned in that edition. "The religious historian and former nun did give an account on how religion has been implicated in the catastrophes of the 20th and 21st centuries and how the growth of militant piety in all the major religions as a response to the challenge of modernity has led to a distortion of faith," writes Zainah Anwar. "But for me it was her focus on how to find common ground ... through practical compassion ... that made the biggest impact. ... We didn't need Armstrong to come to Malaysia to tell us this, of course. But the standing room-only audience of all religions and races was a telling sign that we wanted to hear a voice of reason, wisdom and compassion that could help us make sense of a world that has become so polarised and unjust, and how we can make religion a source of solutions, rather than a source of problems."

Unfortunately, Zainah Anwar reports having been jolted from her reflections on this theme by the fact that "the second person to ask a question began by giving his salam only to the Muslim brothers in the room". Contrary to his common assumptions, and those of some Christians in the audience, "according to Armstrong, the Crusaders were shocked at how well

women were treated in Muslim lands...". Now Karen Armstrong's books are banned in Malaysia. Zainah Anwar concludes wryly: "Thank God that although one arm of the government, the Internal Security Ministry on the recommendation of Jakim, banned the books, another arm of the government, the Foreign Affairs Ministry, and the Institute for Diplomatic and Foreign Relations saw the wisdom in inviting the author to give a keynote address on 'Bridging the gap between Islam and the West' and a public lecture on religion in the 21st century. These days, we should be grateful for little mercies that confusion brings."



### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMISSION

The International Women's Commission (IWC) is composed of Israeli, Palestinian and international women who came together in July 2005 to work towards a just and sustainable peace based on a two-state solution. It is endeavoring to put into practice Security Council resolution 1325, which calls for increased engagement of women at all levels of decision-making in conflict resolution.



### UN WOMEN

In *Women, Development, and the UN: A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Indiana University Press, 2005, part of the UN Intellectual History Project), Indian economist **Devaki Jain** provides a 60-year history of the international women's movement "as it intersects with the United Nations and development thinking". Jain traces the evolution of the movement through UN conferences and treaties that helped to define it, including the Commission on the Status of Women, the creation of women's funds and agencies, such as UNIFEM, and the influence and growth of global NGO networks.



At her swearing-in as the new UN Deputy Secretary-General on 5 February 2007, former Tanzania Foreign & Development Minister **Asha-Rose Mtengeti-Migiro**

pledged, "In all I do I will strive to bring about a more integrated United Nations, which delivers as one". She expressed full commitment to the Secretary-General's priorities, which include "strengthening the work of the United Nations, enhancing trust between Member States and the Secretariat [and] bolstering the working culture of the Organization to ensure it is equipped to meet the mandates our membership has given us". When her appointment was announced in January, the *New York Times* reported widespread favorable reaction, including remarks by Dumisani S. Kumalo, the South African ambassador: "Women are multitasking people, and African women are even better. Watch out!"



Mr Ban also appointed **Alicia Bárcena Ibarra**, a Mexican diplomat, to be the under secretary general for management, and Haiti-born **Michele Montas**, who has been an information officer in the UN Department of Public Information for the past 12 years, to be his spokesperson.



**Michele Montas**



**Asha-Rose Mtengeti-Migiro**



## ANOTHER ICC WOMAN

A profile of International Criminal Court **Judge Akua Kuenyehi**, a former lecturer in criminal law, gender law and international human rights law at the University of Ghana, is available from the Institute for War & Peace Reporting <[www.iwpr.net](http://www.iwpr.net)>.



## OTHER PERSONS

Author **Anar Ali**, “The Person Behind the Muslim” (*New York Times*, 10 June 2006) expresses frustration that, “[w]hether you want it or not, as a Muslim (secular and otherwise) you are automatically pulled into the debate on terrorism. Not that I don’t want to discuss it, I do. But I want to discuss it as a citizen, not just a Muslim.

“As a Muslim, people expect you to be an expert, to have special inside knowledge on the topic. They want your opinion on the issue, your help in explaining and analyzing complex political issues, the history of Islam, the psychology of suicide bombers.

“I have no sense of what motivates a terrorist (except maybe as a fiction writer, since it’s my job to enter the hearts and minds of characters). Terrorists and radical Islamists live in a different place from me, psychologically and culturally, even if they were raised in Canada just as I was. To better understand these young men and why they turn to violence as a means to an end, it might make more sense to ask someone who was a skinhead, a member of the Irish Republican Army, a Tamil Tiger, or a Weatherman.

“If you asked me, I would have to speculate, as most people do, from the sidelines.”



Speaking before the UN General Assembly’s Social, Humanitarian and Cultural (Third) Committee on 26 October, **Asma Jahangir**, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, said: “The

freedom in pursuing one’s religion or belief must be protected and respected. On the other hand, the rights of individuals have also to be protected from being violated on the premise of religion or belief. No impunity should be awarded when criminal acts which infringe on the human rights of others are given a religious label. At the same time, all governmental actions should be proportionate, abide by the rule of law and respect the applicable international human rights standards.... Wise and balanced decision-making at all governmental levels, as well as non-discriminatory legislation, are crucial for addressing the delicate issues involved. Furthermore, an independent and non-arbitrary judiciary is a prerequisite for safeguarding freedom of religion or belief.”



Currently based at Wellesley College, partly under the auspices of Scholars at Risk, **Mehrangiz Kar** of Iran was arrested in 2000 and convicted the following year on charges of violating Islamic dress codes and being a threat to national security because she advocated for constitutional reforms at a conference in Berlin. An attorney, journalist, and prolific author in Farsi, she recently published her life story in English, *Crossing the Red Line*, in order to “show that even in the hardest situation one could find new ways to criticize the system and challenge the dominant power”.



Highly recommended by several *Minerva* readers: former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights **Mary Robinson’s** collected speeches, several of which have appeared here in the past: *A Voice for Human Rights* <[www.pennpress.org](http://www.pennpress.org)>.



## GLOBAL GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY

Principle Seven of the Global Good Neighbor Policy, initiated by the New Mexico-

based International Relations Center and now (as of June 2007) being promulgated by the Center for International Policy in Washington DC: *A Peaceful and Prosperous Global Neighborhood depends on effective governance at national, regional, and international levels. Effective governance is accountable, transparent, and representative.* FMI: [www.irc-online.org](http://www.irc-online.org).



## FEDERALISM STUDIES

The Centre for Studies on Federalism of the Collegio Carlo Alberto Foundation in Moncalieri (Turin), Italy announced at the end of October a new issue (2/2007) of the *Bibliographical Bulletin on Federalism*, available at <[www.csfederalismo.it](http://www.csfederalismo.it)>. The Bulletin, to be published on-line three times a year, “provides an overview of articles published by roughly 700 of the principal scientific journals on federalism published in English, Italian, French, German and Spanish. ... It is divided into several sections devoted to specific topics related to federalism, such as the theory and practice of federal states; multi-level systems of government and governance; the theory, practice and reform of international organisations; processes of regional integration; federalism as a political idea. The specific policies of federal polities are not considered other than as case studies relevant to institutional and theoretical arguments, strictly related to federal ideas and structures.”

The Centre for Studies on Federalism, under Antonio Padoa Schioppa (President) and Umberto Morelli (Director), was founded in 2000 by the Compagnia di San Paolo and the Universities of Pavia and Turin, recently joined by the University of Milan. Its “principal focus is the promotion and coordination of research, education, information and the circulation of knowledge and documentation in the field of federal studies”.



## MAYA VASE DATABASE

The Maya Vase Database, an Archive of rollout photographs created by Justin Kerr, and a Precolumbian Portfolio are accessible at the website of the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. <[www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org)>.

## INVITATION

Questions posed in the previous edition of *Minerva* — which was centered on the congruence and alleged clash of civilizations and considered some of the varieties of cosmopolitanism and vagaries of culture — were discussed by readers outside and perhaps within the Institute. It is not too late for anyone in either realm to comment a little more formally on those questions — or anything in this edition — in letters to the editor or essay submissions or proposals

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**Citizens for  
Global Solutions**  
WORLD FEDERALIST INSTITUTE

**Aung San Suu Kyi,**  
***Freedom From Fear:***

*It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it. ...*

*At the root of human responsibility is the concept of perfection, the urge to achieve it, the intelligence to find a path towards it, and the will to follow that path if not to the end at least the distance needed to rise above individual limitations and environmental impediments. It is man's vision of a world fit for rational, civilized humanity which leads him to dare and to suffer to build societies free from want and fear. Concepts such as truth, justice and compassion cannot be dismissed as trite when these are often the only bulwarks which stand against ruthless power.*

*We swim, day by day, on a river of delusions,  
and are effectually amused with houses and towns in the air,  
of which the men about us are dupes.  
But life is a sincerity.*

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**  
(1850)



Mayan water birds with skull-faced fish

Rollout photography © Justin Kerr