



COMMITTEE REPORT  
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## NGO COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, NEW YORK

Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations

Date: 17 February 2009  
To: CONGO NY Office  
Attn: Anita Thomas - Anita.Thomas@ngocongo.org  
Re: February 2009 Report for CONGO for Year 2008

### I. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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#### **Chair**

*Bobbi Nassar*  
International Federation of Settlements and  
Neighborhood Centers

Society for the Psychological Study of Social  
Issues

*Aaron Etra*  
International B'nai B'rith

#### **Vice Chair**

*Shula Koenig*  
PDHRE, Peoples' Movement for Human Rights  
Learning

#### **Corresponding Secretary**

*John M. Miller*  
War Resisters International

#### **Recording Secretary**

*Natalie Riccio*  
International Federation of Settlements and  
Neighborhood Centers

#### **Treasurer**

*Bruce Knotts*  
Unitarian-Universalist United Nations Office

#### **Members-at-Large**

*Clarence Dias*  
Council on International and Public Affairs

*Anie Kalayjian*  
Armenian Constitutional Rights-Protective  
Centre-The Republic of Armenia

*Corann Okorodudu*

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## II. CURRENT MEMBERSHIP

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The current number of due-paying members is: 45.

## III. COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES AND SPECIAL PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN IN 2008\*

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### A. *The New Human Rights Dialogue Series*

The idea behind the New Human Rights Dialogue Series was to introduce an ongoing discussion and dialogue on the holistic vision of human rights—the indivisibility, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness of it all. The series was intended to provide a constructive, open forum to examine and debate new issues, new actors, new approaches, new challenges and new opportunities impacting on the realization of our human rights. A collaborative initiative of member states, NGOs, the DPI and the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, the New Human Rights Dialogue Series was a 12-part, monthly series of discussions at the United Nations Headquarters, leading up to the celebration on 10 December 2008 of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Please see *Appendix A* for the “New Human Rights Dialogue Series Calendar”.

### B. *“Preparing for the International Year of Human Rights Learning” Panel Discussion*

On Thursday, December 11, 2008 at the Church Center for the United Nations, UNA-USA’s Council of Organizations, the NGO Committee on Human Rights and the NGO Committee on the Status of Women held a panel discussion, titled “Preparing for the International Year of Human Rights Learning.” Featured speakers were: Shulamith Koenig, Founder and Executive Director of PDHRE, Peoples’ Movement for Human Rights Learning; Bertin Babadoudou, Permanent, First Counselor from the Mission of the Republic of Benin to the UN; and Professor Kathleen Modrowski, Director of North American and European Studies, Long Island University.

From the announcement: “With 2009 having been declared the International Year for Human Rights Learning, what does this mean in practical terms? How was this year determined, and what are expectations for promotion and celebration of this observance? The current draft resolution under consideration by the UN GA would urge member states to develop regional, national, and local programs of action aimed at broad-based and sustained human rights learning at all levels. So how is the US and international community involved in implementation of this resolution? What practical steps can NGOs take to engage on this issue and broaden understanding of human rights? These questions and more will be addressed by our panel of experts at this UNA-USA Council of Organizations monthly *UN Briefing*.”

### C. *A Dialogue: Learning about Human Rights as a Way of Life at the Community Level as an Imperative for Social Development (Took place Year 2009)*

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On Thursday, February 5, 2009, the NGO Committee on Human Rights and the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights co-sponsored a discussion on the learning about human rights as an imperative for social development, in relation to the UN GA resolution 63 L/24/REV1. Panelists included: Bobbi Nassar, Chairperson of the NGO Committee on Human Rights; Danila Boneva, Human Rights Officer; and Shulamith Koenig, PDHRE Peoples' Movement for Human Rights Learning.

#### *D. Subcommittee on Human Rights Learning*

The NGO Committee on Human Rights established a Subcommittee on Human Rights Learning to act as a working group that invites various consultants for ongoing discussions on the meaning of Human Rights Learning as a way of life at the community level. The Subcommittee has met three times over the course of 2008.

\*not inclusive

#### **IV. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR 2009**

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- The Committee will continue to hold monthly meetings, support its working groups, and post relevant information via our listserv.
- The Committee is looking toward future participation during relevant conferences, meetings, etc.
- The Subcommittee on Human Rights Learning is now discussing the implementation of the UN GA Resolution L/24/REV1

#### **V. CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE**

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##### *A. Challenges*

As with other CONGO Committees, the NGO Committee on Human Rights, relies upon the time, effort, and dedication of volunteers—all of whom have other forms of employment. As such, our resources are limited. We request more infrastructural support from CONGO, that would aid in accomplishing operational and ongoing tasks, such as the collection of data regarding our activities, the maintenance of our committee websites, and a template for the creation of committee reports and other necessary documents, submitted on a regular basis.

##### *B. Recommendations*

The Committee has prepared a special recommendation to be made to the CONGO Board, at its next meeting in February 2009. \*Please see *Appendix B* for the formal recommendation.

[This report has been prepared and submitted by Bobbi Nassar, Shulamith Koenig and Geronimo Desumala, on behalf of the NGO Committee on Human Rights.]

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## APPENDIX A

### New Human Rights Dialogue Series Calendar

	Themes	Date	Venue	International Days	Sponsors
1	All of It, for All of Us: Toward an Inclusive Human Rights Agenda	10-Dec-2007	Conference Room 1	Human Rights Day	Switzerland, NGO Committee, OHCHR
2	Digital Dignity: New Media and Human Rights	10-Dec-2007	Conference Room 1	Human Rights Day	DPI, OHCHR
3	Just and Favorable: Decent Work as a Human Right in the Age of Globalization	22-Feb-2008	Conference Room 1	n/a; linked to theme of Commission for Social Development	Chile, NGO Committee, DPI, OHCHR
4	What Would Martin Say? Human Rights and the Struggle against Racism Forty Years after the Death of Martin Luther King, Jr.	26-Mar-2008	Conference Room 1	21 March- Racism; 25 March-Slavery; 27 March-DPI/NGO briefing	Jamaica, NGO Committee, DPI, OHCHR
5	From Manifest Failure to Collective Action: Realizing the Responsibility to Protect	28-Apr-2008	Conference Room 4	7 April-Rwanda Genocide; 60th Anniv. of Genocide Convention	Canada, Rwanda, NGO Committee, DPI, OHCHR
6	The Highest Common Denominator: Human Rights in Peacemaking	29-May-2008	Conference Room 2	29 May- Peacemaking; DPI/NGO briefing	Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, NGO Committee, DPI, OHCHR
7	Fortress or Sand-Castle? Human Rights in the Age of Counter-Terrorism	30-Jul-2008	Conference Room 2	n/a	Mexico, Sweden, NGO Committee, DPI, OHCHR

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8	Reconciliation between States and Indigenous Peoples	8-Aug-2008	Dag Hammarskjold Auditorium	9 August-Indigenous People	Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, NGO Committee on HR, DPI, OHCHR
9	The Human Right to Food and the Global Food Crisis: Root Causes and Responses	29-Aug-2008	Conference Room 2	n/a	Cuba, Malawi, NGO Committee, DPI, OHCHR
10	Knowledge, Power, and Progress: New Approaches to Human Rights Learning	17-Sep-2008	Conference Room 5	21 September-Peace	Benin, Philippines, NGO Committee, DPI, OHCHR
11	The Price of Dignity: Human Rights and Global Economics	22-Oct-2008	Conference Room 3	16 October-World Food Day; 17 October-Poverty; 24 October UN Day	Germany, NGO Committee, DPI, OHCHR
	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>International Days</b>	<b>Sponsors</b>
12	Reclaiming the Vision: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Today	10-Dec-2008	Conference Room 4	9 December-10th Anniv. Of Decl. on HR Defenders; 60th Anniv. Of Genocide Convention; 10 December-Human Rights	NGO Committee, DPI, OHCHR

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## APPENDIX B

### **Recommendation of the NGO Committee on Human Rights to the CONGO Board Re: The Learning about Human Rights as a Way of Life at the Community Level**

The NGO Committee on Human Rights, recognizing the importance of the recent resolution on the International Year of Human Rights Learning (*L/24/REV1*), has decided to focus the year 2009 to discussions, dialogue and outreach about Human Rights Learning as a way of life at the community level. To strengthen this effort, it created a Subcommittee on Human Rights Learning that acts as a working group, that will invite various consultants for ongoing discussions on the meaning of Human Rights Learning as a way of life at the community level, the meaning of human rights as a way of life, and the methods of reaching out to grassroots communities. This accumulated knowledge will be presented at the UN, through the NGO Committee on Human Rights, in collaboration with the OHCHR and all interested governments.

The proposed Declaration for Human Rights Education and Training, which is now under consideration in the Human Rights Council, is one element of a broader commitment of the United Nations system to Human Rights Learning, as in resolution *L/24/REV1*. Human Rights Learning is a process infused by a dialogue at the community level, as relevant to peoples' daily lives, for people to have systemic analysis and critical thinking towards the realization of human rights as a way of life, moving from charity to dignity, to participate as equals in the decisions that determine their lives.

It is imperative that every CONGO member be aware of the content and mission of resolution *L/24/REV1*. Each of these members, whatever their specific objectives and goals are, are human rights issues. When the work they do is understood by themselves, and the people they work with, as human rights issues, it will strengthen their potential and enforce the understanding of the indivisibility, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness of human rights—in short its universality. Human Rights Learning enables people to move beyond charity, and to belong in community in dignity with others.

As an existing network, CONGO has the ability to be the conduit for implementing the resolution. As a conduit CONGO, can utilize its existing communication tools to arouse the consciousness among its more than 600 members all over the world, of the need for all peoples to learn, know, and live human rights. The NGO Committee on Human Rights can help in the provisions of content for such outreach—to be shared among all CONGO members and their constituencies.

The members of CONGO stand to benefit from participating in the implementation process. The universality of human rights encourages the collaboration and coalition building between those addressing the individual needs for societal development—all of which are interconnected, indivisible, and interrelated. The resolution calls for such a network and coalition of civil society groups to develop, share, and implement existing and new ways and means for facilitating—through the media, cultural events, and dialogue within the communities—the learning about human rights at the community level. Beyond the

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call for collaboration, members of CONGO are encouraged to reexamine the human rights framework as related to their work.

We call upon the CONGO Board to adopt the resolution at the next board meeting (February 2009). We invite all members to participate in the ongoing discussion on how to implement the International Year of Human Rights Learning.

Please note: after 20 years in the field, facilitating the development of more than 20 Human Rights Cities, and outreach to more than 60 countries, the network of PDHRE Peoples' Movement for Human Rights Learning (a member of CONGO and the NGO Committee for Human Rights) members could serve as backbone to initiate and oversee the collaborative process. Materials, written and audio visual, prepared and gathered during the years by the PDHRE network, can be used for this purpose as well.

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