

Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation Newsletter

Occasional Newsletter of the JPIC office in Rome

March 1, 2009

Dear JPIC coordinators,

Greetings from Rome. Perhaps you may be interested in some of my activities and experiences I have gone through during the last few months. Let me share some of them with you.

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1. My trips

Since September of 2008 I made two important trips, one to the USA and one to Brazil. Let me share with you some of my impressions.

1. Internship with VIVAT International in New York

From 1 September till 5 December 2008 I was in the USA. The main reason for being there, besides visiting our JPIC activities in our three US provinces, was my Internship with VIVAT International in New York. Since I am much involved in working with VIVAT International here in Rome, I wanted to have a hands-on experience of what VIVAT International is and how it works, what the UN is all about, what is the role of NGOs in its system and also how the Catholic-inspired NGOs at the UN work.

My experience was very enriching. Every morning, during working days I would walk to the VIVAT office and remain there till the late afternoon. In the office my main task was to get acquainted with the dynamics of the VIVAT office work. The Executive Team members, Fr. Felix Jones, SVD and Sr. Zelia Cordeiro dos Santos, SSpS, were my great companions, tutors and colleagues. Besides them there was another intern in the office, Sr. Adria, SSpS from Korea.

Since VIVAT International makes sense only in its connection with the UN, my interest was therefore not only to get to know what the structure of the UN is and how it works, but also to participate in some of the meetings organized by the UN. There were many choices every week at various levels of participation: e.g. informative presentations, brief meetings, workshops, conferences, working groups, etc. Besides that there were also meetings organized by the NGOs and other organizations: for instance, the Church Center, the International Catholic Organization, the Religious at the UN, etc. I took part in many of the meetings, but because of the short time I was supposed to be in New York and the main scope of my internship I really did not intend to become a stable member of any of the regular working groups and their meetings.

What I have learned? VIVAT International is a great work, it certainly has a meaning, it has a chance to be respected and taken seriously by the UN and our grassroots members if it works efficiently. Since it represents more than 20.000 members (together with us SVDs it represents 7 other religious congregations) who as missionaries work with the poorest of the poor it can inform UN decisions with grassroots experiences of the people who need its help most.

2. PANAM Zonal JPIC meeting in Brazil

The meeting was held on 19-23 January 2009 in Alter do Chão, a holiday resort on the Tabajos River about 30 km from Santarém, the seat of our regional of the BRA region.

There were about 25 of us participating in the meeting comprising SVDs, SSpS sisters, and laypeople as well.

Sustainable Development was the main theme of the meeting. It consisted in various presentations, talks, discussions, reports, prayers, celebrations and sharings. Among the talks those that struck our attention most were: "Water cycle", given by an Argentinean medical doctor, "Project Art and Culture for Justice and Peace in Amazonia", given by the lay SVD JPIC collaborators in the Amazonian Region and "Amazonia – A Clash Between Two Worlds" given by a lawyer. He argued that there are two approaches to the Amazonian region practiced today: predatory or eco-social (or environmentally friendly). Unfortunately, the first one is the more prevalent. He is campaigning for the second one. Also VIVAT International had its presentation.

One entire day was reserved for the visit of one of the 72 communities our SVDs to take care of, in Vila Franca, about 30 km (or 1 ½ hour by boat) across the Tabajos River. When we arrived there, we were greeted on the shore by the local people with a musical band. They accompanied us to their community center where they held a program for us: welcome, our self-presentation, explanations about the history of the place and present situation. After the presentations we were offered a good and abundant lunch by the local people. After lunch and siesta the program continued with dancing and cultural shows, especially by the children.

The meeting was well organized; the food was plentiful and very tasty. The place was well chosen. The conditions were simple but exactly the ones we needed to experience. We experienced the great hospitality of our SVD confreres, especially our main host Fr. Joe Boeing, the regional of the BRA region and local people. Besides being together and learning something new, we also had a good opportunity to experience the everyday reality of the Amazonian people.

3. World Social Forum in Belém, Pará, Brazil

The 9th World Social Forum was held in Belém, Pará, Brazil from 27 January to 1 February 2009. Our group, consisting mainly of JPIC coordinators, participating previously in our PANAM JPIC meeting in Santarém stayed in the Franciscan House in the center of the city in very modest but friendly and hospitable conditions.

Having more than 1.5 million of inhabitants, Belém is the capital and the largest city of the state of Pará. Though it had a glorious past, today it is rather dirty and violent, struggling with poverty and lots of social problems. The gap between the rich and the poor is noticeable.

The city is home of two universities UFPA and UFRA (Federal University of Para and Federal Rural University of Amazon). The World Social Forum was held on their immense campuses, located about 10 km from the place where we lived. Over 110.000 people from 4000 social movements and civil society organizations of 150 countries participated in the Forum. During the five-day activity about 2000 workshops, seminars, conferences and meetings were organized.

The Forum started with a grand rally participated by over 80.000 people on January 27th. The rally, a true reflection of Amazonian flare, marched through the major city avenues. It took four hours to cover the distance of about 4 km to reach the city center. Shortly after the introductory ceremony, however, a strong rain started and lasted until the rally ended. The participants comprising of activists, protestors, campaigners, with agendas ranging from land rights for the indigenous people to secure ecological future and social and economic equality were there to express their desire for a new world free of exploitation. In fact the motto of the WSF was: *Another world is possible*.

The choice of the workshops and activities was immense. One had to spend much time each day to study the program in order to choose what one is most interested in.

VIVAT International also had its meetings: one on the UFRA campus for everyone and another in the house of Adorer sisters in the city center for Vivat member congregations.

The WSF was a good opportunity to hear about, see and feel the problems the people of today's world struggle with, especially in Latin America. Everybody had an opportunity to express themselves.

2. VIVAT International Workshops

After the two successful VIVAT International workshops, one in March 2007 in Rome (organized for Europe) and the other in July 2008 in São Paulo (organized for Brazil), a third one will be held from 19-25 July 2009 in Cochabamba (Bolivia) for the Spanish-speaking southern part of Latin America.

Another one is planned for the anglophone East Africa, but the date and venue are not yet set; most probably it will be in 2010.

3. JPIC Inter-congregational training sessions in Africa

In Rome we have an inter-congregational working group dedicated to organizing of JPIC 2-3 week-long training sessions. So far there were two: One in Kinshasa (Congo) from July 1-27, 2007 for the francophone East Africa and the other in Nsawam (Ghana) from August 24-September 6, 2008 for anglophone West Africa.

There are two planned for this year: one in Bamako, (Mali) from 5-18 July 2009 for the francophone West Africa, and another one in Summer or early Fall 2009, in Nairobi (Kenya) for the anglophone East Africa. The exact date and place is not yet decided.

4. Generalate JPIC Webpage

I am working on a new JPIC Generalate Web page, which would include among other things also information about JPIC activities in particular provinces. I will let you know more about this project later when it is ready. The only thing I would like to ask you is to keep sending me materials and information about the JPIC activities in your province that you would like to share with others.

5. Greeting

I wish you a happy journey through the Lenten Season towards the Resurrection Day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Milan Bubák, SVD