

## WSCF women speak out at United Nations

WSCF women have joined the international call for an end to discrimination and violence against women and the girl child. Four WSCF women spoke out at caucuses, forums and a WSCF event at the 51st United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York. For WSCF Inter-Regional Women's Co-ordinator Sunita Suna the UN forum was a vital opportunity to raise young women's voices, "This is a place to break the culture of silence. We must speak out to end all forms of violence against women and the girl child," she said. Joining Sunita and US senior friend Kathy Todd in the WSCF team, were three women students Cosette Atallah (Lebanon), Annabel Dulhunty (Australia) and Ingjerd Jøssang (Norway). Other SCMer and senior friends taking part in the events included Zena Caytap, Mary McIntyre, Roger Schmidt, Suzanne Matala, Annie Patta, Chris Ferguson and Bonne Marks. The annual UN CSW brings women and men from across the globe to discuss, debate, formulate policies and bring out Agreed Conclusions on priority themes for governments, intergovernmental bodies and other institutions. Held between February 26 - March 9, 2007, the CSW was joined this year by around 5,000 women and men, including 1,880 NGO participants.

The WSCF women joined with the "Ecumenical Women 2000+" coalition to contribute their perspectives at regional and thematic caucuses and to participate in NGO-run parallel events. The parallel events focused on the plight of girls subjected to child labour, domestic violence, lack of access to education, sexual abuse and exploitation, poverty and HIV/AIDS, war and armed conflict, and early or forced marriage. Australian SCMer Annabel Dulhunty described the experience as overwhelming, saying it was hard to take in the gravity and breadth of the issues facing women and girls. Lebanese SCMer Cosette Atallah was shocked at the global scope of crimes against women, "When I learned that trafficking existed even in industrialised countries and heard some of the stories, it hurt my heart deeply" she said.



Photo: ©WSCF/A. Dulhunty

▲ Young WSCF women pictured at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York are from left: Annabel Dulhunty, Cosette Atallah, Ingjerd Jøssang and Sunita Suna.

On March 1st, WSCF presented its own seminar entitled "Young Women Say No to Violence against Women and the Girl Child". The WSCF women spoke from their own contexts and shared how their movements are working for positive change. Ingjerd Jøssang noted that in Norway where women and men are seen as equal, there is a surprising level of violence against women. She reported that in Europe WSCF provides space for young women to share their negative experiences and to overcome them, particularly in countries where talking about violence is taboo. Cosette Atallah explained how cultural practices and traditions are used to oppress women in Lebanese society. Early and forced marriages are widespread, as are "honour" killings of women by their male relatives, she said. Cosette noted that violence against women in her context is not only physical, but also a cause of great psychological trauma. Annabel Dulhunty shared that in Australia violence against women is "perceived either as a shameful private issue or as a law and

order problem, with little discussion about any structural causes". Annabel shared how WSCF challenges these attitudes by encouraging students to look at the underlying structural oppression of patriarchal society and theology. Sunita Suna explained how WSCF is committed to questioning, challenging and reshaping the ecumenical movement and the church, aiming to make them communities that empower women and girls.

WSCF's regular UN representative in New York Kathy Todd reported with delight on the SCMer at CSW, "the WSCF students are making a great contribution to the proceedings. ...their presentations were very substantial, well-organised, well-presented and well-attended. For me it was confirmation that the spirit and witness of WSCF are as strong as ever and are even more greatly needed today".

WSCF has had special consultative status with the UN through the Economic and Social Council since 1970. ■

# EAP on track for '07-'08

W<sup>SCF</sup> is pleased to report that the German aid and development agency Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED) has confirmed funding of USD 400,000 for the Federation's Ecumenical Assistance Programme (EAP) in 2007-2008. The Ecumenical Assistance Programme is WSCF's vehicle to fund projects of national Student Christian Movements. EAP grants enable students to carry out relief work, movement building and development projects in their local contexts. WSCF first sent emergency relief to a national SCM in 1919 when a shocked WSCF staff member (Ruth Rouse) saw the impoverished state of local students on a visit to Vienna. Miss Rouse's recommendation to provide financial aid to those students was the beginning of WSCF's grants to national movements that has evolved into today's Ecumenical Assistance Programme. Last year WSCF

provided emergency EAP grants to SCMs in Lebanon, Zimbabwe, Indonesia and Timor Leste and funded cutting edge programmes in leadership formation, women's empowerment, civil society development and HIV/AIDS prevention in a host of countries. Since 1919 the shape and scope of WSCF's support to national SCMs has changed to reflect different needs and emphases. Following World War II WSCF's relief work developed into a separate organisation, the International Student Service (ISS), later to become World University Service (WUS). The Ecumenical Assistance Programme currently supports approximately thirty national projects in each two-year funding cycle. WSCF is very grateful for the support of its major EAP funder EED and would also like to thank the United Church of Christ (USA) and the WSCF Centennial Fund for their generous contributions to the programme. ■

## WSCF stands in solidarity at World Social Forum



Photo: ©WSCF

▲ Africa Region Treasurer Gloria Lae Joseph (Sudan) and Global ExCo member Abraham Chikasa (Zambia) check out the WSCF stall during the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi this January.



Photo: ©WSCF/M Wallace

▲ WSCF's global team of staff and officers line up at their meeting in Geneva this February. The staff and officers began with reports on their work at the mid-point of the 2004-2008 quadrennium and laid out their plans for the next two years. Shared planning for the immediate future included Inter-Regional programmes on migration and students in 2007 -2008 and a review of the first step towards a new WSCF fundraising programme. A major component of this year's meeting was its focus on ecumenical networking and staff training, led by invited experts and taking advantage of global ecumenical organisations on hand in Geneva. A visit to the World YMCA headquarters brought the meeting up to speed with the Y's global movement strengthening plan and a trip to the WCC's Bossey Ecumenical Institute included a strategic meeting with Fr. Ioan Sauca on ways to collaborate more closely on ecumenical formation. Training seminars throughout the meeting tackled the practical aspects of WSCF organisation and institutional development in the areas of donor reporting, communications, movement building and office and personnel management. Yale Divinity School Library Archivist Ms Martha Lund Smalley led a workshop on archiving and records management to ensure the appropriate handling of material for WSCF's global archives. Throughout the meeting staff and officers reflected on issues related to migration, the Federation's global theme of study for 2007. Bible studies on the theme were led for the group by Rev Thomas Wieser and Dr Boudewijn Sjollema. Pictured from left to right are: (back row) Youhanna Kamal Shawk, Ken Guest, Elias El Halabi, (middle row) Brandon Gilvin, Georgine Kengne Djeutane, Eilidh Whiteford, Necta Montes Rocas, Hanna Tervanotko (front row) Dan Gonzalez Ortega, Udan Fernando, Adèle Djomo Ngomedje, Sunita Suna and Michael Wallace.

W<sup>SCF</sup> staff and students took a stand in solidarity with people's movements from across the globe at the World Social Forum in Nairobi this January.

Joining with churches and Christian NGOs, WSCF offered a student and faith perspective on "People's struggles, people's alternatives", the theme of this year's forum. The WSCF contribution was organised by Sunita Suna and Georgine Kengne Djeutane. It included two WSCF workshops, supporting and networking with numerous people's movements and providing an information stall dedicated to telling the WSCF story. The WSCF workshop entitled "Women, Migration and Poverty" focused on the burden placed on women that exposes them to abuse and exploitation. Workshop panelist Dr Belinda Bennet of Christian Aid summed up the situation, "when the majority of the 1.5 billion people living on less than one dollar a day are women, poverty has a female face". The second WSCF event was a panel discussion on the problem of migration for developing countries. Human rights advocate Dr. Julien Beassemda (Chad), Ms. Tetet Lauron (Asia-Pacific Research Network, Philippines) and Mr. Dion Carlo Cerafaon (Chairperson, SCM Philippines) led the discussion on migration problems which included trafficking, xenophobia and public sector brain drain in developing countries. A WSCF exhibition stall showcased the Federation and its work around the world and acted as a focal point for SCMs at the event. Staffers Mbutu Kariuki and Simba Oliver welcomed numerous senior friends, SCMs and other young people to the stall over the duration of the six-day event. This year's contribution to the WSF 2007 is part of the Federation's ongoing commitment to support the forum and to network with organisations working for just alternatives to the current global systems. ■

# Students reflect on migration for global day of prayer

SCMs around the globe joined together for the Federation's Universal Day of Prayer for Students (UDPS) again this February. WSCF General Secretary Michael Wallace is delighted at the growing strength of the day, as reports from national and local events flow back to the Inter-Regional Office in Geneva.

"Stories from this year's UDPS confirm what a spiritual treasure we have in the Universal Day of Prayer for Students. It is uplifting to find that so many students and movements around the world joined the celebration. For me, the UDPS is a tangible example of our unity as a federation"

This year's UDPS was prepared by the Europe region on the issue of migration, the Federation's global theme for 2007. The liturgy's opening section called on students to open their hearts to the outsider; 'Creator, you told us to love our neighbours and to see you in the face of a stranger. There is nothing to be proud of about loving our close ones, but to love a stranger challenges us everyday'.

Study notes with the service outlined the issues associated with different forms of forced and voluntary migration - of refugees, internally displaced or uprooted persons, economic and labour migrants and those moving to re-unite families. SCMs were encouraged to creatively engage with the theme; by holding the liturgy in a place of transit such as a railway station or in the open air. They recommended worshippers put candles on a world map to indicate migration points. SCMs were asked to display images during the prayers of intercession illustrating the plight of migrants. Prayers were offered for those trafficked for cheap labour and sex work, those forced from their homes by natural disaster or economic need and those fleeing persecution.

In Geneva, WCC intern and Sudanese SCMer Beatrice Mukhtar Mamuzi joined with WSCF staff and officers to lead the ecumenical centre community in celebration of the UDPS.

She was encouraged by the fact that migration is a constant throughout the Bible.

For her, the stories of Israel's search for the



Photo: ©ACEET/WSCF.

▲ **SCM Togo's brass band and choir lead the congregation of Agoè Presbyterian parish in praise, at this year's ACEET celebration of the Universal Day of Prayer for Students. 183 SCMs and 151 other students turned out to pray for WSCF and the world's students in Lomé, Togo on February 18, 2007.**

promised land and the holy family's flight to Egypt reassured her that migrants are "in God's hands". Cuban senior friend Carlos Ham was among the WCC staff who took part in the Geneva service. He enjoyed sharing in the prayer saying, "the celebration of the UDPS reminded me how great it was to be in SCM and of the vibrancy of the Federation".

In Togo, ACEET held the Lomé observation of the UDPS in a newly established branch. National Secretary Kossi Holali Alague reported that the UDPS was 'a time of joy and sharing for all participants'. SCM Togo President Kodjossé Awalegbedji introduced ACEET and WSCF to the congregation and Agoè catechist Komi Dodji Ganyra led a reflection on the material and spiritual aspects of migration.

In Britain, SCM celebrated the UDPS

within the closing worship of their annual conference. British SCMs prayed for all those exiled from their homes, for WSCF and the world's students.

In Haiti, SCMs celebrated the UDPS with a five-hour workshop of prayer and reflection on the theme. Ezechias Salomon reported that the UDPS in Cité Soleil saw 120 SCMs and other young people "singing, praying and sharing our ideas on the realities of poverty and misery". The Haitian SCMs concluded that with God's help, the power to change the conditions that bring about suffering is in their hands. The Haitian movement affirmed that this day of prayer was productive, and promised to continue holding this celebration every year. The UDPS has been observed since 1898. ■

## Centennial Fund welcomes expert Norwegian investor

The WSCF Centennial Fund is delighted to announce that Norwegian SCM's highly successful investment manager Mr Olav Nomeland is to join its investment advisory group. A graduate in law and currently an Oslo high school teacher, Mr Nomeland (55) first began investment management for Norwegian SCM in 1979. Since then he has sustained an outstanding 28-year record of building up the movement's endowment as the chairman of the Norwegian movement's financial

foundation. From modest beginnings raising the rent on SCM Norway's one downtown Oslo property in the 1970s, Olav's property management and real estate investment have led the SCM fund from a 1979 net value of 1.2 million euro to its current value of 12 million euro. The foundation has continued to fund Norway's SCM which today owns student houses and investment properties in five cities round the country. Olav sees investment work as focused on the long-term view of sustaining the

movement for the future's students. He plans to use his investment expertise to help build up a stable funding base for WSCF, so that current and future SCMs have the ongoing support to make their vision of the Federation and its work come to fruition. Olav took up the Federation's invitation to join its Centennial Fund advisors in November and will remain for a renewable term of two years. ■

## WSCF pays tribute to Milan Opočenský

A pivotal figure in WSCF history, Milan Opočenský, has died, aged 75.

Milan served WSCF as its Europe Secretary from 1967 to 1973. During his time as Europe Secretary Milan played a major part in the WSCF debates on the structure of the Federation and on WSCF's ideological direction.

Milan's successor as Europe Secretary Alastair Hulbert remembers Milan's passionate concern for the world and his belief in the importance of politically-engaged theology,

"Opočenský's view of the church, like Hromádka's (Czech theologian and Milan's teacher), was prophetic. The church is not founded on some concept of God, but on the reality of God's grace at work in the world. Only by holding theology and prophecy together can theology be instrumental and relevant to life. This conviction, I believe, informed Milan throughout his whole life"

The son of Protestant ministers, Milan was born in 1931 in Hradec Králové, about 100 kilometres from Prague. His mother was the first woman to study Protestant theology in Czechoslovakia.

Milan was ordained in the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren in 1955 and completed his Th.D. in 1965. After his time in Geneva as Europe Secretary for WSCF, he returned to Czechoslovakia to become professor of Social Ethics at the Comenius Faculty of Protestant Theology in Prague. Milan continued to support the Federation as an active senior friend and in 1977 he took up the role of Chairperson of the Europe Region.

In 1989, Milan returned to Geneva as General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), a post he held until March 2000. Throughout his career Milan continued to challenge the reformed churches and the ecumenical movement with his vision of economic justice and ecological responsibility. A staunch advocate of the decentralisation of WSCF in the late sixties, Milan's work led the WARC to become more representative of its member churches in the southern hemisphere. Milan was a prolific writer and public speaker and shared his theological and political vision with many generations of students. He contributed two titles to the WSCF global book series, "Christians and Revolution - A breakthrough in Christian thought" and "The Fourth Man and the Gospel".

Milan is survived by his wife, Jana Opočenska, an ordained pastor who with him formed "a formidable team in the ecumenical world". Milan's funeral in Prague was attended by WSCF General Secretary Michael Wallace and former WSCF Europe Secretary Alastair Hulbert. Charles-Henry Bazoché, John Moyer and Chris Ledger offered their respects on behalf of WSCF at the memorial service for Milan in Geneva. Alastair Hulbert has written a broad-ranging essay reflecting on the life and thought of Milan Opočenský. The essay can be viewed on the WSCF website under Links and Resources > De Te Fabula Narratur: Milan Opočenský — It's your story that's being told. ■



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## WSCF gives thanks for the life of Robert Bilheimer

WSCF senior friend and pioneering organiser of the ecumenical movement the Rev'd Dr Robert Bilheimer has died, aged 89. A Presbyterian minister, Robert was first involved in ecumenism as a divinity student at Yale University in the early 1940s. He joined SCM and went on to become Exec. Secretary of the Interseminary Movement.

Dr Bilheimer then became Programme Secretary for the New York WCC office while also ministering in a parish. In 1948 he went to Amsterdam and became the primary organiser for the inaugural Assembly of the World Council of Churches. He went on to become the key administrator for the first three WCC Assemblies and all the mid-level governing committee meetings of the WCC's first fifteen years.

As well as being a gifted organiser Dr Bilheimer was a writer, a theologian, a teacher and a human rights activist. He was a supporter of the American civil rights movement, an opponent of the war in Vietnam and an advocate of anti-apartheid activism within the churches. He concluded his career with an academic post as Director of the Collegeville Ecumenical Institute in Minnesota. ■

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