

LIBERTAS

Rights & Democracy in Kabul to set up a Women's Rights Fund in Afghanistan



Ariane Brunet, Palwasha Hasan and Isabelle Solon Helal.

Two staff members of Rights & Democracy recently returned from a ten-day mission to Kabul, Afghanistan, to assess the situation of women and their potential role in peacebuilding and reconstruction of the country.

"The situation is precarious," said Ariane Brunet, the Women's Rights Programme Coordinator. "The departure of the Taliban and the presence of the Northern Alliance in Kabul have not brought a feeling of security to women's lives. Many are still too afraid to remove the burqa."

Ariane Brunet and Isabelle Solon Helal were in Kabul with a view to setting up a Women's Rights Fund, a \$500,000 year-long project that will be funded by the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) Peacebuilding Fund. The two staff members opened an Afghanistan office, and

appointed Ms. Palwasha Hasan as coordinator of the Rights & Democracy project in Kabul.

Ms. Hasan was until recently director of the Afghan Women's Education Centre (AWEC) in Peshawar, Pakistan. While in Kabul, the Rights & Democracy representatives held working meetings with the Minister of Women's Affairs, Habida

Sarabi, the State Secretary for Women's Affairs Mabupa Hakukmal, members of the Human Rights Commission, representatives of international organizations and several women's groups, including some 20 members of the Association of Women Jurists.

"The Women's Rights Fund was very well received everywhere," explained Isabelle Solon Helal, assistant coordinator of the Women's Rights Programme. "There is widespread concern about the role of women in the process of reforming the 1964 Constitution in order to ensure that women's rights are enshrined therein."

In addition, the mission to Kabul also allowed staff to identify people who will act in an advisory capacity to support the work of the Project Coordinator. Selection criteria for projects the fund will support are to be drawn

up and the advisory committee will play an important role in the evaluation of these projects.

The Women's Rights Fund will prioritize projects focussing on women's rights, education on women's rights, awareness-raising work, networking and women's legal rights.

Rights & Democracy also took steps to assess the situation concerning commitments made by donor countries who met in Tokyo and who had promised millions for the reconstruction of Afghanistan but who have yet to deliver the promised aid. The issue of security is another priority, with the Afghan government and NGOs urging deployment of peacekeepers outside Kabul to ensure an end to the fighting so that reconstruction of the country can begin in earnest.

Rights & Democracy has urged the UN Security Council to increase the peacekeeping forces to at least 30,000 and to deploy peace troops throughout the country with instructions to disarm warring factions. Although the mandate of the International Security Assistance Force was extended, the small peacekeeping force is deployed only in Kabul.

"As soon as the security situation is more stable, women will be able to turn their attention to other pressing issues, such as the reform of the Constitution to ensure the protection of women's rights," said Ariane Brunet. "The situation is difficult, but there are possibilities for improvement."



Rights & Democracy

International Centre for Human Rights
and Democratic Development

Rights & Democracy (International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development) is a Canadian institution with an international mandate. It is an independent organization, which promotes, advocates and defends the democratic and human rights set out in the *International Bill of Human Rights*. In cooperation with civil society and governments in Canada and abroad, Rights & Democracy initiates and supports programmes to strengthen laws and democratic institutions, principally in developing countries.



Message **from the President**

Rights & Democracy is an institution that is modest yet essential.

It is modest by virtue of the sheer magnitude of the challenges that come with efforts to deploy democratic values in a tangible and sustainable manner and to secure full respect for social, economic and political rights for all. The enormity of these tasks is compounded by the slow pace of growth, the lack of a level playing field in relations between the different regions and nations of our world, the ever-widening gap in the distribution of material and non-material goods, and the weakness of world governance.

It is essential by virtue of the urgent necessity of nurturing a strong culture of peace at the global level, of halting the progress of incivility at all levels and of developing new conditions for living together differently. The foundation for all these essential needs is nothing other than absolute equality for all — an equality that follows from the effective recognition of all rights for all people.

Rights & Democracy enjoys the collaboration of numerous partners, both in Canada and abroad. As I take up my new duties, I would like to salute them and to express my thanks. I would also like to assure them that we are ready and willing to embark with them on projects that offer potential for the concrete reinforcement of democratic values and fundamental rights, that inseparable duo.

I salute the remarkable work of my predecessor, the Honourable Warren Allmand, as well as the generous contribution of Kathleen Mahoney, Chairperson of our Board of Directors, to the transition that has marked our institution over the past months.

I would also like to thank the managers and staff who have welcomed me so warmly. I invite them to act with these three words in mind: concrete, effective and sustainable.

Jean-Louis Roy.

Historic First Meeting

of the Assembly of States Parties to the ICC

Jean-Louis Roy, President of Rights & Democracy, and Iris Almeida, Director of Programmes, attended the historic first meeting of the Assembly of States Parties to the International Criminal Court on September 2-6, 2002, in New York. They participated in the international NGO Coalition for the ICC (CICC) Steering Committee meeting where they reiterated Rights & Democracy's commitment to pursuing work on the ICC and attended a meeting hosted by the German mission with delegations from the group of like-minded countries who support the ICC.

While in New York they also met with Chris Hall (Amnesty International), Reed Brody (Human Rights Watch), Vahida Nainar (Gender Caucus), Asma Khader (Jordan), and Phillip Krisch, John Holmes and Valerie Oosterveld (Canadian delegation).

In a statement prepared for the meeting, Rights & Democracy highlighted three points: the responsibility of States Parties to ensure that the Court be established on the basis of the highest possible legal, political and moral standards, the importance of electing impartial and highly qualified judges for the credibility of the future Court, and the need to resist the political pressure

of the United States in its campaign to undermine the integrity of the Rome Statute and to secure blanket immunity for its troops in UN peacekeeping missions.

All 79 states having ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court attended the meeting. The election of judges will likely take place in February 2003 during the resumed meeting of the ASP, and the Court is expected to be operational by mid-2003. Details on the mandate and work of the International Bar of the ICC will also be formally tabled for discussion at the February 2003 meeting.

Ayesha Imam

**to visit Canada
in December**



Ayesha Imam and BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights of Nigeria will be honoured in Montreal in December for their work on women's rights in Nigeria and in particular their work in challenging conservative interpretations of Sharia law, through such notable cases as Hafsat Abubakar, Safiya Hussein, and Amina Lawal who have been sentenced to death by stoning. Ayesha Imam will accept the

John Humphrey Freedom Award on the eve of International Human Rights Day at a ceremony to be held at the Salle du Gesù in Montreal on Monday, December 9 from 5 to 7 p.m. For more information: avbiljou@ichrdd.ca.

World Summit on Sustainable Development:

What About Human Rights?

There were some strong and principled voices calling for human rights to be recognized as an essential part of sustainable development at the world's largest UN Conference, held in Johannesburg from August 24 to September 4, 2002.

But there were not enough of them.

UN human rights agencies were active. Mary Robinson, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Committees on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the special rapporteur on housing and others put out statements and spoke out in the plenary session and other fora.

NGOs were also active. Both the women's caucus and human rights caucus engaged in an intense lobbying effort to include human rights in the final documents and to prevent backsliding from previous UN conferences. Rights & Democracy joined this effort.

A small number of states were also actively supporting human rights, including a strong intervention by Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, who called human rights an essential part of sustainable development — an assertion that was not echoed in the final documents.

New Publications

- Annual Report. Rights & Democracy's annual report for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, was tabled in parliament in October and is now available for public distribution. Please contact publications@ichrdd.ca for your free copy.

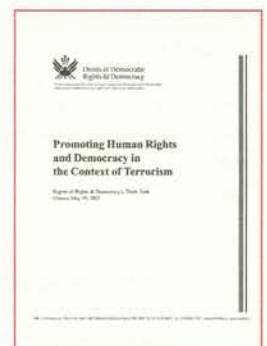


- Rights & Democracy has also published an adaptation for indigenous women of its *Methodology for Gender Sensitive Research* and a Spanish version of the first companion booklet *Documenting Human Rights Violations by State Agents: Sexual Violence*.



Gender Sensitive Research and a Spanish version of the first companion booklet *Documenting Human Rights Violations by State Agents: Sexual Violence*. These publications propose a standardized methodology and protocol for collecting data and preparing reports on violations of women's rights. They are available by contacting publications@ichrdd.ca.

- A Report of Rights & Democracy's annual Think Tank held in May 2002 in Ottawa is now available in English and French at www.ichrdd.ca. It is entitled *Promoting Human Rights and Democracy in the Context of Terrorism*.



The Struggle for Peace in Asia:

Inauguration of the Asian Peace Alliance.

From August 29 to September 1, 2002, more than 150 peace activists from across Asia met in the Philippines to inaugurate the



Asian Peace Assembly (APA), a coalition of NGOs and individuals from across Asia whose aim is to promote peace and protest the war-mongering taking hold around the world, under the pretext of the "war on terrorism." Rights & Democracy supported the participation of representatives of the Pakistan-India People's Forum on Peace and Democracy. Lucie Léveillé, Rights & Democracy's Urgent Action Assistant, also participated as an

observer. The APA works to collectively uphold and promote the ideals of peace and help resolve these conflicts through the intervention of concerned individuals organized in an Asia-wide civil society organization.



It was highly symbolic that the Philippines were chosen as host country since joint military operations are being conducted by US and Philippine military forces, resulting only in further instability in the country. In addition to the US-led war on Afghanistan, some of the other military activities which have been targeted by the APA include: the vigorous remilitarization of Japan through the introduction of wartime laws, which aim to establish a national system that enables Japan to make war overseas; the suppression of Palestinian people's right to self-determination that has reached a new intensity and brutality since the Government of Israel, under the pretext of "war on terrorism", invaded Palestine just before Easter this year; the scorn for democracy by President



To mark the inauguration of the APA, on September 1 all delegates participated in a peaceful rally, leading to the American Embassy in Manila, under the banner "Stand for Global Peace: Stop the War! Justice, Not Aggression." Although police prevented the protesters from reaching the Embassy, the event took place peacefully and was well attended by the local media.

Musharaf in Pakistan; the Hindu government in New Delhi that labels the Pakistani government "terrorist" in order to close off any peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue.

It was agreed among delegates that the wars breaking out in Asia cannot be divorced from the larger processes unleashed in the region by economic globalization. Among the issues are the structural adjustment programmes imposed by the IMF and World Bank which have led to increased poverty, widened inequality, consolidated economic stagnation, and worsened ecological degradation. In Asia, the "war on terror" exacerbates an already difficult situation by providing a pretext for instituting more repressive and authoritarian forms of control.

Human Rights, Democracy and Sustainable Development are Inextricably Linked

Rights & Democracy joined forces with the United Nations Association of Canada on September 19, 2002, in a one-day conference in Ottawa on the 2002 United Nations Development Programme's report *Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*.

Speakers included Jean-Louis Roy, Rights & Democracy's new president; Tanni Mukhopadhyay, one of the authors of the 2002 UNDP report; Geoffrey Pearson, President of UNAC Canada, as well as representatives of Canadian government and NGOs.

Mr. Roy applauded the UNDP report's linkage of democratic values with sustainable development, but charged that the report could have gone a step further.

"There is no sustainable democracy without a system that respects human rights, that is, all rights — social, economic and political rights. Democratic values cannot be dissociated from human rights, from sustainable social development," Mr. Roy told some 100 delegates. "This complementarity could have been more clearly affirmed in the crucial report that brings us together today."

The UNDP report confirms many of the conclusions of Rights & Democracy's *Democratic Development 1990-2000: An Overview*, available at www.ichrdd.ca, including the observation that only 47 of the 81 states that have become democracies since 1980 can be considered fully democratic. Rights & Democracy maintains that true democracies must build the conditions to allow the realization of all human rights — civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights. The nurture of the full range of these rights ultimately feeds a culture of democracy, which is the only path to sustainable development.

Libertas is the quarterly newsletter of Rights & Democracy. It is available free of charge and is accessible electronically at www.ichrdd.ca. Articles may be freely excerpted, provided credit is given and a copy of the publication in which the material appears is sent to Rights & Democracy. Legal Deposit, 4th quarter 2002. ISSN 1027-0884.

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