Intergenerational Cooperation brings Inspiration to the UN in Vienna
"Communicating Change: Youth Perspectives on Peace"
European Leadership Conference: July 1th – July 3rd 2011
Vienna International Centre (United Nations Building) and NH Danube City Hotel, Vienna

It is significant that this third European Leadership Conference of the Universal Peace Federation in 2011 took place in the Board Room of the International Atomic Energy Agency based at the United Nations in Vienna. This Agency has and does play a major role in securing world peace in that it regulates and monitors the use of nuclear energy and the observance of international treaties associated with prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Our Austrian UPF chapter took up the challenge to host a European Leadership Conference during our annual planning meeting in Prague in March. Peter Haider, Austria's UPF Secretary General, in his opening speech congratulated the UN for proclaiming a "Year of Youth 2010/2011". He expressed that this is particularly relevant at a time when suddenly, to the surprise of even the experts, the young generation are at the forefront of peaceful revolutions and movements for more democracy and youth participation based on human rights and human dignity in Tunisia, Egypt and other parts of the world. Later he commented that NGO activity in the UN in Vienna is in general confined to much smaller meetings of the older generation. That is why UN staff are very impressed when they see an NGO meeting, like this European Leadership Conference, which attracts over 200 in one of their major conference halls, 70% of whom are under 30 years of age!

Mrs. Zena Eggough, UPF Austria's Vice President and UN Liaison, played an important role in securing the use of the most prestigious available room at the UN Vienna for this event. Her beloved husband, Martyn Nkanu Eggough, died just one month ago. He was one of the most eminent Nigerians involved in international governance, being a Director of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) based in Vienna. Zena was deeply impressed by this Vienna Conference, especially by all the outstanding young people who participated and now plans to attend the International Leadership Conference in Abuja, Nigeria, later this month.

The conference was explicitly designed to support the International Year of Youth declared by the UN in Augsut 2010. As a result UPF received the support of UNOV, the NGO Liaison office at Vienna and UNIS, the United Nations Information Service, which promoted the Conference through its official channels. This publicity directly contributed to the 250 participants who registered on line for the conference.

The Director of UNIS in Vienna, **Mr. Janos Tisovszky** welcomed the conference participants to the UN Vienna. He mentioned that partnering with young people is essential for positive change and that this is supported by the Year of Youth, which seeks to promote dialogue and mutual understanding. He also alluded to the unprecedented events of 2011 (a reference to the 'Arab Spring') and how social media provided a new dynamism, used not just for social interaction, but as a way to promote global change and to empower youth to be instrumental in realising this change.

Mrs. Hai Ok Song Lee (wife of UPF Europe's Chairman who was in Japan reporting on the recent UPF Founder's Tour in Europe), emphasised that promoting good character is a foundation for good leadership and that we often underestimated the importance of the family as an instrument for grassroots peace-building. In conclusion she quoted from UPF's Founder's UN Speech in 2000 which advocated the importance of providing a place for religious leaders and spiritual wisdom in matters of global governance at the United Nations.

Referring to the large number of young people attending she mentioned: 'When I entered the UN International Centre I was welcomed by so many young people. It touched my heart and I feel I am getting younger by being here!

Dr. Willem van Eekelen (former Defense Minister of the Netherlands) spoke of himself as part of the elderly young.
What do I expect from young people today – above all a sense of values and responsibility and a good dose of idealism and hope. Do you have a clear idea of what you want to do in life? Idealism is not pursuing a starry eyed impossible objective, but keeping a goal in mind whatever you do.
If you have a problem, it is very difficult to solve it by attacking it head on. If you are able to change the context, you have a chance. But to change the context you have to know in detail what makes the other side tick. What are his or her motives and interests and where might it be possible to find common ground. In Europe we have changed the context through a process of solidarity and enlightened self-interest. Maybe a strange mix of idealism and pragmatism, but it works, if we are able to maintain our values and norms, apply them responsibly and keep our idealism throughout the course.

The defining character of this conference was the part that youth played in the organising and presentation of the conference and their sense of being supported and encouraged by the wisdom, experience and appreciation of their elders.

The UPF Austria Youth Committee played a crucial role and the conference attracted an audience which was predominantly young. There was a very successful collaboration between established UPF staff and the support of young volunteers who revealed their flair and enthusiasm for the cause in major staff roles and in the outstanding cultural evening which showcased the talents of the Vienna Peace Choir and several other young performers who delighted hearts and minds.

The contribution made by some **outstanding young speakers** who shared about their adventurous contribution towards peace through social entrepreneurship and active roles in global hot spots was extremely impressive. These young people convinced UPF's Ambassadors for Peace and staff that we are indeed forging meaningful links with leaders of the future. They in turn were very appreciative of the platform that the conference offered them to interact with 'wise elders' and the feeling of appreciation and encouragement that this provide as a recognition of their efforts.

Just to mention some examples:

Karim Rihan – The Egyptian Revolution – my experiences
An 18 year old of Egyptian family background, just finishing high school in Vienna who spent his one week midterm holiday in Tahrir Square in Cairo as his heart compelled him to support change and to take his seat on an empty Austrian Airlines jet airliner bound for Egypt when everybody else was leaving Cairo! I saw old and young, women and men, rich and poor, Moslems and Christians fight for freedom and dignity in unity. For the first time I saw Moslems and Christians praying and eating together.

Nicole Heydari - Cultural Analyst in Support of the US, Polish and French forces in Afghanistan now studying at Vienna's prestigious School of Diplomacy.
I had to build my own credibility with Afghan leaders – eventually I became the resident expert and the military recognised the value of the information I gathered. I realised that many families' land and property were being damaged by the road building initiated by the foreign military and that this caused much resentment. I could arrange and implement a scheme of compensation to resolve this issue. The best progress which I was a part of was the promotion of good relations between the foreign forces and the Afghan population. A famous Persian poet wrote 800 years ago – Human beings are one – if one member is afflicted with pain – all feel it – he who does not feel the pain of others cannot be called a human being.

Neelam Rose – 20 year old Social Entrepreneur, a young Moslem woman, National Union of Students and member of Birmingham Youth Parliament.
From 13 years of age I wanted to change the world – my mother told me: ' change our community as a start'. I saw lots of funding for youth centres but nobody attending. I started to work to get young Mums more involved in the community and next with youth who felt they did not have a voice. They were interested in media and journalism – we did projects and then got support, working with 100s of young people. We now produce educational programs and publications for use in schools. To succeed you need the community on your side –you need to listen first to what young people and parents want.

Andre Hackett – South London based Social Entrepreneur in his 20s – founded a Company called Make A Change.
My journey started trying to solve the gun and knife crime that was killing or putting into prison my friends. We sold hundreds of T shirts and had 750 knives and guns melted down into key holders with the slogan 'Education is the Key' and auctioned them to fund youth projects.
Andre felt great encouragement last year to be a recipient of a UPF and WFWP Youth Award given in the UK Parliament.
The contribution of young volunteers in the preparation of the conference resulted in innovative elements being developed as part of the ELC program:

World Café discussion groups – which enabled all participants young and old to interact centring on productive exploration and discussion on the key topics of the conference - Dr van Eekelen mentioned that he enjoyed this part of the conference most.

Ambassador for Peace Fair – an opportunity for Young Ambassadors for Peace and the organisations they represent to be displayed in the conference room for all participants to view and the additional support this gives for good networking.

Reflection from Peter Haider, UPF Austria Secretary General
One of the interesting experiences relating to the ELC in Vienna on the 'International Year of Youth' was that more and more individuals and even organizations wanted to be part of the conference.

UPF Austria undertook at the Annual European Conference to organize an ELC with 120 participants which should at least be partly organized in the UN in Vienna. We decided to relate it to the "UN Year of Youth 2010/2011". Based on the initiative of Bogdan Pammer some of our 2nd Generation students formed a Youth committee of the UPF in Austria. They created the theme of the conference and made the programme following the basic structure of an ELC. So the conference became their conference.

UPF in Austria had tried several times to start a series of events for youth. This spring Bogdan had organized an evening about "human rights and human dignity" timely after the Geneva European Leadership Conference. This was inspired by the topic of the peaceful revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and by a lecture of Ambassador Lichem, who addressed the topic of "human dignity" during a consultation meeting

last December on the Interreligious council in the UN.

Two persons who were interested to work with service projects contacted Bogdan Pammer. He guided them to be part of UPF's upcoming UN related Leadership Conference. An American student called Nicole Heydari helped to send E-Mails to Embassies, phoned them and invited several students from the University where she is doing her MBA.

She was one of the most successful mobilisers of young people to the conference. The other person, who has already two degrees and is a member of the Austrian association for foreign politics and UN relations, will go to Nigeria. He is an outstanding future leader.

We publicized the conference with full openness through the internet. After working with Facebook for over a year UPF Austria invited more than 1000 contacts worldwide through this social media site. Through this medium two Australian students belonging to the Oak Tree Foundation, who are studying in Geneva found out about the conference and attended as fully paying participants. One American young lady was seriously considering to attend from Los Angeles because she was absolutely touched by the intentions of the conference. We were hesitant to go into full advertising by E-Mail, because it was obvious that the limited number of participants allocated to Austria would be reached easily. Such advertising is basically cost free but it needs a clear vision and a little imagination.

Even our international president Dr. Thomas Walsh got excited about the conference and was ready to sponsor participants from outside Europe. Finally we had two students from Russia and a young MP from Sri Lanka who participated. We had additional applications from Nepal and several African nations which did not result in participation because of Visa problems.

In order to promote the conference we organized a panel discussion less than two weeks before the conference. A representative of the Vienna city EU program "Youth in Action" was presented there. We also had an offer from ACUNS, the Academic Council on the United Nations System, to present a book about a conference on "Equal Rights of Youth". So these organisations all became part of the conference initiative as they saw it as a chance to present their work. It became their conference and as a result they brought the representative of the Austrian National Youth Council as a speaker. Austrian Service Abroad sent a delegation. The president of AIESEC (Association Internationale des Étudiants en Sciences Économiques et Commerciales), the world's largest student-run organization that offers young people the opportunity to be global citizens, to change the world, and to get experience and skills that matter today, contacted us. They offered to help with the planning of the program. Finally a delegation of their leadership participated in the conference.

We expected 120 people in the UN and had more than 200. Our goal for the conference was 120. We had almost 150 participants. Our limitation was the budget not our outreach potential!! All the participants were really happy at the end. They were fascinated by the vision of the Founder and the spirit it seems to generate.
The Conference is now very fully reported on both the UNIS and ACUNS websites.

Links to extensive reports on the UN Information Service Website and the ACUNS website
http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis (link on the UNIS-Homepage to our report on Austrian UPF homepage: mehr auf Englisch...) Internationales Jahr der Jugend: Konferenz "Communicating Change: Youth Perspectives on Peace" (mehr auf Englisch...)

Acuns Vienna Liaison

Report on the European Leadership Conference 1-3 July 2011: "Communicating Change: Youth Perspectives on Peace" Friday, 1 July – Vienna International Centre (United Nations) IAEA Board Room Session I: International Year of Youth The Chair of this session and Secretary General of the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) in Austria Peter Haider stressed that this conference was inspired by the Int ...