

SEPTEMBER PEACE DAYS 2011

For the third successive year, Uniting for Peace is promoting the 'September Peace Days': the UN International Peace Day on September 21, and for churches, September 18 as the closest Sunday for special services for peace. For September 21 itself, UfP is hosting a high-profile meeting in central London with **Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP**, former Secretary of State for International Development and currently Shadow Leader of the House of Commons, speaking on **After the Conflicts – How Can Development Build Peace?** at Friends House, Euston Road NW1 2BJ, 6.30 – 8.30pm

Through the publicity networks of UfP Churches & Inter-Faith Work,



local faith groups are being encouraged to link up with other civil society bodies such as local UNA branches and peace and justice groups, to hold September 21 events on peace themes especially with a UN focus. It is hoped UfP members will get involved in events in their localities, and if nothing is arranged, will consider taking the initiative in organising an event. The UN's strategic role in global security and international peace-making and post-conflict peacekeeping, and its worldwide work for development and humanitarian relief through its various agencies such as UNICEF and UNHCR, would be very relevant topics for such meetings. Also, with North Africa, Middle East and other conflict zones very much in the news, and bearing in mind that UN urges the international community to observe September 21 as a 'Day of Global Ceasefire', an event on the theme of 'Overcoming Conflict, Building Peace', would also be very appropriate.

Conflicts have many causes: super-power hegemonism; states' desire to control natural resources; economic and social injustices; suppression of popular aspirations; community, ethnic and religious divisions, and many others. For followers of the Christian and other religions, if they are true to their core beliefs and values, peace - with the Divine, the human neighbour and throughout the global community - must be both the highest aspiration and constant challenge to action.

◀◀ **p8** protection and hope for peace. Nonviolent Peaceforce has also started working in Southern Sudan, protecting people so that they don't lose cattle and schools remain open, which has a real impact on their lives. Further projects are being developed in South Caucasus and Kyrgyzstan.

How to support Nonviolent Peaceforce in our own countries was discussed. In the UK we host NP speakers at some events, teach about Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping at Leeds Metropolitan University and take leaflets to other events, but ideas suggested included a travelling photo exhibition, a local website, and building media interest. So there is much we can do to expand the support in the UK: watch out for a meeting, event or exhibition near you!

A number of workshops were held. I ran one on behalf of UfP on how we could better show what we do; it discussed what we did now and how satisfied we were with it. New research subjects were proposed, including the costs of both military and civilian peacekeeping, where unarmed civilian peacekeeping fits into the larger international structures and how to use evaluation reports to influence more people.

Arrangements for next year's meeting were discussed; also how we will continue to communicate and how to link into the International Governing Council (IGC) of Nonviolent Peaceforce.

Mindful that so often in history religion has been perverted by violence, and that in today's world religious fundamentalisms threaten community harmony and global stability, faith communities today have a particular responsibility to be bearers of good news of peace.

Accordingly UfP Churches & Inter-Faith Work is promoting September 18 as 'Peacemaking Sunday' for local church services and also urging churches and other faith communities to hold inter-faith occasions for peace over the Peace Days

period. As the Sunday closest to UN Peace Day September 18 affords ideal opportunity for a local church to dedicate one of its regular worship occasions to the Biblical theme of God's call to peace with justice, with relevant hymns, readings, prayers and sermon. Or a special ecumenical service may be held, with local 'Churches Together' bodies hosting such an occasion. (Peacemaking Sunday is also promoted by the 'public issues' departments of the Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches, which issue a worship resource pack. See:

www.jointpublicissues.org.uk)

Uniting for Peace gives special importance to promoting those occasions when representatives of different faith communities come together for public affirmation of a common commitment to peace-building. For September 2011 UfP Churches & Inter-Faith Work is once again promoting this concept of inter-faith occasions on the theme of local community harmony and global peace. Relevant readings for the various sacred scriptures, statements from different traditions, meditation, music, visual presentations and other means can form an engaging event, expressing the highest peace aspirations of the world's religions.

(UfP is producing a special Inter-Faith Resource Pack: £5 from: UfP Peace Services, PO Box 28209, Edinburgh EH9 1ZR, phone 0131-446-9545 — cheques to 'Peace Services').

BRIAN COOPER, UfP Churches' & Inter-Faith Secretary

An •'Interlink'•group includes European representatives on the IGC. This group will now start to liaise with other MOs, across the world.

In 2012 Nonviolent Peaceforce will be 10 years old and an international assembly will be hosted in Europe. We have pledged to hold a celebratory event in the UK, prior to the international meeting. As part of this programme we will organise talks by people who have worked as Unarmed Civilian Peacekeepers, invite financial support of €10 (for the 10 years of NP) and build a network of supporters in the UK.

Nonviolent Peaceforce is making a difference to people's lives every day. The annual meeting of European MOs is an opportunity to think and plan about how best we can support them. We want long-term sustainable peace, and I hope that the actions we plan in the UK as a result of this meeting will show our support for Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping across the world.

To offer support, meeting venues or request more information please contact Uniting for Peace or myself, Rachel Julian, email: rachel@peacehouse.org.uk

Rachel Julian previously worked for Nonviolent Peaceforce and is currently a researcher in evaluation and conflict transformation.