

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT UNITED NATIONS BRIEFINGS FOR NGOS

by Pat Aller

Trade between nations has now been surpassed in financial value by direct foreign investment by transnational corporations, reported Karl Savant, research chief of the UN's Transnational Corporations Division, on Jan. 21st. This reflection of the globalization of the economy suggests that Georgists should watch big business at least as carefully as they watch nations' foreign trade.

One hundred corporations control a third of the world's stock of investment. They are the elite of 35,000 transnationals, and their foreign direct investment now delivers more goods and services than trade.

Where goods are transferred or produced abroad, such investment can improve local skills in office procedures, maintenance, marketing, and other business areas. Transnationals also often build infrastructure in the countries where they do business. But, only 20% of foreign direct investment goes to developing nations (of which ten predominate). Poorer nations, trying to create an environment conducive to investment, often fall further behind.

Transnational supremacy raises problems of monopoly, the dwindling significance of trade, and the implications of some countries' actions as they reshape to become foreign corporate clients.

Conflict resolution, instead of war, is a prime UN goal. Peter Kung, delegation chief of the International Committee for the Red Cross, described his group's work toward that end on January 28th. While national Red Cross/Red Crescent groups respond to natural disasters, the ICRC deals mostly with those created by humans: wounded civilians and soldiers, military prisoners, and the needs for shelter, food, water and sanitation. Kung explained that the distinction between natural and human-caused disasters is blurring, and he stressed the need to prevent conflict, rather than pick up during it or after it. ICRC has arranged ceasefires, created neutral zones, evacuated residents, and appealed directly to combatants for humanitarian behavior. Kung praised the efficiency and courage of NGOs who help ICRC in its work.

Karen Christianson of the International Association on Religious Freedom, a conflict resolution consultant, described several kinds of conflict, and various ways,



good and bad, of coping with them. Examples of conflict include differences between generations, groups unable to listen to each other, and economic dislocations such as plant closings. Trying to cope, people might attack, compromise, surrender, or retreat - but to resolve conflicts it is necessary to move beyond mere coping and find solutions. The process includes

identifying causes and goals, listing alternatives, and developing awareness of clashing roles and expectations. The greatest conflict-management challenge, Christianson added, comes when sides are unequal or one is evil.

UN humanitarian relief efforts in Somalia were discussed by Philip Johnston, President of CARE (Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere) on February 4th. UN officials had to overcome dislike for all the warring factions. To work toward social stabilization, the UN is attempting, with local input, to restore district police systems which can function after United States and, later, UN forces leave. While the primary needs are famine relief and citizen disarmament, there are huge underlying needs: improvements in water, health (of livestock as well as humans), agriculture, education and jobs - and the resettlement of 1.5 million displaced persons.

Johnston admitted that it is hard for recruiters to identify trustworthy local leaders, but he stressed the need to act quickly. He cited examples where local groups, after UN education and help, refused to let former warlords rule.

Every week 253,000 children die because of famine and preventable diseases such as diarrhea, said Staffan deMistura, UNICEF Deputy Director, on February 11th. The rise in ethnic disputes creates a corresponding rise in child misery. Juveniles are used as shields, food procurers, bargaining chips, and warriors. In Afghanistan, "stroll teams" of boys as young as nine are taught to throw grenades at Russians. When deMistura first went there, he learned that his natural and professional inclination to reach out to children could be fatal. Instead, he and his associates went to the marketplace, leapt atop a jeep, and explained the UN's peaceful mission.

An old merchant called out, inviting the speakers to inspect the ruins of his home. "The tomtom of the marketplace went through the city," said deMistura, "Taxi drivers, children, everyone understood that these UNICEF foreigners were different, not enemy soldiers." **NGO Briefings** are on Thursdays at 10:30 AM. The usual format is a half-hour film or videotape, followed by a question and answer session. NGO delegates, whose passes admit them to many other activities, often lunch afterward in the UN cafeteria. Alanna Hartzok, who plans to visit New York monthly to represent the International Union, has represented other groups at the UN. Pat Aller has enrolled the IU in a new NGO committee on the environment. This, and other meetings at the UN, will be reported in the months to come.

Godfrey & Yvonne Dunkley, Georgists and friends from South Africa, will be traveling across the USA this September en route to the Intl. Conference in Australia. Can any friends in the movement offer them lodging for a night or two? If so, contact us at the HGS for details.