

Short Report on the first UNOY International Working Group meeting in Handel, the Netherlands, 14-19 May 1989

“... Empowering youth to become generators of positive change in the world”

Report of the International Work Group for the United Nations Of Youth

"Take a child to the top of a mountain and have him yell out 'hello there'. With the echoes of his voice, he can create an avalanche..." Manoj Dani (19 years), Hong Kong Sept.27th, 1989

In a small town named Handel in the beautiful country of Holland, stands a monastery which lodged 35 youth from five continents. All of them came together to have their voices heard and amplified by the simple pure energy of their unity. To most of them, the week of June 14th to June 19th reflected many wonderful surprises. To all of them, it meant an unforgettable experience. The conference was held in an old monastery named 'De Weyst', now run by a few dedicated to the Gandhian principles. It was an ideal venue, for its peace and serenity allowed for much of the youth's magical work.

From the first day when Nikolai Firioubine (the initiator Of the United Nations Of Youth) proposed his vision of establishing an international organization of youth to solve impending world problems, the youth remained determined to succeed in their tasks - unshakeable and unencumbered by the mistakes of the world's senior decision makers. The delegates' function in Holland was to set in motion a movement for a United Nations Of Youth - serving thereby as the International Working Group (IWG) - the aims of which were amongst others to formulate the Charter and the declaration of the United Nations Of Youth, and to prepare for the First International Youth Assembly of the UNOY in 1990.

To the delight of the organizers, the young delegates took charge of the conference almost instantly. As soon as a coordinator was elected to run the meeting smoothly, the group focused on gaining the visions of each delegates' dreams for a better world. From these ideas, the first draft of the Charters' Preamble was created - the symbolic words which would have a great impact on all those involved.

The delegates were blessed with contributive help from visiting workshop leaders. Among the various workshops were "The Power of Consultation", "Global Cooperation"; the movie 'The Global Brain' all of which provided the youth with further insight with which to develop their goals. Central to the ideas of networking with other organizations, was the bond between the United Nations Of Youth and the International Children's Peace Council founded by Marguerite Smithwhite, who also attended the IWG session. It was decided that both groups would exchange delegates, and develop ideas on a mutually complementary ground. Three other groups represented at Handel were: Globetradet of Sweden, the Baha'is, Stichting Universele Opvoeding (Universal Education Foundation) and the contribution of Dr. Bernhard Benson (author of 'The Peace Book'), who, as a special guest attended the whole conference. Without the contribution of all of them much of the essential education that emerged from the week-long conference would have never blossomed.

The success of the IWG began to surface gradually, and on the fourth day, an ad-hoc committee was established to make the initial presentation of UNOY on the Dutch radio in Arnhem.

An unforgettable evening was also the visit to Nijmegen and the Pizza in Restaurant 'Romagna' which was offered to us by the Mayor of Nijmegen. We returned late at night. However, in the light of the fact that an actual Charter had not been completed for adoption at the Plenary Session the next day a group stayed up the whole night and on through the following morning to complete a substantial definition of the UNOY goals, structure and ideals. A vital meeting was in session during the whole of June 18th, for it was the last day, prior to the Press Conference at 's-Heerenberg. This was perhaps the most awe-inspiring session for all the delegates. In the morning, the UNOY Charter was read aloud, and soon the inseparable UNITY of the IWG was realized. All work done during the rest of the conference was done with a ceaseless burst of enthusiastic energy. Even though the UNITY had existed during the first few days, and during the moments of crisis, it became an enlightened awareness and driving force this day. The IWG met in smaller working groups to prepare for the last minute details for the final adoption and to be presented at the following day's press conference. During such time, the words to Preamble of the Charter were altered ever-so-slightly about 6 times, each time projecting the spirit of the UNOY even stronger than initially.

During the early evening, a Preparatory Committee whose task it is to prepare for the First International Youth Assembly was formed. It was at this session that a most remarkable event shed light on the members. Upon voting for the Preparatory Committee members, everybody had nominated each other symbolizing, unlike in regular selection procedures, every delegates' ability to becoming an outstanding contributor to the IWG tasks. It was at this time that the group selected Sacha Westerbeek as UNOY representative to the 'Seeking the True Meaning of Peace' Conference in Costa Rica, 25 - 30 of June. Eventually, a 9-member committee was inducted and the immediate actions of the IWG were inaugurated.

The delegates spent their last night together as a group singing the night away at the campfire out in the patio of the monastery. Tears of joy and togetherness touched the hearts of these young peace builders: for deep in their hearts was burning a flame that lit the darkness of a world torn in misery and conflict.

On Monday, June 19th, at Creative Center Gouden Handen in 's-Heerenberg, the 1st IWG presented their banner and Charter to Mr. Van den Broek (Minister of Foreign Affairs), and the attendants of the "Street-Children Day" and proclaimed June 19th as "Youth Sharing Day" and sang the "UNOY-song". Mr. Van den Broek praised the initiative of the UNOY, expressing his deep admiration of the fact that youth have taken the positive step of creating a better world condition for their future. Soon after this event, the delegates were showered with new members, and were interviewed by several media representatives. Through such interviews, the delegates were able to inspire those who had questions concerning the reality of the UNOY dream. This was yet another score for humanity as a whole - to sow the seeds of the promise for world peace.

The pinnacle of the 's-Heerenberg gathering was the live radio interview of United Nations Of Youth conducted by children under the age of 13. At the end of such an outstanding success, tears rolled down the cheeks of those who had witnessed all that youth can amount to. With their creative talents and unending capabilities, young people have shown their elders that age was no longer a barrier to achievement. By the late afternoon, the delegates left 's-Heerenberg and each other in solemn tears of Joy, Love, Light and Peace. To some, this was a miraculous moment they had only once experienced before. To others, such beauty and power of UNITY emerged as a true enlightened education. The delegates returned to their countries, inspired and touched by the work they had achieved. They made clear to all that youth have all the potential and enthusiastic energy to make a positive difference in the world. All that is needed is their voices and dreams to be heard, and their ideas to be taken seriously.

The achievement of the UNOY IWG may be labeled as "a positive, enlightening step for youth, and yet another score for humanity...".

And thus it was - the UNOY IWG Conference - the beginning of the fulfillment of international action and understanding.