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Mauritius: teaching for freedom

Being a member of AI and trying to get its message across is a difficult task in itself, but the idea of producing a book on human rights is an even more daunting task for a small section like ours. We hope that relating our experience and the obstacles we faced producing the book will prove useful to others who may wish to engage in a similar activity. Copies of the book, Teaching For Freedom, were distributed to all sections present at AI's International Council meeting in Cape Town.

Looking for clues

We had decided that we needed a book for our sixth formers aged 16 to 18, but we had no idea what the end product would look like when we embarked on the project. Fortunately, most of the people who sat on the National Committee for Human Rights Education (NCHRE) were teachers or were working in related fields and it was suggested that we ask our own school students about the subject. Our investigations during "General Paper" classes where students discuss various topics were most fruitful and enlightening. In some ways they provided the most important clues with regards to their knowledge or absence of knowledge on human rights issues.

The HRE Coordinator, Lindley Couronne, collected all the information for analysis and in late 1996 he identified a list of themes which were put before the NCHRE for examination. Our NCHRE eventually shortlisted the themes after much debate and asked us to get back to the students and find out their feeling about the content. Their reaction was most encouraging. It was important that we kept local concerns in sight as regards subject matter. Everyone on the Committee commented on the issues and we blended the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) together with AI's commitments and local concerns.

THE DIFFICULT THEMES

Death penalty

The subject of the death penalty naturally fell into place as it ideally united the three issues mentioned above — the UDHR, AI's concerns and local aspects. Perhaps it would be important to remind readers that our Parliament suspended the death penalty in November 1995 to replace it with a mandatory prison sentence of 30 years. We considered it most important to take up the issue in our book (for information purposes and also to prevent any backtracking). It is also important to point out that for the majority of the local population the abolition of the death penalty is not an established fact. The rising crime rate, including drug abuse, recently prompted one of our top ministers to raise the possibility of restoring the death penalty for deterrence purposes. From our dealings with students and the public at large, we can reasonably infer that the death penalty for Mauritians represents vengeance and not deterrence. With hindsight, we do not regret having retained this issue in our book. HRE work will have to be backed by AI's work for some years to come.

Labour rights

The issue of trade unionism was also felt as being of utmost importance to us. In recent years stringent legislation has made it more and more difficult for unions to exercise their rights. It never occurred to most students that labour rights are human rights. Only 20 per cent of the local labour force are members of trade unions and only a limited number of these are active members. Furthermore, unemployment is non-existent in the emerging economy of Mauritius and workers are being brought in from China, India and Madagascar to supplement the limited workforce. Almost all students are taken with the new political discourse on the merits of a free economy. It was a good thing that we placed things in perspective when deciding to include the subject in our book.

Human rights instruments

This theme was felt to be the most important and the most trying. Important because it was the backbone of the book and trying because it was entirely foreign to most students we had talked to. Yet there was no way we could go around it and we eventually decided to simplify the subject to a maximum. Notions such as declarations, protocols and conventions and their legal implications were discoveries for young people. When we started teaching in our pilot colleges, we found out that it was still difficult for the students to come to terms with such notions. It is true that this area is very technical but we feel we will have to look into the matter again when we produce a final version of the book by the end of our project.

Women

Bias against women is very common in our country and it was even entrenched in law. Until recently women who married foreigners could not stay in the country with their husbands. Discrepancies still exist with regards to equal pay for equal work, especially in the private sector. We believed that such situations were due to absence of information and we hope the book will contribute towards empowering the future female workforce as well as helping to reduce remaining strongholds of male chauvinism.

When the important themes had been identified, the NCHRE distributed the chapters to AI members who had considerable experience of human rights and AI's work. One of our worries was that we would not be in time for the start of the HRE classes, as 1996 was drawing to an end. We had decided that it would be best if each of us worked on a subject with which we were most familiar. This was not easy and at the end of the day some of us had plodded through unfamiliar terrain. It is important to point out at this stage that were it not for the camaraderie which characterizes all AI sections it would have been an arduous task.

All texts were submitted in January 1997 for revision by our supervising body before going to press. In the meantime other AI members worked with a well-known local artist, Feroz Ghanty, on the illustrations, presentation and the cover. The book was ready for distribution in late March and the HRE teachers did a good job working with photostat copies.

We do not regret the worries that came with the work as it helped us to get even more professionalized in AI Mauritius and reinforced the commitment of members. We would like to seize this opportunity to thank the Norwegian Section for having given us the opportunity to do more HRE.

Rajen Sawmy AI Mauritius AI has invested heavily in information systems over the past few years, covering all aspects of our work — how we gather information, how we store it, and how we make it available to our members and to the public. Most of our "product" is information, and the ability to manage and move that information quickly can literally mean the difference between life and death for victims of human rights violations. It is therefore natural that human rights activists are becoming experts in computers and telecommunications. AI has embraced the developments in computer technology with enthusiasm.

As a democratic worldwide movement, with over a million members and sympathizers in more than 160 countries, AI decided that computer networks like the Internet could only benefit human rights work in strengthening international solidarity. We saw three major advantages. First, the Internet could increase the input of accurate and timely information to our researchers. Second, the Internet could increase the speed and quantity of information that we output to our worldwide members and the public. Third, the Internet helps human rights activists talk to each other, share information and resources, and network together to take action.

At the International Secretariat (IS), just five years ago, we had computer staff who were primarily internally oriented, managing databases and accounting programs. We used telexes more than e-mail, and Reuters news came in on a teletype machine that clattered incessantly.

Today over 74 AI offices worldwide use e-mail on a daily basis, communicating easily with other offices, key AI activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individual research contacts. About 5,000 messages a day go in and out of the IS by e-mail. Researchers gather information from what is available on the Web, Internet discussion groups and electronic databases. They have real-time newsfeeds directly to their desktop, incorporating Reuters, AFP, EFE and the BBC SWB. AI is now running over 50 international and national websites and all our country reports, campaign reports, news releases and urgent actions are made available. There is also an electronic archive used by the IS and five international offices which contains all documents produced by the IS since 1991. Web activism is now a standard part of our planning for any major campaign. In total, we transmit about 150 megabytes a day out of the building, enough information to fill a small library.

There are currently 15 staff employed at the IS to constantly upgrade the computer system that AI members around the world use. Two staff specialize in hooking up AI sections to the Internet in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Two recent examples show the way the movement is continuing to develop its use of new technology. For the first time ever at an International Council meeting, in Cape Town last December, extensive computer facilities were made available to the delegates. Approximately 100 machines were set up with word processing facilities and access to the Internet, and individual temporary e-mail accounts were provided for 490 users. IS staff demonstrated Lotus Notes and an internal website was set up for the duration of the meeting, which included the meeting schedule, delegate lists and all resolutions and reports of Working Parties.

Thanks to a grant from the United Kingdom (UK) National Lottery to the UK Section, this year a special project has been set up to provide additional information technology support to the African membership. New machines and training in packages such as Lotus Notes and Windows 95 will be provided to several African sections, and the West Africa fieldworker will be trained in computer support techniques so he can give on-the-spot assistance for solving technical problems. There is no question that computerized communication is shaping the worldwide human rights movement. But there are differing views of this new technology. Some people believe it offers a wider democracy and freedom of communication which will allow countries in the South greater participation in a global electronic civil society. They agree with US Vice- President Al Gore, who said: "The Internet is narrowing what has always been the biggest gap between the rich and the poor: the information gap."

Other people believe new technology will promote greater disparity, where an elite can afford to connect to the global information networks, leaving behind the unconnected many who can't pay for enough food to eat each day, let alone afford a Pentium processor computer. The ongoing work that AI is doing to ensure that all sections have equal access to this technology is thus of vital importance.

One of AI's key priorities is to prevent human rights violations before they occur. We approach this work from different angles: by improving protection of human rights defenders; by building better networks within the human rights and NGO world; and of course through a growing program of human rights education and awareness. In all these areas information technology is important.

The Internet is excellent for raising awareness about human rights among the general public as it facilitates a widespread distribution of information. One idea currently being discussed is to add pages devoted to human rights education to the IS website. Materials produced by the IS HRE team that could be included are the First Steps manual, the HRE bibliographies produced each year, the recently completed 12-Point Guide for Good Practice in the Training and Education for Human Rights of Government Officials, as well as selected articles from this newsletter. Within AI, human rights educators should also take advantage of computer technology to improve communication, exchange of information and experience. Another option would be to start an e-mail conversation, or a bulletin board along the lines of the one set up for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights campaign, to which sections and individual HRE coordinators could subscribe.

For human rights educators, there is a growing pool of resources available via the Internet which can be drawn from when designing and developing human rights education programs and curricula. For some suggestions of sites you can visit, please refer to the box below. If you know of any other websites that might be useful for human rights educators — particularly resources from other regions or in different languages, please write and let the HRE team know so that the details can be published in subsequent issues of this newsletter. Also, please tell us your ideas of the kind of HRE material that should be included in the proposed HRE pages on the IS website. Contact Claire Thomas, HRE team, International Secretariat.

Internet sites

For those who have access to the Internet we suggest a few sites which might complement your teaching activities:

Amnesty International USA Educators Network

http://amnesty-usa.org/education

UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

http://www.education.unesco.org

One way of measuring the effective application of the right to education is to compare the indicators of access to education for different countries and regions. To do this you can consult annual statistics prepared by UNESCO:

http://www.unesco.org/general/stats/index.html

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

http://www.unhchr.ch

This contains the National Plans of Action for HRE that have been developed within the framework of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education, as referred to by Elena Ippoliti in this newsletter

International Bureau of Education (IBE)

http://www.unicc.org/

ibe/Inf Doc/Nat reps

The IBE is a centre of comparative education and an observer of educational trends throughout the world. Its website includes a profile of the education system in many countries, using data available from national reports presented to the International Conference on Education during the 1990s.

http://www.unicc.org/

ibe/Inf Doc/Nat reps

Human Rights Internet

http://www.hri.ca

Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa

http://www.uottawa.ca

http://www.hri.ca/hredu/

syllabi/index.shtml

Education International

http://www.ei-ie.org

Save The Children

http://www.oneworld.org/scf

World Wildlife Fund — Environmental rights explored

http://www.wwf.org/new/

frame.publications.htm

Partners in Human Rights Education (PIHRE)

http://www.umn.edu/

humanrts/education/pihre/

index.html

Note that the First Steps HRE manual produced by the IS HRE team is available on:

http://www.umn.edu/

humanrts/education/pihre/

content.htm

Human Rights USA

http://www.hrusa.org

StreetLaw Inc

http://www.streetlaw.org

Peoples Decade for Human Rights Education

http://www.pdhre.org

Peace Resource Center

http://www.umn.edu/

humanrts/peace

UN Decade for Human Rights Education

The UN Decade for Human Rights Education covers the period from 1 January 1995 to 31 December 2004. The objectives of the related Plan of Action are:

- (a) the assessment of needs and formulation of effective strategies for the furtherance of HRE;
- (b) the building and strengthening of programs and capacities for HRE at the international, regional, national and local levels;
- (c) the coordinated development of effective HRE materials;
- (d) the strengthening of the role and capacity of the mass media in the furtherance of HRE; and
- (e) the global dissemination of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

I would like to focus on national and local initiatives envisaged in the Plan of Action, in which I believe AI sections and groups have an important role to play. At the national level, the Plan provides for the establishment, upon the initiative of governments or other relevant institutions, of a national committee for human rights education, which should include a broad coalition of governmental and non-governmental actors and should be responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive (in terms of outreach), effective (in terms of educational strategies), and sustainable (over the long term) national plan of action for human rights education, with the support of regional and international organizations.

Accordingly, national and local initiatives are being undertaken in various countries in the framework of the Decade, and they vary considerably in scope, in the focus and in the identity of the actors involved. Also, ad hoc educational and public information initiatives are being undertaken in the framework of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the UDHR. I would like to mention here only two examples of national efforts in which AI is actively involved:

- 1. In areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority a committee made of representatives of the Authority and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has been set up to follow up a recent workshop organized in October 1997 by AI in Gaza, which recommended the development of a national plan of action and a national committee for HRE.
- 2. The Philippines: a National Plan of Action for HRE was prepared by the Philippine Commission on Human Rights. It includes objectives, target audiences, strategies (trainers' training, integration of human rights in all educational curricula, promotional campaigns, development of evaluation systems, etc.) and programs, including the creation of a human rights training, documentation and research centre. A coalition involving AI Philippines, various NGOs and governmental agencies has also conducted consultative workshops to elaborate HRE plans at the national and regional levels.

OHCHR activities for the Decade

In order to support these national efforts, in January 1997 the OHCHR convened in Geneva an expert meeting — in which AI representatives actively participated — to develop guidelines for national plans of action for human rights education. The guidelines include a set of principles for effective HRE and comprise six steps:

- establishing a national committee;
- * conducting a baseline/needs assessment study;
- * setting priorities and identifying groups in need;
- * developing the Plan;
- * implementing the Plan; and
- * reviewing and revising the Plan.

Three complementary documents to these guidelines are also being finalized and will be published by mid-1998 by the OHCHR:

- 1. The Right to Human Rights Education, a compilation of full texts/excerpts of international instruments pertaining to HRE;
- 2. Human Rights Trainers Guide, a methodological approach to the human rights training of professional groups; and
- 3. HRE Programming, a paper which includes ideas and suggestions for the implementation of targeted HRE programs regarding: (i) public awareness; (ii) the schooling sector; (iii) other priority groups and a resource guide to assist in program implementation.

The OHCHR is also developing training materials for specific target groups, such as prison officers, primary and secondary-school teachers, judges and lawyers, national and local NGOs, journalists, human rights monitors and parliamentarians, and other publications for a general

audience. Moreover, the OHCHR is developing a database on existing programs, materials and organizations for HRE at the international, regional and national levels, which will be made available through the OHCHR website. Other specific projects are being undertaken in the framework of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the UDHR and include the implementation of a joint project with UNESCO for the dissemination of the UDHR in schools, the compilation of a "shopping list" of practical ideas to commemorate the anniversary and the diffusion through the OHCHR website of 250 different language versions of the UDHR. What AI sections could do for the Decade

You may wish to be more involved in this global project by:

- * Taking the initiative for a national committee for HRE (or participating in its activities, when the committee is already established). AI sections can have a leading role in this effort, and you may review the above-mentioned Guidelines for national plans of action for HRE in this regard.
- * Sending regular information about your activities and the educational materials you produce to the OHCHR. This will be useful both for the above-mentioned OHCHR survey on HRE programs and materials, and for the OHCHR future Documentation Centre (many interested people and human rights workers from all over the world visit office, and they often consult the materials we have in-house for ideas and inspiration).

How the OHCHR can support your work

- * The OHCHR can provide you with information and publications (a list in the six UN languages is available from the OHCHR. You can address your requests to the UN Information Centres in your country, and if those publications are not available there, to the Publications Section of the OHCHR.
- * You may benefit from our Technical Cooperation activities. In various developing countries, the OHCHR manages technical cooperation projects, in cooperation with the governments, which aim at strengthening national capacities for human rights (through the organization of training courses, seminars, establishment of national institutions or documentation centres, etc.). Within this framework, training courses are also organized for NGOs or, in limited cases, grants are given. You may wish to write to us to receive information about this issue. The proclamation of the Decade for Human Rights Education is itself a tool for your activities. As a matter of fact, by proclaiming this Decade the UN General Assembly called upon governments, international organizations, NGOs, professional associations and all other sectors of civil society to concentrate their efforts and to work together to promote HRE. NGOs have an important role to play in inspiring, participating in and contributing to HRE initiatives. The Decade for Human Rights Education is indeed our common project, whose success will depend heavily on the work that each of us will be able to accomplish.

Elena Ippoliti

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The views expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Education and political reforms

Without doubt, one of the most important elements in the development of a just society is education. For this reason I find it interesting to look at the evolution of educational theories and practices.

Until about a hundred years ago, the immense majority of people did not know how to read and write — even in the western world. The possibility of education accessible to all was considered as a dangerous utopia. The idea of free and compulsory education found great resistance at the beginning of the 18th century.

One of the most committed pioneers of education as a vehicle for democratization was Thomas Jefferson. For him the normal exercise of democracy was not possible without education. Thanks to him and Benjamin Franklin, for the first time, a country (the USA) established free and compulsory education, although in Sweden and Denmark it was obligatory from 1719, but not free.

Nowadays the right to education is universally accepted, although it is not applied everywhere. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaims that elementary education should be free and compulsory. From this point onwards, education and the principles of educating for peace, democracy and human rights become recurrent texts in international and national legal instruments.

It is not difficult to see how education has been at the centre of big political reforms (Rousseau in France or Jefferson and Franklin in the USA), which in turn have had an important impact on national educational policies.

Paradoxically, the point of reference for all this evolving pedagogical knowledge is the legislation (constitutions, laws, ordinances, etc.)— teachers are going to read about teaching reforms in legal documents, and not in pedagogy. In fact, the majority of these reform processes have given little, if any, recognition to teachers' pedagogical knowledge. They are simply recognized as executioners of actions and plans determined by the state.

Latin America has not been exempt from this relationship between education and political reforms, even though most of the transformations have taken place one century later. It is enough to look at the reforms made by Santander and Ospina or the Law of 1844, where one can clearly see that the political disputes of the time were also disputes about the goals of education. In the 1990s the international agenda has given greater emphasis to topics such as democracy, peace, human rights, gender issues and the environment. For example, the 1991 General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS), which took place in Nassau, Bahamas, had as a central topic the strengthening of democracies in the continent. In 1992 the UN World Summit in Rio de Janeiro was devoted to environmental matters. Subsequently the UN organized the World Summit on Human Rights in Vienna (1993); on women, held in Beijing (1995); and on social development, held in Copenhagen (1995). In 1995 the UN declared the Decade for Human Rights Education (1995 to 2004).

The recent meeting of Ibero-

American Ministers of Education in Venezuela (September 1997) was an important springboard for the region. The main topic for discussion was "The Ethical Values of Democracy". The conclusions were then presented to the VII Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State in Venezuela (November 1997), which had as a main topic "Democratic Governance and Human Rights". It was the first time that this forum of Heads of State combined the themes of democracy

and human rights — although this was done from a negative perspective since the attention was on adjustment policies and the tensions between the "beneficent state" and the "minimum state". For educators it is very important to understand and follow this debate because at its heart you find the discussion between the traditional school and the democratic school, or between the traditional school and the activist school. It is in such debates that educators can propose models for our societies and then convert them into pedagogical practices.

At the moment, throughout Latin America, we are facing changes in educational legislation. Several countries in the region have adopted new general laws or are in that process (Mexico, Panama, Colombia, Peru and Chile). Other countries have decided to develop the existing general law (Venezuela). This is a key moment for the educational programs of AI in the region. These events present us with the possibility of actively participating in the development of appropriate legislation in support of the principles enshrined in the UDHR. But this is a task that we should not embark on alone. We need to develop new alliances to take on the challenges ahead so as to create an education which truly aims at the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Article 26.2 of the UDHR). Carlos Mario Gomez

Colombia

This article is based on extracts from a text by the author.

Eastern/Central Europe — new project

A new project has been set up to further develop AI's HRE work in the Eastern/Central Europe region. The aim is to contribute to the establishment of indigenous, self-sustaining human rights education programs by supporting initiatives launched during the special project for human rights education in Eastern and Central Europe carried out by the IS from 1993 to 1996. The new project will provide support for and coordination of human rights education programs already run by AI and other NGOs in the region — in particular in Croatia, Czech Republic, Moldova, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

We welcome Jana Kviecinska who has been hired on a fixed-term contract to coordinate the work and will be based in Slovakia. Jana will provide advice, including about funding opportunities, and will also carry out exploratory visits and develop proposals for new programs in countries where HRE has not yet been developed. She will also prepare and organize a regional meeting of AI members and other HRE practitioners aimed at identifying common needs and formulating common strategies for the region.

A poem used by AI Guyana on the cover of an HRE publication

If a child lives with criticism, she learns to condemn.

If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.

If a child lives with ridicule, she learns to be shy.

If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty.

If a child lives with tolerance, she learns to be patient.

If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.

If a child lives with praise, she learns to appreciate.

If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.

If a child lives with approval, she learns to like herself.

If children live with acceptance and friendship, they

learn to find love in the world.

HRE manual for Africa

The IS HRE team has obtained a grant from the European Human Rights Foundation to produce a human rights education manual for the Africa region. The African membership and other non-governmental organizations in the region have indicated that there is a clear need for a practical, generic HRE manual, similar to First Steps which the HRE team produced for Eastern/Central Europe, but more suited to the needs of an African audience. For Africa, it is hoped to produce a publication which would incorporate methodology and activities for teaching human rights in an African context and in more informal settings, and thus could be easily adapted and used by African community-based organizations as well as by teachers in schools. The pack will be produced in English and will also be translated into French.

Morocco — workshop planned

The AI groups in Morocco, in conjunction with the Middle East Development team at the International Secretariat, are planning a human rights education workshop to be held in 1998. The objective of the workshop is to introduce teacher trainers to human rights concepts and participatory methodologies so as to support moves towards the permanent inclusion of such concepts and practices in the curricula of teacher training colleges.

The topics proposed for the workshop include:

- * Human rights and their universality: presentation from a Moroccan cultural perspective.
- * The curricula and human rights: why and how should human rights be made part of the curricula?
- * Introduction to participatory teaching methodologies.
- * Contributions that teacher training colleges could make towards the efforts the government is undertaking to reform the school system.

Integrating human rights into Palestinian education

A workshop focusing on developing a strategy for the integration of human rights concepts into Palestinian educational curricula was held in Gaza City from 19 to 21 October 1997. It was organized by the Palestinian groups of AI and funded by AI Norway's Teaching for Freedom program.

The Palestinian Authority was well represented at the opening session and took part in the debate. The workshop heard reports on the roles of human rights organizations and other institutions in human rights education, and on the efforts of the Arab Institute for Human Rights and UNESCO in this field. A committee was set up to follow up the recommendations from the workshop.

New HRE materials

Congratulations to AI Senegal who recently published Un Guide pour l'Education aux Droits de l'Enfant. This book is intended as a pedagogical tool for educators and group facilitators throughout Senegal. It explains why it is important to educate about children's rights, and discusses techniques for group animation including guidelines for organizing role-play. There are also descriptions of the educational games for children produced by AI Senegal, as well as some supporting texts such as the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and tools for evaluation. For further information, please contact: Cheikh Tidiane Camara, HRE Coordinator, AI Senegal.

AIUSA has revised its collection of Human Rights Education Resource Notebooks. These notebooks are unbound compilations of activities and resources for use with young children and

adults. AIUSA's Human Rights Education Steering Committee has now produced 10 books covering the following topics:

- * Children's rights
- * Conflict resolution and peace
- * Economic rights
- * Death penalty
- * Indigenous people's rights
- Gay and lesbian rights
- * Religion, race and ethnicity
- * Teaching human rights through literature
- * Women's rights
- * Teaching young children about human rights

For more information or to order copies of the notebooks (US\$8 each), please contact:

Human Rights USA Resource Center, 310 Fourth Avenue South, Suite 1000, Minneapolis, MN 55415-1012, USA

captions

Students and teachers from the Prof. B. Bissoondoyal College in Flacq, Mauritius, who participated in the AI Mauritius' HRE project

Information technology in use at the 1997 International Council meeting in Cape Town

The Western Sahara refugee camp in Tindouf, southwest Algeria. Children in the camp participate in a project called "Spanish Voices", which was funded by the European Union and links them through the Internet to groups of children in Granada, Guatemala and the UK.

Children engaged in HRE activities organized by AI Argentina

Wei Jingsheng, a former prisoner of conscience in China, at a press conference at the International Secretariat in November 1997, shortly after his release

A Somali refugee girl crossing the border into Kenya on her way to a refugee camp near Liboi, northern Kenya

(c) Jean-Claude Coutausse