

**Water Apartheid: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis** by Suzanne Golas CSJP

We've heard the facts so many times. Over a billion people do not have access to clean water. Over 2.4 billion people (one third of the world's human population) do not have decent sanitation, and 1.8 million children under five die every year from water borne diseases. The Millennium Development Goals will try to halve the number of people who do not have clean water and adequate sanitation. However, the United Nations recently published a "Human Development Report 2006: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis." The document, containing statistics, research results and analysis, reveals disturbing facts.

The global water crisis, according to the report, is mainly related to power and poverty, rather than scarcity. Water and sanitation simply are not considered "glamorous" issues by wealthy Western donor nations. Despite all that has been written about the global water crisis over the last decade, the amount of aid given to this problem has diminished by 25%.

Furthermore, the nations suffering most from the crisis place little priority on clean water and sanitation because those most affected are the poorest, often women and children, who have no influence with the ruling powers. Water distribution is key. Slum dwellers cannot afford to connect to water mains even if they are available. They must buy their water from resellers who truck it into poor areas. Often these vendors pay tariffs four to five times the price paid by domestic users. Add in the transport costs and the poor can end up paying ten times as much for water as the nation's wealthy. In many of the poorest areas of the world, people pay more for a gallon of water than people in New York or London. The BBC has called this crisis "water apartheid."

Ultimately, the reality of water is about power. Those who have the power decide the priorities that determine who gets how much water. Examples abound – Pakistan spends 47 times more on guns than on clean water and sewers. The military budget of Ethiopia is 10 times the water and sanitation budget. Israeli settlers take six times the amount of

water from the West Bank as the local Palestinians.

There is good news in the report which describes successful water strategies in countries including Thailand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and South Africa. The report also makes some strong and practical recommendations starting with the need for all governments to legislate that water is a human right guaranteeing every person 20 litres, or about six gallons of water a day. (In the US, 152 gallons of water are used per person per day; in the UK 88 gallons per person per day!) The UN Report urges national governments to "draw up credible plans for tackling the crisis in water and sanitation." However, there is also a call for a global action plan "to focus fragmented international efforts to mobilize resources and galvanise political action by putting water and sanitation front and center on the development agenda."

The report includes strong motivational factors for nations to centralize their water efforts. It describes how a global clean water campaign would spur economic growth in regions presently experiencing diminishing growth each year because of poor water and sanitation. The report states that each dollar invested in water and sanitation improvements would return \$8 through increased productivity, reduced healthcare costs and other economic windfalls, especially for the poor.

Finally, efforts to better manage water resources could also reduce the likelihood of wars and armed conflicts erupting over control and access to a basic necessity of life. The report clearly re-focuses the emphasis on the importance of water. In identifying the benefits of such an emphasis, the report increases the possibility of realizing the Millennium Development Goals.



## The Alliance of Civilizations: Bridging the World's Divides by Kitty Parisi CSJP-A

Reading and hearing news accounts of the horrific situations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon and of the growing hostility and divide between Muslim and Western societies, many question whether we are in the midst of a clash of civilizations or a war of religions.

In November 2005, Secretary-General Kofi Annan formed a high level panel of world-renowned experts to study this important issue. Named the Alliance of Civilizations, the panel was co-chaired by leaders of Spain and Turkey and included Archbishop Tutu and Karen Armstrong. The results of the panel's year-long study were presented to Kofi Annan in November 2006 and I heard them at a December NGO briefing.

This panel rejects the "fatalistic idea of a clash of civilizations" and believes we can bridge the Muslim-West divide. It also maintains that while religion has been exploited to "stir passions, fuel suspicions and support alarmist claims" of a new war of religion, the root cause of the Muslim-West divide is political and not religious. After reading the report, Kofi Annan said we need to reject stereotypes, generalizations, preconceptions and not "let crimes committed by individuals or small groups dictate our image of an entire people, an entire region, or an entire religion." The problem, he said, "is never the faith—it is the faithful, and how they behave towards each other."

The Alliance of Civilizations panel gives clear and concise insights into the historical and present-day causes for the growing mistrust and resentment between the Western and Muslim societies. It also proposes concrete and practical long-term initiatives in the areas of education, media, youth and migration that would promote a culture of respect and understanding and help to build bridges between these societies. Among the recommendations are:

- ① An objective analysis of the successes and failures of past Israeli-Palestinian peace initiatives to find a way out of this crisis
- ② Immediate resumption of regional and international Middle East Peace conferences
- ③ Support for the expansion of political pluralism in the Muslim world
- ④ Achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals to decrease poverty and ensure sustainable development for all people
- ⑤ Creation of film and TV programs to promote

understanding and appreciation of each other's culture and religion

- ⑥ Promotion of cross-cultural and human rights education for all students everywhere
- ⑦ Development of a Global Youth Solidarity Fund
- ⑧ Increased cooperation between countries on migration and the successful integration of immigrant populations
- ⑨ Development of training programs to widen journalists' understanding of critical international issues and to enhance the media's ability to inform the public in an accurate and balanced way.

I believe that implementation of these recommendations will go a long way in overcoming the Muslim-West divide and in building bridges of justice and peace in our world. The Alliance of Civilizations group deserves our strong support. I invite you to read the report at [www.unaoc.org](http://www.unaoc.org).



### Q *What does the UN do?*

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- ① Establishes international tribunals and courts to ensure justice for war crimes and violations of humanitarian law.
  - ② Leads campaigns against poverty, hunger, disease and other areas to ensure the Millennium Development Goals are met.
  - ③ Assists countries in their economic and social development.
  - ④ Removes thousands of landmines that would injure and maim civilians.
  - ⑤ Promotes human rights for all.