



Integral Board Meetings – October 2014

Strategic Topic 06 - The importance of Human Rights and Rule of Law for development¹

When working for the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) to raise a voice within the United Nations, I might not necessarily give you the impression to be busy with something worthwhile. It is my aim that this will change and that my paper will contribute to it; and what is more, that members of Integral will discover the importance of both WEA and the UN. A world would be won if we discover that in actual fact they both are indispensable.

Let's start with the **United Nations**. Most of you have spent your life in development work. In your work you have come across the UN. I bet this often causes mixed feelings, to put it mildly. I am not here to refute this. I very well know that there is ample reason to doubt the UN's performance. I would like to cut it short by a rhetoric question: What's the alternative for the UN in the post-cold war era, in a multi-polar world? WEA is working at the UN because we think there is no alternative. This is the platform where the world's nations meet, talk and negotiate.

The second question mark is the **World Evangelical Alliance** itself. It is a structure started in 1846 which assumes seniority but for a church gathering it is still rather young. Listen to what an outsider has to say about Evangelicals, in this case the English Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm in his book *Fractured Times*, page 218: "*Evangelicalism is at bottom an ensemble of autonomous congregations. (...) These are not movements centrally concerned with the politics of their societies, but with the creation or re-creation of communities... by powerful, individual spiritual experiences.*" Hobsbawm thus concludes that Evangelicals are politically highly relevant and uses the hidden opinion of the Chinese government as a proof. Now, my question to you is: where do we put the "A" of the WEA? What is the role of the Alliance? Representing 600 million people worldwide, it feels like a sleeping giant.

Both subjects can better be addressed by discussing **the emergence of Human Rights and Rule of Law**. I want to quote a recent substantial research into 60 years of development aid by the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy. The research project concludes: "*No borders, no justice, or rather: no social justice*".² The leader of the research project, Peter van Lieshout, in a TV interview said that African nations so far had "*foreign invented, resource driven institutions with no relevance to local institutions.*" Not surprisingly the report concluded that Rule of Law should be put on the future agenda.

In other words: for the emergence of Human Rights and Rule of Law, for justice, we need sound institutions, in particular at national level: **the State**. But the reality is that we are dealing with resource driven State institutions and unsanctioned international structures. Clearly there is the possibility of dis-functionality at every level. This is a disaster that does not make many headlines. When your mission is, like the Integral website puts it, "*a world without poverty*", it should give you ample cause for alarm.

Here is where I want to introduce what we are doing in Geneva. We are participating in a process to improve coherence of national human rights and rule of law through several mechanisms in the UN's human rights system. One particular relevant example is the

¹ This paper is the fruit of discussions and reflections involving several people. I would like to thank in particular my colleague Albert Hengelaar co-author of this paper. He is himself a former NGO director and is now part of the WEA Liaison Office at the UN in Geneva.

² Volume "Doing Good or Doing Better", page 366

Universal Periodic Review,³ conducted within the UN Human Rights Council; a Review that is universal to include all nations, not just partial selections; and periodic, to recognise that Rule of Law is a *process* that needs to be scrutinized time and again. It is a peer review of countries where the civil society and therefore also the WEA and its national and local constituencies are allowed to participate.

So the subject of the UPR is justice and human rights, the level is international, the focus is national and the inputs are local. In theory this is what it takes to bring progress. In practice you might guess that this is not an easy ride. Although this mechanism was only started in 2007 and not, like in the case of development, in 1948, the hurdles are substantial. As an example we could point to a report we surfaced on corruption in a resource cursed State. The national alliance is defunct, the development organization in the country could not support our report without approval of the international headquarters, but during the UPR session the nation strongly rebuked our conclusions as complete nonsense. So how come that our efforts are despised in Geneva by the countries Justice minister? Are we doing something irrelevant? Is the level of engagement dysfunctional? Why is the national alliance in this nation with many Christians defunct? What makes the government nervous when they are questioned on corruption?

Another example: there is a nation where the WEA always had a keen interest in: the Central African Republic; perhaps the only country in the world with a majority of non-mainline church Evangelicals. In view of what I said before it may not come as a surprise that politics also in this country is run by a small group of power brokers, often military strongmen. As you all may know this situation recently came to a head when a Russian trained minority representative who twice lost elections conspired with forces in neighbouring countries. He was successful in grabbing power. We ended up with a country without a State. We lost everything except maybe... a functioning Evangelical Alliance.

In this situation the President of the Evangelical Alliance together with the RC Archbishop and most importantly the president of CAR's Islamic Conference did something completely innovative and courageous: they started campaigning for peace together. In actual fact they created a community driven social contract and not a resource driven social contract. Strikingly, the Geneva Ambassador of the nation, appointed by the recent coup leaders, was not interested in our efforts. He sat in all meetings on funding, but did as if what WEA said was irrelevant; until the brothers of the interfaith platform arrived in Geneva and arrived at the Palais des Nations. All doors went open and the UN institutions went out of the way to use the momentum created.⁴

I hope that you will notice that what we are up to in Geneva, as WEA within the UN, is highly relevant:

- We tackle the performance of the **national** governments
- We give opportunity to Evangelicals to **unite** for defending justice in their nations
- We stimulate the **community driven** national social contract to support the emergence of justice
- We give relevance to **global justice** without loosing sight of indispensable development of **national institutions**

³ For more information on the UPR, see this very informative webpage made by a civil society organisation: www.upr-info.org.

Since 2012, the WEA has submitted UPR reports on India, Switzerland, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, DRC, Viet Nam, Kazakhstan, Italy. All these reports can be downloaded here:

<http://www.worldevangelicals.org/resources/categories/index.htm?cat=98>

⁴ See FIEDLER Rebecca, The contribution of the interfaith platform to reconciliation process in the Central African Republic, WEA Geneva Liaison Office to the UN, June 2014 (available on demand).

I want to encourage you to think about the opportunity that this creates. What the relevance of a community bred and national social contract is. How different it is if people are responsible for their own country. How important it is to think broadly about poverty. To work not only against the causes of injustice, but to work also on the structures that create and sustain injustice. Let's not cast our minds into scenarios that are defunct in the contemporary political context. There is a world to be won if we emancipate religious communities into a present day context. The world discovers religions. The secularization thesis has failed and it has failed dramatically. Last month in Geneva there was a major conference on redefining secularism. The discovery is that secularism is just another form of fundamentalism. Do we take such developments serious? *What an opportunity would it be if we as Christian justice oriented NGO's are in the forefront of innovation.* The brothers in the CAR have shown us that innovation arrives at unexpected moments. Perhaps you can think of them when you deal with budget cuts. Those cuts might just as well be turned into expansion if the policies are changed. In June we hosted a Caritas officer who made a deal with the International Red Cross to deliver boots on the ground for Global Fund campaigns... because Caritas has a great network at local level. And even more so do the Evangelicals.

As WEA we are both the think tank and boots on the ground in the international arena. So far we mainly interested partners (for advocacy purposes and/or funding) in the sector of Religious Liberty. We would be keen to work with members of Integral to use the momentum at the UN. This could greatly enlarge the torque of your efforts and create new chances. Know this: our boots on the ground in the countries are those busy with "re-creation of communities". The seculars acknowledge this power, not realizing however that in the end it comes from God who inspires humans. Do we acknowledge it too? To me this question is a good enough end for an Evangelical call. A call to wake up a sleeping giant.