

Report on the January 1990 Session of the

Diplomacy Training Program

Aims and Objectives

The DTP's stated aim is "to train peoples of the developing world to better utilise the United Nations and other international forums"

This general statement can be broken down into component parts:

A) Provision of information about the UN system and its many agencies; International Law, Human Rights Law etc

B) Encouraging the participants to develop legal argument and factual analysis of their people's struggle for justice and self determination. This includes, among other things, practice sessions involving a "devils advocate".

C) Providing an awareness of the type of skills required to represent peoples at the international level - eg public speaking, legal argument; knowledge of the UN Charter and Human Rights instruments; Utilising the Media etc. and to provide a basic introduction to each.

D) Contact with National Liberation struggle organisations and their experience. This is done through special session devoted to particular issues, eg Eritrea, as well as through contact between the participants themselves and the development of shared experience.

E) Introduction to international politics

The January 1990 Session was the first four week main training session attempted. It is planned that follow-up In-Country sessions, specific to peoples' needs will be implemented during 1990 in the Philippines, Thailand. and Australia (Alice Springs).

With 14 countries represented directly at the course it is difficult to formally address every participant's issue in sufficient depth. However participants are encouraged to use the session convenors as resource persons and to take up their issue with them directly at a later date. This was done by some participants.

The Participants

There were 30 participants from 14 countries, representing a wide range of non government organisations and peoples. All had direct experience in their own communities on a local level and some had participated in national and international campaigns before. 18 participants were women.

Although English was the first language of only a few participants, that did not produce any severe difficulties.

The mixing of highly educated individuals with lower educationally qualified people produced a harmonious group with varied talents. Similarly the mixing of representatives of extremely varied organisations with widely divergent needs and issues produced a learning environment of great strength.

The Diplomacy Training Program is not an elite training program and encourages locally based participants who may never use international

forums directly. Confirmation was found of this approach during face to face interviews with those participants least likely to become international representatives. Each strongly supported the spread of knowledge and the development of international strategies from a local base.

Issues

There was, of course, a wide variety of issues represented by the participants, and it was not possible to cover them all sufficiently

Some participants were disappointed that their issue did not receive due prominence, however the course is designed to bring together many issues and to provide a cross fertilisation of ideas and strategies. Rather than concentrate on a few issues the DTP prefers to bring together groups that may never have had contact before.

This strategy worked extremely well. Strong friendships were formed and links between organisations and individuals fostered which will stand for a long time. The DTP will maintain contact with all its participants through a Newsletter which will provide information about the international activities of Indigenous peoples and National Minorities.

Session Convenors

The session convenors were resource persons, not lecturers, and some participants used the contacts made during the course to follow up at a later date - eg for legal advice. Some convenors found their style of communication did not suit the group's needs and the DTP organisers will rearrange the teaching program for future sessions, following the participants comments during evaluation, eliminating some sessions and replacing them with new ones, and seek out session convenors that can adapt their teaching style to the participants.

Overall the course provided a little too much information and too little practical workshop style

learning. Partly this was due to teaching style problems, and partly it was due to the fact that the January 1990 session was the first course attempted and was a learning process for the DTP organisers as well.

However the course content does have to be highly information oriented and to stretch the participants' discipline and listening abilities. There is, after all, a lot of factual material to be presented and the course is designed to take participants out of their normal environment of "solidarity group" support and make them adapt to a, largely foreign, concept of proving their case against a doubting and unsupportive listener.

This is not easy, particularly to people who tend to use unspoken assumptions about the justice of their cause, and who often expect immediate sympathy. The sceptical Western attitude can be extremely difficult to face when a person feels their struggle intensely and cannot understand why others do not share that feeling.

During the evaluation, when participants were asked if there was too much information, almost all said yes but if then asked which sessions they would cut from the program were often unwilling to cut anything and would agree that the amount of information was necessary.

The Teaching Program

The four week program was a very intensive and rewarding experience for all involved.

30 separate session convenors were used plus numerous other resource persons during the four weeks and the teaching schedule included the following teaching sessions:

In all sessions participants were encouraged to actively search out specific issues and case studies and to challenge assumptions and methodology.

Introduction to Public International Law - 4 hours, (Professor Ivan Shearer (University of NSW) and Professor James Crawford (Sydney University);

Human Rights Law and Refugee Law - 7 hours, (Professor Patricia Hyndman University of NSW);

Media Workshop - 5 hours (Dale Keeling, Fiji Independent News Service)

Human Rights and Foreign Policy - 3 hours (Convenors James Dunn, Human Rights Council with representatives of the USA and USSR Embassies)

ECOSOC and the UN Human Rights Commission - 5 hours (Convenor Professor Maxim Tardu, Diplomatic Studies Centre, Geneva, with John Sheppard, Australian Dept of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Professor Garth Nettheim, University of NSW)

Sub Commission on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities - 2 hours (Professor Tardu, with Tony Simpson, Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Sydney)

Human Rights Commission Working Groups on indigenous peoples, disappearances, torture - 3 hours (Professor Tardu and Tony Simpson)

UNESCO - 5 hours (Thelma O'Con-Solorzano, Director UN Information Office, Sydney, with Martin Sharpe, Aust Dept of Foreign Affairs, Dr Margaret Bailley, Freedom From Hunger Campaign)

The International Labour Organisation - 5 hours (Dr Shinichi Ago, ILO Regional Office, Bangkok)

Application of the Right to Self Determination - 5 hours with presentations by participants of the cases of East Timor, West Papua and New Caledonia (Professor Howard Berman, Western Law School, San Diego, USA, with Tony Simpson)

Non Government Organisations - 2 hours (John Birch, Australian Council for Overseas Aid)

Non Government Organisations and the Environment - 3 hours (Bill Hare, Deputy Director Australian Conservation Foundation)

The UN System - 4 hours (Thelma O'Con-Solorzano)

Security Council Debate - role play session debating the Panama crisis - 6 hours including

preparatory sessions (Thelma O'Con-Solorzano, Jose Ramos-Horta, Executive Director Diplomacy Training Program)

The Special Committee on Decolonisation - 2 hours (Thelma O'Con-Solorzano, Jose Ramos-Horta)

Special Session on Namibia - 3 hours (Michael Maley, Australian Electoral Commission and Jose Ramos-Horta)

Tibet and Eritrea - 5 hours (Peter Grogan, International Commission of Jurists, and Fessehaie Abraham, Eritrean relief Association)

The Non-Aligned Movement - 4 hours (Jose Ramos-Horta)

Negotiations - 10 hours (Leslie Fallick, Public Sector Union, and Professor Brian Brooks, University of NSW)

The situation in the Philippines - 2 hours (Lisa Dacanay and Carmencita Karagdag, Rural Reconstruction Movement)

Environmental issues and the law - 4 hours (Donna Craig, Ben Richardson, Macquarie university, Nicola Paine, Environmental Defenders Office, Sydney)

The Timor Gap Treaty - 2 hours (hosted by the International Commission of Jurists, (with Professor Ivan Shearer, Dr Sasha Stepan, Monash University, Dr Derrick Wilde, Gold Coast CAE)

Country situation reports by participants, covering Australia, Burma, New Zealand, Fiji, Palau, El Salvador, Malaysia)

World University Service - a presentation by the Geneva based NGO (Laksiri Fernando)

In addition an hour at the beginning of each day was set aside for feedback and special requests by participants. This often provided the opportunity to bring issues and case studies to participants' attention which may not have been raised during the formal sessions.

There were also 5 separate social events held during the four weeks - 4 evening functions and a Sunday bus trip to Jervis Bay. The participants also organised their own, impromptu social events.

Evaluation method

A three stage evaluation procedure was used. This involved:

1. Face to face interviews with participants in country groups - aimed at obtaining responses about the overall effectiveness of the course and its applicability to each country situation. Standard questions were used and the participant was encouraged to present alternatives.

2. A formal questionnaire - an anonymous standard form was filled in by participants. This was designed to obtain personal responses from participants about individual sessions and session convenors, as well as the overall effectiveness of the course.

3. A full group gathering of all participants to discuss the course and ways of improving it, through discussion, presentation of alternatives and seeking of consensus.

The evaluation found:

1. That the January 1990 Session was a tremendous success, both from the participants' comments and suggestions and from the comments of session convenors.

2. A strong camaraderie developed between participants which will continue. This is an important outcome which, combined with the development of new strategies and a sense of encouragement, will lead to increased international activity by the participants and their organisations.

3. The balance between information and practical sessions could be moved a little towards the practical. However almost all participants, as well as session convenors, commented that information was an important part of the course. Style of presentation by some convenors could be improved.

4. The course should be run again in Jan 1991 and In-Country Sessions, specific to participants' needs should be run during 1990.

5. A Newsletter should be produced by DTP to network the participants and other organisations.

6. The mixing of highly educated individuals with lower educationally qualified people produced a harmonious group with varied talents. Similarly the mixing of representatives of extremely varied organisations with widely divergent needs and issues produced a learning environment of great strength.

7. The participants were strongly encouraging for the further development of the Diplomacy Training Program, with many wishing to be kept informed of developments and wanting to send other representatives of their organisations to future courses.

The January Session of the DTP is a recognised University of New South Wales course and a certificate is awarded to participants who have successfully completed it. Assessment is based purely on attendance and participation. Only three participants failed to be awarded a Certificate of Completion of the 30 who attended.

The future

3 separate In-Country sessions, of shorter duration and more specifically targeted than the January session, are planned for 1990 as well as another four week January session in 1991 in Sydney. In-Country sessions will be planned and developed in cooperation with local organisations and follow specific local needs. An additional four week session, in Spanish and Portuguese, is planned to be held in Portugal, in August 1990, (funding permitting) aimed at Spanish and Portuguese speaking nations of Africa and Latin America.