

International Humanist and Ethical Union 1952-2002

Humanistics Library

*Bert Gasenbeek and Babu Gogineni (eds.)*

# **International Humanist and Ethical Union 1952-2002**

Past, present and future

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## Preface

When an organization celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, there is good reason to look back and to look forward. This is what the staff of the *Humanistisch Archief* (the Humanist Archives) in Utrecht, the Netherlands, thought two years ago, when they were appointed the official keeper of the archives of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). The IHEU, the world federation of humanist, rationalist, secular, atheist and ethical culture organizations founded in 1952, enthusiastically welcomed their idea.

Would it not be an idea to describe the IHEU's fifty years of history in a book? And would not such a publication also gain in value by complementing its historical account by a comment on IHEU and world Humanism today? So we set about circulating statements by two IHEU leaders and inviting some young humanists from around the world to react to their ideas, and to discuss their own views of the future of Humanism. As IHEU would celebrate its anniversary with a jubilee congress in the Netherlands, where it had been founded, we saw this also as a nice occasion to publicly present the book.

We hope that this publication captures the vision and enthusiasm of the founding fathers, the leaders, the volunteers and professionals of a unique organization, and that it also provides some stimulating perspectives for the future of International Humanism.

We hope you will enjoy the result of this co-production.

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# Humanism for the world

The IHEU in a nutshell

*Babu Gogineni*

## The humanist way

As a life stance rooted in rational thinking, modern Humanism provides a way of understanding our universe in naturalistic rather than in supernatural terms. It offers men and women, both as individuals and as members of society, a secular ethics grounded in human values.

Drawing inspiration from their rationalist and freethinking heritage, Humanists reject absolute authorities and revealed wisdom. Humanists consider human experience to be the only source of knowledge and ethics. Humanists believe in intellectual integrity, and do not allow custom to replace conscience. Humanists promote free inquiry, which is the basis of the scientific spirit. As a living philosophy, Humanism constantly enriches itself with the progress of knowledge.

Guided by the spirit of human solidarity, Humanists are committed to tolerant pluralism and human rights. As Humanism is also a philosophy of human freedom, Humanists aim for a social order in which individual freedom and dignity, social justice, fundamental rights and the rule of civilised law are protected. Humanists continuously explore ways of extending responsible freedom and happiness in our increasingly complex world.

The social ideal of Humanism is the spread of democratic values resulting in comprehensive social, political and economic democracy. Humanists believe that this can be achieved only with the strength of humanity's own moral and intellectual resources.

Humanism seeks to be a modern, cosmopolitan and democratic alternative to traditional religion and to authoritarian and other oppressive social attitudes.

## The humanist world

Historically, the Humanist tradition has its intellectual roots in ancient China, India, Greece, Rome and Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe. Humanist (humanist, ethical culture, rationalist, secularist or atheist) organizations, however, are a relatively recent phenomenon. Humanist groups are cultural organizations working on an educational or non-party political basis to translate Humanist aspirations into practical actions. In modern society, these organizations

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### **International Humanist and Ethical Union**

The IHEU is the world federation of humanist organizations: the sole world umbrella organization embracing humanist, atheist, rationalist, secularist, ethical cultural and free-thought organizations.

#### *Mission*

The mission of IHEU is:

- to bring into active association groups and individuals throughout the world interested in promoting humanism and humanist ethics;
- to promote humanism internationally;
- to represent the world humanist movement in international fora; and
- to assist in the development of humanist organizations world-wide.

#### *Aims*

The long term aims of IHEU are:

- to promote Humanism as a non-theistic life stance throughout the world;
- to promote the identity of Humanism, including the name and symbol of Humanism;
- to promote the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Values as a moral charter for the world;
- to promote the humanist perspective within international organizations and the international community;
- to strengthen organized Humanism in every part of the world;
- to build a strong and effective global organization.

#### *Activities*

The IHEU is currently a small organization which needs to consolidate its current activities to make them effective before being able to expand its range of activities and increase its visibility. Currently the IHEU activities are:

- international congresses;
- support for Humanist groups in developing countries;
- participation in international and regional bodies to further humanist goals;
- policy formulation;
- communications: organizing campaigns, publications, website and e-news;
- fundraising.

[Source: *IHEU Strategic plan 2002-2006*, November 28, 2001]

also provide a community for those who find meaning and value in life without the aid of traditional religions or gods.

There are nearly a hundred Humanist groups flourishing in nearly forty countries, from Nepal to Peru, from Slovakia to Indonesia, from Ghana to New Zealand. All these groups are engaged in fulfilling their primary task of keeping the human-centered scientific outlook alive. Humanist groups provide criticism of dogmatic religious claims, reject authoritarianism in all aspects of life, cultivate the use of critical intelligence, develop ethical values appropriate to the present human condition, encourage the ideals of tolerance and dissent, and the negotiation of differences by rational means.

To achieve their goals, Humanist groups publish literature, contribute articles to newspapers, organize seminars, workshops, conferences, produce broadcasting material for TV and radio, participate in debates, maintain internet websites, lobby governments and the media, and respond to official consultative documents.

Practical activities in the community by organized Humanists are as diverse as the defense of democracy, protection of civil rights, provision of sheltered housing for the elderly and helping the victims of religious and sexual intolerance and persecution. Humanist organizations in countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands provide social and personal support through education, counseling and community care where hundreds of Humanist professional moral educators and counselors are employed in schools, hospitals, prisons and the armed forces. Humanist groups in Asia work for democracy, women's emancipation and the eradication of superstition, while Humanists in Canada and Europe have fought for contraception and abortion rights. In Norway and in the United Kingdom, Humanist groups offer non-religious rites of passage (naming ceremonies, weddings and funerals) as a service to the Humanist community. Still other Humanist groups fight for the separation of religion and state, promote the scientific attitude, come to the rescue of religious prostitutes in India, or campaign against the genital mutilation of female children in Islamic societies.

### **IHEU—international organization for humanism**

A strong international organization is essential to increase the world-wide impact of Humanism and to ensure that the world Humanist community benefits fully from the achievements of all its members. The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) is the international organization for Humanism.

IHEU was founded in 1952 in Amsterdam and is the only umbrella organization of Humanist, rationalist, atheist, secularist, ethical culture and agnostic groups around the world. Its member organizations range from large membership groups to specialist bodies such as publishers, universities and development agencies. As a federation of national and regional Humanist groups, IHEU coordinates activities of its member organizations, stimulates their policies and guides their strategies, fosters the growth of new Humanist groups, and represents the interests of Humanists at the UN (New York, Geneva and Vienna), UNICEF (New York), UNESCO (Paris) and the Council of Europe. IHEU is a clearing-house for information and inspiration, and a forum where Humanist organizations and individuals can exchange thoughts and expertise for improving the impact of national and international activities. By representing Humanism to the world media, IHEU ensures that an ever greater number of people learn of the Humanist alternative.

IHEU is democratically organized and is funded by donations and membership dues from its member organizations and individual supporters. IHEU member organizations are full members, specialist members or associate members. Individuals can associate themselves with IHEU by becoming individual supporters. Apart from its international headquarters in London, IHEU runs regional and



specialist secretariats and networks like the South Asian Humanist Network (Mumbai), the Secretariat for Growth and Development (London) and the Bio-Ethics Network (Brussels).

### **IHEU, internationalism and human rights**

For IHEU, national sovereignty is less important than the building of a universal community. IHEU is strongly committed to the ideals of the UN; in fact, the first directors of UNESCO (Julian Huxley), FAO (John Boyd Orr) and WHO (G. Brock Chisholm) were all prominent Humanists. IHEU advocates that non-discriminatory international conventions on arms control, human rights or environmental issues be ratified by all countries.

Many Humanist principles have already found expression in international human rights conventions; indeed, the Humanist attitude forms the philosophical basis of the concept of human rights as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. IHEU has made submissions to the UN bodies on questions of environmental, economic, social and cultural rights. IHEU's concerns for human

rights and peace have been many and varied: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on Torture; the Geneva Convention on Refugees etc. find strong support from IHEU member organizations.

Outside the UN, IHEU and its member organizations have defended civil liberties, promoted more humane and rational attitudes on abortion law, sexual relationships, voluntary euthanasia, capital punishment, criminal reformation and the exploitation of animals. Of importance to IHEU have been campaigns against blasphemy laws; the protection of minorities and ethnic groups, the elimination of discrimination based on religion, or the lack of it, and the promotion of the rights of the terminally ill. As they are a minority, Humanists also need to establish the status of their own convictions as equal to those of traditional religionists and get them widely acknowledged and respected.

Individuals associated with IHEU testify before state and local legislatures on issues of contemporary concern (for example surrogate parenting, cloning of animals, AIDS issues), assist in drafting legislation, serve on federal and state commissions, and participate in public discussions. IHEU has campaigned against the inclusion of God in the German constitution on the grounds that there ought to be absolute separation of religion and state.

### **Giving a moral leadership—IHEU declarations and resolutions**

IHEU's *Declaration of interdependence: A new global ethics*, issued at its Global congress at Buffalo, New York, in 1988, emphasizes a global moral consensus, human rights and human global responsibilities.

IHEU's pioneering statements in defence of gays and lesbians, and its *Affirmation on homosexuality and bisexuality* are widely quoted. IHEU statements are standard declarations on contemporary issues: recent IHEU resolutions have opposed French atomic testing, blasphemy laws, the forced development of ethnically homogeneous territories such as the Balkans and former Yugoslavia, and the abuse of children in the name of religion. The text of the IHEU's statements can be obtained from the IHEU's website at [www.ih.eu.org](http://www.ih.eu.org)

### **IHEU Networking and Development Programme**

IHEU fosters development of new Humanist organizations and supports them with Humanist resources and advice. In collaboration with its Dutch specialist member HIVOS, IHEU also funds member organization activities in the third world through the Humanist Networking and Development Programme.

### **IHEU congresses and awards**

IHEU congresses which feature leading intellectuals and social activists are an opportunity to formulate Humanist positions on important issues. At IHEU congresses, outstanding achievements and contributions to the progress and defense

of Humanism are recognized through the prestigious International Humanist Award.

### **International Humanist News**

*International Humanist News* is a quarterly magazine with news and special features on Humanist developments and is published from London. Humanist magazines worldwide reproduce articles from *International Humanist News* in their pages. The magazine is sent free to IHEU's individual supporters.

### **[www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org)**

The IHEU's website [www.iheu.org](http://www.iheu.org) is the gateway to the Humanist world. The IHEU's Newsportal and information about the IHEU as well as its member organizations can be obtained from here. Subscription to the IHEU's free e-mail news service is available from the site.

# Past

## From theory to practice—a history of IHEU 1952-2002

In the following chapters we present a concise history of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). Fascinating though this history is, for reasons of available space and research time it regrettably was out of the question to write a rigorously thorough and definitive historical study. Instead, we have tried to give a readable mix of what was important and what was interesting. Major developments in IHEU's internal developments alternate with sketches of IHEU's varied activities and impressions of its interaction with the world it was part of. For those who want to know more, we have added a final chapter describing our main sources and giving suggestions for further reading.

The main text of the chapters in this part was written by Hans van Deukeren, with topical contributions from Pieter Edelman, Wouter Kuijman and Jan Loman, all employed at the Humanist Archives. Bert Gasenbeek was directly involved with the concept, content, and conclusions. We thank Levi Fragell, Nettie Klein and Paul Kurtz for their willingness to read and comment on the draft texts—Nettie Klein also volunteered to correct our language errors—, and all the others who supported us in this project. However, for any remaining errors, inaccuracies or debatable views we are, of course, fully responsible.

Hans van Deukeren\*

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## 1850-1952: The road to the founding congress

In August 1952 the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) was founded. At that moment organized modern humanism already had a tradition of at least a hundred years, including other international federations that are reckoned among the humanist tradition. One can discern four 'generations' of modern humanism, originating around 1850, 1890, 1918 and 1945, three of which came together in IHEU in 1952.

### **Four generations of organized humanism**

The oldest generation is formed by the atheists, including freethinkers, rationalists and secularists, who explicitly reject all religion. This movement originated in the mid-nineteenth century in Western Europe and America. The various organizations of freethinkers soon met at international congresses and in 1880 they founded the World Union of Freethinkers (WUFT), which still exists. The WUFT was quite active in the years around 1952, which explains why no outspoken freethinker organizations were among the IHEU founders. However, from the 1980s they increasingly joined IHEU.

The second generation is formed by the so-called free-religious or 'ethical culture' groups, which sprung up in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Historically, these groups have Jewish and Protestant roots but they became progressively more liberal, until at last they identified religious feelings with a sense of belonging to one great cosmic unity and no longer recognized a personal God. In 1896, at a Zürich congress, ethical societies from the USA, Great Britain, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and France united themselves in the International Ethical Union (IEU). From 1908 until 1932 this organization held a congress every four years. However, when the Second World War broke out the IEU ceased to exist. Representative of the ethical tradition among the founders of IHEU were the American Ethical Union (AEU, founded 1889, with forerunners from 1876), the British Ethical Union (BEU, founded 1896, forerunners from 1886), and the *Gemeinschaft für Ethische Kultur* or *Ethische Gemeinde Wien* (Vienna Ethical Society; founded 1902, forerunners from 1894). The important *Bund Frei-Religiöser Gemeinden Deutschlands* (BFGD, Association of Free-Religious Communities in Germany) joined IHEU in 1960.

The third generation is that of the American humanists from the interbellum, a group sprouting from the Unitarian denomination who, in the graphic words of Nicolas Walter, 'having discarded the second and third persons of the Trinity, [...] discarded the first person too, replacing supernaturalism and theism with naturalism and humanism'. From the late 1920s they left the American Ethical Union. They considered themselves to be 'religious humanists', and founded the American Humanist Association (AHA, legally established 1941).

In 1933, at the height of the economic crisis of the 1930s, a group of these humanists presented the religious and ethical views of their modern liberal humanism in a public declaration, *A Humanist Manifesto* (the first one). It declared that conventional religions, including 'new thought' varieties, had been superseded, and that 'to establish [a new] religion is a major necessity of the present'. This religion, emphatically called 'religious humanism', 'maintains that all associations and institutions exist for the fulfillment of human life'. This meant 'a heightened sense of personal life and a cooperative effort to promote social well-being'. The manifesto concluded:

'Though we consider the religious forms and ideas of our fathers no longer adequate, the quest for the good life is still the central task for mankind. Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, that he has within himself the power for its achievement. He must set intelligence and will to the task.'

Here it should be noted that the combinations 'religious humanism' or 'humanist religion' in the past had another emotional value than they have today. Today we, as humanists, take humanism for granted and it is the adjective 'religious' that makes us frown. In the 1930s it was just the other way around: religion was respectable, and it was the word 'humanist' in 'humanist religion' that made eyebrows rise.

Yet, the word 'humanism' stuck, as is shown by another initiative from the interbellum, which anticipated future close connections between IHEU and United Nations organizations. In 1922 a forerunner of UNESCO was formed, the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC), a subsidiary to the League of Nations. Humanist in spirit, it devoted its 1936 yearly convention to the theme *Vers un nouvel humanisme* (Towards a new humanism), producing what has been described as 'a program for an "ethical humanism"'. IIIC's president was Julian S. Huxley, who in 1945 became Director General of UNESCO and who in 1952 opened the first IHEU congress.

Finally a fourth generation of humanism arose in the aftermath of the Second World War and gave the actual impetus to the founding of IHEU. It consists of two synchronous but fully distinct movements, one in the Low Countries and one in India. In the Netherlands Jaap van Praag, himself of Jewish descent, wondered why Western civilization had not put up more resistance against nazism and fascism. As a major cause he pointed at widespread 'nihilism' (moral indifference) in spite of the fact that most people considered themselves to be 'religious', and he stressed the importance of a moral awareness based on human values. In addition, as a socialist Van Praag aimed at breaking through the rigid

**Jaap van Praag**

Jaap van Praag was born in Amsterdam on 11 May, 1911, in a modern Jewish socialist environment. He studied Dutch language and history and became a teacher. In the prewar period he was active in various pacifist youth organizations, where he met people with whom he would found the Dutch Humanist League (HV) after the Second World War. During the German occupation of the Netherlands (1940-1945), Van Praag had to go into hiding. In this period he developed his theory of humanism. In February 1946, Van Praag was one of the principal initiators of establishing the Dutch Humanist League, and became its Chairman from September 1946 to 1969. From 1954 to 1974 he was a member of a provincial Executive. Van Praag was one of the first professors in humanist studies (University of Leiden, 1964-1979). He stressed the importance of a non-religious humanist life stance which, as an alternative for the churches, could give meaning to life. Van Praag played a major role in founding the International Humanist and Ethical Union. As its first Chairman he was actively engaged in the work of consolidating and enlarging IHEU. His natural authority enabled him to take an active part in arranging contacts and dialogues, for example with the Vatican and with Marxists in the 1960s and 1970s. He resigned as a chairman in 1975, but continued to be a Honorary Board Member. At the 1978 London Congress Van Praag was presented with a Special Award in recognition of his importance to IHEU. He died in 1981.

compartmentalization of Dutch society on the basis of religious denominations. Van Praag became the key force behind the founding of the Dutch *Humanistisch Verbond* (Humanist League, HV) in 1946, designed as a broad and pluriform humanist movement. In Belgium a comparable Belgian *Humanistisch Verbond* (HV(B)) was founded in 1951.

In India, the process of decolonization that followed the end of the Second World War led Manabendra Nath Roy to found an Indian Radical Humanist Movement (IRHM). Originally this had been a political party striving for independence, but Roy arrived at the conclusion that politics was corruptible (you have to make concessions to win votes) and so in 1948 he decided to reconstruct his party into a social movement. Although contacts between India and Western Europe were difficult, his movement became one of the founders of IHEU.

**Preparations for a new federation**

Though the IEU had disappeared in the late 1930s, during the Second World War there remained informal contacts between American and English humanists. For example, Lloyd Morain, who was serving as a field representative of the AHA in the US Air Corps in England during the latter part of the war, had informal meetings with several British humanists. Among them were Harold J. Blackham, active in the BEU and from 1945 its Secretary, as well as leaders of the Rationalist Press Association (RPA) and humanist scientists such as science sociologist John Desmond Bernal.

Morain later remembered how they all hoped for increased international contacts between humanists after the war. Blackham also pleaded vigorously, from 1944 on, for a new international humanist organization to provide a synthesis of all 'constructive' forms of humanism, that would absorb and transcend the existing freethinker organizations. Among those whom he convinced, were men like biologist Julian Huxley and philosopher and freethinker Bertrand Russell.

**Harold J. Blackham**

Harold John Blackham was born in 1903 near Birmingham. He studied literary theory and was a teacher for two years. Then he addressed himself to philosophy and adult education. In the early thirties he became a leader in the British Ethical Union. Together with leaders of the main churches he set up a 'moral education program' in Great Britain, of which he was quite proud. Blackham played a key role in the founding of IHEU, and acted as its Secretary until 1967. In 1965 he represented IHEU in its contacts with the Vatican Secretariat for Non Believers. At the 1974 Amsterdam Congress he received the International Humanist Award 'for his long and creative service to humanism in England and in the world'. Blackham repeatedly stressed that humanist principles and humanist organization should be undogmatic: 'The conception of the humanist mission is subject to the same method of development as the humanist conception of civilization, that is to say, it is derived from tradition, it is open to challenge and discussion, and it requires review in the light of the experience into which it leads'.

After the war Blackham at first kept trying to work via the World Union of Free-thinkers (WUFT). He took the initiative in organizing its first post-war conference (April-May 1946), held in London in Conway Hall, home of the South Place Ethical Society. The theme of the conference was 'The challenge of humanism'. According to Blackham, this challenge was to reach a 'marriage' between 'scientific humanism' and 'literary humanism'. As the Cold War unfolded, Blackham presented this cooperation between Rationalists and Liberal Humanists as 'a Third Force between the main developed alternatives of Christianity and Marxism' (1948).

In 1947 Blackham and J. Hutton Hynd, a leader of the AEU, visited the Netherlands to 'identify' the Dutch Humanist League, which had been founded a year before. To explore the possibilities of closer international co-operation, they met with its President Jaap van Praag. The three distrusted the WUFT, partly because they were suspicious of its communist sympathies, but more specifically because of its vehement and negative atheism and anti-religionism, which they thought was too negative and counterproductive. What was needed, was a more positive alternative to religions. This idea had fallen on fertile ground in the Netherlands, for the Humanist Dutch League grew fast since 1946, while the refounded old style Dutch freethinker movement remained as small as ever. By the time IHEU was founded, in 1952, the Dutch HV had more members than any other of the founding organizations, perhaps excepting the Indian Radical Humanist Movement.

### **Tasting the freethinkers: Rome 1949**

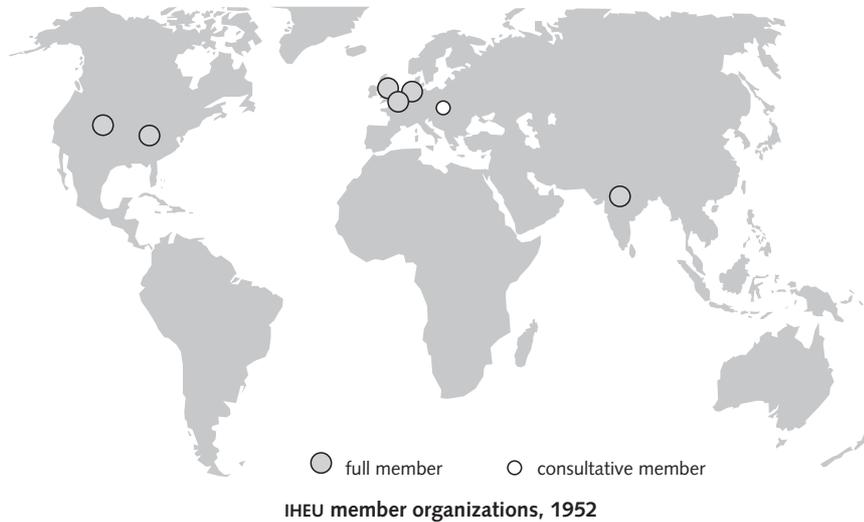
From 9-12 September, 1949, the freethinkers organized their first international World Congress after the war, in Rome. Delegations of the Dutch (Van Praag and international secretary Mrs. Henriëtte Polak-Schwarz) and British (Blackham) humanist organizations attended this congress, eager to experience the atmosphere within the WUFT at first hand. The two major American associations, the AEU and AHA, were absent from the congress, though the latter was a WUFT member. For Van Praag and Blackham the congress was a great disappointment. True, they got on well with freethinkers from Northern Europe such as M.C. Bradlaugh Bonner from the RPA, who was 'the amiable president' of the congress, or the Dutch freethinker Anton Constandse. But Van Praag and Blackham perceived a huge gap between the congress participants from Anglo-Saxon, Protestant countries on the one hand, and from Latin, Catholic countries on the other. This became especially clear from a discussion on the relation between humanism and freethought, which was one of the three central themes at the congress. The northern freethinkers saw the battle against religion and church only as a means to be able to create a positive life stance that could inspire non-religious people. The southerners, however, saw this battle as an aim in itself. In fact, the door was virtually slammed in the face of the humanists as the congress decided that 'there could be no weakening of Freethought policy to accommodate Humanist Societies'.

Van Praag considered this to be a negative, sterile approach. 'The Italians and the French did not understand a single letter of our stance', he wrote in a report on the congress, though he admitted that for them 'it was not easy to get an understanding of modern humanism in only a few discussions'. Yet his conclusion was that 'the question arises whether facts do not impel us to accept the idea of an entirely different form of consciousness-awakening in Catholic and non-Catholic countries'. Though he did not exclude entirely the possibility that the 'Latin' WUFT members would eventually come to accept the modern humanist views, he suggested that presently it might be useful to establish a new close connection between the humanist organizations in the Anglo-Saxon countries and the Netherlands.

### **The IHEU founding congress: Amsterdam 1952**

It took another three years before a congress was convoked to discuss the principles of the proposed organization and to decide on its practical realization. The preparatory work was done by five humanist organizations: American Ethical Union, American Humanist Association, British Ethical Union, Vienna Ethical Society, and Dutch Humanist League who also hosted the congress.

Various kindred organizations had been invited to attend the congress; several sent delegations and during the congress two of them, the Belgian HV and the Indian IRHM, decided to become co-founders. Incidentally, the timing of the congress was remarkable, for it coincided almost exactly with a rival congress: from 22 to 27 August the freethinkers' WUFT held its congress at Brussels. Whether this was accidental is not known.



A problem that arose immediately was a confusion of tongues. Words such as ‘humanism’, ‘ethicism’, ‘secularism’, or ‘religion’ did not mean the same to everyone. This problem became acute when a name for the new federation had to be found. The Americans preferred to call it ‘Ethical’, the Europeans ‘Humanist’. To the Americans, especially the AEU, ‘humanism’ smacked of pragmatism, positivism and rationalism, which ill-fitted their own idealistic background. Conversely, to the Europeans the word ‘ethical’ had become a neutral synonym of the word ‘moral’ and had nothing specifically humanist about it. It may sound incredible, but it took fourteen hours of deliberation before a brilliantly simple solution was reached: the organization was to be called International Humanist *and* Ethical Union.

The Amsterdam congress was attended by more than two hundred participants. It was truly international: half of the participants were Dutch, but no less than thirty-five visitors came from the United Kingdom and thirty from the United States. There were considerable delegations from France, Germany and Belgium as well, and visitors from Japan, Australia, Finland and Austria. The largest delegations came from organizations that had been co-organizing the congress, or at least had been invited beforehand to join the prospective federation. For example, from France a delegation from *Les Amis de la Liberté* was present, though in the end they decided not to become a member. They did favor the general basic assumptions, such as defense of individual liberty and promotion of social justice and of mutual understanding, contact and communication, but would not narrow this down to the ‘more precise, and more exclusive, principles and aims’ of an explicitly ‘humanist’ organization. They accepted, in other words, humanism, but kept clear of Humanism.

**Flavours of humanism in 1952—two eyewitnesses**

Lloyd and Mary Morain, who together represented the AHA on the IHEU Board of Directors for some fifteen years, commented in 1992 on the 'flavours' of humanism united in IHEU. Lloyd noted how in 1952 delegates from the various countries each laid their accent slightly differently: 'The Dutch on the whole objected to calling humanism a religion, preferring the term faith, philosophy, or viewpoint. Some British delegates desired a more fully developed philosophical basis as well as recognition of humanism's social implications. The Americans could hardly have been said to have any single area of emphasis or agreement. The Belgians were much concerned about freedom from religion in the schools. The Germans were hopeful that they would be recognized as integral parts of the international fight for freedom on all fronts. The French were primarily concerned with the protection and furtherance of personal liberty, for they had vivid recollections of what it meant to have lost a measure of it. Nevertheless, there was a common bond among these delegates of many nations, a bond which tied the present with the future.'

His wife Mary Morain observed a difference between humanists from the United States and from the rest of the western world, which might be called 'cultural' and be summed up in the words theoretical vs. practical. Many Americans 'feel a great inspiration towards ethical behavior in the very fact that one recognizes that human beings are an inherent part of nature and are dependent for help on each other without any supernatural concern or guidance.' The 'European' view is 'more relaxed, practical, concerned not so much with theory as to why one is moral, but rather with the important end-product of moral, social behavior—with the need to stress that one can be both moral and a humanist.'

**'One must have a hand before one can make a fist'**

The congress began Thursday evening, August 21, and lasted until Tuesday afternoon, August 26. The prospective chairman was biologist, self-proclaimed 'scientific humanist' and first Director General of UNESCO Julian Huxley. Blackham, a staunch supporter of cooperation between IHEU and the United Nations, had persuaded him to preside. Blackham's commitment to UN ideals may be seen as an expression of hope in a dark era. It is chilling to realize that most participants of the Amsterdam congress had been witness to the First World War, the Great Depression, the Second World War, and then the Cold War. When that last one broke out in the late 1940s, prospects of a better, more peaceful, democratic and human world seemed crushed again, as George Orwell's *Nineteen eighty-four* (1949) testifies. At the time of the congress, the Korean War was in full course; in America McCarthy's witch-hunt against crypto-communists was at its height. Against this background, the bright spots during the last decade seemed very few: mainly the institution of the United Nations in 1945 and its adoption of a Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It was no coincidence that the Amsterdam congress explicitly emphasized its support to both.

As Huxley had fallen ill, the Congress was opened by Jaap van Praag, chairman of the Organizing Committee, who summed up the aims of calling the congress: 'First to draft a conception of humanism on an international level, and second to

establish permanent relations between humanist and ethical groups all over the world'. Van Praag explicitly warned that founding a new international organization when there exists the WUFT should not be interpreted as an act of enmity. Implicitly, however, he worded his criticism of the freethinkers in the sequel.

'If we are convinced of the necessity to shape humanism and ethical culture as a *positive and constructive* philosophy of life [italics added—ed.], we cannot do without an international institution that answers this conviction.'

Yet, Van Praag carefully added that there were good personal relations between humanists and freethinkers. Some freethinkers did indeed take part in the congress, and ultimately some organizations of freethinkers would join IHEU, though not many from WUFT core areas such as Mediterranean Europe.

Van Praag stressed the need for self-organization before intervening in practical world-problems.

'One must first have a hand before making a fist. Our first task is to give international humanism hands now. [...] So our first duty is to develop our national movements and to gather the scattered sparks of humanism all over the world.'

### Humanism as a religion

Van Praag also urged his audience: 'let's try to see through the traditional meaning of words and hit the thing meant'. His audience got the chance to practice this exhortation immediately, since the next speaker was Julian Huxley, who had a reputation for advocating a 'humanist religion'. In his Presidential Address on 'Evolutionary Humanism', which in spite of the speaker's illness was quite voluminous, Huxley indeed pleaded for a humanist 'religion'. He said:

'As I see it, the world is undoubtedly in need of a new religion, and that religion must be founded on humanist principles if it is to meet the new situation adequately. [...] We must believe that some sort of humanist religion could and should eventually arise.'

**Die Gedanken sind frei**

1. Die Ge - dan - ken sind frei, wer kann sie er - ra - ten?  
Sie flie - hen vor - bei wie nächt - li - che Schat - ten.  
Kein Mensch kann sie wis - sen, kein Jä - ger er - schie - ßen, es  
blei - bet da - bei: die Ge - dan - ken sind frei.

'Die Gedanken sind frei' (IHEU hymn)



Participants of the IHEU Congress, 1952, at Oudemanhuispoort, University of Amsterdam

Huxley was aware that he was using the word ‘religion’ in a non-standard way:

‘I mean an organized system of ideas and emotions which relate man to his destiny, beyond and above the practical affairs of every day, transcending the present and the existing systems of law and social structure. [...] and I believe we have nothing to lose by using the word *religion* in the broadest possible sense to include non-theistic formulations and systems as well’.

On the contrary, Huxley feared that *not* calling it a religion might be bad public relations, curtailing its potential appeal, and that it might ‘sterilize the ideas we put forward, by implying that our systems are not so fully satisfying’ as traditional religions.

### **Towards a program**

On Friday, Saturday and Monday the principles of the new federation were debated, first in general and then progressively more specific. The theme on Friday was ‘The meaning of science and democracy in human progress’, that on Saturday ‘The humanization of man in society’. Introductory papers had been prepared by experts, such as philosophers, scientists, politicians and leading members of national humanist organizations. These introductions were discussed first in working groups, then in the evening in plenary sessions.

Though these broad themes might make for interesting discussions, and many might stress, like Blackham, that ‘the essential point’ of humanism was that ‘its ideas and ideals are always subject to revision’, yet some choices had to be made before a humanist union could actually be founded. Therefore, ‘The program of



humanism and ethical culture' was the theme for the third day. It had to be decided what kind of humanism the new federation should stand for: either humanism in the sense of a broad defense of individual liberty, social justice, and mutual understanding without political or religious constraints, or 'Humanism', that is a specific 'view of man's nature and destiny, and therefore more precise, and more exclusive, in its principles and aims'. Was personal freedom to be defended as an aim in itself, or as a consequence of man's responsibility as bearer of values?

In line with Van Praag's earlier exhortation that 'one has to make a hand before one can make a fist', the large majority preferred to solidly found the own position first and therefore favored a specifically Humanist organization. They trusted that this choice would not be detrimental to the contacts with the broad humanist and freedom-loving movement, for humanists were 'by their own temper and principles' naturally committed to contacts with persons of different convictions for the sake of mutual understanding. It was generally felt that the program of the Union should be both internal, i.e. 'philosophical and moral edification and fortification of the individual', and external, i.e. 'action on the political fronts vital to humanist concerns'. These internal and external programs were deemed 'reciprocally conditioned and vitally united'.

### **The Amsterdam Manifesto**

On the last day of the congress, Tuesday, August 26, 1952, five resolutions were adopted. The first resolution decided to actually found the IHEU. The fundamentals of 'modern, ethical Humanism' were described in the fifth resolution, which became known as the Amsterdam Manifesto (or Amsterdam Declaration), and

**The Amsterdam Manifesto**

- 1 *It* [Humanism] *is democratic*. It aims at the fullest possible development of every human being. It holds that this is a matter of right. [...]
- 2 It seeks to use science creatively, not destructively. [...]
- 3 Humanism is ethical. It affirms the dignity of man and the right of the individual to the greatest possible freedom of development compatible with the rights of others. There is a danger that in seeking to utilize scientific knowledge in a complex society individual freedom may be threatened by the very impersonal machine that has been created to save it. Ethical Humanism, therefore, rejects totalitarian attempts to perfect the machine in order to obtain immediate gains at the cost of human values.
- 4 It insists that personal liberty is an end that must be combined with social responsibility in order that it shall not be sacrificed to the improvement of material conditions. [...]
- 5 *It is a way of life, aiming at the maximum possible fulfillment, through the cultivation of ethical and creative living*. It can be a way of life for everyone everywhere if the individual is capable of the responses required by the changing social order. The primary task of humanism to-day is to make men aware in the simplest terms of what it [humanism] can mean to them and what it commits them to. By utilizing in this context and for purposes of peace the new power which science has given us, humanists have confidence that the present crisis can be surmounted. Liberated from fear the energies of man will be available for a self-realization to which it is impossible to foresee the limit.

was appended as a preamble to the first Bylaws of the Union. The Manifesto formulated five fundamental characteristics of humanism, as agreed on at the congress.

In its second resolution the congress decided to apply for NGO status (non-governmental organization) at UNESCO, and pledged its allegiance to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and several United Nations Conventions, thereby setting IHEU on its pro-UN course. The two remaining resolutions addressed the world population problem.

**A reaction from the press**

The usually respectable Dutch weekly *Elseviers Weekblad* commented on the Amsterdam Congress under the lead 'Assault of the Humanists': '[...] In fact, it is staggering. More than ever our society is craving for character, for roots, for trust in God. And yet here this crowd of savages is gathering to ring the great bell, and in the halls of the High School of our Capital it seizes the opportunity to once again hammer away at the unpicking [dissolution] of the minds of our people, and of all peoples. With their New Reason! One would say that humanity in the last few centuries has endured more than enough invasions by such Norsemen of the new reason. [...]

The congress was quite seriously covered in the press, especially by liberal and socialist newspapers. Protestant media were critical, the Catholic ones even sarcastic. One Dutch weekly compared the humanists venomously with 'barbaric Norsemen'. But such attacks were the exception, and the IHEU founding congress had really been a success. IHEU was put on its trail. Now it was up to the Board of Directors to implement and pursue the decisions taken at the congress.

## 1952-1962: Years of construction

Between 1952 and 1962 IHEU developed an effective working organization. In close cooperation with national member organizations several impressive congresses were organized, among which the two world congresses at London (1957) and Oslo (1962) were the most successful and outgoing. International membership and various activities increased and prospered. In spite of all these successes, however, two problems made their first appearance that have persistently troubled IHEU ever since: collecting overdue contributions and getting up to date information from the member organizations.

### **The Utrecht office**

Most of the office work came to be performed at the headquarters of the Dutch HV at Utrecht, as HV was the largest of the seven founding organizations and had hosted the Amsterdam congress. In addition the IHEU chairman, Jaap van Praag, happened to be the president of HV too, and had shown impressive organizing capacities in building up the Dutch HV organization from scratch.

Initially, IHEU had two administrative layers, the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee (EC). In the Board of Directors every member organization was represented—two seats for the full members, one for members with consultative status. However, the Board did not often meet in person. It met only at congresses, once in every five years. The Executive Committee was a smaller body and could meet more frequently. It consisted of seven persons: the Chairman (Van Praag), the Secretary (Blackham) and the Treasurer (Scheuer), two representatives from IHEU's full member organizations (MO's), and two Dutch supporting staff acting as (Honorary) Organizational Secretary and (Honorary) Organizational Treasurer—'honorary' meaning that they were volunteers. The Executive Committee convened every summer. The decisions it proposed to take were communicated by post mail to all the Board Members. Unless they protested within two months, the decisions became final.

As we will see, the practical work multiplied very soon, so that already in February 1955 a paid part-time 'assistant (organizing) secretary' was hired. She worked at the office of Dutch HV. This introduced a third layer of administration, which called for its own staff meetings, the Chairman's Committee (later



IHEU headquarters, Utrecht, 1957-1980

called Organizing Committee). Its two-monthly meetings are mentioned for the first time in 1959, but the Committee probably existed earlier. It consisted not only of the four Dutch IHEU staff (Chairman, Organizing Secretary, Organizing Treasurer, and Assistant Secretary), but also, apparently for practical reasons, of two staff of HV: its office manager and an 'assessor'.

So, from the beginning the role of the Dutch in IHEU was pivotal. There can be no doubt that in those years the Dutch worked very hard. In spite of difficult circumstances, such as having to find out how to tackle new international tasks, a persistent shortage of money, and less than adequate reactions to communication from the other organizations, they did a very good job. As a consequence, in the Netherlands' humanist movement IHEU is quite often considered an overwhelmingly Dutch initiative. However, this may need some qualification. As to financing, it is clear that the two American organizations paid the largest share (between 40 and 70%) until the late 1970s. And though Van Praag was the central figure in IHEU, the contribution of two other members of the Board seems at least as important. Blackham, as Secretary and Englishman, did much organiza-

#### **Karel Cuypers**

Karel Cuypers was born on May 26, 1902, in Antwerp, Belgium. He became an astronomer, but also published on educational and philosophical topics. His pedagogical view was that pupils should above all learn the method of thinking rather than accumulating facts. Initially a freemason and open-minded atheist, he in 1951 became one of the founders of the Belgian Humanist League. From 1955 to 1965 he was its president. He was a member of the IHEU Board of Directors from 1952 to 1975. Cuypers embodied the search for a harmonious society without violence and with respect for different life stances and opinions. In a speech on tolerance at the 1962 Oslo Congress he drew a comparison between the way different styles of architecture can be enjoyed together and the way different life stances can exist in mutual harmony and co-operation. He died in 1986.

#### **Roy and Tarkunde**

The Indian Manabendra Nath Roy (1887-1954) arrived at humanism by way of a long journey. Starting as a Comintern Marxist, he became active in the Indian movement for independence. His undogmatic Marxism gradually became less collectivistic and more individualistic, until in 1947 he proclaimed his own interpretation of 'new' or 'radical humanism' in the form of a manifesto with the famous '22 statements'. He then transformed his Radical Democratic Party into a social movement, the Indian Renaissance movement. Roy was elected IHEU vice-Chairman in 1952.

Among those who were inspired by Roy's humanism was Vital Mahadev Tarkunde (b. 1909), who played a crucial role in the Indian humanist movement. 'Justice Tarkunde' started his career by helping the so-called 'untouchables' in India. He was a judge of the Mumbai High Court, a senior advocate before the Supreme Court, and co-founder of Citizens for Democracy and of the People's Union for Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights. In his book *An outline of radical humanism* (1988) Tarkunde called for a humanist life stance and sketched a consistent program to reform Indian society. Tarkunde has been an IHEU Board member for forty years. At the 1978 London Congress he received the International Humanist Award.

**Executive Committee 1952-1962**

<i>Chairman:</i>	Jaap P. van Praag, HV (1952-1975)
<i>Secretary:</i>	Harold J. Blackham, BEU (1952-1966)
<i>Treasurer:</i>	Sidney H. Scheuer, AEU (1952-1987)
<i>Members:</i>	Rudolf Dreikurs, AHA (1952-1954) Mary Lloyd Morain, AHA (1955-1963) Karel Cuypers, HV(B) (1952-1956) Mrs. Ellen Roy, IRHM, (1957-1960) Sib Narayan Ray, IRHM (1961-1969)
<i>(Honorary) Organizing Secretary:</i>	Mrs. Henriëtte A. Polak-Schwarz, HV (1952-1957) Mrs. A.C. Terpstra-Heinrich, HV (1957-1959) Wim C. Koppenberg, HV (1959-1966)
<i>(Honorary) Organizing Treasurer:</i>	Jan Bijleveld, HV (1952-1966)

tional work around the London congress of 1957 and played a substantial part in its follow-up activities regarding the nuclear arms race; the American Mrs. Mary Morain was an inexhaustible source of ideas for new activities IHEU might take upon itself.

**The Antwerp and London congresses**

Initially it had been decided that IHEU world congresses would be held every five years. This meant that the second world congress would have to take place in 1957. To prepare for it three regional conferences were organized in 1955, in Antwerp, New York and India. Of the American and Indian conferences not much is recorded, except that they did indeed take place, but the Antwerp Conference was planned from Utrecht. As it was extensively discussed at the EC meetings and its *Proceedings* have been published, we are well informed.

In contrast with the world congresses, which aimed at publicity, the Antwerp Conference was planned as an 'internal' conference with minimum press coverage. By promoting open and broad discussion instead of letting the participants 'comment a pre-cooked declaration', the conference aimed at strengthening both the philosophical basis and the practical organization of IHEU, which would help to make the next world congress a 'show of strength'.

In 1957 the second world congress was indeed held in London. It 'demonstrated the unity and confidence of IHEU after five years of steady growth'. The congress adopted two resolutions. One called for the preparation of a *Humanist Manifesto*, the other was the so-called Eaton resolution.

### European conference Antwerp, 1955

The first European IHEU conference was held in Antwerp on August 27-31, 1955. Its objective was to work out the program decided on at the inaugural congress of 1952, and to prepare the agenda for IHEU's second World Congress in 1957.

The first session, led by IHEU chairman Jaap van Praag, was devoted to a review of the state of affairs of humanism in France, Germany, Norway, Great Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands. On the whole the same problems had to be faced everywhere: lack of understanding and intolerance on the part of religious people, and indifference on the part of non-believers. As for the Dutch situation, philosopher Libbe van der Wal was rather optimistic as regards the spiritual climate in the Netherlands, stating that the humanist movement had been fully acknowledged and that the humanist conviction was looked upon as an, of course, very regrettable but quite respectable creed.

President Jean Cotereau of the French Humanist Federation made a speech on human freedom and its implications. Garnt Stuiveling, Vice-President of the Dutch HV, gave the main lecture on Humanism in an international context. In his view humanism was best symbolized in the dictum 'know yourself'. To be a humanist, he argued, means to become aware of one's position as a human being, both formed and limited by one's time and place. Humanists, being concerned with what is human, should learn as much as possible about the whole human race. In this way man can arrive at a deeper self-knowledge, at an awareness of unity in diversity and at the acceptance of others as they are. So it is the task of humanists to promote this undogmatic way of thinking and living.

### The Eaton resolution

In the 1950s the Cold War was at its height. From 1950 until 1953 the West fought a war against communism in Korea. The domino theory seemed a reality: Eastern Europe had become communist in the late 1940s, China in 1949, Cuba would follow in 1959, Vietnam was threatened. In the USA senator McCarthy succeeded in involving an entire nation in his own maniacal rage against a supposed fifth column of crypto-communists. In 1956, a year before the London congress, Moscow had bloodily crushed risings in Hungary and Poland and its evil hand was discerned in the Suez crisis. What boosted fears was the fact that the Russians had atom bombs. Though the 'Russki's' were considered to be 'not as clever as us', yet they had developed the hydrogen bomb incredibly fast (1953). It was widely thought that they could only have accomplished this by espionage and treason, stealing the atom secrets from the West. On top of this, the Soviets in late 1957 launched their first space missiles, Sputniks, that might be helpful to deliver their atom bombs to Western cities. All these concerns fed the climate of mutual East-West suspicion. Because of the very real risk that in a Third World War atom bombs would be used, worried scientists began to organize a series of international conferences on peace-keeping, initiated by the British philosopher and freethinker Bertrand Russell. The first of these conferences was held in 1957 at Pugwash, Canada.



IHEU Executive Committee, July 1960.

From left to right: Harold Blackham (Secretary, BEU), Theo Polet (Organizing Secretary Dutch HV), Mrs. Mary Morain (AHA), Chi Ogwurike (Development Committee), Wim Koppenberg (Honorary Organizing Secretary), Jaap van Praag (Chairman, HV), James Hornback (AEU), Kristian Horn (HEFIN), Jan van den Ban (Office Manager HV), Mrs. Molly Terpstra-Heinrich (Development Committee), Jan Bijleveld (Honorary Organizing Secretary), Mrs. M.H. Boomsma (Assistant Organizing Secretary).

The London IHEU congress adopted a resolution on nuclear weapons, proposed by industrialist Cyrus Eaton, that made an appeal to IHEU to join in with the Pugwash-movement. After sketching the ‘unprecedented situation [that] has emerged with the power of nuclear weapons to execute unimaginable mass slaughter’, the IHEU resolution called for new thinking:

‘New thinking, directed to sorting out the problems and attaining a clear vision of the complex alternatives, is urgently needed. This must be world thinking and critical, not ideological, thinking. It must be the thinking of experts of the highest calibre in political, social, philosophical, and scientific fields drawn from the trained minds and wisdom of East and West.’

The resolution then urged that a recent Geneva conference of atomic scientists be followed up by ‘a broader conference of representatives of the relevant disciplines’. The congress clearly considered this a break with the past.

‘No conference of such a composition has ever been called. A new pattern of civilized behaviour can be induced by the pressure of world events if the way is made clear. To attempt to make it clear is a world-wide human responsibility that should no longer be postponed.’

### World Congress London, 1957

The second world congress, held on July 26-31, 1957, in London, was attended by 363 participants from 22 countries, who discussed the concerns of IHEU in the fields of philosophy, personal life, social life and 'organization and mission'.

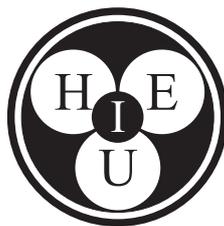
British world food expert Lord Boyd-Orr spoke about the human species and humanism related to 'The urgency of our time', being the use of nuclear energy and the nuclear armament race between America and Russia. In view of this worldwide threat several speakers stressed the responsibility of scientists and the duty of humanists in this matter.

Dutch adult-education specialist Tonko ten Have expounded the principal aspects of the humanist venture: the conviction that the only way for man to proceed is by way of his fuller growth; that the contents of the intrinsic values of human life are everywhere essentially the same; and that we will discover that the human mind is their source. Thus the main condition for a pan-human civilization is fulfilled. Humanism, he concluded, should bring man to a fuller awareness of these universal values and through it to fuller dignity.

Blackham took it upon him to arrange for this 'Atom bomb conference'. However, it turned out to be difficult to find enough eminent scientists who would be prepared to commit themselves to this initiative, especially from the communist world. In the end it was decided instead to draw up a new declaration on world policy, that would be submitted to the 1962 Oslo congress. This exhaustive declaration was adopted and became known as the 'Oslo statement'. It was quite successful in stimulating consequential activities with some of the IHEU member organizations.

### Public relations

From the very beginning IHEU had an active publication policy, as a vehicle to foster its ideals. The *Proceedings* of the 1952 congress appeared one year later, and from 1954 the quarterly *Information Bulletin* was published. At first it was



IHEU logo, 1962

mimeographed, then, after the London congress, printed. It contained primarily information on the IHEU member organizations, as it was thought that mutually informing each other would promote the growth of organized humanism. In 1960 it was decided to make the periodical more attractive to interested outsiders by including informative articles of a general nature, and from 1962 the name was changed to *International Humanism*, which sounded more colourful without being 'pretentious'. It fitted in with a trend towards better public relations, of which other

examples are the design of a separate IHEU emblem, and an (abandoned) proposal to issue PR-oriented quinquennial reports at the occasion of world congresses.

In its first ten years IHEU developed various other activities. Board member Mrs. Morain in particular was a creative source of suggestions to strengthen international contacts between individual humanists. One of her ideas was an essay

**The voice of IHEU**

Over the years IHEU has issued more than a hundred public statements: congress resolutions, declarations of the Board or Executive Committee, public telegrams and manifestoes. These range from opinions on world political affairs, the environment or human rights to specific subjects such as war toys and birds of passage. They illustrate what IHEU considered important in the world at large. Here we present a small selection, side by side with a short list of events in the period.

1945 End of Second World War; atom bomb; United Nations founded	1957 (Board of Directors), Universal Declaration of Human Rights: 'The Board of Directors of IHEU requests member organizations ... to work for the incorporation of its articles in the laws and practices of every land, and to celebrate annually ... Human Rights Day, December 10.'
1945-1947 Cold War begins	
1947 India independent	
1948 UN: Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Israel established	
1948-1949 Berlin blockade and airlift	
1949 NATO established	
1950-1953 Korean War	
1953 Death of Stalin; hydrogen bomb	1957 (IHEU Congress), Racial discrimination: 'We humanists want every sort of discrimination caused by racial prejudices in the fields of economics, politics, and society to be abolished ...'
1954 Western European Union founded (six countries)	
1955 Warsaw Pact founded	
1956 Khrushchev denounces Stalin; insurrections in Poland and Hungary crushed	
1956 Suez Canal crisis; Second Arab-Israeli War	1962 (IHEU Congress), A New Perspective in International Life: 'The great humanist tradition of toleration ... embodies respect for the claims of others, and a commitment to work towards agreement ... Every human transaction ... can be made to produce advantages to all concerned. We should aim at making this a universally applied test.'
1957 USSR launches Sputnik I spacecraft	
1957 European Common Market	
1957-1962 Heyday of African decolonization	
1958-1963 Pope John XXIII: reforms in Catholic Church	
1959 Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro	
1960 World population reaches three billion	1962 (IHEU Congress), Freedom from hunger: 'We welcome the initiative of FAO as a notable example of humanist action, and we hope that ... [they] will stress the inseparable association of freedom from hunger and population control.'
1960s US civil rights movement	
1961 First manned spacecraft (Yuri Gagarin)	
1961 South Africa independent: Apartheid	
1961 Berlin Wall built	
1962 Cuba Crisis	
1962 Soviet-Chinese conflict and rift	

contest on humanist subjects. It could be financed from the surplus of the London congress, and the Morains themselves donated the prize money. In 1959 6,000 announcements were put out, which resulted in 84 essays from eighteen countries. The winners were A.J. Dam (Netherlands), with *The Humanist answer to the world's need*, and Haig Khatchadourian (Lebanon), with *Ethical Humanism as a basis of right and wrong*. Both essays were published in the *Information Bulletin*. It meant a lot of work for the bureau, but the results were deemed worthwhile: new contacts, wide publicity, a furthering of humanist ideas. Another Morain plan was less successful: IHEU's correspondence club attracted only a few dozen participants. A third plan concerned help for emigrants. It resulted in some spiritual assistance from the American Ethical Union to humanist emigrants to the United States.

In January 1960 a special issue of *Information Bulletin* contained a series of (national) Humanist manifestoes, written at the behest of the London congress by the member organizations. Originally it had been intended to integrate them into a single declaration, but this had proved impossible. Besides, it was feared that if a 'monolithic' declaration was composed, this might discourage instead of stimulate local humanist initiatives if these were at variance with the Unified Declaration.

### Membership and 'development'

Between 1952 and 1962 the number of IHEU member organizations gradually rose from seven in six countries to twenty-two in fifteen countries. However, only one of the new members had become a full member, the German *Bund Frei-Religiöser Gemeinden Deutschlands* (League of free-religious communities in Germany). Seven new members took on consultative status and paid a small contribution; an equal number became registered groups and paid nothing (until 1964, when small dues were introduced). The Austrian *Gesellschaft für Ethische Kultur*, one of the IHEU founders but a small and languishing group, could not keep up the consultative status it had initially opted for and in 1957 had to fall back to registered group status.

Though the fifteen new members only marginally increased IHEU's income, they reflected an intention to substantiate the 'P' in IHEU. Among them were organizations from Japan, Korea, Australia, India, Israel, and Nigeria, as well as several Western European countries (Germany, France, Norway, Denmark). This broadening was the result of a concerted effort to develop humanist organizations in countries where no such organization existed. It started with cultivating a network of personal contacts, who were sent the IHEU quarterly *Information Bulletin* and other communications. Burgeoning humanist groups received financial aid too: the Nigerian Humanist Association was given NLG 100 from a Development Fund in 1956. In that year the network consisted of 226 individual contacts in twenty-five countries. The most active of these, who were considered to be the local nucleus of a new humanist organization, were called 'field representatives'. In 1956 there were only two field representatives, three years later there were a dozen. The Norwegian *Human-Etisk Forbund i Norge* (HEFIN, Human-Ethical League in Norway) was the most successful group to grow from such modest beginnings. The field representative in this case was Kristian Horn. HEFIN was accepted as an IHEU member in 1956; Horn was a member of the IHEU Board until 1981.

Some groups were ephemeral, and communications often proved difficult. Now and then IHEU met with disappointments. When Blackham in 1955 investigated the application for affiliation of a Nigerian group, he found that its secretary had a criminal record (he had served a six months sentence for theft, and had been thrown out of the Nigerian Limbless Veterans' Association, where he had been secretary). Only four years later a Nigerian group was accepted. As to the Rationalist Association of Johannesburg, the Executive Committee invested in verify-

**Kristian Horn**

Kristian Horn (1903-1981) and his wife Ester from 1951 onwards were the driving force behind the introduction of secular civil confirmation ceremonies in Norway. Horn was a typical example of an IHEU 'field representative', who established, with the support of IHEU, a national humanist organization. The organization he founded was *Human-Etisk Forbund* (HEF, 1956), of which Horn was to remain the main ideologist and leader until 1976.

Horn was a member of the IHEU Board of Directors, on behalf of HEF, from 1957 until his death in 1981, when Levi Fragell took over. Horn's explicitly secularist view included four main elements: rationalism; agnosticism; ethics based on humanism, not on religion; and the *golden rule* ('do to others what you want them to do to yourself').

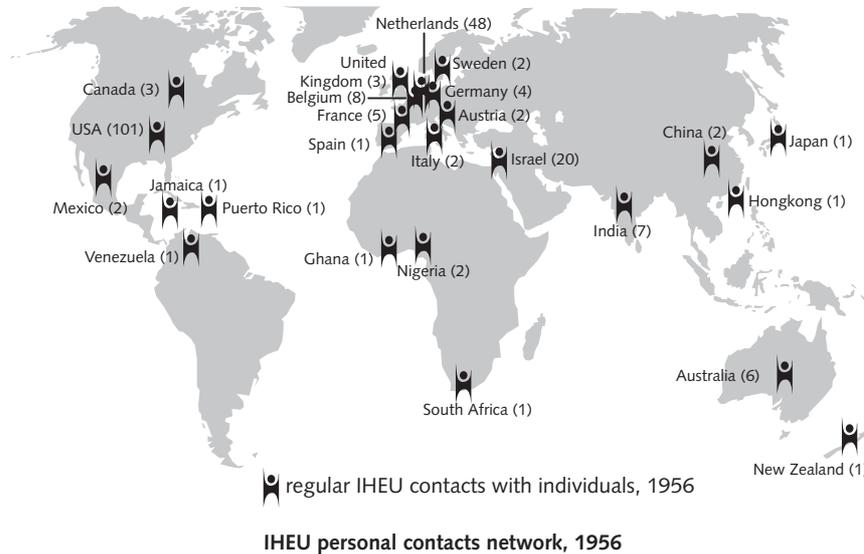
ing carefully whether the group rejected Apartheid. The group passed the test, but their membership did not last; after a few years they had the honor to be the first group to leave IHEU (1961), where they had been a paper member only.

European groups sometimes posed problems of another kind. In 1957 a French group was refused membership because it was said to be 'under communist influence' (the group did become an IHEU member in the early 1980s). A year later, another French group, *Action Laïque*, showed interest in joining IHEU. It was an immense group with 1.5 million individual members. Though IHEU rejoiced in the prospect of catching such a big fish, this also posed a problem. At that moment the number of votes of each member organization in the Board was proportional to its size, so accession of the French group would have swamped all votings. To prevent this, the Board hastened to change the vote weight formula so the group would get 18 votes instead of 1500 (all other organizations together had 28 votes). In the end, *Action Laïque* never became an IHEU member.

The Indian IRHM had the problem that currency restrictions forbade them to transfer money abroad. To pay their dues, they offered to send Indian books and periodicals instead, to be sold from the Utrecht office. As the Dutch office feared the market in the West for such publications to be slim, the offer was apparently declined.

**A growing budget**

As a consequence of its ambitious activities, IHEU's budget increased tenfold between 1952 and 1962. At first the Executive Committee at its annual meeting simply divided the total expenses for the current year among all full member organizations, proportional to their own total annual income. Their payment to IHEU typically amounted to a few percent of their own budget. In 1958 ominous problems occurred in this informal system. AEU and AHA declared that they weren't able to pay their dues, in spite of the fact that the budget had been raised only a year before at the request of the AEU. Van Praag was furious. The agreed budget had already been spent, he said, and he regarded non-payment as a threat



to IHEU itself. 'The alternative to realistic estimates and prompt payment was not default but liquidation, the winding-up of IHEU.'

As the old system would have become impractical anyhow because of the increasing number of member organizations and the increasing total budget, a new and more rigid system was introduced. Contribution dues were calculated a year in advance from the recurrent income and the total membership of each organization, using a prearranged formula. Because this procedure severed the direct coupling between IHEU expenses and income, it opened the road to large deficits, as would become clear in the sixties.

### The Oslo Congress

The 1962 Oslo World Congress, in spite of its slightly eccentric location, was even more successful than its two predecessors. IHEU even felt compelled to limit the number of participants from any single country to one hundred, though granting that this rule was 'to be interpreted liberally'. More important for the future, the Oslo Congress was the cradle for ambitious plans.

**World Congress Oslo, 1962**

Some 450 delegates from 22 countries met in the capital of Norway on August 2-7, 1962, attending the third IHEU World Congress. With 'In search of long range goals for Humanism' as its main theme, the general aim was to make the humanists' voice heard in human affairs on important issues of worldwide concern.

The Indian Sib Narayan Ray, editor of *The Radical Humanist*, responded in his main paper to the question of how a humanist movement can contribute to the achievement of maturity in an immature world: by means of a wide range of activities, programs and projects in which the development and propagation of humanist ideas would have top priority.

The French philosopher, historian and sociologist Raymond Aron examined in his talk 'Towards freedom in an organized world' how large-scale organization, technology and controls can threaten the humanist idea of a free personality in a pluralist community. Humanists should decisively prefer the functional approach, handling problems one by one, aiming to give each person the opportunity to develop freely. In the discussions the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations was supported. In order to diminish the effect of the East-West confrontation, it was proposed to make fuller use of the agencies of the UN, and to advance towards world government. A manifesto, calling for a new perspective in international affairs, stated that the humanist tradition of tolerance implies a commitment to work for agreement—in brief, to end the Cold War, to accept different political systems, and to strive for peaceful coexistence. The congress issued resolutions on population control and freedom from hunger, on world policy, and a humanist call for a new perspective of international life, thus providing a number of concrete and practical suggestions.

1962-1975:

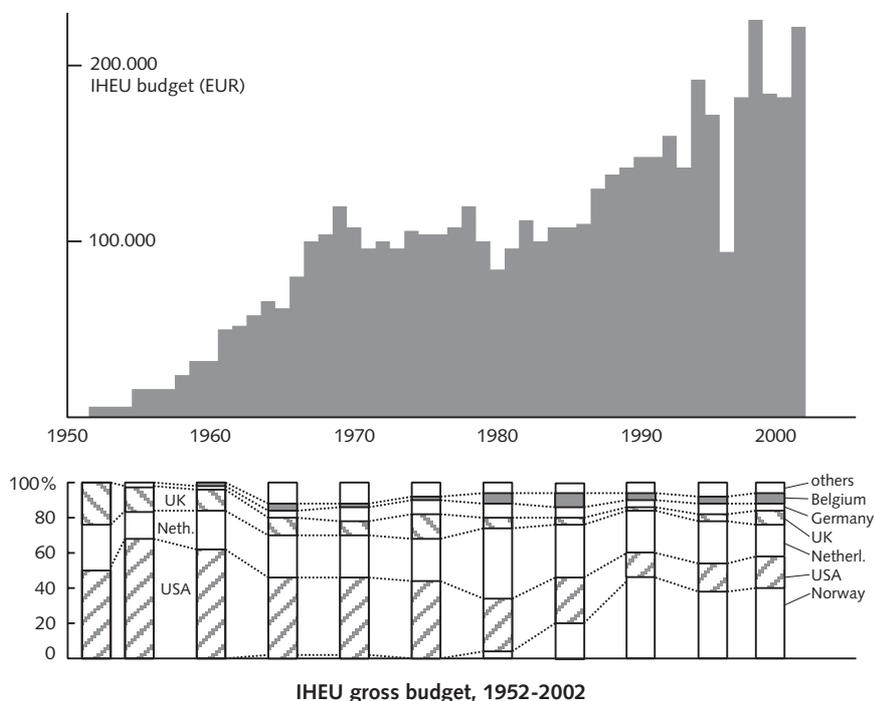
## High expectations, lean years

The 1962 Oslo Congress in some respects marks the coming of age of IHEU. The preceding decade can be characterized as a period of preparation: IHEU's purposes and philosophy had been defined, headquarters had concentrated on exchanging information between member organizations so as to help them in getting to know each other better, a working organization had been built up. At the Oslo Congress enthusiastic and ambitious plans for the future were launched: IHEU should be a kind of command center to stimulate humanism and humanist organizations worldwide. Another sign of IHEU's maturity is that it concentrated increasingly on practical activities instead of theoretical self-definition. Specific projects were set up, such as the Bihar Third World development project and various dialogues; working parties were created to discuss specific areas of practical activity; the frequency of the congresses was increased. A trend from theory to practice is also visible from the central themes that were chosen for the congresses.

The period may be divided in two, a subdivision that parallels developments in world history. The 1960s, with its struggle for civil rights in the USA, increasingly comprehensive worldwide student protests, the growth of an independent youth culture, sexual revolution, and decolonization on a global scale, were a period of imagination, new ideas, high expectations. However, 1968 was not only the high point of the 1960s' protest movement, but also the year in which Richard Nixon became president of the USA and, in Czechoslovakia, Dubček's 'communism with a human face' was crushed. Likewise, 1968 was a turning-point for IHEU. Before 1968 IHEU's membership and budget grew, after 1968 both stabilized. Before 1968 many new activities were started, after 1968 few activities were entirely new. The main exception was the International Humanist Award, which was presented for the first time in 1970.

### **Financial hardship**

Humanist organizations are proverbially poor and IHEU was no exception, especially not in the 1960s and 1970s. Paul Kurtz would later remember this period as 'the lean years'. From 1960 until 1977 thirteen out of eighteen years ended on a deficit, three had a zero balance and only two, 1963 and 1967, ended on a surplus.



IHEU gross budget, 1952-2002

The budget is shown in Euros, corrected for inflation. The lower part shows the geographical distribution of membership dues.

Saving on the office costs of IHEU, which amounted to some 90% of the budget, was hardly possible. IHEU already relied heavily on volunteers, the paid staff only consisting of one and a half person (the Organizing Secretary, later Executive Director, and a typist).

Since office costs could hardly be reduced, everything depended on income. 80% of this was brought in by the IHEU full member organizations. Other classes of members, consultative and registered or associated, paid much less, and other sources of income such as the sale of brochures hardly made up for the costs involved. The dues for full members were proportional to the number of personal members these organizations had. In practice this meant that IHEU income depended largely on only three member organizations, each of whom paid approximately one fifth of the total budget: the American AEU and AHA, and the Dutch HV. The other full members, being smaller, paid considerably less. This situation made the functioning of IHEU heavily dependent on prompt payment by the big members.

#### Some financial *cris de coeur* from the Annual Reports

1964: 'All in all the financial situation remains precarious.'

1965: 'It has to be recorded, unfortunately, that our financial situation is critical.'

1971: 'The prospects in 1971 were very gloomy.'

1974: 'Our liquidity is put in jeopardy.'

1978: The financial situation continued to give cause for anxiety.'



Various IHEU periodicals

### Investing in publicity

In 1963 at the request of the Oslo Congress an ‘ideal budget’ was composed. This ideal budget, though minimal and explicitly aiming at ‘practical possibilities realizable within five years’, amounted to more than double the current budget. It summed up the tasks that were deemed indispensable ‘if the IHEU is to be able to keep in step with a growing international development’. Most items were virtually doubled—bureau costs, Board, congress costs—with two exceptions. The item ‘Promotion of new groups’ (in countries where humanist organizations did not yet exist), which already was a minor entry, was reduced further, from 7% to 1% of the budget, because activities in this field had never met with much success.

## The voice of IHEU, 1962-1975

1962-1965 Second Vatican Council: reforms in the Roman Catholic Church	1968 (Board of Directors), Student Revolts: 'We deem the [students'] demands reasonable, and extend our sympathy and solidarity to the student movement striving for a more equitable society.'
1963 Partial nuclear test ban	
1963 US: President John F. Kennedy assassinated	
1964 USSR: Khrushchev ousted by Brezhnev and Kosygin	
1964-1975 Increasing US involvement in the Vietnam War	1970 (Board of Directors), Population Control, Family Planning and Abortion: 'The IHEU ... makes an urgent appeal to the Catholic Church to ... stop opposing effective family planning and the liberalization of abortion legislation ...'
1966-1969 'Cultural Revolution' in China	
1966-1977 India: Indira Gandhi in power	
1966- Third feminist wave	
1967 Third Arab-Israeli War (Six-Day War)	
1967-1970 Biafran War in Nigeria	
1968 Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia ends liberal Dubček regime	1970 (Board of Directors), US Policy in South-East Asia: '... calls upon the US Government to cease its appalling destruction of life and liberty in South-East Asia and to withdraw its forces without delay ...'
1968 Student riots in US, Paris, Japan	
1968 Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy killed	
1968 International treaty to prevent spread of nuclear weapons (61 countries)	
1969 Man lands on the moon	
1969 Catholic-Protestant violence in Northern Ireland starts	
1969-1974 Nixon presidency (resigns after Watergate scandal)	1974 (IHEU Congress), Dr. Henry Morgentaler: '... whereas, the [IHEU] has repeatedly expressed its view that women ought to have the right to discontinue an unwanted pregnancy with competent medical assistance ... Therefore: be it resolved that [the Congress] urges that the sentence passed against ... Morgentaler should be remitted ...'
1969-1975 West Germany: Willy Brandt government, <i>Ostpolitik</i>	
1971 Communist China admitted as a UN member	
1973 Fourth Arab-Israeli War (Yom Kippur); oil crisis; start of world economic crisis	
1974 Death of Salazar; end of the Portuguese colonial empire	1974 (IHEU Congress), Beneficent Voluntary Euthanasia: 'We ... declare our support on ethical grounds for beneficent voluntary euthanasia ... We appeal to an enlightened public opinion ... to move in the direction of a compassionate view toward needless suffering in dying.'
1975 Death of Franco	
1975 Bangladesh secedes from Pakistan	
1975 Helsinki agreements	

The other exception was a drastic eightfold increase in the proposed budget for public relations. The circulation of the quarterly *International Humanism*, 'really our own means of outside communication' was to be boosted from a few hundred to 2000 copies. Quite optimistically it was thought that 1500 paying subscribers could be found, but even if that cheerful wish were to come true, the periodical would still suffer a yearly deficit of 2500 guilders. However, 'the importance of having a quality magazine [...] weighs up against the disadvantage of a deficit.' The second spearhead of the public relations effort was to be a paid part-time PR officer, because 'again and again we are asked to pay more attention to propaganda and public relations'. In the end it was Jaap van Praag who took it upon himself to perform some PR tasks—as a volunteer, and a capable

one at that; when 'more attention was paid to [the 1966] Congress in the press than usual', this was credited to his being the PR officer.

### **Failure of the 'ideal budget'**

In 1963 the membership dues were indeed doubled. The next year IHEU doubled the budget for its quarterly *International Humanism*, and for the first time a Board meeting was organized between congresses. This extra meeting, however, led to a financial debacle. The crucial blunder was that IHEU had decided that from now on all documents for Board meetings were to be translated into French and German. These translations absorbed more than 10% of the (enlarged) total annual budget, and the year ended in an appalling deficit. Never again was the experiment repeated, but other projects were to follow which, in spite of a growing budget, led to dramatic and persisting financial losses of up to 40% (!) of the budget.

On four occasions between 1961 and 1967, the Dutch HV donated large sums of money to bridge over the shortages, but clearly this could not go on indefinitely, especially not after the 'personal union' of IHEU and Dutch Humanist League (HV) ended in 1969, when Van Praag resigned his chairmanship of the Dutch HV. In its 1967 annual report IHEU stated that a choice had to be made between either 'remaining as we are' or 'exploring new horizons'. In the latter case IHEU was to become 'the more vital force in the general humanist movement either through its influence on members or the exciting and desperately needed dimension of entering into development in Africa and Asia'.

### **Membership and recruitment**

In fact, the financial sacrifices had not really resulted in a marked growth of IHEU. At first sight, between 1962 and 1968 IHEU had grown by more than 50%: the number of member organizations rose from 22 to 34. However, this growth was entirely due to new members with the lowest status, so-called 'registered groups' (since 1967 renamed 'associate members') who were not much more than correspondence contacts, and barely even that—some hardly ever answered the mail that was sent to them. There was only one new full member, the Rationalist Press Association from London. To be sure, the Italian *Centro-Coscienza* and the Humanist Association of Canada became full members in 1968 and 1971 respectively, but for both of them the financially exacting full membership turned out to be too much of a burden, so after a few years they stepped down and became consultative members again.

The aim of keeping a class of associated groups was to stimulate humanist organization-building outside the core areas of modern humanism, North-West Europe and North America. To further this aim, in 1967 a Board member was assigned to each associate group, who would personally keep contact with them. Each year the annual report to the Board included a detailed continent by continent report of achievements, setbacks and prospects regarding humanist initia-

tives, especially in mission areas such as Eastern Asia and Africa. However, many parts of the world were hard to reach and the groups quite often ephemeral. Year after year the Board and the Executive Committee discussed dropping the Nigerian humanists from the membership list. They never answered any letters and it was not at all clear whether they still existed. However, again and again the Nigerians were given the benefit of the doubt, because for many years they were the only 'bridgehead' of humanism in Africa. In Latin America too there was, until the 1990s, only one member, the Argentine Humanist Association. Mediterranean Europe, heartland of the freethinkers that were organized in the WUFT, was hardly more accessible. Only in Northern Italy a few organizations like *Centro-Coscienza* were ready to join IHEU. In the Arab and the communist world only a few individuals kept in contact with IHEU (the Chinese branch of IHEU still consists of four individuals on a total population of more than a billion). By 1969 it had become clear that IHEU's chances for expansion were finite. As the 1969 annual report notes:

'For several years there has been talk that the IHEU should play a more active role in the world's humanistic revolution. This dream will remain only talk until there is

#### **What ethical humanism stands for**

In 1965 the IHEU Board amplified the 1952 Amsterdam declaration by formulating ten characteristics of what humanism stands for. It was explicitly stated that these should not be taken to constitute a definition, for humanism was too complex and adaptable to be truly represented by any list of absolute statements. The ten characteristics were adopted at the 1966 congress and are therefore known as the *Paris statement*.

- 1 Ethical humanism expresses a moral conviction; it is acceptance of responsibility for human life in the world.
- 2 It represents a way of life relying upon human capacities and natural and social resources.
- 3 Humanist morality starts with an acknowledgement of human interdependence and the need for mutual respect.
- 4 Ethical humanism calls for a significant existence made worthwhile through human commitment and acceptance, as a basis for enjoyment and fulfillment.
- 5 Man becomes human in society; society should provide conditions for the fullest possible development of each man.
- 6 Human development requires continuous improvement of the conditions of free inquiry and of an open society.
- 7 Scientific knowledge progressively established and applied is the most reliable means of improving welfare.
- 8 Human progress is progress in freedom of choice; human justice is the progressive realization of equality.
- 9 Justice does not exclude force, but the sole desirable use of force is to suppress the resort to force.
- 10 Ethical humanism affirms the unity of man and a common responsibility of all men for all men.

more support from member organizations. During 1969 there was no significant increase in support and, as a result, no significant increase in IHEU activities.’

From 1968 onwards, both membership and annual budget (corrected for inflation) remained virtually constant for many years. After 1972 IHEU even succeeded in reducing the annual deficits to manageable proportions. By 1975 it looked as if IHEU had consolidated its position. When in that year Jaap van Praag retired, having been Chairman for 23 years, it was said that IHEU now really had come of age: ‘1975 marked the end of IHEU’s beginnings’.

### Congresses

After Oslo, world congresses were organized every four years: Paris (Puteaux) 1966, Boston 1970, Amsterdam 1974. A regional European congress was held at Hannover in 1968; a regional congress in India in the same year was planned but had to be cancelled.

These congresses tended to focus less and less on theoretical expositions and more on the practical consequences of being a humanist in today’s world.

The Paris congress was notable because it attracted lots of young participants, which seemed promising for the future of humanism, though probably this was a bit self-deceptive because many young people had come to Paris in the first place to visit a congress of the *Ligue Française de l’Enseignement*. In any case, the trend did not last, in spite of the fact that two years later at Hannover a Youth Secretariat was formed.

The Boston congress in 1970 was the first to be held outside of Europe. Influenced by recent developments, such as the youth protest movement, rethinking democracy, and growing concerns about the environment (the first International Humanist Award was presented to a proponent of ecological concern, Barry Commoner), it focused so strongly on social issues that Van Praag at its closing felt compelled to remind his audience that this was supposed to be a humanist congress. Concern for the environment and the future of man, and the way humanists should react in those fields, featured even more prominently in 1974 at the second IHEU congress to be held in Amsterdam.

### Working Parties

At congresses humanists from all over the world met in person. This presented an opportunity to organize collateral personal meetings, such as Board meetings, national and specialized conferences, and Working Parties. The latter were permanent committees, generally consisting of between five and thirty members from the various full member organizations, that discussed specific areas of IHEU or humanist activity. The groups exchanged information, experiences and opinions in their own specific area, in order to provide the staff of member organizations with first-hand documentation regarding relevant activities by humanist organizations in other countries. Between congresses the working parties main-

**World Congress, Paris, 1966**

The theme of IHEU's 4th World Congress, held on July 25-30, 1966, in Puteaux, a Paris district, was 'The humanist response to the problems and aspirations of man'.

IHEU chairman Jaap van Praag identified in 'The humanist outlook' the various trends in the humanist tradition, and discussed what they have in common and what distinguishes them from non-humanist ways of thinking and living. In his view humanism is life-affirming, not merely God-rejecting. Humanists hold a common moral conviction, that men themselves in their humanity shape the world in a free, creative and responsible way.

In his talk on 'The Humanist contribution' Gerald Wendt, a former UNESCO Director, defined the humanist role concerning the social problems and the aspirations of mankind. He proposed IHEU to proclaim that humanism is uniquely dedicated to the enrichment of life for all men. Sidney Scheuer, Vice-President of the American Ethical Union and IHEU Treasurer, presented in his talk 'An ethical approach to peace and a practical suggestion for implementation' an imaginative proposal for a lend-lease type, world-wide operation to mobilize resources to meet basic human needs. He won the enthusiastic support of the congress.

Young humanists were notably present at this Congress. They organized a working party which proposed to set up a youth secretariat within IHEU, and they made some of the most effective and important contributions to the discussions. IHEU at this congress has been described as 'moving towards a fuller, more hospitable, open and mellow humanism. Its members came from different backgrounds, followed different approaches, and insisted on emphases, or even aims, of their own. This time more was heard of the imaginative and aesthetic side of man; aspects of the inner life and of the arts figured in the program of discussions. A dialogue within IHEU began to take place in Puteaux'.

**European Regional Congress, Hannover, 1968**

The second European IHEU Congress took place on July 14-19, 1968, at Hannover, Germany, and was devoted to the pressing problem of 'Conservation and human fulfillment'. Dutch Vice-President of the European Economic Community Sicco Mansholt argued that a reasonable solution had to be found for the contradiction between the tremendously increased intellectual demands on the individual and the petrified structures of a prehistoric form of society.

Conservation Society co-founder Douglas MacEwan dealt with 'Conservation as the intelligent and purposeful control of the environment'. He said that the fundamental humanist principle of respect for human life as such implied that 'if humanist morality is to mean anything, it must mean that unwanted human beings must not be born and the total numbers of [them] must be adjusted to the available resources'.

Student-activist and co-founder of the *Institut de l'Homme*, André Niel, argued that in the twentieth century the problem of human fulfillment was most urgent. Humanity's existential failure in this respect caused trouble and conflict, and threatened civilization. As a solution, man was to become a social being without conflict. Niel envisioned 'a humanism dedicated to man's maturity and definitive fulfillment'.



Participants at the 1966 Paris congress

#### World Congress Boston, 1970

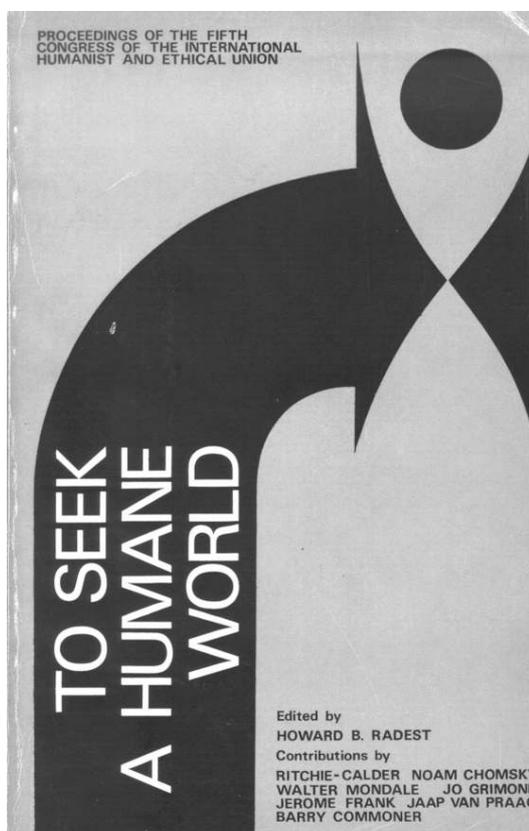
The theme of the fifth IHEU World Congress, held at Boston on August 4-9, 1970, was 'To seek a humane world (How can man direct his future evolution?)'. This theme was chosen because it was felt that the decade of the 1970s would be dominated by the urgent problems of pollution, waste of resources, ecology, nuclear weapons, and the survival of mankind, and by the idea that man had been enabled to shape his future as never before. Emphasizing man's complete responsibility for his own future, humanists from around the globe had to identify, to analyze and to respond to this new situation by devising a value system compatible with survival in such a revolutionarily changing world.

British UN consultant Lord Richie Calder discussed 'The twenty-first century—a look ahead'. He set forth his views on the great influence of science and technology, biotechnology in particular, on the constitution of man and on the state of his environment, and he proposed to constitute a multicultural worldwide body of wise men.

American environmentalist Barry Commoner, who received the First Humanist Award, argued that people should get mastery of themselves again and reinstate the power of science and technology to the service of mankind.

The American linguist and anarchist Noam Chomsky severely criticized the capitalist system and the foreign policy of 'imperial America' in his talk 'The crisis of power'. He saw solving America's problems as a precondition for solving the world's problems, and expressed his unconditional support for the revolutionary student movement that, he said, contained his hope for the future. American senator Walter Mondale discussed the problems of poverty, exploitation, and racial discrimination. In his talk 'What can we do—what must we do. Critical liberalism and social action' he suggested creating community-based power as a means to attain social reforms of the American system.

To seek a humane world  
(book cover 1970)



tained contact by post mail. At first the discussions were rather theoretical, but from 1966 the emphasis shifted to more practical issues, such as producing materials that might be used by other humanist organizations in their educational, PR or counseling activities.

The first two Working Parties (WP's) had been set up in 1959. One dealt with 'Public relations', the other, called 'Group work' or 'Groups', concentrated on the problem how best to organize humanist groups. A year later WP's on 'Counseling' and on 'Moral education' were constituted. These four WP's had fruitful meetings at the Oslo Congress in 1962, but thereafter it proved difficult to keep up the planned mail contacts. Neither the secretariat nor the convenors succeeded in stimulating the member organizations to respond, let alone to become active.

In 1964 the two oldest WP's were already dissolved and replaced by a single new and broader WP on 'Advancement of Humanism'. The other two WP's did not meet the expectations either, and three years later all WP's were restructured. Through new regulations and by asking the member organizations to appoint 'interested and expert people', it was hoped to stimulate continuing activity of the WP's, 'which they have sometimes lacked in the past'. However, changing the regulations did not really solve the moot problem, which consisted in a shortage of adequate participants in the WP's. In the end the new rules were applied flexi-

#### World Congress Amsterdam, 1974

Over four hundred humanists from nineteen countries assembled at the sixth IHEU World Congress, held in Amsterdam on August 5-9, 1974. The general theme, 'The humanist revolution', referred to the challenge to make humanist values function within a fundamentally different kind of society which would take into account *The limits to growth* (as the Club of Rome had named its report).

Indian former High Court Chief Justice V.M. Tarkunde presented 'Twentieth-century Renaissance' as a second humanist revolution. He offered a number of recommendations to invigorate democracy by new institutional forms, for example by the foundation of a network of People's Committees, and by the exposition of its basic humanist values.

K. Kaluratnam (Ceylon) dealt with 'The quality of life', emphasizing the necessity of global politics and co-operation to ensure a minimum standard of living and to counteract population growth, ecological problems and social and economic inequality.

Dutch sociologist Piet Thoenes, discussing 'Ends and means of humanist social change', was one of those who emphasized that formulae alone are not adequate. In his view organized humanism could do more and better if it was able to give humanism a face of its own by shaping a humanist subculture and expressing itself as a way of life.

As is clear from the program, environmental and ecological problems were central issues at this congress. However, there were some complaints that the ethical aspect, the humanist philosophical underpinning of rights and duties, had not been brought out well, no more than the issue which political and economic system should be applied in view of these urgent problems.

bly. For example, the WP on 'Advancement' was disbanded in 1971 and replaced by ad hoc meetings of the Managing Directors of humanist organizations at the IHEU congresses.

The malfunctioning of existing WP's had not made the Board refrain from making plans for a new WP on 'Youth' in 1964, to activate the work among young people and to tighten the bonds with organized humanist youth. At the Paris congress, where many youths took part, the new WP had a successful meeting and as a result it was decided to transform it into a Youth Secretariat. The Secretary, a volunteer of course, with a limited budget, resigned within a few months. But after this false start the Youth Secretariat (later called Youth Section) was founded anew two years later at the Hannover congress. In 1970 and 1971 disagreement arose between the Youth Section and Board on the issue whether the Youth Section could make public statements and carry on political campaigns independently of IHEU. The Board was rather skeptical about the political fervor of the youths, but decided that it would not dictate a youth policy, and the Youth Section was given the right to elect a consultative representative on the Board. Among the activities of the young humanists we may note the conferences they organized, for example in 1969 at Milan on birth control, and in 1974 at Amsterdam, immediately before the IHEU congress, on problems of consumption. However, attempts to organize conferences in 1975 (Cambridge, UK) and 1976 (Arnhem, the Netherlands) collapsed, and in 1977 the Youth Section was dissolved.



**Blackham (at center) receiving the International Humanist Award out of the hands of Van Praag, Amsterdam, 1974.**

Contacts by mail were strenuous, but wp meetings at the congresses were generally appreciated by the participants as 'profitable', and on these occasions numerous new wps were proposed. Most initiatives dragged on for a few years and then ran aground. Examples of abortive wp proposals between 1966 and 1975 are 'Law reform', 'Social work/social services', 'Multinational corporations', 'Politics', and 'Humanism and science'. The only wp that got off to a flying start was 'Social reform', founded in 1972, which intended to serve as a watchdog for guarding the open society. It had been proposed in 1970 by Peter Draper of the British Humanist Association (formerly the British Ethical Union) out of dissatisfaction with the little effect that IHEU statements on political issues had had so far.

Apparently, many Working Parties had difficulties in keeping up their momentum. The role of the convenor was crucial, as is demonstrated by active convenors like Lisa Kuhmerker of the wp on Moral education, or Piet Pols of the wp on Counseling. The Youth Secretariat in particular was vulnerable because of its intrinsically frequent changing of the guard. Yet, external circumstances may also have contributed. Even when in the 1990s the working parties returned in the form of Secretariats, in a much smaller world where European Community networks, e-mail and fax made contacts much simpler, it was not always easy to keep them alive and thriving.

### The Bihar project

At the 1962 Oslo congress, S.N. Ray of the Indian IRHM, put forward a proposal for a development project in a poverty-stricken part of Bihar in Eastern India. The project, to be organized by IHEU and IRHM as co-partners, sprung from the Freedom from Hunger Campaign of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). Its aim was not only to raise production and improve living conditions, but also and in particular to stimulate the local population's self-reliance—which was at the time a groundbreaking approach. The population was to be educated in more modern agricultural and handicraft techniques, such as the use of fertilizers and tapestry looms, and they would be stimulated to form co-operatives. Within IHEU the proposal was enthusiastically received, a Bihar Fund was installed, and a Bihar Action was held to raise money.

However, the noble aims of the project got frustrated in actual practice. In 1971, nine years into the project, an IHEU inspector squarely concluded: 'It is sad to say that this plan failed'. The main reason, he thought, was that it had proved very difficult to convince the population that they could improve their situation by their own effort.



The Bihar project office, c. 1962

‘The trainees did not understand it, and refused the system. Their mentality is not yet ripe for independence, for being responsible for helping themselves. They wanted to be a simple wage-earner, which gave them certainty.’

However, it seems that it was not only the population, but also the project management that failed. Though a variety of industrial activities had been planned—shoemaking, basket making, rug production, carpentry, blacksmith work, cotton yarn production—in 1971 only a teacher for rugmaking had been made available. Only in 1967 the first ten rug makers were ready to start production. Other elements in the project went wrong as calamitously. The supply of fertilizers and seeds, which should have been provided on credit, ran out owing to lack of funds: they were sold on a profit basis to whoever was able to pay for them. Two bullocks had been bought to help plough the land, but as no one knew how to take care of them, the first died and the other then was sold.

In 1975 the Board decided that as long as there was money left in the Bihar Fund, the project should continue. Efforts were made to restart activities, such as training in the use of handlooms and carpet weaving, and building a river dam for irrigation purposes. This seems to have been the last anyone ever heard of the traumatic Bihar project. With the members of the Board the word Bihar became synonymous with a prolonged and hopeless fiasco.

#### **Sidney Henry Scheuer**

Sidney Henry Scheuer (1893-1987) had a career in the textile business and took part in several international missions for the American government. He was active in the American Ethical Union and helped found IHEU, of which he was the Treasurer from 1952 to 1987. In 1966 Scheuer delivered an important address at the IHEU Paris World Congress: ‘An ethical humanist approach to peace and a practical suggestion for implementation’. In 1978 Scheuer was elected Honorary Member of the IHEU Board. At the London Congress of that same year Scheuer was presented with a Special Award for his services to IHEU.

#### **Humanist awards**

In 1968 the IHEU Board decided, at the suggestion of the Israeli humanist movement, to establish an International Humanist Award, to honor exemplary humanists at the IHEU World Congresses. People who had stood firmly by their humanist principles might thus be put in the limelight, but it was realized that an award might also be useful to spark off publicity and offered an opportunity for IHEU to present itself on controversial issues.

The International Humanist Award consists of a parchment scroll, bearing a text with the motivation for the prize. In the course of time, two kinds of people have been honored with the award. First, there are people from outside the organized humanist movement—sometimes internationally famous—who have been active in such implicitly humanist fields as human rights, defense of democracy, or the environment. Examples are Alexander Dubček, Andrei Sakharov and Barry Commoner. Second, prominent humanists from within the organized move-

ment have been presented with the award, such as Harold Blackham or V.M. Tarkunde, as well as an organization—the Atheist Centre.

In 1978 a second award, the Special Award for Service to World Humanism, was presented to three IHEU pioneers: Harold Blackham, Jaap van Praag, and Sidney Scheuer. So far this has been the only occasion this particular award was presented. However, in 1988 a comparable award, the Distinguished Humanist Service Award was established; it has been presented at every IHEU World Congress since. In addition, from 1988 onwards several other IHEU awards have been given on an ad hoc basis, and national humanist organizations have also sometimes awarded prizes of their own at IHEU congresses, especially at IHEU's regional congresses.

#### Humanist awards 1970-2002

IHEU World Congress	International Humanist Award	Distinguished Humanist Service Award	Other
1970 Boston	Barry Commoner		
1974 Amsterdam	Harold J. Blackham		
1978 London	V.M. Tarkunde		(a) Harold J. Blackham; Jaap van Praag; Sidney Scheuer
1982 Hannover	Kurt Partzsch		
1986 Oslo	Arnould Clausse; Atheist Centre		
1988 Buffalo	Andrei Sakharov	Corliss Lamont; Indumati Parikh; Mathilde Krim	(b) Betty Friedan; Herbert Hauptman; Steve Allen; (c) Henry Morgentaler; (d) Paul Kurtz
1990 Brussels	Alexander Dubček	Jean Jacques Amy	
1992 Amsterdam	Pieter Admiraal	Indumati Parikh; Vern Bullough; Nettie Klein	(e) Elena Bonner
1996 Mexico	Nettie Klein	Jim Herrick; James Dilloway	(f) Shulamit Aloni; Taslima Nasrin; Xiao Xuehui
1999 Mumbai	Paul Kurtz	Abe Solomon; Paul Postma	(g) Levi Fragell
2002 Noordwijkerhout			

Notes: (a) Special Award for Service to World Humanism; (b) Humanist Laureate Award; (c) Humanist of the Year Award; (d) Academy World Humanist Award (International Academy of Humanism); (e) Distinguished Human Rights Award; (f) Humanist Awards; (g) World Humanist Award of the Council for Secular Humanism.

**A mini portrait of the winners of the prestigious International Humanist Awards:**

- 1970 Environmentalist professor Barry Commoner (USA), for his activities in the field of preservation of the world environment. Commoner played a major role in achieving worldwide commitment to the cause of ecology.
- 1974 Harold John Blackham (UK), who had played a key role in founding IHEU, for his long-standing involvement with ethical humanism in Britain, and his achievements in the field of moral education.
- 1978 V.M. Tarkunde (India), a former judge of the Bombay court, who had shown great courage during the state of emergency in his country. He defended the values of democracy and dealt with many cases that were related to the repressive measures of the Indian government in that period.
- 1982 Kurt Partzsch, a former Minister for Social Affairs of the German federal state of Lower Saxony, for his contributions to the cause of human well-being and for his initiatives in social work in particular.
- 1986 Arnould Clausee, a Belgian professor emeritus of education, who as president of the *Ligue Internationale de l'Enseignement* had promoted a public educational system based on the principles of equal chances for all, free inquiry, and high quality.  
The Atheist Centre (India) for their efforts to bring humanism in practice, by means of education, social work and their fight against superstition and religious intolerance.
- 1988 Andrei Sakharov (USSR), atom scientist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace, for his indefatigable struggle for the cause of human rights in his country, and for his humanist ideals. The Award was presented *in absentia*, as at that time the Soviet authorities refused to give him permission to leave the country.
- 1990 Alexander Dubček, in recognition of his attempts in the 1960s to give communism in Czechoslovakia a more human face. Dubček, who after 1968 had to pay a heavy toll for his dedication to his ideals of democracy and humanity, stressed in his speech that it is morality and humanity that give meaning to life.
- 1992 Pieter Admiraal, a Dutch anaesthetist, for advocating the right of self-determination in the field of voluntary euthanasia.
- 1996 Nettie Klein (Netherlands), humanist counselor, for her long-standing volunteer work for IHEU. In her last 'Nettie's Column' in *International Humanist News* she wrote that she felt 'very honored to be admitted to the ranks of such distinguished recipients of this Award as Sakharov, Dubček and Admiraal'.
- 1999 Professor Paul Kurtz, in recognition of the immensely important role he has played for both the American and the international humanist movement.

**IHEU representation at the United Nations and UNESCO**

The 1952 Amsterdam congress had in three out of its five resolutions pledged support for United Nations ideals. One of the first tasks the Executive Committee took upon itself, was therefore to become a consultative member of UNESCO. In 1953 and 1954 three letters were sent to UNESCO, but they remained unanswered. This experience made the Executive Committee aware of the necessity of

being informed beforehand of correct procedures, as well as the need to foster personal contacts instead of simply sending a letter. In 1955 an alarming message was received, stating that a Belgian organization which called itself humanist but was in fact Catholic, had 'jumped the queue' by also applying for representation at UNESCO, and allegedly had received a willing ear at that organization. The Executive Committee kept calm and continued its controlled approach.

For years the procedure dragged on. As an alternative, IHEU thought of seeking representation instead at ECOSOC, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, but this was considered less fitting in view of IHEU's aims. Then at last in November 1958 UNESCO decided to admit IHEU as an NGO (non-governmental organization), but regrettably with C (informative) status. Not only was this the lowest status, 'practically without any rights or privileges', but to make things worse, within weeks after IHEU had been admitted UNESCO decided to restrict its future conferences to organizations of A (associative) and B (consultative) status only. Jaap van Praag visited the 1960 NGO conference as an IHEU representative where, as the new rules regarding C status had not yet come into effect, he was allowed to make some interventions. He took the opportunity to correct the chairman of a proposed UNESCO working group on 'Humanists and scientists: the man of to-morrow', who had pictured humanism as the counterpart of science. Perhaps thanks to this appearance IHEU status was upgraded in 1961 to B status, which conferred the right to submit written information and to take part in the deliberations of the NGO conferences that UNESCO organized every two years in Paris. From 1962 to 1967 Theo Polet was the IHEU representative; he was succeeded by Ernst van Brakel (1967-1980). Now that IHEU was accepted by UNESCO, it was also allowed to appoint a representative at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Mrs. May Weis, who was an observer at the United Nations for the Women's Conference of the AEU, took this task upon herself (1959-1975).

There is a marked difference between the annual reports sent by Polet and Mrs. Weis. Polet was quite skeptical of UNESCO procedures. Starting with his first report (1962) he criticized the amount of talking. 'After someone had read [aloud] a report, which everyone had lying in front of him, he was thanked by the chairman in a long speech.' In addition he complained that he 'had heard a great deal about the way in which NGOs wished to use UNESCO money for their *own* [italics Polet] activities but that little had become apparent of interest in each other'.

After Polet had voiced his discomfort at one of the meetings, 'quite a number of people informed [him] during the interval for lunch [...] that they fully agreed with the remarks made. The general discussions became a little more matter-of-fact, at any rate on that day'. Polet concluded that the main use of the meetings lay in the opportunity for informal personal contacts.

The annual reports by Mrs. Weis are quite different from Polet's: they sound enthusiastic and convey the impression that she was confronted with an embarrassment of riches. Unlike the biennial UNESCO conferences, the UN meetings in New York were a continuous happening. Every month she had to pick those activities that looked the most useful or interesting. It was not uncommon for her to report that she visited only selected parts of a conference since it coincided

with another UN activity that she found of interest too. Mrs. Weis also organized activities herself, such as parties at her New York apartment for UN dignitaries or various humanists. For example in 1962, when Harold Blackham visited New York, she arranged for a lunch with him at the United Nations, while in the evening she organized a meeting at her home for members of the two American IHEU member organizations, where Blackham delivered a speech on humanism.

### Dialogues

In the mid-sixties a series of ‘dialogues’ was started. The main dialogues were those with the Roman Catholics and Marxists, but many others were attempted—though only few attempts were successful. The dialogues were meant:

- 1 to clarify ideas and correct misunderstandings about the other party;
- 2 to bridge ideological gaps—not by minimizing differences but by establishing modes of communication;
- 3 to support humanist minorities within for example the Catholic Church. ‘By our communication we say: you are not alone’;
- 4 as ‘a critique of our own self-righteousness [...] We learn that humanism is not the sole possession of an “elect”; that our “wisdom” is only wise in confrontation and [...] before the continuing question’.

The importance that IHEU attached to these dialogues is apparent from the fact that in general heavy delegations were sent to the meetings, consisting of prominent Board members and often including Chairman Van Praag himself.

It was the Vatican that in the wake of the Second Vatican Council took the first step in this series of dialogues. At the invitation of the Vatican Secretariat for Non Believers (founded 1965) explorative discussions were held in 1966 at Amersfoort, The Netherlands, which showed that traditional differences between Catholics and humanists ‘were losing their relevance’. After several national dialogues between humanists and Catholics in Britain, the Netherlands, the United States and Canada, a further IHEU-Vatican dialogue took place at Brussels in October 1970. This dialogue was slightly hampered by a public statement of pope Paul VI in his 1969 Christmas Message that ‘without Christ there is no true humanism’ (which none of the Roman Catholic participants in the Brussels dialogue was inclined to defend) and by his opinion on population policy and his categorical condemnation of contraceptives in the encyclical *Humanae vitae* (1968). The Board, by a resolution earlier in 1970, had made clear that it thought differently of contraceptives.

Some thirty people took part in the three-day dialogue. The dialogue was in general appreciated by the participants, though it was realized that only left-wing Catholics were present, and that to reach a common view on lofty abstract ideas did not guarantee that an agreement could also be reached on things practical. However, the spirit at the dialogue was sincere and cooperative, as is exemplified by an episode described by Howard Radest. With regard to the aforementioned statement of the Pope that ‘a true humanism without Christ is impossible’, the conference agreed that a message should be sent to the Pope to refute this attack:

‘While those of us from IHEU were prepared to submit a rather diplomatic statement, it was the unanimous opinion of the Catholics present that IHEU Chairman van Praag’s very strong attack on the Pope’s sectarianism should be sent to the Vatican from the Dialogue. When some of us asked if, perhaps, the Catholic participants would want to discuss this matter privately, it was Father Gómez Caffarena (Spain) who said, “There is nothing I would want to discuss with my Catholic brothers that I cannot discuss as freely with all of you”.’

A second dialogue was held at the American Ethical Union in 1972, bringing together many famous American humanists, such as B.F. Skinner, Corliss Lamont, Sidney Hook, Ernest Nagel, Paul Kurtz, Howard Radest, and atheist Madalyn Murray O’Hair. Many well-known Catholic dissidents were present.

A third and last dialogue was held in Amsterdam, 1988. Among the Catholic participants were two Cardinals, Paul Poupard of France and Godfried Daneels of Belgium. Half of the IHEU representatives were women, a fact that, as Kurtz remembers, ‘seemed to annoy the Vatican delegation!’ By then the mood of the Vatican had turned very conservative, and, as a consequence, no further humanist-Catholic dialogues have been held.

**The value of dialogues**

Some humanists have expressed doubts regarding the usefulness of the dialogues. Paul Kurtz, however, who has been present at nearly all the dialogues with Marxists and Catholics, is convinced that they were constructive and they had a significant influence. The dialogues with Marxists, he says, have ‘in a modest way helped to convince intellectuals about the importance of humanism. [...] In retrospect, Stojanović and other philosophers believe that Marxist Humanism had an important role in moving communist countries away from Stalinism and towards democracy.’

The dialogues with the Catholics inspired many liberal Catholic thinkers, by ‘our defense of the right of privacy, self-determination, freedom of conscience, women’s rights, gay rights, our defense of euthanasia, abortion, contraception, etc. Today, many of the critics of the Roman Catholic Church do so from a humanist perspective, at least in part. Thus the dialogues were important and are of historic significance, and at least have been read by liberal theologians (such as Hans Küng and others).’

The key point, Kurtz says, is that IHEU and humanists defended the open society, human rights, and civil liberties.

Dialogues with Protestant Christians have never been very successful. Since 1967 IHEU approached the World Council of Churches (wcc) to discuss the possibilities of constructive co-operation, and in 1968 the IHEU Chairman and Secretary personally visited Geneva for talks with the wcc. To no avail, the Council turned out to be not interested.

On the other hand, an IHEU dialogue with the Marxists seemed more promising. In the late 1960s, several Eastern European countries tried to carve out a more open and progressive political course that was less dependent on the Soviet Union than before. In particular Dubček’s Czechoslovakia (until 1968), Tito’s Yugoslavia and Ceaușescu’s Romania showed various forms of ‘communism with a

human face'. This seemed to make a dialogue with them interesting. After several prominent Marxists had been approached in 1967 and 1968, three dialogues took place: Vienna 1968, Herceg-Novci 1969, and Boston 1970. Subjects discussed were alienation, bureaucracy, tolerance, freedom, human nature, social structure, revolution, and social change. The Marxists professed being 'humanists with a Marxist flavour' rather than 'Marxists with a humanist flavour', yet there were profound differences:

'The Marxist humanists were inclined to condone less humane means for the achievement of high purposes and ideals, the non-Marxists from principle did not want to resort to inhumane means, at the risk of not realizing their ideals.'

The hoped-for establishment of a separate section for humanism and ethics by the national philosophical societies succeeded only in Yugoslavia. This Humanist and Ethical Section of the Yugoslav Association of Philosophy (HESYAP) became an associate member of IHEU in 1970 and was promoted to consultative status one year later, apparently as a token of support.

In 1970 the dialogue with the Marxist humanists could be continued in Boston, though on a small scale, as only a few Eastern Europeans were able to participate. After that, the dialogues were hampered by increasingly uncooperative Eastern European authorities, and planned dialogues in 1972-1974 were cancelled. Not until 1979 would there be another meeting. However, IHEU found other ways to support the Marxist humanists in their struggle for human rights. When in the early 1970s the HESYAP group was put under increasing pressure by the Yugoslav authorities, IHEU intensified its support, both by issuing public declarations, and by choosing HESYAP figurehead professor Mihailo Marković as an IHEU co-chairman.

From the late 1960s IHEU started to conduct so many dialogues that it sometimes looks as if they called any meeting a 'dialogue'. Among others there were dialogues with South African Apartheid defenders, the Club of Rome, Buddhists and Hindus, homosexuals and freethinkers. The dialogue with the freethinkers was hindered at first by the fact that it proved difficult to find out whether the WUFT still existed. However, another international freethinker organization was traced, the International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom (IARF). In 1974 IHEU and IARF co-operated in organizing a seminar in Dortmund, Germany.

### **The end of the Van Praag era**

In the late 1960s there are signs of doubt whether IHEU was going in the right direction. At the 1968 Board meeting, Van Praag even posed the question whether there should continue to be an IHEU. Possibly these were rhetorical questions, only meant to act as a shock therapy—the next item on the agenda would be a revision of the contribution system. The other Board members hastened to declare that they thought IHEU and its aims were indeed very important, and that surely it should be continued. Two years later, as a consequence of the stagna-

tion in membership, the Board expressed its worries about the way IHEU was perceived by outsiders, and doubted whether IHEU was on the right course. A Committee was instituted to investigate this issue, but the problem kept cropping up. In 1973 Van Praag once more asked whether continuation of IHEU was useful.

Van Praag himself clearly had strong doubts by then. A few months after his resignation as Chairman in 1975 he suggested in an interview—published only in 1997—that he did not consider IHEU all that important. ‘Altogether, it didn’t amount to very much. To be honest, it still doesn’t.’

How should the significance of Van Praag for IHEU be rated? The original building of the organization was largely his personal merit. Van Praag could apply the vision and experience he had acquired in building the Dutch *Humanistisch Verbond*. As he was a president of both IHEU and Dutch HV, IHEU could heavily depend on Dutch resources. Van Praag, who was a meetings addict who had ‘twenty solutions ready even before a problem arises’, had the capacities to guide IHEU into the directions he saw most fit. However, this entailed the risk of dominating the Board meetings that he presided and ‘crushing’ his partners. Maybe his resignation freed the way for his successors to follow their imagination and this might explain the abundance of novel ideas in the late 1970s that we will encounter in the next chapter.

1975-1989:

## From imaginative consolidation to bright vistas

In 1975 Jaap van Praag resigned as Chairman. The three-headed chair that succeeded him, the so-called Troika, led an IHEU that was at first rather on the defensive. By 1980 IHEU definitely discerned a growing anti-humanist trend in society, an upsurge of authoritarianism, fundamentalism, and orthodoxy. It was the world of Ronald Reagan (1980-1988), Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990), and Leonid Brezhnev (†1982). The Board regularly expressed its opinion that humanism was threatened in the world at large, and even chose this to be the main theme of the 1982 World Congress: 'Anti-humanist trends: challenge and response'. This was not the right period for bold initiatives.

Instead, IHEU concentrated on creative consolidation. In the late 1970s a whole range of imaginative measures was introduced to strengthen IHEU, and particularly its financial position. These measures paid off remarkably well. By 1979 the financial situation had improved markedly: before that year deficits were the



Fragell, Tielman and Kurtz at the 1988 Buffalo congress

rule, thereafter they became the exception. In addition, from 1981 the number of member organizations began to rise sharply.

In the late 1980s the atmosphere became much more optimistic. The congress themes that IHEU chose, express self-confidence and a pro-active stance rather than the defensive 1982 theme. In 1986 the theme was 'Humanists say yes to life', two years later it was 'Building a world community: Humanism in the twenty-first century'. The 1988 congress attracted an unprecedentedly large number of participants. One year later, in 1989, the collapse of Communism opened up decidedly promising vistas for world humanism. The future looked bright again.

### Troika

In 1975, after holding the Chair for 23 years, Jaap van Praag retired. By experiment, it was decided to replace him for a two year period by a so-called Troika of three Co-Chairmen: Piet Thoenes (Dutch HV), Howard Radest (AEU) and Mihailo Marković (HECYAP)—in the end, the Troika system was maintained for 21 years, until 1996. By 'spreading' the chair, the international look of IHEU was emphasized and the Dutch 'domination' of IHEU, complaints about which had occasionally been voiced in the Board, was reduced. One of the chairmen was still chosen from the Netherlands, lest the efficiency be endangered of the organizational work that was performed by the bureau in the Netherlands. At the same time the influence of other IHEU member organizations increased—especially members with another 'flavor' of humanism, such as the ethical humanism of the AEU or the secular humanism that became increasingly popular in America in the 1970s (Paul Kurtz, whose *Humanist Manifesto II* in 1973 had still admitted religious humanism, issued *A secular humanist declaration* in 1980).

#### The first Troika: Radest, Thoenes, Marković

American philosopher Howard B. Radest (b. 1928), a former Executive Director of the AEU, was elected Secretary General of IHEU in 1970 and served as one of IHEU's Co-Chairmen from 1975 until 1985. He was Director of the Ethical Culture Fieldston School in New York, and is the Dean Emeritus of the Humanist Institute in New York. Among his specialisms is medical ethics.

Dutchman Piet Thoenes (1921-1995) was a sociologist with a special interest in the welfare state and the caring society, and their future development. He was actively involved with several scientific organizations within the Dutch humanist movement. He was an IHEU Co-Chairman from 1975 until 1978.

Mihailo Marković (b. 1923), as Director of the Institute of Philosophy at Belgrade University, was one of 'the six of Belgrade', who in the late 1960's were fired by the Communist regime. The journal he had founded, *Praxis*, was banned. Marković participated in the IHEU Board since 1971, and was elected Co-Chairman in 1975. In Marković's view Marxism was a kind of Humanism. When in the early 1990s he became an active member of the Yugoslavian Socialist Party and co-operated with Slobodan Milošević, the Board froze its relations with him.

By choosing the Yugoslav Marković as a Co-Chairman, IHEU wanted to give a signal that it looked positively towards the non-aligned countries that in the Cold War tried to find a third way between the capitalist and the Communist bloc. This signal was the more remarkable as Marković was a dissident: IHEU openly declared its willingness to support the Yugoslav humanists, who were at the time harassed by the Tito government. Since the autumn of 1972 half a dozen humanist professors at the university of Belgrade—Marković among them—had been fired and their passports confiscated, thereby incidentally hampering the Humanist-Marxist dialogue; their periodicals such as *Praxis* had been suppressed, and trials had been started against them. In 1973 and 1974 IHEU repeatedly filed protests against this repression of academic freedom. ‘Ideas should be defeated by better ideas—not by force’, Van Praag said. When in 1985 Marković stepped down as Co-Chairman, IHEU appointed another member of the group of dissenting Yugoslav philosophers, Svetozar Stojanović, to succeed him.

### Thoenes’s long-term view of IHEU

At the 1977 Board meeting, Co-Chairman Piet Thoenes presented a personal view of what IHEU should have achieved by the year 2002. His memorandum was intended as the starting point for the development of a long-term view, ‘so that the members of IHEU would have some idea of where we are going’.

Thoenes’s starting point was that the world was in an economic crisis. The key problems, he said, lay in distribution—distribution of wealth, and of control over labour. In his analysis, the problem was that labourers hardly shared in the control of work. Thoenes put well-being above material comfort, and then proceeded to mention a dozen characteristics that he considered essential for a ‘humanistic society in 2002’, which would give the individual more opportunities for self-realization. Thoenes’s wide range of wishes included an end to all discrimination, more attention to artistic education, mutual respect in the army, and working in decentralized units. Thoenes also sketched how his ideals might be realized: people should engage in discussions and become a member of IHEU, and IHEU should become ‘a clearing-house for information’ regarding criticism of present-day society, visions of the future and strategies to realize them.

In retrospect Thoenes’s proposals appear somewhat disappointing—honest and well-meant but naïve and impractical. With his utopian wishes he seems to look back to the sixties rather than forward to the year 2002. Thoenes’s proposals had little direct follow-up. The discussion in the Board was summary only, and ensuing proposals to start working parties on ‘Humanism and science’ (to study humanist schools of thought) and ‘Multinationals’, did not come off. However, raising the question which future IHEU really wanted—irrespective of practical obstacles—may have inspired a bolder approach by the younger guard in IHEU.

**Paul Kurtz**

Paul Kurtz (b. 1925) was professor of Philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo from 1965 until 1991. As a protagonist of secular humanism, skepticism, rationalism and atheism, Kurtz is respected and feared by many in the United States as 'the pope of unbelievers'. He has founded several important humanist institutions, among which are Prometheus Books (the world's largest humanist publishing company), the Council for Secular Humanism, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, and the magazines *Free Inquiry* and *Skeptical Inquirer*.

From 1969 Kurtz has been a member of the IHEU Board, at first representing the American Humanist Association, and later Prometheus Books and the Council for Secular Humanism. From 1986 until 1994 he was IHEU Co-President. Being of the opinion that IHEU had an important role to play in spreading humanism worldwide, and convinced that a potential for such growth existed, he exhorted international humanism to overcome lethargy and inaction.

Kurtz is the author and editor of 35 books. In 1999 he wrote *Humanist Manifesto 2000*, which has as its main theme 'A call for a new planetary humanism'. One of its suggestions is to transform the United Nations organization into a world parliament with elected representatives. At the IHEU World Congress in Mumbai, 1999, Kurtz was presented with the International Humanist Award, for his long-standing contribution to the international humanist movement.

**Rob Tielman**

Sociologist Rob Tielman (b. 1946) in the 1970s played a prominent and pioneer role in the Dutch gay movement and in gay studies. From 1977 to 1987 he was president of the Dutch HV. He is a proponent of the Dutch model of humanism as a modern social movement that pays much attention to the translation of humanist principles into education and counseling, and the implementation of these principles into legislation. His involvement with IHEU began in 1972, when he joined the Organizing Committee of volunteers, with special responsibility for dialogues. Three years later he became a Board member. From 1986 to 1996 he was Co-Chairman, from 1996 to 1998 President of IHEU.

Being a phenomenal 'networker', Tielman has contributed considerably to establishing the European Humanist Professionals and the European Humanist Federation, and in setting up the *Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands* in the early 1990s. He was involved in a wide variety of IHEU activities. To cite Nettie Klein: 'As everyone who has met him knows, "active" is very much the operative word with Rob'. For many years he was the face of IHEU and of international humanism.



Rob Tielman, c. 1980

**To boldly go ...**

At the 1978 Board meeting, as a sequel to Thoenes's paper, the Board again discussed the future of IHEU in connection with the tight financial constraints. A contrast may be noted between the old guard with an Executive Committee background (Van Praag, Radest), who tended to pragmatically 'mind the shop' and avoid risks, and junior Board members like the newcomers and future Chairmen Paul Kurtz and Rob Tielman, who were ready to try less conventional paths.

Radest and Van Praag conceded that 'there has never been a dearth of ideas, of projects that would be important, worth doing and exciting', but they stressed the indispensability and exacting character of existing routine and long-term work: 'these two things must be supported. When these two matters are dealt with, very little energy is left for other matters.'

Kurtz, however, was one of those who asked for 'the establishment of programs of a daring kind'. Tielman pleaded that 'as an experiment we should try and raise funds for new projects and concentrate less on [routine and long-term work]'. Consensus in the Board turned out to be remarkable, including even veterans like Blackham and V.M. Tarkunde, so in the ensuing discussions it was indeed decided to give priority to two projects that had a good chance to secure additional independent funding: the humanist ombudsman and a summer school. The Chairmen made it clear that the Board would be responsible for the outcome of this decision. Radest said that, if other work at the office would have to wait, there could be no blame for things not done. Thoenes stated that—if volunteers could not be found in sufficient number—extra work, arising from new choices, would have to be carried out by the members of the Board.

In 1986 the flourishing of optimism, activism and new ideas within the IHEU Board was reflected in a new Troika, when Rob Tielman and Paul Kurtz were elected Co-Chairmen. Tielman was the young president of the Dutch HV, Kurtz, who represented the AHA on the Board, was a prolific author and staunch defender of secular humanism, an increasingly vociferous and influential movement in the United States in the 1980s. A year later Stojanović was succeeded by

**Members of the Troika, 1975-1996**

1975	Piet Thoenes (HV)	Howard B. Radest (AEU)	Mihailo Marković (HESYAP)
1979	Bert Schwarz (HV)		Svetozar Stojanović (HESYAP)
1985			
1986	Rob Tielman (HV)	Paul Kurtz (Council for Secular Humanism, Prometheus Books)	Levi Fragell (HEFiN)
1987			Kari Vigeland (HEFiN)
1990			Jane Wynne Willson (BHA)
1993			
1995-1996			Vern Bullough (Prometheus Books)

the Norwegian Levi Fragell, who had played a major role in the unprecedented growth of the Norwegian humanist movement. Tielman, Kurtz and Fragell may be seen as the exponents of a new 'generation' of humanists to come to the fore in IHEU.

### Solving IHEU's financial problems

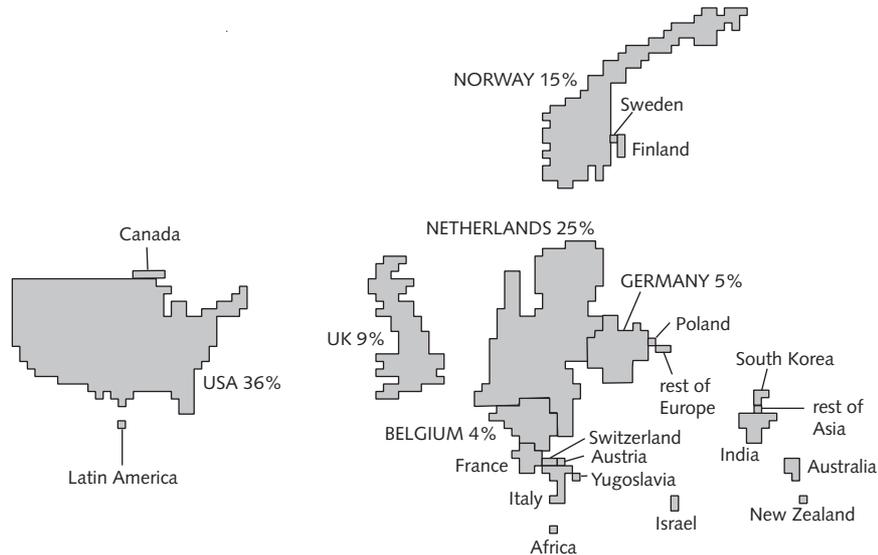
In the late 1970s the post-Van Praag Board devised various means to improve IHEU's financial situation, which was so desperate that at one time the Board was warned that 'IHEU could not afford to continue in the present way beyond six months'. These new means worked very well: a long series of budgetary deficits ended at last in 1979, and the 1980s were a very successful period for IHEU indeed.

First, the Board cut in the paid staff of the central bureau in favor of cheaper part-time administrative personnel and volunteers. In 1977 the staff consisted of one full-time and one half-time employee, by the end of 1981 there was only Executive Director Ernst van Brakel, who by then worked half-time. To get all the work done in spite of the severe reduction in experienced and professional staff, IHEU tried to recruit volunteers. These, however, were not easy to find, especially since IHEU at this moment not only needed general administrative support such as typists, but also looked for 'enthusiastic specialists' for its so-called 'task forces', to be described later.

Second, the Board chose to embark on projects that would pay for themselves or had good prospects of being subsidized. In 1978 three such projects were proposed: a human rights ombudsman project, a humanist lobby with the European Community, and a summer school. We will return to the first two later—the summer school was not successful.

Third, publication of the loss-making quarterly *International Humanism* was suspended for two years (1979-1980). From the summer of 1979 IHEU published a *Newsletter* as a cheaper alternative to keep the members informed. The quarterly returned in 1981 under a new title, *International Humanist*, and from 1987 to 1992 was produced from Canada. Some other activities went into hibernation by default, such as the working parties and dialogues. Of the half-dozen WP's that had existed in the 1960s only two remained in the late 1970s, neither of which held formal meetings during the 1978 London Congress, because the two convenors were unable to attend. Dialogues were held only intermittently.

Fourth and finally, income from IHEU members rose. Norwegian HEFIN began its fast growth and it was very convenient that they proved to be impeccably prompt payers. IHEU also increased its income by raising membership dues, by incidental fund-raising campaigns and campaigns to encourage individual life membership, and by flexibly creating new categories of membership whenever there seemed to be a market. For example, when two prospective new members expressed their wish to become a co-operating group, such a category was created. A similar innovation was the introduction in 1980 of 'member-of-members', local branches of a national organization that itself already was a member of IHEU. This incurred some practical problems, such as the theoretical risk that



**World map of humanism (according to the IHEU treasurer)**  
Area indicates mean share in IHEU membership dues, 1952-2002

an organization by means of its own member-of-members might swamp votings in the Board, but these were easily solved. In 1981 another new class was created of 'extraordinary' members, to attract organizations that specialized in one particular activity, such as humanist education, social work or development aid. The 'new categories' strategy resulted in an unprecedented increase in the total number of member organizations—from 36 in 1980 to 61 in 1984, after which a slow further increase took place to 67 in 1989. It is notable that many of the new members were from the United States: while in the 1970s only three American

#### **Wim Koppenberg, Ernst van Brakel, Nettie Klein**

Wim C. Koppenberg (1904-1972), a chartered accountant, had been appreciated in the 1950s as Treasurer of the Dutch HV for his skilled handling of financial problems. In 1959 he became Organizing Secretary of IHEU, and from 1966 until his death in 1972 he was Deputy Treasurer. After his death, in recognition of his capable financial management the IHEU Endowment Fund was given his name.

Ernst van Brakel has been a staff worker of IHEU from 1965 until the mid-nineties. He also was IHEU's representative at the UNESCO from 1967 until 1980. In 1977 and 1992 he sketched the history of IHEU in anniversary issues of the IHEU periodicals. In the 1990s Van Brakel undertook writing a more comprehensive history, but this project has remained unfinished.

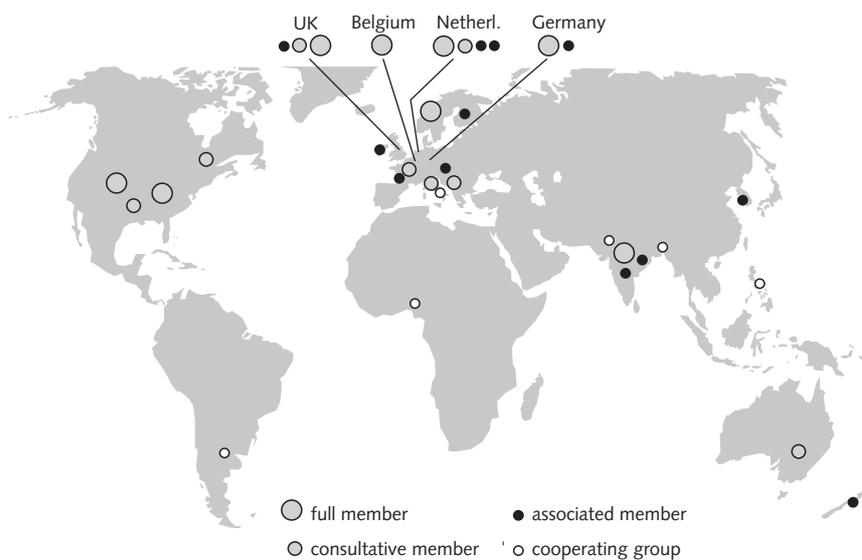
Nettie Klein (J.W.F. Klein-von Baumhauer, b. 1927) had her first contact with international humanism at the 1962 Oslo Congress. In 1966 she became Honorary (that is, volunteer) Organizing Secretary of IHEU, and from 1982 to 1996 she was General Secretary. In the 1990s she wrote 'Nettie's Column' in *International Humanist News*. In 1996, at the Mexico City Congress, Nettie Klein was presented with the International Humanist Award, for her long-standing merits for IHEU.

organizations had been an IHEU member (AEU, AHA and the Friends of Religious Humanism), this number increased to twelve in 1989 and twenty by 1995. This increase gave a welcome financial injection into IHEU, even though most newcomers applied for the low status of associate member.

### Task forces

Together with the reduction of its paid staff, IHEU in 1979 launched a 'new approach', which encompassed the introduction of specialized volunteer 'task forces'. Besides continuing its existing 'coordinating function for humanism worldwide', IHEU proposed to take up concrete projects that might contribute both to humanism in general and to the member organizations. So-called 'task forces' were to be set up, volunteer teams that met periodically. By performing all the work that was related to their specific task, including for example all correspondence, these teams would relieve the workload of the reduced Secretariat staff.

The first such task force was the Organizing Committee, an enlargement of the former (before 1975) Chairman's Committee, that assisted the Chairmen in preparing and implementing Board decisions. The Chairman's Committee had consisted of generalist 'consultants', but within a few years from 1978, each Committee member had its own specialty, for example Education, European contacts or Human rights. As specialties in turn got subdivided, the group doubled in size from less than ten members in the late 1970s to fifteen in 1989, including specialized 'visitors' who formally were not members but took part in all monthly meetings. In 1993 the Executive Committee, as it was called since 1983, was reformed and trimmed down.



IHEU member organizations, 1977

Another activity for which a task force was proposed, was the 'adoption' of member organizations. The idea was that each member of the Committee would keep in close contact with some member organizations, and support them with whatever help, advice, information, etc. it required. The Organizing Committee soon took up this task but, after an enthusiastic start, this adoption or 'twinning' scheme seems to have atrophied. From 1983 a Committee on Growth and Development, originally consisting of Fragell, Kurtz and Tielman, has in a more comprehensive and structural way discussed ideas to further humanism worldwide, and especially in the non-western world.

The idea of task forces was also used in two new IHEU projects: the Euro Committee, to be described later, and the international Human Rights Ombudsman project.

### The Human Rights Ombudsman project

At the 1978 Board meeting Co-Chairman Tielman proposed several projects that might be useful in three ways: furthering intrinsic humanist aims, being instrumental in procuring positive publicity, and presenting good perspectives for acquiring external funding. The most illustrious proposal was to create an international humanist ombudsman with whom complaints could be lodged in cases where human rights were violated, in particular human rights of non-religious people or cases which involved the separation of church and state. The ombudsman would then start an investigation and, if appropriate, would take further measures such as legal action to support the victim. The prospective ombudsman should be an eminent and widely respected international law expert. Ivo Samkalden, a former Dutch Minister of Justice and mayor of Amsterdam, was willing to take up the function, but was not immediately available. He was appointed in 1983, on which occasion his function was renamed Commissioner for Human Rights (CHR). In 1986 Samkalden was succeeded *ad interim* by former Dutch judge Pieter van Dijk, in 1988 Jan Glastra van Loon, a former Dutch Secretary of State for Justice became CHR.

The Commissioner led an 'Ombudsteam' that had already started work in 1979. It consisted of volunteer legal specialists, who could in turn draw on a network of other experts both in the Netherlands and abroad, for example to get precise information on countries where violations occurred. The team was secretarially supported by a conscientious objector, who fulfilled his military service in this alternative way. The Commissioner and his team closely cooperated with other human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, but tried to concentrate on issues that other organizations did not cover well. The first 'niche' were rights of humanists and other non-believers, or cases where the separation between church and state was at stake. For instance, the Commissioner supported a campaign to separate church and state in Ireland by offering legal advice regarding the lodging of complaints with the European Court at Strasbourg. Further, the Commissioner attended to 'sensitive' kinds of human rights violations that most international organizations shied away from. Examples are conscientious objection, homosexuality, or the right to abortion.

By the late 1980s it became clear that the project had achieved less than expected. It had no record of formidable successes, did not make money, was highly legalistic, had not been well integrated in IHEU's activities, and was not as broadly international as it had been intended to be—in fact, many cases simply regarded refugees who had come to the Netherlands. In the next chapter we will see how from 1988 the project was transformed to improve it.

**A spectacular and unexpected success**

On March 8, 1989 the UN Commission on Human Rights passed a resolution recognizing the right to have conscientious objections against military service. This was an important success for IHEU, because the resolution closely reflected an earlier IHEU statement that in turn was based on a paper on conscientious objection by Stephan Pas, a conscientious objector working at the IHEU Human Rights Project.

'Given the lack of time, it was almost a miracle that such success was achieved', concluded James Dilloway, IHEU representative at the United Nations at Geneva. 'Conscientious objection is now firmly established as a recommended policy'.

**Henry Morgentaler**

Henry Morgentaler was born in Poland in 1932. Being of Jewish descent, he ended up in the concentration camps of Auschwitz and Dachau, which he survived. After his medical studies in Brussels he emigrated to Canada, and settled as a general practitioner in Montreal. In 1968 he became the founding president of the Humanist Association of Canada, which immediately became a member of IHEU, with Morgentaler representing it on the IHEU Board.

Morgentaler has become well-known for his struggle for the legalization of abortion in Canada. He saw the right of women to abortion as a derivative of the right to moral self-determination and as part of the right to 'control their reproductivity'. He spent ten months in prison, and his letters from prison were published in the *Canadian Humanist*. IHEU supported him, among other things by sending letters of protest to the Canadian authorities. In 1976 the Quebec government decided to end all further prosecution of Morgentaler.

In 1988 he received the Humanist of the Year Award at the Buffalo IHEU Congress for upholding his humanist principles, at the cost of great personal sacrifice.

**Humanist-Marxist dialogues**

In August 1979 a three-day Humanist-Marxist dialogue was held at Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, in which two dozen people took part. It was the first of its kind since 1970. The general theme was 'Humanist prospects and scientific predictions'. Apparently the Yugoslav participants were quite optimistic on the possibilities of science to guide society in a more humanist direction, while Western participants stressed the need to give room to the *non*-predictable: creativity, imagination, poetry.

Jaap van Praag opposed the view that humanism could deliver a definite recipe for the future. He pointed out that 'not any [political] shaping of society will meet humanist demands', and he explicitly mentioned the risk that socialism would develop 'a sterile ideology of centralism and conformity that gave rise to a suffocating *bureaucracy* (italics Van Praag), based on coercion and oppression.' The Yugoslav participants, including at least four so-called dissidents, will have understood what he meant.

After the conference the Board concluded that 'these exchanges are important for both East and West and should be continued to continually define and develop humanist ideas'. Preparations to carry on with the dialogue were started immediately, but after the death of president Tito, repression of the dissidents started anew. By December 1980 Co-Chairman Radest felt compelled to once again send a letter of protest to the president of Yugoslavia.

It was ten years before the next conference was realized in Moscow, July 1989. The Communists were still in power, but, as Paul Kurtz noted, 'Gorbachev's new policies had relaxed the rigid guidelines defined by the Party, and a freer and more relaxed atmosphere prevailed'. In 1991, after the fall of Communism, a further dialogue was held in Prague. In 1997 a full-fledged international conference was organized in Moscow, which may be considered as the sequel to the series of Marxist-Humanist dialogues.

### Congresses

IHEU held its seventh, eighth and ninth World Congresses at London (1978), Hannover (1982) and Oslo (1986). The London Congress reflected the long-term and utopian approach that Thoenes had introduced in the Board, the Hannover congress concentrated on humanist answers to anti-humanist trends in society, and the Oslo congress had as its theme 'Humanists say yes to life'. Doubling the congress frequency, the tenth congress was held only two years after the ninth, in 1988 at Buffalo. Focussing on humanism in the century to come, this congress made an appeal for a 'New global ethics' and 'Planetary Humanism'. No regional congresses were held in these years, but instead IHEU began a series of thematic congresses: two on Moral education (Brussels 1980 and 1985) and a Peace Conference in Zutphen, 1983.



Tarkunde (at left) receiving the International Humanist Award, London, 1978

#### World Congress London, 1978

The seventh IHEU World Congress took place from July 31 until August 4, 1978 in London. It discussed 'Work for human needs in a just society'. In order to meet the real needs of man, several speakers advocated radical changes in private life and society, requiring full democratization of society, an ecological attitude towards nature, reduction of the scale of production, and the pushing back of too extreme divisions of labour.

British former UN officer James Dilloway discussed an alternative way to look at work. For most people work could be a means to self-respect, self-expression and community. Yet work often leads to anguish, which Dilloway linked to the force of pay as the criterion of excellence. By providing a near equal monetary reward and by making the reward and distinctions in other ways to stimulate choice, we could remove much anguish.

British educational psychologist James Hemming argued for the need of a revolutionary change of the secondary educational system, needed to get young people who are 'whole' and confident and contributive to the struggle of mankind. Two hundred years of mis-education had appealed only to the left hemisphere of the brains and had killed the natural curiosity of adolescents.

Dutch sociologist Piet Thoenes argued for 'a qualitatively better life with less', emphasizing a new respectful attitude towards nature, new manageable social units, and the adoption of a kind of civil and personal rights and liberties in connection with these and with the idea of a just society. On behalf of the IHEU Board Thoenes proposed to establish an Ombudsman for the Defence of Freedom of Conscience to call world attention to violations of human rights and to muster worldwide support for individuals who got in trouble because of their non-conformist beliefs.

**World Congress Hannover, 1982**

More than two hundred humanists from twenty countries assembled in Hannover, Germany, on August 1-5, 1982, to discuss and to formulate recommendations on 'Anti-humanist trends: challenge and response'. The purpose of this congress was to analyze negative currents and unfair attacks on humanism, and to discuss opportunities for humanists to change these developments into a more positive direction.

In his opening speech on 'Anti-humanist trends in the world today' Yugoslav philosopher Mihailo Marković drew attention to various threats to humanity resulting from the pursuit of power, such as bureaucratic obsession with political power, egoistic obsession with material desires, large scale institutionalized violence, the increasing commercialization of information and culture, ideology of any kind, and the rise of conservatism. In the struggle against anti-humanistic trends, 'humanization in social life can only be the work of enlightened human beings themselves, who join their forces in broad democratic pluralist movements'.

American ethical humanist Matthew Ies Spetter gave 'A Humanist's response to institutionalized violence' by pleading for a learning process how to humanize our lives: 'It is in the emotional bonds between people, in our ability for compassion in short, in our capacity for identification with one another that lies the promise of a saner and better human order'.

Paul Kurtz, American philosopher and Board member, described a recent proliferation of new cults of unreason in a discourse on 'Anti-reason'. After giving several examples of this backward trend, Kurtz stressed that we need to investigate the causes of this decline and the characteristics of human nature in order to know whether and how a secular humanist world is possible.

**World Congress Oslo, 1986**

IHEU held its ninth World Congress on August 2-7, 1986 at Oslo. More than 500 people from 25 countries took part. The assertive leading theme, 'Humanists say yes to life', was approached in quite different ways by the various speakers.

British astronomer Hermann Bondi argued that humanists' acceptance of life also implied accepting certain limitations of human existence and human knowledge. From this basic principle he attacked adherence to sacrosanct religious convictions.

American feminist author Marilyn French in an enthusiastically received speech criticized Aristotelian ideas regarding self-respect and freedom that, she said, have for a long time affected thinking in the Western world. Contrary to Aristotle for whom *power* was the key concept, French concluded that *freedom*, which she defined as a balance between commitment and satisfaction of one's needs, was essential for self-respect. The way to attain freedom, she said, was by discovering what gives us *pleasure*, a deep and real satisfaction in life. Norwegian sociologist and 'peace professor' Johan Galtung in his lecture on 'Solidarity: in a global perspective' discussed human solidarity, which he extended not only to the deprived in the world of his time, but also to future generations. The greatest danger, he said, is the idea of being the chosen people.

Religious fundamentalism in particular was attacked by American Old Testament specialist Gerald Larue, who pointed out that in the United States alone there were already forty million fundamentalist Christians, waiting for the end of the world and therefore indifferent to human life here and now.

Dutch-American psychologist Matthew Ies Spetter, however, was more optimistic: trust and utilize the inventiveness of man, and there is ground for hope, was his advice.



**Andrei Sakharov (left) receiving the International Humanist Award, 1988**  
At the time of the Buffalo congress Sakharov was not allowed to leave the Soviet Union.  
Kurtz presented him with the Award later that year

#### World Congress Buffalo, 1988

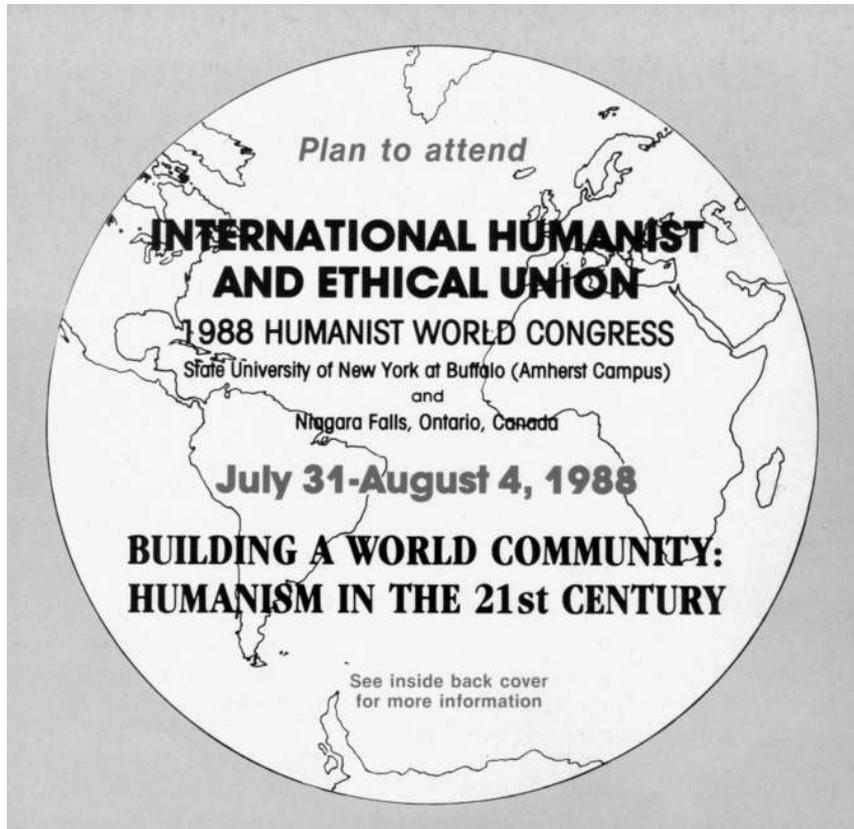
The tenth IHEU World Congress, held at Buffalo (New York) from July 31 until August 4, 1988, was attended by over 1300 persons from 30 countries. Titled 'Building a world community: Humanism in the twenty-first century', it was intended to stimulate discussions on the ethical issues facing humankind in the century to come. What can be the humanist role, how can humanists develop a 'new global ethics' that is truly planetary in focus?

Biophysicist and Nobel Laureate Herbert Hauptman gave a gloomy analysis of the critical issues facing mankind in the twenty-first century, such as the abuse of power by strong nation states, racism and religious bigotry, the arms race, inequities between the rich and poor, and the violation of human rights.

American William Jones noted the fact that virtually all participants to the congress were white, highly educated, and middle to upper class. He linked this to the difficulties IHEU met in expanding the humanist movement into the Third World.

German psychologist and Board member Renate Bauer promoted in her speech the 'Right to work' as one of the Human Rights.

American philosopher and Humanist Award winner Corliss Lamont expressed concern about the humanist movement's neglect of its struggle for reason and scientific method as a means to solve human problems, and against faith in divine guidance. He did not think it wise to revive the debate whether humanism is a philosophy or a religion, and thought that time and energy were better spent on other humanist issues and work. The Congress adopted *A declaration of interdependence: A new global ethics* by Paul Kurtz, to respond to the new challenges and revolutionary changes. The declaration pleads for cooperation and dialogue between world religions and world views on the basis of the development of a new 'Planetary Humanism'.



Announcement of 1988 Buffalo congress

#### Humanist Education Conferences, 1980 and 1985

The IHEU held two conferences on humanist education. The first took place on August 27-29, 1980, in Brussels. Its purpose was to exchange experiences and to reflect on methods and perspectives in the field. Chairman of the British Humanist Association J. Hemming explained the characteristics of the 'caring man' that had to be developed in order to build up a new world.

Belgian moral pedagogue J. Buelens sketched the outlines of 'The new education', characterized by respect for the pupil, egalitarianism, an active involvement of pupils in their acquisition of knowledge, open-mindedness on the part of the teacher, the use of dramatic arts, and the school as a workshop for a living democracy. It was concluded that future conferences on specific subjects should be stimulated.

The second conference was held on August 28-30, 1985, in Brussels as well. By that time, according to IHEU Co-Chairman Bert Schwarz, humanist education had become a priority within IHEU.

Belgian Claude Javeau argued in favor of an education which not only teaches fundamental values such as 'freedom', but also, in view of the dominant contemporary moral climate of cynicism and anomie, brings to consciousness the possibility at all of positive values.

Dutch sociologist and IHEU Co-Chairman Rob Tielman discussed 'The meaning of humanist values in our society'. He stated that a democratic pluralist view of education, implying basic values of autonomy, freedom and solidarity, best fitted the humanist outlook.

J. Schelle, director of the Max Planck Institute in Cologne, Germany, read a paper on 'Genetic engineering, or how to develop ethical norms with relation to the use of new knowledge'. He instigated a lively debate on the freedom of the scientist and on the place of ethical issues within his training.

#### **International Humanist Peace Conference, 1983**

On August 26-28, 1983, the Dutch and Belgian Humanist Leagues co-organized an IHEU conference in the Dutch town of Zutphen to discuss the issues of 'Humanist answers to the problem of (nuclear) armament' and 'Peace education in a humanist perspective'.

Belgian polemologist J. Niezing stated that many humanist organizations had not yet clearly spoken out on armament problems, as their precarious position made them hesitant to make statements on controversial political issues. Humanism however should address these problems as the modern arms race is utterly incompatible with all that humanism stands for. Joachim Kahl (Germany) stressed the political aspects of peace education and the importance of a strong joy of life, to transform the justified fear of war into a productive trust in the struggle for peace. A successful peace policy, he argued, is a necessary condition for peace. Belgian polemologist G. Geeraerts pointed out that 'Social defence without violence' is not without risk, but that the dangers of a nuclear war are much greater.

#### **International representation**

In the 1970s IHEU began to expand its network of international representatives, which up until then had been restricted to two posts (UNESCO at Paris, and United Nations at New York). In 1979 Bert Schwarz in the Board stressed the need for good contacts with the European Parliament. This might be useful to further humanist interests, by introducing a clearly humanist voice in its meetings, but the initiative was also prompted by the consideration that European lobbying might be 'income-conducive'. To stimulate networking, it was proposed that the IHEU member organizations from European Community countries form a European Committee for the Promotion of the Interests of Non-Denominational People, soon abridged to Non-Denominational European Coordination (NEC), Euro Committee, or 'Humanist lobby'.

Two years later the Board decided that it would be useful if IHEU were not only represented at the European Parliament, but also at the Council of Europe, where more European states are represented. In fact IHEU had asked for, and obtained, NGO status with the Council of Europe in 1973, but nothing much had happened thereafter. In 1980, however, Alexandre Marius Déés de Sterio, from Luxembourg, became IHEU representative at the Council of Europe at Strasbourg. In his first report Sterio was not much impressed by the discussions in the human rights section—'repetitive and generally of low standard'—but he stressed the importance for IHEU to become better known. De Sterio has fulfilled, and

## The voice of IHEU, 1975-1989

1975 Helsinki agreements	1978 (IHEU Congress), Conception outside the womb (IVF): 'We affirm the principle of freedom of choice and the right of individuals to determine responsibly matters concerning their private lives.'
1975-1976 Civil war in Lebanon	
1975-1979 Cambodia: Red Khmer terror	
1976 Eurocommunism in Italy and France	
1976 China: Tangshan earthquake kills 650,000; death of Mao Ze-dong	
1976-1980 USSR: Repression of dissidents	1982 (IHEU Congress), Lebanon: 'As humanists we disagree with the use of physical violence for the attainment of political goals by the belligerents.'
1976-1980 US: Carter presidency	
1977 USSR: New constitution adopted	
1977 Israeli-Egyptian rapprochement	
1979 SALT II treaty	
1979-1988 Soviets in Afghanistan	1982 (IHEU Congress), Homosexuality: 'Freedom to shape one's own existence, also with regard to sexuality, is one of the fundamental human rights [...].'
1979-1990 Great Britain: Thatcher Prime Minister	
1980 Yugoslavia: death of Tito	
1980 Zimbabwe independent	
1980-1981 Poland: Solidarność labour movement challenges Communist government	1986 (IHEU Congress), Nuclear weapons: 'We urge: 1) the immediate stopping of all nuclear arms testing; 2) the immediate starting of negotiations aiming at the reduction and eventual total nuclear disarmament, and at the prevention of future re-armament.'
1980-1981 US hostage crisis in Iran	
1980-1988 Iraq-Iran War	
1981 Egypt: Sadat assassinated	
1981 New disease: AIDS	
1981 Personal computer (DOS 1.0)	
1981-1983 Massive pro-peace demonstrations throughout the world	1987 (Board of Directors), Islamic fundamentalism: 'IHEU requests the governments of the Islamic world to tackle the danger of intolerance toward other beliefs and life stances, and to stop violations of human rights.'
1981-1989 US: Reagan presidency	
1982 Israel invades Lebanon	
1982 USSR: Death of Brezhnev	
1982 Falklands War	
1982-1998 Germany: Kohl chancellor	
1984 Indira Gandhi assassinated	
1985-1991 USSR: Gorbachev reforms	
1986 Chernobyl nuclear reactor disaster	
1986 European Community 12 members	
1987- Palestinian Intifada	
1987-1988 Reagan-Gorbachev arms agreement; ending of Cold War	

still fulfils, his post very well. In 2000 he was given a rare *pro-merito* distinction of the Council of Europe.

The second new IHEU post was at the United Nations in Geneva, where A. James Dilloway has been the IHEU representative from 1976 to 1997. Being a former United Nations officer, Dilloway knew the voluminous organization from within. His annual reports show that this definitely was an advantage: each year Dilloway presented an instructive account of the major developments the United Nations were involved in, and he then concentrated on those areas of activity that mattered most to IHEU, especially human rights, describing what was im-

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portant for IHEU to know, and where IHEU might contribute to the United Nations. Dilloway was presented with a Distinguished Humanist Service Award at the 1996 Mexico congress.

Since 1981 the IHEU has also been represented at the United Nations in Vienna, but until now it has proven difficult to find candidates who can spend enough time on this function for a longer period.

## 1989-2002: Clashes and resurrection

In 1989 Soviet Communism crumbled. In June the Chinese leaders had still maintained their position by brutally suppressing a students' revolution at Beijing, but later that year unheard-of consequences of Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* occurred. First in Poland, then in Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, and most other Soviet satellite states the ruling Communist regimes discovered that their being 'peoples' republics' took on a new meaning: a peoples' revolt broke out that they were not capable of putting down. The Iron Curtain was opened between Hungary and Austria and then, in November, the emblematic Berlin Wall was torn down. In the following years, as the Communist regimes crumbled, long-suppressed tensions became fatal to several countries, and the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia disintegrated into separate autonomous republics.

At the time this break-up of Communism seemed a good opportunity for democracy and humanism in Eastern Europe. In the end it was capitalism rather than democracy that profited, and many of the new states turned out to be nationalist and authoritarian. Neither was it realized that humanism and Marxism historically stem from a common root, which means that some weak spots of Marxism might be relevant to humanism as well, as postmodernism would show. But at the time prospects seemed better. In 1989 a humanist-Marxist dialogue was held in Moscow, and in 1991 another was held in Prague. Immediately after the latter conference the annual Board meeting was held. Paul Kurtz opened it by saying:

'This is a great opening and a great opportunity for humanism. There are dramatic changes throughout the world. The challenge from the ancient religious establishment provides humanism with a real and genuine alternative. [In the dialogue] it was stated clearly that in the Czech situation there is a kind of vacuum of values. There is a great criticism about everything and a widespread belief that unless you are religious you cannot be moral. We made the point that humanism is an authentic ethical alternative.'

### Broadening of membership

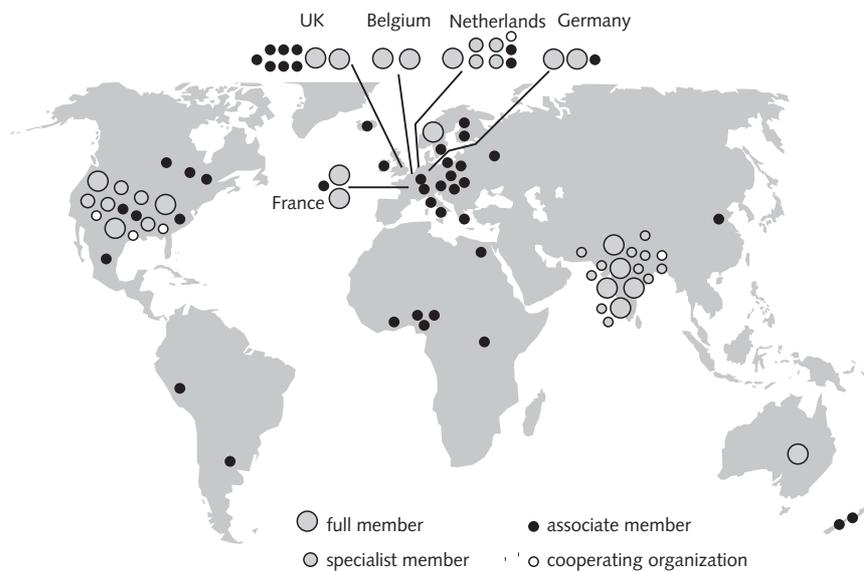
In many Eastern European countries humanist and freethinker groups cropped up. Especially in 1991 and 1992 there was an unequalled flood of applications for membership: more than a dozen in each of those years, a large proportion of which came from Eastern Europe. In 1992 no less than three Polish groups applied for affiliation; all were accepted. However, though many Eastern European organizations applied for membership, by 2002 only six were still a member: three from Poland and one each from Hungary, Russia and Slovakia.

After 1992 the flood of new members reduced to a trickle and the total number of member organizations stabilized at around ninety. There was indeed growth, but this was partly offset by a declining number of 'member-of-member' associated groups. Qualitatively IHEU became stronger. The number of full members nearly doubled from eleven in 1989 to nineteen in early 2002, a quarter of them from India. This illustrates a significant diversification of membership, resulting from an influx of Third World countries and freethinker organizations.

Of the net increase between 1989 and 2002, half were Asian organizations, most of them from India; a quarter was African, among which were three Nigerian organizations; three were Latin American and another three Eastern European. This influx was partly due to a development and networking project that grew out of the IHEU human rights project.

### From human rights to development and networking

The Commissioner for Human Rights project in the 1980s had not lived up to its expectations. This led to plans to transform the project and increase its potential



IHEU member organizations, 2002 (world map)



IHEU counselors, Atheist Centre, India, 1992-1993

for the development of new humanist organizations in developing countries. The idea was to broaden the Human Rights project with a Development project. Through humanist contacts suitable social movements in the Third World were to be approached, such as the women's, peace, gay and AIDS movements. Those social movements should then be strengthened in their strategies towards self-determination and towards educating their members in the philosophy of 'informed consent', for example by means of health care or education projects. At the same time within IHEU itself a stronger awareness of development cooperation would be stimulated.

This expansion of the project paved the way for funding by the Dutch organization HIVOS (Humanist Institution for Development Cooperation), itself an IHEU member and since 1978 one of four organizations through which the Dutch government channels part of its development aid. HIVOS was prepared to co-finance the Human Rights project by making available NLG 50,000 a year for salary and other bureau costs for a three-year period starting 1988, on two conditions.

- 1 IHEU had to spend the money exclusively on Third World human rights projects. Up until then, most human rights projects had dealt with European cases. The new projects were to aim at self-reliance of the poor and at structural social change, and should provide a coherent development program. Therefore, IHEU split its Human Rights project in two: a First and Second World project, which was discontinued in 1991, and a Third World project.
- 2 IHEU had to find matching funds of NLG 50,000 a year 'outside of the Netherlands'. In fact, fund-raising abroad proved to be very laborious and never attracted enough money. HIVOS suggested that it would suffice if IHEU allocated a percentage of its foreign membership dues to the project.

By separate contract it was agreed that IHEU would administer HIVOS-paid development projects in the Third World to a total amount of NLG 100,000 a year during a three-year period. In 1991 both projects were merged into a single Human Rights and Development Program (HRDP).

In March 1989 it became possible to hire paid staff. Czechoslovakian jurist Oldrich Andrysek became the first full-time co-ordinator of the HRDP. He devised a project to stimulate western style humanist organization-building around intellectual nuclei in the Third World. His plan was legalistic and Eurocentric, reflecting the views of the IHEU Board, which has been described as 'operating as an island', and for whom development was only an 'abstract concept'. At least, Andrysek's idea of educating Third World humanists in the West resulted in a successful Study Visit by seven visitors from Bangladesh, Mexico, Ghana, Egypt and India to the 1990 Brussels Congress.

A change in course of the project occurred in March 1990, when Andrysek was succeeded by an American, Mrs. Nathalie Zimmerman. She discontinued the academic approach and insisted on a 'hands-on' and 'grass-roots' approach. In July 1991 the IHEU Board professed its firm commitment to the new style HRDP, and its members promised to stimulate personally both fund-raising and adoption ('twinning') of Third World groups by Western organizations. However, the same Board rejected two resolutions on Third World human rights subjects proposed by Mrs. Zimmerman, one denouncing genital mutilation of women and children, the other calling for active support for HRD programs. This threw doubts on the practical value of the Board's commitment, doubts that increased when Board members proved hesitant to implement their promise. Mrs. Zimmerman suffered other, financial, disappointments. She was not allowed to decide on how to spend her budget. Financially she remained dependent on the IHEU administration—there was not even a separate bank account for the HRDP. She had no travel budget to cultivate essential personal contacts in the Third World. Neither was there money for an office assistant. In 1992 an external evaluation report commissioned by HIVOS criticized the way IHEU treated the HRDP, especially the 'obscurity in financial affairs as handled by the secretariat'. But because the Third World projects proved very successful and IHEU had started to repair several shortcomings, the report advised HIVOS to continue and even expand the project for another three years.

In 1994 HIVOS signed a new two year contract. Matt Cherry, a young PR officer from England, became IHEU's Secretary for Development and Public Relations and came to lead the HRDP, now restyled into IHEU-HIVOS Humanist Networking Program. Besides local projects, this program once again concentrated on humanist organization building, by supplying resources and promoting regional and North-South networks. A South Asian and a Latin American humanist network were developed,



Education of birth attendants, Ghana, c. 1992

and in Egypt an Arab humanist conference was co-organized, with the aim to form an Arab network. When in 1995 Cherry moved to Buffalo to become Executive Director of the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (CODESH), part of his international work moved with him to the newly instituted IHEU Secretariat for International Growth and Development at CODESH. This institution temporarily financed the work when HIVOS stopped its funding because of 'under-achievement' of the project.

However, in late 1998, after IHEU's move to London, confidence was recovered, and the IHEU-HIVOS Humanist network and development program was re-started, aiming at projects which closely reflect the original HRDP spirit: projects regarding separation of religion and state, 'inculcation of scientific temper', discrimination connected with life stance, self-determination, and other human rights.

**A sample of characteristic HRDP projects (1992)**

*India, The Atheist Centre:* the HRDP sponsored a mobile exposition on 'Popularizing the scientific outlook', to assist in the struggle against superstition.

*India, Mahila Abdhayadaya Samsha (Institute for the Advancement of Women):* Sponsoring of 'legal literacy' training camps for women, that help them become aware of their human rights and provide them with information on laws that affect their lives. As the partaking women are female village leaders, via 'training of trainers' a multiplication effect is reached.

*India, Samskar (Society for the Rehabilitation of the Socially Abandoned):* Aid to victims of the 'Jogini' system. Under this system poor casteless girls are dedicated to a local goddess, which effectively drives them into prostitution. The Samskar project offers counseling, education, medical facilities and agricultural assistance to promote awareness and self-respect and to stimulate women to become financially more independent.

*Ghana, Ghanaian Association of Women's Welfare:* Training of traditional birth attendants. Traditional practices are exchanged for science-based health education, while at the same time the creation of a women's and health network on a humanist basis is fostered.

### Growing tensions

In the preceding section we cited some critical remarks about the IHEU secretariat at Utrecht. These were no exceptions, but signs of a growing criticism of its administrative functioning, which in turn was partly responsible for strained relations between the Dutch organizations and most other IHEU members. From around 1990 old misgivings about a historically grown Dutch 'monopoly' were reinforced by increasingly frequent complaints of less than adequate administrative handling and opaque financial management.

Additional debates arose, where the Dutch stood opposite the IHEU majority. Dutch views on humanism came to differ from those of the majority of IHEU, and Dutch dedication was questioned. There were discussions about centralizing or decentralizing IHEU by means of Secretariats, and about the relation between Board and Executive Committee. Another discussion centered on the location of

the IHEU headquarters, which, as we shall see, was transferred from Utrecht to London in 1997.

### **The struggle for headquarters location**

In the early 1990s the discussion flared up as to where the seat of the IHEU headquarters should be. From the beginning, in 1952, the IHEU Secretariat had been domiciled in the premises of the Dutch HV. Already in the 1970s there had been complaints of the Dutch 'monopoly' in IHEU; precisely this had been the reason to choose an international Troika instead of a single Chairman who for practical reasons—the location of the offices—had to be Dutch. From that time such complaints kept being voiced from time to time in the Board.

In 1992 the Dutch HV, the landlord of the IHEU Secretariat, had to move, so the question arose whether the IHEU office should also move. A letter was sent to the full members, asking them whether they were prepared to house IHEU. No answers were received before the set deadline, and because time pressed, the Secretariat decided to cut the knot and sign a new contract with Dutch HV. At the Board meeting in 1993 this led to a fierce discussion, since the members felt they were presented with a *fait accompli*. The Norwegians in particular, the number one IHEU sponsor, were not amused. Norwegian HEF had moved into a new Oslo office that same year and had been prepared to lodge the IHEU Secretariat, but they conceded that they had not been responding in time, as a consequence of last-minute uncertainties regarding the move to their new office. As a compromise the Dutch promised to try to halve the term of the lease to two and a half years. This meant that in 1996 the Board would once again have to discuss the future location of IHEU headquarters.

### **The 'battle of Bombay'**

The housing discussion took place in 1996 in Bombay (now Mumbai). There were three proposals:

- 1 staying in Utrecht;
- 2 moving to London where the main British humanist organizations had recently opened a common office;
- 3 moving to Bombay.

Choosing for Bombay would greatly emphasize the international character of IHEU. In addition it had the advantage of low salary costs: the Norwegian membership dues alone would suffice to employ an Executive Director plus six head-office staff in Delhi or Bombay! However, the Indians themselves conceded that running a headquarters would probably prove too ambitious; a regional office would be more feasible.

As to keeping the office in Utrecht, some traditional advantages were mentioned, such as the legendary polyglot talents of the Dutch, but these arguments were rejected as being 'paper arguments' only. What really mattered was how the office was actually run, and on this count the position of a Dutch office had be-

come much weaker in recent years. Matt Cherry told the Board of his two year day-to-day experience as a public relations officer at the Utrecht office, where he found the atmosphere old-fashioned, tired, and uninspired. For example, this center of a worldwide international movement only got a fax machine in 1989.

Besides, Cherry said, IHEU did not 'live' in the Dutch humanist movement. Perhaps it would have been more to the point to say that IHEU *humanism* did not live in the Netherlands. Contrary to concentrating on explicit humanism as did IHEU, in the mid-1990s Dutch humanism had come to focus on implicit humanism. Explicit humanism means that the organization, through its resolutions, public statements, reports etc., proclaims 'officially' preferred opinions on various subjects. Implicit humanism on the other hand stresses that it is not the specific opinion that counts, but the fact that people are able to think for themselves. In this view, humanism is inherent in the way opinions are formed, rather than in their content. A related development in the Netherlands was the rise of 'postmodern humanism', which acknowledges the inherent weaknesses of the rationalist, technical, masculine, progress-oriented Enlightenment tradition in which humanism stands. Postmodern humanism tries to overcome these weaknesses and to maintain humanist values, not by adding more rationalism, but by integrating critical insights. Thus a less dogmatic humanism had emerged in the Netherlands. In addition to this, the Dutch humanist organizations were keen on what they considered their 'autonomy'. Cherry had been virtually unable to persuade Dutch humanist media to pay attention to their fellow-organizations, let alone to the IHEU.

In this respect London, where the British humanist movement had recently been very energetic, had much better credentials. Moreover, as a communications center the provincial town of Utrecht was no match for London, where many important international organizations, such as Amnesty International, would be just around the corner.

The support for a move to London was overwhelming. It nicely fitted in with plans to make IHEU more active and outgoing, instead of an organization that had as its major aim to keep the organization intact. It was clear that 1997 would be exactly the right moment for this change. The two Dutch staff members were to retire by then, so that no money would have to be wasted on unemployment costs that according to Dutch social legislation would have to be paid if they had been dismissed earlier. Already a few years before it had been decided that the financial reserves just sufficed to bridge the lean years until 1997, when an energetic, high-profile Executive Director was to be contracted.

### **Decentralization**

While the location of the Secretariat was under discussion, another issue was IHEU's organization model: centralized or decentralized. Instead of doing all the work at headquarters, the idea was to limit the activities there to general administrative work. Particular issues and projects could then be allocated to specialist offices, Secretariats that were to be accommodated by appropriate member organizations. Examples of such particular fields were Social work, Growth and de-

velopment, Education, Women, and Young Humanists. In early 1995 a plan was presented for an IHEU/EHF (European Humanist Federation) Network that included no less than sixteen decentralized Secretariats. To stimulate international cooperation, most of these Secretariats would closely cooperate with a few foreign member organizations that were experienced in the same field. For example, the Young Humanists Secretariat was to be located at the Belgian *Humanistisch Verbond* and would closely cooperate with the German *Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands* and the Dutch *Jonge Humanisten*.

In later schemes the number of proposed Secretariats was reduced, for instance by accommodating the networks for various types of professional work, such as education, counseling, social work and development cooperation, in one Secretariat. A proposed Working plan in 1997 mentioned nine Secretariats spread over five locations: London, Buffalo, the Netherlands, Brussels and Berlin. In Bombay 1996 the Board decided to give priority to a small number of Secretariats that might—unlike before—qualify for IHEU subsidizing.

The highest priority was the Growth and Development Secretariat, which was located at Buffalo in 1995. Five years later the IHEU Executive Committee decided that Growth and development was so important that it was to become a headquarters task. Another priority was the Secretariat for Central and Eastern Europe at the *Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands* in Berlin, which from 1994 did very good work to stimulate humanist organizations in the former Communist countries. However, it had to close down in 1997, when IHEU headquarters had no funds available to guarantee its future activities.

By 1998 five Secretariats had been realized: Growth and Development (Buffalo), Humanist Professionals (Utrecht), Social Work (Amsterdam), Media (Hilversum), and an Ibero-American Secretariat in Costa Rica. In addition there were various Networks and Committees that were a kind of low-profile Secretariats, among which were the South Asian Humanist Network, the Network on Bioethics, and the Committee on Religious Extremism and Rational Inquiry. More Committees were in the process of being formed: Religious Abuse of Children, and Universal Declaration of Human Values.

In 1998 the Board adopted a bylaw that said that all full members should take a Secretariat-type task upon themselves: they 'are expected to carry out responsibilities or activities on behalf of IHEU: the aim is to make member organizations conscious of their responsibilities to IHEU'. A side-effect of this regulation is that Third World organizations, who lack funds to pay high membership dues, now had another way to implement their full participation in IHEU.

Several other organizational reforms took place in the late 1990s. In November 1996 the Troika system was reformed: from now on there would be one President, in order to give IHEU a more clearcut 'face', and several vice-presidents. Rob Tielman was President until 1998, when he was succeeded by Levi Fragell. The voluntary Secretary General (Nettie Klein) was succeeded by a paid high-profile Executive Director, the Indian Babu Gogineni. In 1998 a few more reforms were decided on: the Board Meeting was renamed General Assembly, and the Executive Committee became the Board. These changes aimed at streamlining activity and were also designed to make it easier for IHEU to achieve charitable status in England.

### Restarting in London

In February 1997 the London office opened. Room space was very restricted, but the plans were great, as Executive Director Babu Gogineni wrote in *Humanism for the World ...*, his first annual report of activities to the Board.

‘The move to London and the recruitment of a polyglot Executive Director were the first in a series of steps taken by the IHEU Board to strengthen its headquarters office, and to improve the effectiveness and outreach of International Humanism. The on-going transformation of IHEU into a vibrant and dynamic organization [has] the objective of achieving increased visibility and impact for International Humanism.’

After listing all the work that had been done in the first one and a half year, Babu concluded:

‘IHEU is now on the path to establishing its credibility by increased professionalisation [...] Increased activity, management of change and consolidation of existing resources and planning for the future has put tremendous demands on the work of the office—more than it can fulfil [...] The continued success of the IHEU will depend entirely on the continued involvement, participation and support of all those who constitute the IHEU: all of IHEU member Organizations.’

After the move to London, problems arose in connection with the way the transferal was dealt with in practice. Tensions got so high that in May 1998 President Rob Tielman stopped all his activities for IHEU at once. Only from 1999 did relations improve, after mutual misconceptions were eliminated in personal meetings between the IHEU top and the main Dutch humanist organizations. In May 2000 Levi Fragell could open the Los Angeles General Assembly by saying that ‘IHEU was in a new phase and that now there was good cooperation with all member organizations’. *Het Humanistisch Archief* (the Humanist Archives) at Utrecht was appointed official keeper of the IHEU archives. Paul Postma, who as a treasurer from 1981 until 1996 had been responsible for the finances, was given a Distinguished Humanist Service Award at the Mumbai 1999 Congress, which may be regarded as a public show of reconciliation and of trust in his capacities as a treasurer. That the 2002 World Congress is organized in the Netherlands, is also a sign of improved relations.

### Internationalization: the I of IHEU

In the last few years, after tidying the less than perfect administration, IHEU’s headquarters has concentrated on outreach and visibility, on becoming known as the voice of international humanism. Electronic media, such as e-mail, internet and teleconferencing, have speeded up communications immensely. Instead of the once-a-year Board resolutions, the discussion of which sometimes dragged on for ten years or more, statements can now be circulated immediately when required. For example, after the terrorist attacks of 11 September, 2001,

IHEU immediately posted the following statement by the President and Executive Director.

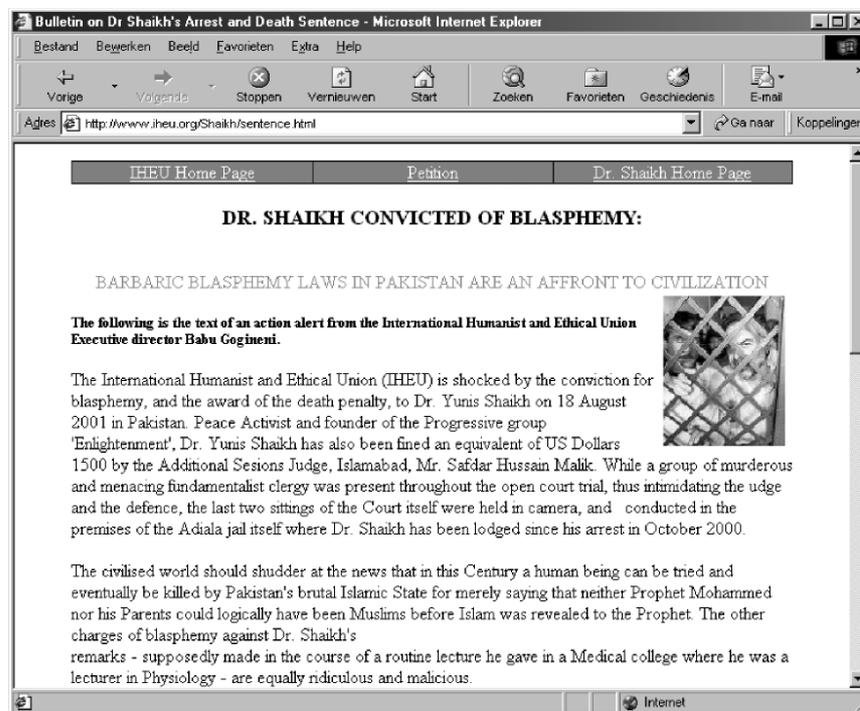
‘In this time of tragedy and great distress, on behalf of the IHEU we would like to share with you all our feelings of solidarity and togetherness.

There is disbelief and disgust for what has happened. The horror of the human devastation was as intense as the incomprehension and anger at the spontaneous jubilation in some parts of the world. Never, it seems, are human values more urgently needed than now. In the past, civilization has ultimately triumphed against such barbarity, and we hope this will be the case now as well.

As we all psychologically pick ourselves up from the rubble of our destroyed humanity, our hearts go out to those who have become victims of this mindless and senseless attack.

The culprits who have planned and conspired to carry out this attack have to be identified and punished appropriately, but we hope that vulnerable communities will not be victimized in the search for the guilty.’

IHEU also co-organized an ensuing demonstration which called for keeping heads cool and reacting prudently. When individual protagonists of humanism or even simply of tolerance are being harassed by fundamentalist regimes, like Pakistani Dr. Yunis Shaikh and Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasrin, both of whom have been accused of blasphemy, IHEU now is able to react *à la minute* by sending letters of protest and e-mail alerts around the world. In the last few years



IHEU internet statement on Dr. Shaikh, 2001



Future IHEU Executive Director Babu Gogineni at the 1992 Amsterdam congress with Dutch humanist journalist Bert Boelaars

the Executive Director and the President have traveled extensively to tighten the international bonds by means of personal contacts. The Executive Director also has been personally active in making IHEU truly international, for example by acting as representative at the United Nations in Geneva and Vienna and at UNESCO, Paris. The IHEU quarterly *International Humanist News* (since 1993) has become more international than before. For the first time in IHEU history the number of its congresses outside Europe exceeds the number within Europe.

Having an Executive Director from India can in itself be of importance, by complementing the traditional Eurocentric and academic outlook of IHEU with a first-hand familiarity with a Third World country and with the practical problems humanists there face in everyday life. This nicely fits in with the plurality of humanism to which the present IHEU top has pledged its commitment. Today's international humanism houses philosophical as well as practical forms; anti-religious or anti-church oriented schools of thought have their place as well as more implicit forms of humanism. Amongst other things, this has led to an active cooperation with the freethinker organization WUFT. The number of freethinker members of IHEU has also increased markedly of late.

Though no two humanists are the same, IHEU now puts the emphasis on what all humanists have in common, their 'common global identity'. As Levi Fragell has time and again advocated, the emphasis now is on 'just eight letters' (that is, the

word 'humanism'), without qualifying adjectives such as 'secular', 'religious' or 'atheist'. In the same vein Fragell has pled for the adoption by IHEU of a 'minimum statement' on humanism, a simple definition which should be acceptable to all humanist organizations.

**The Minimum Statement (1991, 1996)**

In 1991, after many years of discussions, the IHEU Board adopted a Minimum Statement on Humanism. Five years later a middle sentence was added, which illustrates that definitions like this can only be a snapshot in time of changing views that can never be considered final. The Minimum Statement now reads:

*'Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance that affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethics based on human and other natural values in a spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality.'*

The first draft of this statement was proposed in 1988 by Levi Fragell, who has been an indefatigable defender of the advantages for IHEU to be identified by a single common and concise definition. The text has been fine-tuned by a committee consisting of Fragell, Prakash Narain and Harry Stopes-Roe.

## Congresses

Increased internationalization is apparent from the location of recent IHEU congresses. In 1990 and 1992 two World Congresses were organized in the Low Countries that were remarkable in that both were visited by a group of Third World participants. After that, a series of congresses outside Europe took place: World Congresses in Mexico City (1996) and Mumbai (1999), regional congresses in Buenos Aires and Sydney (2000). In addition IHEU organized, or was involved with, international conferences in Costa Rica, Egypt, Stockholm, Oslo, Avignon, Strasbourg and Brussels. IHEU was also represented in UN conferences and meetings in Durban, Madrid and Geneva, and IHEU leaders have lectured on humanist concerns in humanist and non-humanist forums in Helsinki, Delhi, Mumbai, Boston, Mexico City, Dhaka, Khatmandu, and at a Cambridge Union Society debate.

The 2002 IHEU World Congress, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of IHEU and having as its theme 'All different—all equal: human diversity, human rights, Humanism', will take place on July 3-6 at Noordwijkerhout, the Netherlands. In 2005 the next World Congress is planned to take place in Paris, when it will be one hundred years ago that the French law on separation of church and state was passed.

### World Congress Brussels, 1990

IHEU held its eleventh World Congress on August 5-11, 1990, in Brussels, under the general theme 'The secularization of society on the basis of liberty, equality and fraternity'. It was attended by over 300 humanists.

Canadian abortion law activist Henry Morgentaler opened the congress by emphasizing that in spite of the great progress already made in realizing the ideals of the 1789 French Revolution, the humanist still faced an immense task to achieve the full realization of those ideals.

British Board member Harry Stopes-Roe in his lecture on 'The many senses of the Secular' examined what a truly secular society would look like. He advocated a humanist conception of the open society.

Johannes Neumann (Germany) in a discourse on 'Tolerance and intolerance as parameters of political culture' pointed out that new fields of conflict between the poor and the rich were being created worldwide. He situated 'Tolerance as a humanist task' in the context of a process of human cultural development: tolerance is not a sheer pragmatic principle but it is the start of realizing a rational and responsible humanity.

Lily Boeykens, Representative of the International Women Council, argued that 'Women rights are not different from men rights'. Despite many promising declarations worldwide, increasingly dangerous counter-forces were developing that could undo the progress made in the last Decade of Women: fundamentalist and ultra-conservative groups all over the world rank religious rights and freedom higher than state laws, and they sanction the domination of women by men.



Amsterdam Congress, 1992, at Artis Zoo

### World Congress Amsterdam, 1992

In Amsterdam on July 26-30, 1992, 441 participants of the twelfth IHEU World Congress exchanged their experiences and thoughts on the theme 'Humanism for head and heart'. This theme implied a distinct shift away from philosophizing on intellectual matters only to focussing on the whole person, including emotional, ceremonial and aesthetic needs and commitments.

On the sub-theme Humanist Services, Dutch counselor Elly Hoogeveen introduced the subject of humanist counseling in the Netherlands, whereas Steinar Nilsen, President of Human-Etisk Forbund, discussed humanist services in Norway relating to birth, coming of age and death. The coming-of-age ceremony has been a cornerstone of the enormous growth of the Norwegian organization.

Social Action was the second sub-theme. Mrs. Sakala from the Atheist Centre in Vijayawada, India, described 'Working with women' in India. The Atheist Centre provides women, who are among the worst victims of rapid social change, with various kinds of help: medical assistance, family planning information and education. Norm R. Allen (African-Americans for Humanism) saw great 'Prospects for humanism in the Black community', on the African continent in particular, providing that the upper middle-class, white, male humanist message was made digestible for black people. Aad van Oosten from the Dutch social work organization Humanitas, speaking on 'Tolerance and social assistance', dealt with the moral dilemmas involved with this area of work.

On the sub-theme Education, Netherlands-Antillean author Frank Martinus Arion described the difficulties to establish a humanist school in Curaçao. Denise Berré, Belgian teacher of ethics, set out the principles, the goals and the successful program of (humanistic) ethical education in secondary schools. The congress participants could not agree on the issue whether or not the humanist movement could, and if yes, should, be promoted within the frame of these educational activities.

### World Congress Mexico City, 1996

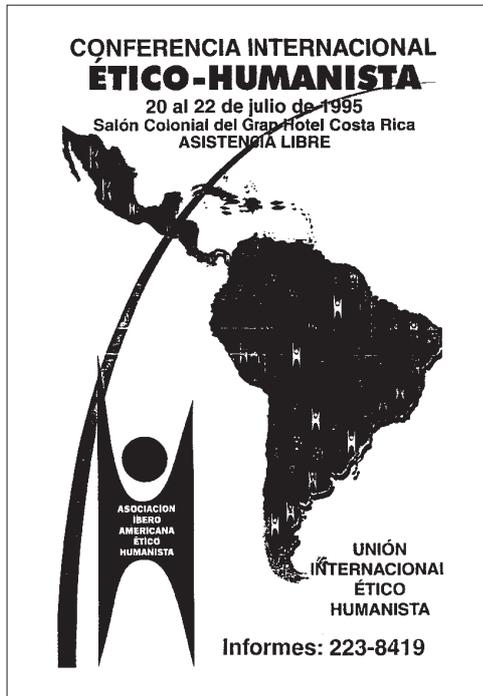
On November 14-19, 1996, the thirteenth IHEU World Congress was held in Mexico City, on the subject 'Global humanism for the cyber-age', to discuss topics like the impact of the information revolution on the developing world, secularism and the threat of intolerance, empowerment and sustainable development, the future of sex and gender, seeking a new global consciousness, organizing humanism in the cyber-age, and the social and ethical challenges of bio-technology.

Paul Kurtz, speaking on 'The infomedia revolution: opportunities for global Humanism', argued that humanism could only go through a revival if one was prepared to engage in bringing about a basic *cultural reformation*.

Shulamit Aloni from Israel struck a similar note when she was presented with an Award: 'Humanists must change the Zeitgeist. We must say yes to the four freedoms of Roosevelt, yes to human solidarity and dignity, yes to civil society'.

Chairman Prakash Narain of the Indian Humanist Union set out the relation between 'Humanist values, cyber-age and the Third World', arguing that a decisive choice is to be made between the humanist values of human self-reliance and free enquiry on the one hand, and the religious precepts of unquestioned belief and surrender on the other.

Ibn Warraq in his speech 'How to encourage secularism in the Middle East in the cyber-age' put forward a number of practical proposals, among which the establishment



Poster of Latin American conference,  
Costa Rica, 1995



Nettie Klein receiving the International Humanist Award from Levi Fragell, Mexico 1996

of a center for inquiry for secular humanists of Muslim origin, and the development of a comprehensive publishing program.

Bangladeshi writer and campaigner for women rights Taslima Nasrin considered 'The threat of intolerance. Countering religious extremism and ethnic rivalries'. Nasrin, who was compelled to flee her native country because of Islamic fundamentalist threats, described her personal development as an atheist from her own experiences.



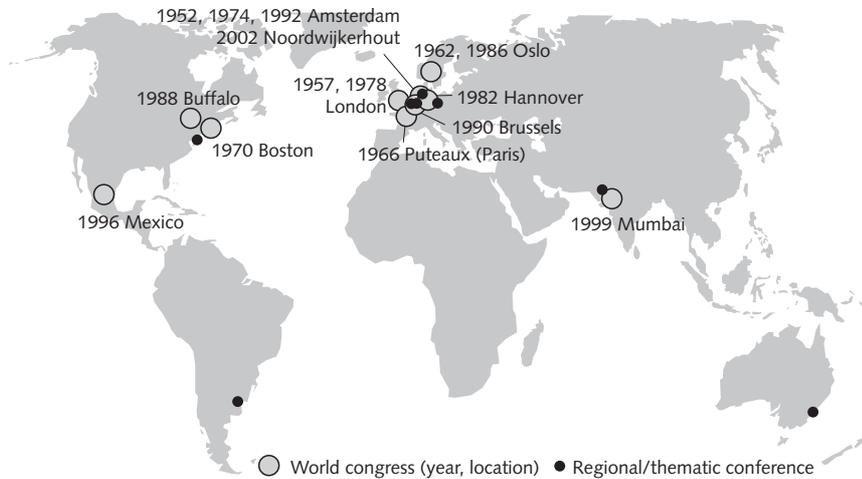
**Inaugurating ceremony at the 1999 Mumbai Congress. Well-known humanist, skeptic, and nuclear physicist Dr. H. Narasimhaiah, plants a tree**

#### **World Congress Mumbai, 1999**

A lively and informal fourteenth IHEU World Congress was held in Mumbai on January 10-14, 1999, on the theme 'Humanism for human development and happiness'. Indian scientist and freethinker H. Narasimhaiah set the tone for the plenary session on 'Science, scientific attitude and the anti-science movement' by exposing the double standards that many educated persons and even scientists live by in their daily life. They believe in the nonsense of astrology, and are thus deplorably lacking in scientific temper. Only scientific temper and scientific humanism, said Narasimhaiah, can bring sanity and unity into this fragmented society.

Indian humanist Amlan Datta elaborated on the theme 'The finer spirit of Humanism', consisting of a number of fundamental ideas, namely the conviction that mankind has a common destiny, the belief in the value of the individual, the centrality of reason in conjunction with the compassionate spirit, and our final allegiance to all mankind.

The session on 'The Humanist world view' had two main speakers. Paul Kurtz discussed 'The view from the West', in which he identified two possible trends for the future: a plu-



IHEU World congresses, 1952-2002

realistic global development or the creation of a world civilization. 'The view from the East' was dealt with by Justice V.M. Tarkunde, father of modern humanism and human rights in India. In the present situation in India, he said, priority should be given to the alleviation of poverty. Humanists must speak and live with the people in order to impart on them humanist values like self-reliance and mutual cooperation.

#### European Humanist Congress Berlin, 1993

The European Humanist Federation and the IHEU jointly convened a congress in East-Berlin on July 25-30, 1993, where 600 participants from 25 countries conducted a dialogue between Eastern and Western Europe on 'Democracy, human rights and humanism'. Among the subjects discussed were violation of human rights, the position of women, homosexuality, religious fundamentalism, nationalism, totalitarianism, and right-wing extremism and racism in Eastern and Central Europe.

In a session on 'Emigrants and refugees: issues concerning Humanist solidarity', former IHEU representative to the UNESCO Vera Freud argued that only worldwide solidarity could solve the problems of emigration and refugees.

Levi Fragell, Chairman of the IHEU Committee for Growth and Development, closed the congress by advocating a vision of humanism as a life stance, defined as 'a secular, non-theistic position, as a distinct alternative to the religions'.

#### Regional Humanist Congresses, 2000: Buenos Aires and Sydney

The first ever regional IHEU Congress in South America was held in Buenos Aires, on October 26-28, 2000. It was an important incentive to humanism in Latin America. For instance, it was decided to establish a humanist group in Chile. The overall theme of the congress was 'Latin America: Between freedom and fundamentalism'; sub-themes were 'Church, state and politics', 'Education for Humanism and freedom', 'Science, technology and society', and 'Fundamentalism and human rights'.

Argentine historian Emilio J. Corbière argued that in Latin American societies free thought and humanism are needed to counter the social problems. His compatriot and lawyer

Jorge Vallejos stressed the need for a 'New Humanism', having solidarity as its message and 'putting humanity at the centre of every social endeavour'. Peruvian Manuel Paz Miño in his talk on 'Discrimination and intolerance' proposed to stimulate clear thinking and a critical sense to counteract irrational and mysticist groups.

Two weeks later, on November 12-14, 2000, another regional congress was held in Sydney, Australia, dedicated to 'Ethics and values for this new century'. An original program, balancing art, dance, play and speech, expressed the commitment to a wide range of global citizenship issues, ranging from bio-ethics and the mass media to female genital mutilation and ecology. Among the star speakers were broadcaster Philip Adams and euthanasia campaigner Philip Nitschke, who defended the right to die as a fundamental human right and called for the establishment of a Humanist hospice.

Australian Ian Ellis-Jones, president of the Humanist Society of New South Wales, discussed the rationalist image of humanism. Religion, he said, primarily appeals to emotions, to the 'heart'. Many potential humanists remain 'closet humanists' because humanism is not presented as an exuberant and emotionally appealing way of life. An alternative initiative to increase the appeal of humanism was proposed by Paul Kurtz in his *Humanist Manifesto 2000*, which presents a perspective to a better life for all of humanity.

**Levi Fragell**

Levi Fragell (b. 1939) is Norway's best known humanist. Originally he was a preacher in a Pentecostal church. He has an MA covering Christianity, History of religions, and Sociology. From the 1970s he became active in Human-Etisk Forbund i Norge. He was, after Horn, its second leader from 1976 until 1991, except for one year when he worked as a teacher.

In 1976 Fragell became a member of the IHEU Board of Directors. In 1987 he was elected Co-Chairman, and since 1998 he has been the President of IHEU. Fragell has always stressed the importance of having a large organization. For IHEU to be a credible alternative for secular people in the twenty-first century, serious work should be made towards its growth, visibility and increased effectiveness. In order to achieve this, Fragell has been the driving force behind both the IHEU Minimum Statement on Humanism, and the concept of Common global identity (the use of the word 'humanism' without qualifying adjectives). In 1999 Fragell was given the World Humanist Award by the Council for Secular Humanism for his outstanding contribution to the development of humanism around the world.

**The voice of IHEU, 1989-2002**

1989 China: Student revolt crushed	1989 (Board of Directors), Demonstrations in China: '...urges that the government of the People's Republic of China recognize the rights of its citizens to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.'
1989 End of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe; fall of the Berlin Wall	
1989-1994 South Africa: De Klerk presidency; Apartheid abolished	
1990-1991 Persian Gulf War	
1990 West and East Germany merge	
1990s Internet, e-mail	1993 (IHEU Board meeting), Destructive Cults and Sects: 'Noting the authoritarian ideology of these groups, ... condemning their methods of mental manipulation, ... the IHEU regards the operations and methods of such cults and sects as violating human rights and rights of freedom...'
1991-1999 Russia: Yeltsin presidency	
1991- Disintegration of Yugoslavia	
1992-1993 Somalia: international intervention	
1993 Oslo agreements (Palestinian self-government)	
1993 Maastricht Treaty (European Union)	
1993-2001 US: Clinton presidency	1993 (IHEU Board meeting), Xenophobia, Discrimination, Racism and especially 'Ethnic Cleansing': '... noting that ... "ethnic cleansing" is expressly included in the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights ... urges the UN ... to confirm and adopt these paragraphs; ... in so urging, wants to express its ethical humanist principles implying the basic unity of all human beings.'
1994- Russia: Chechen War	
1994 Eastern Europe offered Partnership for Peace (cooperation with NATO)	
1995 Dayton accords: Bosnia divided	
1997 East Asian financial crisis	
1997 Poland, Czechia, and Hungary invited to join NATO	
1998 India, Pakistan: nuclear tests	
1999 Kosovo: international intervention	
1999 World population: six billion	
2000 Human genome charted	2000 (Sydney Congress), Protest against blasphemy laws: 'We call for a strict separation of state from religion, and call on all countries, particularly Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom, to bring their domestic legislation in line with universal standards, freedom of religion and belief [...]'
2000- Second Palestinian Intifada	
2001 Milošević before War Tribunal	
2001 Suicide attacks on Twin Towers and Pentagon	
2001- Afghan War; Taliban ousted	
2002 European currency	

**Humanist Youth**

The IHEU Youth Section that had existed in the 1960s and 1970s had been disbanded in 1977. However, in 1983 at the IHEU Peace Conference in Zutphen plans were developed to re-launch an IHEU youth organization. One year later, in October 1984, humanist youths from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, England, Luxemburg, Italy and Norway met in Brussels and decided to refound the IHEU Youth Section under the new name of IHEYO: International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organization.

The IHEYO organized various activities, such as summer camps, seminars, conferences, and humanist youth exchange programs. For example, in 1989 an international summer camp was organized on the theme 'Are the Netherlands really as tolerant as they are pretending', and in 1990 and 1992 IHEYO conferences were held in connection with the IHEU World Congresses at Brussels and

Amsterdam (the 1992 IHEYO conference theme 'Being equal being different' was a remarkable foreshadowing of the theme that has been chosen for the IHEU congress in 2002). However, IHEYO's base was small, as only in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany separate humanist youth organizations existed. Elsewhere humanist youths in general joined an adults' humanist organization, and the only such organization with substantial youth membership apparently was the AEU. The small number of humanist youth organizations also prevented IHEYO from tightening its contacts with the European Community, for to do this it needed member organizations from at least four countries. The IHEYO Executive Committee was exclusively Dutch, until in 1992 its seat was moved to Brussels.

Finding volunteers who were prepared to take on the organizational work, was not easy. In 1987 this led to a virtual standstill of IHEYO activities for half a year, and from 1995 IHEYO went into prolonged hibernation, until in 2000 it was 'revitalized'. With the support of *CommonSense*, a US-based intercollegiate humanist and freethinker quarterly, an international Internship Exchange Program for young humanists was launched. In July 2002 IHEYO will hold an International Humanist Youth Congress in the Netherlands, parallel to the IHEU Congress.

### Representation at the United Nations and Europe

Around 1990 two IHEU representatives were added to the already existing five. As the powers of the European institutions increased, in 1989 Etienne Boumans became IHEU representative at the European Parliament (Luxemburg and Strasbourg) and the European Commission (Brussels).

One year later IHEU was also given consultative status at UNICEF, New York, where Thelma Stackhouse came to play an important part in the NGO Working Group on the Rights of the Child.

Representation in Brussels has been taken over in 1993 by the European Humanist Federation, which effectively consists of the European IHEU member organizations.

In 2000 the IHEU status at the United Nations was upgraded to 'Special Consultative NGO Status', which automatically entitles IHEU to contribute statements to ECOSOC, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (New York), where IHEU until then was not represented.

To be more effective, several IHEU delegations have since the early 1990s been enlarged and reformed. For instance, the team at the United Nations in New York now consists of five persons.

In 1990 the Board noted that IHEU might qualify for European subsidies, and one year later at the Prague Board meeting the European Humanist Federation (EHF) was founded, consisting of the European members of IHEU. During this Board meeting the European members were rushed to become an EHF member *stante pede*.

EHF has three major fields of activity: it focuses on specific European issues, lobbying, and finding European subsidies. It functions as a two-way intermediary

**The value of representation**

One might ask whether the relations with the UN and European institutions are worth the invested—and scarce!—time, energy, money, and manpower. Harold Blackham addressed this question in 1992. It is no coincidence that it was he who asked the question, for Blackham had in the 1950s been the driving force behind IHEU representation at international bodies. Most IHEU spokesmen, when asked what are the central functions IHEU has to fulfil, will mention mutual contacts, spreading humanism, development of its ideas and organization; but when Blackham addressed the question in 1992, he characteristically added: relations as an NGO with both the United Nations and with the Council of Europe and the European Community.

Blackham acknowledged the dangers, as he wrote: 'Are we not asking valuable members to immerse themselves in an ocean of paper [...] with little effect and without reward?' But he had no doubts as to the answer, for two reasons. First, he said, the high NGO status that IHEU has been granted, constitutes 'a formal international recognition of public existence', and this brings with it certain responsibilities. It would be indecent to shirk these obligations. Second, it is a unique opportunity to show 'by our performance' what humanists stand for. By stepping out, the humanists would leave a monopoly to the established religions. 'There is a cause to be won.' Blackham, however, warned IHEU to withstand a temptation that competition with religious groups might lead to. 'The task is to make it human, not a sectarian, cause.'

between the European Community and the European IHEU member organizations.

Among practical EHF activities are conferences and seminars, for example the 1993 IHEU regional congress in Berlin, a conference in Utrecht on 'Multicultural society' (1998), and a conference on 'Civil society in Europe' at Oostende (2001). An example of EHF's activity at the Council of Europe was when that Council in 2000 condemned euthanasia. EHF protested by means of a press release, defending the right to die in dignity. The EHF has also supported the Secretariat for Central and Eastern Europe, which from 1994 to 1997 supported humanist groups in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czechia.

The EHF illustrates how regional networks may be of use in furthering regional interests. Elsewhere in the world comparable humanist networks have been formed. In Northern America there is a North Atlantic Committee for Humanism, which was founded independently of IHEU by six US and Canadian humanist organizations. In South Asia in 1995 the South Asian Humanist Network was formed, which focuses on 'the real concerns of humanism in the region: democracy, rationalism, human rights, poverty, fundamentalist revival, superstition and population control'. Another humanist network exists in Latin America.

**Humanist professionals: IAHECL and EHP**

In 1988, at the Buffalo World congress, the International Association of Humanist Educators, Counsellors and Leaders (IAHECL) was founded as a subsidiary but autonomous organization for humanist professionals. These professionals in-

clude, among others, teachers of humanistic ethics and philosophy; counselors in hospitals, the army, prisons; people who lead life-cycle celebrations; and spokespeople who present humanist ideas to a wider public. The objective of the IAHECL is to encourage the exchange and development of skills and experiences, thereby strengthening the professional status of those professionals. IAHECL has organized seminars, formulated professional ethical standards, and issued a periodical, *The humanist professional*. It has also presented notable professionals with a 'Distinguished Humanist Professional Award'. In view of practical difficulties regarding communication and distribution of materials, and because professionals in various continents face different problems, it was decided in 1994 to divide the IAHECL in regional branches, starting with a North American and a European organization. The latter was called European Humanist Professionals (EHP).

### **IHEU activity after the move to London**

Though many practical problems of the past remain, in the last few years IHEU has advanced both in activist orientation as well as in visibility. As has been told, IHEU has organized or been involved in a series of congresses throughout the world. It is also involved in several global initiatives for promoting the growth of science, for the furthering of human values and for the advancement of democratic ideals. Interests and activities have ranged from exposing claims of the paranormal to drawing attention to global poverty and from peace initiatives to the advocacy of anti-nuclearization. The recent global campaigns of the IHEU for separation of religion and state and for abolition of blasphemy laws have been reported in international, national and regional media all over the world.

IHEU has acquired Special Consultative NGO status at the UN, and is recognized by the Council of Europe as one among forty NGO's able to lodge collective complaints as regards violation of the European Social Charter. IHEU supports development projects and individuals in twelve countries in Eastern Europe and in Asia, and a Growth and Development Committee is exploring ways in which the Humanist movement can grow in countries where Humanism does not exist or is most needed. IHEU has also been involved with individual initiatives, such as a 'peace walk' by Phil Ward from Belfast to Jerusalem. In the 1990s attempts have been made to start a Humanist-Muslim dialogue, for example in the form of a seminar in Egypt on Averroes (1994). A dialogue with Buddhists is planned to occur in Thailand in the year 2003. IHEU is engaged in supporting various Humanist and human rights activists the world over, taking advantage of modern electronic media, for example to set up a Humanist and human rights related news distribution service. As Executive Director Babu Gogineni says:

'In short, the IHEU has today, in its fiftieth year, transformed itself into an efficient tool for its member organizations, so that the international tool will also help achieve national objectives, by lobbying, and by bringing attention to the Humanist view point.

The IHEU is after all nothing but its member organizations! I have therefore no doubt that we are on the way to being what the founders of the IHEU wanted it to be—an internationally recognized moral, social and philosophical alternative to authoritarian forces and supernatural movements.’

## Conclusion

In the review of fifty years of IHEU history, what stands out? We will attempt to indicate some of the most conspicuous trends.

The very fact that the International Humanist and Ethical Union celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year, is in hindsight no small miracle, in view of the near-continuous problems that have threatened its survival: persistent financial restrictions, difficult communications with member organizations, dependency on a few motivated individuals, and a crisis in the mid-1990s.

In the 1950s and 1960s the Dutch played a crucial role in guaranteeing the continuance of the organization. Without the leadership of Jaap van Praag and the office support and repeated emergency financial injections from the Dutch HV, it is hardly conceivable how IHEU might have survived its infancy.

In the 1980s and 1990s the Americans and Norwegians were similarly vital in keeping IHEU alive by means of their financial support and their personal involvement. These came at a time when the IHEU bureau in the Netherlands came to function less satisfactorily, and when in addition the general support for IHEU within the Netherlands weakened because of internal developments within Dutch humanism.

The increasing financial contribution from the US and Norwegian member organizations in particular was paralleled by a shifting balance within IHEU between the various views of humanism. Conducive to this development was the growth of both the number and the diversity of the organizations participating in IHEU. This increasing internationalization in itself is a consequence of concerted efforts to invest in development in the Third World, while making use of opportunities offered by the Dutch Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation (HIVOS).

In spite of a sustained long-term rise in both membership and budget, lack of finances and personnel remain a constant problem. In comparison with religious movements such as the churches, or single-issue movements such as Greenpeace, a life stance movement like IHEU has a hard task attracting large memberships. When problems arose, member organizations have in the past often used their subscription fee as a means of exerting pressure. Another weak point is IHEU's heavily depending on the capacities and motivation of a very small number of paid staff and dedicated volunteers.

Market niches have sometimes helped IHEU to achieve successes. Notable examples are the series of IHEU/HIVOS programs for development projects in the Third World. IHEU's offering a non-religious channel for such projects made it interesting to HIVOS, while at the same time both the spirit of the projects and the possible creation of a humanist network made them interesting to IHEU.

These co-projects also illustrate a trend from theory to practice that is visible in IHEU's history: at first the purpose of these projects was educating Third World intellectuals by teaching them 'European' humanism; now they are much more oriented to local needs. IHEU's public statements show the same trend from theory to practice: though long-pondered theoretical statements have not completely disappeared, fast reactions to current events have become more frequent. Connecting theoretical philosophy and practical acting is a central theme at the 2002 World Congress.

One important aspect that we have been unable to investigate, is the influence of national contexts within IHEU. It is very clear that humanism and its tradition in the United States differs from that in the Netherlands, or Norway, or India, or Nigeria ... and so on. How do these differences become visible in IHEU, and how do they interact? Can we add to the dialogues with Catholics, Marxists and Buddhists an 'internal-humanist dialogue'?

A final question is, what has IHEU achieved? 25 years ago Jaap van Praag was pessimistic as to its record. At international bodies like the United Nations or the European Community IHEU's successes have only been incidental, even though this is considered a core activity. The number of individual supporters of IHEU has always been small and large parts of the world are virtually devoid of humanism. Even in Western countries IHEU's influence on national laws concerning for example equal treatment of religious and non-religious people, or 'sensitive' rights such as those concerning homosexuality, abortion, or euthanasia, has not been overwhelming.

However, the last few years have witnessed increased activity and an increased dynamics on the side of IHEU. Using modern electronic media, IHEU has been able to react swiftly to various developments. It is supporting a series of projects in the Third World and in Eastern Europe in which human rights and human values are central. It also has in various ways supported individuals whose human rights were threatened. IHEU has organized or contributed to a series of international conferences in fields that matter to humanists. Its efforts to become an active international movement now are very serious. The increase in media coverage it has achieved brings with it increased opportunities to show what humanists stand for. IHEU's activity at the European and United Nations organizations has been recognized and appreciated.

With some caution—many of the long-standing problems are still there—this may be regarded as promising.

## Sources and suggestions for further reading

This history of fifty years of IHEU is mainly based on the following primary sources:

- annual reports;
- minutes of Board/General Assembly and Executive Committee meetings;
- the various IHEU magazines (from *Information Bulletin* to *International Humanist News*);
- congress and conference proceedings.

Use has also been made of two earlier IHEU anniversary publications:

- *The International Humanist and Ethical Union 1952-1977. A record of 25 years.* This special issue of *International Humanism* (1977) contained year-by-year surveys of major developments;
- The October 1992 issue of *International Humanist News*, which contained a dozen contributions on specific themes, some of them historical, written by prominent IHEU members.

From 1992-1996 former Executive Director Ernst van Brakel has been working on an IHEU history; his notes have been used too.

A valuable aid has been Nicolas Walter (1998), *Humanism. Finding meaning in the word.* Amherst: Prometheus.

Full references, notes to our text and other supplementary material will be published on the website of the *Humanistisch Archief* (The Humanist Archives): <http://archieff.uvh.nl>.

## Present

At the crossroads of its fiftieth anniversary, is there a reason for organized international Humanism to restate its goals and objectives? Can the experience of the past fifty years within both the IHEU and its member organizations be a guide to action in the future? Should Humanists go beyond the traditional areas of focus? Or should they concentrate on the 'core issues' connected with religion? What should be the identity of Humanists as a global movement? Do Humanists need an identity? Is the IHEU in tune with the modern world? How can the IHEU better reflect and fulfil the aspirations of Humanists around the world?

In this section, Babu Gogineni (Executive Director of IHEU) and Levi Fragell (President of IHEU) reflect on some of these questions, offering in their complementary essays an ideological and organizational view. Their statements were circulated among a representative sample of young humanists from around the world, whose reactions and comments are presented later on in this book.

Bert Gasenbeek and Babu Gogineni

# Humanism and ketchup, or the future of Humanism

## The Humanist elephant

*Babu Gogineni*

What is Humanism exactly, what does it mean in the modern world, and in what sense can it be meaningful in this new century—and more importantly, how does it resemble ketchup? These are the questions I wish to address. In the classic story, five blind men gave five different descriptions of the elephant. Here is my version of the Humanist elephant, but with eyes wide open!

I believe that our Humanism is a living philosophy of freedom and democracy (Tarkunde); in fact my own entry into organized humanism came via an interest in human rights and democracy. My atheism is an important part of my identity, but that is not what propelled me into Humanist activism. In social life I believe that our commitment to human dignity should lead to opposing all that makes the human an instrument to serve a 'higher' purpose: God, nation, religion, community, class, caste or creed. Our attachment to reason and to reasonableness should become the means to tackle human problems. Our scepticism—for we are sceptics, I believe, not cynics—should help us look critically at our world and help us improve it for ourselves and for others. I believe that our social commitment should be to ever expand the frontiers of responsible human freedom.

Of course, Humanism is both a social as well as a personal philosophy. As the personal philosophy of the human being, Humanism tries to help answer the great questions of life. We try to find out what this world is about, what we are doing here, and how best to lead a life which is both personally satisfying and socially useful. It is also true that we try to give meaning to our own lives because we see no set purpose other than that which we give to it. Here we are trying to answer some of the questions that traditionally religion has attempted to answer. But philosophy is not theology and Humanism is not religion. The essential difference is that while we might be engaged by those same questions as religion, our interest is not in religion's eternal answers—for us what is permanent are these questions. It is the pursuit of truth that is most important to us, not its possession (Venkatadri). Humanism is nothing if it is not a continuous interrogation about our universe and our place in it.

### **Humanism and natural selection**

Our naturalistic understanding of the universe, our valuing of the scientific spirit, our concept of the morally autonomous being, our loyalty to the demo-

cratic culture, our desire to re-build the world, our sense of responsibility to fellow human beings and to the rest of nature, our understanding of the true nature of beauty, and our appreciation of the fine arts and refined culture: all this ties up into a life stance—a life stance deserving to be adopted by the world. This hope was eloquently articulated in the 1970s when the *Humanist Manifesto II* started off with the grand declaration that the next century—this one—can be and should be a Humanist century. Sadly, we are not yet in that Humanist century. There is today a confederacy of irrationalism—of religion allied with the tribal values of nation—and a widespread disregard for human values which is regressing us into our social memory of intolerance and of inconsiderateness to fellow human beings.

Three hundred years ago the beacon lights of the world were our spiritual ancestors. Name a social reformer a few centuries ago, and it is very likely that this was a Humanist—our spiritual ancestors were articulators of inspiring visions for the world and leaders of people—not merely heads of organizations, as is the case today. Today the world is not being remade in the Humanist image anymore. I suggest we lost this battle because by a steady process of self-elimination we have pushed ourselves out of the mainstream of human activities, through our endless discussions about religion and God: famously diagnosed by a fellow humanist as ‘paralysis by analysis’.

It appears to me that at times we Humanists do not even preach what the other side practises! To be back on track, we need to reconnect to the grand Humanist tradition. For inspiration, let us remember one of our spiritual ancestors, Thomas Paine. When Benjamin Franklin said: ‘Where there is freedom, there is my country’, Thomas Paine so nobly retorted: ‘Where there is none, there is mine’. That is where we should be: where there is a deficit of freedom, so that we can fight for it and achieve it. Are modern-day Humanists at the barricades then? No. The warning to organized Humanism is very clear: there is no reason why Humanism should triumph in the present-day world if we continue to be how we are—after all, we believe in Darwin’s natural selection! If Humanism will not mean a better life for people, if it will not make a difference in their lives, why should it appeal to anyone?

### **The world in our image**

We need a renewal and a rejuvenation. For that, we need to identify the most pressing problems of the world—and as groups of concerned individuals, we need to apply Humanism’s liberating principles to the solution of these problems or to set the direction for new changes. Today, immense changes are taking place in the world, and there is a great need for Humanists to play an active role in the global processes and influence these developments. Even though today’s world is a happier place than it has ever been in the past, there are several disturbing trends which need to be addressed.

We are told that a new World Order is being established—what a misleading term, there is no discernible order in this new world! The so-called world order is related to the military might and the economic strengths of the rich countries.

And today's globalization is in fact an economic globalization. One can notice that in the West parts of the world are referred to as 'emerging markets'. Not people—just markets; people are perceived as targets for economic activity, clients for debt industry, customers for the death-peddling arms industry! This predatory attitude of the Western economic expansionists needs to be combated. We are for globalization: but the globalization that Humanists should fight for is not that of the market, not that of the free market or of the regulated kind, but the globalization of the free mind. It is the globalization of the mind, of the universalization of our achievements that we must strive for.

Humanism is a cultural achievement of humankind, and it matters not whether it came from Greece, which it did not, or if it came from India—even that it did not. I think that it is a failing in the understanding of our common humanity as well as imperfect scholarship to claim that only some parts of the world contributed to its progress. In this world 'divided by maps' too often we are stuck into moulds that are created by etymology, by chronology, and by geography. Humanism originates in human nature, and it is for this reason that it is universal, not because it came from the navel of the world, which for most people living in the West is the ancient slave-owning societies of Greece. Let the West not be unduly proud: slavery of Africans, adoption of one of the most irrational of religions, imperialism and the atom bomb are part of its history.

### **Modernization, not Westernization**

The West should theoretically epitomize the grandest achievements of Humanism: democracy, free choice, human rights, the spirit of science, a spirit of openness ... But when one looks at those who are at the receiving end of the countries enjoying these achievements, it is natural to develop doubts. Specially when you are a citizen of the Third World, when you are in, as an American Humanist once put it, 'not the third world, but the two-thirds world', then you are under one of the kleptocracies of the Mobutus or in the Banana Republics of South America propped up by the active collusion of the West, or in a country being sold destructive technologies.

Let us continue to look around: one fifth of the world (the West) participates in four fifths of its economic activity. Of the twenty-three trillion dollars of global domestic product, eighteen belong to just one fifth of the world (the West). If we have to be fair, then the resources of the world should be equitably shared—not all of it should be exported to the West! We do want the rest of the world to benefit from the achievements of science and technology, and we do hope that this will lead to a better way of life for all the inhabitants of the planet, but the Western model of development—of unbridled consumerism—is inappropriate. Let us replace free trade by fair trade; let us replace concepts of military security by those of human security and welfare. Let us put the Human back at the center of our endeavors.

### **Broadening our embrace**

Humanism combats the despotism of religion, but why not the despotism of the market? If the global society that is to be formed has to be formed on universal principles, then can we just let the impoverishment of the planet happen unchallenged? We need to demonstrate that our values are not just an elevated particularism, but that they have a universal significance.

Then are Humanists to play politics? I suggest they should. Not the power politics that we are accustomed to; not the 'strife of interests disguised as a conflict of principles'. Not supporting democracies which are founded on the 'collective wisdom of individual ignorance'—but the politics of freedom—a politics of liberating people by fighting for their human rights. What is Humanism, if it is not about human rights?

The Humanism of this century has to be an angry Humanism, an all-embracing Humanism; a Humanism not defeated 'by the pessimism of thought, but fired by the optimism of the will'; a Humanism which is willing to assert itself. We need a missionary zeal in Humanism, but yet it will have to be a Humanism beyond religion; a post-religious Humanism.

### **Deepening our identity**

When we throw our arms wide open, how far do we go? I have heard a suggestion that the Humanist group should open its doors of membership to even the religious because Humanism is inclusive. It is society's job to be all-inclusive and to make sure no thought process is excluded, and we must indeed work for such a society. However, a Humanist group should be open only to Humanists because we have shared objectives to pursue and common goals to attain. In our context, we need to think in organizational mode. The organizational mode has its own hazards undoubtedly—frequently we are caught up in organizational identities; and at times the organization we belong to becomes our own identity. Is that not why some Humanist groups are in conflict with each other? Our identity I believe should be as human beings, first and last—an identity that we realize best through Humanism.

I have advocated that Humanists have to go beyond religion and embrace other fields of human activity, like economics and politics, but I would also like to emphasize the importance of continuing to critically evaluate religion. My proposals are not about abandoning old duties, but about recognizing new ones. I am also asking for a deepening of our identity at the same time as broadening our embrace: let there be no doubt—we are children of reason, and as Edd Doerr said 'let passion fill your sails, but let reason be your rudder'. Humanists need to continue to safeguard the individual's liberty of conscience by advocating truly secular states, and we should also strive for secular societies. There is a new tendency among Humanists now: when some of us criticize religion we are exhorted to be positive, not negative. Yet, as Levi Fragell asked, what is negative about restoring common sense? Voltaire warned us that people who believe absurdities also commit atrocities and we need to protect ourselves and others



from fanaticism. Where necessary, Humanism has to destroy so that the way for the new and the better is created. Why should religion be spared from our critical gaze?

### **Humanism is thixotropic**

As we go out into society and we try to influence people with our rational, secular, liberating, modern ideas, we will help humanize our society. Whether people join our organizations or not is less important than achieving a society built on human values. A society that is built on universal human values will be a Humanist one, and that is what we desire.

The crucial challenge for us, and in fact the challenge to the Humanism of this century, will be: 'How shall we extend the values of Humanism to the present and future world condition?' The answer I believe can be found in ketchup. Ketchup is thixotropic—it is both liquid and solid. And so is Humanism, which can destroy the bad as well as rebuild for the better—it has done so in the past and can do so in the future. Also, Humanism can be organized as in the context of the IHEU and its member organizations; but it can also be a movement. Since we look at our tradition as a human tradition that exists within and without our

groups, we should be able to build alliances with people, even outside our groups, to achieve our common purposes. So for me the crucial question is: 'How can Humanism retain its dual, thixotropic identity of destroyer and creator; or of organization and of movement so as to pave the way for a new civilization?'

The answer to this question shall hold the key to the future of our hopes, and indeed the answer to the problem of the future of Humanism.

## The future of international Humanism and the IHEU

*Levi Fragell\**

This article deals more with strategies than with the ideal objectives of Humanism. In order to avoid any misunderstanding of what is my greatest wish and fundamental purpose, I would therefore like to state briefly what I consider to be the primary focus, indeed the very *raison d'être*, of the organized Humanist movement: it is a campaign to achieve an open society in which individuals may freely and equally practice their chosen life stance, and in which the human potential is realized to the benefit of the individual and the community at large.

It is, however, not my intention to elaborate here on what such a society would comprise or which aspects of human potential would be of the greatest significance within this context. There are others who are better qualified than I to debate the philosophical tenets and priorities of Humanism. As president of the IHEU in this anniversary year of 2002, I would like to share with my readers some of the thoughts that have come to my mind, as a result of both my professional experience as a communication advisor and my growing concern in recent years as regards the development of the IHEU as an organization. Humanism is a life stance greatly in keeping with our times, and is therefore without doubt an alternative that holds great appeal for the enlightened, knowledgeable masses of today. But only a tiny fraction of those who truly share our views have sought the membership of a humanist organization.

One obvious reason why so many people with a humanist orientation do not participate in our organization, is that they have not really understood what we stand for—and that they often do not even know that we exist. This is, surely, at least half the explanation. However, since many others clearly feel that it is possible to be a Humanist without needing to be part of a humanist organization, we must also seek additional explanations. Many of our associations do not offer members any specific advantages or 'benefits'. The annual membership fee thus becomes a diffusely grounded moral obligation, while a number of other organizations deal more effectively and discernibly with the individual issues that together form the basis for the Humanist platform—from euthanasia to human rights.

This article will take a closer look at the problems that these two obstacles pose to the development of the IHEU, namely:

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- 1 the fact that a majority of the world's secular population has not discovered the existence of the international Humanist movement, and
- 2 the fact that many of our local organizations do not seem to hold any definable appeal for people who essentially advocate a Humanist life stance.

Before I proceed, I would like to assure my readers that I take an optimistic view of the outlook for the IHEU in years to come. I am convinced that the future of Humanism is bright, that it will emerge as a natural choice of life stance as religions gradually lose ground.

### Visibility

The IHEU was founded by a group of prominent thinkers and cultural figures. They gave the organization a substance and merit that still stand us in good stead. With names such as Sir Julian Huxley, Lord Boyd Orr, Jaap van Praag and Harold Blackham among the founders we have been viewed with respect. What the founding forum may perhaps have lacked, in my view, were individuals with experience from political life, marketing and media. At least this kind of expertise was not fully incorporated into the start-up phases. The organization's name, International Humanist and Ethical Union, is so heavy that even our own members have trouble remembering it, and the acronym IHEU is virtually unpronounceable in most languages. It is much simpler for organizations such as Amnesty International, the Red Cross, Save the Children, etc., whose names are easy to grasp and remember.

It is true that many national Humanist groups have straightforward names, such as *Humanistisch Verbond* or Humanist Association, and it is a fact this does not automatically lead to greater numbers of members than organizations with less clear, more elaborate names, such as *Human-Etisk Forbund* in Norway, my own country. Increased growth in the local organizations will be due to many factors, but there can be no doubt that the application of a common naming principle would make us more visible as an *international* movement. Nor can there be any doubt that the individual national groups would benefit from belonging to an easily identifiable, well-known world organization, which would define us all—large and small alike—as part of a recognized global community. I have argued for this view within the IHEU for over 25 years. I have been pleased to note that organizations in Germany and Sweden have understood the importance of this line of thinking, and have taken the difficult step of changing their names. Such adaptation is not possible in many groups for local reasons that I fully respect, but whether one is known as a rationalist, freethinker, secularist or atheist, it is still possible to include words like Humanist or Humanism in a logo, in information material, on letterhead stationery, journal covers, etc.

There are those who believe that this strategy is designed to make our organizations more uniform. They fear that it is part of an effort to remove or moderate the radical, critical or sceptical profile that characterizes those of our member groups whose roots lie in the rationalist and freethinking traditions. Let me emphasize that this is in no way the case. On the contrary, I consider the IHEU's diversity to be a great virtue. It goes without saying that humanists in the open and

tolerant Netherlands face other challenges than the need to criticize the Christian Church, while many Polish humanists consider religious anti-Humanism to pose their greatest problem. While superstition and 'spiritual' fraud are only marginal problems in Western Europe, they are widespread in Indian society. There are many who speak of dogmatic Humanism in reference to groups who delineate the critical frontlines of Humanism, but in my opinion it is often the accepting, 'nice' form of Humanism that is dogmatic—in the view of its propounders it is the others who have lost sight of what 'genuine' Humanism is about.

So let me state once again: the IHEU's diversity is not a weakness but a strength. But this does not mean that we should distance ourselves from one another by means of unrecognizable identities. We are all Humanists. In many countries, however, the term 'humanism' has more than one meaning, and IHEU local groups are concerned about being misconstrued as advocates of movements that utilize this term in a manner different from ours. But where in the science of semantics does one find a word that cannot have more than a single meaning? If socialists, conservatives, democrats and Christians had put off giving themselves names until their designations were absolutely unambiguous, there would have been few political parties and very small congregations. Naturally, I understand the problem that arises from multiple meanings of the term humanism that are just as legitimate as 'our' humanism. They describe different traditions within education, culture, politics and charity. But why should we bow out when humanism as a specific secular life stance is defined as one of the primary meanings of the word in most of the world's best known dictionaries. Here are a few examples.

- *Little Oxford Dictionary* (1995) contains only one definition: 'Humanism: non-religious philosophy, based on liberal human values'.
- *Collins Concise Dictionary* (1995): 'Humanism: the rejection of religion in favour of the advancement of humanity by its own efforts.' (One of several definitions listed.)
- *Chambers* (1994): 'Humanism: any system which puts human interest and the mind of man paramount, rejection of the supernatural, belief in God etc.' (One of several definitions listed.)
- *Chambers, mini edition* (1995): 'Humanism: seeking without religion, the best in and for human beings.' (The one and only definition.)

The founding pioneers could have selected a different name during their discussions in Amsterdam in 1952. But since the word humanism was chosen, it seems foolish not to apply greater effort to profile it—otherwise we risk finding ourselves deleted from future editions of dictionaries.

The British Humanist and philosopher Harry Stopes-Roe is one of my international friends who has also shown a keen interest in the identity problem of IHEU. Together we drafted a statement in 1988, *The Humanist Identity*, which was signed by Harold Blackham, Corliss Lamont, Rob Tielman, Harry Stopes-Roe and myself. The statement asserts among other things:

‘All Humanists, nationally and internationally, should always use the one word Humanism as the name of Humanism: no added adjective ...’

The statement continues with:

‘If the International Humanist and Ethical Union does not succeed in getting the groups in our movement to identify themselves as Humanists within very few years, the already weak organization of Humanists will die and become one of the less important episodes of the changing twentieth century.’

Today I not only believe in the survival of the IHEU, I also believe that the twenty-first century will be the century in which Humanism comes into its own. My optimism is based on recent global statistics that show that the non-religious individuals are the fastest-growing category of all. (*World Christian Encyclopedia* 2001). While the number of Christians is three times larger than it was a hundred years ago, and the number of Muslims has increased six times over the same period, the number of individuals without any form of religious association has leapt from three million to nine hundred million, which is a factor of three hundred. This development is unprecedented in human history. There are many, many millions of people out there who basically advocate the Humanist alternative.

We have just embarked upon the twenty-first century. The alarm expressed in the 1988 statement has not become less significant, but let us reinterpret it in the following way. Organized Humanism did not become what it might and should have become in the twentieth century, primarily because we did not settle on a common strategy for identifying our international organization. Let us not make the same mistake over again. Let us invite the millions to join us as *Humanists*.

### **What is the appeal?**

Why should Humanists join a Humanist organization? Is it not possible for each individual to be a Humanist in private? Humanists do not need to go to churches or temples to receive a blessing or find redemption. Organized Humanists seem to think, in a somewhat moralistic way, that joining us is a matter of idealism and solidarity. Of course there are idealists who feel obliged to support our work, but since the world is full of good causes many Humanists may feel that we have not always chosen the most essential ones. To encourage people to join and pay our annual fees there needs to be some special advantage or benefit associated with the membership, such as the satisfaction of participating in the fight to right some of the wrongs of today’s world. But issues of this nature are usually dealt with by groups and organizations that have been set up precisely to attack or defend particular issues.

Are there causes that the Humanists support that are not also dealt with by one or more of these specific, usually dynamic entities, offering emotional fellowship and enthusiasm? Yes, some of our national and local groups are able to offer this kind of uniqueness, conveying a message that others do not care about or do not

dare to propagate. It may be particular human rights connected to the freedom of conscience, scientific knowledge in superstitious cultures, sexual freedom in traditional societies, exposing fraud in religion, etc. Such groups provide members and followers with a feeling of individual importance. The members not only contribute to the cause, they also receive something in return: emotional satisfaction. To these groups I say: keep up the good work. Do not let philosophical or intellectual claims about another or more correct Humanism distract you. But please be aware of it when the problems you deal with have been resolved or have been reduced to minor faults in your society. Do not chase predators that have already become extinct.

The situation faced by many Humanist organizations is that some or all of their specific causes have already won or they have lost importance, and others will in the future be made up for by the continuing development towards a more open and tolerant society. In Europe, for instance, the separation of church and state is on the political agenda even in countries that still have religious constitutions, and within a generation the secular society will be the normal. It is most urgent that Humanist organizations that are influenced by this general development should deal more systematically with growth (survival?) strategies. And since we consider Humanism to be an alternative to religions, we should take a closer look at the strategies of these religious 'life stance competitors' to see if they have anything to teach us.

The larger religions of the world are among the most stable cultural phenomena in existence. Despite what their followers prefer to believe, however, neither their doctrines nor the extent of their organization is everlasting, but they are far more resilient than any other movements. No other organizations can trace their traditions back several hundreds and even thousands of years.

### **What makes a life stance viable?**

Humanism is concerned with the same kinds of 'deeper' questions as traditional religion, and generates a comparable identity and communal feeling among its followers. But does this mean that our secular life stance can develop the same ability as the religions to survive throughout the ages, so that we can aspire to remain a viable alternative in the future? The answer to this question is yes, but only if we can identify precisely what it is about the nature of religion that allows it to take root under even the most difficult conditions. And then we must ask ourselves if we can or want to integrate similar qualities in the organizing of Humanism.

### **Various explanations**

Theologians often claim that the reason for a religion's success lies in supernatural events. It is an act of God, or the Holy Spirit has given his followers strength and courage. Humanists do not accept this kind of mystical explanation. Of greater interest to us are the claims concerning the power of the believer's fervor

and willingness to sacrifice. Many believe that it is this deeply-felt, 'personal' conviction that helps to keep religion alive, and it is certainly true that devoutness and faith have been powerful forces during periods of the history of religion, particularly during times of revival, proselytizing zeal and cultural conflict. But in most countries and societies we can compare ourselves with, this intense form of religion is atypical for the day-to-day lives of the citizens. A variety of studies have shown that a majority of the members of broad-based popular Churches do not sustain such deep, personal convictions. They do not pray, do not attend church services and are unable to explain the fundamental principles of their own religion. Moreover, there is much that indicates that religious communities that place a high premium on personal conviction gradually lose their support, and often fade quietly away.

The quality of the ideological message is not a successful measure of the ability of a life stance to survive into the future in an organized fashion, although this optimistic premise is woven into the utopian rhetoric of all religions, where the 'gospel' is endowed with eternal validity and a unique, timeless 'power to redeem'. This is not to imply that the substance of the message is immaterial, especially as concerns moral credibility. But were it truly the case that the relevance and importance of an issue would be enough to ensure the survival of any philosophical undertaking, then the world's organizations for nature conservation would be assured of immortality. In reality, even the genuinely life-saving causes are fighting to survive, and each reaches only a small fraction of a country's population.

The justification for the establishment of the IHEU is founded on our ideal objectives, and I am in no way advocating that we should cease fighting for Humanism's ideals, or lessen our commitment to justice, compassion and freedom of thought. The organization is a channel by which to achieve our objectives, but its structure and existence are sustained by human needs, not by the correct opinions.

### **Fundamental needs**

In my view, the key to ensuring a stable organization of a future secular life stance association does not lie in attempting to emulate the emotional devotion and ideological emphasis of religion. If we disregard the importance of political power and economic privilege, I believe that the success of religion in a historical perspective first and foremost is due to its ability to meet specific, fundamental, human needs that are not satisfied elsewhere.

Such needs include:

- 1 the need for life-cycle ceremonies, and
- 2 the need for care services during life crises.

The fact that religious communities fulfil precisely these needs is more than anything else the reason why religion continues to appeal to the modern masses.

I believe that the continued existence of organized Humanism in the secular world of tomorrow hinges upon our willingness and ability to establish appropriate mechanisms for dealing with our cultures' fundamental human social needs in a comparable fashion.

### **Ceremonies**

As regards ceremonies, the greatest, most wide-ranging need among registered and unregistered Humanists is the need for a Humanist funeral ceremony. As I mentioned, a hundred years ago there were three million non-religious people in this world. Today the number is nine hundred million. Those who have left religion during the last couple of generations are aging, and there will soon be a dramatic increase of the death-rate among non-believers.

Those who have helped to provide services in connection with Humanist funeral ceremonies know that this involves needs far beyond the technical arrangements. If we do not focus our immediate attention on implementing measures to deal with this challenge, then I fear there will be negative repercussions for Humanist organizations as a whole.

Ceremonies associated with birth, coming of age, marriage and death have been monopolized by religions, but are of course expressions of a common culture, connected to family traditions and social patterns. Some Humanist groups have augmented their success by developing alternatives for these events. In my own country, for instance, we gather 9000 young men and women at Humanist coming of age ceremonies each year. More than 100,000 relatives and friends attend these ceremonies, which highlight Humanist views and values. The question of whether ceremonies in themselves are crucial to a life stance is obviously debatable. Viewed in relief against need and injustice in the world it is easy to find polemical arguments against giving priority to ceremonies. But then I must pose the following questions: do we not wish to be perceived as a broad-based, popular life stance organization that provides common ground for the vast number of individuals who do not believe in religious dogmas? Would not such an organization help to promote true freedom of choice and integrity in life stance issues? Is it not also an ethical challenge for Humanists to help to meet the human needs underlying such life-cycle ceremonies? In what other situations would we have a similar opportunity to present our Humanist ideals to a broader public?

### **Care services**

The other fundamental need met under the auspices of religious communities is the need for care services in times of life crises. This applies particularly in cases of serious illness and death, but also in situations involving personal traumas or large-scale disasters. (In some countries, Humanists have developed expertise and services within this sphere, and participate alongside members of the clergy at hospitals, prisons and in private home visits.) Priests and religious leaders are active and visible in media-covered catastrophes and disasters, which helps to sustain the image of religion—and religion alone—as a caregiver for people in the throes of the most difficult times of their lives. In my view, these efforts sometimes seem intrusive, and even leave the impression that the life stance representatives may be exploiting the situation to promote their own interests. It seems to me, however, that Humanists should be represented in all private or

public crisis situations where traditional religion is represented, although our services should be offered discreetly and made primarily available to those who seek them out.

In discussions about the participation of Humanists in such care functions it is often pointed out that these services are usually better provided by medical personnel or social workers, but surely this is not a question of one versus the other. Healthcare personnel and Humanist advisors would fill complementary roles. Clearly, Humanists who wish to provide assistance in times of serious crisis will need special training, perhaps even academic qualifications. (Humanist advisors in the Netherlands, Belgium and the USA have usually completed a special training.) However, a care service strategy must encompass several different levels, and indeed it is the lowest level—the ground level so to speak—that may prove most crucial to the organization, the level where we take care of one another as friends and fellow human beings. No special training is required to visit a member who is confined to a convalescent home. Naturally, a broad-based Humanist organization—like any open religious society—will have a substantial number of members who are not interested in such personal involvement in their lives, except under extraordinary circumstances such as large-scale tragedies or in times of extreme personal difficulties. But how do we relate to those Humanists who have joined us because they need to belong to a group that cares?

This kind of question was not in focus when IHEU was established in 1952. After two world wars and international crises our founding leaders had visions about a better and more peaceful world, and a dream that Humanism would be the force that could move the world ahead. There are no reasons to abandon their great expectations. Looking at the present world situation visions of global peace and justice are needed more than ever and may be what today's Humanists need to find new hope and courage. But organizations consist of structures, practical choices, strategies and ... people! In the future we must give much more attention to organization building. But Humanist organization should never be a goal in itself, though. It is the tool with which we endeavor to achieve our goals.

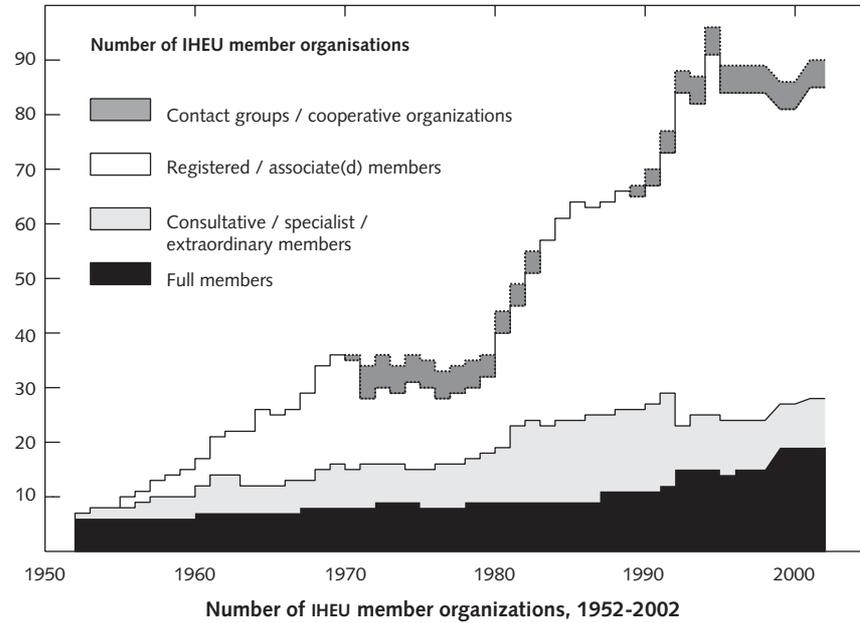
### **Can the goals be the method?**

When I have discussed organizational matters with humanist friends, especially the younger ones, they often ask: cannot the campaigning for the Humanist goals in itself be the method that fulfils the two strategies of:

- 1 giving Humanism a visible identity and
- 2 being attractive for potential members.

I would answer that pointing at our goals is important for both of these strategies. First and foremost because without the goals we would have had no Humanism, but also because activity causes both visibility and emotions. But the problem will often be that Humanism consists of a hundred causes—and stabilizing structures must have a more permanent character, and must not be divisive on the basis of politics.

Partly the question also concerns the organization model we have in mind. Do we want to build a large organization, with members at all levels of society, or



are we satisfied with being smaller? As you will have understood from this article *my* leading star is not the slogan 'small is beautiful'.

The most important effects of the Humanist ideas and ideals are not their marketing potentials, they are much more important. The fight for human rights, against suppression and injustice, for self-determination and self-respect—is not a question of pragmatic public relation. It is a question about the organization's heartbeat.

## Future

In the former section, Babu Gogineni (Executive Director of IHEU) and Levi Fragell (President of IHEU) offered their ideological and organizational views. Their statements have been circulated among a representative sample of young humanists from around the world, who were invited to react to the issues raised, and to comment on the ideas proposed. In inviting young humanist leaders, we took into consideration age, gender balance, voices from, and concerns for different continents and for viewpoints being formulated in varying political contexts. Written for a non-academic publication, and within severe constraints of length imposed by the editors, no doubt this collection of essays and reactions reflects a vibrant Humanist world, no longer uniquely Western, reflecting on itself, evaluating opportunities and viewing the ideas of others both critically as well as with respect.

And just as in the real Humanist world, they capture the concerns of those who are engaged in practical action, as well as the interests of those who are involved in theoretical reflection.

Bert Gasenbeek and Babu Gogineni

## How to grow an elephant?

In response to Babu Gogineni and Levi Fragell pondering the future of humanism

*Andrzej Dominiczak\**

I am not a believer, in any sense of the word. I do not believe in the human rational potential, nor do I believe in freedom, dignity or human rights. I do not believe—I know! I know that rational thinking provides the best possible way of understanding the universe and the best way of understanding human life—social and individual. I also know that it provides the best methods of solving human problems and the best tools for planning progress towards a happier future. As regards freedom, dignity and human rights, I believe they constitute the necessary preconditions for an organization of the human world in which ‘human potential is realized for the benefit of both individuals and the community at large’. I know and I understand, but I do not claim that this knowledge and understanding are of a scientific character. They are, however, based on the same principles of cognition on which the scientific method has been built. Time and time again, they have been verified so conclusively that they should at least be granted the status of ‘instrumental knowledge’ that could form a solid basis and justification for our actions.

Despite these apparently rationalistic claims, the humanism I advocate is equally passionate and fired by a strong will. As a philosophy of freedom and as an ethical system that gave rise to the idea of dignity for all, humanism must be vigorously involved in the defense of rights and liberties and it must be wrathful always, when people are humiliated or enslaved by others. I do not, however, share the opinion that ‘the humanism of this century has to be an angry humanism’. If we truly are the *children of reason* we should simply be more flexible: angry when necessary, compassionate if need be, open to dialogue when both sides share goals and values, and ironic—in the sense ascribed to this concept by Richard Rorty—to prevent our community from stagnating and becoming excessively moralistic.

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### Scrutinizing science and religion

Should humanism be concerned with cosmological questions about the origins of the universe? Is it true, as Babu Gogineni asserts, that humanism is nothing if it is not a continuous interrogation about our universe and our place in it? No! We should not try to answer every question. Here lies one of the many differences between humanism and religion with its totalitarian tendency to embrace all aspects of human life. Scientific questions should be left to scientists. Of course, we must use their findings to deepen our understanding of the world and improve the quality of our lives—but not without some kind of scrutiny. Despite our full support for the ideal of scientific inquiry, we must not create a religion of science. Particularly, we should not worship science as a social institution, as it is often a victim of the same common fallacies as we all are, or of the fallacies created by its own specific culture. As Bertrand Russell once said:

‘University life is so different from life in the world at large that men who live in an academic milieu tend to be unaware of the preoccupations and problems of ordinary men and women. [...] Academic institutions, therefore, useful as they are, are not adequate guardians of the interests of civilisation.’

Indeed, there are good reasons not to abstain from criticizing science—but on no account should we refrain from criticizing religion. Humanism, despite widespread misconceptions, has nothing in common with religion although it is true, as Fragell points out, that we are concerned with the same kind of ‘deeper’ questions as traditional religion. ‘I do not think, however, that it is the pursuit of truth that is most important to us, not its possession’. Humanists are just as interested in possessing truth as the religious. Humanists, however, know that the only way to truth leads through collective scientific pursuit. What we really reject, in clear opposition to the religious, is the illusion of ‘absolute truth’—a dangerous and powerful concept, as it appeals to people’s most intrinsic need to make sense of life, and thus offers a handy tool for those who seek control of our way of thinking.

The principal difference between humanism and religion lies in the ‘methodology of inquiry’. We refer our ‘deep questions’ to ourselves, while the religious ask their supernatural authorities—or rather their self-appointed, earthly representatives. We expect the answers to be based on evidence obtained in fully controlled conditions, to be coherent, to be double or triple checked—whereas they accept them merely by virtue of faith.

What makes the method of religion particularly pernicious, however, is its aversion to doubt—the first source of free inquiry. The faithful are not allowed to raise doubts because most deities for some reason find them highly offensive. Humanists, on the contrary, are obliged to question any findings, to verify any claims and to look for better theories providing more reliable answers to their ‘deeper’ questions.

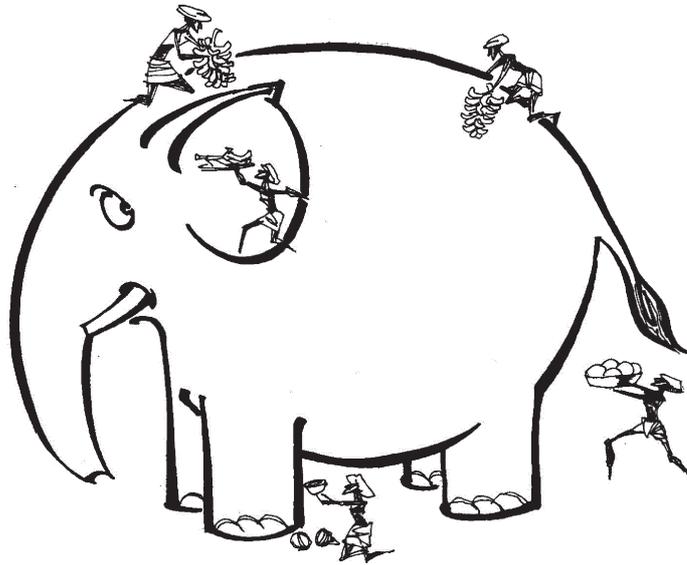
**Why close the door?**

In the paragraph devoted to deepening our identity, Babu Gogineni says that humanist groups should be open only to humanists, because ‘we have shared objectives to pursue and common goals to attain’. Fair enough, but what about those faithful who declare their full support for our goals and objectives? Over the years, we have been approached by a number of religiously minded people who expressed a wish to join our organization. They agreed with our ‘declaration of values’, thus meeting our operational definition of a humanist, as being anyone who entirely accepts its content. Why should we close our doors to them and how could we justify this decision? We finally invited them into our association—on condition, however, that they did not believe in Hell. In our opinion the idea of eternal punishment is more incompatible with the humanist worldview than a vague need for the sacred from which they seemed to suffer. What at first was meant to be a semi-humorous, provisional solution, in the course of time turned into standard practice, particularly when we realized that our activities were not in any way hindered by the presence of the religiously-minded in our midst. On the contrary, they even supported some highly controversial projects that were finally rejected by the majority of the ‘genuine’ humanists. They backed the proposal to launch a humorous campaign to clone the Pope, and supported a project to file a motion with the Constitutional Tribunal to outlaw the Catholic Church as an institution clearly practicing and supporting discrimination against women and sexual minorities. I do not claim that this is an ideal solution for all. I simply want to say that we should avoid the tendency to adopt seemingly obvious, rigid solutions where more subtle, creative and friendly solutions might be possible.

**Be more creative!**

Generally speaking, it is the shortage of creative solutions, creative thinking and creative vision that I miss most in both contributions. If we really want to grow our ‘humanist elephant’, we need more courageous and visionary thinking, which in my opinion is as important as ‘optimism of will’, and probably more important than a better name for our international organization. The creativity that I have in mind should mostly take the form of concrete, spectacular projects that would appeal to people’s imagination, hopes and hearts. This is not meant to diminish the role of programs aimed at meeting basic human needs, for life-cycle ceremonies or for care services during life crises, whose importance is so convincingly shown by Levi Fragell. It is merely a suggestion about how to enrich our philosophy and politics.

Levi Fragell ponders why the rapidly growing number of unbelievers in the world does not lead to a proportional growth of the humanist movement. He submits that many idealists and humanists who feel obliged to support our work do not join the humanist movement because the world is full of good causes, and many humanists may feel that we have not always chosen the most essential ones. Fragell believes that many of those who lost their faith replaced their reli-



gion with some kind of subtle secular morality and a strong sense of social solidarity. I am afraid that this picture is far too bright. It is rather moral and social indifference that prevails among the new unbelievers. What today's believers as well as unbelievers expect from life is rudimentary excitement and satisfaction derived from defeating their neighbors in a global game of 'win or lose'. This is the main reason that millions of unbelievers do not join the humanist movement or any other movement. They do not care, either about humanism, or about any other 'ism'. In my view, it is this moral and philosophical apathy and nihilism that we must be ready to challenge in the future if we really want to replace faith and obedience with reason and compassion.

### **What about suffering and happiness?**

Lastly, I would like to refer briefly to 'suffering' and 'happiness', two basic forces in our lives that are almost entirely ignored by both writers. Contemporary humanism has been based on the idea of the inherent dignity of all members of the human family. The emotional dimension of human life, however, somehow escaped our attention, although, as compassionate naturalists, we can't simply deny the importance of joy and pain as universally understood experiences shared by all people.

The concept of dignity in its modern sense is rarely understood and in fact has been rejected by many philosophers as a notion devoid of meaning. I don't agree with this view (the social sciences tell a lot about human dignity), but there is no

doubt that we have not yet succeeded in devising a satisfactory definition of dignity. Furthermore, the humanist and religious concepts of dignity are entirely incompatible, the former having been derived from the concept of human cognitive and moral autonomy, while the latter, on the contrary, arises from the lack of any intellectual or moral independence. This is not to say that we should abandon speaking of dignity altogether, but we should be aware of its deficiencies and of the difficulties arising from its confused sense and status.

To understand suffering and happiness we need no words at all. Not even Christianity has succeeded in corrupting their meaning, although it created a whole mythology to justify its perverted and politically motivated ethics of suffering as a positive value, and happiness as a posthumous promise for the meek. Indeed, it is this morality of slaves that has been the main cause of human misery throughout the ages. Humanists must never forget this basic truth, and must never cease to speak about human suffering and happiness, while pursuing their intellectually more sophisticated goals.

# Sticking points: a response to the future of Humanism

Some things stick in the mind

*Shirley Dent\**

Let me tell you about a couple of things that stuck in the adolescent mind of this writer when she was LBH (Living Before Humanism).

A doubting, rapidly-lapsing London Anglo-Irish Catholic girl (labels, as Levi Fragell notes, are things twenty-first century Humanism is concerned with and I will return to this point later), I used to hang-out, knock-about, okay downright flirt, with the lads from the local Catholic College. And I remember a few of these lads getting, shall we say, over-excited and chanting pro-IRA slogans: 'Oh-Ah-Up-the-RA' etc. Most—all of them—had about as much chance of a skirmish with the Provos as I have of an encounter with the Virgin Mary Incarnate. What stuck with me about this incident was the mashed up, but strongly spiced, commitment to a political position based on religious heritage. That's one point.

The other point? There is/was no argument in these slogans. None. Whatever the political reasoning behind the struggle for an Irish (rather than Catholic) republic, or for power-sharing in Northern Ireland, it just completely gave way to religious romanticism. We hear a lot about the threat to humanist values from the religious right. I think humanist values are equally endangered by a reactionary religious romanticism.

So where do we go from here? The eminent historian and Humanist, Romila Thapar, said 'You cannot right the wrongs of history. They're already done'. But you can make a better future for humanity. This is Humanism's great potential. We are freethinkers, rationalists, unbounded by roots (particularly religious roots), but inspired by routes. Routes both as ways out for human suffering—be those routes scientific, political, social, cultural or aesthetic—and ways into what Babu Gogineni describes as 'our common humanity' and 'humankind's common destiny'. This is our great potential. But we have problems. We are stuck.

First, an observation. Go out in the street and ask a stranger—any stranger will do—: 'Have you heard of any of these organizations: the IRA, Al-Qaeda, and last but not least, the IHEU?' I guarantee you that the vast majority will have heard of

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the first two, but will be nowhere near the foggiest with the last. To my mind this is a tragedy.

But wait, I hear you protest, these are *terrorist* organizations. People have heard of them because of the terror they have unleashed on the world. So your argument is that in the battle for ideas—and that is what these terrorist organizations are ultimately about (think, for example, what focus has been thrown on political Islam's ideas by the World Trade Center attacks)—terror wins? *Couragio*, I say.

Similarly, ask your stranger what they understand by Republicanism, Nationalism, Fundamentalism, Christianity, Islam and Humanism, and I suspect the one they will fumble for and fudge is Humanism.

We can call ourselves whatever we like, label ourselves up to the eyeballs. Personally, I don't care what we call ourselves at a national or international level—there are bigger arguments to be won or lost—but if the idea, the vision, isn't clear and concise, then forget it. A name will not inspire commitment or instigate change. Ideas about how the world could be a better place will. At the end of the day, it is not for us to scratch our heads about a name. If those nine hundred million secularists out there commit themselves to the International Humanist body, they will let us know what they want to be called. The problem at the moment is that Humanism has lost its way as a leader. We need to reclaim the ideas at the heart of Humanism.

Before putting forward one conception of those ideas, let me, from my introductory comments, extrapolate on another problem facing us. Religion, in my lifetime, is still doing a good propaganda job. We are doing a bad one. Religion goes forward with emotion. It is not afraid to put its bloody martyrs on posters and billboards, to propagate the double binds of injustice turned into cause and brutality romanticized.

Well let's talk about those other 'religious martyrs', the martyrs not *for* but *to* religion. The women stoned, beheaded and lashed under Shar'ia law last year. The 'rat children', whose plight Zaffarullah Khan exposed in his prize-winning essay for the IHEU International Essay Competition for Youth in 2000, deposited at a tomb in Gujarat when born to 'ensure' continued fertility for their parents—they have an iron-cap locked on their skulls, preventing mental development, they are mutilated and stunted before they are hardly aware of the world so that they may serve as human-collection plates in a tomb. The young girl in the 'civilized' USA, whipped to death by her Jehovah Witness parents as they administered the biblical punishment of forty lashes minus one three times. I could go on. I won't. In comparison with the above, I think ceremonies and care services should be the least concerns of the international body. They are undoubtedly needed and wanted, but individual countries have responded well to this need while paying due respect to those individual countries' cultural traditions and laws. We are not going to build a ground swell of support on the basis that someone wants a nice wedding or a good send-off.

I will not apologize for feeling emotional about the above cases. We are so proud of our rationality. But we should not underestimate the power of emotion to

spark a response, to make people aware, to make people committed to change. If Babu Gogineni is right that the 'Humanism of this century has to be an angry Humanism ... willing to assert itself', then let it be angry out there. Give the world these images of human victims nailed to the stake of religious servitude, deprived and dying in the name of the un-provable, the intolerant, the inhumane. But give the world something else as well. Give the world reason. Reason which is an engagement of free and open debate.

We need instead to build an international momentum, a coherent network. IHEU needs to be the hub, the spyglass that focuses diverse beams. The trust-keeper of reason. Take the appalling story of the rat children—what is the international strategy for gaining media coverage for this story? How do we get it as a feature in the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, *Marie Claire*? Where is our network of international media contacts? Who are our friends?

Imagine we had an international group connected with the media, to whom we could feed stories. Imagine we had a group of eminent scientists, worldwide, whom we could support and who would support us. Imagine we had such a grouping in politics. Work needs to be done to nurture and gather those who are with us who have influence. Grass roots are great, but an influential network of supporters equals impact. We have more friends than we realise.

And this is my far-from-immaculate conception of *why* we should bother to cohere, co-operate and co-exist in such a way. Because after the emotional shock-wave, we don't ride out on a crest of emotion. We have an answer. What is the answer, you ask?

My answer is: I do not have *the* answer. This is the most rational and the only position I can take. The answers are out there and we need to stick to our guns to ensure that they are not lost, silenced, or discarded. Our strength is that we do not have one *idea*, but that Humanism is a forum for human ideas. It is this forum of free-expression and freethinking—the root-core and route-forward of progress and the scientific method—that is under attack at an international level. You do not have to be Lady Macbeth to say, in these circumstances, 'screw your courage to the sticking place.'

## Humanism in a humane world

Free inquiry and free development in a free world: the enlarged cultural and historical perspective—*l'humanité oblige* or humanity obliges

Marc Campine\*

### Comparative chronology in a chronological community?

Since the dawn of time, since the beginning of the chronology of Homo Sapiens, our direct ancestors diversified and spread over the entire world, resulting in a multitude of histories and cultures. The possible relationship with other branches of the human tree at the beginning of our chronology can unfortunately not be treated: essentially we remain at present as one, as one human species.

It has, however, been just recently in our chronology that humankind has once again come together in a world, within a framework stretching all over our planet, essentially living in a global village. A variety of histories have come together, and humankind, interlinked, continues its path necessarily together. The challenges posed to humanity regarding global development, and beyond, appear 'historically' without precedent. What values will allow continuing development of humanity? Are we furthermore in need of a recalibrated, a new chronology?

### The human being in a human world?

Recognition of the human condition, relatively determining relationships to environments appears most essential. Biology has always been a factor. Strangely enough, only relatively recently through scientific endeavors, whilst studying the entire spectrum, the entire *Umwelt*, the biological condition of the human being, with its inherent 'logic' and its resulting predispositions, became an acknowledged fact. Apparently, however, sometimes only reluctant. One is tempted to wonder—why?

We can refer to the works of Richard Dawkins, Desmond Morris, Julian Huxley, and others as well for, essentially, an analysis of the 'nature of things', the most distinguished human being added.

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Compared to other living entities, human beings appear to possess, besides a degree of compatible biological dispositions, enhanced degrees of 'freedom', an enhanced set of capabilities to conceptualize and to intervene in the surrounding world. It has been debated in the philosophical realm, during respectable amounts of time already, to what extent 'human freedom' is guaranteed, and to what extent the 'human being' is determined. However, sincere incorporation of biological data other than to possibly cure illness has appeared, to put it carefully, somewhat problematic, not only in the philosophical realm. Meanwhile, humanity continued its activity.

The filling-in of the degree of freedom of humankind, compared to other biological entities, to conceptualize and construct its own world has, apparently, throughout our chronology been at stake in battles between worlds of ideas. These battles sometimes generated quite interesting thought-structures and expanding human horizons of insight, even though not all systems were equally realistic while accounting for the 'natural' parameters.

### **Humanity for a humane world?**

Birth, youth, procreation, old age and death, together with related existential experiences such as pain and joy, are experiences that humans share and which they share, intelligibly or not, with other living beings. These facts have resulted in questions and answers regarding the 'nature' of being. Whereas 'eternal' questions remained the same, answers often seemed inadequate for human beings. Continuing intellectual activity of humankind can be observed in refining these questions and validating the answers. The related human condition is, however, universal throughout time and geography.

How are we to relate these 'eternal' questions and possible answers to our present global framework and our technological world, to the world of instant communication and instant intervention that humanity has created and continues to create? A humane world for humanity?

### **Humankind and Humanism—an essentially enlarged cultural-historical perspective**

The latest 'segment' of 'temporal' perception has witnessed the rise of the humanist tradition as an institutionalized fact, as a recognized denomination, next to other denominations traditionally described as religions within the 'geographical' entity described as 'the West'. By no means, however, humanist thought and humanist conceptual heritage is limited to a region perceived as 'the West'. Humanism is a world affair, predispositions and parallels to it can be found in different geographical locations, throughout different timeframes. East-West interactions, for instance, also played an important role in the interactive development of Humanism, as recent academic research has shown.

Essentially, various cultural-historical branches of Humanism have come together in our present-day world. Within the dynamism of various renaissances,

such as the Western whirlwind Humanist Renaissance with capital R, released from the fifteenth century onwards, IHEU, with an acknowledgement of the enlarged cultural-historical perspective, can be considered as the judicial heir, an NGO following present international law, of the various regional renaissances, resulting in an organization, stimulating further development of a World-Renaissance, a Highlife, in which the human being will come to its own.

### **Humanism and humankind—freedom of inquiry, freedom of development, freedom in the world and traditions of freedom**

It has, however, in all time and in all places been a disposition within human beings to think freely, and accordingly to develop freely in a constructive way: mentioned dispositions can be traced back within a variety of cultural-historical traditions.

Being concerned with development of the whole of human potential in an objectified way, the principle of free inquiry is an essential point of departure for Humanism, stimulating free development—guiding principles within this perspective can be considered as freedom of belief, as well as freedom of make-belief, in necessary juxtaposition towards one another.

Within the framework of our present-day world, taking the possible enlarged cultural-historical perspective into account, one needs to refer to the essential contributions of the fourteenth IHEU conference, with its theme ‘Humanism for happiness and development’, held in Mumbai, India, 1999, regarding further development of the humanist tradition and the human potential, such as brought to bear by the efforts of the then newly appointed IHEU Executive director, Babu Gogineni.

Here, through a paper, it proved possible for me to disclose for the first time scientific data regarding the importance of the enlarged cultural-historical perspective, related to the need of interdenominational research, for Humanism, as an expression of research in the field of Humanist thought and comparative philosophy. Furthermore, centered around the theme East-West interactions, it proved possible to support the conference with a further, academically elaborated framework—influences of Eastern thought regarding Humanism through Ibn Rushd and the philosophy of Gautama would be treated. The present article is a brief elaboration of the same research conducted by myself in relationship to Humanism for the world of which IHEU is a genuine expression.

### **Comparative philosophy in a comparative world—interdenominational research and Humanist thought**

Secular societies appreciated by Humanism allow existence and interaction between various denominations within a same administrative area, ranging from, for instance, regional Western Europe to the global United Nations, creating exceptional possibilities regarding comparative research between various denominations, often in configurations unedited in human chronology. For the aca-

demic researcher in the field of humanist thought this implies possible related commitment to further introduce humanist conceptual heritage into the world of ideas, thereby possibly further contributing to Comparative philosophy in a comparative world.

Advocating a secular-democratic society, Humanism contributes to an exceptional frame of reference regarding research and exchange of thoughts between denominations. Given its commitment to the framework allowing interaction and dialogue, Humanism, with its rich conceptual heritage, should not remain on the sidelines concerning constructive dialogue. The shown enlarged cultural-historical perspective inherent within humanist heritage, already creates possible frameworks stimulating and catalyzing encounters.

Within this perspective, constructive exchange of thoughts can be mentioned between the Humanist and the Buddhist tradition in the region inhabited by the author. As an applied research-project in the field of comparative philosophy that proved possible for me to develop, the Humanist tradition would co-organize the first conference organizing and institutionalizing Buddhism. Whereas the Buddhist tradition would adopt humanist principles with regard to the secular society, the intellectual interaction would place the human potential within an enlarged conceptual perspective.

Efforts in consolidating an academic basis for well-founded interdenominational research, through the discipline of Comparative philosophy in relationship to Humanist thought, by myself continue.

Among others, it appeared and appears essential to me, regarding human rights, human dignity, to be aware of antecedents in interaction and exchange of ideas, between various cultural-historical groups, as possible enlarged frame of reference, for continued interaction.

### **Chronological conception and compatible chronology**

During sustained comparative philosophical research, various cultural-historical denominations, with their own appreciation of human chronology and chronological reference points, became objectified clear to me, often theoretically excluding one another concerning perceived positions in human chronology, through overlapping and/or conflicting chronological appreciations.

The larger variety of denominations maintain a general temporal frame of reference, organizing and developing human activity, foremost striking me as contributing to a unique perception of the world in the systems concerned. Shared perception of a timeframe clearly contributes to strength and endurance of various denominational communities. Chronological conception of the conceptual human being appears paramount.

### **Universal chronology in a united community**

Common chronological appreciation by conceptual human beings clearly constructively contributes to continued development of communities—At present

our world has become a global community allowing constructive global participation to the development of the human project. I therefore want to argue the importance of a shared, universal chronology, independent of specific denominations, stimulating the sense of belonging of the human being to a united community.

As the founding of the United Nations epitomizes a united commitment to a united community, I would like to advance the inauguration of the UN as a reference-mark, recalibrating chronological conception, maintaining an utmost respect for temporal appreciations within particular denominational structures.

Advancement of such commitment as a human and humanist cause, underlining the importance of shared human effort to developing a humane world, would be most appreciated by myself. Derived from the founding of the UN, the human project has continued to develop for over fifty cycles of UN chronology, in the UN Era, UNE, within our developing united world-community.

During the fiftieth anniversary of IHEU, the UN Era will have developed into its 57th year.

### **Humanist endeavour in a humanist era**

Noticing observed commitment to collective chronology, within various cultural-historical denominational communities, it strikes me that, at present, the humanist world has retained the standard Western chronological conception, essentially derived from a 'western' religious denominational community. In this year of celebration, I would like to delineate the importance of a shared chronology for the humanist denomination, the introduction of a Humanist Era. Appreciating the landmark event of the celebration of the inauguration of IHEU as a genuine commitment to universal Humanism, fifty years ago, we, together as humanists, can consider ourselves at present as living in the Glorious Year 50, Humanist Era, HE.

### **Humankind in a humane world: *l'humanité oblige*—humanity obliges**

Humanism as a humane expression of genuine commitment towards human development can at present be acknowledged as a genuine tradition. Given the degree of freedom of humankind to conceptualize and to construct its own world, compared to other living beings, with unprecedented dispositions to intervene in the natural world, the enhanced responsibility of humankind towards itself and its surroundings becomes apparent. Having to deal with complexities of construction, humankind should retain its commitment towards maintaining and developing a dignified society. Eternal questions will continue to be refined, although answers will remain partial. Whereas development of a humane world for humankind has always been associated with inquiry, research and education, the whole of human possibilities should be allowed to be developed, objectively and constructively, honouring the whole of human potential—*l'humanité oblige*, humanity obliges.

## Humanism: a social approach

*Hugo Estrella*\*

In order to respond carefully to the question of what are the prospects for Humanism in the years to come, one must necessarily take a look at the past to see what was right and what was wrong. What were the conditions that enabled humanists to enjoy equality, to make their own choices, to advance their ideas and institutions inside their—our—societies? On the other hand, it can also be interesting to look at the opposite side of the coin: what happened in societies where the Humanist approach was missing or was disregarded? I would like to take the Balkans as an example of the latter case, and from it, derive what I think is the best lesson of what should and should not be done.

For many of us, the Humanist stance is a very lonely one. Humanists are people that generally go against the stream, placing doubts on what others accept as absolute truths. From white flies to black sheep, according to the time and space we live in; ours is not the easiest way to go through life.

Living among religious people, or in a religious environment, is quite a normal situation and one that in general doesn't worry us. Secular institutions enrich our lives through the diversity they preserve and promote. We've been living together for years, and often even our parents or grandparents are believers. Where that is not the case, attacking religiously biased public institutions is a task we have never evaded.

As Babu Gogineni puts it, Humanism is like ketchup in some respects. And that dual capacity makes it more appealing. We feel we have to destroy the unequal order, and build a better one. Sometimes we are supported by the many, sometimes we are almost alone. But our usual tools are powerful: science, commitment, and bright personalities. But coming back to the point I wanted to raise: after being engaged in conflict research for many years, I observe that the religious dimension appears major in most conflicts.

The case of the Balkans is a typical one. People who had been living together for years suddenly turned their backs on each other and started a massacre of huge proportions. They all identified themselves and the enemy as members of a religious/ethnic community. We can hardly understand the issues that justified the

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war, but it happened. Croats, Serbs and Muslims could no longer live together. Different analysts agree on the fact that after decades of living in a system that took care of everything, even of balancing (in authoritarian ways) the expectations of the different groups inside the country, once Big Brother disappeared, the in-fighting between political leaders started fragmenting what was, once, united.

What were the categories to go back to in the conflict? How could they identify one another, protect themselves and their families from attacks, ethnic cleansing and slaughter? By recovering their lost identity—an identity based on ancient religious and ethnic roots. Pure Middle Ages. And slaughter, ethnic cleansing and systematic rape took place just as they had over a thousand years ago—but this time with the added destructive power of modern technology. We all know the result, and still have to deal with it. My question is, and I think it's a very important point for the coming debate: how can we, as humanists, help create a sense of community?

How can we create a new identity, satisfactory to everyone? Is it possible to promote the feeling that, being humanists, we are not alone, defenseless? I like the ketchup example, but I think we need to emphasize its solid component. Nobody wants to live a miserable life. It takes much energy and courage to fight all the time, for ourselves and for others. Humanism and the fight for a humanistic environment is a good choice, of course, and it has changed the world for the better. But while we know we can rely on each other, we must make this evident for all.

At a time in which the world is again witnessing the consequences of religion-driven violence, war and terrorism, our voice is needed more than ever. Religious leaders who have praised or tolerated violence as a stock part of their tools of salvation are now hypocritically moving away from the fire they started. And then, for reasons of greed or demagoguery, political leaders enter the game.

We have to be clear and we must be effective. Putting two and two together means showing how religious intolerance de-humanizes people and promotes violence, threatening the very existence of humanity. On the other hand we have to be effective in promoting humanist institutions—accepting that we may never get to be a consistent majority in terms of numbers but a strong and outspoken minority committed to a better world for all.

How can we move from our isolation? That I cannot answer, but we must be up to the task. The more we feel part of a community, the better we can work. IHEU is taking proper steps for networking, for identifying individuals and communities who have taken up the humanist stance. IHEU's role is, therefore, vital. But it does not replace the part that every national group and every humanist must play.

Personally I have enjoyed this sense of community since the very first moment I met an organized humanist group. And my activities, as well as those of the group of like-minded people who engaged with me, were pushed forward exponentially. Every day we are present in the social and political life of Argentina. We have won respect and a place of concern in people's minds, as well as in the media. Our existence is acknowledged, and we are speaking clearly about human rights, freedom, education and secularisation.

We are creating a community. If we succeed, then maybe in the future there will be fewer Balkan-like conflicts, rather the opposite: a community of reliable human fellow beings.

# Organizing Humanism

*Stephanie Kirmer\**

## **Can Humanism be like religion?**

I think that it's clear that spreading Humanism is the goal of both Mr. Gogineni's and Mr. Fragell's comments. Their chosen ways of achieving this goal are not nearly so similar. Mr. Fragell encourages us to make Humanism more palatable to a world community that is familiar with religion and its practices, while Mr. Gogineni believes that increasing the visibility and the effects of organized Humanism beyond the sphere of religion is a preferable course to take. Both Mr. Gogineni and Mr. Fragell comment on the difficulty in organizing Humanists. To adapt a Unitarian adage I was told once, it's like herding cats. Humanists are fiercely individualistic people.

What divides Humanism from religion is not how we behave or how we present our message; it's the content of our message. People call themselves Humanists because they believe in the power of human beings exercising their natural abilities of logic and reason. But saying it, without acting to advance those principles, makes the words hollow.

And there are very good reasons why it is imperative that Humanists be organized. The most convincing one, to me, is that there's no way to achieve the great things that Humanism has the potential for, unless we work together. We avow principles of reason and logic over fanaticism and dogma, and that is truly admirable. But keeping these principles to ourselves will achieve nothing. What we cannot do alone, we can do together.

When it comes to the sorts of organizations that exist, it is important that we don't try and lay all the issues on one group, however. There is an international Humanist movement, and we can afford to distribute some of the responsibilities to member organizations. The organization I represent, the Secular Student Alliance, is an example of this. Our purpose is to help students, particularly in the United States, find their bearings first and foremost as secular people. We do not focus on the issues of economics and world politics because, though they are important, we want to increase the depth of emphasis we can put forth for stu-

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dents, as opposed to expanding the breadth of everything we do. So we incorporate certain Humanist principles into our work full-force, and strongly encourage others. We are preparing the upcoming generations for leadership of the Humanist movement of the future.

But I do have some critical comments about the means that are being suggested to fulfil the goal of expanding Humanism. To begin, I feel that Mr. Fragell is on the wrong track with some of his statements. He tells us that the existence of the IHEU, and in fact all of organized Humanism, is 'sustained by human needs, not by the correct opinions'. However, I find it unacceptable to neglect the opinions we are advocating even slightly in order to make Humanism more commercially viable. Mr. Fragell cannot persuade me, in any case, that using our 'correct opinion' won't have a beneficial effect on the progress of organized Humanism. Granted, it may not be the only reason we survive, but I really do think it will help. Religions need to work on their public image because often they are trying to convince people of illogical dogma. All that Humanists are saying is that we should put people first, discard dogma, and work towards quality of life. Isn't it obvious that the content of our message should require less coaxing than that of religion? As long as we remember the content of our message, and the principles we stand for, we will find an advantage in them.

In response to another comment of Mr. Fragell's, I do not think that the fact that religion supplies tradition and ritual to the public is the only reason that religious people still exist. My experience with the religious, and, of course, my experience as once having been religious, has told me that people who stay with religion into adulthood often do so because they believe what they're saying. They may believe only in the existence of a god or they may agree with all the dogma of their denomination. But if they don't believe, the majority won't be religious or claim to be so. There are young adults who, while they are lapsed believers in their college-aged days, will return to a church to raise children. However, I see this issue as best addressed in a different way than what Mr. Fragell proposes. If we provide support and community for secular people in high school and college, then I don't think that the need to return to practicing a religion in which they do not believe will be so prevalent. It seems to me that they return to organized religion because they don't know of any sort of community outside of a religion that will provide morality for their children. But if they have the opportunity to realize as young adults that they don't need a religion to give them morality, then that pull will be much lessened.

### **Organizing Humanism locally**

Now, I don't want any of my strong words here to make it seem as though I discount the importance of the local adult Humanist group. This is not the case at all. However, I see the local adult group as differing from Mr. Fragell's recommendations. Global and national Humanism should have an obvious interest in supporting strong local Humanist groups, there's no question. The local groups are one of the most important ways that the goals of Humanism will be carried

out. Often, real action and organization take place at the local level that national or global leaders would be unable to achieve alone. But the purpose of the local group is just that, organization and action. While a sense of community may form, and should form, from a group of people who assemble with the same principles in mind, what comes first are the common principles; we cannot exclude the part about having the same principles and focus solely on building community. Groups should come into existence because people want to work towards the fulfillment of the same goals. These groups may provide other features, including social belonging, and this is certainly to be supported. But it cannot be our only priority. Humanism on a personal, individual level is definitely capable of being a 'life stance', as Mr. Fragell likes to phrase it. However, I do not believe that Humanism on a global scale can be responsible for creating an institution for guiding people's daily lives. Humanism springs up out of the principles that people have already chosen to guide their lives.

Mr. Fragell also mentions that his colleagues, many of them young, think the goals may be the method of Humanism. I have an alternative idea. I believe Humanism ought to make as its foundations the principles we're all here for. We must differentiate our actions and our specific goals from the larger principles that really make us Humanists. Our goals should stem from these principles and work towards their effective implementation wherever necessary. Furthermore, these principles can create the methods. The Principles of Humanism expressed in our goals can give us a visible identity, and the principles themselves *should* be what attract future members. No one should become a Humanist because they want a 'group that cares' if they don't feel strongly about our principles.

I agree with a very substantial portion of what Mr. Gogineni has to say. The problems that he articulates, such as poverty and irresponsible globalization, are problems where I really do see Humanism as potentially having a positive effect. We are secular, that is true, and that is part of what our principles are. But we are more than that; we are concerned with our fellow human beings and their welfare. We can retain our secularism while building upon it.

To close, I think that there is a clear direction for the future of Humanism. It is characterized by using our most essential, strong, basic principles to create goals for Humanist organizations, whether great or small. These goals should relate to all the principles we hold, from stamping out inhumane practices to eliminating religious fanaticism. We should not limit ourselves to only one or two of our principles, and our principles must be our one unchanging guiding force. And if we can carry this out, I believe there will be no end to the good that Humanism can do.

## Reaching out to the world

*Norm Allen\**

Western arrogance and biased Eurocentric thinking have been obstacles to developing Humanism worldwide. We must also take class and cultural differences into account, however. The leaders of organized humanist groups have been primarily middle-class to upper middle-class, highly educated Western Whites.

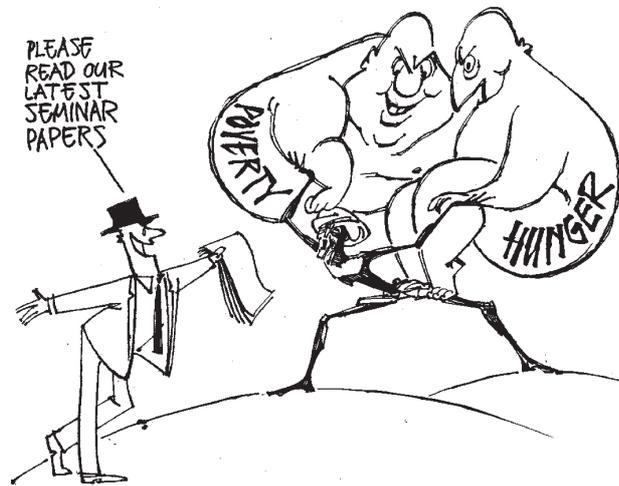
To reach the masses, however, it is often necessary that we tailor humanist messages to their experiences. In the US, for example, poor and lower middle-class Blacks have been attracted to Humanism by activists that shared their cultural interests. In Kansas City, Missouri, a humanist leader focused on the history of Black Humanists and the ways in which humanist ideals helped to substantively develop Black intellectualism and activism. Moreover, that local humanist group hosted poetry readings, jazz and blues performances, soul food dinners, and other cultural activities of interest to many African Americans. In the area of activism, the group engaged in efforts to combat police brutality. These kinds of activities are of interest and relevance to African Americans, and they are in no way inconsistent with Humanism.

As in Southeast Asia, the IHEU has not made significant efforts to promote and develop Humanism in Africa. Today there are groups in Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Uganda, and other nations. Indeed, the potential for spreading humanist ideals far and wide in Africa is truly immense. Why, then, does the IHEU not take advantage of this tremendous opportunity?

The IHEU could—and should—do much to aid African Humanists in their efforts to build humanist organizations. In the 1990s, IHEU leadership agreed that it would be a good idea to send several copies of its newsletter to humanist groups in developing countries. This was a good idea, but it was not carried out consistently.

It would be a great idea if the IHEU published newsletters for Humanists in various parts of the world, in addition to its main newsletter. For example, there could be a newsletter for Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and so forth. This way, humanist writers in developing countries could promote humanist ideals drawing upon their own experiences. Many Africans, for example, do not have much interest in many of the issues raised by African American

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Humanists. Moreover, sometimes they cover the same issues from different cultural perspectives.

The IHEU could also act to facilitate meetings and actions among Humanists of similar cultures. For example, Ethiopians admire Indians for their long history, rich culture, and ancient civilization. Many Ethiopians relate to Indians more closely than to Europeans. Many Indians are held in high esteem in Ethiopia. Because there are so many humanist groups in India, the IHEU could put these groups in contact with each other. Moreover, IHEU representatives could explore possible links among other cultures, and help to arrange meetings in various countries.

The IHEU could also produce pamphlets and other reading materials in different languages. In the 1990s, Emmanuel Kofi Mensah of Action for Humanism, in Nigeria, had plans to develop humanist groups in French-speaking nations in Africa. He did not, however, have humanist reading materials in French. If the IHEU could at least put African humanist leaders in touch with humanist groups in France and other French-speaking countries, this would be a huge boost to the international humanist movement.

The IHEU could also take seriously the notion of building sister-city projects among humanist groups throughout the world. If humanist groups in wealthy nations agree to work with their counterparts in developing nations, Humanism will thrive. There could be valuable cultural exchanges, and Humanists in developing countries will stop feeling isolated and neglected. They need and deserve constant support. They are trying to spread humanist ideals under adverse conditions. There is no reason why they should not get a great deal of support from Humanists in the West, who have comparatively vast resources and much experience in the area of organized Humanism.

It is time for the IHEU to host a conference in Africa. If money was no object for hosting conferences in Mexico, India, and other developing nations, there is no reason why a conference should not be held in Africa. Eventually, there should also be plans to host future conferences in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and other long-neglected areas of the world. If the IHEU is truly an international organization, it must hold some of its meetings throughout the globe.

It also helps if international humanist ambassadors are altruistic. People all over the world naturally want to feel welcome and respected. Too often, we have been accused of being cold, unfriendly, and uncaring toward our fellow Humanists. This could be mere perception, but we must change our image. Our leaders are a reflection of the movement. Indeed, many times our leaders bear the *only* face of the movement. We must be conscious of our actions and how we are perceived. After all, many religionists are known for their acts of kindness toward their fellow human beings. By stressing the importance of altruism, we will only improve our image and help our cause.

### **Criticizing religion and making humanism relevant**

Humanist philosophers must examine ideas that are relevant to solving human problems. As the humanist philosopher Mario Bunge asks in ‘Philosophy in crisis’ (*Free Inquiry*, Spring 2001, p. 30):

‘Why kill time thinking of a handful of artificial mini-problems, when knowledge and action pose so many authentic and urgent problems? For example, why do not moral philosophers devote more attention to the problems affecting billions of people—such as those of poverty and unemployment—than to those that touch only a few, such as abortion and euthanasia? Just because religionists are more upset by the latter than by the former?’

We need to not merely respond to religionists. We must also take the initiative in trying to solve the most intractable problems of the human race. Who knows how much better off the world might be if moral philosophers were primarily concerned with trying to improve the plight of the masses rather than obsessing over the meanings of words, and trying to be obscure rather than helpful?

### **Defining Humanism**

It seems that Humanists will always struggle over definitions of Humanism. In the early 1980s, conservative US religionists attacked ‘godless’ Secular Humanism. In response, Paul Kurtz led the formation of the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (CODESH). CODESH leaders believed it was necessary to stress the democratic thrust of their conception of Humanism to distinguish it from ‘godless’ communism, which was also under attack by Christian fundamentalists.

Kurtz and others also wanted to distance themselves from religious Humanism. Even religious Humanism has different varieties, however. There are those calling themselves Christian Humanists. There are members of the Unitarian Universalist Association who embrace deism or other vague beliefs in a Supreme Being. Paul Kurtz speaks of *non-religious* religious Humanists who reject belief in a deity while embracing the trappings of traditional religions such as ceremonies, rites of passage, singing, and so forth. Furthermore, some lexicographers define Humanism as a religion. For these reasons and others, it will probably always be necessary to define the many varieties of Humanism (or Humanisms) to avoid confusion.

### **Final thoughts**

We should welcome those that have a sincere interest in our life stance, though they might not be prepared to become full-fledged Humanists. Religionists are largely successful at gaining converts because they are engaged in a time-consuming *process* of influence. They understand that people must convert in their own time and in their own way. Likewise, Humanists must learn to be patient and not expect everyone with an interest in Humanism to be ready to embrace it immediately and in its entirety. Indeed, for many—if not most—former religionists, the abandonment of religion was a very long and painful experience. We must always keep this in mind as we are trying to broaden our appeal and increase our numbers.

It is time for organized Humanists to get serious about developing Humanism worldwide. The time for mere lip service is over. Let us open our minds and try our best to present the best face of Humanism to the world. We must relate to people on their level, or we will be forever left behind. The future is ours if only we get serious about seizing it.

# Humanism in action

## Humanism as a way of life

*Vikas Gora*\*

It is high time that Humanism moved away from its old notions and thought afresh. Mere criticism of religion and its practices is not enough. In fact, religion itself is changing its nuances to face the challenges of the times. Because of its enormous wealth and the institutions that it commands, religion appears to be on the rise, but in reality it is not making any headway and people are moving away from religion in their practices. Centuries of accumulated wealth and control of the institutions, and the patronage of governments and powers that supported religion, make it appear to be on sound footing, but appearances are deceptive.

Humanism must develop as a way of life. It should discard some of its old planks and channel its energies into tackling the problems that confront ordinary people. Merely academic approaches or solutions will not endear them to the majority of people—it is their day-to-day problems that require their urgent attention. It is true that people are moving away from religion, but they have not yet come closer to the humanist perspective because the humanist alternative still needs to show that it is capable of delivering the goods. A merely intellectual appreciation of Humanism will not yield the desired results. What matters is to commit our lives to the ideas we profess. Instead of trying to parallel religion, Humanists must think afresh. We should build new institutions, new organizations and give new hopes to people that their future is intertwined with this new approach. This means building bridges of friendship with larger sections of society through service, commitment and innovative approaches. It is credibility that matters.

### Challenges to Humanism

One of the biggest challenges to Humanism is the need to transform itself from an academic worldview to a practical way of life. To turn humanist ideals into reality is a very big challenge, which will require careful thought and concerted effort. It is high time that Humanists concentrated on the real issues that confront the majority of the people. Poverty, inequality, injustice, oppression, social

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justice and equity are the issues that matter to the poor and the downtrodden. How to inculcate the scientific temper among ordinary people is another major challenge. Today, religion is trying its best to utilize many of the inventions of science, but at the same time it is not open to promoting the scientific outlook. Humanists need to emphasize the scientific outlook that is the basis for critical examination and inquiry.

Strengthening the avenues for humanist funding to help developing countries has become an urgent necessity; the thrust of this century should be the realization of social justice. In this way like-minded people in the developed world could add their weight to strengthening the secular ethos in developing countries. We should not forget that an overwhelming proportion of the world's population still lives in developing countries, and needs the support and cooperation of enlightened people in the developed world. To advocate and strengthen democratic institutions all over the world should be part and parcel of the humanist effort.

### **Humanism and education**

Humanists must concentrate on building educational institutions and on making inroads into the educational system to secularise it and enable people to develop a questioning spirit and their faculties for critical inquiry. Alternative educational institutions, textbooks and literature are very much needed. Humans are not only rational, but also emotional. Their psychological needs must be taken into account and building bridges of friendship is of the utmost importance. A sense of belonging, of togetherness and of collective effort is the need of the hour.

Similarly, in the coming years, Humanists must concentrate on providing services in the realm of social work, health and the other services that affect the lives of ordinary people. It is an effective way to demonstrate the efficacy of Humanism as an alternate way of life and its readiness to shoulder responsibilities in a credible way.

### **Humanism and organization**

In the coming decades and while the humanist movement remains small, it will be the quality of its work that attracts attention. Mere numbers may not add to its effectiveness. It is the critical intervention that makes all the difference. Casting the net very wide will not yield the desired results. To make a mark, Humanism must be very sharp, clear and unambiguous. It should be uncompromising on its fundamentals, but at the same time it should make common cause with others for wider outreach.

Forcing people towards unanimity will not yield the desired results. People resist uniformity both overtly and covertly. Decentralization is the answer. There may be networks of organizations as and when the need is felt, but it is not possible to put people into organizational straight-jackets. A single organization for the en-



tire country may not be possible. Give people a choice. Organizations should be like platforms—a link for a common cause.

### **Humanism and the family**

When stress is laid on an alternative way of life, the family becomes the basic unit for the development of Humanism and atheism in daily life. The family not only fulfils emotional needs, but is also the smallest unit for collective action in a cohesive manner. Family ties should no doubt be on the basis of equality and gender justice. But at the same time, the importance of the family in building an alternate life stance should not be underestimated. It provides emotional as well as practical support. It is a nursery for new thought and approaches that can have a long-lasting impact on people's minds. In other words, people's attitudes and aptitudes for years to come take shape to a large extent in the formative period of childhood.

### **Humanism and the environment**

Humanism is inseparable from the environment. The growing problem of environmental destruction and the urgent need to safeguard the environment are forcing people to be innovative in their approaches and programs. Most of India's environmental movements have emerged in the hope of bringing about change in the policies that affect the population. No movement has given

up the struggle on the grounds that 'fate' is more powerful than the 'will of the people'. On the contrary, the people concerned continue to fight to achieve their objectives.

Climate change and global warming have been recent scary developments. But sadly many of those involved tend to magnify the issues so much that an individual feels out of place and unqualified or incapable of bringing about change for the better. Humanists have a role to play in showing that an eco-friendly lifestyle can lessen the consequences of environmental degradation. It brings to the fore the necessity of developing alternative sources of energy, such as solar and wind power. If our attention were turned from war to peace, it would not be difficult to explore alternatives within a short space of time, as the necessary resources and research would be focused on this issue.

### **Looking ahead**

At the global level, IHEU has made its presence known. In the second part of its first century it will move further and with redoubled vigor to face the seemingly insurmountable challenges posed by globalization and commercialization. IHEU will be both a beacon of light and a common platform where people of every non-religious complexion can come together to compare notes and plan strategies to carry forward the struggle of making the world a better place to live.