

Issue 1 2004

LIBEL

IFLRY Magazine



Digital Democracy or Digital Divide?

International Federation of Liberal Youth
www.IFLRY.org



Contents of Issue 1 of 2004

Article	Page
Editorial	3
A word from the IFLRY Bureau	4
IFLRY launch new website	5
Digital Campaigning , Allan Siao Ming Witherick	6
Digital Democracy	11
New Technologies and Democratic Participation - Vision or Reality	12
Genetically Modified Organisms , Alonzo Emery	14
Choices , United Nations Development Programme extract, Michelle Argueta, USA	16
Subscribing and Contributing , how to subscribe to or write for LIBEL	18
About IFLRY and Calendar , Information about IFLRY and upcoming events	19
Back Page Photos , Pictures from IFLRY in Budapest	20

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LIBEL

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Opinions expressed in **LIBEL** are – except if otherwise stated – the personal opinions of the authors, which are not necessarily the same as those of **IFLRY** or the **IFLRY** Bureau.

Translations of some articles in other **IFLRY** official languages are available on the **IFLRY** web site.
<http://www.iflry.org>

A view from the chair...

Well, what shall I say?...

This is my first magazine as the proper editor for **LIBEL**, and it's a strange feeling. In the past I have always written articles on demand, or inspiration, sent them off to the Board of Editors and then waited to see if they are accepted.

Sometimes they have, sometimes they haven't.

But the thing which has been most valuable to me is the feedback, both from the Board of Editors, but also from the normal members from the Member Organisations who have read the articles and felt it useful to comment. **LIBEL** is our opportunity to share ideas and thoughts across borders. To look at the ways in which we campaign and improve on them.

Within this issue we have taken the launch of our new website to use the opportunity to talk about how technology is helping to shape the way that we work as political parties. This is especially important to our Liberal youth wings across the world as new technology provides many of us with an opportunity to lead our mother parties forward. We are the generation growing up with this technology and the understanding of how this can be used to take our message out to the wider public.

It also shows how we can help each other, regardless of the distances between us, to support each others Member Organisations.

These are the areas where **IFLRY** can really help people to work together. Please do have a look at the new website. You will find in the Member Organisations list links to many of our youth wings. Have a look at their websites. See what ideas you like and then ask them how and why they have used a particular technique or idea.

Finally, **LIBEL** has also under gone many changes in the past. For 2004, again we have changed the look and layout. Like **IFLRY**, the magazine changes and grows because of the things influencing it. We are always receptive to your ideas. If you think that we should change something- then please tell us.

Don't sit there and complain, get involved. **IFLRY** and **LIBEL** can only ever be as good as the people who volunteer to and help us to make things happen.

I look forward to the coming year, and some of the challenges that it will bring.

Yours liberally,



Allan Siao Ming Witherick, UK

Allan Siao Ming
Witherick



LIBEL
Chief Editor
IFLRY



Dear young liberal friends

Coming into the year 2004 we are as young people more and more using emails, internet and mobile phones as means of communication.

This way of communication have also broaden to an extend that it has become a very effective tool for campaigning as well as an interesting tool for increasing the involvement of the people in the democratic process.

From a point of campaigning the number of people you reach by using emails, sms or internet webpages and adds have increased to an important percentage of the population as these technologies have become more and more normal in the every day life.

Also for communicating inside an organisation, both in campaigning times and during normal times, these tools have proven effective. Not least for an international youth organization as IFLRY, with young members all over the world. This is why the IFLRY bureau have put emphasis on creating a new and more informative and up to date web page, so that we can service you, our members even better in the future. We are proud to present you the result on www.iflry.org and in this issue of LIBEL you can also read more about the elements in the new webpage.

We hope that you all will visit our new website and that you will become active users in our goal to become an increasingly interactive organisation.

Yours Liberally

Emil, Jacob, Linda, Ramona, Daniëlle, Paola and Martin

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IFLRY launch new website

As part of IFLRY's ongoing work to improve our communications, both with our Member Organisations and the wider world, we recently relaunched our website.

We have added many new sections:

Bureau

The website now holds information both on how to get in contact with each of the Bureau members, but also on each of their responsibilities.



www.iflry.org

About IFLRY

The website includes information about how to join IFLRY as well as what IFLRY stands for. This includes keeping all of our policies, manifestoes and work programmes online.



Member Organisation List

Interested in organising an exchange with a particular country, or finding out which parties are affiliated to the Liberals in a particular country? The MO List has their contact details.

www.iflry.org

LIBEL

To help spread LIBEL further we have provided back copies of LIBEL in PDF format on the website.

Of course that's no substitute for getting a subscription and a printed copy!

Bureau Statements

As well as formal policies, the Bureau work to promote Liberalism all year round and you can now find the Bureau Statements online,



categorised by geographical area. The website search engine also helps you to search through old statements.

Forums

Everyone loves to talk, and Liberals are among the best. We hope that the forums will provide a location for open and frank discussions from members across the world.



Currently it is even open to unregistered guests to try and encourage those interested, but not necessarily Liberal, to join in.

www.iflry.org

Pictures

The last thing is photographs- with so many people getting digital cameras every website needs a gallery. If you attend an event e-mail the photos to the office and we will put them up!

www.iflry.org

So what are you waiting for? Get online!

Technical Details

For those interested in the technical aspects, the website is based on a PHP content management system with a MySQL database, called "Postnuke". This was chosen for a number of reasons.

Unlike commercial software all of the parts have been developed by a community of online volunteers all over the world. Together they support each other to help grow the facilities of the software and continually improve it.

<http://www.postnuke.com>



Digital Campaigning

Welcome to the digital revolution. The 21st Century. A world where even money is ruled by a trickle of 0s and 1s held electronically. All over the world digital campaigns are becoming more important as access to the internet increases. Yet what does it mean for democracy, for political parties?

To be honest, although there are many experts in the field, the field itself is continually changing as the technology develops. As young people with limited resources some of these tools can be invaluable to reaching out...

This article sets out just a few of the opportunities, and pitfalls, open to us.

e-newsletters

Keeping in contact with your supporters can be time consuming and costly. If they are spread out across a country or region the postage alone can quickly eat into any funds that you raise. If you don't post but use activists to deliver member newsletters that eats into the time they could be campaigning for you.

e-newsletters help you to reach out with regular briefings or special alerts rapidly. Sign up boxes on websites, and through partners and word of mouth help to spread your message.



Newer e-mail programs and webmail can also accept HTML newsletters. This allows you to send something which looks almost like a webpage, but

make sure that you include a plain text option as not everyone can read these.

Other people prefer to receive a printer friendly PDF newsletter. These are nicer to read, but can become quite large in size.

The example below is from a HTML Bureau Statement. This meant that we could use the logo, unlike the mailing above which is pure text.



Webcasting, Chat

Although only really viable to those with larger connections to the internet, webcasting is a great new way to reach out to members, including those who can't get to a meeting. Recorded speeches can help to explain to people more vividly what your organisation stands for.

Online chats, sometimes with webcasting, give a cost effective way to bring people together to debate issues when it is not possible to hold physical meetings. Typed discussions can be held online, which makes writing the minutes a lot easier!

Equally though it can be used to invite new people to ask questions about your organisation and get instant responses.

Forums

How do you motivate people? When they are spread across a region, a country, or even the world, it can be difficult to keep people involved and up to date. Sometimes it is simply that you need to hold a meeting at short notice.



The online forums can provide these opportunities. They allow people to hold both political debates, and social conversations, almost regardless of where they are in the world. Unlike the online chats however, they are less time restricted, discussions can carry on over weeks and months with people joining in when they want.

Fund raising

The internet CAN be used to generate funds for your organisation- but the ways of doing this are not always quite so clear. Some well known services such as Google can be used to help provide advertising content on your website way money is earned on a "per click" basis. Others allow you to arrange a percentage bonus based on what your members buy through them.



This is in addition to using your website to attract donations from like minded people- see www.justgiving.com for an example which is used to raise money on behalf of charities.

Don't forget that any resources which can be raised, even in kind, are valuable.

Sadly, you can't expect to raise huge amounts, yet.

Banners

Do not underestimate the value of banners, after all this is what many organisations pay for to use for advertising. For political organisations this is no different.

Banners can be used in both directions. Encouraging your friends, Member Organisations and interested parties to have banners and links to your website can help in two ways.

It helps to increase the visibility of your organisation- so that people who would not normally see your website are at least made aware of it.

Invisibly it also helps to improve the links between your website and others to actually develop a web. Many search engines value a website based on the number of links it has to and from other websites. This makes it very important to have as many links as possible.

Newsfeeds (RSS)

One of the newer developments for dynamic websites is the ability to share information. RSS is a system which allows one website to "pull" information from another. This is normally used to syndicate news information. The main benefit is that it is done automatically- your own website can look current and up to date, without you actually doing anything.

From the IFLRY website you can use <http://www.iflry.org/backend.php> to syndicate IFLRY headlines on to your own website.

About us

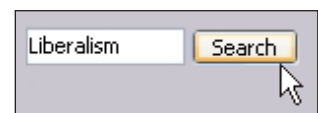
Daft question- who are we?

After we've said all about the different things that we will use to reach out to our current members and try to raise our visibility to new members, what about the world in general?

Ten years ago if you wanted to find out about something you asked your friends, maybe the local library or council.

Today search engines help us to find information infinitely faster. If you want to find out more about an organisation you just type in the name and hit go.

But this only works if someone has written about the organisation. If you want to make sure that people get the right message, then the only way is to make sure that you have your own website with the information that you want people to find.



So always make sure that you have a webpage which says about your organisation and how to contact you to find out more. Even if your website doesn't change from one month to the next, this basic information can help to make it worth having one.

First thought

So how many of these are you using for your campaigns? It might not get you many votes yet- but every vote counts!



Losing your edge

There are some caveats to digital promotion however which should not be forgotten in the rush to create that all singing, all dancing website. Sometimes a website has the potential to do as much damage as good.

If your message isn't clear people can be confused about what you are about. Use of humour is always dangerous as nearly everyone has a different style and it become easy to offend either external readers, or internal if they don't feel that it reflects them.

The other is deciding clearly how formal, or informal your website should be. It might even mean that you have a separate site for your members which is more social and fun, whereas the public site is far more formal and informative. Finding the balance can be crucial as your website is a recruitment tool. Come across as too formal and some people will think it too serious. Be too informal and others won't take you seriously.

Size

Size can refer to two different aspects. The physical size or amount of content, and then the actual electronic size. In all cases you need to think about what your audience need, and what they can cope with.

At the basic level this can be looked at as follows:

- **Electronic Size**

Does your audience have good access to broadband/fast internet connections? If not think twice before designing that really graphic intensive flash website. Even if they do, have a quick look at whether you're excluding part of your audience.

- **Physical Content**

Regardless of how good your newsletter or website is, content or looks wise- can people actually digest it? This could be just making sure that it's layed out well. Do you have an index or contents page to the website or e-mail or do you have to hunt to find what you need?

- **Website**

With websites it's worth thinking- can I generate a low bandwidth version which can be used by those with small connections- or even mobile access. Some Content Management Systems include facilities for AvantGo for example- but are you using it?

Content wise a good search engine on the website can help your visitors find what they want quickly. Try to break up pages into smaller sections so that people can glance down and find what they need.

- **e-mail & Newsletters**

We discussed earlier the types of e-mail newsletters- but have you looked at the amount of content? Could you actually remove some of the content and put it onto the website as a link? A short summary rather than a full article can make the Newsletter more attractive. Remember- you'll probably want to replicate a lot of the content online anyway.

Within the newsletter an index at the top can save people wading through the content- and actually make them more likely to read it?

- **Documents**

Similar to e-mails, if you've put them on your website- regardless of format include a summary so that they can decide- Do I need to download this? Try to ensure that if you have a search engine for your website can index documents in PDF and other formats. This will help them find what they need quicker.

If you're e-mailing the documents directly to people, again be cautious. Is it appropriate? Or could you just send a link? You might not really notice but if you e-mail too many large documents it can slow down smaller networks quite rapidly.

Too much of a good thing

You've got things sorted out and your organisation is going well. People seem to be engaged and achieving. But are you in danger of reaching the other extreme?

Frequency of newsletters/press releases

Newsletters- what kind of content do you have? Does it need to go out every week? Or does that just repeat a lot of the information you sent out the first time. If you send out press releases be careful not to make them too frequent- they need to be interesting and unique so that the press don't treat it as a "and this week they're complaining about...".

Type of files

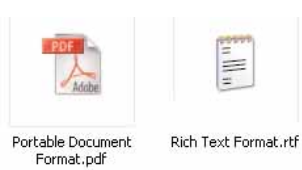
The internet has literally thousands of file types and it is important to remember that just because one type is your favourite there is no guarantee that other people will have access to the programs needed to edit it.

- **PDF vs RTF**

There are a number of generally accepted standards for files. This includes the print ready Portable Document Format, PDF, and Rich Text Format, RTF.

Which one you chose to use should depend on both your organisations capabilities, and what the document is for.

PDF files from most systems require



additional software to create them. A key exception however is the free package OpenOffice

which allows you to save files directly into PDF format. The software readers for PDFs tend to be free and can be downloaded in a large variety of formats.

- **JPG vs GIF**

There are also two common file formats for pictures, although most of us will have experience of JPGs from digital cameras.

Your best option is usually to save an image in both formats and see which is smaller.

JPG can also be saved in a compressed mode to save space, but at a loss of quality.



Up to date

How much are you doing? If it's not much, DON'T have a calendar which shows every day of the week being blank. Make sure that the webpage emphasises the consistent parts of your organisation, rather than relying on press releases.

Don't be afraid to back date news items either. The chances of someone looking at the site the exact day it should be up there is relatively small.

It also doesn't look very professional to leave signs saying "this is under construction" for weeks at a time!

Use of forums

A vibrant online forum can be a good indication of an active community, even if all they are doing is talking. The reverse is not always true.



(IFLRY Forums before the launch of the new website!)

If your forum isn't very active it might be because you haven't got enough members to really make use of the facilities. Or that they don't consider your organisation too high up their priority list when they have other discussion forums for more interesting sites.

Then again it could be because your members and supporters are busy out there campaigning in real life.

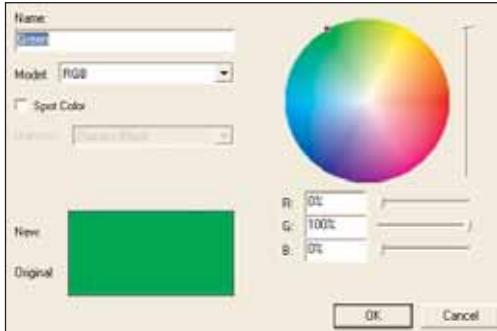
To the average person visiting the site though it is almost impossible to make the distinction. And with many people the chances are they will think that the more negative version is the truth.



Digital Democracy or Digital Divide?

Layout

21,000 different colours and pictures might well look pretty to you, but equally be fairly ugly. Like wise a website with only text is likely to only be attractive to those visitors who are patient enough to read everything.



Eye catching, but user friendly website designs are hard to come by. Even the new IFLRY website has difficulties trying to find the most appropriate balance.

Conclusion

This article has provided a very short summary of some of the different ways that the internet can be used for electronic campaigning in the 21st Century. There are always dangers and the possibility to damage your own cause if you fail to use these things properly- you are putting yourself on show for all to see.

A lot of this can be achieved using free software off of the internet and some of these are listed in the **Useful Links** box to the left.

This doesn't only provide a cost effective means for promoting your organisation. It is also one of the areas where it *IS* possible for our Member Organisations and individuals to support each other across countries through the use of the internet to develop projects and websites together.

English isn't the only common language growing across the world. The Internet has its own language which we have the opportunity to share.

Allan Siao Ming
Witherick

LIBEL
Chief Editor
IFLRY

Accessibility

This has been listed separately because, although the internet is open to everyone who can gain access, it is still practically a closed door to others even when they can get connected.

A good example are those with visual impairments such as blindness. It is always important to try and consider this through inclusion of "alternate text" and/or captions wherever you use an image or graphic.

Other examples can be the use of red and green, some forms of colour blindness can make it very difficult for them to distinguish between the different shades.

There are a number of software programs and websites which can be used to check this.

Useful Links

Some things in life can be free- and this includes some of the more useful utilities. The links below include software which is developed by individuals or online communities for the benefit of all.

Many will also have the option of additional "plug-ins" or "extensions" which can help increase the features of the program:

www.mozilla.org Firefox web browser, an alternative to Internet Explorer (still in testing).

www.irfanview.com A well known basic graphics viewer and manipulation tool.

www.openoffice.org A free alternative to Microsoft Office (TM) which includes the ability to save documents in PDF format.

Website collections:

www.tucows.com This website includes versions of many software packages for testing or buying, they come in different types:

Shareware - normally limited in some way but allows you to try the software before you buy it.

Freeware - Usually developed by one group but free to copy and use.

Adware - Paid for by advertisements built in to the software.

GPL - Similar to freeware but often maintained and developed by a community.

www.opensourcecms.org For the more adventurous who want to try a whole new website, this site allows you to test some of the popular content management systems available.

Digital Democracy

Voting electronically has already been tried in several countries- this articles looks at some of the benefits, and disadvantages, of an electronic ballot.

Access to the ballot

Pros- The electronic ballots can be accessed by anyone, anywhere. All they need is the correct details, which are usually posted out. This means that even if you are on holiday the other side of the world you can vote!

Cons- Does everyone have internet access? And even if they do, are they comfortable using it? Some people won't even bank online. Access to a computer doesn't always ensure that you can use it...

Fraud at the ballot

Pros- High level encryption means that the chances of people forging your ballot are extremely unlikely. Secure systems, similar to those used for internet banking, help to prevent interference during the vote and long pass number/s/voter id's help to prevent fraud voting attempts.

Cons- Unlikely the ballot box there are no safe guards to ensure that the person who says that they are voting actually is. If someone else has the voter ID number etc, they can use it as a keyboard can't tell who is actually entering the data. There is also no way to tell that the person isn't voting under duress.

Recounts and what if

Pros- Not sure of the vote? It can be recounted instantly. The chances of their being a variation are very small. The raw data can be transmitted almost as quickly as the results to anywhere in the world, thus ensuring some security against loss.

Cons- You can press the button again. There's really not much else you can do- so if your faith in the system has been shaken already, this won't reassure you. In addition, when you had the paper ballots a recount was a simple matter. If someone has a big enough magnet, be afraid, be very afraid- all your results could disappear.

In practice

As part of a series of voter experiments in 2003 St Albans City & District Council had a mixed voting system. This combined all of the different methods mentioned above, internet, postal, telephone and voting booth, together to try and boost performance. Despite their best efforts numerous problems were reported with people unable to get through to the telephone line and computers failing to be set up in time for the electronic polling booths.

In the end the turn out did go up, but at least some of that can probably be attributed to curiosity and stronger campaigns by the parties.

Other types of ballots...

e-voting is just the latest of a long list of ways that people have been looking at to improve the process of voting.

Proxy voting- this is where an individual nominates someone to vote on their behalf.

Postal Voting- Before the electronic innovations of recent years the other

Telephone Voting- Telephone voting, whilst reaching out to more people than internet voting, has also come in for it's share of criticism. In real life tests the problem has been towards the end of the voting period where many people try to get through at the same time.

End thought

In the end though it seems clear. The main factor as to whether people vote is not whether they find it easy, or if they have faith in just the systems, but whether they have it in the politicians as well.

As Liberals let's make sure that they have something worth voting for.





New Technologies and Democratic Participation - Vision or Reality

In February 2004 IFLRY held a seminar looking at the various issues raised in this magazine at the European Youth Centre in Hungary. The article below reflects back some of the results, and concerns, that the different groups raised during the event. The representatives of eight working groups briefly introduced the work and the ideas of their groups related to new technologies and democratic participation as follows:

New user registration

Register now! It's free!
We won't sell/give others your personal info.

Username:

E-mail

Email again:

(Password will be sent to the e-mail address you enter)

Option: Allow other users to view my e-mail address

I agree to be bound by this website's [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

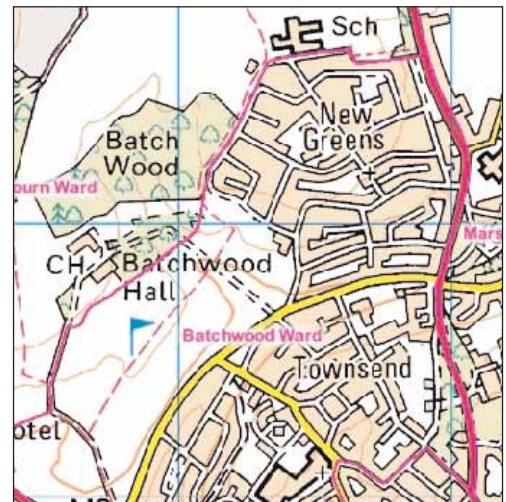
"Interactive Web Site For Democratic Participation"

The first project was called "Interactive Web Site For Democratic Participation". The main idea of this project is to create interactive web site including e-forums, e-membership, information guide and optional e-voting. Birsen Jemilova Feda (Bg) said that the idea of this project came from the lack of possibility of active participation in real life, easy access to information and transparency in party life.

"Amazon - Private Lessons for Public Politics"

Ben Ricketts (UK) presented the work of his group called "Amazon - Private Lessons for Public Politics" whose goal is the production of an online forum for a local community i.e. the geographic area ran by a local council. The underlying theme of the

site is to promote local residents interest and involvement in community politics. To do this, the site must act as a central hub for dialogue between both elected representatives/party candidates and the residents themselves.



"Utilizing New Technologies to Increase Democratic Participation"

The presentation of the third project - "Utilizing New Technologies to Increase Democratic Participation" followed. This project aims at increasing political participation and awareness of young people

by providing a website with impartial information about the politics and parties as well as different interactive features and materials which can be used by teachers at school.

"Technology as a Tool of Political Inclusion and Citizens' Strengthening"

After that, Paola Silva (Co) introduced her project "Technology as a Tool of Political Inclusion and Citizens' Strengthening". Because of lack of creativity for involving youth in the nearer political realities as well

as communications informality, this project is an oriented project for increasing transparency and accountability levels inside of UCJD, by means of information dynamic and wide access to deliberation.



e-voting

Another project idea was related to e-voting. Gerald Folly (A) talked about the need and the advantages of e-voting - possibility for more people with specific needs like youth, disabled people, soldiers etc. to participate in voting. The survey showed

that 55% of voters in Poland would like e-vote . E-voting would provide society with a faster and cheaper way of conducting the decision-making process, with low levels of mistakes and higher trust in democratic decisions.

"Efficiency in Democracy and Think-Tank Marketing

- Making Democracy Easy"

Jared Licinia (SA) introduced his work named "Efficiency in Democracy and Think-Tank Marketing - Making Democracy Easy". The idea is to create 'drive through' political campaigns that give voters everything in

short, simple and easy to follow and decide on information, change current political idea of information overload or boring speeches, and encourage efficiency in communication (facilitated by IT).

"New Technology Empowering Democratic Participation"

The penultimate project was "New Technology Empowering Democratic Participation". These days people are not interested in democratic participation, voting, or solving major problems affecting whole

nation. Based on scientific research e-campaigning would be an evolutionary step to a level where the main channel for sending and receiving information will adjust to a new media.

Engagement among young people

The final project presented by Bart Woord (NL) and Mikkel Aabye Jensen (DK) aims to raise awareness and engagement among young people about the development of the third world and the possibilities information

technology might have in store. This would be a workshop that aims at discussing and analysing the potentials of information technology in the development of the third world.



Participants from the seminar in Hungary



Genetically Modified Organisms

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs): for some they inspire fear and rage, but for most, ambivalence and confusion. Yet the



respective positions of the European Union and the United States in this derisive debate over GMO use in food production shine out

miraculously clear and in direct opposition. Large-scale US agriculture interests remain staunch supporters of GMO technology, identifying its potential to produce profit yielding crops and unnaturally large fruits and vegetables. Fearing that these so-called 'franken-foods' could negatively impact health, the EU issued a World Trade Organisation (WTO) moratorium on the import of GMO food. The US recently fought back against the moratorium with a formal WTO suit against the EU, claiming that Europe is stifling US agriculture export potential. So with the end of the Iraq war, international tensions once again centre around trade.

While GMO-opponents claim that health risks and environmental damage remain a negative externality of biotechnology, GMO proponents maintain that 'rigorous' field-tests prove their safety. In attempts to settle the row, the United Nations designed the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety which would allow countries to decline GM seed imports if they are shown to pose ecological or socio-economic risks. True to form, however, the Bush administration rejected UN attempts to resolve this international dispute.

The US government's publicly expressed rationale for GMO support

utilises a scrim of humanitarian concern to mask undeniable trade incentives. During the recent G8 summit in Evian, France, George W. Bush attacked the EU's reluctance to accept GMO products as a de facto denial of food aid to starving Africans. And he is not entirely off mark. African countries have refused US aid in the form of genetically modified food, fearing that GMO seed might taint their organic crops and therefore prohibit African farmers from selling their produce to large European markets.

Although few market watchers trust Bush's altruistic claims, his public smear campaign against the EU has done much to befuddle the minds of an already ill-informed public regarding the uses of biotechnology.

This week in Sacramento, California the US government seeks to further propel its trade bias by inaugurating a new form of trade diplomacy, one that abandons inflammatory rhetoric in favour of fostering public approval and foreign support. Sacramento sets the stage for a biotech Expo hosted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), USAID, and the US State Department. The Expo aims at persuading trade, agriculture and environment ministers from over 100 nations



that genetically modified organisms are both safe and essential to international development.

Anti-GMO activists came out in full force to protest the Sacramento ministerial and were met with a sizable counterforce of police in riot gear and armoured vehicles. As activists with multi-coloured hair

“ Fearing that these so-called 'franken-foods' could negatively impact health, the EU issued a World Trade Organisation (WTO) moratorium on the import of GMO food. ”

and pierced faces took the speaking dais, they recalled the halcyon days of the late 60s when counter-culture youth railed against the exploitation of agriculture workers. But in an increasingly conservative America, these activists would have done well by borrowing a note from the US government's public relations playbook. If activists are to prove successful in wooing moderates to their cause, then they must make clear to the public what dangers lurk in genetic tampering. For example, contrary to Bush administration propaganda, much evidence suggests that GMO farming will not end world hunger precisely because it produces lower yields than agroecological farming, while using more chemicals-chemicals marketed by US corporations, of course. But protest speakers made few efforts to drive this point home and merely preached to the already sympathetic choir by enumerating other well-known, if not unrelated, misdeeds of the Bush administration. In the United States, these activists garnered a great deal of public attention, yet they failed to use the media effectively in articulating their concerns. The most vocal activists spouted the same, emotive rhetoric that seemed unconvincing and even alienating to those with a less radical stance. Some protesters even found



themselves caught in a contradiction by both fighting for the end of biotechnological research and simultaneously

pushing

the US government to provide developing countries with experimental drugs to fight a host of diseases, even though many of these drugs have benefited from biotech innovations. With an issue that is mostly ignored and misunderstood by the general public, the neo-hippies that form the core of the anti-GMO movement must do more than publicly humiliate the Bush administration. In order to bring the average



global citizen to support their cause, activists will have to engage in a coherent, fact-based education campaign that will effectively counter the US government's successful efforts to persuade foreign ministers.

And if you thought Asia didn't have a dog in this fight, consider this: China already has harnessed GMO technology to incorporate into its agricultural program. With recent ascension to the WTO, and therefore great potential to become a major exporter of its crops, China has a serious stake in the GMO debates indeed. In a nation still weary with the memory of famine, biotech agriculture's ability to produce huge crops yields resistant to pests might seem attractive, particularly in a country with now 1.3 billion mouths to feed. However, anti-GMO activists like Anuradha Mittal, Co-Director of the Institute for Food and Development Policy, says that the issue is not so simple and that China must factor in a number of other variables in their food production calculus. During the Sacramento Expo, Mittal appealed to the Chinese government to stop its biotech research, development, and production program, claiming that biotech agriculture will only make them less competitive in the world market. Once the 'realities' of GMO use lie exposed, activists like Ms. Mittal are convinced that countries who have given into biotech production will be at a distinct trade disadvantage. So whatever you believe about the health and ethical impacts of genetically modified organisms, the financial repercussions could prove all too real. Citizens of the world must have access to information about biotechnology and its potential for both harm and good in order to develop a well-informed opinion. But until that happens, trust that the Bush administration will continue to throw up its

biased smoke-screen and impose its own



agenda on the rest of the world.

Alonzo Emery
LIBEL Correspondent IFLRY



CHOICES

The Human Development Programme
March 2004

The following article have been summarised from the UNDP Website "Choices the Human Development Magazine" This is part of IFLRY's on going commitment to support the work and role of the United Nations throughout the world. You can find out more from their website: <http://www.undp.org/dpa/choices/>

Youths in Venezuela slums learn to monitor human rights

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) supported the Center for Peace and Human Rights of the Central University of Venezuela, which conducted the Human Rights Observatory, a 12 month pilot project directed by sociologist Ana Maria Sanjuan. The purpose of this project is to train young people in human rights and appeal to the appropriate authorities, to educate people on human rights and make them aware of the protections they have under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

According to the project director, "a comprehensive approach to human rights education for young people is crucial for strengthening justice and eradicating an authoritarian culture." Sanjuan added that emphasis should be placed in the poorer areas where the lack of education allows for human rights abuses to be the daily creed. People have been made to believe that police officers are authorized to use physical violence and verbal harassment tactics in their investigations and that there is no protection against unfair conduct by employers.

Venezuela has a history of human rights abuses, which human rights advocates believe that is due to poverty and a culture of impunity. Other reasons include unemployment and lack of education of the

law enforcement officers themselves. The populace does not trust the institutions since it has witnessed unjust and unfair practices by the authorities.

Ms. Sanjuan believes that projects like this can aid in restoring the lost credibility in the governmental institutions. Part of the project was for young people to develop 'Neighborhood Maps' to asses their communities and select one right that was of particular concern to the community. Each group focused on one of these rights, the right to education, security, and work.

The youths found that one of the main obstacles to the right to an education is economics. Often times parents do not have enough money to buy school supplies for their children or cannot afford these to go to school since even children have to contribute to the family income, working in whatever job they can find. Another problem is of a social nature. Youths are forced to drop out of school because they have made their girlfriends pregnant and now must support them by finding jobs. The project has concluded that often times such pregnancies could have been prevented had the teens been provided with education on contraception.

The group that focused on the right to security belong to the barrio "70" which is





notorious for its gang activity and violent streets. The project found that often times citizens were victims of police brutality since these would conduct their investigations by resorting to violence, harassment, and abuse. Through the project, police officers have been made aware of the regulations that limit their actions and the community members have learned of the ways to report offenses.

The group researching the right to work has found that often times a lack of experience and adequate education are reasons many youths cannot find work. These youths are often forced to become part of the informal economy by doing jobs such as taking horse-

race bets since the barrio is very close to the racetrack. A project member believes that knowledge on their rights is helpful in appealing unfair employer conduct, noting that, "now I know we all have the right to work and if someone is fired, or has other problems with his rights, he can appeal to the Ombudsman Office."

The project has been hailed as successful by Sonia Obregon, a UNDP officer on human rights. She believes that further benefit to the communities is possible if the project is continued and expanded with the cooperation of the Ministry of Education to reach out to Venezuela's youth in all levels of the school system.



Venezuela
Population: **24.8 million**
Area: **912,050 sq km**
Human Development Ranking: **69 of 173**
Public expenditure on health:
2.7% of GDP
GDP per capita: **\$5, 670**

Other topics covered in March 2004

As well as this particular article the other areas covered in this quarters magazine were:

- Governance by the Numbers
- Election Experiment Broadcasts Divergent Views
- Georgia—An Election Gone Wrong
- Rwanda's Parliament Now Leads World in Gender Parity
- Youths in Venezuela Slums Learn to Monitor Human Rights
- New Judicial Reforms in Philippines Aim to Address Needs of Poor
- Congo Legal Clinic Opens Doors for Poor
- First Person: A Reporter's Journey to Avoid Hying Hate in the Côte d'Ivoire Press
- Efficient Service from Revamped Finance Ministry Takes Lebanese by Surprise
- A Harbinger of Decentralization: Local Tajik Groups Set Their Own Agenda
- Local Governments in Poland Try to Map Future
- Afghanis Trading AK-47s and Rockets for Civilian Jobs
- Liberia Charting New Course for Rebuilding a Nation

You can find the full text on the UNDP website at:

<http://www.undp.org/dpa/choices/2004/march>

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About IFLRY

IFLRY stands for "International Federation of Liberal Youth", it is the international umbrella organisation for liberal and radical youth organisations all over the world. It provides a platform for co-operation and a voice to bodies such as Liberal International and the United Nations.

Our members come from all over the world with parties as diverse as those in government to others where they are currently collectives working to further democracy under oppressive regimes.

Our Member Organisations include Members of National Parliaments, Councillors, but also normal people who have a belief in human rights, ecological sustainability and other related issues.

You can find out more, including copies of current policies, manifestoes and press statements online at our website, or contact the office for more details.

Remember- **IFLRY** only exists because of volunteers and political active people like YOU!

IFLRY's policies and manifestoes are democratically decided by our Member Organisations. They are based on the belief in the universality and indivisibility of human rights. As liberals and radicals we strive for a free and tolerant society without any form of discrimination, with equal opportunities, respect for the individual and for minorities. We believe that these goals can only be reached through a democratic system of governance.

As liberals and radicals we are in favour of a market economy operating within the limits of a fair distribution of wealth and ecological sustainability. To reach the goal of equal opportunities distribution of wealth has to take place within the states as well as between them.

IFLRY Calendar

This calendar shows the events which happened in the last few months- and those planned for the next few.

Past

22 - 29 February	<i>"New Technologies and Democratic Participation – vision or reality"</i> European Youth Centre (EYC) Budapest (Hungary)
Statutory	
18 - 20 June	Executive Committee Singapore

Future

25 April - 02 May	<i>"Human, Social and Economical Rights in a Globalised World"</i> Vilnius (Lithuania)
13 - 16 May	<i>"Uniting Youth"</i> Kiev (Ukraine)
13 - 17 June	<i>"Advocating Human Rights: Position of Young People in Society"</i> Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia)

If you are interested in attending any of the events please get in contact either with the Member Organisation listed, or with IFLRY. More details will be sent out through our e-newsletter.

Please check the website for the most up to date information: <http://www.iflry.org>

Photographs from IFLRY in Budapest February for:
“New Technologies and Democratic Participation – vision or reality”

