United Nations Backs Restorative Justice

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Basic principles for restorative justice have now been approved by the United Nations. At the latest meeting (11th) of the UN Commission on Criminal Justice and Crime Prevention, held in Vienna in April 2002, a resolution was passed that puts restorative justice officially on the international map.

After restorative justice was considered in the informal sessions of the 2000 Congress in Vienna, the 11th Commission adopted a resolution that noted the Ottawa statement of principles, drawn up by a meeting of a Group of Experts on Restorative Justice from all over the world in Ottawa in Oct/Nov 2001. These include asking member states to consider the development of restorative justice and the promotion of a culture favourable to the use of restorative justice among law enforcement, judicial and social authorities, as well as local communities.

It was also gratifying to note that 10 other countries joined Canada in sponsoring the final resolution: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Mexico, Netherlands, Peru, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Sadly the UK was not among them.

So restorative justice is definitely on the map, and will be included in the next UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 2005 in Bangkok, Thailand. (The Commissions take place every year and consider resolutions; the Congresses happen every five years and are opportunities for government representatives to make presentations about criminal justice in their country.)

This progress at the UN follows hot on the heels of the European Union Council Framework Decision in March 2001, which directs member states to promote mediation in appropriate criminal cases, and take victim/offender mediation agreements into account.

Indeed, RJ initiatives seem to be springing up all over the globe. We are now part of a movement that is larger than most of our dreams.