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HOLY WISDOM

PEACE: SHOWING THAT OTHERS MATTER!

VOLUME XXI

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Publication of the Syrian Orthodox Church in America on United Nations Affairs. This publication is disseminated to the entire membership of the Church throughout the world on a quarterly basis. Please bring this information to the attention of your parishioners and all those under your care. The Earth is holy and a manifestation of God. Pray for peace and the UN.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

It is necessary through the collaboration of NGOs to raise awareness among communities as we promote peace. If you will, the need for community consciousness is a way we can connect parties and others. It is important at this time that all parties begin to realize that they are a part of a larger picture, that they are in it together and they have common concerns. If there is a conflict all parties have contributed to the conflict and they have the power to come together; to develop a non-violent intervention that results in a resolution. It is time for us as people to acknowledge that there is something more that exceeds our own individual positions and needs. The United Nations, religious institutions and NGO can be an avenue to promote community consciousness to encourage global consciousness, clear and realistic decisions as they promote non-violent solutions to conflicts!



His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas enjoys reading a copy of In The Tree House.. Read more on page 55.

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Our Work at the United Nations

The Syrian Orthodox Church of America is accredited to the United Nations through the UN Department of Public Information.

Attention: NGO Petition In Support of the UN DPI/NGO Resource Centre and Weekly NGO Briefings

To: **Mr. Joseph Deiss**, President of the 65th session of the General Assembly
Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President-elect of the 66th session of the General Assembly
Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General
Mr. Kiyotaka Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information
Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

We, the undersigned, as representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in association with the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI), call your urgent attention to the deplorable physical condition of the DPI/NGO Resource Centre in its current location and request that this vital service be relocated to and maintained at an accessible, clean and safe space as a priority for the United Nations. The NGO Resource Centre, a service of the DPI NGO Relations Cluster, is the “home away from home” at UN Headquarters for the more than 1,500 NGOs associated with DPI. It is an important place for us to meet, work and obtain information about United Nations activities and events. Especially during the disruptions imposed by the implementation of the UN Capital Master Plan, it is critical that NGOs have this space and these services readily available.

We also appeal for special consideration in prioritizing space for the weekly NGO briefings, which are a vital link for providing information on critical UN initiatives for the NGO community, and which have similarly been undervalued in the allocation of regular space during the Capital Master Plan.

Developing and maintaining strong partnerships with civil society and the opportunity to exchange information with and among NGOs, are important contributions to the program of the United Nations. An effective and fully functioning DPI/NGO Resource Centre is a critical component of that program. Action is urgently needed with regard to the existing NGO Resource Centre and to designing an appropriate location for it in the Capital Master Plan for UN Headquarters as well as ensuring the continuation of the weekly NGO briefing venues.

If you are a representative to a DPI-associated NGO and support this cause, please visit the NGO/DPI Executive Committee’s website to sign the petition.

Executive Committee website:
ngodpi.org



DPI/NGO Relations - WEEKLY BRIEFINGS

“Understanding and Managing Cyber Crime: The Virtual Criminal”

Thursday, 3 February 2011

Moderator:

Gail Bindley-Taylor Sainte: Information Officer, NGO Relations, Department of Public Information (DPI)

Panel Speakers:

Ms. Gillian Murray: Chief of the Conference Support Section in the Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking Branch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC].

Ms. Betty Shave: Assistant Deputy Chief for International Computer Crime in the Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section (CCIPS) of the Criminal Division of the US Department of Justice.

Dr. Gang Tan: Assistant professor of Computer Science and Engineering and leads the Security of Software (SOS) Lab at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania.

BRIEFING SUMMARY

By: Kathryn Rahill, Youth Representative of the Syrian Orthodox Church of America

The briefing began with a short clip produced by United Nations TV, entitled, *Jamaica: Pulling the Plug on Cybercrime*. The clip examines how Jamaica is handling cybercrime today.

The first distinguished panelist for this week’s briefing was **Ms. Gillian Murray**. Ms. Murray is Chief of the Conference Support Section in the Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking Branch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). She is also in charge of the Organized Crime Section of UNODC. Ms. Murray presented on the evolutionary history of cybercrime offenders, the resolutions and mandates relevant to cybercrime, and the actual ways in which UNODC is working to help combat cybercrime. She began in the 1960s, when cybercrime was primarily focused on the physical damage of computer systems. As technology became more advanced, cybercrime has become a global issue, occurring in various forms including information hacking, denial of service attack, software piracy, virus dissemination, and phishing, otherwise known as email scam.

According to Ms. Murray, the role of the UNODC is to encounter such forms of crime from the crime prevention and criminal justice angle. The Office works within various mandates that come from the UN General Assembly, Economic and Social Security Council (ECOSOC), UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, and the UN Crime Congress. In 2005 the UN held a Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) and adopted a resolution to serve as the main international instrument in which the UNODC can use to foster international cooperation and target specific areas of organized crime such as cybercrime. Murray explained that in order for computer-related crime to be fall under the auspices TOC, the crime must contain all three angles: organized, transnational, and the intent of financial and/or material gain. She further clarified that this last tenet allows for pedophilia and other forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation on the web to be considered TOC, because the predominant motivation of the offense involves sexual gratification.

Ms. Murray discussed another significant article in the Convention against TOC, article number 29, in which all parties are required to develop specific training programs for law enforcement personnel such as prosecutors and investigating magistrates. In this capacity, the UNODC helps to provide technical assistance and sustainable faculty building. Her office helps countries abide by international legal standards on cybercrime in accordance with their own national legal traditions. In April 2010, the UN 12th Crime Congress in Brazil focused on cybercrime and resulted in two main objectives. The first is a focus on developing an action plan for capacity building at the international level. The second objective is to perform a comprehensive study on cybercrime. In response to this second objective, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice has requested an intergovernmental and open-ended expert group to conduct the cybercrime study using member states, the international community, and the private sector. Ms. Murray stressed the importance of the private sector’s cooperation in the comprehensive study, as the research will cover all aspects of cybercrime. She argued the study will be the first of its kind and will provide an invaluable tool for international cooperation and best practice sharing. *Continued on page 4.*



“Violence against children must stop and children’s safety must be upheld at all times”

**- Marta Santos Pais,
Secretary-General’s
Special Representative
on Violence against
Children**

Ms. Murray’s last point of discussion focused on the specialized work of the UNODC and its efforts to combat cybercrime. As the only global intergovernmental body working in crime prevention and criminal justice, Murray argued, “the UNODC is in a unique position to encourage international cooperation and focus on the developing world.” According to Ms. Murray’s, UNODC’s network of twenty-three field offices throughout the world allows them to apply their skills practically on the ground. The UNODC work on cybercrime can be broken down into four main areas: strengthening the institutional and operational capacity of public safety agencies while providing technical assistance to support the implementation of the Convention and its Protocols; the training of criminal justice practitioners in order to foster sustainable capacity building; act as a focal point through which information on TOC is shared among criminal justice practitioners; and lastly, help assess organized crime trends^[1] while mobilizing and raising awareness among Civil Society. In her concluding point, Ms. Murray stressed the importance of attacking cybercrime from all angles and thus requiring the need for international cooperation and capacity building within all relating institutions.

The former head of the US delegation to the High-Tech Crime Subgroup of the G8 countries, **Ms. Betty Shave** was this week’s second distinguished speaker on the panel. As the current Assistant Deputy Chief for CCIPS of the Criminal Division of the US Department of Justice, Ms. Betty Shave presented on the work of CCIPS against cybercrime, and her suggestions on ways in which cybercrime should be managed. According to Ms. Shave, the Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section (CCIPS) is composed of almost entirely prosecutors. The office itself provides a wide range of services; CCIPS prosecutors have several of their own cases, in addition to providing assistance to other outside prosecutors and public safety authorities in the United States. CCIPS also assists U.S. authorities with procuring electronic evidence from foreign entities, as well as helping foreign authorities obtain electronic evidence from U.S. entities.

Ms. Shave gave a brief outline of the different kinds of cybercrime her office most frequently works against. The first is a more classic form of cybercrime, hacking and information stealing. Cases which depend on electronic evidence are another common issue. Shave explained that most of the crimes which demand electronic evidence are violent crimes, such as kidnapping, bomb threats, and murder. She argued that the danger towards physical life through electronic (online) networks is rapidly rising. To combat this increasing threat, CCIPS holds trainings and seminars through the U.S. and abroad to advise countries and their respective public safety agencies on how to draft comprehensive anti-cybercrime statutes, how to improve their investigation capacities, and how to address a variety of internet-related issues, including racism, free speech, and confidentiality. Ms. Shave added that CCIPS is also involved in policy making and building bilateral and multilateral relationships between country governments, private organizations, and public institutions. Her office will often consult with countries on drafts of their cybercrime statutes and offer comments and recommendations. Ms. Shave further clarified that all CCIPS training and consultation is not based on U.S. law, but rather, is tailored the Protocols of the [Council of Europe Cybercrime Convention](#), which can be applied to the legal system of any country.

In her final stage of her presentation, Ms. Shave offered some suggestions on how to move forward in the effort against cybercrime. She argued for a comprehensive approach and advised all stakeholders need to communicate all the time. Shave also stressed the importance of countries to have adequate cybercrime legislation and clear enforcement laws to ensure accountability. She once again referenced the 2001 Cybercrime Convention as a model for countries interested in establishing or modifying their laws against cybercrime. Ms. Shave’s third recommendation was the need for countries to have adequate specialized law enforcement. She argued that governmental support and understanding is crucial in order for capacity building to occur. Lastly, countries need to establish formal and informal connections to other countries. An example of key international cooperation mechanisms is the 24/7 international cybercrime reporting network. She explained the emergency network is about 12 years

old, includes about 55 countries around the world, including the US and Jamaica, and allows for a point of contact within participating countries in the case that an investigation requires urgent assistance involving electronic evidence across borders.

Ms. Shave concluded that almost every country in the world, no matter at what stage of development, is pursuing an interest in combating cybercrime. To that end, Shave claimed there is plenty of opportunity for NGOs and members of Civil Society to become more involved. Ms. Shave encouraged anyone who is interested in learning more about cybercrime and the work of CCIPS to visit their site at www.cybercrime.gov.

The final speaker for this week's briefing was **Dr. Gang Tan**, Assistant professor of Computer Science and Engineering and head of the Security of Software (SOS) Lab at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. Dr. Tan focused his discussion on how computer security research can help to understand and manage cybercrime. The latest work of researchers focuses on the threat of botnets, a network of infected computers are controlled remotely by hackers, or a botmaster, in order to perform malicious tasks or functions. Dr. Tan described this cybercriminal activity as dangerously stealthy; most likely the actual owner of a compromised computer may not realize that it is being controlled elsewhere. Tan cited one study, in which it was estimated that up to one fourth of all personal computers may be part of a botnet. Botnets can be responsible for a range of online criminal activity, including email spamming and distributive denial of service attacks, or DDS. While email spam is an issue relatively known to the public, DDS exists on a much more technical level. Dr. Tan explained that DDS occurs when a huge number of machines, controlled by an external command center, deliberately make a service request at the same time to one website. The simultaneous requests overload the website's capability of processing all of the requests and results in a temporary shutdown or malfunction of the website. Botnets are also used for information theft; bot controllers are able to gain access into computer users' electronic records and steal private information.

According to Dr. Tan, there is a thriving underground botnet economy which requires much more research to fully understand it. Botnets can be sold online for approximately fifty cents per affected computer, often selling up to 3,000 computers at a time. Botnets can also be rented to interested parties, and a botmaster may even sell only pieces of his botnet. Dr. Tan explained that much of the information known about botnets has come through computer security research, and hence the role of researchers is crucial to combating cybercrime. Researchers often create "honeypots" on the internet to attract existing botnet streams, observe their behavior, and ultimately try to take the botnets down. In 2001, an expert research and investigation led to the successful arrest of three bombmasters, controllers of the infamous botnet, Mariposa. With the collaborative work of researchers at Georgia Tech Information Security Center and Panda Security, along with other international security experts and law enforcement agencies, investigators were able to locate Mariposa's Command & Control (C&C) servers and arrest the men behind the botnet. Mariposa was found to have control over 12 million networks, making it one of the largest botnets in history to be taken down.

Another way in which computer security research can assist in fighting against cybercrime is in the area of computer forensics. Dr. Tan explained that obtaining legal evidence from computers and digital media requires advanced technical expertise and investigators often turn to researchers for help. For example, in 2004 a group of citizens and local elected officials in the State of New Jersey filed a lawsuit to prevent the use of the state's electronic voting machines. The prosecutors claimed the electronic machines were vulnerable to manipulation and the accuracy and security of the votes could potentially be compromised. As a result of this claim, a group of expert technology researchers were called to study the machines to decide whether or not the machines were susceptible to cyberabuse. Dr. Tan added that is not uncommon for the job of a computer security researcher to include testing the validity and confidentiality of all electronic machines, including voting machines.

In his conclusion, Dr. Tan stated research and academia have also helped in public policy against cybercrime. He argued researchers have a responsibility to promote security awareness, inform on best computer security practices, and advocate for future generations of computer security professionals. What is needed then is increased interaction between information technology and public policy, such as Princeton University's Center for Information Technology Policy.

"The International Year of Volunteers + 10: Inspiring Millions to Join in Volunteer Action"

(In Observance of the International Year of Volunteers)

Thursday, 10 March 2011

Moderator: **Ms. Gail Bindley-Taylor**, Information Officer, NGO Relations, Department of Public Information (DPI)

Panel Speakers:

Mr. Kiyotaka Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information (DPI)

Ms. Daphne Casey, Chief, UN Volunteers Office in New York

Mr. Jordi Llopart, IYV+10 Liaison Officer, UNV *Continued on page 6.*

Mr. Marwan Jilani, Permanent Observer of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) to the UN

SUMMARY OF AKASAKA'S WELCOME REMARKS

By: Kathryn Rahill, Youth Representative to the Syrian Orthodox Church of America

The briefing welcomed special guest, **Mr. Kiyotaka Akasaka**, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information (DPI). Mr. Akasaka expressed his great pleasure in receiving the opportunity to attend the DPI briefing on the International Year of Volunteers (IYV+10). As the focal point for this year is UN Volunteers (UNV), Akasaka noted the importance of the new partnership between the Department of Public Information and UNV in organization the upcoming 64th Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference, held in Bonn, Germany. According to Mr. Akasaka, the UN DPI/NGO Conference theme, entitled "Sustainable Societies: Responsive Citizens," encapsulates this year's focus on volunteerism and sustainability. Akasaka admitted he is delighted to see how popular 'volunteering' has become. The act of volunteering, he recalled, had become so prevalent in society that it is now considered a value of important citizenship. Mr. Akasaka urged the Briefing's audience to use this volunteer force to mobilize and renew the pursuit of 'sustainable development', a concept which he argued has not been vigorously pursued by member states and stakeholders as expected. The concept's definition has blurred and its hackneyed use dilutes the original meaning and significance of the term, 'sustainability.' Nevertheless, the UN readdresses this issue in its upcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in Rio, Brazil. Mr. Akasaka encouraged the NGO community and its volunteers to use the upcoming Conference as an instrument to reinvigorate the international forces and promote sustainable social, economic, and environmental development.

Mr. Akasaka's welcoming speech was followed by a short film produced by UNV entitled, "**Ancient culture, modern goals.**" The film is about what it means to be a volunteer across cities and towns in Uzbekistan.

"Reach Them to Teach Them: the Role of Psychology in Achieving Universal Access to Education"

(In Observance of World Health Day - 7 April)

Thursday, 14 April 2011

Ed: Fr. George McBride

In observance of World Health Day 2011, which marks the founding of the World Health Organization (WHO), the briefing focused on psychology's role in achieving universal access to education.

According to UNESCO, 100 million primary school-aged children were out of school in 2008. This report also found that only 64% of eligible children from the poorest households were attending primary school. Psychologists concerned with the large number of children out of school have been producing innovative solutions to increase access to education in a variety of contexts. Through the study of human behavior, psychologists have shed light on the multi-faceted barriers that compromise full educational opportunities for girls and boys, women and men to achieve their full potential in all fields of endeavor.

Psychologists have been able to apply behavioral science to meet the needs of all children by designing culturally relevant educational interventions and childcare policies in diverse settings. In this way, psychologists contribute to the mission of the United Nations and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly the Education Goal (MDG 2) which will speed progress toward all the other MDGs. The briefing, organized by NGO Relations with the support of the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations and the American Psychology Association, was part of Psychology Day at the United Na-

tions. It examined the role psychology has played in enabling children to attend primary school and also identify ways the NGO community, private sector, and individuals may become more involved in reaching out to helping all children attend school.

Moderator: María Luisa Chávez; Chief, NGO Relations, Department of Public Information (DPI)

Opening Remarks: **H. E. Mrs. Maria Regina Maria Cordeiro Dunlop,** Deputy Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations

Panel Speakers:

Dr. Barbara Reynolds, Senior Education Advisor, UNICEF

Dr. Pam Flattau, Professor of Psychology from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium

Dr. Maria-Regina Maluf, Professor of Psychology, Catholic University of São Paulo, Brazil

Foday Sackor, Graduate Student studying International Affairs, Columbia University

“Challenges and Opportunities for Preventing Non-Communicable Diseases: The Key to Achieving the MDGs”

Thursday, 21 April 2011

Ed: Fr. George McBride

On 13 May 2010, the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution A/RES/65/238 decided to convene a high-level meeting on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) on 19 and 20 September 2011 in New York. The meeting presents a unique opportunity to secure commitments from Heads of State and Government for a coordinated global response to NCDs, address their socio-economic impact and save millions from premature death and debilitating health complications.

Non-communicable diseases are by far the leading cause of death and disability worldwide, with developing countries bearing a particularly heavy burden. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the four main NCDs – cancer, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes - account for over 35 million deaths each year, representing 60% of all deaths globally, 80% of which are in low- and middle-income countries. Based on current trends, NCDs are expected to be responsible for 73% of all deaths by 2020. The rapid rise of these "silent killers" poses a serious threat to the economic and social development of many countries and an obstacle to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

There is evidence that NCDs are largely preventable by reducing the main risk factors associated with these diseases including: tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and the harmful use of alcohol. In a recent statement on this issue, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon indicated "... we want to work more closely with pharmaceutical companies to make medicines more affordable and accessible. But we will also look to food companies to cut back on the salt, trans fats and sugar....virtually all industries can help reduce pollution and promote healthy lifestyles".

This briefing examined the challenges and opportunities in non-communicable disease prevention and how action can be galvanized to halt and reverse the prevalence of premature deaths attributed to these diseases. It also looked at the link between NCDs and poverty as well as their impact on global development and the MDGs.

Moderator: **Maria Luisa Chavez;** Chief, NGO Relations, Department of Public Information, DPI

Introductory Remarks:

Mr. Kiyo Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information (DPI)

Panel Speakers:

Dr. Karen Sealey, PAHO/WHO Special Adviser, UN Matters and Partnerships

Ms. Kiti Kajana, Advocacy Manager, NCD Alliance

“Indigenous Rights, Mining and Development: The Need for Free, Prior and Informed Consent”

(In tribute to the 19th Commission on Sustainable Development – May 2011)

Thursday, 28 April 2011

Ed: Fr. George McBride

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was established by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1992 to ensure effective follow-up of the groundbreaking UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in June 1992 in Brazil. Among its many responsibilities would be monitoring and reporting on implementation of the Earth Summit agreements at the local, national, regional and international levels. The 19th Session of the CSD is scheduled to take place 2-13 May 2011. This year the focus of its review will be the 10-Year Framework of Programmes (10YFP) in support of regional and national initiatives to accelerate the shift towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production that will promote social and economic development. One of the thematic issues that the CSD-19 will focus on is the issue of mining and that is also the subject of this week’s Briefing.

According to the United Nations the world’s estimated 370 million indigenous peoples are found in more than 90 countries. They regularly face discrimination and are counted among those who are extremely poor, lacking access to health, education and social services. Often, they are disproportionately affected by climate change, deforestation and environmental degradation or exploitation. In the name of development, their lives are sometimes threatened and the quality of their communities and health suffers.

Indigenous people traditionally live on lands rich in natural resources and minerals. Their rights to ancestral lands reach back many generations. Their lands contain sites sacred to their culture and religions. Development projects and mining contracts can clash with these pre-existing rights. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted in 2007, obliges governments or corporations to gain the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of indigenous people, as custodians and ‘owners’ of their lands and resources, before any action is taken related to mining, harvesting of timber or the use of plants and other living things found within indigenous lands. This right is slowly being recognized in human rights law and, in several legal cases, it has been used as precedent. It is now enshrined in some national constitutions.

This week’s Briefing examined the impact of mining on affected communities from different perspectives with special emphasis on the impact on indigenous women. It also explored how to include Indigenous Peoples in the decision to begin mining. As mineral resources belong to the common good, what is needed to protect Indigenous lands from contamination, which could last for several generations? What is required to ensure that Indigenous Peoples receive a fair share of the proceeds of the activities undertaken on their lands and resources? FPIC has a critical role in all of these questions. The expert panel explored possible solutions and look at the role of NGOs, the private sector and civil society in addressing these issues.

“21st Century Media: New Frontiers, New Barriers”

Observance of World Press Freedom Day

Wednesday, 4 May 2011

Ed: Fr. George McBride

When African journalists met in the capital of the newly independent state of Namibia in 1991, the social and political excitement that was sweeping much of the world in the wake of the Cold War had spread to the African Continent. Despite the toll taken by the multiple conflicts that ravaged the region in the previous decade, there was a sense of hope, expectation and a strong will among civil society to grasp this mo-

ment to craft a new future.

The Windhoek Declaration- a statement of press freedom principles-was inspired by the then global move towards democratization and the recognition that an independent, pluralistic and unfettered media was indispensable for the future of every nation aspiring to democracy and social equity. It has been 20 years since this landmark Declaration was produced by mainly newspaper journalists. Whilst there have been important advances for press freedom on the African continent and elsewhere in the world, far too many restrictions continue to exist in the form of censorship, lack of access to public information and harassment, intimidation and outright attacks on journalists, which hinder press freedom and thwart economic and political development in far too many countries.

And now, two decades after the historic the Windhoek Declaration, media is once again at the center of a new wave of change. This time however it is citizens and journalists, grasping the new tools of social connectivity and crafting messages from collective voices, clamoring for change and a role in the future of their respective nations.

OPENING SESSION

Moderator: **Kiyo Akasaka**, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information

Speakers:

Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General

H.E. Mr. Zahir Tanin, Acting President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly

Irina Bokova, Director-General, UNESCO

H.E. Ambassador Eduardo Ulibarri-Bilbao, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations; Chairperson, Committee on Information

Giampaolo Pioli, President, United Nations Correspondents Association

PANEL DISCUSSION

Moderator: **Janis Karklins**, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO

Opening Remarks:

H.E. Wilfried I. Emvula, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Namibia to the United Nations

Richard Coffin, Journalist, France Television

Panel:

Gwen Lister, Editor of the Namibian

Alaa Abd El Fattah, Editor of Manalaa

Sanja Tatic Kelly, Senior Researcher and Managing Editor, Freedom House

Graham Usher, Correspondent, Al Ahram Weekly

Abderrahim Foukara, Washington Bureau Manager, Al Jazeera

“Achieving the MDGs: MDG 2 [Education] + MDG 3 [Gender Equality] + MDG 5 [Maternal Health] = 8”

Thursday, 12 May 2011

Ed: Fr. George McBride

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were officially agreed following the conclusion of the United Nations Summit on the MDGs in 2000. A global plan of action to achieve 8 anti-poverty goals by the year 2015 also contained new commitments by all 192 member states along with 23 international organizations, for women’s and children’s health as well as initiatives against poverty, hunger and disease.

According to UN Reports on progress made on the MDGs, of all the Millennium Development Goals, MDG5 is among those where the



UNFPA Provides Child Delivery Equipment in Timor-Leste

least progress has been made. MDG Goal 5 consists of two targets; first, to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters and second, to achieve universal access to reproductive health. Currently only 23 countries are on track to reach this goal. According to the World Health Organization, more than 350,000 women die annually from complications during pregnancy or childbirth, almost all of them - 99 percent - in developing countries. *Continued on page 10.*

Progress in achieving MDG5 is dependent upon the achievement of the other MDGs, in particular MDG2 and MDG3. MDG 2, which highlights the importance of education, is directly linked to maternal health and mortality as educated women are more likely to seek medical care during pregnancy, ensure their children are immunized, be better informed about their children's nutritional requirements, and adopt improved sanitation practices. MDG3, which promotes gender equality and women's empowerment, is closely linked to MDG5 as gender disparity is one of the social determinants at the heart of inequity in health. Evidence indicates that investing in maternal health not only improves a mother's health, but also increases the number of women in the workforce and promotes the economic well being of communities.

Moderator: **Gail Bindley-Taylor Sainté**; Information Officer, NGO Relations, Department of Public Information (DPI)

Panel Speakers:

Dr. Rene Ekpini, Senior Health Advisor, Health Section, UNICEF

Dr. Sorosh Roshan, President of International Health Awareness Network (IHAN)

Dr. Mary A. Papazian, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, Lehman College

Dr. Vijaya Melnick, Professor Emeritus of Biological & Environmental Sciences, University of the District of Columbia, Washington, D.C.

BRIEFING SUMMARY

By: Kathryn Rahill, Youth Representative of the Syrian Orthodox Church of America

The briefing began with a showing of a short film produced by the UN Millennium Campaign, entitled, United Nations Millennium Campaign Goal 5: Maternal Health.

This week's briefing welcomed its first speaker, **Dr. Rene Ekpini**, to present his own story of growing up in Africa, in relation to the MDGs. His mother bore 10 children, never attended school, and was married to a school teacher. While Dr. Ekpini described his mother as powerless and uneducated, he argued his mother taught him the power of love and dedication – the main elements, he added, that make NGOs the key actors for change. Dr. Ekpini recounted that, in 2000, a total of 189 countries agreed to the Millennium Development Goals, including goal number 5: improving maternal health. Yet progress has been slow. In 2008 there were approximately 358,000 maternal deaths still occurring, only a 34 percent decrease from the statistics in 1919. As a consequence, he cited, "every day over 1000 women are dying from child-birth or pregnancy complications. Those that do not die suffer from chronic and painful illness."

As Dr. Ekpini argued the need for faster reduction rates, he outlined a series of causes for maternal mortality. These causes included the AIDS/HIV epidemic, weak referral systems between communities and medical point sites, social-cultural barriers, lack of education, limited commitment, lack of reliable data to track progress and program information dissemination, poor coordination, low accountability, fragmented approaches, and a focus on facility-based intervention which overlooks the value of communities. Women in countries with high prevalence of AIDS/HIV, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, are especially vulnerable to maternal mortality. Dr. Ekpini continued that there are several social, cultural, and economic barriers which impede access to existing and new resources for women and children, such as stigma and domestic vio-

lence against women. He stressed that as a result, we need to foster more gender-sensitive and human-rights-based programs at the community level. He called for the importance of not only looking at the supply side, but also addressing the specific needs of communities by involving the community itself, and include women as partners at the sub-national and national levels.

Dr. Ekpini also argued that investment in maternal health is highly cost effective, yet requires the development of clear strategies at the global, national, and sub-national level. He encouraged the increased use of new technologies, such as mobile support, to improve service delivery and access to health services. This, he claimed, requires improved coordination between donors, communities, the private sector, national and international governments, and civil society. Dr. Ekpini concluded that for most of these women, it is just a matter of survival. Yet hope still exists in the momentum of the progress for improved maternal health, however slow that progress may be.

The briefing's second panelist was **Dr. Mary Papazian**, professor at Lehman College. Dr. Papazian introduced her discussion by speaking broadly about the elements of education in the context of the Millennium Development Goals. She claimed that even the richest and most developed countries in the world still face challenges to improve on issues of healthcare, education, and gender equality. She reminded us that any progress is only momentary unless we make deep cultural, social and structural changes, and strive to consider necessities such as health care as human rights, not privileges. In order to ensure this perspective, Dr. Papazian argued the importance of including multiculturalism in the curriculum of higher education in the effort to educate younger generations on the value of community, social justice and diversity. She added that is the responsibility of educators to instill a commitment to others through civic community engagement, community service and service learning.

Dr. Papazian also stressed the importance of primary schooling for girls and the inextricable link between women education and poverty. While a girl's education can dramatically impact her ability to make her own decisions, she may fall victim to her family's need to survive and instead drop out of school to work, or be married off to another family. The issue of stigma also severely prevents women and children from attending school, further increasing their dependency and vulnerability within the community. Dr. Papazian discussed the need to educate not only women and girls, but also entire communities about the importance of education and of the harmful effects of discrimination against women. To this end, she argued for community-based strategies and the inclusion of men not as obstacles, but as key actors in solution-based developments. In her final comment, Dr. Papazian acknowledged that while the progress is still slow, history tells us that progress can and does happen.

Dr. Vijaya Melnick led the third discussion on the panel for this week's briefings. Her presentation focused on the intersections of women's rights, development and social justice, and their relation to infant and maternal mortality. According to Dr. Melnick, the outcomes of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 serves as the backdrop of Millennium Development Goal number 3, as member states agreed the "full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women and girls is a priority for governments and the United Nations, and is essential for the advancement of women." Yet despite the promising proclamation, Melnick noted that many women's rights groups and organizations argue the goal's indicators and targets set for 2015 are too limited, and do not reflect the ongoing affront to women's humanity and the moral necessity of this goal. Despite making up over half of the world's total population, women are still considered a vulnerable minority in that they are restricted in access to education, professional and political participation, property ownership, paid work, banking and health care.

The issue of women's access to social, economic and political opportunities reflects Dr. Melnick second argument, in which she claimed a nation's development is limited when its definition is measured solely by economic terms. Dr. Melnick described how the wealth of a nation is marked by economic terms, e.g., per capita growth and gross domestic product, and The World Bank's categorizations of higher income, middle income, and lower income are parallel to the developed, developing, and under-developed stages of nations. However, a nation's economic strength does not wholly define its development, and does not demonstrate the actual economic and social circumstances of all its citizens. Dr. Melnick argued that "conventional economic categories do not report the rights and freedoms enjoyed by the nation's citizens, nor the opportunities citizens have to maximize their personal fulfillment." She cited South Africa as an example of this paradox, claiming "during the period of apartheid, South Africa measured relatively high economic ranking, but the majority of South Africans had their rights denied and their access to institutions and places of residence restricted. Currently, South Africa is categorized as a developing nation, however, now its citizens enjoy freedom, civil liberties, and personal dignity." She added that by denying the full protection of women's rights and denying the potential contributions of women, nations limit their own capacity for development.

In response to this disconnect, Dr. Melnick suggested a 'capabilities approach' to measure the development of a society. She referred to the work of Martha C. Nussbaum, author of "Creating capabilities: The human development approach." According to Ms. Nussbaum, the task of the governing body is to secure to all citizens at least a threshold level of the central capabilities, and the degree to which a government achieves this security is the measurement of the nation's human development and advancement. One of the 'central capabilities' Ms. Nussbaum refers to is that of life. To its end, governments are required to ensure

women receive access to adequate health care in order to protect against the pregnancy and childbirth related deaths of women and infants. However, in countries with rising economies, such as China and India, the lives of women are still largely threatened by the practice of selective abortion. The issue proves that the customs and cultural values of a community, namely, the belief that the birth of a girl is considered to be a burden, override the nation's ranking in education and income. Dr. Melnick argued that although the severity of a nation's gender inequality and women's limitations are not represented in the nation's GDP measurement, the issues will nonetheless have major effects on the nation's overall development.

In conclusion, Dr. Melnick pushed for strong government involvement to ensure that women have access to adequate nutrition and health care. She advocated for the application of a human rights approach to understanding women's mortality and mobility and for creating more sustainable and participatory solutions. When considering that "more than half a million women die every year of complications from pregnancy and childbirth," the Millennium Development Goal number 3 is not just an issue of public health, but is a threat against the basic human rights of women. Dr. Melnick encouraged members of Civil Society to take action against this human rights issue as she quoted Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

The last panelist at this week's briefing was **Dr. Sorosh Roshan**, the founder and President of International Health Awareness Network (IHAN). Dr. Roshan presented on a new initiative formed between IHAN and Lehman College aimed at decreasing women's mortality. She began her discussion by recalling that she had delivered 15,000 babies in all parts of the world, and can vouch that childbirth an experience a mother never forgets. And yet, every 90 seconds, a mother is dead due to pregnancy or childbirth related complications. Dr. Roshan pointed out that on March 11, 2011, when over 20,000 people died from the tsunami disaster in Japan, the world and Japan became one in their grief and commitment to help. "But how about when over 350,000 women die each year because of poor maternal health?" she asked.

Dr. Roshan described the joint initiative as a program that honors mothers by making pregnancy and childbirth safe. The program includes three steps; the first is to develop a plan of action to create the most effective intervention for ensuring safe motherhood. To do this, the program will invite local nurses from three countries, Somalia, Tanzania, and Sudan to be educated in becoming a trained birth attendant. IHAN has already been working extensively with these three countries, and the program will only operate in countries where IHAN is invited to intervene. According to Dr. Roshan, the second step is to broaden awareness among the affected communities, the general public, the media, and our leaders. Lastly, the initiative plans to take actions to ensure that decision makers take the necessary steps to implement and invest in change. If anyone is interested in funding the program, Dr. Roshan asked that you visit the [Lehman College Foundation](#).

"Our Year, Our Voice: From IYY to IYV + 10 - Young People Building Partnerships and Promoting Dialogue"

(In observance of the International Year of Youth (IYY) and the 10th Anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV+10))

Thursday, 9 June 2011

Ed: Fr. George McBride

"Youth should be given a chance to take an active part in the decision-making [at] local, national and global levels."

- *United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon*

On 18 December 2009, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/64/134 proclaiming the year, beginning 12 August 2010, as the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding. The Year coincides with the 25th anniversary of the first ever International Youth Year in 1985.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, [DESA] young people, aged 15-24, constitute approximately 18 percent of the world's population or some 1.2 billion people; in many African countries they comprise over 70 percent of the population. These young people are among the most valuable yet under-utilized resources of any country. The United Nations sees the International Year of Youth (IYY) under the slogan *Our Year, Our Voice* as an opportune moment to harness their energy, talent, and creativity in tackling the challenges facing humanity, from promoting peace to boosting economic development and reaching the Millennium Development Goals.

The IYY is also the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV + 10). IYY and IYV +10 provide a unique opportunity to mobilize young people to make a commitment to causes that they feel passionately about, to shape the development of their communities and, particularly through information and communication technologies such as online volunteering, to act as bridge-builders and agents of change.

This briefing examined ways in which youth volunteering can serve as a tool to address development challenges and to promote intercultural dialogue and partnerships. It also looked at how mechanisms can be put in place to ensure youth participation in decision-making processes at the global, national and local levels.

Moderator: **Maria-Luisa Chavez**; Chief, NGO Relations, Department of Public Information (DPI)

Special Guest: **Flavia Pansieri**, Executive Coordinator, United Nations Volunteers (UNV)

Panel Speakers:

Daniel Coviello, Student, Lehigh University

Sara Cott, Student, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service

Gilonne-Leonore Roquefeuil, Consultant for the UN Programme on Youth

“Our Year, Our Voice: Engaging Youth Towards a Green Economy”

Presented by: Youth Subcommittee; 64th Annual UN DPI NGO Conference Planning Committee

Thursday, 9 June 2011

In honor of the International Year of Youth (August 2010- August 2011) and the theme of this year's 64th Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference, “Sustainable Societies, Responsive Citizens,” this briefing focused on engaging youth towards a green economy, and the ways in which youth can have a more integral role in the advancement of sustainable development through volunteerism and the corporate sector. For more information about the conference, held 3-5 September 2011 in Bonn, Germany, please visit the official UN website: <http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/ngoconference/>.

Immediately following the briefing was a youth networking fair with volunteer organizations (UN Volunteers + more), and representatives from green companies.

Moderator: **Ms. Kelly Roberts**: Co-Chair Youth Subcommittee; UN DPI/NGO Conference Planning Committee

Panel Speakers:

Ambassador Miguel Berger: Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations

Kiyotaka Akasaka: Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information (DPI)

Brice Lalonde: Executive Coordinator for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio +20

Mitch Lowenthal: Legal Assistant for SustainUS: U.S. Youth for Sustainable Development

Dan Bena: Senior Director of Sustainable Development at PepsiCo.

Dr. Michael Dorsey: Asst. Professor of the Environmental Studies Program at Dartmouth College





BRIEFING SUMMARY

By: Kathryn Rahill, Youth Representative of the Syrian Orthodox Church of America

The Youth briefing began with welcoming remarks from both **German Ambassador Miguel Berger**, and **Mr. Kiyotaka Akasaka**, the Under-Secretary-General for UN Communications and Public Information (DPI). Ambassador Berger stressed the importance of youth involvement in upcoming priorities in the UN agenda. Young people, he declared, can significantly help draw more attention to UN concerns on environmental sustainability, including issues like finding renewable energy sources and responding to the Earth's climate change. He stressed the importance of countries around the world finding a consensus on green economy solutions, especially with the Rio+20 Conference approaching this December 2011. Mr. Kiyotaka Akasaka echoed the Ambassador's remarks, describing the potential of young people to initiate global reform as "great." He called on the younger generation to come up with better ideas of the concept of 'sustainable development', arguing that the concept is too broad and has begun to lose its meaning. Akasaka also referenced the political revolutions occurring in countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. The "Arab Spring," he argued, "has been a result of young people's determination and search for freedom. They are the initiators and driving forces of great history." Indeed the youth of Northern Africa and the Middle East have proven the power of their voice, and should continue to be the reinvigorating force behind environmental reform towards a global green economy.

First to speak on the panel of experts was **Mr. Brice Lalonde**, one of the appointed Executive Coordinators of the upcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio +20. Lalonde gave a very candid presentation on what youth can do in lobbying for a greener economy. He began by explaining the often conflicting nature of achieving global objectives, such as trying to lift the millions of people living in poverty into economic stability, while also limiting the amount of resources extracted from the environment. He proposes the questions, "What can governments do? Can we reach objectives collectively while using different approaches?" Lalonde admitted that the voices of youth will probably not be heard enough; in the end it is senior politicians who will make the decisions affecting the environment. What youth *can* do, he added, is to establish their voice as the "long-term watchers." Many policy makers, he explained, make decisions that will look good in the short term and subsequently increase their popularity in the public. Youth need to be the voice of the long-term and future effects of environmental decisions. "It is your time!" Lalonde concluded, so use it well.

Next to speak on the panel was **Mr. Mitch Lowenthal**, a legal assistant for the environmental practice group of international law firm, SustainUS. Lowenthal discussed the various ways in which youth can become more involved in promoting for a greener economy. The power of consumption, he argued, is the backbone of our economy, and youth therefore have a strong purchasing power to influence the way goods are made. Lowenthal called for youth to initiate a change in our consumerism behavior through buying goods that are environmental-friendly and rejecting products that are not. He added that young people can also use their voting power to elect officials who support green-economy policies and to hold politicians and their governments accountable. Lastly, students can begin advocating for a greener economy right in their own university. He urged students to begin investigating the endowments made to their schools; ask, 'where is the money going and is it going for sustainable means?' Lowenthal argued students should get involved in any way they can, sometimes requiring them to think out of the box, but nevertheless should ensure that environmental-friendly practices begin with themselves and with their community.

To speak on behalf of the private sector, **Mr. Dan Bena** of PepsiCo Inc., presented on what his company is

doing to promote sustainable development. PepsiCo Incorporated is a consumer-products company with over nineteen brands sold in over 190 countries – more countries than in the UN system, Bena added. ‘How does one get a consumer-products company such as PepsiCo to do something he or she wants?’ This is a question asked by Mr. Bena in the beginning of his presentation; his answer echoed Lowenthal’s call for youth to use their consumer power in a way that persuades companies to act accordingly. In a recent survey presented by PepsiCo to its customers, the company asked, “What do you hold companies completely responsible for?” Mr. Bena explained that the consumers responded they held companies accountable for not harming the environment, not hurting people, and creating safe and quality products. According to Bena, PepsiCo works to achieve all three of these ends while also employing a strategic business strategy that increases their profit while helping the community as well. Mr. Bena makes it clear that PepsiCo’s charitable work is “not philanthropy,” but rather an approach to consumer marketing that is strictly business. “Imagine,” he said, “if we [PepsiCo] could help those four billion people who do not have access to education, food, shelter, or healthcare. Imagine if PepsiCo was the company that lifts them out of poverty.” Mr. Bena’s remarks presented a candid perspective on what it means to be a responsible company. As PepsiCo promotes its name through endorsing economically and environmentally sustainable practices around the world, the company thereafter is able to expand its consumer base, bring in more money towards PepsiCo, and finally, put the money toward making healthier and more convenient products. Mr. Bena’s philosophy of doing good works is best captured by PepsiCo, itself, [“We believe being a responsible corporate citizen is not only the right thing to do, but the right thing to do for our business.”](#) Mr. Bena concluded that if the voice of youth, particularly youth consumers, is loud enough, then they can get businesses to concede to their demands, if not out of actual concern for the issue, but concern for doing ‘good business.’

Last to speak on this week’s panel was Assistant Professor of Dartmouth University’s Environmental Studies Program, **Dr. Michael Dorsey**. Dr. Dorsey provided an interesting perspective on corporate and government responsibility and the role of youth in creating a sustainable environment. He began by asking the first two rows of the briefing’s audience to stand up. The two rows, he explained, represent the powers that control the resources of the rest of the population, represented by the remaining briefing audience. Once this sense of “context” was achieved, Dorsey went on to explain the role of youth is to create a resistance to the dominant paradigms that outline how governments and corporations claim to respond to needs for sustainability. He warns youth to pay attention to what is both said, and *unsaid* at global summits such as at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, and in the upcoming Rio +20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. Dr. Dorsey concluded that in using their voice, youth should feel responsible to seek truth over mendacity, shine light over darkness, and ensure planning over promises.

“Refugees in Current Conflicts: 1 Resolution – Human Rights Protection”

Thursday, 16 June 2011

The briefing was held in observance of World Refugee Day, held on June 20th of each year. On 4 December 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 55/76, which decided that from 2001, 20 June would be observed as World Refugee Day, in coincidence with Africa Refugee Day. The year 2001 also marked the 50th anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

In honor of this observance, the briefing’s expert panelists focused on the status of refugees and stateless people throughout North Africa and the Middle East, with particular attention on the widespread protests and uprisings that have recently spread across the region and have resulted in a growing number of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons.

Moderator: **Maria-Luisa Chavez**: Chief, NGO Relations, Department of Public Information (DPI)

Panel Speakers:

Mr. Udo Janz: Director and Special Adviser to the High Commissioner, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Ms. Anke Strauss: Deputy Permanent Observer/Liaison Officer, International Organization for Migration (IOM) Office of the Permanent Observer to the United Nations

Mr. Sebastian Kohn: Program Coordinator for the Equality and Citizenship Program of the Open Society Justice Initiative

Continued on page 16.

BRIEFING SUMMARY

(Continued from page 15)

By: Kathryn Rahill, Youth Representative of the Syrian Orthodox Church

This week's briefing began with UNHCR-produced video clips entitled, '[Tunisia: No Way Home](#)' and UNHCR's '[1 Campaign](#)'. First to speak from the panel was Mr. Udo Janz, the Director and Special Advisor to the High Commissioner in the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in New York. Janz gave a brief history of UNHCR and presented on the agency's work and recent '1 Campaign,' a growing

movement in over 100 countries which calls on people to "do 1 thing" to help the plight of refugees. What many people may not know, stated Mr. Janz, is that UNHCR was originally created in 1950 as a temporary UN agency to help assist thousands of displaced European in the wake of World War II. While UNHCR's mandate was originally supposed to last for only three years, its work has proven to be undeniably necessary. The agency has since grown to work in over 123 countries, with 124 main staff locations, and 272 regional and field offices. Additionally, over sixty (60) percent of the UNHCR staff work on the frontlines of where they are needed. Although refugee law is officially observed by 147 countries, much of the UN agency's work deals with governments' implementation at the ground level. Janz described the agency's work as very physical, hands-on, and focused on the protection of every individual. In countries that do not follow refugee law, or lack the institutional capacity to handle their refugee cases, UNHCR staff members often handle daily refugee claims as part of their work.

The emphasis on every individual is the theme of UNHCR's "do 1 thing" campaign to help make a difference. Janz explained their focus is not just on the statistics needed to satisfy the appetite of donors, governments, and the public; but rather, they advocate that behind every number and every statistic is an individual. UNHCR recently celebrated its 60th anniversary in December 2010 and is currently launching a Statelessness Conventions Campaign in order to help governments adhere to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. These two Conventions serve as the international legal frameworks for protecting the rights of stateless people and reducing their numbers throughout the world. According to Mr. Janz, stateless people are a particularly vulnerable population. If a person is not recognized by his or her country's national registry, then the person lacks access to any civil rights, including health care, education, and housing.

The current clientele of UNHCR is estimated to be over forty-four (44) million people, not including an estimated twelve (12) million stateless people. To support this growing population, the High Commissioner for Refugees has a bi-annual budget of over three (3) billion U.S. dollars. Janz revealed UNHCR is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions of member states, and uses up only 1.7% of the actual UN system's budget. According to Mr. Janz, the budget is currently based off a global needs assessment; its high number accounts for the growing rise in conflicts and ensuing displaced persons throughout several countries.

UNHCR has also been very involved in the recent uprisings throughout Northern Africa and the Middle East. The UN agency is currently working alongside the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Libya to assist migrants who are stranded in the revolution-torn country, many of them having been working in the grey economy. Janz added, "UNHCR has rescued approximately 200,000 people from Tunisia and Egypt." He explained that during these operations, UNHCR is faced with three options for refu-



gees: return them home if possible; negotiate with the host country to integrate them into the country and eventually become citizens; or resettle them into countries that are opening the door. According to Mr. Janz, approximately 100,000 refugees per year are able to be resettled. The United States, alone, accepts 70,000 refugees per year, while the European Union takes around 7,000 per year. Recent refugees from Burundi have been able to find sanctuary in Tanzania through a different route, opting to become recognized citizens of the host country. In the Middle East, over 10,000 Syrians seeking political refuge have now crossed the border into Turkey and are awaiting their fate.

Mr. Udo Janz concluded with a few words on the challenges ahead. While the 1954 and 1961 Conventions have laid the foundations for legal protection of refugees and stateless persons, there still remains a large dearth in the details for guidelines and implementation methods needed at the ground level. What's more, the international community has yet to come to a consensus on how to address the exponentially rising numbers of displaced persons around the world.

Second to present on the panel was **Ms. Amy Muedin**, a current Programme Specialist in the Office of the Permanent Observer for the International Organization of Migration (IOM). Ms. Muedin pointed out that similar to UNHCR, the IOM is also celebrating its 60th anniversary this year. Its history parallels that of UNHCR, formed after World War II as a temporary organization to address the millions of Europeans displaced by the war. Based in Geneva, the IOM now consists of 132 member states and growing. Muedin presented on the recent work of IOM in Northern Africa and the Middle East as examples of the kind of issues the organization addresses. The IOM has been leading the evacuation efforts of third-country nationals and Libyans fleeing from the violent unrest that has been sweeping through the country. "As of this week, over 1 million people of over 46 nationalities have fled Libya," stated Muedin, "263,000 of this 1 million include nationals from neighboring countries, and 280,000 represent third-party nationals." She added Tunisia has received more than 300,000 people; its numbers have since dropped to 90,000 as many Libyans have now returned home. The scale of these numbers reflects the crucial need for IOM's support in border transit centers and evacuation centers. Ms. Muedin also explained IOM's work to help resettled people reintegrate into their host countries through providing cost-effective migration assistance.

Migrants especially, argued Muedin, are a very vulnerable population during times of civic unrest. In the chaos of countries such as Libya, it becomes even more difficult to identify the particular needs of each group of migrants. Refugees become mixed in with other migrating communities, e.g. labor migrants, stateless peoples, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons. As a result, the IOM advocates using a case by case approach to ensure the needs of each vulnerable group are both identified and addressed.

The briefing's third panelist came from the philanthropic arena; **Mr. Sebastian Kohn** is the Program Coordinator for the Equality and Citizenship Program for the Open Society Justice Initiative based in New York. Kohn has been researching and advocating for statelessness and the human right to nationality for almost four years now and presented on current issues and challenges within his work. According to his report, approximately 300,000 Kurds remain stateless in Syria; they remain unrecognized by the state and left without civil rights and protection. Kuwait's Bedoun (also Bidun, meaning "without" in Arabic) population also remains stateless and subsequently unable to access any of the nation's social services including access to state education, employment, or health care. While the issue of statelessness protection is addressed in the UN's 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, Mr. Kohn argued many countries still consider the issue as a "fringe issue." As stated by Kohn, stateless persons are caught in an ironic battle, in which they are an incredibly vulnerable population in need of protection and assistance, and yet, the numbers and exact scale of their needs are left unknown because the host countries do not bother to document the size of their stateless population. The conceptual identity of statelessness creates conceptual needs. These needs however are beginning to get more recognition as human rights advocacy organizations such as Open Society Foundations shine more light on them.

Mr. Kohn brought up yet another challenge in dealing with stateless populations. He argued that while the 1954 Convention on the Status of Statelessness provides a definition of statelessness, the definition solicits a critical question: 'what does it mean for a state to not consider a person as a national?' In response, Kohn identified two crucial aspects to consider; "who are the authorities in charge of citizenship determination, and what kind of evidence can we rely on when a state does not recognize a person as a national?" He answered that a state may never actually outright declare a person as 'stateless,' thereby absolving itself of any imminent duty to address the needs of that person. Kohn turned again to the example of the Bedoun population in Kuwait. In 1962, Kuwait's newly independent government issued a census that effectively left out a population, known as the Bedoun, from citizenship. This population has since grown to over 300,000 Kurdish people. Over the years, the government of Kuwait has been gradually limiting the civil rights of these people. Recent demonstrations by the Bedoun people in Kuwait have been met with little positive change. In fact, a Bedoun-led demonstration this past March 2011 was violently suppressed by the Kuwait government. Kohn concluded that until governments like Kuwait feel any real political pressure to address this issue, the human rights of stateless populations, like those of the Bedoun, remain unprotected.

The final speaker on the panel was **Mr. Bob Carey**, Vice President of Resettlement and Migration Policy at the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Over the past four years, the IRC has produced four studies about the plight of Iraqi refugees. Carey described the Iraq crisis, one of the largest refugee crises of our time, as a proxy for all other refugee crises. He explained that the current situation of internally displaced Iraqis, most of who are living in squatted settlements, has received very little global attention due to the longevity of the issue. As the refugee crisis persists and becomes more convoluted, the international public begins to lose interest, and the refugees are left unaided. Many of them have since integrated into the urban population, effectively becoming an invisible but still extremely vulnerable population. As of yet there is no comprehensive framework for how to address the Iraqi refugee crisis, stated Mr. Carey. The IRC has been working diligently to bring this issue to the forefront, arguing that a generation of IDPs without access to education and livelihood can spur a poor economy, national resentment and terrorists' movements. Carey concluded resettlement is not just a solution for the individual, but a broader strategic tool for the protection of wider populations.

63rd Annual UN DPI/NGO CONFERENCE: Interactive Media Report

By: Anne Riccitelli, NGO representative of the Media Sub-Committee, New York & Representative of the Syrian Orthodox Church in America

The official, comprehensive website of the 63rd Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference was launched in English on May 14, 2010 at [Http://www.undpingoconference.org](http://www.undpingoconference.org). The website was updated regularly with new information about the Conference for NGOs and other civil society actors worldwide to interest them in attending. It was designed with the same motif as the Visual Conference, including the most important travel and visa information. This was followed by more important content on the Conference itself including the programme and biographies of speakers participating in the Conference.

During the three days of the Conference, the website featured up-to-date information on the detailed programme of the Conference and the various events that took place each day. This information was updated hourly. The website also provided information on keynote speakers, including those participating in the Roundtables and the 54 Workshops under the section titled Conference. All media coverage was updated incorporating all articles and media contributions from both the mainstream and NGO media as well as coverage of the public events. All documents including press releases whether emanating from the official Conference Officer or the Conference Officer preparing material for audiences in the Pacific, or those from the public programme, as well as statements from key participants were uploaded and updated in real time. Radio clips as well as the audio of interviews in different languages were also uploaded as soon as they were made available. Other media resources, such as the webcast and the photo galleries, were imported from our partners at Making-HealthGlobal.com.au, the website of the group managing the Public Programme. Special thanks to Eric Falt, former Director of the Outreach Division in DPI, who personally supervised all the work performed on the website while in Melbourne.



Inside Look at Major UN Actions & Events

UN Envoy on Cultural Rapprochement in Impassioned Appeal for End of Bigotry

New York, 3 April 2011

The Secretary-General's High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Jorge Sampaio, today urged the world to honestly confront the problem of intolerance and extremism in the face of recent manifestations of bigotry, saying the vice cannot be overlooked, while silence can be seen as consent.

"Recent words and actions by Gainesville Pastor Terry Jones are offensive and dangerous. They express religious hatred and show deliberate disrespect for Muslims," said Mr. Sampaio, a former president of Portugal, in a statement. "The desecration of the Qur'an -- as of any holy text -- has to be vehemently repudiated. More than this, no religion tolerates the slaughter of innocents," he added.

Mr. Sampaio's statement followed Friday's attack in Afghanistan in which a large crowd of demonstrators angry at the burning of a copy of the Koran allegedly by Pastor Terry Jones of the United States stormed a United Nations compound and killed three European UN staff members and four Nepalese guards. "The outrageous attack on the UN Assistance Mission in Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan, the victims of which include both UN workers and Afghan demonstrators, has to be firmly condemned, as does the violence that is spreading to other provinces," said Mr. Sampaio.

The Alliance of Civilizations is an initiative launched in 2005 by Spain and Turkey under UN auspices to promote better cross-cultural relations worldwide. Mr. Sampaio said advocacy of religious hatred that amounts to incitement to hostility or violence against believers in all regions of the world has to be condemned and prevented; "Intolerance and extremism have to be addressed by long-term action focused on education for a culture of respect that is based on the value of toleration of diverse beliefs, commitments, and actions of different people." "Accordingly, I would like to call on governments, religious leaders, and civil society to scale up efforts, and work closely within the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations to confront intolerance and extremism as a key dimension of peace, human security and sustainable development," he added.

"Preventing Genocide Only Real Way to Honour Rwandan Victims" – Ban Ki-Moon

New York, 7 April 2011

The only way to truly honor the memory of the more than 800,000 people who perished in Rwanda 17 years ago is to ensure that such tragedies never occur again, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today, as the United Nations observed the annual day of remembrance of the victims of the genocide.

"Preventing genocide is a collective and individual responsibility," Mr. Ban said in a message for the day, which is observed every year on 7 April. "Rwanda's survivors have made us confront the ugly reality of a preventable tragedy."

More than 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and Hutus were murdered in the tiny African nation, mostly by machete, during a period of less than 100 days beginning in April 1994.

The Secretary-General noted that the recognition of the collective failure of the international community to come to the assistance of the people of Rwanda, and to shield the victims of the wars in the Balkans, led to the endorsement by the 2005 World Summit of the responsibility to protect.

Statement by the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations

Intolerance and extremism have to be confronted head on. In the face of acts of bigotry, inaction doesn't work and silence can be seen as consent. Recent words and actions by Gainesville Pastor Terry Jones are offensive and dangerous. They express religious hatred and show deliberate disrespect for Muslims.

The desecration of the Qur'an – as of any holy text -- has to be vehemently repudiated. More than this, no religion tolerates the slaughter of innocents.

The outrageous attack on the UN Assistance Mission in Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan, the victims of which include both UN workers and Afghan demonstrators, has to be firmly condemned, as does the violence that is spreading to other provinces.

The advocacy of religious hatred that amounts to incitement to hostility or violence against believers in all regions of the world has to be condemned and prevented. Intolerance and extremism have to be addressed by long-term action focused on education for a culture of respect that is based on the value of toleration of diverse beliefs, commitments, and actions of different people.

Accordingly, I would like to call on governments, religious leaders, and civil society to scale up efforts, and work closely within the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations to confront intolerance and extremism as a key dimension of peace, human security and sustainable development.

Senior UN Official Stresses Kyrgyzstan's Key Role in Regional Anti-Drug Efforts

New York, 26 April 2011

The United Nations anti-drug chief today [highlighted](#) the key role of Kyrgyzstan in countering illicit drug trafficking, as he met with officials in the Central Asian nation to discuss a range of issues, including drug treatment services and prison management.

Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), pledged that his agency would continue to assist Kyrgyzstan, particularly with the re-established State Service on Drug Control and in building the country's capacity to combat drug trafficking.

"The formation of this agency is critical in combating the interconnected ills of drug trafficking and organized crime," Mr. Fedotov said on the sidelines of his meeting with Vitaly Orozaliev, Chairperson of the State Service on Drug Control.

"UNODC is proud to be able to work with authorities in assisting the people of Kyrgyzstan and the wider region in reducing the threat of illicit drugs and we look forward to expanding our existing partnership."

He noted that, given its proximity to Afghanistan, the country has a key role in tackling the movement of drugs produced in Afghanistan to Europe, Russia and China.

While in the capital, Bishkek, Mr. Fedotov met with President Roza Otunbayeva and Prime Minister Almazbek Atambaev, as well as the Speaker of Parliament, Akhmatbek Keldibekov, and the Foreign Minister, Ruslan Kazakbaev.

They discussed UNODC's expanding partnership with Kyrgyzstan, which has come to include mutual legal assistance, enhancing cross-border cooperation, combating transnational organized crime, effectively promoting drug dependence treatment, responding to HIV and AIDS as it relates to both drug users and in prison settings, and countering human trafficking.

As part of the visit, Mr. Fedotov visited a pre-trial detention centre in Bishkek to discuss issues of prison management, which forms part of a €3 million European Union-funded project to support comprehensive prison reform activities in Kyrgyzstan.

“UNODC is committed to working with the Kyrgyz Government to improve the quality of prisons in the country, and to help the Government implement rule of law and criminal justice reforms,” the Executive Director pledged.

Top UN Relief Official Sounds Alarm after ‘Deeply Troubling’ Visit to Côte D’Ivoire

New York, 7 April 2011

The United Nations relief chief sounded the alarm today about the humanitarian situation inside Côte d’Ivoire, saying emergency aid is needed now to help hundreds of thousands of civilians caught up in the deadly violence that has engulfed the West African country.

Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, told journalists in New York that she had “just returned from a deeply troubling visit” to Côte d’Ivoire and neighboring Liberia.

Ms. Amos said she saw evidence of “what must have been terrible violence” and spoke to numerous people who had either endured or witnessed atrocities as a result of fighting between forces supporting the former president Laurent Gbagbo, who has refused to step down, and those backing Alassane Ouattara, the UN-certified winner of last November’s presidential election.

The heaviest fighting is now focused on the commercial capital, Abidjan, where pro-Gbagbo forces are concentrated. The UN peacekeeping mission (UNOCI) is carrying out ground and air patrols to try to protect civilians and to respond to requests for assistance from journalists and foreign nationals.

UNOCI troops deployed to secure the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Bridge in Abidjan were shelled from the lagoon side late yesterday and had to return fire.

“People are immensely traumatized,” Ms. Amos said. “They have witnessed terrible violence, and many have been directly targeted.”

Ms. Amos heard stories of women witnessing the execution of their husbands, of women and girls being abducted, and of children being forcibly separated from their parents.

“I spoke to women who had hidden in a swamp for three days, hiding from militias. I heard claims there are hundreds if not thousands of people still hiding in the forests. I also heard claims that militias are hunting people with dogs.”

The Under-Secretary-General stressed that there can be no impunity for the perpetrators of crimes against civilians.

“While we don’t yet know the full extent of the atrocities that have been carried out, they clearly add up to extremely serious human rights violations.”

Earlier this week prosecutors at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague said they may open investigations into the “widespread and systematic” killings in Côte d’Ivoire in recent weeks.

Ms. Amos noted that given the deep roots of the violence and discord in Côte d’Ivoire, “a sustained process of reconciliation is going to be needed” throughout the country.

But she said that the parties to the fighting must ensure that humanitarian aid can reach those in need.

“Humanitarian aid needs to be provided now – to alleviate the worst suffering; to provide protection for people; and to help reduce the tensions which will only escalate as food and other basic essentials run short.”

UN aid officials have estimated that up to 1 million Ivorians have been displaced by the violence, with some internally displaced and others forced to flee into neighboring countries, particularly Liberia.

“Liberian authorities, UN agencies and our partner NGOs [non-governmental organizations] are doing their utmost to ensure that the response is adequate,” the Emergency Relief Coordinator said.

“But we still have a long way to go. With more money, we can deliver more food, provide shelter [and] offer better medical treatment to those who are sick, and much more.”

Ms. Amos said the UN would focus on ensuring that aid workers can gain access to those areas where populations require assistance.

“The important thing to remember here is it is ordinary people who are caught up in this violence. What they told me over and over again is they want a safe and stable Côte d’Ivoire, so they can go on with their lives.”

Women Playing Critical Role in North Africa Democracy Movement, UN Official Says

New York, 7 April 2011

Women have played a critical role in the pro-democracy protest movements that have swept across North Africa and the Middle East this year, and their rights and leadership potential must continue to be encouraged, the head of the new United Nations entity for gender equality and women’s empowerment said today.

Michelle Bachelet, the Executive Director of UN Women, met with United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other senior US officials today during a visit to Washington, D.C. that focused on how to advance women’s political participation, economic empowerment and ending violence against women.

Ms. Bachelet called on US officials to continue advance women’s rights and leadership around the world, particularly in emerging democracies.

“In Egypt and Tunisia, women have played a key role in the movement for democracy, and their legal rights and decision-making within the transitional structures are critical,” Ms. Bachelet said in a press release issued by her office following the visit to Washington.

UN Official Exhorts Countries to Work Harder to Build Climate Change Consensus

New York, 8 April 2011

The top United Nations climate change official today urged countries to work harder for further progress on combating global warming this year, saying there were positive discussions on the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emission reduction at this week’s meeting in Bangkok, Thailand.

“Discussions in Bangkok under the Kyoto Protocol importantly included not only a focus on what should happen with regard to the future of the protocol but also how it will happen,” said Christiana Figueres, the Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), at the end of the six-day meeting.

“It is significant that there is a strong desire to build on the Kyoto rules and a desire to find a political solution in 2011,” she added.

Continued on page 23.

Wave of Enforced Disappearances in China Sparks Concern from UN Rights Experts

New York, 8 April 2011

A group of United Nations human rights experts today voiced serious concern about the recent wave of enforced disappearances reported to have taken place in China, calling on authorities in the Asian nation to release all those who have been forcibly disappeared.

The five-member UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has received multiple reports from China of “a number of persons” being subject to enforced disappearances including the lawyers Teng Biao, Tang Jitian, Jiang Tianyong and Tang Jingling.

In a press statement issued in Geneva, the working group said that human rights activists, lawyers and students appear to be the targets of the recent disappearances.

“According to the allegations received, there is a pattern of enforced disappearances in China, where persons suspected of dissent are taken to secret detention facilities, and are then often tortured and intimidated, before being released or put into ‘soft detention’ and barred from contacting the outside world,” the working group said.

The experts stressed that an enforced disappearance represents a crime under international law.

UN Officials Laud Vital Role of Civil Society In Tackling HIV/AIDS Epidemic

New York, 8 April 2011

As representatives of civil society and the private sector met with governments today to discuss how to advance the response to HIV/AIDS ahead of a high-level meeting in June, United Nations officials lauded the vital role played by non-governmental actors in tackling the epidemic.

“The engagement of civil society and the private sector is indispensable in holding governments accountable, in ensuring that the AIDS response respects human rights, and in advocating for the creation of legal and social environments that protect people from infection and support social justice,” General Assembly President Joseph Deiss said at the start of the civil society hearing held at UN Headquarters.

Egypt Makes Progress on Human Rights but Challenges Remain, UN Team Finds

New York, 8 April 2011

Egypt has made progress on human rights since the revolution that toppled the regime of Hosni Mubarak earlier this year, a United Nations team reported, while noting a number of challenges that need to be tackled such as combating impunity and ensuring an inclusive dialogue during the transition period.

The five-member delegation from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) that visited Egypt from 27 March to 4 April also encouraged the current leadership to translate the legitimate aspirations of the Egyptian people for change into concrete democratic reforms.

It also called for combating abuses and impunity, noting that “the credibility of reform for any society in transition depends on the way past as well as current human rights violations are addressed,” according to a news release issued today in Cairo.

UN Documentary Forum Shines a Spotlight on Global Fight Against Hunger

New York, 8 April 2011

Filmmakers, activists, journalists, aid workers, policy-makers and United Nations staff are gathering in New York this weekend for a two-day documentary forum aimed at raising public awareness about the fight against hunger worldwide.

The third annual "Envision: Addressing Global Issues Through Documentaries" forum, which kicks off tonight, comprises film screenings and panel discussions centered on the themes of combating hunger and poverty, one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that world leaders have pledged to try to achieve by 2015.

Kiyo Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, said the choice of poverty and hunger for this year's event was particularly timely given the approaching target date for the MDGs.

"We must redouble our efforts to bring the crisis facing so much of the world's population into the public eye," Mr. Akasaka said. "Documentarians, who present complex issues to filmgoers in ways that engage the heart and mind alike, are crucial allies in that effort."

UN Anti-Crime Chief Calls for Action to Combat Online Abuse of Children

New York, 11 April 2011

Online child abuse is growing rapidly as more people gain access to the Internet, a top United Nations official warned today, calling for concerted global action to combat one of the most common forms of cyber-crime.

"Serious offences are being committed – often right under a parent's nose," Yury Fedotov, the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), said in his <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/speeches/2011/April/2011-04-11-crime-commission-opening.html> address to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, which opened its 20th session in Vienna.

"The web literally opens a portal into your home and your children may be letting criminals in," he stated.

Protecting children from online predators is among the issues to be taken up by the weeklong meeting of the Commission, which is focusing on progress in global efforts to address transnational organized crime, including emerging issues such as cybercrime.

UN-Backed Small Loans Help Refugees in Ecuador Break Out of Poverty

New York, 11 April 2011

A United Nations-supported micro credit project is helping vulnerable refugees in Ecuador, especially women who have turned to sex work to support themselves and their families, break out of poverty.

Ecuador is home to the largest number of refugees in Latin America, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Of the more than 53,000 recognized refugees, 73 per cent are women and children.

Over the past year, UNHCR has been working with partner organizations to set up programmes and provide

financial services to help needy Colombian refugees and their hosts in Ecuador, including supporting income-generating projects.

Such projects “benefit Colombian and Ecuadorean women, especially those who are often subject to discrimination, in order to give them a different alternative,” said Luis Varese, the UNHCR deputy representative in Ecuador.

Among the most vulnerable are refugee women who turn to sex work, either because they have limited job opportunities or need a second income to support their families.

Studies done by UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Ecuadorean health ministry have found that nearly half of the Colombian refugee women who are sex workers in Ecuador’s northern border area were not in the trade back in their homeland.

UNHCR supported organizations such as 21 de Septiembre, a group that promotes the human rights of sex workers, to provide financial services to sex workers and their families in Esmeraldas, a border town on the Pacific coast.

Last year 19 women each received an average credit of \$300, and so far there has been no delinquency in the loans.

UN Human Rights Office Voices Deep Concern About Killings in Syria

New York, 12 April 2011

United Nations human rights officials today expressed deep concern amid reports that Syrian security forces have increased the killings, arrests or harassment of protesters, journalists and human rights defenders.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) today urged authorities in the Middle East country to immediately stop the use of excessive force, especially the firing of live ammunition against peaceful demonstrators.

Rupert Colville, a spokesperson for OHCHR, told reporters in Geneva that the office had noted reports of an “intensification” of killings of protesters by security forces, as well as the mass arrest of human rights defenders and the harassment of journalists.

“A number of journalists, international and Syrian, as well as Syrian bloggers, have reportedly been arrested and TV signals suspended of at least one private TV station,” he said.

“Syrian authorities must immediately release journalists detained for doing their jobs and to respect the right to freedom of expression.”

Mr. Colville noted that OHCHR has told Syrian authorities that the use of force against peaceful demonstrators has not quelled the discontent, either in Syria or in other countries across North Africa and the Middle East where similar protests have erupted this year.

OHCHR’s concerns echo those of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who spoke by telephone with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on Saturday, a day after a deadly confrontation between protesters and security forces in the southern city of Deraa.

Darfur: UN Helps to Secure Release of Sudanese Aid Workers Taken Hostage at Camp

New York, 13 April 2011

United Nations officials have helped to secure the release of 12 Sudanese aid workers who were taken hostage by a youth group at a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the war-torn Darfur region.

Representatives of the joint African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) worked with the leaders of the Kalma IDP camp in South Darfur to successfully mediate the release of

the aid workers.

The aid workers are scheduled to be released later today, UNAMID said in a press release.

The aid workers – who had been conducting a vaccination campaign in Kalma, which is home to tens of thousands of people – had been taken hostage on Monday, apparently in retaliation for the arrest by security forces of an IDP who worked for a national non-governmental organization (NGO).

Some humanitarian organizations suspended their operations in Kalma after the aid workers were taken hostage, UNAMID reported.

IDP camps have emerged across Darfur's three states since deadly conflict erupted in 2003 between rebels, Government forces and allied militiamen. UNAMID has been in place since the start of 2008 in a bid to quell the fighting and ease the humanitarian suffering.

Upcoming UN-Backed Summit to Focus on Sustainable Management of Rainforests

New York, 13 April 2011

Top officials from more than 35 nations covering the world's three major rainforest regions will gather at a United Nations-backed conference next month to discuss the common challenges faced by these vital ecosystems that support more than a billion people.

The aim of the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Amazon, Congo, and Borneo-Mekong Forest Basins is to achieve a plan for the sustainable management of forest ecosystems in the three basins.

The four-day meeting, which will be held in Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo, beginning on 31 May, is also part of celebrations of the International Year of Forests (2011).

The Amazon Basin of South America, the Congo Basin in Central Africa, and the Borneo-Mekong Basin in South-East Asia make up 80 per cent of the world's rainforests and contain two thirds of its biodiversity.

"Every one of us, all 7 billion people on Earth, has our physical, economic and spiritual health tied to the health of our forest ecosystems," said Jan McAlpine, Director of the UN Forum on Forests Secretariat. "Throughout Forests 2011, we will celebrate this intricate, interdependent relationship between forests and people."

UN Agency Honours Young Artists Who Promote Arab-Western Cultural Exchanges

New York, 13 April 2011

The United Nations cultural agency today celebrated 20 young artists – from an Iraqi pianist and a Lebanese trumpeter to a Dutch composer and two Israeli curators – for their contributions to dialogue between the Arab and Western worlds, saying it hopes their efforts will spark similar initiatives from other artists.

The Young Artists for Intercultural Dialogue between the Arab and Western worlds were announced at a ceremony early this evening at the Paris headquarters of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The agency said in a press statement that the awards are part of a wider joint effort by UNESCO and the UN-backed Alliance of Civilizations to promote intercultural dialogue and understanding, and it hopes these

awards will heighten awareness about their work.

One of the artists honored, the Iraqi pianist Zuhail Sultan, founded the National Youth Orchestra of Iraq when she was aged just 17 and has since worked with many Western performers.

The Palestinian-American playwright Betty Shamieh writes plays focused on intercultural relations, particularly involving Arab-Americans, while the French-Algerian novelist Faïza Guène depicts the realities of life for North Africans residing in the French suburbs.

Other artists named include the Belgian-Moroccan dancer-choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, the French photographer JR, the Italian film director Federico Ferrone and the Israeli curators Ruti Sela and Mayaan Amir.

Several musicians were also garlanded, including the Lebanese trumpeter Ibrahim Maalouf, the Egyptian band Massar Egbari, the Dutch composer Merlijn Twaalfhoven and the members of Talent 2008, a project bringing together nine musicians from the Palestinian territories, Egypt and Norway.

Landlocked Asia-Pacific Countries Pledge at UN Meeting to Enhance Cooperation

New York, 14 April 2011

Landlocked developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region today pledged during a United Nations-backed meeting in Mongolia to promote greater cooperation and to reduce trade and transport barriers in an effort to achieve mutual sustainable development.

“Landlocked developing countries, made most vulnerable by their geographical isolation, are often the hardest hit by rapid global economic swings,” said Noeleen Heyzer, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

“We need to deepen regional cooperation and invest in the people, institutions and ecosystems of these countries to support their journey to shared prosperity, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people,” she said at the end of the three-day meeting of the region’s landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) in the Mongolian capital, Ulaanbaatar.

Ministers and senior government officials from Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Mongolia, Nepal and Tajikistan met to review progress in implementing the Almaty Programme of Action and assess challenges arising from the severe socio-economic impact of the food, fuel and financial crises on the LLDCs.

Foreign Corrupt Practices Act in India

Thursday, 26 May 2011

The number of U.S. companies that conduct business in and with India has escalated dramatically in the past several years. This rapid growth leaves some companies and their employees unprepared to comply with the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA)—and violations can be quite costly.

In Nov. 2010, the SEC and DOJ agreed to settle with an offshore drilling company over alleged FCPA violations of making improper payments of approximately \$2 million in India and other countries. The company agreed to pay a \$32 million fine and \$23 million in disgorgement and prejudgment interest.

The SEC and the DOJ are intensifying their focus on FCPA anti-corruption enforcement efforts and U.S. companies' interactions with overseas officials. In the current era of heightened enforcement, companies must develop, implement and monitor comprehensive compliance programs.

Our panelists, recruited from the country's top law firms, have developed this program to provide guidance to counsel for compa-

nies doing business in India to develop and implement an FCPA compliance program. We will review recent FCPA enforcement focused on India operations and discuss the unique FCPA challenges for conducting business there.

The panel will review these and other key questions:

- What are the risk factors that make companies conducting business in India vulnerable to possible FCPA violations?

What lessons can be learned from recent SEC and DOJ enforcement efforts affecting companies doing business in or with India?

What are the best practices for companies to utilize in developing anti-corruption compliance programs and due?

UN Human Rights Experts Urge Syria to End Crackdown and Carry Out Reforms

New York, 15 April 2011

A group of United Nations human rights experts today denounced the rising death toll and brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters, journalists and human rights defenders in Syria, and called on authorities to immediately halt the repression and engage in a meaningful dialogue on reforms.

“Firing on peaceful crowds attending protests or funerals is by no means justified,” stressed Christof Heyns, Special Rapporteur on arbitrary executions, one of 10 independent experts joining the call on the Syrian Government to end the crackdown.

Since the beginning of the protests calling for democracy, in mid-March, the violence has dramatically intensified, reportedly resulting in at least 200 deaths, the experts noted in a news release. Demonstrations are taking place across the country, in Deraa, Damascus, Aleppo, Latakia, Duma and Banias.

“Live ammunition is being used outside the prescribed limits and in clear violation of international law. Firearms may only be used in self-defense or in the defense of others,” Mr. Heyns added.

Citing reports that people are now taking up arms to retaliate against law enforcement officials, he warned, “this can easily escalate into widespread violence.”

Security Council Committee Meets to Discuss How to Accelerate Fight Against Terrorism

New York, 19 April 2011

The Security Council committee tasked with spearheading efforts to tackle terrorism began a three-day meeting today with regional organizations that is aimed at accelerating and unifying international strategies to defeat the scourge.

Participants at the special meeting of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), hosted by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, are expected to focus on improving prevention policies, particularly those dealing with radicalization, incitement and terrorist recruitment.

The meeting – whose attendees include representatives of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Council of Europe – will also discuss the role of law enforcement and the criminal justice system in pre-

venting terrorism, including information-sharing between different law enforcement agencies and the prosecution of offences related to terrorism.

Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri of India, chairman of the CTC, told today's opening session that terrorism represents the greatest threat to international peace and security.

"Just as terrorism is continuously evolving, so should our policies and strategies," he said. "Prevention is one important piece of the puzzle."

The CTC, formed in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, is tasked with ensuring the implementation of Security Council resolutions dealing with terrorism and with pressing Member States to take the necessary steps to prevent and combat terrorism.

Syria: UN Official Voices Concern About Lack of Humanitarian Access

New York, 10 May 2011

The United Nations relief chief today expressed her concern about the lack of humanitarian access to parts of Syria, including key cities where many protesters have reportedly been killed after clashing with security forces.

Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, issued a statement in which she voiced particular concern about the southern city of Deraa and the coastal cities of Latakia, Jablah, Baniyas and Douma.

Media reports say large numbers of protesters have been killed or detained in recent weeks as Syrian security forces respond to peaceful demonstrators that are part of a broader uprising across North Africa and the Middle East.

In her statement Ms. Amos noted that while her office has no confirmation of the number of people detained, injured or killed, "we remain concerned about alleged human rights violations."

A planned humanitarian mission by her office to Deraa on Sunday has not taken place, "despite repeated requests to the Syrian authorities for access," the Emergency Relief Coordinator said.

"The main objective of the mission was to independently assess the situation and plan a response if needed."

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has also spoken out in recent weeks about the situation in Syria and underlined the need for an independent investigation into the killings.

Ms. Amos said she was alarmed by reports of the deployment of tanks and the shelling of residential areas in some cities.

"In addition, ongoing security operations may be preventing the provision of basic social services," she said, citing the suspension and limited delivery of assistance to schools, clinics and community centers from the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as worrying.

"Of particular concern are reports that many wounded do not seek help in hospitals for fear of reprisals."

UN Report Outlines Benefits of Empowering Women and Youth in Poor Countries

New York, 10 May 2011

Women and youth have the capacity to spur economic growth and reduce poverty in the world's least development country if giv-

en access to education, employment and health, including family planning services, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) says in a report unveiled today.

Girls are often overlooked when investments in social services, including education and health, are made, according to the report, entitled *Population Dynamics and Poverty in the LDCs: Challenges and Opportunities for Development and Poverty Reduction*, made public at the ongoing Fourth UN Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in Istanbul, Turkey.

“Empowering women and girls starts with improved access to reproductive health care and family planning,” said Babatunde Osotimehin, UNFPA’s Executive Director. “Too many teenage girls become mothers, too many die giving birth, too many drop out of school, too many are abused and discriminated against in their daily lives.”

“When girls are educated, healthy and can avoid child marriage, unintended pregnancy and HIV, they can contribute fully to their societies’ battles against poverty,” said Dr. Osotimehin. “In a world of 7 billion, every person, especially women and girls, should enjoy human rights and human dignity, and have the opportunity to make the most of their potential.”

Syria: Ban Reiterates Calls Forward to Deadly Violence and Mass Arrests

New York, 9 May 2011

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has reiterated his calls for an immediate end to the violence in Syria and for an independent inquiry into the numerous killings during recent protests amid fresh reports of deadly clashes in the Middle East country.

Mr. Ban also underlined his call for an end to the mass arrest of peaceful demonstrators, spokesperson Farhan Haq told journalists today.

“He noted the need to respect the human rights of the population,” Mr. Haq said.

The Secretary-General has previously called for an independent investigation of all the killings that have occurred during the protests, including the alleged killing of military and security forces.

The protests in Syria – which have reportedly claimed hundreds of lives – are part of a wider uprising this year across the Middle East and North Africa that has toppled long-standing regimes in Egypt and Tunisia and led to open conflict in Libya.

Last month the UN Human Rights Council voted for a mission to be sent to Syria to probe allegations of violations of international human rights law and crimes committed against civilians.

Mr. Ban has also stressed the humanitarian needs of the population, and called for a UN team to enter Syria to assess the humanitarian situation, particularly in the southern city of Deraa.

UN Chief Urges Men to Champion the Cause for Gender Equality

New York, 7 May 2011

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today challenged men to champion the cause for the empowerment of women, saying they remained “second-class citizens”, often subjected to violence in many societies, despite the important gains made in improving their participation in social, economic and political affairs.

"I believe that unless you change mentality and behavior of men, it will be very difficult to change this situation," said Mr. Ban in an address to the Global Summit of Women in Istanbul, Turkey, where he was honored with the Women's Leadership Award in recognition of his efforts to promote gender equality.

He noted that he was the first man to receive the award in its 21-year history.

"So, beginning from me as the first man to receive this, I sincerely hope that there will be many more men who will receive this award," said the Secretary-General, recalling that he had in 2009 launched the Network of Men Leaders to combat the scourge of gender-based violence.

The Network brings together current and former politicians, activists, religious and community figures -- including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho -- to combat the global pandemic.

He said the UN has, during his tenure as Secretary-General, focused on health care, especially through a global strategy for women's and children's health to save at least 16 million lives by 2015, recognizing that access to health care remains inadequate or unavailable even though it is critical for building stable, peaceful and productive societies.

On the empowerment of women within the UN system, Mr. Ban told the summit that the number of women in senior management positions had risen by 40 per cent over the past four years.

"I am working hard to break down barriers for the advancement of women by tearing down this glass ceiling at the United Nations," he said. On the latest developments in North Africa and the Middle East, the Secretary-General told the summit that he has been urging leaders there to listen to the voices of women and the youth when they engage in dialogue with those calling for political reform.

"I never failed to mention women in the Arab world because I know that women in the Arab World must be emancipated, and they must be given equal rights. Women who have fought for gender equality know that the battle does not end there. The battle does not end until there is no discrimination, against any human being, on any grounds. The battle does not end until all people can enjoy a life of dignity," said Mr. Ban.

"I am counting on you, women leaders from around the world and from all walks of life, to work with me to realize this goal. I am asking world leaders, and I am asking business leaders, and I am asking women leaders to work together to achieve that goal where everybody, men and women, without any fear of violence, without any fear of discrimination can work in harmony and in dignity as human beings," he added.

Clean Development Projects Under UN Climate Change Pact Top 3,000

New York, 5 May 2011

An international arrangement that channels investment into clean energy and greenhouse gas reduction technology in developing countries has registered its 3,000th project, the secretariat of the United Nations climate change convention reported today.

The 3,000th project, under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), is a wind power project in Inner Mongolia, China, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) said in a press release. The mechanism is part of the Kyoto Protocol, an addition to the Convention that contains legally binding measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Making Sense of the Syrian Crisis

5 May 2011

By: Reva Bhalla

Syria is clearly in a state of internal crisis. Facebook-organized protests were quickly stamped out in early February, but by mid-March, a faceless opposition had emerged from the flashpoint city of Deraa in Syria's largely conservative Sunni southwest. From Deraa, demonstrations spread to the Kurdish northeast, the coastal Latakia area, urban Sunni strongholds in Hama and Homs and

to Aleppo and the suburbs of Damascus. Feeling overwhelmed, the regime experimented with rhetoric on reforms while relying on much more familiar iron-fist methods in cracking down, arresting hundreds of men, cutting off water and electricity to the most rebellious areas and making clear to the population that, with or without emergency rule in place, the price for dissent does not exclude death. (Activists claim more than 500 civilians have been killed in Syria since the demonstrations began, but that figure has not been independently verified.)

A survey of the headlines would lead many to believe that Syrian President Bashar al Assad will soon be joining Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak in a line of deposed Arab despots. The situation in Syria is serious, but in our view, the crisis has not yet risen to a level that would warrant a forecast that the al Assad regime would fall.

UN Chief Urges Governments to Pursue Family-Friendly Policies

New York, 15 May 2011

Governments should adopt policies to ensure that all types of families, particularly the most vulnerable, have access to the necessary services so they can provide a better future for their children, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today.

In a message marking the International Day of Families, observed every year on 15 May, Mr. Ban said too many families endure "chronic, punishing hardship" or neglect that can leave them with life-long scars and an inability to escape poverty.

"Social exclusion is often at the root of the problem," he said. "Discrimination and unequal access to social services deprive families of the opportunity to plan a better future for their children."

The Secretary-General noted that "certain types of families are at particular risk, including large families, single-parent families, families where the main breadwinners are unemployed or suffer from illness or disability, families with members who suffer discrimination based on sexual orientation, and families living in urban slums or rural areas.

"Indigenous and migrant families, as well as those living through conflict or unrest, are also on the front-lines of marginalization and deprivation."

He urged governments to use the International Day as a spur to expand family-focused policies, such as cash transfer programmes, child allowances, tax incentives and gender- and child-sensitive social protection measures.

"An expansion of these policies, which can improve the nutrition and educational status of children, can help end cycles of poverty that persist across generations."

UN Chief Urges Change in Resource Consumption Patterns for Sustainable Development

New York, 13 May 2011

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today stressed the need for fundamental changes in humanity's resource consumption patterns and values, saying the planet's natural environment are under unprecedented pressure with far-reaching social and economic consequences.

"Our vision must be clear; a sustainable green economy that protects the health of the environment while supporting achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through growth in income, decent

work and poverty eradication,” Mr. Ban told the high-level segment of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, whose current session is due to end later today.

“Equity, not only within societies but globally, will need to become more fully integrated into our institutions and our policies,” said the Secretary-General.

More than 1 Billion Tons of Food Lost or Wasted Every year, UN-Backed Report Finds

New York, 11 May 2011

About a third of all the food produced for human consumption each year – or roughly 1.3 billion tons – is lost or wasted, according to a new study commissioned by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The study, compiled by the Swedish Institute for Food and Biotechnology and unveiled today, finds that food waste is more of a problem in rich countries and food loss during production is a bigger issue in poor countries because of poor infrastructure and technology.

Consumers and retailers in industrialized countries waste an estimated 222 million tons of food each year, mostly by throwing away perfectly edible food. Fruits and vegetables have the highest rates of wastage.

The average consumer in Europe and North America wastes 95 to 115 kilograms of food a year, while his or her counterparts in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia or South-East Asia wastes only six to 11 kilograms of food.

The report outlines steps to reduce waste, noting that surveys consistently show consumers are willing to buy foods that are safe and taste good even if their appearance does not meet some standards.

Selling farm produce direct to consumers, without having to go through supermarkets and their over-emphasis on the appearance of foods, is another recommendation.

Charities should work with retailers to collect and then distribute or on-sell food that would otherwise be thrown away, despite meeting standards of safety, taste and nutrition.

The report also calls for a change in consumer attitudes to encourage them to not buy more food than they need at any one time and to not throw food away needlessly.

Homophobic Hate Crimes on the Rise, UN Human Rights Chief Warns

New York, 17 May 2011

Hate crimes against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people are rising around the world, the United Nations human rights chief said today, urging governments to do much more to eliminate discrimination and prejudice based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

In a video message marking the *International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia*, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said homophobia and transphobia are no different to sexism, misogyny, racism or xenophobia.

“But whereas these last forms of prejudice are universally condemned by governments, homophobia and transphobia are too often overlooked,” she said.

“History shows us the terrible human price of discrimination and prejudice. No one is entitled to treat a group of people as less valuable, less deserving or less worthy of respect. Each and every one of us is entitled to the same rights, to the same respect and ethical treatment, regardless of our sexual orientation or gender identity.”

Ms. Pillay said statistics indicated that homophobic-based hate crimes were on the rise in many parts of the world, from New York to Brazil and Honduras to South Africa. Homosexuality also remains a criminal offence in more than 70 countries.

Yet the High Commissioner said homosexuality and transgenderism have been present in all societies throughout human history.

She added that international human rights standards have already incorporated the principle that no one should experience discrimination on the basis of their sexuality or gender identity.

“Seventeen years ago the UN Human Rights Committee, whose job it is to remind States of such things, confirmed that, under international law, States have an obligation to decriminalize homosexuality and to protect individuals from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation. Other UN treaty bodies have said the same thing.”

In a separate message, the Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) said that the stigma and discrimination faced by many lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people was hampering an effective response to the disease.

“The AIDS response has shown that when people are stigmatized because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, they are less likely to access the HIV services they need,” said Michel Sidibé. “This leads to new HIV infections and AIDS deaths.”

Mr. Sidibé urged governments to create social and legal environments that ensure respect for human rights and universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and support.

UN Drafts Plan to Improve Plan to Improve Maternal and Child Health through Better

New York, 23 May 2011

The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) has drafted a plan committing Member States and development partners to implement priority nutrition interventions and policies on health care, education and agriculture to improve the health of mothers and their children.

The measures, which will be included in a WHO report to be entitled *Maternal, infant and young child nutrition: implementation plan*, were discussed today at WHO’s ongoing 64th World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva.

The draft plan outlines priorities to confront child under-nutrition, low birth weight, growing rates of child overweight, both maternal under-nutrition and overweight, and the consequences of vitamin and mineral deficiencies for mothers and children.

UN Human Rights Investigators Still Awaiting Access to Syria

New York, 27 May 2011

The United Nations said today it is still awaiting a response from the Syrian Government to a request for access for a human rights team to enter the country early next month to investigate the recent violence.

The assessment mission, which will be headed by Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Kyung-wha

Kang, is set to begin on 6 June after first visiting neighboring countries, according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Rupert Colville, spokesperson for OHCHR, told a news conference in Geneva that the Office remains “deeply concerned” about the situation on the ground, where Government security forces have clashed with protesters in a number of towns and cities for several weeks now.

“There is much conflicting information out there, and we urge the Government to grant us early access into the country to help clarify the issues,” he stated.

Ban Outlines Social Benefits of Ensuring Women Have Access to Education

New York, 26 May 2011

Secretary-Ban Ki-moon today underlined the huge benefits societies reap from ensuring that girls and women have access to education, saying the opportunity to acquire knowledge creates a new generation of mothers who in turn raise educated and empowered young women.

“Education sends a message – a message of confidence and hope. It tells that child; you have a future; what you think matters,” Mr. Ban said at the launch of the Global Partnership for Girls’ and Women’s Education at the Paris headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

According to UNESCO, there are an estimated 39 million girls of lower secondary school age across the world not enrolled in either primary or secondary school. Two thirds of the world’s 796 million illiterate adults are women, and only about a third of countries have achieved gender parity in secondary school enrolment.

World Leaders to Gather at UN Meeting on Combating HIV/AIDS Epidemic

New York, 31 May 2011

An unprecedented number of national leaders and other high-level figures will participate in next week’s United Nations meeting on combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the UN announced today.

At least 32 heads of State, heads of government or vice-presidents have committed to participating in the three-day event beginning on 8 June, the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) said.

The agency described the number as a positive signal that the international community is committed to meet goals on HIV/AIDS prevention and care at a critical time “as more people than ever before are living with HIV, but international funding for AIDS is seen to be declining.”

“The commitment we are seeing for this meeting from world leaders is an extremely positive signal and is coming at a critical time,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “This meeting will provide a real opportunity for countries to take ownership of the response and produce a strong and visionary declaration to guide global efforts in reaching universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2015.”

UNICEF Calls on Syria to Investigate Reported Killings of Children

New York, 31 May 2011

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today called on the Syrian Government to investigate reports of torture and killing of children and said all parties to the fighting in the Middle East country must “spare civilians, particularly children and women.”

According to media reports casualties among civilians protesting against the government have been high. UNICEF said it had received, but could not independently confirm, information that the use of live ammunition against demonstrators has reportedly left at least 30 children dead.

“While UNICEF cannot verify the reported cases and events, we are particularly disturbed by the recent video images of children who were arbitrarily detained and suffered torture or ill-treatment during their detention, leading in some cases to their death,” the agency said in a statement.

“We call on the Government to thoroughly investigate these reports and ensure that perpetrators of such horrific acts are identified and brought to justice.”

UN Advisers Denounce ‘Apparently Deliberate’ Attacks on Syrian Civilians

New York, 2 June 2011

Two high-ranking United Nations officials today said they were “alarmed at the apparently systematic and deliberate attacks” on civilians in Syria, and called for an investigation into possible violations of international human rights law.

Francis Deng, the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, and Edward Luck, the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, said in a joint statement that they were “gravely concerned at the increasing loss of life in Syria as a result of the continued violent suppression of anti-Government protests.”

Media reports indicate that several hundred persons have been killed in Syria during recent anti-Government protests that are part of a broader uprising this year across North Africa and the Middle East.

“We are particularly alarmed at the apparently systematic and deliberate attacks by police, military, and other security forces against unarmed civilians taking part in the last two months of protests. These attacks have reportedly resulted in many hundreds of deaths.

“The deployment of armed forces and the use of live fire, tanks and artillery in response to peaceful protests, and the targeting of residential areas where protests have taken place, are unacceptable under any circumstances.”

Ban Urges Tolerance and Social Inclusion in an Age of Global Emigration

New York, 1 June 2011

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged the world to deepen its commitment to the common values of social inclusion, acceptance and understanding, saying emigration was increasingly a global trend with minorities and migrants gravitating towards cities for economic opportunities.

“We meet in what I call an age of mobility. This is an era where people are crossing borders in ever-increasing numbers in pursuit of opportunity and hope for a better life,” said Mr. Ban, addressing the International Conference on the Inter-Ethnic City in the Italian capital, Rome.

“Cities are the main centers of action – the hubs, the magnets, the places where people collide and coexist,” he told the conference, organized by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the auspices of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, which was created to promote intercultural dialogue and understanding.

The Secretary-General acknowledged that cities face both economic and social challenges in creating an inclusive environment, especially in the prevailing global economic uncertainty and political transitions under way in many countries.

UN Envoy Calls On Syria to Protect Children from Violence

New York, 3 June 2011

A senior United Nations envoy today voiced her deep concern at the ongoing violence perpetrated against children amid the ongoing unrest in Syria and urged the Government to ensure the protection of all children.

“Violence against children must stop and children’s safety must be upheld at all times,” said Marta Santos Pais, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Violence against Children.

“Children need to be protected from unlawful arrest, torture and ill-treatment, and their lives should not be put at risk under any circumstance,” she stressed.

Several hundred people, including women and children, have been killed in Syria during recent anti-Government protests that are part of a broader uprising this year across North Africa and the Middle East, according to media reports.

Earlier this week, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said it had received, but could not independently confirm, information that the use of live ammunition against demonstrators has reportedly left at least 30 children dead.

Ms. Santos Pais called on the Syrian Government to ensure the protection of all children from violence, in accordance with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

“Children’s right to medical care and to social and protection services must be guaranteed. Child victims and witnesses of violence must be supported in their process of healing, recovery and reintegration,” she stated.

The Special Representative also called for a thorough and impartial investigation of all reported child deaths and incidents of violence against children, including alleged cases of unlawful arrest in demonstrations, and torture in detention.

UN Chief Voices Alarm at Escalation of Violence in Syria

New York, 3 June 2011

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today voiced his alarm at the escalation of violence in Syria, which has reportedly claimed at least 70 lives over the past week alone, and called for independent and transparent investigations into all the killings.

This week’s toll in the ongoing Government crackdown against protesters calling for reform brings the number of casualties to more than 1,000 since mid-March, with many more injured and thousands arrested. The protests are part of a broader uprising this year across North Africa and the Middle East.

A statement issued by his spokesperson stated that Mr. Ban is “deeply troubled” by the continued serious violations of human rights, including disturbing reports of the deaths of children under torture, live ammunition and shelling.

“All killings should be investigated fully, independently and transparently,” it said.

Mr. Ban took note of the announcement by the Syrian authorities of an amnesty and the establishment of a committee to establish a national dialogue.

“He emphasizes, however, that violent repression by security and military forces must end immediately for a genuine and inclusive

dialogue to take place and lead to the comprehensive reforms and change called for by the Syrian people," the statement said.

Citing Reports of Abuses, UN Human Rights Office Urges Probe into Syria

New York, 15 June 2011

The United Nations human rights office has called for a thorough probe into the allegations of widespread abuses committed by Syrian authorities during their violent crackdown against protesters, including the excessive use of force against civilians, arbitrary detentions and torture.

"The most egregious reports concern the use of live ammunition against unarmed civilians, including from snipers positioned on rooftops of public buildings, and the deployment of tanks in areas densely populated by civilians," states a preliminary report prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) that was released today.

"As of mid-June, the number of those killed during such incidents is believed to have exceeded 1,100 persons, many of them unarmed civilians; among them were women and children," it added.

Syrian authorities have been widely criticized for their bloody repression of the protests, which are part of a broader uprising this year across North Africa and the Middle East that has already toppled the long-standing regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and led to ongoing conflict in Libya.

UN Rights Body Hits Out Against Violence Based on Sexual Orientation

New York, 17 June 2011

The United Nations Human Rights Council today expressed grave concern at the violence and discrimination experienced by people because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and called for a global study to document the suffering they face.

In a resolution adopted narrowly in Geneva, the Council asked the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to carry out a study by December that details "discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, in all regions of the world."

The resolution calls on the study to also consider "how international human rights law can be used to end violence and related human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity."

Twenty-three countries voted in favor of the resolution, 19 countries voted against, and three others abstained.

A month ago UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay warned that hate crimes against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people were on the rise around the world.

Murder of Indian Journalist Head of UN Agency Defending Press Freedom Deplores

New York, 16 June 2011

The head of the United Nations agency defending press freedom today condemned the recent murder of an Indian journalist whose killing is believed to be linked to his reporting about the oil mafia in the western

city of Mumbai.

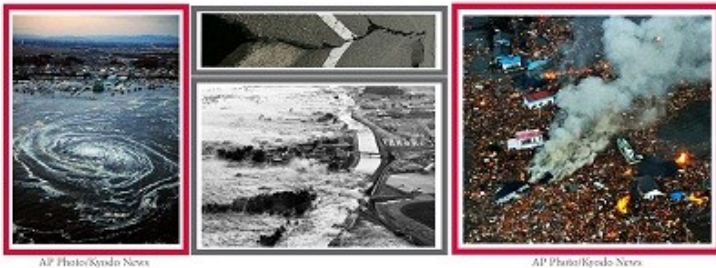
Irina Bokova urged the authorities to investigate the 11 June murder of Jyotirmoy Dey and bring the perpetrators to justice.

“This is vital if journalists are to meet their duty to serve as watchdogs reporting professionally on the work of government, civil society and business. Journalists need to be supported as they ensure that informed citizens are able to take an active part in society,” Ms. Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), stated in a news release.

Religious News from Around the World

Religions Working for Peace and Justice

Secretariat Updates:



Japan Needs Our Help.

The recent catastrophic earthquake, subsequent deadly tsunami, and the continued threat of nuclear radiation in Japan has touched the hearts of people of faith across the world. RFP-USA offers its heartfelt sympathy and solidarity with RFP-Japan. We call upon you to consider making a contribution to the “Earthquake and Tsunami Relief” emergency campaign initiated worldwide by Religions for Peace.

Your generosity will be channeled through

RFP-Japan to provide immediate relief to people seriously impacted by the tsunami. In addition to providing emergency relief, your support will further strengthen the bonds of multi-religious cooperation so important in times of crisis. Your contribution of any size will be translated into life-giving care.

News, Events, & Programs:

China-US Bilateral Begins

On April 13, six delegates from Religions for Peace China (China Committee on Religion and Peace - CCRP) met with five delegates from Religions for Peace USA in a first formal exchange between the two affiliates. Ms. Judith Hertz, Representative from the Union for Reform Judaism and Vice Moderator of the US affiliate, and Dr. Tony Kireopoulos, Representative from the National Council of Churches, the hosting institution, led the meeting together. Venerable Yu Zhengui, Secretary General of Religions for Peace China, headed the Chinese delegation. He is a leading Buddhist figure with over 6 million people visiting his blog (in English) each day.



Religions for Peace China are the only national interreligious platform in China and came into formation in 1994. The Chinese delegates requested that a course of ongoing bilateral dialogue be formulated between representatives from the two countries. They cited economic, class distinction, and women’s issues as being examples of concern and as potential topics for any ongoing dialogue.



Catholic-Jewish Prayers Offered at Nazi Massacre Site

On March 27 Pope Benedict XVI and Chief Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni together visited Fosse Ardeatine site on the outskirts of Rome to pay homage to the 335 people summarily executed, in a 1944 Nazi reprisal for a partisan bombing that had killed 33 Germans. Both religious leaders laid a bouquet at the site and prayed the Psalms during this historic visit. Among those killed, 75 were Jewish. Cardinal Andrea Cordero Lanza di Montezemolo, whose father was also one of the massacre victims, accompanied the Pope. The mass executions were “a grave offense to God,” Pope Benedict said. He went on to say that only God’s mercy can “fill the void -

the abysses opened by men when, impelled by blind violence, they renounce their dignity as children of God and brothers of one another.”

Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign

Representatives of member communities of RFP-USA recently joined with the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) in standing shoulder-to-shoulder against extremism of all kinds in support of American values. They came together on March 10 to issue a statement in which they declared that “as American religious leaders, we share a deep sense of obligation to call upon our fellow citizens to treat each other with compassion and honesty, and to foster an ethical commitment to bedrock American values such as pluralism and religious freedom, mutuality and respect - values also at the core of our religious traditions.” The statement was issued in response to the House Committee on Homeland Security convening hearings on the putative “radicalization” of American Muslims. Signatories to the statement included representatives of the following member organizations of RFP-USA: American Baptist Churches USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Islamic Society of North America, National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, The United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, and World Sikh Council-America Region. The complete statement can be found [here](#).



NILI for Peace in the Middle East

NILI - The National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East - advocates for the U.S. government to provide active, fair and firm leadership in negotiating, including a two-state solution of a viable, independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza alongside Israel, with security and peace for both peoples and peace agreements between Israel and all her Arab neighbors. Some of the prominent Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders of this coalition include Cardinal Theodore McCarrick (Archbishop Emeritus of Washington), Rabbi David Saperstein (Director & Counsel of Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism), Dr. Sayyid Mohammed Syeed (National Director of Islamic Society of North America), Bishop

Mark Hanson (Presiding Bishop of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), and Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon (General Secretary of National Council of Churches, USA). Learn more about the initiative [here](#).



JAINA to Work with Boy Scouts of America

The Jain Association in North America (JAINA) recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the Boy Scouts of America to work to establish and nurture Jain Scout Troop units as an expression of the Jain community's outreach programs in North America. JAINA, a member organization of RFP-USA, is the umbrella organization of local Jain associations in the US and Canada. Its purpose is to preserve, practice, and promote the Jain Faith. More information on JAINA can be obtained [here](#).

FILM REVIEW: Father James Martin, SJ: "Of Gods and Men"

Father James Martin, SJ, culture editor of America magazine, shares his thoughts about the movie "Of Gods and Men," the story of a community of Trappist monks in Algeria who have close relationships with their Muslim neighbors but who must decide whether to stay or leave when they are threatened by Islamic militants. The award winning movie is largely based on the book "The Monks of Tibhirine," by John Kiser (Religions for Peace International Trustee)

Ecumenical News International - News Highlights

Japanese churches respond to earthquake-tsunami disaster, March 2011

Tokyo (ENInews)--Churches across Japan are responding with prayers, donations, and relief operations to the impacts of the 11 March earthquake and its subsequent tsunamis and nuclear power plant accidents.

As of 16 March, more than 3,700 people were confirmed dead, more than 7,800 missing, and about 2,000 injured, according to the National Police Agency. More than 400,000 people have been evacuated from the disaster zones in northeastern Japan. The earthquake also damaged the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, where workers have been struggling to contain radiation leaks.

Continued on page 42.

International Ecumenical Peace Convocation launched in Jamaica

Kingston, Jamaica (ENInews)--Jamaican church leaders and guests gathered on 15 March to call attention to the upcoming International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, which will take place from 17 to 25 May at the University of the West Indies in Kingston and will highlight the successes and challenges of work to overcome violence.

Anglican priest arrested on marriage charges

London (ENInews)--A Church of England vicar has been arrested in Britain's second major police investigation in as many years into bogus marriages staged to help immigrants win residents' visas. The church immediately suspended the Rev. Canon Patrick Magumba amid claims he was involved in scores of sham weddings at three churches in northeast England, Religion News Service reports.

Japanese churches continue searching for disaster victims

Tokyo (ENInews)--Churches are among those who keep searching for missing people, including clergy, members and their families, as the death toll after the 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami has reached the highest in the history of natural disasters in postwar Japan.

Declining ratio of women in India a challenge, church leader says

Bangalore, India (ENInews)--Responding to a recent prediction that gender prejudice and sex-selective abortion in India will result in 20 percent more men than women by 2030, a prominent church woman leader says the church should address these issues.

Obama taps U.S. campuses for interfaith service projects

Washington, D.C. (ENInews)--The White House is hoping to recruit America's college and seminary students in a nationwide interfaith service campaign that was launched on 17 March. In the next month, the Obama administration will solicit plans submitted by colleges, universities, seminaries and rabbinical schools for year-long community service projects such as food drives, house building or mentoring, Religion News Service reports.

Catholic nun to head Norway's council of churches, 23 March 2011

Oslo, Norway (ENInews)--Sister Else-Britt Nilsen, 64, a Dominican nun, has been elected the first Roman Catholic to moderate the Christian Council of Norway, the national daily Vaart Land reported. The council spans most nationwide churches, from Orthodox to Pentecostals, in a country where 78 per cent of the 5 million inhabitants belong to the Lutheran state church.

Elements of Anglican, Lutheran worship will mark a decade of communion

New York (ENInews)--Elements of Anglican and Lutheran worship will mark celebrations on 1 May of a decade of full communion relationships between the Episcopal Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and, in Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Anti-Christian violence continues in Pakistan

New York (ENInews)--Anti-Christian violence in Pakistan continued to take a toll as two Christians were shot and killed and two were wounded after Muslim youths allegedly attacked them outside a church building in Hyderabad on 22 March, according to reports in Christian media.

Templeton Prize awarded to British cosmologist, 6 April 2011

New York (ENInews)--A British cosmologist who has explored the origins and size of the universe and has also sounded serious alarms about the future of life on the planet has won the 2011 Templeton Prize. Martin J. Rees, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, was awarded the one million pound (US\$1.6 million) prize by the U.S.-based John Templeton Foundation for his "exceptional contributions to affirming life's spiritual dimension."

Churches address Libyan humanitarian crisis

New York (ENInews)--The World Council of Churches, Conference of European Churches and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe on 6 April expressed concern over the humanitarian situation in Libya after reports that 250 migrants fleeing the chaos were missing after their boat sank off the Italian coast. In a joint statement, the three groups expressed appreciation for the various governments and aid agencies providing assistance, but added that the response needs to be broadened "to provide aid and protection to refugees, migrant workers and other people at risk, and to enhance efforts to find peaceful and just solutions to the crisis in Libya."

Kenya Christians and Muslims debate hijab in schools, 7 April 2011

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--Muslim leaders in Kenya are calling for government action on Christian schools that have banned students from wearing hijab, the head covering traditionally worn by Muslim girls and women. Church leaders have defended the ban, saying head teachers have the right to determine dress code in the schools, according to a denomination's religious traditions, discipline and philosophies.

Obama, Karzai blast Florida Quran burning

Washington, D.C. (ENInews)--U.S. President Barack Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai on 6 April blasted the recent burning of a Quran at a Florida church and the deadly riots that followed. Speaking during a video teleconference meeting, both leaders "deplored" the desecration of the Muslim holy book and condemned the subsequent 1 April attack on a U.N. compound, the White House said in a statement. Both men also "expressed deep regret for the tragic loss of life," Religion News Service reports.

European churches debate response to anti-Christian violence, 8 April 2011

Warsaw, Poland (ENInews)--When Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's only Christian cabinet minister, was assassinated on 2 March; it was only the latest act against Christians to provoke outrage worldwide. Now, church leaders in Europe are debating the best course of action to be urged on governments to counter the wave of violence.

Churches in India endorse protests against corruption

Bangalore, India (ENInews)--Churches in India have joined the growing support for social activist Anna Hazare, who launched a hunger fast on 5 April to call attention to the problem of corruption in government and is urging the passage of a strict anti-corruption law.

Leaders highlight ecumenical challenges

Geneva (ENInews)--Five general secretaries of international ecumenical organizations engaged in lively conversation with leaders of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) on 8 April, the final day of the EKD Council's visit to the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva. "One of the most pressing challenges we face is religious intolerance," said John Nduna of ACT Alliance, a coalition of churches and

church-related agencies working in human development and emergency assistance.

"Cross of comfort" erected at devastated Japan church site, 18 April 2011

Tokyo (ENInews)--A "cross of comfort" has been erected at a church site about one month after its building was washed away by the tsunami that followed the magnitude-9 earthquake on 11 March, a Christian relief organization reported. A team from the Osaka-based Japan International Food for the Hungry and volunteers from Tokyo Christian Institute erected it, after they went to the site on Kesenuma Bay in Miyagi prefecture to clear rubble.

U.S. Senate confirms religious freedom ambassador

Washington, D.C. (ENInews)--A New York minister will soon fill the Obama administration's long-vacant position to oversee international religious freedom after the Senate voted to confirm the Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook for the post. The 14 April voice vote positions Cook to become the first female and the first African-American in the post after a lengthy and controversial nomination process, Religion News Service reports.

Should faith have a role in U.S. foreign policy?

Washington, D.C. (ENInews)--The State Department has a "rigidly narrow" view of diplomacy that neglects religion's role in foreign affairs, a prominent Catholic ambassador charged on 17 April as he announced his resignation. Other foreign policy experts have another name for it: Religion Avoidance Syndrome. And the departure of Douglas Kmiec as ambassador to Malta, they say, is symptomatic of a longstanding God gap in American foreign policy, Religion News Service reports.

Poles debate John Paul II's significance in his homeland, 28 April 2011

Warsaw, Poland (ENInews)--When the late Pope John Paul II is declared "blessed" in Rome on 1 May, it will be a moment of joy and satisfaction for Roman Catholics in his Polish homeland. Since the pontiff's death on 2 April 2005, the Polish church has prayed and lobbied for his beatification, the final step to full sainthood. In a recent pastoral letter, its leaders reminded Catholics that John Paul II's prayer for the renewal of Poland after his 1978 election had inspired the creation of a world "liberated from totalitarian handcuffs and a godless system."

John Paul II's papacy is assessed on eve of beatification

Rome (ENInews)--As pilgrims begin to arrive in Rome for the weekend ceremonies that will declare the late Pope John Paul II "blessed," many are assessing the legacy of his 27-year papacy and analyzing the movement to declare him a saint. Opinion polls in Italy show overwhelming support for the beatification, the final step before sainthood. The church is generally receiving positive press coverage and Roman businesses suffering through the recession are eagerly awaiting the arrival of as many as one million visitors. But at the same time, some criticize what they see as the motives behind the beatification, the fastest in church history, coming just six years after John Paul's death in 2005.

Conservative Anglican group elects head of archbishops' council

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--Conservative Anglican archbishops, meeting under the name Global Anglican Future Conference, or GAFCON, said on 28 April that Archbishop Eliud Wabukala of Kenya was elected chairman of a council of primates, or national archbishops. The council met from 25 to 28 April in Nairobi

and also announced that Archbishop Tito Zavala of Chile, who is also Presiding Bishop of the Province of the Southern Cone (of South America), and Archbishop Onesphore Rwaje of Rwanda became the newest members. Archbishops from Uganda, Nigeria, Australia, North America and Britain also attended the meeting.

Panel cites Egypt for violation of religious freedom

New York (ENInews)--Violence against religious minorities in Egypt, including Coptic Christians, has prompted an independent U.S.-based commission to cite Egypt as a country that violates religious freedom. The designation, in a report released on 28 April by the Washington-based U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, marks the first time that the panel has recommended that Egypt be placed on a U.S. government list of "countries of particular concern" that violate religious freedom.

U.N. report on Sri Lankan conflict evokes mixed reactions

Bangalore, India (ENInews)--The report of a special U.N. panel that investigated allegations of massive human rights abuses in an ethnic war in Sri Lanka has prompted mixed reactions. "We are relieved that finally the report has been made public (internationally). But the response (to the report) here is shocking and disappointing," Ruki Fernando, coordinator of a group of about two dozen clergy and lay people calling themselves "concerned Christians" in Sri Lanka told ENInews on 27 April. The report of the panel, set up by the U.N. secretary general, acknowledged tens of thousands of deaths of civilians in the concluding phase of Sri Lanka's prolonged war against Tamil separatists.

Evangelical icon David Wilkerson dies in car crash

Washington, D.C. (ENInews)--Evangelist David Wilkerson, who wrote the popular book "The Cross and the Switchblade," founded New York's Times Square Church and an international ministry to gang members and drug addicts, died in a traffic accident on 27 April, according to media reports. Wilkerson, 79, died after his car slammed into a truck on a highway about 95 miles southeast of Dallas, according to The Associated Press. His wife, Gwen, was also injured but is expected to recover, Religion News Service reports.

Japan's churches urged to work together to respond to "triple disaster", 9 May 2011

Seoul, South Korea (ENInews)--Japan's churches and Christian councils should establish a consortium to respond to the devastating 11 March earthquake, tsunami and nuclear power plant accident, an ecumenical meeting said.

In addition, the National Christian Council in Japan should "convene a forum of all the Japanese partners to facilitate the exchange of information and activities and explore avenues of cooperation," according to a statement released at the end of the Japan Earthquake/Tsunami Relief Ecumenical Solidarity Meeting held here from 6-7 May.

Christian-Muslim clashes in Egypt leave 12 dead, Coptic churches burnt

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--Christian and Muslim clashes in Egypt have left 12 people dead, 238 injured and two Coptic churches in Cairo burned, the state media reported. Faith and political leaders condemned the weekend violence, which was triggered by rumors that a woman who had converted to Islam was being detained at the sixth-century Coptic Church of St. Mena in the working-class neighborhood of Imbaba in northwest Cairo. It's the worst sectarian violence since protests in February overthrew Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's long serving president, and the clashes are presenting fresh challenges to the military-led government.

Churches counsel Taiwanese aboriginal youth

Taipei, Taiwan (ENInews)--It is Saturday night in a mountain village in eastern Taiwan and the local church is rocking. Singers jump in time to the music of drums, guitar and keyboard. A crowd of young people waves their arms and sing along, their faces aglow. The musicians and young people are members of Subus Presbyterian Church, a parish in Taiwan's Central Mountain region that serves the Truku aboriginal community. They gather weekly as a "praise group" to sing, pray, and dance. But within a few months, some of the dancers will head for the big city, leaving a village that, increasingly, can't educate or employ them. "Most young peo-

ple eventually leave their home community for the city as there are few senior high schools in Taiwan's rural areas and little chance for employment," says Sing 'Olam, Associate General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, which helps aboriginal youth adjust to urban life.

Religious leaders urge Russians to heed lessons of World War II

Moscow (ENInews)--Patriarch Kirill I of the Russian Orthodox Church and Rabbi Berl Lazar, the chief rabbi of Russia, speaking at separate ceremonies on 8 and 9 May, urged Russians to heed the lessons of World War II. The end of the war, known in Russia as the Great Patriotic War, is marked on 9 May in most of the other former Soviet republics as Victory Day over Nazi Germany. Soviet civilian and military deaths in the war are estimated at upwards of 20 million and the losses are still seared into memories here, even of those born long after the war.

Ugandan gay activist honored with human rights award, 6 May 2011

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--Religious leaders in Uganda have responded from conservative and liberal perspectives to the news that Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera, a Ugandan gay rights activist, was given on 3 May the Martin Ennals Awards for Human Rights Defenders. The award, given by the Martin Ennals Foundation in honor of the first secretary general of Amnesty International, will help the campaign for minority group rights in the East African country, said retired Anglican bishop Christopher Senyonjo. "It is appropriate and encouraging? We now know there are people who understand what we are suffering from and support our position," he said on 6 May in a telephone interview with ENInews.

Theologian Kung says only radical reforms can save the Catholic church

Munich (ENInews)--The Catholic Church is seriously, possibly terminally ill and only an honest diagnosis and radical therapy will cure it, one of the sharpest critics of Pope Benedict XVI, the Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Kung, has written. Speaking at a sold-out event in the Literaturhaus (Literary Centre) in Munich on 2 May, Kung who is a former colleague of the pope at the University of Tübingen, introduced his new book, "Ist die Kirche noch zu retten?" ("Can the Church Still Be Saved?").

Scholars chase Bible's changes, one verse at a time

New Orleans (ENInews)--Working in a cluster of offices above a Life Way Christian Bookstore, Bible scholars are buried in a 20-year project to codify the thousands of changes, verse by verse, word by word -- even letter by letter -- that crept into the early New Testament during hundreds of years of laborious hand-copying. Their goal: to log them into the world's first searchable online database for serious Bible students and professional scholars who want to see how the document changed over time, Religion News Service reports. Their research is of particular interest to evangelical Christians who, because they regard the Bible as the sole authority on matters of faith, want to distinguish the earliest possible texts and carefully evaluate subsequent changes.

India's Catholics plan first synod for lay people, 24 May 2011

Bangalore, India (ENInews)--Saying that lay people need a greater voice in the church, India's national Catholic lay network is preparing to hold the first synod, or national meeting, of lay Catholics in early 2012. "The Second Vatican Council called for the empowerment of the laity. But after 50 years, there is not much to show," Remy Denis, national president of the All India Catholic Union (AICU), told ENInews. Vatican II, as it became known, was a gathering of church leaders in Rome in the early 1960s that liberalized a number of church rules, such as allowing Mass to be said in local languages rather than Latin.

Anglican book on inter-faith relations published in digital form

London (ENInews)--The Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns announced it has launched a digital version of "Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue: An Anglican Theology of Inter Faith Relations." The digital book also contains notes and articles on topics covered in the 2008 report, including links to Bible studies, prayers, and questions for discussion. In addition to the text, the e-book contains video and audio resources, which the Anglican Communion Office (ACO) hopes to expand in the near future, according to a news release.

Peace gathering addresses nonviolence and the environment

Kingston, Jamaica (ENInews)--As the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) in Kingston, Jamaica enters its seventh day, attendees discussed topics such as helping communities resolve conflict through peaceful means and how churches can positively respond to the challenge of climate change and environmental destruction.

Allan Jacobs elected president of B'nai B'rith International

New York (ENInews)--Allan J. Jacobs was elected president of B'nai B'rith International, the 167-year-old Jewish humanitarian organization, at a board of governors meeting in New York on 22 May. Jacobs, who most recently served as executive chairman, has been an active B'nai B'rith member for more than 45 years, according to a news release. Jacobs said he will "continue to work to advance our mission advocating for the global Jewish community and the state of Israel, providing humanitarian aid and promoting human rights and senior advocacy initiatives."

Rudi Zimmer elected chairman of the United Bible Societies' global board

Missenden Abbey, England (ENInews)--Rudi Zimmer was unanimously elected chairman of the United Bible Societies' (UBS) global board during a meeting held in Missenden Abbey, England on 17 May, UBS announced. Zimmer had been executive director of the Bible Society of Brazil since 2005 and has been with the organization for 20 years. A Lutheran pastor, he was a professor of theology for over 20 years and is fluent in English, Spanish, German, and Portuguese.

Global Recovery Must Start with the Poor – UN Human Rights Expert

New York, 1 June 2011

Unjustified cuts in aid to the poor during a financial crisis could violate human rights standards, and economic recovery must start with the most vulnerable, according to a United Nations human rights expert.

Magdalena Sepúlveda, the UN Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty, told a Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva that "unjustified reductions in expenditures devoted to implementing public services that are critical to the realization of economic, social and cultural rights will be in violation of human rights standards.

"There is no space in human rights for a trickle-down approach," she said on Monday. "From a human rights perspective, recovery must start with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged."

"Human rights are not expendable during times of crises and recovery. Even when resources are limited, States are legally bound to respect, protect and fulfill international human rights obligations," Ms. Sepúlveda said. "The challenge of recovering from the global economic and financial crises is an opportunity to embrace a vision for the future aimed at the full realization of human rights."

Human rights groups praise indictments in Salvadoran Jesuits case

New York (ENInews)--Salvadoran and U.S. human rights groups are applauding indictments and arrest warrants issued by a Spanish judge in the 1989 murders of six Jesuit priests, the clerics' housekeeper and her 16-year-old daughter at El Salvador's Central American University. Among the 20 former Salvadoran military officers named in Judge Eloy Velasco's 30 May indictment is Rafael Humberto Larios, El Salvador's then-minister of defense.

Book details MacArthur's efforts to fill Japanese 'spiritual vacuum' after World War II

(ENInews)--In the wake of the destruction and surrender of the Japanese empire in August 1945, a "spiritual vacuum" emerged that the country's de-facto ruler, General Douglas MacArthur, sought to fill with religious and quasi-religious beliefs still new to Japan, from Christianity to Freemasonry. That is the focus of a recently published study of the Occupation years of 1945 to 1952 by Japanese investigative journalist Eiichiro Tokumoto. In "1945 Under the Shadow of the Occupation: The Ashlar and The Cross," Tokumoto documents MacArthur's efforts to persuade missionaries to intensify their efforts among the Japanese population in hopes of providing a counterweight to the growing appeal of communism in the earliest days of the Cold War.

Cuba's churches grapple with a changing society, says council leader

Geneva (ENInews)--As Cuba moves toward a post-Fidel Castro society, its churches are finding ways to "give a Christian witness with integrity" in a state-controlled country that places restrictions on areas of life such as free expression, said the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) after a visit to the Caribbean island. Relations between religious groups and a government that was officially atheist at its revolutionary beginning in 1959 have warmed somewhat, said the Rev. Olav Fyske Tveit in an interview with ENInews at WCC headquarters in Geneva. Tveit and a WCC delegation visited Cuba from 25 to 30 May, celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Cuban Council of Churches, visiting an ecumenical seminary and meeting with Roman Catholic Cardinal Jaime Ortega.

Oxfam calls for global food-system reforms as churches demand food and fuel price cuts

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--As Global South church leaders heighten demands on governments to lower food and fuel prices, a U.K. charity has called for urgent reforms of the global food system. "For too long governments have put the interests of big business and powerful elites above the interests of the 7 billion who produce and consume food," said Jeremy Hobbs, Oxfam's executive director, in a 30 May press statement. Decades of progress against hunger are being reversed by a broken food system and environmental crises, the charity said in its latest report, "Growing a Better Future."

Pedophilia a serious problem in Asia, say Catholic bishops

Tokyo (ENInews)--The clergy office of the Federation of Roman Catholic Asian Bishops' Conferences has announced that it will hold a seminar on "The Impact of Pedophilia-Crisis on the Church in Asia." "[It is an urgent task before us, especially the leaders of the Church, to come together to devise some mechanisms to prevent future occurrences of child abuse by Church men/women," said the office that is organizing the seminar for Asian bishops and clergy from 14 to 19 November 2011 at Assumption University in Bangkok.

Muslims contribute to German society, church gathering told

Dresden, Germany (ENInews)--Islam is part of a modern, changing Germany and necessary to develop a

vibrant society, President Christian Wulff said in a panel discussion on 2 June at the ecumenical gathering called the Kirchentag. Christians should also be more tolerant towards other religions, Wulff said. "If one is not open to other religions, one cannot expect Muslim societies to be receptive to freedom of religion." He then went on to appeal to Turkey to do more for religious freedom.

New York exhibit examines 'the Man of Sorrows'

New York (ENInews)--An acclaimed exhibit ending a four-month run in New York City has given art lovers the chance to explore a single theme, Christ as the Man of Sorrows, and the Venetian artistic tradition that gave it full flowering. "Passion in Venice: Crivelli to Tintoretto and Veronese" at the Museum of Biblical Art in Manhattan has been a rare opportunity to see how the theme of Christ depicted between death and resurrection evolved throughout history.

Nudity in religious art: Godly or sinful?

Salt Lake City, Utah (ENInews)--The Rev. France Davis doesn't want any nude Adam-and-Eve figures at his Calvary Baptist Church -- even if Michelangelo himself painted them. Davis is unequivocal in his view that there is nothing inspiring or redeeming about naked figures in religious art. "Since we sinned, as it said in the book of Genesis, the human body has certain parts that are private," the pastor said. "We should keep them for more intimate settings like people's bedrooms." Davis is hardly alone in that view, reports the Salt Lake Tribune via Religion News Service.

Indian churches deplore crackdown on anti-corruption protests

Bangalore, India (ENInews)--While endorsing criticism of the midnight police crackdown that ended a massive fast against corruption led by yoga guru Swami Ramdev, Indian churches have expressed concern over what they see as politicization of the anti-corruption campaign. "We condemn the police action that could have been avoided. We are also worried about the politicization of the protests," the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) said in a 7 June statement. Religious leaders fear that members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the main opposition party, are using the protests to attack the governing Congress Party.

Palestinian and Israeli leaders condemn mosque attack

Jerusalem (ENInews)--Israeli and Palestinian politicians condemned an arson attack on a West Bank mosque on 7 June, but Palestinians also accused Israel of "turning a blind eye" to the attacks, which they suspected were carried out by Jewish settlers. According to reports, the fire began in the mosque of the West Bank village of al-Mughayyir northeast of Ramallah, in the early hours of the morning and was discovered by Palestinian worshippers who had come for morning prayers.

Religious leaders assess UN AIDS declaration

New York (ENInews)--Religious leaders and representatives of faith-based organizations are giving generally high marks to a United Nations AIDS meeting that set new targets to combat the continued spread of HIV/AIDS. At the 8-10 June meeting at the U.N. in New York, marked by frequent references to the three decades in which acquired immune deficiency syndrome has claimed more than 30 million lives, U.N. member states agreed on a final document which called for strengthening measurable targets to fight HIV/AIDS.

Christian council will return torture documents to Brazil

Geneva (ENInews)--On 14 June, three boxes containing records of brutal torture and repression suffered under two decades of Brazilian military rule will be returned to the South American country from peaceful Switzerland, where the material has resided at the World Council of Churches (WCC) archives. Religious and political leaders, including WCC general secretary the Rev. Olav Fyske Tveit and Brazilian Senator Pedro Taques, will hand over the documents in a ceremony in Sao Paulo at the Public Prosecution Office. The information was collected by dissident lawyers and church leaders from 1979 to 1985, surreptitiously copied and sent to the WCC. Brazil was under a military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985.

Pakistani court postpones trial in 2009 attacks on Christians

Bangalore, India (ENInews)--Nearly two years after ten Christians were killed and nearly 100 houses burned in the Punjabi town of Gojra, a special court has suspended the trial of suspects in the carnage after a key witness fled Pakistan. The Anti-Terrorism Court in Faisalabad also granted bail on 7 June to the last three of the 66 suspects (others had been already released on bail) who were arrested in connection with the incident in August 2009.

Lutheran federation president urges members to pursue justice

Geneva (ENInews)--The president of the Lutheran World Federation, (LWF), Bishop Munib Younan, urged members to pursue justice in the world, as the federation's governing Council considers a strategic plan for 2012 to 2017. "We must never shy away, nor be intimidated by political pressure, from confronting issues of justice. Rather, we must address these issues head on, whether they are individual, societal, religious or political in nature," said Younan.

Lutheran community seeks to redefine path at meeting in Geneva

Geneva (ENInews)--At a meeting taking place from 9 June through 14 June in Geneva, members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) will vote on adopting a strategic plan for the years 2012 through 2017 that places greater focus on responding to emergencies, especially those having to do with the environment. The new focus also includes proposals for increasing the role of youth and creating financial sustainability. "There is a need to explore how to get involved in advocacy work that is linked to climate change," said LWF General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge, who is leading the renewal process. Under the proposal, Lutheran churches hope to be able to better respond to human suffering through coordinated actions with partners.

Egyptian Christians fearful of security situation

Jerusalem (ENInews) -- The security situation in Egypt has "deteriorated considerably" since former president Hosni Mubarak stepped down on 11 February, leaving a security vacuum and Christians feeling "threatened more than ever," according to aid workers. "Security is still not where it needs to be to give people a greater sense of personal safety. Undoubtedly, there has been an increase in the tensions between Muslims and Christians since Mubarak stepped down ... All Egyptians, not just [Coptic Christians], feel more insecure these days," said Jason Belanger of Catholic Relief.

African faith leaders call for action on climate change

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--World leaders must set binding targets for phasing out fossil fuels and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to less than one degree centigrade as a measure of slowing down global warming, African faith leaders have said. The leaders, meeting under the auspices of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), gathered from 7-8 June at the United Nations complex in Nairobi. They discussed how climate change would be addressed at the 17th Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change meeting in Durban, South Africa in November.

Christchurch's Anglican landmark suffers further damage

Christchurch, New Zealand (ENInews)--This city's most famous building, its historic Anglican cathedral, may be damaged beyond repair after 5.7-magnitude and 6.3-magnitude earthquakes shook New Zealand's second biggest city on 13 June. The cathedral, the centerpiece of the business district for 150 years, was ini-

tially seriously damaged in February's 6.3-magnitude earthquake, which killed 181 people. The central city is in ruins, and many businesses have moved to the western suburbs.

Conference to address issues faced by Christians in the Middle East

Geneva (ENInews)--The volatile situation facing Christians in the Middle East is a key topic of concern for members of the central committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and will be highlighted at an upcoming conference on Christians in the Middle East to be held in Volos, Greece from 20 to 22 June, according to a news release. With the diminishing presence of Christians in the region, the central committee said in a statement in February, the "conviviality among peoples from different faiths, cultures, civilizations, which is a sign of God's love for all humanity, will be endangered." The conference in Greece will explore the issue from a theological, ecumenical, cultural, and political perspective.

Japanese interfaith group opposes U.S. bases on Okinawa

Tokyo (ENInews)--A new interfaith group in Japan has joined local opposition to the U.S. military presence on the southern island of Okinawa as the two countries announced on 21 June that they have postponed the 2014 deadline for relocating a U.S. Marine base there, due to the plan's unpopularity. "The lives of Okinawan people are still threatened [by the bases]," said the Tokyo-based group composed primarily of Buddhists and Christians. "We as religionists have the same resolution in caring for life and protecting peace," the group said in a statement adopted at its launch on 17 June.

In Libya, Christians bring aid to civilians amid conflict

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--Christians are braving the fighting in Libya to deliver help to civilians trapped in the five-month-old conflict between dictator Moammar Gadhafi's forces and NATO alliance-backed rebels, a senior Roman cleric there said on 21 June. "The Christians are still in the hospitals and schools. They are giving their share of help to alleviate the situation of the people," the Rev. Daniel Farrugia, a senior Roman Catholic priest at St. Francis Catholic Church in Tripoli, told ENInews via e-mail.

Australian church leaders to lobby politicians on aid

Sydney (ENInews)--Australian national church leaders are joining with global campaigners Micah Challenge to lobby federal politicians on 22 June, seeking an increase in Australia's overseas aid budget for maternal health, child immunization, and sanitation programs to reduce poverty. Micah Challenge National Coordinator John Beckett told ENInews it is the largest meeting between denominational representatives and political leaders to discuss aid.

In Moscow, religious leaders will discuss faith-based human rights

Moscow (ENInews)--Patriarch Kirill I of the Russian Orthodox Church, opening on 21 June the annual meeting of the European Council of Religious Leaders, said that the only way they can serve a real need in contemporary consumer society is to avoid playing by secular rules and to never lose sight of their larger purpose and moral foundation. Kirill said that as the host, the Russian Orthodox Church was allowed to choose the theme of the meeting, "Human Rights and Traditional Values in Europe."

World Jewish Congress confirms new leader

Jerusalem (ENInews)--The governing board of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) on 20 June confirmed foreign policy expert Daniel Diker as its new secretary general, succeeding Michael Schneider. Representatives from some 45 Jewish communities around the world attended the meeting, which ran from 19 to 21 June and marked the WJC's 75th anniversary since its founding in Geneva. The WJC is the international organization representing Jewish communities in 92 countries.

Europe needs more humane treatment of refugees, says expert

Warsaw (ENInews)--The European Union risks "undermining its core values" unless it treats refugees and asylum-seekers more humanely, according to a senior Protestant expert. "Two decades ago, most Europeans would never have believed people would

be dying on Europe's borders simply trying to get in," said Torsten Moritz, executive secretary of the ecumenical Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME). "Yet thousands have died doing just that, especially in the Mediterranean, this year alone. This is really undermining our core values and having a dehumanizing effect on European society."

Chinese house church leaders attend rights defense seminar

Hong Kong (ENI). Chinese house church leaders attended a training seminar from 14-16 June in Zhejiang, an eastern coastal province in China, to learn how to safeguard their legal rights. Participants included pastors and leaders from Beijing; six provinces, including Hebei and Shandong; and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, according to a news release from the Texas-based organization ChinaAid, which sponsored the seminar. Attendees studied Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, which relates to freedom of religion.

Racism a topic of concern for church leaders at conference in Nicaragua

Managua, Nicaragua (ENI). Church leaders from across the Americas and the Caribbean met yesterday on the first day of a conference to discuss the violence of racism and the challenges it poses for churches and ecumenical organizations, according to a news release from the Latin America and Caribbean Communication Agency. The conference is sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in partnership with the Latin America Council of Churches (CLAI), and brings together people working with Afro-descendent and indigenous communities across the region.

China vows to ordain bishops without Vatican's OK

Beijing (ENI). In a move likely to aggravate tensions with the Vatican, China's state-run Catholic church announced on 23 June that it might soon ordain more than 40 bishops without the approval of Pope Benedict XVI. According to the official Xinhua news agency, a spokesman for the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA) said the church "faces an urgent task" of choosing bishops for more than 40 dioceses, and planned to do so "without delay."

Orthodox churches still support ecumenism, theologian says

Warsaw (ENInews)--Orthodox churches remain "fully committed" to ecumenical cooperation, despite recent disagreements with Protestants, according to a senior Orthodox theologian. "It may appear that some Orthodox churches aren't satisfied over moral and ethical issues, and this may bring them closer as a family of churches. But we shouldn't necessarily see this as a form of competition. Although we should argue for cohesion within the ecumenical movement, we shouldn't see our disagreements as a danger to unity. The Orthodox churches are more fully committed than ever to CEC and will be working to strengthen the Orthodox presence," said Viorel Ionita, interim general secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC).

Anglican-Lutheran dialogue examines service and witness

New York (ENInews)--The third phase of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission wrapped up its sixth and final meeting on 25 June in Jerusalem by discussing how greater theological agreement can lead to concerted action in ministry. "We are no longer putting the same emphasis on reconciling forms of ministry. We are now sufficiently akin; we need to do actual ministry, living and proclaiming Jesus Christ in the world," said Canon Alyson Barnett-Cowan, Anglican co-secretary of the meeting, in an interview.

Hong Kong cardinal joins protest for religious freedom in China

Hong Kong (ENI). Cardinal Joseph Zen Ke-kun, the retired bishop of Hong Kong, joined a protest outside the Chinese Liaison Office in Hong Kong yesterday, asking Beijing to stop harassing Catholic bishops and priests in mainland China. Zen and the event's organizer, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, criticized Beijing for interfering with recent bishop ordinations. An ordination on 29 June in Leshan, Sichuan, took place without papal mandate. On the same day, however, the authorities in Handan, Hebei stopped one with a papal mandate. The candidate, Fr. Joseph Sun Jigen, was arrested.

Conference looking at racism in Latin America ends with call for change

Managua, Nicaragua (ENI). Religious leaders from across the Americas and the Caribbean issued a declaration calling for a world-wide move by churches to educate people about racism, according to a news release. The statement came at the conclusion of a conference held last week in Managua, Nicaragua. Organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Latin America Council of Churches (CLAI), the gathering focused on the violent effects of racism against people of African descent in the region. It was the first such event to bring together church leaders of Afro-descendent communities in the Americas and the Caribbean.

Local Ecclesiastical News

A LETTER FROM DR. MARY NORTON

Greetings to all,

I am delighted to share an "outcome" of our last conference. As you all know my mantra was "sanitation and water" are essential to global health. I have also been sharing it with my students.

Below is *another outcome document of our conference*-developed by students-to raise the consciousness of the Felician College community –April 28; and the wider geographical community during the annual health fair, and also their home countries about the importance of sanitation and water to health.

Collectively we have taken one small step to a "healthier world."

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6rl80JanF8>

Warmest regards to all,

Mary

Dr. Mary E. Norton

Associate Dean and Professor

Global Academic Initiatives

Felician College

The Franciscan College of New Jersey

The Standing Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in America

New Jersey, 7 April 2011

The Standing Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in America held its spring meeting on Thursday, April 7, at the Coptic Orthodox Papal Center in Cedar Grove, New Jersey.

Bishop David of the Coptic Church hosted the meeting that was



chaired by His Eminences Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, of the Armenian Orthodox. His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim represented our Archdiocese, accompanied by Very Rev. Fr. Shamoun Asmar and Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun. Attending also was His Eminence Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Ecumenical Director of the Armenian Diocese.

Topics discussed included a proposed forum on Oriental Orthodox youth, future joint activities— including the annual United Nations prayer service—with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church on the local and International levels. The participants agreed on a date for the next concelebrated liturgy to be hosted by the Coptic Church in Staten Island. A Special guest Fr. Mark Arey of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese provided information on the recently formed Assembly of Bishops, which includes the canonical bishops of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Participants also engaged in a discussion on the situation of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt.

The Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches of America includes representatives of the Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, and Syrian Orthodox Churches. The next meeting of the Conference will be hosted by our Archdiocese in fall of 2011.

His Holiness the Patriarch meets with His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch



On Friday, April the 1st, at 10:00AM, His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, paid a visit to the Ecumenical Patriarch, His Holiness Bartholomew I, at his residence in Fanar, Istanbul, Turkey. The Patriarch of Antioch was accompanied by their Eminence the Prelates of Aleppo, Syria, Tur_Abdin and Istanbul in Turkey, as well as, the Patriarchal Assistant and Secretary in addition to a number of lay people from Turkey.

His Holiness was welcomed warmly by His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch. Patriarch Zakka thanked the Lord for allowing this meeting to take place and explained to his brother, His Holiness Bartholomew I, the love and prayers of the Church of Antioch to the Church of Constantinople. He then went on to explain the reasons and results of visiting the Prime Minister and the President of Turkey, in Ankara.

A discussion about the importance of dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches took place, for which His Holiness, Bartholomew I assured our Patriarch Mor Zakka Iwas I, of his personal commitment and encouragement to pursue the dialogue

The two patriarchs then discussed the world events, and specially the current situation in the Middle East and particularly the conditions in Syria. Our Patriarch requested his host to keep Syria in his prayers. After the meeting, His Holiness Patriarch Zakka, paid a visit to the Fanar Patriarchal Cathedral, and offered prayers at the holy relics of the two Church Fathers, Saint John Chrysostom (407 A.D.) and Saint Gregory the Theologian (390 A.D.) Both Saints were Patriarchs of Constantinople. His Holiness, Patriarch Zakka I was greatly moved for seeing these relics for the first time, since they were brought from Rome to Constantinople (Istanbul) on the 22nd of November, 2004.

Meeting of Clergy from the Eastern and Western Archdiocese During 48th Annual Convention



The 48th Annual Convention of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch for the United States and Canada was underway on Thursday, July 21st and began with a meeting of Clergy from the Eastern and Western Archdiocese. The opening prayer at this first session was delivered by His Eminence Mor Clemes Eugene Kaplan, Archbishop of the Western Archdiocese.

The meeting's agenda highlighted a Biblical presentation given by Very Rev. Rabban Raboula Somi from Sweden. The presentation was entitled "The Brothers of Jesus in the Syriac Tradition." Present also was the Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Shabo of Aleppo. Decisions taken at this first session included a proclamation that the week between the two Holy Days of the "Consecration of the Church" and the "Renewal of the Church" be designated as a week of Bible Reading for our Syriac Orthodox Church in North America.

The second decision called for cooperation between the Eastern and Western Archdiocese in the publication of religious books and the standardization and printing of the Annual Calendar.

A discussion on continued education for clergy resulted in a decision requiring clergy to take refresher and self-improvement courses of study that include theology, sociology, management and public speaking.

At the conclusion of this four-hour session, His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim, Archbishop of the Eastern Archdiocese gave closing comments and ended the meeting with a prayer.

H.E. Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim Publishes a Children's Pictorial Book – *In the Tree House*

Archbishop Cyril held a group of children spellbound while reading from his new children's book, *In the Tree House*. On this special Sunday afternoon, children and parents alike were caught up in the Archbishop's reading and spontaneous interaction with the children.

As one attendee, Jack Darakjy, Esq., shared: "This was one of the most interesting and unique events I have ever attended. The picture of Archbishop Cyril sitting with those young toddlers and reading to them was, as the saying goes, "priceless." In the nearly 50 years that I have been attending our Church here in the U.S., I have never witnessed anything comparable to this heartwarming scene. I think that virtually everyone who was there felt exactly the same way. It is hard to think of a more perfect example of Christian love and humility. I'm glad I was there to be a part of it and I thank you again for the invite."

His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas enjoys reading a copy of *In The Tree House*.

This is a joyful story celebrating the determination of a boy as he grows into manhood.

The story begins one beautiful Sunday morning with seven-year-old Matthew. While attending church with his family, Matthew hears a calling to the priesthood. Later in the day, Matthew invites his sister Sarah and best friend John to "play church" with him in his tree house. A wondrous transformation takes place.

In The Tree House follows Matthew from childhood to early adulthood. He comes alive to us as we learn about his good deeds and evolving relationship with God. As Matthew follows his dream, he receives ongoing support and compassion from his family, friends and the clergy.

In The Tree House is a story about love – among family, between friends, and of God. This gentle story explores the joy of listening to your calling, loving your neighbor, and welcoming God.



Sole Orthodox Church In Southern Tajik District Closed

21 April, 2011

Lyudmila Khojaeva

KHATLON, Tajikistan, -- The local authorities in a district in southern Tajikistan have closed its only Orthodox church, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Local official Dilbar Nurova said on April 20 that the church in the Jaloliddin Rumi district of Khatlon Province was closed because it was not officially registered.

She said the congregation had submitted a registration application, but it was rejected because of "some shortcomings."

Nurova said that when the congregation submits a revised application, the church will be registered and they will be able to worship there. She noted that three local mosques have also been closed and must re-register.

Lyudmila Khojaeva, who heads the Union of Russian Speakers in Khatlon Province, said that closing the church just before Easter, one of the most important Christian festivals, is a blow to local Orthodox Christians. She said the authorities should have allowed more time to prepare the application for registration.

Russians are believed to account for 3-5 percent of Tajikistan's population of 7.3 million people.

The registration of new places of worship and the registration of existing mosques and churches is mandatory under the controversial law on religion passed in 2009.

That law has served as the rationale for closing mosques and some churches. During the first three months of 2011, 229 mosques were closed in Khatlon Province alone.

His Eminence visits His Holiness Mar Dankha IV, in New York

Tuesday, the 12th of July, 2011, His Eminence, Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim paid a cordial visit to His Holiness, Mar Dankha the IV, Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, who was paying pastoral visits to his churches in the area. Rev. Father Gabriel Adde, pastor of St. Peter's Church in Long Island, New York, accompanied his Eminence. Mor Cyril conveyed to His Holiness, Mar Dankha, the brotherly regards of our Patriarch, His Holiness Mor Zakka I. During the visit, relationships of the two sister Churches were discussed; the shared past with its glory and misfortunes, as well as the future plans for closer relationships were aspired. His Holiness and His Eminence expressed their concern for the future of our people in the Middle East and prayed for God's care and protection during this very critical time in our homeland.



Interfaith Center of New York Programs – Past & Present

5th Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer Retreat for Social Justice: Creating Safety, Preserving Faith: Religious Leaders Address Domestic Violence

Wednesday, 25 May - Thursday, 26 May, 2011

Stony Point, New York

This Spring's Marshall Meyer Retreat considered the reality of domestic violence in all faith communities and explore the ways in which religious leaders can work to end abuse. They examined the importance of theological and pastoral responses to the problem of domestic violence, highlighting the importance of elements in our traditions that emphasize the dignity of women. The retreat also sought to equip religious leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify domestic violence and take action where intervention is required. Speakers, panels, and small groups discussed ways in which we can address domestic violence by resorting our own traditions as well as social and municipal resources. A screening of the recent documentary *I Believe You: Faiths' Response to Intimate Partner Violence* grounded our discussion. Please consider joining us for this important event. The retreat took place over the course of two days, and all religious leaders were invited to attend. For interested participants, the Interfaith Center provided a bus service from our Manhattan office to the retreat center.

Interfaith Center Annual Gala Dinner

6 June, 2011

Tribeca Rooftop, Manhattan

Celebrating the *internationally acclaimed award-winning musician Wynton Marsalis!* Master of Ceremonies: **Nancy Giles, Actor & CBS News Sunday Morning Contributor**

Needed: Faith Leaders Experienced In Inter-Faith Connection

Date/Time: Summer and Fall 2011

Location: Varied

To support religious pluralism and multi-faith cooperation, and to counter religious intolerance as part of the new "Prepare NY" coalition.

PREPARE NY – *get involved.*

The Interfaith Center of NY is a cofounder of this new coalition along with Auburn Seminary, Intersections, Odyssey Networks, Quest and Tanenbaum.

See www.prepareny.com

Prepare NY is a community-building initiative created to promote conversation and connection between New Yorkers in this tenth anniversary year following the attacks of September 11, 2001. In this season of heightened emotion and memory there is need for opportunities for learning, relationship building, reflection, and discussion. In this anniversary year it is particularly important that we help build understanding about -- and solidarity with -- any faith communities that are experiencing any kinds of persecution, including those who have been erroneously assigned collective blame in connection with the attacks of September 11, 2001.

We invite you to host an event between now and the end of this year. The Interfaith Center can provide speakers and other resources – including representatives of faith communities such as the New York City Muslim and Sikh communities, as well as some speakers who lost family members on 9/11/01 or who were direct survivors. These family members and survivors are committed to joining with their neighbors to build up our shared communities and to ensure that the lingering wounds from that terrible day ten years ago do not include the continued violence, harassment, and prejudice that some of our neighbors are experiencing.

For more information contact Annie Rawlings, Prepare NY Education Director for The Interfaith Center of NY: annie@interfaithcenter.org 212-870-3518

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Other Programs in the NYC area

9/11 Healing and Remembrance Program

Date/Time: April-July 2011

Location: NYC, Arlington, Shanksville

Through a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime, the 9-11 Healing and Remembrance Program will provide survivors, families, emergency responders, and others with a centralized resource to provide case management services to access needed victim services, such as mental health counseling or emotional support, and information on events and activities related to the commemoration of the 9-11 attacks. The Mental Health Association of NYC (MHA-NYC) will ensure that the 10th anniversary of September 11 is a meaningful and healing time by offering those affected a variety of resources to encourage hope and renewal. Visit the website, or call 1-866-212-0444 for more information.

Link: <http://click.icptrack.com/icp/relay.php?r=1039583747&msgid=5598360&act=9VLK&c=48147&destination=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.9-11healingandremembrance.org%2F>

Letter in Support of a Young Girl in Texas—Please Consider Signing

On March 8, 2011, 19 men and boys in Cleveland, Texas raped an 11-year-old girl. Media including the New York Times coverage of this incident focused on statements made by local community members expressing concern for the futures of the men and boys involved, questioning her parent's ability to care for her, and even criticizing the 11-year-old girl about the clothes and makeup she wore. A community rally was held in Cleveland where both victim blaming and blaming of the victim's parents were front and center. Outraged anti-violence and women's activists, independent media outlets and individuals engaged in a vigorous debate about ethics of reporting on societal violence. This petition is a letter to the child. Once signatures are collected, local women activists who are in touch with the family will deliver the letter to the family. Please disseminate widely and join us in supporting the child and sending a clear message that she is not to blame

The 3rd annual DIVINAMENTE NYC festival

Date/Time: May 18th through 22nd

Founded by renowned Italian actress Pamela Villoresi (artistic director), the festival celebrates the spiritual dimension of the arts and their ability to bridge national boundaries. On the 150th anniversary of the unification of Italy, artists from different backgrounds had been invited to reflect upon the idea of "home": the home of our birthplace, the home where we have chosen to live, or the home we seek in our imagination.



Other Related News

His Excellency Rev. Ambassador Anthony DeLuca Celebrates 50th Jubilee of Priesthood

By: Rev. Fr. George McBride

THE LIFE OF FATHER ANTHONY

The Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, the priests and staff of Sts. Peter and Ignatius Mission and I personally, congratulate Father Anthony DeLuca on the Golden Jubilee of his Ordination to the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Fifty Years!

Let us now look back over the memories of those years.

Father Anthony was born to James DeLuca and Antoinette Scarano in Jamaica, Queens, and New York. His mother, 98, is with today. He was baptized, made First Confession and Holy Communion and Confirmation at St. Monica's Church where his parents were married. He attended with his sister, Angela, St. Monica's School. And while he was in first grade, Mario Cuomo, future governor of New York, was in third grade across the hall. Children of the struggling working class attended the School.

Father attended Andrew Jackson High School while teaching Sunday School at Christ the King Church. At high school graduation, he received many awards, was accepted, without exam, to Queens College of the City University that was known as the poor man's Harvard in those days. There he completed the Basic Air Force ROTC training program and graduated with a B.S. in pre-medical studies.

At this cross-roads, Father recalls that at age 20 at Christmas Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral, he responded to Christ's call to follow Him which he had felt from childhood. He made preparation to enter St. John's University to complete pre-theological studies under the Vincentian Fathers in preparation for the Major Seminary and was awarded the B.A. in philosophy. He was accepted by the Brooklyn Diocese and sent to the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception, Huntington that was known as "the rock." He was ordained June 3, 1961 and was awarded the Bachelor of Sacred Theology the following day by the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C.

He served as parish priest in Queens and Brooklyn. During this time, he was one of the first priests ever given permission to teach in a secular college while completing his master's and doctoral degrees in philosophy at Fordham University under the Jesuits for nine years.

Archbishop McEntegart gave permission for Father Anthony to accept a professorship and chaplainry at Notre Dame College, Staten Island while assisting in parishes on weekends.

Having explored the philosophical dimension of religion, he entered the Clinical Psychology program at St. John's to gain further depth and earned advanced degrees. He was one of the first priests to be psychoanalyzed and subsequently the first priest to be accepted into the Fellowship Program of the Postgraduate Center for Mental Health and was Certified as a Psychoanalyst.

Father Anthony is licensed in various branches of mental health in three states. The American Psychological Association elected him a Fellow for outstanding contributions to International Psychology which distinction is held by very few psychologists. He has been in "Who's Who" for a quarter century.



US

Father married Andrea in 1973, has two daughters, Helena and Antoinette, both psychologists, they probably liked their parents' career - a granddaughter, Lillah, and son-in law, Charles who practices law.

Father Anthony founded several not-for-profits, American Institute for Creative Living- a low fee counseling clinic; International School for Mental Health Practitioners- a training institute for license in psychoanalysis; Ignatius University – providing specialty training for diplomats; Syrian Orthodox Church in America, an NGO accredited to the United Nations since 1993, which I am happy to be one of the UN Representatives and Editor of the Newsletter posted on our web.

For ten years, Father produced “Sunday Mass Live” appearing weekly on local TV; at the same time he, Andrea and daughters produced college counseling courses which were weekly cablecast.

In 1994, Father was received into the Orthodox Church that is under the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East. For his service to the church, he was later given the Pectoral Cross by his Beatitude Catholicos of India and his Archbishop. Father has been Ecumenical Secretary for a half dozen of his Archbishops and has met personally or officially with most of the heads of the Orthodox Churches and the Vatican. He serves on various Commissions: the Oriental; the Oriental-Eastern Orthodox Dialogue and the Oriental-US Conference of Catholic Bishops Dialogue.

One day, Father Anthony, wearing a Roman Collar, as an NGO Rep for the Syrian Orthodox Church at UN , was approached by an ambassador /advisor. That encounter was to change the life of Anthony for the next 20 years! The Ambassador said maybe our two Missions could work together. From what you know of Father Anthony, the wheels began to turn, in fact, they spun violently! Within a week, he was meeting with the head ambassador of Kyrgyzstan, which is a poor country in Central Asia just recently independent from the USSR, and they needed a lot of help..... Enter Anthony.!

By that summer, he went to Washington to meet at the Kyrgyzstan Embassy, the Ambassador to the United States and at the same time enrolled at Georgetown University to study international relations and law. So while learning in the morning class about the World Trade Organization, in the afternoon he was at the Embassy helping Kyrgystan with their pending application to the World Trade Organization and having the hutzpah to telephone the US Trade Representative at the White House to ask her how he could help in expediting the application, since he was visiting professor at Georgetown University. He then instructed the Ambassador what to fix up and told him just be quiet. Kyrgyzstan was accepted into WTO.

With his reputation assured, he returned to the UN in NY, and came before the newly appointed Ambassador as Dr. DeLuca that was changed in later years and he has fondly become to his fellow diplomats “the professor.” He persuaded the Ambassador that he would be more effective if he were appointed as Special Advisor and member of the UN delegation. This was granted and he remains one of two or three non-nationals who advise one of the 200 countries at the UN.

Realizing, that he better know what he was doing, Dr. DeLuca returned for a another summer at Georgetown and then for two years he spent Tuesdays 10 to 10 at Princeton. He has held the UN delegate position for some twenty years under six different ambassadors, three presidents and two or three revolutions. He covers the Sixth Committee (Legal) of the General Assembly, Security Council and advises on the changing geo-political situations. He was appointed His Excellency, Honorary Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2004.

Father Anthony does not remember that he ever did anything big but did help big people. Living on a mountain, looking out to the ocean, he does remember something about mountains: he successfully negotiated placing a resolution for financial assistance to the mountain peoples of the world on the agenda for the 60th session of the UN General Assembly. He acted as facilitator for the Second Committee of the GA working with the European Union, the G-77 and member states for the resolution. It passed unanimously

that fall.

So Father is still engaged in all of the above activities, advising and teaching diplomats at the UN, teaching student-psychoanalysts, treating twenty patients a week, tending his mountain garden, loving his wife of nearly 40 years, ever solicitous of his children, and special time with his granddaughter watching "Dora the Explorer."

"Yes," he says, "there are some cloudy days but most of it has been exciting sunshine." "Finally," he told me, "the Call of Christ never leaves me; and if it were rooted out, I would no longer be me; and so I still fulfill the ministry of the priesthood wherever something is available and God always seems to lead me someplace-now by being chaplain at both Wagner College and Sunrise Senior Living. I can't ask for greater blessings."

A Cent'anni, Father Anthony

The Family Celebrates!

