

Holy Wisdom

Peace: Showing that Others Matter!

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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 to result into a resolution. It is time for us as people to acknowledge that there is something more that exceed 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!

Ambassador Anthony DeLuca attended this meeting in the General Assembly as special advisor.

WITH SYRIA AT PIVOTAL MOMENT, UN OFFICIALS PRESS FOR UNITED ACTION TO END CRISIS

New York, Jun 7 2012

Amid growing atrocities and little evidence that the Syrian Government is living up to its commitment to stop the ongoing violence, United Nations officials today urged the world community to act with one voice to end the crisis in the Middle Eastern country.

“Syria is at a pivotal moment. And so are we,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told a meeting of the General Assembly. “Syria and the region can quickly move from tipping point to breaking point. The dangers of full-scale civil war are imminent and real.”

Today’s meeting comes in the wake of the recent massacre in Houla, where 108 people, including 49 children, many of whom were under the age of 10, were killed, as well as reports of large-scale killings in Mazraat al-Qubeir, near Hama, which the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) is currently trying to verify.

“We condemn this unspeakable barbarity and renew our determination to bring those responsible to account,” said Mr. Ban, who added that UN observers, who were initially denied access, are working now to get to the scene. While trying to do so, they were shot at with small arms.

“We join forces at a grave and grievous hour,” he stated. “The situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. Each day seems to bring new additions to the grim catalogue of atrocities.”

There is “too little evidence,” he said, that the Syrian Government is living up to its commitments under the six-point plan presented by Kofi Annan, the Joint Special Envoy of the UN and the League of Arab States for the Syrian Crisis, and many elements of the opposition have declared they will no longer respect the plan.

The plan calls for an end to violence, access for humanitarian agencies to provide relief to those in need, the release of detainees, the start of inclusive political dialogue that takes into account the aspirations of the Syrian people, and unrestricted access for the international media.

“The inability of either the regime or the opposition to engage in any meaningful political dialogue makes the prognosis extremely grave. And the longer this conflict goes on, the more difficult the path toward peace and eventual reconciliation will become,” warned Mr. Ban. “The international community must recognize these realities - and act, with unity and collective will.”

He added that the so-called ‘Annan Plan’ remains the centerpiece of these efforts. “We must continue to support it with stronger steps to ensure compliance... No one can predict how the situation in Syria will evolve. We must be prepared for any eventuality. We must be ready to respond to many possible scenarios.”

Mr. Annan reported to the Assembly that, despite the acceptance of the six-point plan and the deployment of UN observers to Syria, the plan is not being implemented.

“It is your shared interest - and our collective responsibility - to act quickly. The process cannot be open-ended. The longer we wait, the more radicalized and polarized the situation will become, and the harder it will be to forge a political settlement,” said Mr. Annan.

“The international community has united, but it now must take that unity to a new level. We must find the will and the common ground to act - and act as one. Individual actions or interventions will not resolve the crisis.

“As we demand compliance with international law and the six-point plan, it must be made clear that there will be consequences if compliance is not forthcoming,” said the envoy. “If we genuinely unite behind one process and act and speak with one voice, I believe it is still possible to avert the worst and enable Syria to emerge from this crisis.”

General Assembly President Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser urged all Member States to unite in cooperating with the Joint Special Envoy and to impress upon the Syrian Government and all parties the need for a cessation of violence in all its forms, and for a rapid and peaceful solution to end the crisis.

“We need to have a frank and results-oriented discussion on Syria. Time is pressing. The lives of tens of thousands of Syrians, and the stability of the region, are at stake. The credibility of this Organization is also at stake,” Mr. Al-Nasser stated.

Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, stressed that the serious deterioration of the human rights situation being witnessed in Syria demands the full attention and engagement of Member States.

“People are dying as we speak,” she said in a statement that was delivered by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ivan Šimonovic.

“I urge the international community to unite here in the General Assembly, as well as in the Security Council, and to speak with one voice to all Syrians - including the Government and armed opponents - in order to convince them to pull back from the brink and begin genuine negotiations for a peaceful process of change. There would be a terrible cost for not doing so.”

The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Nabil Al Araby, said that the League does not call for the Security Council to resort to the use of force or military options, but rather for using political, economic and commercial pressures enshrined in the UN Charter.

“I call for backing and supporting the measures incorporated in the six points to end this crisis and to achieve a peaceful, political solution that will enable the Syrian people to live in freedom and democracy,” he said. “It is not acceptable, ethically, that the Syrian people continue to suffer.”

Mr. Ban and Mr. Annan are also scheduled to brief the Security Council later today on the situation in Syria.

For more details go to UN News Centre at <http://www.un.org/news>

United Nations General Assembly -Sixty-Sixth Session

By Christopher Casais, student at International School of Mental Health Practitioners (ISMHP) and UN Youth Representative

The UN General Assembly held on May 17th 2012 presented the State of the World Economy and Finance in 2012. The thematic debate on the world economy was presented by keynote speakers Jose Manuel Barroso (President of the European Commission); Ali Babacan (H.E. and Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey); Mr. Paul Volcker (former head of the U.S. Federal Reserve); and Professor Joseph Stiglitz.

President Barroso spoke about developing a solution to the global economic crisis stating that it must have a global dimension. Barroso mentioned the efforts the European Union is willing to give to struggling Greece, whose longstanding economic crisis turned into a political crisis with opposing political parties raising doubts to the terms of a 130-billion euro bailout. In addition, Barroso explained that Greece must also take into account the decisions of the 16 other Euro zone nations that have agreed on conditions for giving Greece financial aid.

The thematic debate on the State of the World Economy in 2012 also brought together presidents and ministers from developing market nations in Europe, Middle East, Africa and Latin America. President Ramotar of the Republic of Guyana spoke on Thursday citing that the IMF (International Monetary Fund) has concerns over the progress of the world's economy, which after three years of work at stimulating recovery, it is still fragile and "the medium-term prospects are bleak" (Ramotar). H.E. Khalid bin Muhammad Al-Attiyah, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs for Qatar, reiterated the state of the world economy during the assembly stating that the crisis has multiplied the challenges faced by developing countries and lessened their effectiveness in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for 2015. Al Attiyah underlined the significance of developing countries to strengthen their private sectors, enhance public-private sector partnership, and reminded developed countries of their international obligations to developing countries.

United Nations Academic Impact: Activity Report

Dear and valued UNAI member,

On behalf of the United Nations Academic Impact, I would like to thank you for your continued support for and interest in supporting the work of the United Nations through UNAI and its principles.

UNAI now enjoys a global membership of over 835 institutions in 117 countries. To better reflect the activities of this large pool of members and to bring them closer to each other, we have revamped our website (<http://outreach.un.org/UNAI>) and re-introduced a monthly newsletter. Please note this website which expands upon the core information provided on the website www.academicimpact.org.

We now need your feedback - about what you have done and how the UNAI secretariat could serve you better. We are particularly interested to learn about your activities in support of UNAI. As you may already know, UNAI members are expected to show their support of at least one UNAI principle. We have developed a simple reporting template (attached) to help you report about your activities undertaken within the last twelve months. We would be grateful if you could complete and send us this form by July 31, 2012. Should you already have provided this information to us, please ignore this request.

We will post a number of these “success stories” on the UNAI website and in our newsletter; we also encourage you to share these stories on our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/ImpactUN).

To make UNAI truly global and truly alive to its mission, we need to project activities of all our members and find ways to build partnerships among them. This is only possible when you keep us informed, and we, in turn, share this information with others. Please help us make this happen.

With thanks, and personal regards,

Ramu (Damodaran) Chief, United Nations Academic Impact

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CREATION OF SUSTAINABLE JOBS AT CENTRE OF UN YOUTH FORUM

New York, May 4 2012

The creation of green jobs is essential to ensure a sustainable future, United Nations officials stressed today at a forum held at the Organization's Headquarters in New York aimed at giving young people a platform to voice their concerns, experiences and ideas to tackle youth unemployment.

"Young people are the future of our societies. As such, they should also be part of solutions," the Vice President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Luis Alfonso de Alba, told participants at the first Youth ECOSOC Forum. "Creating a sustainable future means empowering youth with better job opportunities - and it means giving young people a voice."

The forum, whose theme is "Empowering Youth with Better Job Opportunities," brought together young delegates and entrepreneurs, students and representatives of youth non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Participants took part in two interactive dialogues, the first one focusing on education and training, and the second on the creation of green jobs and the conditions needed to create them.

In her address to participants, Deputy Secretary-General Ashe-Rose Migiro stressed that youth are mobilizing like never before and that their ideas can help countries achieve their sustainable development objectives.

"Young people can drive the global push for green growth. As entrepreneurs, consumers and leaders, they can adopt new lifestyles that respect our planet. They can promote trends that encourage sustainable development," she said, adding that youth participation is particularly important in events such as the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) next month in Brazil.

Youth unemployment has soared in both affluent and poor countries since the global financial crisis began in 2008, with the largest annual increase on record reported in 2009. At one point, nearly 76 million people aged between 15 and 24 years of age were unemployed worldwide.

Currently, young people are three times as likely as adults to be unemployed. In Europe nearly one in four young people are out of a job, and in North Africa and the Middle East youth unemployment is almost 30 per cent, the highest worldwide.

Mr. de Alba highlighted that in addition to a high rate of unemployment, it is important to look at underemployment and vulnerable employment, as many young people are on precarious short-term contracts, or trapped in low-skill and poorly paid jobs.

"Labour policies and institutions may not create any incentives to hire young people, and, as many of you know, policies are not yet in place in many countries to equip young people with the skills demanded by today's labour market," he said.

The Secretary-General for Rio+20, Sha Zukang, underlined that job creation is a top priority for action for the conference, as ensuring employment for youth goes hand in hand with sustainable development.

“Unemployment affects both current well-being and future prospects, and these ramifications can trickle down to the next generation,” said Mr. Sha, who is also UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

“There is a growing convergence of views on the importance of creating green jobs. By training our youth in the skills needed to transition to a green economy, we can address both unemployment and sustainable development issues. This is the approach that will secure the future for the youth of today and generations to come,” he added.

ON ANTI-HOMOPHOBIA DAY, UN OFFICIALS CALL FOR REPEAL OF DISCRIMINATORY LAWS

New York, May 17 2012

Marking International Day against Homophobia, senior United Nations officials today drew attention to laws around the world which discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, and called for equality and the repeal of such laws.

“When I raise these issues, some complain that I’m pushing for ‘new rights’ or ‘special rights’ for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. But there is nothing new or special about the right to life and security of person, the right to freedom from discrimination,” said the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, in a statement.

“These and other rights are universal... enshrined in international law but denied to many of our fellow human beings simply because of their sexual orientation or gender identity,” she added.

While not an officially observed UN day, the majority of which have been established by the UN General Assembly or designated by UN specialized agencies, the International Day against Homophobia, observed on 17 May, has become an important day for millions of people around the world to pause and remember the victims of homophobic violence and discrimination, and to make the case for genuine equality for LGBT people.

According to the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), close to 80 countries, territories and areas still have laws that criminalize same-sex relations between consenting adults.

“We cannot let these abuses stand. We know what needs to be done,” Ms. Pillay said. “States must repeal discriminatory laws and ban discriminatory practices: punish violence and hatred... not love.”

In connection with the Day, a UN spokesperson said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

has called on States to tackle violence against LGBT people, decriminalize consensual same-sex relationships, ban discrimination and educate the public - and he “supports the High Commissioner’s message: ‘We are all human and we all deserve the same rights.’”

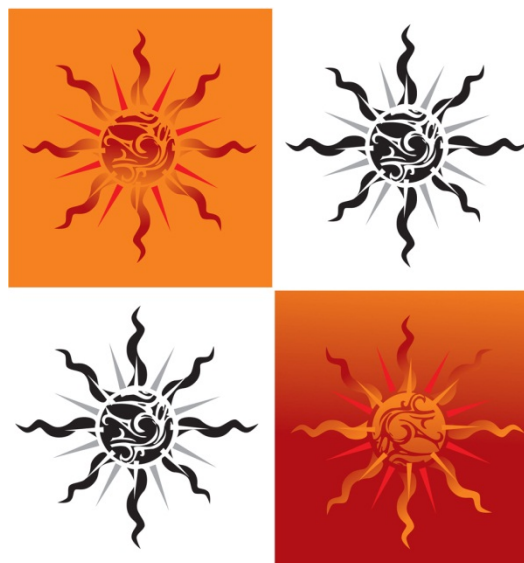
The spokesperson said Mr. Ban is distressed by the fact that LGBT people are discriminated against in the labour market, in schools and in healthcare, and are even abused and disowned by their own families.

“He is outraged that they are singled out for physical attack, even murder,” the spokesperson said. “And he has called for a repeal of laws, now on the books in 76 countries that criminalize loving relationships between people of the same sex.”

In March, the UN chief told the Geneva-based Human Rights Council that he had not grown up talking about these issues, but had learned to speak up “because lives are at stake.” In 2010, he lauded the “courageous” decision by President Bingu wa Mutharika of Malawi to pardon a gay couple who had been sentenced to 14 years in prison, and, more recently, he stressed the need to ensure the rights of LGBT people during a visit to Zambia.

The head of UNAIDS, the lead United Nations agency dealing with the global HIV/AIDS response, said the laws are serious barriers to an effective AIDS response and are driving LGBT people underground where they cannot access life-saving services.

“A society’s value should not be based on money or power. It must be measured by the way it values people, regardless of their sexual orientation or social status. A prosperous society is one that ensures inclusiveness and respects all people,” said UNAIDS’ Executive Director, Michel Sidibé. “To our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender friends, UNAIDS stands with you.”



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE ON AFRICA DAY

25 May 2012

Each year, Africa Day provides an opportunity to acknowledge the achievements of the peoples and governments of Africa and to reaffirm the support of the United Nations for their efforts to build a better future.

The United Nations commends Africa's recent efforts to consolidate its peace and security architecture, and to reject unconstitutional changes of power. We will continue to work with Africa in building durable peace, ending armed conflicts, boosting democracy, and promoting respect for fundamental human rights, especially the rights of women and youth.

Africa is a dynamic continent undergoing fundamental transformation. Even during the world economic crisis, Africa's economies continued to expand, and growth forecasts remain positive. However, the benefits are not reaching all Africans. Poverty, hunger, and disparities in health, education, and participation in society, are preventing hundreds of millions of Africans from fully realizing their potential. Greater effort is needed by all to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

The growing number of success stories across Africa indicates that broader social and economic progress is realistically attainable for most Africans. I have personally seen the dividends of investing in women's and children's health and sustainable agriculture. I have spent many hours with African leaders who are committed to peace, human rights, democracy and good governance.

The challenge is to extend these advances and ensure they reach all Africans, especially the continent's poorest and most vulnerable people. In particular, we must address the spectre of hunger - from the highly visible periodic food emergencies to the hidden disgrace of stunting that is affecting a new generation of African children.

Many of these issues are on the table at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development next month in Brazil. Rio+20 is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to mold the future we want - a future where climate change and desertification are no longer threats; where devastating maternal and child mortality, and diseases such as TB and HIV/AIDS, are consigned to the past; where all people have access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation.

From renewable energy to thriving oceans, from empowered women to productive partnerships between governments, civil society and business, Rio+20 is our chance to deliver for all, particularly Africa. On this observance of Africa Day, as the world tries to forge a renewed global partnership for sustainable development, I pledge to work with Africa's leaders and people to implement an agenda that addresses Africa's needs - an agenda that will set the continent on the path to the future we all want: dynamic, equitable and sustainable growth that benefits all Africans.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

REMARKS TO PARTNERS FORUM OF THE

UN ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Istanbul, 31 May 2012

Prime Minister Erdoğan, let me begin by thanking you for your support and for hosting us today.

Five years ago, we launched the Alliance of Civilizations with the leadership of the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Spain.

Today, we meet to look to the next five years and beyond.

The Alliance was founded to advance the most noble of our common ideals - greater understanding among peoples and nations, a deeper embrace of global diversity.

On the fundamental issues of tolerance and cooperation - the Alliance has emerged as an increasingly important voice on the global stage.

But as we work for the world that we want, we are mindful of the world as it is.

This is a time of budget difficulties. There is growing competition for scarce financial resources.

Every day, the news headlines remind us of the uncertainties of our era: The crisis in the Eurozone. Growing joblessness. Wider gaps between rich and poor.

Economic hard times everywhere mean economic difficulties for the United Nations as well.

We are doing more and more with less and less resources.

But the long-term solution is not just too simply tighten our belt. The larger challenge for any Organization - big or small - is to stay relevant in this age of austerity.

Our ultimate test is not how we talk of noble aspirations but how we deliver to the people who need our support.

The Alliance of Civilizations emerged in a time of turbulence.

This is an era of great transitions. And by their very definition, transitions bring forth tensions and expose hidden fault lines.

We have seen that clearly over the past year with the Arab Spring and, most urgently, in Syria.

Our mission on the ground -- the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria, or UNSMIS -- is there to help bring about a cease-fire. Our observers are the eyes and ears of the international community.

We are there to record violations and to speak out so that the perpetrators of crimes may be held to account. And that is what we did after last Friday's massacre in El-Houla, drawing on our own unbiased and incontestable evidence. The more the international community knows, the more likely it is that we can advance on our most important goal: to help find a political solution, a solution that safeguards the lives and interests of all the Syrian people.

Let me state plainly, however: the UN did not deploy in Syria just to bear witness to the slaughter of innocents. We are not there to play the role of passive observer to unspeakable atrocities.

The Joint Special Envoy, Mr. Kofi Annan, has expressed his concern that we may have reached a “tipping point” in Syria. The massacre of civilians of the sort seen last weekend could plunge Syria into a catastrophic civil war - a civil war from which the country would never recover.

I demand that the government of Syria act on its commitments under the Annan peace plan. A united international community demands that the Syrian government act on its responsibilities to its people.

In these difficult times, in the face of humankind’s terrible capacity for inhumanity, it is all the more important for those of us here today to take a clear and principled stand. To speak out; and more, to act in the cause of peace, tolerance and harmony among people.

There are many fault lines - many regions in the world that could all too easily slide into conflict.

We hear a great deal about the so-called “clash of civilizations” – the supposed rift between predominantly Muslim and Western societies.

That is not what is going on in Syria. There, it is the old story of a tyranny seeking to hold power.

And in seeking to hold on to power, the regime threatens to exacerbate tensions among Syria’s diverse people, much as we saw in the former Yugoslavia two decades ago.

Today, we see similar tensions in many other spheres of life, though certainly not so extreme.

We see them in the polarization that marks political discourse in many countries, in the debates about immigration and cultural identity in rich nations as well as poor, in the growing economic uncertainties that afflict people almost everywhere.

Together, we have looked upon these challenges – and we have seen that the world needed new approaches - new ways to address these big questions.

We saw how human rights needed to be strengthened – particularly the rights and protections of minorities.

In societies torn by conflict, we have seen the imperative of reconciliation and the healing power of dialogue and mediation.

We have asked: How can we improve the way media and opinion leaders address sensitive cultural issues?

How can we better respond to the great “isms” of our day – radicalism, extremism and terrorism?

How can we better help immigrant communities to more fully engage in the social and political life of their host countries? How do we help break down barriers of mistrust and mutual suspicion?

Along the way, we discovered something important: In addressing these challenges, we found that we do not need another large new multilateral agency. We did not need to build another big bureaucracy.

Rather, we needed to create a platform - a global platform. A platform where governments, civil society, young people, scholars, local authorities and the private sector could come together to innovate, share, support and build.

A platform wide enough for anyone in the world to step up and say: We stand for inclusive societies. We stand for tolerance and understanding.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Five years later, that platform is in place.

We call it the Alliance of Civilizations. And every time we come together, as we do today, we appreciate its growing strength and reach.

We see it in the impressive Annual Forums that gather thousands of participants from every corner of the world.

We also see it through the exchanges that the Alliance arranges for young Arab, European and American leaders. Through award-winning youth projects that build bridges. Through support that the Alliance provides to innovative grassroots initiatives in collaboration with corporate partners such as the BMW Group.

We see it as the Alliance teams up with universities to engage with policymakers on topics ranging from media literacy to education to the diversity of religious belief.

We see it through our team of experts who spring into action in times of crisis, who speak out for tolerance and against racial or cultural stereotypes.

Most important, we see it through you – our ever-expanding network of partners.

All of these efforts are innovative. They are cost-effective. But we know they are still not done on a scale that matches the challenge.

The Alliance has space to do more and to be more. As we know, that requires additional operational capacity, even if the Alliance is to essentially remain a match-maker. That means broader financial and in-kind support from a wider circle of partners. I salute the growing contributions of corporations and foundations - as well as more creative partnerships.

As President Sampaio rightly says: “The Alliance can only deliver if you deliver with us. You are the Alliance”.

That is precisely the aim of this first Partners Forum: to encourage public and private partners to invest in the Alliance and ensure that all voices are heard.

Supporting the Alliance is all the more necessary because much has changed in the past five years.

Think of the rapid transformations in the ways we communicate ... the challenges and opportunities of the Arab Spring ... the way young people have used technology to give new meaning to the power of democratic governance.

The challenge before us now is how to enable the Alliance of Civilizations to play an even more constructive role on the issues that confront us. Your ideas, your energy, your support is essential.

For example, the Alliance could have an important mediating role in the many conflicts where culture or religion comes into play.

I am not talking about traditional political work of getting various antagonists to sit down at the negotiating table.

I mean mediation in the broader and more difficult sense of helping societies to change, to move from a culture of conflict to a culture of acceptance, to embrace reconciliation rather than anger and the language of hate.

To solve our most intractable global challenges, I believe that we need to think across borders and other lines that might divide.

I believe we must cooperate to repair relations between cultures.

I believe our future is one of greater interconnectedness and interdependence.

That is why I believe in the Alliance.

I thank you for believing in it, too - through your commitments and your actions.

This work has no endpoint. We can never declare victory. This is a never-ending mission.

Let us continue to build on our progress, strengthen our partnerships, and deliver for our world.

I thank you very much for your commitment.

Thank you.



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE ON WORLD OCEANS DAY

8 June 2012

This year's World Oceans Day falls as the international community marks an important milestone: the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

When the Convention opened for signature on 10 December 1982, it was rightly characterized as a "constitution for the oceans." Forged through a process of negotiation among more than 150 States, the treaty is a living monument to international cooperation.

When it was adopted, the Convention on the Law of the Sea made treaty history. With 320 articles and 9 Annexes covering every aspect of the oceans and marine environment, the Convention sets out a delicate balance of rights and duties.

The protection of the world's oceans and coasts is among the key goals of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which will open in Rio de Janeiro in just 12 days. The Convention is contributing to this goal through its provisions, including on the preservation of the marine environment, marine scientific research and the transfer of marine technology.

We must do more for our world's oceans, which are threatened by pollution, depleted fishery resources, the impacts of climate change and the deterioration of the marine environment. Rio+20 must mobilize the United Nations, governments and other partners to improve the management and conservation of oceans through initiatives to curb overfishing, improve protection of the marine environment and reduce ocean pollution and the impact of climate change.

There could be no more fitting way to commemorate World Oceans Day than for all countries that have not yet done so to ratify the Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Let us make 2012 another milestone year for the world's oceans, so that we can set sail toward the future we want.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE FOR 100-DAY COUNTDOWN TO INTERNATIONAL DAY

OF PEACE (21 SEPTEMBER 2012)

13 June 2012

Today, we start the 100-day countdown to the observance of the International Day of Peace, when we call on combatants around the world to put down their weapons and try to find peaceful solutions to their conflicts.

The International Day of Peace, marked every year on 21 September, gives us all a chance to reflect on the unconscionable toll - moral, physical, material - wrought by war. Those costs are borne not only by us today, but by future generations as well.

That is why this year's theme is "Sustainable Peace for a Sustainable Future." It highlights the fact that we cannot possibly think about building a sustainable future if there is no sustainable peace. Armed conflicts attack the very pillars of sustainable development, robbing people of the opportunity to develop, to create jobs, to safeguard the environment, to fight poverty, to reduce the risk from disasters, to advance social equity and to ensure that everyone has enough to eat.

One week from today, as the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development opens in Rio de Janeiro, the world will have an opportunity to fight back. With tens of thousands of politicians, policy-makers, social activists, business leaders and others mobilized for action, Rio+20 can help us to create a global roadmap for a sustainable future, the future we want.

We want a future where natural resources are protected and valued rather than used to finance wars, where children can be educated at school and not recruited into armies, where economic and social inequalities are resolved through dialogue instead of violence.

If we are to build such a future, we must all play our individual part. I urge everyone, between now and 21 September, to think about how they can contribute. Let us work together to ensure that the Road from Rio leads us to sustainable development, sustainable peace... and a secure future for all.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE ON WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

15 June 2012

The World Health Organization estimates that between 4 and 6 per cent of older persons worldwide have suffered from a form of elder abuse -- physical, emotional, financial. Furthermore, emerging research suggests that abuse, neglect and violence against older persons, both at home and in institutions, are much more prevalent than currently acknowledged.

Such abuse is an unacceptable attack on human dignity and human rights. Making matters even worse, cases often remain unreported and unaddressed.

Alarmed at this widening problem, the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, a new observance to be marked annually on 15 June.

Respect for elders is an integral part of many societies. As people live longer, and as we strive for sustainable and inclusive development, it is time to revive and expand our appreciation for those who have advanced in years. A modern civilization can only live up to that name if it preserves the tradition of honoring, respecting and protecting society's elders.

As we commemorate the Day for the first time, let us all join in reaffirming that the human rights of older persons are as absolute as those of all human beings.

I call upon Governments and all concerned actors to design and carry out more effective prevention strategies and stronger laws and policies to address all aspects of elder abuse. Let us work together to optimize living conditions for older persons and enable them to make the greatest possible contribution to our world.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE ON WORLD REFUGEE DAY

20 June 2012

More than 42 million people around the world have been forcibly displaced from their homes and communities. More than a million fled their countries in the last eighteen months alone due to a wave of conflicts, in Cote d'Ivoire, Libya, Mali, Somalia, Sudan and Syria. These numbers represent far more than statistics; they are individuals and families whose lives have been upended, whose communities have been destroyed, and whose future remains uncertain.

World Refugee Day is a moment to remember all those affected, and a time to intensify our support.

Four out of five refugees are in developing countries, and have benefitted from the remarkable generosity of host countries that they face serious deprivations. The Islamic Republics of Pakistan and Iran host the largest number of refugees, with over two and half million between them. Tunisia and Liberia are also among countries that, despite their own national challenges, maintained open borders and shared scarce water, land and other resources for those suffering the impact of armed violence.

Kenya's third biggest city is a refugee camp and hosts over half a million Somalis, many in their third decade of exile. Niger, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso -- suffering famine and drought -- now host some 175,000 refugees fleeing conflict in Mali. These countries cannot be left to shoulder this burden alone.

The United Nations - and in particular the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees - is working to address all of these challenges, while also providing protection and assistance to 15.5 million persons displaced within their own countries. We are also focusing on preventing and reducing statelessness. But humanitarian assistance is not enough.

The recent UNHCR Global Trends report shows that displacement is outpacing solutions. We must work together to mobilize the political will and leadership to prevent and end the conflicts that trigger refugee flows. Where security is restored, we must address the underlying causes of conflict, allowing sustainable refugee return through access to livelihoods, services and the rule of law.

Despite budget constraints everywhere, we must not turn away from those in need. Refugees leave because they have no choice. We must choose to help.

Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on the Meeting of the High Level Task Force on Global Food Security.

New York, 27 June 2012

This morning the Secretary-General chaired a meeting of the High Level Task Force on Global Food Security.

The Secretary-General welcomes the strong outcome from Rio+20 on foods and nutrition security. Following the launch of the Zero Hunger Challenge last week, the High Level Task Force will be reoriented to focus on the Challenge's five objectives as a guide for a coherent UN system approach to food and nutrition security.

The Secretary-General noted that since it was established in 2008, the Task Force had made progress in devising a common comprehensive framework for action for the UN system in food and nutrition security, particularly during recent food crises. It helped forge united positions among its member agencies in Rio and at the G8 and G20 summits. The High Level Task Force also supports the Committee on World Food Security as the primary governance body for food and nutrition.

But with close to 1 billion people still experiencing chronic hunger, he urged agencies, governments, businesses, civil society organizations and the scientific community to eliminate hunger in our lifetimes.

3 April 2012

Passover traditions reflect ethnic, regional customs

(ENInews)--When most Jewish families sit down for the Passover Seder on 6 April, it's a safe bet that they'll eat matzo, ask the traditional Four Questions and tell the biblical story of the Exodus from Egypt. It's less likely that they'll be hitting one another with scallions. Or saving a bit of matzo, the unleavened Passover bread, as a talisman for travels. Or averting their eyes as the Seder leader recites the 10 plagues that God inflicted upon the Egyptians. Most American Passover traditions come from the 80 percent of Jews who trace their roots to Eastern and Central Europe in the Ashkenazi branch of Judaism. But others from the far-flung Jewish Diaspora incorporate traditions from their homelands, and they're often different from the traditional Passover fare.



Myanmar election results greeted with wary optimism

(ENInews)--Although Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) won most of the seats in parliamentary by-elections on 1 April, the results were greeted with wary optimism by Christian organizations. "This is just the beginning and there is still a very long way to go," said Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), the London-based organization working for religious freedom through advocacy and human rights. CSW had earlier reported that the Myanmar army ransacked a village church and broke up a Christian conference. The southeast Asian nation has been under military control since 1962. Although an election was held last year, the military retains an overwhelming majority in the legislature.

British chocolate maker includes Easter story with treats

(ENInews)--As baskets of chocolate, stuffed bunnies and egg coloring appear in stores, it seems as though Easter is becoming more of a springtime festival than a solemn, though joyous, Christian observance. However, the Meaningful Chocolate Company, based in Manchester, England, believes that while candy is dandy, the real meaning of Easter should be part of the seasonal treats. Its four ounce (125 gram) milk chocolate Real Easter Egg includes the story of Jesus' resurrection on the package and part of the price (four British pounds) includes a charitable donation.

4 April 2012

Sudanese bishop says peace depends on lifestyle change

(ENInews)--In South Sudan, clashes among nomadic cattle-raising tribes in Jonglei state have killed thousands, but an evangelical Christian leader says encouraging the communities' permanent settlement will end the bloody circle of conflicts.

Bishop Elias Taban of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of South Sudan said the state had enough natural resources to support a changed lifestyle, a development that will also increase security. "We can use the resources Jonglei has instead of having to wander anywhere for the sake of cattle ... [and] the police cannot police people if they are nomadic and do not have a permanent residence," Taban said while addressing a South Sudan Tribal Peace Conference held 1-3 April in the town of Yei.

Vatican praises Buddhism for the 'wisdom' it teaches its young

Rome (ENInews)--The Vatican this week reached out to Buddhists on the occasion of the feast of Vesak-Hanamatsuri, or Buddha's birthday, with praise for the faith's outreach to the young. In a letter, the Holy See said that Buddhists and Catholics shared the goal of educating the young within the respective faiths. The letter is in line with increased visibility for the Vatican's relationship with other faiths in recent weeks.

Orthodox patriarch hits at "unacceptable" attacks on ecumenism

(ENInews)--The spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians has written to Greece's Orthodox state church, deploring anti-ecumenical statements by its leaders. "Critical voices about ecumenism, long heard in the bosom of the church of Greece, have hitherto been limited in scope - but what has occurred recently has reached unacceptable levels," said Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople. In a late March letter, the patriarch said he was especially concerned by a recent statement by Metropolitan Seraphim (Mentzelopoulos) of Piraeus, invoking an "anathema" against the pope, Protestants, Jews, Muslims and ecumenists.



Lutheran groups explore common observances of Reformation anniversary

Geneva (ENInews)--Representatives of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the International Lutheran Council (ILC) said they will continue discussing joint commemorations of the 500th anniversary in 2017 of the Protestant Reformation. In a communique following their annual meeting, 27-29 March in Geneva, the ILC and LWF stated they had discussed a number of positive developments that had taken place among their member churches since they last met in 2008. In view of the Reformation anniversary, they expressed the hope to work together through seminars, educational events and publications, and agreed to update each other on their continuing plans, according to a news release from the LWF.



9 April 2012

[Pope's Easter message includes Middle East](#)

Vatican City (ENInews)--Pope Benedict XVI used his traditional Easter message on 9 April to call for an end to the conflict in Syria, while his shorter-than-usual "Urbi et Orbi" blessing and frail appearance spurred speculation that his health might be worsening. "May the risen Christ grant hope to the Middle East and enable all the ethnic, cultural and religious groups in that region to work together to advance the common good and respect for human rights," he told about 100,000 people gathered in St. Peter's Square.

[Holy Week draws pilgrims to St. Thomas shrine in India](#)

Malayattoor, India (ENInews)--Last Palm Sunday, James Chevalloor began his annual 200-km (120-mile) pilgrimage on foot with his friends under a blazing sun to the Malayattoor shrine in India's southwestern Kerala state, where St. Thomas the Apostle is said to have prayed. Though Malayattoor attracts pilgrims throughout the year, several million climb the 609-meter (1900 feet) hill to the shrine during Holy Week between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. Over a million arrived on Good Friday alone, causing a traffic jam that extended to the national highway 20 kilometers (12 miles) away.

10 April 2012

[Orthodox spokesman questions Turkish position on confiscated seminary](#)

(ENInews)--A spokesman for the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate has rejected suggestions by the Turkish government that the reopening of a confiscated Orthodox seminary near Istanbul should be linked with parallel concessions to Muslims in neighboring Greece. "I don't understand how this can be linked with steps by Greece, with which we have nothing in common," the spokesman, Dositheos Anagnostopoulos, said in an ENInews interview in early April. "The Halki Seminary is a problem between the Patriarchate, Ankara and the European Union; Athens is not a party to this discussion."

[Filmmaker looks at religion, human rights through eyes of Flemish painter](#)

(ENInews)--As he travels around the world presenting his film "The Mill and the Cross," Polish director Lech Majewski finds himself discussing the many religious themes in the work. The film centers on about a dozen of the 500 characters that inhabit Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting "The Procession to Calvary," painted in 1564 when Flanders suffered under Spain's attempt to crush the Protestant Reformation in the Low Countries.

[Greek monk is released from detention for tax fraud charges](#)

(ENInews)--The head of the largest of 20 Orthodox monasteries on Mount Athos in Greece has been conditionally released three months after being arrested by police on tax fraud charges. Greece's Ekathimerini newspaper reported that Abbot Ephraim, chief monk at the Vatopedi monastery, had returned to his community on 31 March, a day after being freed from pre-trial detention at Korydallos Prison in Athens on bail of 300,000 euros.

11 April 2012

Youth in Peru less likely to consider themselves religious

Lima, Peru (ENInews)--Less than a third of Catholic youth in Peru consider themselves to be religious, according to a study carried out in March by the market research firm GFK Company and the national newspaper The Republic. The survey, conducted in three cities in Peru, also reveals that 41 percent of people polled consider themselves to be religious, compared to 59 percent that consider themselves to be somewhat, little or not at all religious, the Latin America and Caribbean Communication Agency reported.

Australia's Anglican Church still divided over women's ordination

(ENInews)--Australia's Anglican Church has its third female bishop, Genieve Blackwell, but her 31 March consecration was boycotted by her archbishop, Sydney's Peter Jensen, a strong opponent of women clergy. Blackwell, the first Anglican woman bishop in the state of New South Wales, was appointed regional bishop of Wagga Wagga, located between Sydney and Melbourne, by Bishop Stuart Robinson of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. Jensen is archbishop of the region, which also includes Sydney, one of the most conservative dioceses in the Anglican Communion. Of her new role, Blackwood told ENInews, "It is about promoting Christ's church in the world, and encouraging parishes in what they are doing now and in the future."

17 April 2012

Church groups express concern over escalating Sudan conflict

(ENInews)--Reacting to some of the worst fighting between Sudan and South Sudan since the southern country achieved independence last July; two international church groups on 17 April expressed "grave concern" and called for an immediate ceasefire. Referring to the oil-well town of Heglig in Sudan, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and All African Conference of Churches (AACC) said they have followed the developments that led to the occupation of the town by South Sudan's armed forces. The area produces half Sudan's oil output but both countries claim the territory. It is not known how many have been killed during two weeks of fighting, but an Associated Press report on 17 April referred to "clusters of dead Sudanese soldiers" on the road to Heglig.

Bosnian cardinal laments Sarajevo's "disappearing Christians"

(ENInews)--The head of Bosnia's Roman Catholic Church has warned of the "uncertain future" facing Christians in the capital, Sarajevo, after their numbers dwindled by a third in the past decade. "It isn't easy to say what has happened to Sarajevo, this ancient town of mutual coexistence, built up over history by Christians, Jews and Muslims," said Cardinal Vinko Puljic. Puljic, 66, assessed the current condition of Sarajevo's faith communities in a statement dated 6 April that commemorated the start of the city's four-year siege by Bosnian Serb force two decades ago.

18 April 2012

New Bible translation called 'The Voice' focuses on dialogue

Nashville, Tennessee (ENInews)--The name Jesus Christ doesn't appear in "The Voice," a new translation of the Bible. Nor do words such as angel or apostle. Instead, angel is rendered as "messenger" and apostle as "emissary." Jesus Christ is "Jesus the Anointed One" or the "liberating king." That's a more accurate translation for modern readers, said David Capes, lead scholar for "The Voice," a complete edition released this month by publishing company Thomas Nelson, reports Religion News Service via USA Today. Capes says that many people, even those who've gone to church for years, don't realize that the word "Christ" is a title.

Christian Aid helps Kenyan farmers adapt to climate change

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--On the southern slopes of Mount Kenya, a Christian charity is helping small farmers adapt to climate change through the use of both traditional and modern forms of weather forecasting. In the Anglican diocese of Mbeere, U.K.-based Christian Aid and the Humanitarian Futures Project of King's College (London) are funding the pilot project.

Speakers at ecumenical conference in Assisi call for increased dialogue between faiths

(ENInews)--On the opening day of an ecumenical conference in Assisi, the Umbrian hill town known as the home of Saint Francis, speakers discussed the need to increase interaction between faiths and cultures in order to nurture

worldwide harmony. Assisi 2012: Where We Dwell in Common/Pathways for Dialogue in the 21st Century, running from 17-20 April, has drawn some 230 theologians and clergy from 54 nations. "The overall aim is to discern new ways, means and methods of advancing the ecumenical cause in the wake of the 'ecumenical winter' and with renewed energy for a new century," according to the event website.

23 April 2012

Philippine diocese takes strong stance against "corporate greed"

Baguio City, Philippines (ENInews)--A Philippine Catholic diocese is protesting what parishioners and environmentalists describe as the "corporate greed" of the country's largest mall owner, Henry Sy, one of the world's wealthiest people. The Baguio diocese plans to halt the celebration of mass and the performance of other religious rites at a Sy-owned mall to express its disappointment about an expansion project. Leaders hope it will convince the Sy family to listen to critics' concerns, according to Bishop Carlito Cenzone.

Conference in Dominican Republic to discuss emerging threats to religious freedom

(ENInews)--More than 800 scholars, government officials, legal experts, and religious liberty advocates from some 60 countries will partake in the 7th World Congress for Religious Freedom in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. The event runs from 24-26 April, according to a news release from the Latin American and Caribbean Communication Agency. The conference seeks to keep religious liberty advocates "ahead of the curve" by exploring emerging threats to religious freedom around the world, notes the release.

German theologian discusses challenges faced by Protestants

Paris (ENInews)--The Protestant church faces three main challenges as it gears up to celebrate the 500th anniversary in 2017 of Martin Luther's Reformation, according to a leading theologian. Margot Kässmann, former head of the Protestant Church of Germany (EKD) and ambassador for the anniversary, told ENInews that Protestants need to examine their role in an increasingly secular society. [ENI-12-0234, 458 words]

Russian patriarch calls priests who opposed prayer service 'traitors'

Moscow (ENInews)--Patriarch Kirill I called clergy who opposed the holding of mass prayer meeting held in Moscow on 22 April "traitors in cassocks," in a sign of continuing division within the Russian Orthodox Church over political and social issues. Moscow police said the nearly 65,000 people participated in the service of supplication, or moleben as it is known in Russian, held in front of Christ the Savior Cathedral.

8 May 2012

Ecumenical panel kicks off UN forum on indigenous issues

New York (ENInews)--Several faith groups were among the sponsors of a U.N. panel session on 7 May called "Churches Disavow the Doctrine of Discovery: Calling for Poverty Alleviation and Healing," which sought to address various issues facing indigenous peoples, including education and land rights. The discussion took place on the first day of the 11th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), meeting from 7 to 18 May. The theme is the enduring impact of the "Doctrine of Discovery on native peoples and "the right to redress for past conquests."

'Ecumenical accompaniment' aids victims of violence in Colombia

(ENInews)--An ecumenical project to document the plight of people in the violence-ridden Montes de Maria and San Onofre region of Colombia is beginning to gain international attention. Called the Program of Ecumenical Accompaniment in Colombia (PEAC), the project, coordinated by the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), supported by the World Council of Churches (WCC), ACT Alliance and others, is based on a similar effort in the West Bank supporting Palestinians.

Occupy Faith members announce a new pilgrimage to Canterbury

London (ENInews)--A group of faith leaders announced on 8 May in London's St. Paul's Cathedral that a new pilgrimage to Canterbury is planned for this summer to protest unjust economic systems in the 21st century. The group, called Occupy Faith, met at St. Paul's with the permission of cathedral

authorities, in contrast to last year's four-month clash between clergy and protestors outside the cathedral. The 62-mile Occupy Faith Pilgrimage will start at St. Paul's on 7 June and end on 20 June at Canterbury Cathedral, site of Archbishop Thomas Becket's 1170 assassination and a pilgrimage site ever since.

7 May 2012

French faith groups hope for unity after presidential vote

Paris (ENInews)--Faith groups in France revealed marked political differences in voting surveys ahead of the 6 May presidential election, but many now hope that victor François Hollande will uphold the "values of the republic" during his mandate. Hollande, a socialist, beat incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy with 52 percent of the vote and promised unity, justice, equality and "exemplary" behavior, principles that some religious groups had called for ahead of the election.

Worshippers told 'migrant workers must not become scapegoats'

London (ENInews)--Migrant workers in the U.K. must not become scapegoats or targets of popular frustration with the economy, a Catholic bishop told worshippers on 7 May at the 7th annual Mass for Migrants at Westminster Cathedral. Bishop Patrick Lynch, who chairs the Office for Migration Policy of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, praised the contribution migrants make to British society "not just by their hard work" but also through the "many gifts" they bring to the community.

Orthodox patriarch calls Putin Russia's legitimate leader

Moscow (ENInews)--Following Vladimir Putin's inauguration to a third term as President of Russia at the Kremlin on 7 May, Patriarch Kirill I of the Russian Orthodox Church held a prayer service for his health and successful rule and praised him as Russia's legitimate leader. It was the latest sign that the leader of the Russian church has thrown his support fully behind a man who has been called a dictator at opposition rallies that have been violently crushed by riot police for two days in a row.

4 May 2012

Theologian sees links between Christianity and African traditional religion

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--When a missionary asked Africans in Zanzibar to tell him something about their God, they simply said, "God thunders!" The cleric had travelled across the seas in the 19th century to tell "the heathens without religion" or "people with a primitive religion" about God. The missionaries succeeded in spreading Christianity in Africa at a time when tribal religions were ignored or denigrated. However, a new version of the book "Concepts of God in Africa" (which relates the scene described above) says Christianity was actually helped by some aspects of traditional religion.

30 April 2012

Churches attacked in Kenya, Nigeria

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--Kenyan churches are tightening security after a lone attacker exploded a grenade inside an evangelical church in Nairobi on 29 April, killing one person and injuring 15. In Nigeria, a series of bombings during Sunday morning worship services killed at least four people in Maiduguri and 15 in Kano, with many injured. The Geneva-based World Council of Churches said in a statement that its leadership is in close contact with member churches in Nigeria, Kenya and other areas where religious communities have come under fire in recent times. The council's deputy general secretary, Georges Lemopoulos, pledged spiritual and practical support and called for prayer and solidarity with those affected.

Churches cite rising tension between North and South Korea

(ENInews)--The Seoul-based National Council of Churches in Korea on 30 April noted that tensions between North and South Korea are rising following Pyongyang's failed rocket-launching on 12 April, and held an "urgent prayer meeting" for peace. "We, all people of North and South, should keep ourselves awake and pray for peace on the Korean peninsula and do every effort to accomplish it," said a statement released by participants at the meeting.

New Zealand Anglicans choose unconventional bishop

Wellington, New Zealand (ENInews)--A dreadlocked priest who is usually seen in shorts and bare feet is to be the new Anglican bishop in New Zealand's capital city, Wellington. Justin Duckworth replaces Bishop Tom Brown who recently retired after 14 years. In announcing the appointment on 29 April, Archbishop David Moxon pointed to Duckworth's lifestyle, Christian discipleship and mission, citing more than 20 years of mission to street people and those on the margins. "I am confident that his election will challenge, invigorate and grace the church with a deep sense of the breadth and height and depth of the love of God," Moxon said.

Church council stabilizes pension fund, explores real estate development

Geneva (ENInews)--The Geneva-based World Council of Churches (WCC) has announced that its pension fund "has been brought out of a deficit position" and is being transferred to Profond, a collective pension fund institution that manages more than 3 billion Swiss francs in assets under contracts with nearly 1,700 Swiss employers. Reasons for the pension fund's deficit have included the global financial crisis beginning in 2008 and a growing imbalance between retired members drawing income from the pension plan and active members who contribute payments to the fund's balance. Retirees currently represent approximately 70 percent of members, the WCC said in a news release.

21 May 2012

U.S church council elects Birk as transitional general secretary

(ENInews)--The National Council of Churches (NCC) in the U.S. announced that Peg Birk, a nationally-known change management consultant and active Congregational laywoman, on 21 May was elected transitional general secretary. She was elected at the council's governing board meeting, taking place in Chicago on 21 and 22 May, according to an NCC news release. Birk is president and chief executive officer of Interim Solutions, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota and a member of Plymouth Congregational Church, Minneapolis, the NCC said.

Kenyan runners pray and train hard for London Olympics

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--It's running time in Iten, a small town in the Rift Valley province of Kenya where international athletes are flocking to sharpen their running skills ahead of the London Olympic Games in late July. Here, winners of the London, Boston and New York marathons, as well as teams from Germany, Greece, England and other countries are putting their "fast foot forward." At 2,000 meters above sea level, the thin oxygen is believed to help develop race-winning lung power. The Kenyan athletes are maintaining hard training, discipline and nutrition, but they also include another ingredient: a strong belief in God.

Faith-based and civil groups aid Italian earthquake victims

(ENInews)--Faith-based and civil relief groups are providing aid to more than 4,000 victims left homeless by an earthquake that struck the northern Italian region of Emilia Romagna on 20 May, killing at least seven people and wounding dozens. The Italian news agency ANSA said a number of historic churches and castles were destroyed or damaged by the quake, which measured 5.9 on the Richter scale, and its aftershocks. "We're close to the people in prayer and in particular the families of the victims. We will support the local church in providing aid," said Don Francesco Soddu, director of Caritas Italy, part of an international Catholic aid network.

19 April 2012

Religious belief highest in developing and Catholic countries

(ENInews)--Belief in God is slowly declining in most countries around the world, according to a new poll, but the truest of the true believers can still be found in developing countries and Catholic societies. The "Beliefs about God Across Time and Countries" report, released 18 April by researchers at the University of Chicago, found the Philippines to be the country with the highest proportion of believers, where 94 percent of Filipinos said they were strong believers who had always believed. At the opposite end, at just 13 percent, was the former East Germany, Religion News Service reports.

Turkish president, Dutch politician exchange sharp words about religion

Marianne Slegers

(ENInews)--Turkish president Abdullah Gul on 19 April wrapped up a three-day visit to the Netherlands that was mainly about trade relations but was also marked by a pointed exchange of insults with a Dutch politician concerning religion. Referring to relations between Turkey's Islamist-led government and the country's religious and ethnic minorities, opposition Freedom Party leader Geert Wilders called Gul a "Christian-bullier," "friend of Hamas" (the militant Islamist movement in the Palestinian territories) and "Kurd-basher." (Ethnic Kurds within Turkey have accused the government of human rights violations.)

Argentine conference focuses on indigenous rights

Resistencia, Argentina (ENInews)--OBishop Emeritus Aldo Etchegoyen of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina was the opening speaker on 19 April at the first International Congress of Indigenous Constitutional Law. The event runs from 19-20 April in Resistencia, 1,023 kilometers from Buenos Aires, with the theme "Argentina, a Multicultural and Multiethnic State."

MORE THAN \$427 MILLION PROVIDED FOR HUMANITARIAN RELIEF IN 2011, SAYS UN REPORT

New York, May 29 2012

The United Nations humanitarian office provided more than \$427 million last year to assist countries that suffered from emergencies such as drought, floods, and food insecurity, according to a report released today by the Organization.

The report - the 2011 Annual Report of the Central Emergency Response Fund - highlights the contributions of the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to humanitarian partners in 45 countries in 2011.

Financed by voluntary contributions from Member States, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local governments, the private sector and individual donors, the CERF is a humanitarian fund established by the United Nations to enable more timely and reliable humanitarian assistance to those affected by natural disasters and armed conflicts, helping agencies to pre-position funding for humanitarian action.

Climate-related emergencies due to drought, floods and storms, received more than \$149 million from CERF last year, according to a news release issued by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which helps administer the Fund.

CERF also gave more than \$128 million to the Horn of Africa for people affected by drought and food insecurity, and provided needed money to help humanitarian partners intervene early in the Africa's Sahel region to help people affected by drought-related hunger in Niger, Chad and Mauritania.

As in previous years, the World Food Programme (WFP) remained CERF's top-funded agency, and was given \$127 million - almost 30 per cent of all CERF funds - due to its role providing emergency food aid. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) was the second-highest funded agency in 2011, receiving \$109 million in support of 130 projects in 38 countries.

The report also highlights stories and programmes from Cambodia, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guatemala, Kenya, Niger, the Philippines, the Republic of the Congo, Somalia, South Sudan and Turkey, which have received resources from the Fund.

May 29 2012

For more details go to UN News Centre at <http://www.un.org/news>

29 May 2012

Churches in Zanzibar report increased attacks

(ENInews)--Concerns are being raised over the safety of Christians on the Indian Ocean archipelago of Zanzibar after two Assemblies of God churches were set on fire on 26 May during a protest by an Islamist group. Police said members of a group called Uamsho, or the Association of Islamic Mobilization and Propagation, were protesting the arrest of one of its leaders. Armed with sticks and stones, they had attacked the churches and engaged riot police in running battles.

In the U.S., some parents take teaching Hinduism into their own hands

Santa Monica, California (ENInews)--Children are usually the primary complainers about Sunday school, but when Mudita Bahadur started looking for excuses not to take her children to the Hindu temple on Sundays, she knew she had to make a change. "One, it's dogmatic and two, it's inconvenient," she said of the Hindu classes held a 45-minute drive away from her home in Santa Monica, California, Religion News Service reports.

25 May 2012

Russian Orthodox Church faces criticism for government links

(ENInews)--A senior Russian Orthodox priest has been attacked by left-wing politicians after he criticized opposition parties and called for a "strong personified central power" to govern the country. "It is increasingly evident from our television screens that Orthodox Christianity is being used to justify the current regime," a Communist Party secretary, Valery Rashkin, told Russia's Interfax news agency on 25 May.

Religious leaders in three countries rally to eradicate polio

Geneva (ENInews)--Health ministers and officials from Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan said here on 24 May that support from Islamic leaders is helping efforts to eradicate polio. The three countries are the world's only remaining polio-endemic nations, where transmission of the paralyzing disease has never stopped.

Southern Sudanese again seek safety at Kakuma camp

(ENInews)--Violence in South Sudan and along the border with Sudan are forcing hundreds of families back to the Kakuma refugee camp in northwestern Kenya where they lived several years ago. The border clashes involve territorial control and resources. The violence between communities in newly-independent South Sudan involves cattle raids, reports Lutheran World Information, the information service of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

In a changed world, churches need to rethink communications

(ENInews)--The world of communication has changed so radically in the past 20 years that it is time for churches to rethink how they communicate concerns about injustice and conflict, said a group of Christian communicators gathered in Busan, South Korea. Busan is the site of the next assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), scheduled for 30 October to 8 November 2013. The group of journalists and communication advocates met this week to draft a statement on the theme of the assembly, "God of life, lead us to justice and peace."

Uncertainty reigns as Nepal fails to unveil secular constitution

(ENInews)--Uncertainty gripped the former Hindu kingdom of Nepal as the government failed, for the fifth time in a row, to enact a new constitution by midnight on 27 May. Religious minorities in the South Asian nation had hoped the new constitution would ensure religious freedom and equal rights for all faiths. It was to be the first constitution after Nepal was declared secular by its parliament in 2006. However, Hinduism is still the faith of about 80 percent of the 30 million Nepalese.

Faith groups and United Nations condemn massacre in Syria

Geneva (ENInews)--The World Council of Churches joined the international community in condemning the massacre of at least 108 people, including 49 children, on 25 May in the villages of Taldou and Kall Laha in the El Houleh area of Syria. "I express my deep pain over the massacre of innocent people and especially children," said Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, WCC general secretary, in a statement. "We, as churches, cannot but condemn this inhumane act and manifest our feelings of solidarity with the families of the victims, mourning their beloved ones."

UN HEALTH AGENCY RE-CLASSIFIES DIESEL ENGINE EXHAUST AS 'CARCINOGENIC TO HUMANS'

New York, Jun 12 2012

More than a decade after it was classified as 'probably carcinogenic to humans,' the UN health agency today classified diesel engine exhaust as 'carcinogenic to humans.'

The International Agency for Research on Cancer, which is part of the World Health Organization (WHO), announced the re-classification today, after a week-long meeting of international experts, and based its decision on sufficient evidence that exposure is associated with an increased risk for lung cancer.

"The scientific evidence was compelling and the working group's conclusion was unanimous: diesel engine exhaust causes lung cancer in humans," said the chairperson of the IARC working group which reviewed the scientific evidence, Dr. Christopher Portier, in a news release.

“Given the additional health impacts from diesel particulates, exposure to this mixture of chemicals should be reduced worldwide,” he added.

According to IARC, large populations are exposed to diesel exhaust in everyday life, whether through their occupation or through the ambient air. People are exposed not only to motor vehicle exhausts but also to exhausts from other diesel engines, including from other modes of transport, such as diesel trains and ships, and from power generators.

There had been mounting concern about the cancer-causing potential of diesel exhaust, particularly based on findings in epidemiological studies of workers exposed in various settings, the research agency noted.

The IARC working group reviewed the evidence and, overall, it concluded that there was sufficient evidence in humans for the carcinogenicity of diesel exhaust. In particular, it found that there was sufficient evidence to determine that diesel exhaust is a cause of lung cancer, and noted that there is a positive association with an increased risk of bladder cancer.

The working group also concluded that gasoline exhaust was possibly carcinogenic to humans, a finding unchanged from a previous evaluation in 1989.

IARC stated that governments and other decision-makers now have a valuable evidence-base on which to consider environmental standards for diesel exhaust emissions and to continue to work with the engine and fuel manufacturers towards those goals.

“While IARC’s remit is to establish the evidence-base for regulatory decisions at national and international level, today’s conclusion sends a strong signal that public health action is warranted,” said the Director of IARC, Dr. Christopher Wild. “This emphasis is needed globally, including among the more vulnerable populations in developing countries where new technology and protective measures may otherwise take many years to be adopted.”

In 1988, IARC had classified diesel exhaust as probably carcinogenic to humans. An Advisory Group, which reviews and recommends future priorities for the agency, had recommended diesel exhaust as a high priority for re-evaluation since 1998.

For more details go to UN News Centre at <http://www.un.org/news>

14 May 2012

Indonesian authorities restrict places of worship after Muslim protests

(ENInews)--Indonesian authorities have closed and sealed off 17 Christian places of worship in the Aceh Singkil district in the past two weeks after Muslim protests on 30 April. Agusta Mukhtar, a spokesman for the group Pro-Democracy People, said it was regrettable that local authorities had sealed off the buildings following protests by hundreds of members of hard line groups such as the Islamic Defenders Front who oppose the buildings. "The religious peace here has been shattered by this anarchistic action that seeks religious domination for an inflexible faith," Mukhtar said in a statement. "This is a dark time in the history of religious freedom and tolerance in Aceh."

In Cameroon, new churches sprout, many illegally

Yaounde, Cameroon (ENInews)--New religious movements in Cameroon are promising quick fixes to the many problems facing the country, but established churches are concerned that the newcomers are offering people false hope. In addition, the government is having trouble controlling the spread of the illegal churches. Judith Fon, a worshipper with one of the new churches, Winners Chapel International, told ENInews that she left the Catholic Church when her father died two years ago. "I needed comfort that the Catholic Church couldn't offer," she told ENInews. However, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bamenda, Cornelius Fontem Esua, said, "The lure for these sects lies in the fact that they promise easy solutions to their followers."

15 May 2012

Christian network: Japan disaster victims still "isolated and uncertain"

(ENInews)--Many victims of the 11 March 2011 northeast Japan earthquake, tsunami and nuclear plant disaster are still "feeling isolated and uncertain about their future," a Japanese interdenominational relief network reports. "The triple disasters ... claimed the lives of 20,000 people. The number of people that continue to suffer as a result of these disasters cannot be counted. Although one year has passed, for those affected, the painful memories of that

day have not faded," said the Sendai Christian Alliance Disaster Relief Network, also called Touhoku HELP. The report was released 29 April.

Greek churches "face disaster" as crisis deepens

(ENInews)--A senior Greek Protestant has warned that minority denominations "face disaster" due to the country's worsening economic crisis. "Heavy taxation, high unemployment and all our other difficulties are fast-forwarding us to collapse," said Dimitrios Boukis, general secretary of the Greek Evangelical church, which has 29 congregations in two regional synods in Greece and other communities abroad. "We receive no state support and are fully dependent on our members, and we're already short of pastors because we can't afford them. The pastors we have are having to handle everything because we can't employ staff, so some congregations will end up without any spiritual care," he said.

Syrian Christians live in uneasy alliance with Bashar Assad

Damascus, Syria (ENInews)--Hani Sarhan is a Christian who says none of his relatives works with Bashar Assad's regime or has anything to do with it. "But what we heard from (the protesters) at the beginning of this revolution saying, 'Christians to Beirut, Alawites to the coffin,' started us thinking about the real aim of this revolution," he said. "So from this point of view, fearing for my life, I declared my support for President Assad." Muslims dominate this nation of 22 million people, but Christians can be found at all levels of Syrian government, business and military, reports Religion News Service via USA Today.

17 May 2012

Presbyterian Church of Mexico begins anniversary celebrations

(ENInews)--Events in honor of the 140th anniversary of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico begin 18 May and will continue for the next several months. Exhibitions, lectures and roundtable discussions are planned, dealing with the history, theology and anthropology of the church, covering the time of the arrival of the first U.S. missionaries in Mexico in 1872.

23 May 2012

Kenyan Pentecostals launch a uniting organization

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--Pentecostal churches in Kenya, which have proliferated quickly in recent years, announced on 23 May in Nairobi the launch of a uniting organization called the Kenya National Congress of Pentecostal Church and Ministries. "We no longer want to be a church that just looks on, as our nation is crying and all we can offer is prayers," Bishop Stanley Michuki, chairperson of the organization's board of trustees, said at the launch announcement. "We want to be there to cry with the people, pray with them, but also provide assistance to them." The group said it will be involved in development work, relief and humanitarian aid.

In Manila, religious protests helped fan hype for Lady Gaga

Maurice Malanes

(ENInews)--Religious protests in the Philippines apparently helped American pop star Lady Gaga move tickets, as her two recent concerts in Manila were sell-outs. "Sold out night 2 in the Philippines. I love it here," Gaga (whose real name is Stefani Germanotta) reportedly tweeted after her concert on 22 May was packed with 20,000 fans, the same number who attended the previous evening.

Dutch Catholic child abuse inquiry to focus on girl victims

Utrecht, The Netherlands (ENInews)--Women who as children were victims of sexual abuse by Roman Catholic clergy in the Netherlands, are called to submit their testimony as a follow-up to a major inquiry, the official Roman Catholic broadcaster RKK announced 22 May. "The independent scientific research will focus on the sexual abuse of, and psychological violence against under-age women in the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands between 1945 and the present day," it said.

Asian group's general secretary asserts women's right to leadership

Bangalore, India (ENInews)--The Rev. Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, the first woman general secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), has asserted that churches should make serious efforts to support women in positions of authority. "It is not right to exclude women from the leadership of the church and community," said Lebang. Founded in 1957, the CCA includes 17 national councils and over 100 churches in 21 countries.

Nigerian Christian leader stresses interfaith dialogue

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--With churches increasingly becoming targets of Nigeria's Islamist group Boko Haram, a Christian leader has said growing interfaith dialogue is a good sign of peace. However, Roman Catholic Archbishop John Onaiyekan of Abuja also said a dangerous wave of mistrust and hatred was growing among the people who had lived at peace before the start of the attacks.

U.K.-wide relay of prayer baton to mirror journey of Olympic torch

(ENInews)--A 70-day U.K.-wide prayer relay that mirrors the journey of the Olympic Torch through more than a thousand communities is set to be launched with a blessing during a ceremony in Cornwall, according to a news release from faith organization More Than Gold. With the arrival of the Olympic Torch at Lands' End on 18 May--it will eventually be used to light the cauldron in Stratford's Olympic Stadium at the opening ceremony of the games on 27 July--the Anglican bishop of Truro, Rev. Tim Thornton, along with Rev. Steve Wild, chair of the Methodist church in Cornwall, will lead a special blessing ceremony for the prayer baton.

1 June 2012

Muslim converts in U.K. energize community but face obstacles

(ENInews)--Muslim converts in the United Kingdom -- a small but growing number -- often bring new energy to their faith communities, but also report

facing obstacles to acceptance. "Converts are a bridge between non-Muslim, mainly white, communities and Muslim communities who are mainly from sub-continent communities," said Fiyaz Mughal, founder and director of London-based Faith Matters, an inter-faith organization, in an interview with ENInews. However, converts also told researchers last year that they felt cast adrift after their acceptance of Islam. Although mosques were delighted to welcome new members, they often failed to provide support when their new co-religionists faced hostility from family and friends, they said. The study, by Kevin Brice of Swansea University in Wales, said there were about 100,000 converts to Islam in the U.K. in the 2000-2010 decade, up from 60,000 in the 1990s.

Mosque construction continues to attract opposition across U.S.

Chicago (ENInews)--Mohammed Labadi had a lot at stake when the DeKalb City Council voted 29 May on a request from the Islamic Society of Northern Illinois University to build a two-story mosque. Labadi, a businessman and Islamic Society board member, said a bigger mosque was needed to replace the small house where local Muslims now worship. He also was hoping for affirmation that his neighbors and city officials have no fear of the Muslim community, Religion News Service reports via USA Today. "Don't look at me just as a Muslim, look at me as an American," Labadi said. The City Council unanimously approved the plan. However, in the decade since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, animosity toward Muslims sometimes has taken the form of opposition to construction of mosques and other Islamic facilities. National debate erupted over plans for an Islamic community center that became known as the "Ground Zero mosque" in Lower Manhattan.

4 June 2012

Israeli archaeologists find ancient seal that mentions Bethlehem

Jerusalem (ENInews)--Israeli archaeologists have said they have unearthed in Jerusalem the earliest artifact containing the name of Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus according to the New Testament, in the form of a clay seal called a bulla. It's significant because it confirms the biblical narrative of the existence of a village of Bethlehem within the Kingdom of Judah, said Eli Shukron, director of the excavation on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, which announced the discovery in late May.

German gospel music festival features new and traditional styles

(ENInews)--Gospel music may have historic roots in black American culture, but German organizers of this year's "Gospelkirchentag" (literally "gospel church gathering") festival say the vibrant music is drawing growing numbers of German fans. An estimated 80,000 people gathered in the West German city of Dortmund from 1 to 3 June to hear traditional gospel choirs alongside the diverse sounds that the genre has influenced. "There are many styles now that are influenced by gospel and they are all represented here at the festival," said Markus Moehl, spokesperson for Gospelkirchentag, in an interview.

New leader of Cuban coalition calls for greater ecumenical partnerships

(ENInews)--The newly elected president of the Council of Churches in Cuba (CIC) says he believes Pentecostal and historic churches can work together "because God calls us to be God's people." The Rev. Joel Ortega Dopico, of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, called on the leaders of the churches to take advantage of the moment to think about social, ecclesial and ecumenical projects, "or what we lack so as to be able to come together as a Cuban family."

Mennonite council stresses global relations, Kraybill chosen president-elect

(ENInews)--The Mennonite World Conference's (MWC) triennial General Council, which met 20-26 May in Bettingen, Switzerland, stressed global networking, acknowledging that its membership in the Global South is growing. The council, which gathered at the St. Chrischona Conference Centre, also selected J. Nelson Kraybill of Elkhart, Indiana, as MWC president-elect, according to an MWC News Service release. Kraybill, who is a pastor at Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, will begin his six-year term in July 2015 at the next global Assembly to be held in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Assemblies are held every six years.

Churches ask Philippine government to improve human rights record

(ENInews)--Church activists from the Philippines on 30 May criticized the government of President Benigno S. Aquino III for failure to improve a climate of rampant human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances and evictions. They spoke at a public hearing at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva organized by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Also involved were the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) and the Philippine Universal Periodic Review Watch (UPR Watch), according to a WCC news release.

5 June 2012

Egyptian Christians seek freedom guarantees ahead of run-off vote

(ENInews)--Egyptian Christians are seeking guarantees they will have freedom of worship as campaigns for the mid-June presidential run-off are reaching fever pitch. Christians hold a crucial number of votes, with six million Copts being eligible alongside Roman Catholic, Episcopalians (Anglicans) and some evangelical groups. The 16-17 June election pits Ahmed Shafik, a former Prime Minister of jailed former president Hosni Mubarak, against Mohammed Morsi, candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood party. Christians have not officially backed either of the two, but Shafik on 4 June warned that voting for the Islamist group would threaten the rights of Christians and women, a view that appeared to resonate with the denominations.

Jubilee celebrations in U.K. end with thanksgiving service

(ENInews)--Four days of celebration in the U.K. of Queen Elizabeth II's 60 years on the throne ended on 5 June with a service of thanksgiving at London's St. Paul's Cathedral. Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams cited St. Paul as he praised the Queen's "lifelong dedication" to the nation and its people. "I don't think it at all fanciful to say," said Williams, "that in all her public engagements, our Queen has shown a quality of joy in the happiness of others. She has responded with the generosity St. Paul speaks of in showing honor to countless communities and individuals of every background and class and race." More than 1,000 invited worshipers, including members of the royal family, religious leaders, politicians and representatives of the 54 nations in the British Commonwealth, attended the service.

8 June 2012

Central African churches aid victims of warlord Joseph Kony

(ENInews)--In the Central African Republic, churches are aiding victims of the violence associated with Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony and his rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). "Since we are humanitarian and social [organizations] as churches, we are paying great attention to the suffering and needs of these people," the Rev. Andre Golike, President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Central African Republic told ENInews in a telephone interview on 7 June. Kony was thrust into the limelight by the film Kony 2012, made by a U.S. nonprofit called Invisible Children Inc., which said it sought to make him "famous" to influence his capture. The film has been viewed more than 90 million times on www.youtube.com.

Thai village will get first Christian crematorium

(ENInews)--Mennonites in Canada and the U.S. are helping to build a crematorium in the village of Borabu, Thailand, where Christians have run into difficulties using Buddhist crematoria for funeral services. The construction at Living Water Church began in February and is expected to be finished in June, according to a joint news release from Mennonite Church Canada News and the Mennonite Mission Network. With financial help from Mennonite Church Canada and Bethesda Mennonite Church in Henderson, Nebraska, the crematorium will enable Christians there to perform those ceremonies for fellow Christians. Thailand is a majority Buddhist nation where cremation is the preferred method of honoring the dead. Borabu is about 235 miles northeast of Bangkok.

Fiji government gives Methodist church limited permission to meet

(ENInews)--The Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma has been granted permission by the Government to hold its annual conference, but the church expressed concerns about the strict conditions of the permit. Reverend Tuikilakila, General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Fiji, welcomed this move by the police commissioner, according to a news release from the Methodist Church in Britain, which said it welcomed these developments. If the permit is not withdrawn, as it was in previous years, it will be the church's first conference in four years, the news release said.

11 June 2012

Orthodox, Catholic leaders suggest priorities for Europe

(ENInews)--Orthodox and Roman Catholic leaders have urged more imaginative measures to tackle Europe's economic financial crisis, including firmer action to create jobs and curb corruption and exploitation. "We have reached this point because finance has become detached from real economics - the economy is not governed by a political will, and politics is separated from ethics," the church leaders said in a joint statement at the end of the third Catholic-Orthodox Forum in Lisbon, Portugal, on 5-8 June. The Forum ended as the European Union agreed on a 100 billion euro (US\$126 billion) bailout plan for Spain's banks.

Hong Kong Christians urge Beijing to investigate dissident's death

Hong Kong (ENInews)--About 25,000 people marched in Hong Kong on 10 June to mourn the death of a Chinese dissident, while the Christian groups that co-organized the rally urged Beijing to investigate the case. Li Wangyang, a union leader in Hunan who had been imprisoned for 21 years for his involvement in the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy protests, was found dead on 6 June in a hospital in what were described as suspicious circumstances. While Hunan authorities claimed Li hanged himself, Hong Kong media said environmental evidences did not support the claim.

Church delegates to bring ethical perspectives to environment summit

(ENInews)--A delegation from the Geneva-based World Council of Churches (WCC) will take part in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) from 20 to 22 June in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The delegates will participate in various ecumenical and interfaith events at the conference, also known as Rio+20, according to a WCC news release. It marks the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), in Rio de Janeiro, and the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. The WCC said it will also participate in the Peoples' Summit for Social and Environmental Justice, an event taking place between 15 and 23 June in Rio de Janeiro alongside Rio+20.

In Indonesia, church head seeks help to mediate tensions

(ENInews)--An Indonesian church leader is calling on the international community to mediate human rights violations after a string of violent clashes with authorities in the Papua region last week. The head of the Papuan Baptist Church, the Rev. Socrates Sofyan Yoma, told Radio Australia's Asia Pacific program on 8 June that only dialogue with local Papuans and international intervention will achieve peace. "West Papuans are really, really suffering under Indonesian authorities. We need the international community to intervene, humanitarian intervention, or United Nations peacekeeping force in West Papua," Yoma said.

15 June 2012

Filipino theologian re-interprets St. Paul in light of feminism today

Baguio City, Philippines (ENInews)--Re-reading St. Paul's letters, reviewing the Philippines' pre-colonial matriarchal legacy, and giving girls and women better access to education can help reverse centuries of bias and oppression against Filipino women, said a Filipino theologian. "Paul's writings have been widely criticized for being unsympathetic towards women. But re-reading Paul from another lens showed that he was actually a champion of women's liberation," said the Rev. Alicia Sibaen, who spoke on 13 June at a yearly assembly of the Ecumenical Women's Fellowship in Northern Luzon.

Church leaders appeal for unity in Mexico as national elections draw near

(ENInews)--Disciples of Christ leaders in Mexico are calling for Christians to put political rancor aside as citizens prepare to vote on 1 July in what has been a contentious presidential campaign season. Political fanaticism and intolerance during the presidential election process have damaged relationships among families, communities and the people, and also those between brothers and sisters in the church, said Pastor Josué Martínez Cisneros, President of the Confraternity of Disciples of Christ Evangelical Christian Churches of Mexico.

Faith groups contribute to British gay marriage consultation

(ENInews)--The British government's 12-week consultation on gay marriage, which concluded on 14 June, aroused strong opinions, with faith groups expressing views both "for" and "against." Opposition came from the (Anglican) Church in Wales and the established Church of England, which foresaw a conflict between the church's and the state's definition of marriage. However, during the consultation, a YouGov poll of more than 2,000 people found that 58 percent of people with a religious faith back same-sex marriage. The poll also showed that 70 percent of the public support the move, including 82 percent of those under the age of 50.

Suu Kyi voices concern over sectarian violence on Myanmar border

Geneva (ENInews)--Myanmar's opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, voiced her concerns in Geneva on 14 June over the escalation of violence between ethnic Rakhina Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in western Myanmar. "Of course I'm concerned ... with regard to the present situation in Rakhine. I think the most important lesson we need to learn from it is the need for the rule of law," she told reporters at the beginning of a two-week European tour. Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

20 June 2012

Jerusalem councilwoman proposes interfaith forum for women

Jerusalem (ENInews)--A Jerusalem city councilwoman said she will work towards creating a forum of women under the city's auspices that would cut across religious lines in order to fight growing religious extremism. "It is essential for women to cooperate," said Rachel Azaria, speaking at a discussion on 18 June during the 21st annual conference of the Interreligious Coordinating Council for Israel (ICCI), which promotes interreligious dialogue and peace. Azaria identifies herself as an Orthodox Jew and has served on the Jerusalem city council since 2008 as a member of the pluralistic Jerusalemite Party.

18 June 2012

German Christian youth group raises awareness of Rio+20 summit

(ENInews)--As the start of environmental talks in Rio de Janeiro approaches this week, young German Christians are staging a series of public events aimed at raising awareness of the global issues at stake. Green Hand Day, an initiative of the German Federation of Protestant Youth, named 16 June as a day of action, but events had been running for several weeks before. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20, will be held from 20 to 22 June. In May, young people demonstrated outside the German parliament building in May -- their fingers painted green -- and staged flash mobs on the streets of Stuttgart, distributing information on environmental issues.

Indian churches in Kerala explore "green" options

(ENInews)--Christians in India's southern Kerala state are exploring "green" options and linking the need for environmental protection to the practice of their faith. The majority Roman Catholic Church recently approved an environmental policy titled "Towards Green Meadows" that calls for promoting eco-spirituality, nature conservation and waste management to build "a new culture in environmental conservation."

Tanzanian churches oppose uranium mining

(ENInews)--Protestant churches in Tanzania have cautioned the government against extracting uranium deposits recently discovered in the East African country, noting that Germany plans to close its nuclear power stations by 2022 and the Japanese city of Fukushima is still recovering from the 2011 earthquake-caused nuclear disaster. The churches, who are members of the Christian Council of Tanzania, have highlighted the Fukushima situation, where the Daiichi plant released radioactive material into the surrounding countryside, saying that Tanzania lacks safe structures to explore, mine or export the mineral. Germany announced in May 2011 that it will abandon nuclear energy completely within 11 years, saying it wants to focus on renewable energy. "The government should quickly stop the exploration and

mining of uranium," the Rev. Leonard Mtaita, a Lutheran who is the council's general secretary, told ENInews on 15 June.

Christian-Muslim peace summit underway in Beirut

Beirut (ENInews)--A three-day Christian-Muslim peace conference is underway in Beirut, with delegates citing chaotic Egyptian elections, armed conflict in Syria and tension between Israel and Iran contributing to a sense of urgency. Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad-Ali Taskhiri, the highest ranking clergyman among Iran's representatives, urged the dozens of religious leaders, representing nearly all strains of Christianity and Islam, to envision "the heaven and passion of coexistence," adding that "dialogue was born with humanity itself." The conference opened on 18 June, Episcopal News Service reports. It is the second Christian-Muslim peace summit organized by the Episcopal Washington (D.C.) National Cathedral, former diocesan bishop John Chane and the Rev. John L. Peterson, director of the cathedral's Center for Global Justice and Reconciliation.

Faith groups seek permanent solution to refugee crisis in Kenya

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--As the world marks World Refugee Day on 20 June, humanitarian and faith-based agencies are saying a permanent solution needs to be found for the nearly 600,000 people crowded into the Dadaab Refugee Camp complex in northeastern Kenya. Resources in the world's biggest refugee camp are overstretched, following the arrival of large numbers of Somali migrants fleeing drought and war, and the agencies are stressing the resettlement or integration of the refugees into local communities.

Faith groups concerned about civilians trapped in Homs, Syria

Geneva (ENInews)--UN envoys, faith leaders and humanitarian groups, intensified international efforts 20 June to secure safe passage for about 800 Syrian civilians, half of whom are Sunni Muslims and half Christians, trapped in Homs, Syria by armed combat between government and opposition forces. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said it and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent "are attempting to evacuate and otherwise assist people stranded ... by the ongoing fighting" between rebels and forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

Nun and pastor risk staying in Homs, Syria to care for nursing home residents

(ENInews)--Reformed church representatives say there is concern for the safety of an 80-year old nun and a Protestant pastor working in a church-run nursing home for elderly people in the Syrian town of Homs. Sister Valentine and the Rev. Mofid Karajaili have chosen to stay with residents of the Evangelical Centre for the Elderly in the Bab Sbaa neighborhood despite escalating violence between government and opposition forces in the city, according to people with knowledge of the situation.

15 June 2012

Council meeting looks at freedom of religion in China

(ENInews)--Christianity is growing in China, but continues to face difficulties and an increasing need for resources, according to the head of a major Christian organization. "The church ... presents four characteristics: independent and autonomous, post-denominational, fast growing and faced with lots of challenges and emerging difficulties," said the Rev. Gao Feng, president of the China Christian Council (CCC), on 14 June. Feng was speaking in Nanjing at a meeting of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) international affairs commission - the first officially sanctioned WCC and CCC-sponsored meeting held in China since the WCC's establishment in 1948.

New Catholic structure created for Australian Anglicans

(ENInews)--The world's third diocese for former Anglicans wishing to join the Catholic Church was established in Australia on 15 June, headed by a newly-ordained Catholic priest. The Rev. Harry Entwistle's jurisdiction as the Ordinary is equivalent to a diocesan bishop. Entwistle is a former bishop of the Traditional Anglican Communion (TAC), a communion of churches in the continuing Anglican movement, but unaffiliated with the broader Anglican Communion and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The diocese, called the Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross, is expected to have up to six parishes. Entwistle is likely to bring most of his 70-member TAC Perth congregation with him, according to media reports.

22 June 2012

Uganda's Anglican bishops elect Orombi's successor

(ENInews)--Anglican bishops in Uganda announced on 22 June that they elected the Rt. Rev. Stanley Ntagali as archbishop and primate. He succeeds the high-profile Henry Orombi, described by many as charismatic but criticized in the Anglican Communion for his hard-line stance on homosexuality. Ntagali, the bishop of Masindi-Katara and former provincial secretary, was chosen at a house of bishops' meeting at St. Paul's Cathedral in Kampala, over three other candidates. He will be installed as the eighth archbishop on 16 December. Orombi took early retirement last January.

Russian Orthodox leader ends visit to China

(ENInews)--A top leader from the Russian Orthodox Church on 22 June wrapped up a visit to China, saying that the church hopes Orthodoxy may flourish in China despite present constraints. Metropolitan Hilarion, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations (DECR), was on a working visit to China to explore Russian-Chinese religious cooperation. On 19 June, Hilarion led a delegation to Beijing for a consultation in which the "current status of religious organizations" in China was discussed, including the "complex issues associated with the position of Orthodoxy in China," as reported by the DECR website.

Lutheran council speaks out on Central America, Rio+20

(ENInews)--The Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) governing Council, during its 15-20 June meeting in Bogota, Colombia, appealed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish an office in Honduras and to strengthen its presence elsewhere in Central America. The Lutheran group also urged the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to "hear the cries of their people" by protecting human rights and ending impunity for those committing violence, particularly against women and girls, according to a news release from Lutheran World Information (LWI), the LWF's news service. Turning to the U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development (also known as Rio+20) in Rio de Janeiro, the Council called for "a clear and future-oriented outcome document." Council members said environmental decisions should be

in the interests of people rather than transnational corporations, according to LWI.

Ecumenical council active at Rio climate summit

(ENInews)--The World Council of Churches (WCC) has been playing an active role in the two major events taking place in Rio de Janeiro from 12 to 23 June: the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), also known as Rio+20, and the People's Summit. According to a WCC news release, the People's Summit is an open-invitation event that is gathering thousands of representatives of movements working to create a common voice to advocate for human rights and effective commitment of the world's leaders to the care of the planet. An official delegation of the WCC has been following the activities and negotiations at Rio+20 and promoted a side event on 22 June in cooperation with the Lutheran World Federation, Religions for Peace and Caritas Internationalis.

25 June 2012

Australian census shows numbers of non-believers are growing

(ENInews)--The latest Australian census shows that the number of non-believers is growing but Christianity is still identified as the dominant faith. The proportion of people who reported no religious affiliation grew to 22.3 per cent in 2011 from 18.7 per cent from the last census in 2006, according to the report released on 21 June by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Christianity still remains the dominant faith, with 61.1 per cent identifying as Christian, down from 63.9 per cent, with just seven percent saying they regularly attend a Christian church.

Turkish general suspected in murders of Christians

(ENInews)--A retired Turkish general has been arrested in connection with the murders of three Christians in an alleged plot to destabilize the country, according to a 24 June report in Turkey's Zaman daily. General Hursit Tolon was arrested on suspicion of being a member of a clandestine group within the armed forces suspected of plotting to undermine the government by "creating chaos and unease." The newspaper said Tolon was one of 19 charged with involvement in the April 2007 killing of three Protestants at a Christian

publishing house at Malatya in southeastern Anatolia, after plans for the murders were found at a nearby naval base.

Faith groups criticize outcome of climate summit

(ENInews)--Several faith-based organizations said they were disappointed with the U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development, known as Rio+20, which took place 20-22 June in Rio de Janeiro. The Geneva-based Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) said that while the conference's final document, addressing the theme "The Future We Want," acknowledged that access to food is a human right, it did not pay adequate attention to needed changes in agriculture that favor the small farmer over big corporations. The document "leaves the door open for greater intensification of industrial agriculture -- a system that has proved unsuccessful in eradicating hunger sustainably and has led to near-collapse of ecosystems and communities," said Executive Director Peter Prove, according to an EAA news release.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT CONDEMNS ATTACKS ON KENYAN CHURCHES

New York, Jul 3 2012

The President of the United Nations General Assembly, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, today condemned deadly attacks carried out on two churches in Kenya over the weekend.

The attacks, which took place in the town of Garissa near Kenya's border with Somalia, resulted in the deaths of 17 people and serious injury to several others.

"President Al-Nasser stresses the importance of the security of all places of worship and the safety of worshippers from all religions," the Assembly head's spokesperson said, adding that he expresses his heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government and people of Kenya.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon strongly condemned the attacks on Monday, calling for the perpetrators of the attacks, and of other recent terrorist acts in Kenya, to be held accountable.

For more details go to UN News Centre at <http://www.un.org/news>

Hopes to Revive the Christian Area of Turkey

IDIL, TURKEY – Clambering over the rubble of what was once his hometown, Robert Tutus pointed to a spot just up the road from where his family’s house had stood.

“This is where my father was assassinated,” he said. “Two men walked up to him as he was returning home one evening, and killed him with a bullet to his head.”

His father, Sukru Tutus, was the last Christian mayor of Azeh, known as Idil in Turkish, a town in southeastern Anatolia that traces its Christianity back to the time of the Apostles.

Within a month of his killing, which happened on June 17, 1994, Mr. Tutus recalled last month, the remaining Christian population of the town, several hundred people at the time, had gathered their belongings and fled to asylum in Western Europe.

The departure marked the end of the Christian era of Azeh, which had been a bishop’s seat as early as the second century and home to a Christian population of several thousand until the late 1970s.

It is a desire he shares with hundreds of pioneering Syriacs across the Tur Abdin, who have returned from exile in Europe in recent years in an attempt to reclaim their heritage and pave the way for a Christian resettlement of the region.

In the village of Kafro, 50 kilometers, or 30 miles, west of Idil, villagers out for a stroll in the spring sunshine on their neatly stone-flagged street last month gathered around a baby carriage to coo over its occupant. They were admiring Nahir Demir, 1 year old, the first offspring of his family to be born in Kafro since the Syriac village was abandoned by order of the Turkish Army in 1994.

“My father was the last to go,” said Aziz Demir, 45, mayor of the newly rebuilt village. The order to evacuate, he recalled, came at the height of fighting between the army and Kurdish rebels in this region.

But when permission to return was issued in a brief bureaucratic directive by the Turkish government in 2001, the Syriacs of Kafro rushed back from Europe to rebuild their village and to resettle their children in an ancient land they had never seen.

A dozen modern limestone villas now rise up over the ruins of the old village of Kafro, complete with walled gardens and pink-tiled bathrooms, built with the lifetime savings of Syriacs returning from decades in the factories of Germany, Switzerland and Sweden.

Six years after the first moving trucks arrived, Kafro’s population is around 50 and rising, despite the hazards. Both schooling and employment prospects are poor in this impoverished region, where neighboring Kurds herd sheep and ride donkeys to market.

“We knew it would not be easy, and we knew the risks,” said Israel Demir, 46, builder of the villas and father of little Nahir as well as of three teenage daughters transplanted from Goppingen, Germany, in 2006. “But we also know our duty.”

That duty, Mr. Demir said, lies in ensuring the future of the Syriac people.

“I feel a great responsibility, toward my children and toward my people, for safeguarding our homeland for future generations,” Mr. Demir said in an interview in Kafro last month. “Because I know that when a people leave its land, its home, it has no choice but to assimilate. We can see it happening to our families in Europe and in America. There is a danger that in a few decades the Syriacs will cease to exist.”

Mr. Demir paid a personal price for his mission last year when he barely survived after being shot by Kurdish shepherds while trying to prevent them from grazing their flocks on village land.

But neither the hostility of the locals nor a perceived lack of support from the Turkish authorities will deter him, he said.

“I am trying to open the door to the return of our people,” he said. “I have pushed the door open. Now others must decide whether they will follow me and step through it.”

In the neighboring village of Enhil, Fehmi Isler, 50, took a more sober view of the future as he gazed out from the slim bell tower of the village church over dozens of newly restored houses, one of them his own.

“Only the older people come back, the ones who were born and raised here,” he said.

Dormant in the winter, Enhil comes alive at Easter with the arrival of 300 to 400 Syriacs exiles from Western Europe who have restored their family homes in the past few years for use as summer houses.

“But the young people won’t come, and who can blame them,” Mr. Isler said. “There’s nothing for them to do here but gaze at the cattle and collect cow patties.”

Mr. Isler, who was in Enhil to bury an aunt, who died in a retirement home in Augsburg, Germany, in keeping with her last wish, said his own five children had made the trip from Germany only once.

“No Internet, no mobile phones, no swimming pool – forget it,” he said. “And the Kurdish women yelled at the girls to show some modesty and cover up.”

In Idil, Mr. Tutus is similarly skeptical of his chances of success in attempting to persuade the Syriac diaspora to resettle in Idil. With the war raging on between Kurdish rebels and the Turkish Army, it is an uphill struggle, he said.

“Everyone talks about returning, but it’s just talk,” he said. “I’m here fighting for our return, but they’re sitting tight over there.”

Even Mr. Tutus's wife, a Syriac herself, and his children, aged 11 and 7, will not come, preferring to stay in Frankfurt after being badly frightened during a visit to Idil.

"There was a power cut and gunfire in the street at night," Mr. Tutus said. "After that, they refused to come back."

This article was written By SUSANNE GÜSTEN

New York Times#

Only ruins scattered about the hillside remain of their town today, while above it shabby concrete buildings rise to form the new town of Idil, inhabited by local Kurds and Arabs as well as a few Turkish administrators on temporary postings to the east.

And then there is Mr. Tutus, 42, camped out in an apartment in one of those buildings while he tries to reclaim his father's properties and rebuild his parental home among the ruins on the hillside.

"This is our home, the home of the Syriac people," Mr. Tutus said. "We will not give it up."

The plateau of Tur Abdin, upon which Idil lies nestled between the Syrian plain and the mountain ranges of southeastern Turkey, is the historical heartland of the Syriac Orthodox Church, whose patriarchate resided here until tensions with the Turkish republic pushed it to move to Syria in 1933.

The region is still dotted with Syriac churches like Mor Gabriel, which was founded in the year 397 and is one of the oldest active monasteries in the world today. But apart from the monks, very few Syriacs remain.

A century ago, they numbered 200,000 here, according to the European Syriac Union, a diaspora organization. Some 50,000 survived the massacres of Anatolian Christians during World War I, in which the Syriac people shared the fate of the Armenians. Today, no more than 4,500 Syriac Christians, who speak a local dialect of the Aramaic language as well as Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish, remain in Tur Abdin.

In Azeh, which held out against a siege by surrounding Kurdish villages for months in 1915, the final push in the age-old power struggle over the town began in 1977, when Mayor Sukru Tutus was deposed by the Turkish authorities in what his successor, Abdurrahman Abay, today freely acknowledges was a rigged election.

"The military commander, the judge, the district governor – they encouraged me to run and they helped me" to win, Mr. Abay, chief of the powerful Kurdish Kegan tribe, said last month over a glass of tea in Idil. "After the election, I received a telegram from Egypt, from Anwar el-Sadat. It read: 'I congratulate you on the Muslim conquest of Idil.'"

The takeover brought the dramatic shift in the town's demographics that were completed in 1994, with Kurds from the surrounding villages moving in as Syriac

families sold up and joined the rising flow of Christian migration from the Tur Abdin to Europe.

Today, 80,000 Syrians from the Tur Abdin live in Germany, 60,000 in Sweden, and 10,000 each in Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands, according to estimates from the European Syriac Union.

Mr. Tutus found political asylum in Germany, together with his mother, six sisters and three brothers, all but one of whom have since acquired German citizenship and settled there.

A decade later, he was one of the first exiles to accept the Turkish government's public invitation to Syrians to return home. It was issued in 2001 under pressure from the European Union and repeated on several occasions.

Although he carries a German passport, Mr. Tutus spends much of his time in Idil, where he has overseen the restoration of the Church of St. Mary and last year founded an Association for Syriac Culture.

“Our aim is to keep the Syriac language and culture alive in Idil, and to remind people that this is the home of the Syrians,” Mr. Tutus said.

Although the association's office was fire-bombed this year, Mr. Tutus remains undeterred.

“We want the world to see that Syrians still live here,” he said.



Former Syriac Catholic Patriarch, Cardinal Mousa Dawod, passes away.

May God have mercy on him.

Meeting of the Standing Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Churches



The Standing Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in America met on Wednesday, April 25, at the Ethiopian Orthodox Archdiocese in Bronx, New York. His Eminence Abune Zekarias, Archbishop of the Ethiopian Church, welcomed the attendees and opened the meeting with a requiem prayer for His Holiness Shenouda III, the late pontiff of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim, Very Rev. Fr. Shamoun Asmar and Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun, along with Youth Director Gabriel Bar-Sawme, attended the meeting where the participants discussed a proposed forum on Oriental Orthodox youth, planned for October 2012 in conjunction with the con-celebration of the Divine Liturgy to be held at St. Leon Armenian Church in Fair Lawn, NJ. Other topics on the agenda included the annual Christian Churches Together meeting held in Memphis, TN; the Roman Catholic/Oriental Orthodox Dialogue to be held in the Fall; and the annual United Nations Prayer Service.

Updates were also presented by each of the Church's present.





The Patriarchs of Syria Denounce the Explosions in Damascus

We, Ignatius Hazim IV Patriarch of Antioch and All the East for the Greek Orthodox, Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas Patriarch of Antioch and All the East for the Syrian Orthodox, and Gregorios Laham III Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Alexandria and Jerusalem for the Greek Melkite Catholic; denounce the coward and criminal work which attacked the area of “Al-Kazaz” in Damascus on the morning of Thursday May 10, 2012. We also denounce all the terrorist works which targeted different areas of the beloved Syrian land, and which victimized many innocent martyrs, and wounded civilians and militants of this great nation.

In front of this painful hardship, we pray to God Almighty to heal the wounds of Syria and the Syrian people, so that the citizens of the one nation may return back to each other; in love, reconciliation, forgiveness, cooperation and wisdom. They may also favor the interest of the country above all other interests, distance themselves from violence in all its aspects, head towards doing good to our dear country in rebuilding it on civilized and human principles. These principles should include the elements of justice, virtuous citizenship, coexistence, peaceful freedom of expression, and all that is related to serve the nation and the citizens.

We lift up the prayers in one voice and one heart to God Almighty to rest the souls of the martyrs of the country in peace, console the hearts of those afflicted, protect Syria and lead it into the shore of safety, peace, sovereignty and prosperity. In a responsible and fatherly spirit we call on all citizens of the country, Muslims and Christians to share with us the prayer so that God may protect Syrian people from all sorts of danger and damage, and believe in God’s saying: “I am with you till the end of the time”

May the name of God be blessed forever. Amen.

Archbishop Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim Delivers a Lecture at Seton Hall University



At an invitation extended through Monsignor John A. Radano of Seton Hall University’s School of Theology, in cooperation with The Commission on Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Newark, our Archbishop Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim visited the campus of Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey. The purpose of the invitation was intended to cultivate a continuing dialogue between the Archdiocese of Newark and our own and other members of the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

Following a visit and luncheon at the School of Theology where he met with the heads of various departments and a brief tour of the campus, His Eminence presented a lecture at the University’s Chapel of the Immaculate Conception entitled, “The History and Mission of the Syrian Orthodox Church.” He touched on several important points in the course of his presentation, including our Church’s dedication to ecumenism, our long and difficult history of persecution and oppression over the centuries, as well as the various challenges facing our faithful in the United States. After a brief question and answer period, His Eminence and Monsignor Radano expressed their earnest desire to continue and expand their ecumenical dialogue through continuing mutual visits and forums for cooperation.



June 8th Designated as Suryoyo Women's Day

A call from the Archdiocese for Suryoyo Women to come forth and be heard was answered by approximately 200 ladies of all ages from different backgrounds, yet with one commonality, all having the same Suryoyo identity. The Archdiocesan Clergy Council with its spokesman, Very Rev. Fr. Shamoun Asmar, worked diligently for the establishment of Suryoyo Women's Day. Under the auspices of His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim, a committee was formed to work with Very Rev. Shamoun Asmar and Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun to make Suryoyo Women's Day a reality.

The orchestrated evening of June 8th, at St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Cathedral, moved quickly starting with an up-front cocktail hour which offered the ladies in attendance the opportunity to socialize and speculate. The buzz around the hall was apparent to all and aroused a curiosity regarding the expectations of the evening. The appetite of the ladies to get involved on a higher level was clearly displayed.

Upon the arrival of His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim, the entire group was directed to the Cathedral proper to take part in the traditional evening prayers. Assisting His Eminence were Very Rev. John Khoury, Very Rev. Shamoun Asmar, Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun and Rev. Fr. Aziz Hadodo and Rev. Fr. Eli Shabo. Readings were assigned to Selwa Malki, Tagreed Hanna, Christine Ipeci and Jacqueline Aydin with all the women meticulously singing in Syriac, reciting and collectively taking part in the evening prayer vespers. The well synchronized voices of 200 women, for the first time, resonated in the Cathedral. That in it-self, made a significant statement. At the conclusion of the prayer service, His Eminence gave a blessing to all those in attendance after which Fr. Chamoun invited everyone to the lower hall to continue with the program.

Dr. Christine Kiraz, program chairperson, opened with the following statement: "Some of you are probably wondering what is "Suryoyutho"? To me personally, Suryoyutho means to have a sense of pride and belonging to the Syriac Orthodox Church. It can also mean being proud of our centuries long linguistic connection to the actual language of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sadly we do not always know or appreciate

the enormity of the treasure that we are born into. So I hope that tonight will serve to give a small glimpse of our rich Syriac heritage through our faith and we also hope that you realize that you belong to an amazing heritage. Through events like this we hope to foster the Suryoyutho in all of us, especially our younger generation”. Dr. Kiraz continued, “Tonight we hope to enlighten you about women in our history through the keynote lecture and in the open forum we hope to address the current challenges and issues we all face.”

The chairperson introduced the two speakers with the following brief bios on each:

His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim was born in Kamishly, Syria. He studied theology in St. Ephrem’s Theological Seminary in Lebanon and in the Coptic Theological Seminary in Cairo, Egypt. In 1985, he was ordained a monk and then a priest. In 1989, he started his graduate studies in divinity at St. Patrick’s College in Ireland from where, in 1994, he received his doctorate. In 1996, His Eminence was consecrated as the Metropolitan and Patriarchal Vicar of the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese for the Eastern United States by His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas. Since then he has sponsored many successful projects throughout the Archdiocese with this event being one of them. His Eminence also authored two books.

Dr. Carmen Maier received her Ph.D. in 2012 from the Princeton Theological Seminary where she studied Church history and wrote her dissertation on Ephrem the Syrian’s method of biblical interpretation. She also has an M.A. in Early Christian Studies from Notre Dame University, and an M.A. in Theology from St. John’s School of Theology-Seminary in Collegeville, MN. Her interests include inquiry into the relevance of early Christian theology and practice for today.

The chairperson invited His Eminence to the podium. The Archbishop spoke about the role of women in the church today. He said that he was absolutely delighted at the turnout for Suryoyo Women’s Day and told the audience “The opportunity to serve the church exists. I am inviting all of you to seize the opportunity and offer your God given talents to foster and strengthen our church.” The Archbishop continued; “Your position is so important to the future our church. You are the mothers and the Sunday school teachers laying the foundation for our future generations. You are the choir members who add tremendously to our church services and you are the Ladies Auxiliary’s who over the years have proven themselves to be the backbone of church life. Yes, much more than this awaits you during these days of change and growth.” His Eminence concluded saying; “This event is the beginning, the first attempt to bolster the role of Suryoyo Women in our community. In history and in recent times, Suryoyo Women were always there ready to serve. The future requires your further commitment to serve our church and community on a higher level. I am confident you will be ready to take on the challenge.” The audience was clearly energized by the Archbishop’s supportive and encouraging message. An informative Q&A took place after His Eminence’s presentation.

Dr. Carmen Maier, keynote speaker, shared with the audience the role of the Bnoth Qyomo, the Daughters of the Covenant, played in the early Syriac Church. This group of women was assigned the task of singing the madroshe, or liturgical poetry

attributed to St. Ephrem. Dr. Maier explained how, these women, through this ministry, became teachers in the early Syriac church.

The open forum, which followed included: Fay Shabo, Hanna Barhe, Helda Minas, Pascal Shammass Asmar and Alexa Darakjy. Questions from the audience were taken and answered accordingly by the individual addressed.

The program planning committee who worked with Fr. Asmar and Fr. Chamoun included: Aygul Akbulut, Pascale Shammass Asmar, Jemma Ayaz, Hanna Barhe, Yelda Coban, Meric Darakjy, Annmaire Hadodo, Dr. Christine Kiraz, Helda Minas, Natalie Yilmaz and Mona Yunan.

STUDIES AT IGNATIUS - SOFIA UNIVERSITIES: THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, PSYCHOLOGY, DIPLOMACY. Rev. Anthony DeLuca, Ph.D., Psy.D., RECTOR

STUDIES AT INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL FOR MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS: PSYCHOANALYSIS for NYS License; PASTORAL COUNSELING. Anthony DeLuca, Ph.D., Psy.D., DEAN

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