

# HOLY WISDOM

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Religious NGOs at United Nations

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

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** It is necessary through the collaboration of NGO's 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 a power to come together to develop a non-violent intervention that results in a resolution. It is time for us as people to acknowledge that there is something more that exceeds our own individual positions and needs. The United Nations, religious institutions and NGO can be an avenue to promote community consciousness to encourage global consciousness, clear and realistic decisions as they promote non-violent solutions to conflicts!



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## **OUR WORK AT THE UNITED NATIONS:**

**PatriciaAnn McCaffrey, Youth Representative**

February 27th 2012

Hip-Hop and International Diplomacy

Growing up in this generation Hip-Hop is no stranger to me, and I had chosen to attend this meeting because it sparked my interest. The meeting started out with Blitz the Ambassador and a few members of his band graciously performing their song Akwaaba. This was a wonderful way to start off the meeting because it got everyone evolved and introduced Hip-Hop all at the same time. Just like most of the guest speakers explained that hip-hop is much more than a style of music it is a way of life and a culture; this being said the hip hop culture is not just a local phenomenon it is being measured on a global scale. This global influence is the bridge that Hip-Hop and International Diplomacy both share. Dr. Marc Lemont Hill stated that Hip-Hop is a form of resistance and gives people an opportunity to start a conversation even if they do not share the same background if they share the same style of music or interest in this culture it gives them a common ground. This common ground is needed to spread a foreign policy or even a style of music.

**Zachary Weinstein, Youth Representative**

### **Getting My Grounds Pass**

Date: January 20th, 2012

I suppose that it is fitting that my first writing should detail my first trip to the UN. I would describe myself at the time as curious. I had never been to the UN and my first trip was to pick up a grounds pass, which is pretty mind blowing when you think about it. I could go into many minor incidents of getting lost and general confusion, but for brevities sake I will abstain from such indulgences. Receiving my grounds pass seemed a tad surreal, as the me of a year ago would never have conceived of such a concept and roaming the grounds an getting my bearings was a truly awe inspiring experience. I look forward hopefully to the opportunities that this shall grant me.

### **ICMYO training for Youth Representatives to the United Nations**

Date: February 1st, 2012

I attended the ICMYO Youth Representative orientation in order to become ore acquainted with the way of things at the UN as well as the prospect of meeting other Youth Reps. I must say that it was a great success on both counts. The good people of the Pax Romana UN Advocacy Team presented a highly informative presentation, covering everything from the history of the United Nations to its individual branches and how the system all works. In the room were new Youth Reps, more experienced Youth Reps and a variety of Youth Delegates, who were both interesting and informative. I hope to see this event perpetuated into the future as it provides a solid base for new Reps. as well as a good forum to begin making contacts.

Japanese drumming concert on one year anniversary of the East Japan Tsunami

Date: March 05th, 2012

The United Nations' involvement in the massive effort to assist the victims of last year's Earthquake in northeastern Japan has been marked by a resilient effort, spearheaded by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. A year after the fact, On March 5th, the earthquake still a hideous recollection in the collective memories of millions of Japanese, the United Nations hosted a concert paying tribute to the culture of Japan and its continuing efforts to fight the ongoing effects of the earthquake. The concert consisted of a collection comprised of classical Japanese theater and music. It was a fine success, drawing considerable media attention. The event reminds us, not merely of the United Nation's humanitarianism and affirmative influence, but, more importantly, of the extraordinary strength with which the human spirit trumps even the most adverse of circumstances.

### **At Arab League summit in Baghdad, Ban urges region's leaders to "listen to the people."**

Date: March 29th, 2012

The UN engages in a continuous process of uniting cultural elements in a unified whole, reminding us that "Aller Menschen werden Bruder" (All men are brothers), as Friedrich Schiller said. For this purpose, the Arab League gathered in Baghdad several days ago and, led by Secretary General of the United Nations Mr. Ban Ki-moon, talks were held concerning the future of the region and the primal importance of men's dialogue with the yet culturally un-emancipated female populace of several Islamic states. The talks, the first in over twenty years, were meant to conciliate disparate factions of the Islamic World; though the success of the dialogue is uncertain presently, the United Nations might be praised for the steps it has taken to establish peace in what, following decades of theocratic regimes and the brusque transitions issuing from the Arab Spring, has become one of the most tempestuous regions of the modern world.

### **In historic session, UN rights body tackles abuses, violence based on sexual orientation**

Date: March 7th 2012

"Any attack on you is an attack on the universal values of the United Nations," Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said recently to the all homosexual, bisexual, and transgender individuals in the world, calling to an end the millennial era of discrimination against consensual same-sex marriages and urging the public to uphold the dignity of those whose sexual preferences form a minority; he also called for the education of the public regarding sexuality, as well as for the UN's defense of those who have been discriminated against based on the nature of their sexual inclinations. Any discrimination of such a kind contradicts the United Nations Charter as well as the Declaration of Human Rights, and the United Nations openly promotes the liberalization and de-tabooing of the conservative prejudices recycled by modern generations from their traditional forbears. Eventually, according to the Secretary General, with a proper education and a sanitizing of current values, such prejudices are bound to dissipate and give way to a respect and understanding more befitting the Charter of the United Nations.

### **STRENGTHENING THE RULE OF LAW AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE**

#### **Topic for open debate at Security Council, January 19, 2012**

Anthony J. DeLuca, Ph.D.

Justice inclines us to give to each one his or her own due- so that each person receives what really belongs to him or her. It refers to the organization of society so that the common good, to which all are expected to,

contribute in proportion to their ability and opportunity is available to all the members for their ready use and enjoyment. The rule of law insures that there is justice.

On the matter of strengthening the rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies, consideration must be given to the Charter of the United Nations, international human rights law, international humanitarian law, international criminal law and international refugee law.

When there is widespread corruption and political interference, there follows diminished citizen security and economic opportunity. If government distrust develops, then often radical movements use the opportunity by marshaling discontents to challenge order through violence. Reinforcing norms, promoting accountability, building confidence in institutions and addressing gender inequality will stop the cycle of violence and promote economic recovery.

Since 2004, the Security Council has made 160 resolutions involving the rule of law and transitional justice. These include action plans for holding States accountable for violations. We whole heartedly endorse UN policy that rejects amnesty for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and gross violations of human rights. Unfortunately, justice and accountability measures in peace agreements are not standardized.

Transitional justice initiatives should include both judicial and non-judicial mechanisms. Included here would be individual prosecutions, truth seeking, institutional reform, vetting and dismissals. Children who participate in transitional justice mechanisms must be supported by child-friendly procedures. There remains the need for gender-sensitive procedures to protect witnesses and victims.

Truth seeking commissions are important in matters of human rights abuses. However, these should not be introduced too early and may be manipulated for political gain. These commissions should take up economic, social and cultural rights dimensions of conflict so as to insure long term peace and security.

There are cases in post conflict environment where there is poor judicial decision making as judges and prosecutors have inadequate legal training. Training in evidentiary rules and procedures has made significant results in many countries. Some States use informal justice mechanisms by which there is potential in strengthening the rule of law but these must be linked to formal systems for standardization.

Weak legal systems promote discrimination in limiting women's rights to legal redress; gender biases discourage women from reporting crimes against them. This plays into the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war. The UN must continue to monitor laws to ensure enforcement. A significant increase of funding for women's access to justice programs is imperative.

In peacekeeping settings, shared goals should be developed early to guarantee the transition of responsibilities. Establishing baselines is important to avoid gaps in the chief rule of law areas.

The United Nations is often the first on the ground during and in the immediate aftermath of conflict and thus is in a position to make early gains in the rule of law which builds overall stability.

## **WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ALL ASPECTS OF SOCIETY MORE VITAL THAN EVER – UN OFFICIALS**

New York, Mar 8, 2012

Women's voices and their participation in all aspects of society are more important than ever, as witnessed last year in the context of the global economic crisis, political transitions in the Arab world and elsewhere, and environmental disasters, United Nations officials stressed today as they marked International Women's Day.

Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), who travelled to Morocco to celebrate the Day, highlighted the role of women amid the political transitions in the Arab region, and called on world leaders to advance women's involvement in politics and empower them economically.

“Despite the steps taken forward and the progress made in many Arab States, women are demanding greater progress,” she said during a press conference in Rabat. “The distinction of having the world’s lowest representation of women in politics and the labour force provides neither justice to Arab women or to the history, legacy and future of the Arab world,” she said.

UN Independent Expert Kamala Chandrakirana, who heads a new group charged with identifying ways to eliminate existing discrimination practices against women, echoed Ms. Bachelet’s remarks, warning that economic and political transitions are a crucial time to advance women’s rights but warned that they are also at risk.

“In political transition, there is a danger of regression in the enjoyment by women of their human rights and women participating in public life are often exposed to violence,” Ms. Chandrakirana said. “States must take the opportunity of political transition to improve women’s constitutional and political position, adopting positive measures to eliminate discrimination and promote the empowerment of women.”

She also stressed that the impact of an economic crisis is especially harsh for women “as a result of precarious employment, reduction in social security and deterioration in the care economy.”

Women are also more vulnerable during natural disasters, and the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström, stressed that countries need to educate women to be able to face them and to build resilience in the community as a whole.

“Women’s lives are put in danger because they are treated like second-class citizens in some of the most hazard-prone regions of the world,” she said. “There is strong evidence to suggest that women are more likely to die in disasters than men and it is often because they are denied access to basic information about disaster risk and inhibited by social norms from escaping the home or workplace to avoid death.”

In his message to mark the Day, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted that, from access to education and rights to land ownership, to political participation and equal remuneration, women still lag behind men even in countries where there have been significant efforts to address gender inequalities.

“Gender equality and the empowerment of women are gaining ground worldwide” he said, while warning that “despite this momentum, there is a long way to go before women and girls can be said to enjoy the fundamental rights, freedom and dignity that are their birthright and that will guarantee their well-being.” He underlined that countries should eliminate discriminatory laws and practices that have a negative effect not just on women but on entire communities and nations.

Unequal treatment of women can result in wider issues that affect societies as a whole. For example, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) warned that laws in 25 countries that do not allow women to confer nationality on their children threaten to leave thousands of individuals in a state of statelessness. Currently, there are some 12 million people around the world who are not considered as nationals of any state, of whom half are children.

“A child born stateless today faces a future of uncertainty and insecurity,” said Erika Feller, UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. “When there is discrimination in conferring nationality, we see children becoming stateless from the moment they’re born.”

This year's theme for the Day, 'Empower Rural Women – End Hunger and Poverty,' focuses on providing opportunities for some of the poorest women around the world. The UN's International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) organized a discussion with various experts that focused on this particular issue.

"It is necessary that public investment, services and policies for agriculture and rural development be planned and implemented taking into consideration the different roles, interest and opportunities of women and men as farmers and agricultural workers," said Carlos Seré, IFAD Chief Development Strategist.

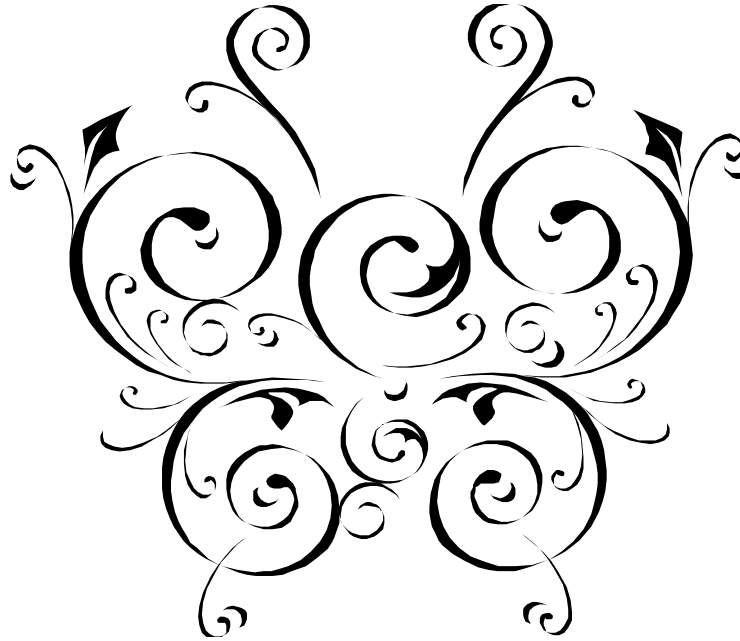
Meanwhile, the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) stressed that women are key in the global fight against the deadly disease. "There are few sustainable solutions that enable women and girls to protect themselves from HIV, violence and poverty," UNAIDS said, adding that "empowered women and girls are critical agents of change in reversing the epidemic."

The Day was observed in various parts of the world, from Afghanistan to Sudan. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) highlighted its report on eliminating violence against women, which found both positive progress and gaps in the implementation of the relevant law in the country. The report noted that although law enforcement is improving, there is a long way to go before Afghan women are fully protected from violence.

In Somalia, the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Augustine P. Mahiga, spotlighted the recent gains made towards increasing women's representation in the ongoing peace process in the country through the roadmap, which encourages women and youth to engage in the political future of the country.

As part of the celebrations for the Day, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) opened an exhibition at UN Headquarters in New York showcasing quilts made by women all over the world that display powerful messages and appeals for action.

In addition, Mr. Ban and the President of the General Assembly, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, have proposed the convening of a global conference on women in 2015 – 20 years after the last women's summit in Beijing.



## **INSIDE LOOK AT MAJOR UN ACTIONS & EVENTS**

### **Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the Security Council Stakeout on Syria, January 10, 2012**

Ambassador Rice: Coming to the substance of the day, as you know, we had the opportunity in consultations to hear a briefing from Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe. He covered principally Syria and also commented on Iraq and Guinea-Bissau as requested by some members of the Council.

The briefing we received on Syria was alarming by any standard. The Under-Secretary-General noted that in the days since the Arab League monitoring mission has been on the ground, in fact, some estimated 400 additional people have been killed, an average of 40 a day, a rate much higher than was the case before their deployment. That is a clear indication that the government of Syria, rather than using the opportunity of its commitment to the Arab League to end the violence and fulfill all of its commitments under the protocol, is instead stepping up the violence despite the presence of monitors and carrying out further acts of brutality against its population even often in the presence of those monitors.

Clearly this is something we profoundly condemn; it's part of a pattern that has characterized the abuses of the Assad regime. It has long been the view of the United States that Assad should step aside and yield to the wishes of the Syrian people for a government that reflects the rule of the people and indeed is unified and committed to peaceful progress for the country.

Unfortunately, rather than take that approach, we heard the vitriol of President Assad's speech today and further belittling by him of the Arab League, which we found offensive given the entire international community, the United States and all members of the Security Council are united in support of the Arab League initiative, and it is something that the Syrian government themselves committed to embrace.

Moreover, we are deeply concerned by reports that at least two of the monitors of the Arab League today--two Kuwaitis--were roughed up, harmed, harassed, hurt, in the context of their work. The Arab League, as I understand it, has issued a statement strongly condemning that and pointing the finger, putting the blame, very squarely on pro-regime elements that were responsible for the attacks on the human rights monitors from Kuwait. And so, as the Arab League has a recall on the government of Syria to uphold its obligations to ensure the protection, the safety, the freedom of movement of the monitors, which has been anything but honored to date.

### **EGYPT: UN HUMAN RIGHTS CHIEF CONDEMNS BRUTALITY AGAINST PROTESTERS**

**New York, Dec 19, 2011**

The United Nations human rights chief today strongly condemned what she described as the “brutal suppression” of demonstrations by the military and security forces in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, saying the violence reportedly left at least 11 people dead and more than 500 others injured over the weekend.

“The graphic images of protesters, including women, being brutally clubbed and assaulted, long after the point when they are showing any resistance, are utterly shocking,” said Navi Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in a press release.

“People lying motionless on the ground are shown on film being smashed on the head and body with sticks. These are life-threatening and inhuman acts that cannot possibly be justified under the guise of restoration of security or crowd control.”

Ms. Pillay recalled that less than a month ago she deplored the use of excessive force, including live ammunition, by security and military forces against peaceful protesters, which by 23 November had reportedly resulted in the death of some 30 demonstrators.

“Some of those who were filmed this weekend, including those viciously clubbing and kicking an apparently unconscious half-naked woman, should be easy to identify. Consequently, there must be arrests and prosecutions,” she said.

“It seems that Egyptian security forces, and their political and military commanders, have learned nothing over the past year, including the fact that actions like these simply fuel further anger and protests and make a resolution of Egypt’s political, social and economic problems more difficult to achieve.”

Ms. Pillay reiterated her call for an impartial investigation into all incidents of abuse and violence, including killings, torture and the use of excessive force by security and military forces. She called for end to the violence, stressing that those responsible must be face justice.

She also called for the immediate release of all detained protesters and for an end to the media campaign aimed at discrediting peaceful demonstrators. Ms. Pillay also urged protesters to preserve the peaceful nature of their demonstrations.

“The ruthless violence being used against unarmed women protesters is especially shocking and cannot be left unpunished,” she said. “There have also been extremely disturbing reports of the ill-treatment of women in detention. These must be immediately investigated and perpetrators brought to justice.”

She urged Egypt’s senior military and political leaders to act on the violence or risk future prosecution for complicity in serious crimes.

“The Egyptian authorities have to show a real commitment to human rights, including through the full eradication of ill-treatment, a comprehensive reform of the security sector, lifting of the state of emergency, and the respect of the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, particularly freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association.”

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a statement yesterday also called on Egypt’s transitional authorities to show restraint, voicing concern over the resurgence of violence in Cairo.

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE TO SEMINAR MARKING 70TH ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE “DECLARATION BY UNITED NATIONS”  
ORGANIZED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**



## **SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES**

**London, 18 January 2012**

Delivered by Dame Margaret Anstee, former United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Angola

It is a pleasure to convey greetings to the distinguished scholars, policy-makers, former UN officials and others who have gathered at Lancaster House to mark the 70th anniversary of the “Declaration by United Nations”. I commend this important meeting and welcome your efforts to delve more deeply into the wartime origins of the United Nations. That pre-history was a period in which states and peoples responded to grave threats with remarkable vision and resolve. The contemporary echoes are clear.

Today the world is living through another pivotal moment. We have witnessed shifts in economic power as parts of Asia and Latin America have emerged as new engines of global growth. We have seen revolution and the birth of grass-roots-led democratic movements in North Africa and across the Middle East, with far-reaching implications in and beyond the region. Climate change and the loss of biodiversity have placed humankind on a collision course with the planet. We are experiencing a rising incidence of mega-disasters, and the widening impact of global food, fuel and economic shocks. And we have seen the increasing salience of a set of global phenomena -- the spread of disease, terrorism, organized crime -- that easily transcend borders. There is growing inequality, widespread uncertainty, distrust in institutions, and a general sense that the playing field is tilted in favor of entrenched interests and elites.

Future generations may well describe this period as an inflection point, when the contours of a new world began to take shape. Amid the unfolding trends and events, the United Nations has sought to uphold the values and ideals enshrined in its Charter. We have strived to highlight the needs of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people, in particular by pressing for greater investment in the Millennium Development Goals. We have strengthened peacekeeping, peace building and mediation, and helped Member States with sensitive elections and difficult political transitions. And we have fought impunity for genocide and other serious violations of human rights by supporting the International Criminal Court and taking practical steps to operationalize the responsibility to protect.

We have made important progress since the Second World War, but I am keenly aware of the distance still to travel and the catastrophes -- economic, environmental, and human -- that lurk if we fall short. This past September, I identified five imperatives for collective action: sustainable development, prevention, building a more secure world, supporting countries in transition and empowering the world’s women and young people. Many of these issues will also be front-and-center at the Rio + 20 Conference on Sustainable Development in June. I am determined to bring all relevant partners together, and strengthen the UN itself, to advance this agenda.

Seventy years ago, President Roosevelt coined a term that found resonance with 26 states. Today, 193 states are carrying forward the idea and the machinery. In a world of 7 billion – and with global population expected to increase by another 500 million in just the next five years – we must all do more as a global society. What began as a necessity to defend liberty and human rights is today a vital instrument of common progress across a broad agenda of aspiration and need. Let us learn what more there is to know as we commemorate the UN’s origins on the road to the 70th Anniversary of the Charter; and let us all work together today to realize the UN’s full potential in building the future we want.

## **THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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### **MESSAGE ON WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY**

**2 April 2012**

Autism is not limited to a single region or a country; it is a worldwide challenge that requires global action.

Although developmental disabilities such as autism begin in childhood, they persist throughout a person's life. Our work with and for people with autism should not be limited to early identification and treatment; it should include therapies, educational plans and other steps that lead us towards sustained, lifelong engagement.

Reaching out to people with autism spectrum disorders requires global political commitment and better international cooperation, especially in sharing good practices. Greater investments in the social, education and labour sectors are crucially important, since developed and developing countries alike still need to improve their capacities to address the unique needs of people with autism and cultivate their talents. We also need to promote further research, train non-specialized care providers, and enable the autism community to more easily navigate care systems to obtain services that can support and mainstream individuals with autism.

The annual observance of World Autism Awareness Day is meant to spur such action and draw attention to the unacceptable discrimination, abuse and isolation experienced by people with autism and their loved ones. As highlighted by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, people with autism are equal citizens who should enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

On this Day in New York, Vienna and Geneva, the United Nations Postal Administration is releasing six commemorative postage stamps and two collectible envelopes dedicated to autism awareness. These tiny pieces of paper -- with images created by artists who have been diagnosed with autism -- will send a powerful message to people around the world that talent and creativity live inside all of us.

My wife has been very involved with autism awareness and advocacy efforts, and has shared with me inspiring stories not only about individuals with autism, but also about those committed to improving their lives. Let us all continue to join hands to enable people with autism and other neurological differences to realize their potential and enjoy the opportunities and well-being that are their birthright.

## **THE SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE ON WORLD HEALTH DAY**

**7 April 2012**

Each year on 7 April, we observe World Health Day to mark the anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organization in 1948. This year's theme, "Good health adds life to years", conveys an important message: promoting good health throughout life improves one's chances of remaining healthy and productive in one's later years.

In the middle of the last century, there were just 14 million people in the world aged 80 years or older. By 2050, there will be almost 400 million people in this age group, 100 million of them in China alone. Soon, for the first time in history, the world will have more adults aged 65 or older than children under five.

This enormous shift in the age of the world's population is closely linked to economic and social development. Thanks primarily to global public health successes in improving childhood survival and adult health, people are living longer in most parts of the world. Many high-income countries are already facing rapidly ageing populations. In the coming decades, low- and middle-income countries will see equally dramatic increases.

Increased longevity is a cause for celebration and something to which we all aspire. Older people make many valuable contributions to society -- as family members, as active participants in the workforce, and as volunteers within communities. The wisdom they have gained throughout their lives makes them a unique resource for society.

But older people also mean an increased demand on health care and social security systems. The greatest health threat for older people in all countries is now overwhelmingly from non-communicable diseases. Heart disease and stroke are the biggest killers, and visual impairment and dementia the biggest causes of disability. In low-income countries, the incidence of these diseases among older people is two to three times greater than in high-income countries. This burden is carried not just by older people, but by their families and by society as a whole.

Many low- and middle-income countries have neither the infrastructure nor the resources to deal with existing needs, let alone to cope with the much greater demands expected in the future. The good news is that there are many practical and affordable solutions that governments can put in place to help their older citizens to lead healthy and active lives. In addition, countries that invest in healthy ageing can expect a significant social and economic return for the whole community.

On this World Health Day, I urge governments, civil society and the private sector to commit attention and resources to ensuring that people everywhere have the chance to grow older in good health.

#### **THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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#### **MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR MINE AWARENESS AND ASSISTANCE IN MINE ACTION 4 April 2012**

United Nations mine action programmes make an invaluable contribution to post-conflict recovery, humanitarian relief efforts, peace operations and development initiatives. They prevent landmines and other explosive ordnance from causing further indiscriminate harm long after conflicts have ended, and help to transform danger zones into productive land. Mine action sets communities on course toward lasting stability.

In Libya, mine action personnel have responded to the threat posed by landmines, cluster munitions, and the lack of secure ammunition storage areas. Thousands of explosive remnants of war have been secured or cleared from schools, roads or residential areas, and tens of thousands of people have received risk education.

Over the past year, mine action operators have also been assisting in stockpile management in Albania, Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The recent disaster in Congo Brazzaville, where an arms depot exploded, is a tragic reminder of the need for such management.

On this year's International Day for Mine Awareness, we are "lending our legs" in a campaign to show support and compassion for survivors. Working closely with national authorities and non-governmental organizations, the United Nations is implementing mine risk education and victim assistance in more than 40 countries, teaching communities how to live safely in contaminated areas, and assisting survivors with disabilities to obtain access to the full range of services and rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I thank all who contribute to international mine action. I also commend the 159 States that have agreed to be bound by the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention, those that have joined the Convention on Cluster Munitions and Protocol V on explosive remnants of war and the 110 that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

On this International Day, I call for universal adherence to these important treaties and for increased support for mine awareness and mine action. Landmines and explosive remnants of war hamper development and endanger lives. Let's eliminate them together for a safe sustainable world.

## **RELIGIOUS NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD**

**21 December 2011**

### **Report shows Christianity shifting to Africa**

Washington, D.C. (ENInews)--With 2.18 billion adherents, Christianity has become a truly global religion over the past century as rapid growth in developing nations offset declines in Christianity's traditional strongholds, according to a report released on 19 December. Billed as the most comprehensive and reliable study to date, the Washington, D.C.-based Pew Research Center's "Global Christianity" reports on self-identified Christian populations based on more than 2,400 sources of information, especially census and survey data, Religion News Service reports.

### **Hong Kong churches promote economic justice at Christmas**

Hong Kong (ENInews)--The Hong Kong Catholic Church has reminded its members to be aware of the need for economic justice during the Christmas season and two other church groups are participating in the "Occupy" anti-corporate movement. The Diocesan Catholic Commission for Labor Affairs (CCLA) has organized a Christmas campaign to boycott shopping centers to promote the cause and highlight the need to alleviate the wealth gap in society.

**1 December 2011**

### **Religious leaders encourage deeper engagement on AIDS**

Toronto (ENInews)--Leaders from five world religions gathered in Toronto just ahead of World AIDS Day on 1 December to encourage their peers to deepen their engagement and action on HIV-AIDS "by addressing the difficult issues raised by the pandemic, in dialogue with people living with HIV." At the same time, the faith leaders expressed "dismay at the recent drop in funding for the AIDS response just as recent statistics show the effectiveness of prevention and treatment approaches."

### **Protestants and Catholics in Berlin assist HIV/AIDS patients**

Berlin (ENInews)--For Christians diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, fear of a lack of acceptance from the church community can be a very real concern. But for HIV positive Christians in Berlin, projects run by both Catholics and Protestants are providing a network of community support in which they know they will not be judged. Pastor Dorothea Strauss set up Church HIV Positive, an ecumenical initiative that provides pastoral care for those with HIV and AIDS and their families, in 1993. The experience of a friend and fellow pastor dying from AIDS-related illness was part of the motivation for the project.

### **Russian government turns to church for help fighting AIDS epidemic**

Moscow (ENInews)--As the number of people suffering from HIV/AIDS continues to grow in Russia, government agencies are turning to the Russian Orthodox Church for help in stemming the epidemic, ministering to its victims, and fighting their stigmatization by society. In the latest example of such cooperation, officials in the Ryazan region, about 120 miles southeast of Moscow, announced on 30 November that they have requested the local diocese's assistance in providing an approach to the crisis that is beyond the state's capacity.

**2 December 2011**

### **In Japan, singles hope for matchmaking before "Tomb of Christ"**

Tokyo (ENInews)--An institute at a Catholic-run university and college and a local revitalization group are organizing a tour on 4 December that asks singles to "swear your love in front of the Tomb of Christ" in the northern village of Shingo. "There are a variety of arguments about the Tomb of Christ in Shingo, but our institute sees it as a legend ... and a precious tourism resource in a village that is aging and being depopulated," Kazutsura Hareyama, office manager of the Research Institute of Hachinohe University and Hachinohe Junior College, told ENInews in an e-mail interview.

### **Court upholds Berlin school's ban on Muslim prayer**

Berlin (ENInews)--A decision by the German Federal Administrative Court allowing a Berlin school to ban Muslim students from praying on their lunch break is being viewed as a ruling on public religious expression and has been closely watched by members of different faiths. Yunus Mitschele, an 18 year-old student at Diesterweg Gymnasium, brought his case to the court in Leipzig, but the ruling on 30 November prioritized the peaceful running of the school over students' right to pray. The school had argued that differing views on the interpretation of the Quran had led to conflict and bullying among its students. [493 words, ENI-11-0663]

### **Action group provides new life to HIV-infected in Indonesia**

Medan, Indonesia (ENInews)--An organization called Medan Plus, founded by an independent pastor, the Rev. Eban Totonta Kaban, has worked to decrease the stigma that still accompanies a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS in Indonesia. Since its founding in 2003, Medan Plus has reached out to more than 2,100 HIV-infected people in a country that is seeing an increase in cases of the deadly virus, according to UNAIDS, a United Nations agency. Indonesia's HIV tally is projected to climb to about 500,000 in 2014 from 330,000 in 2009, without increased prevention, according to UNAIDS.

**28 December 2011**

**UK churches strive for an environmentally "green" Christmas**

(London)--As the concept of "going green" continues to gain traction among consumers and businesses, churches in the United Kingdom are using the Christmas season to highlight their role in improving the environment. In early December, St. Luke's, a Catholic church in the London suburb of Pinner, switched on its solar panels, while the Anglican dioceses of Gloucester, Exeter, Bath, and Wells launched an ambitious project to provide "green" electricity for most of their 300 churches, 200 schools, and other institutions. A number of other green initiatives were implemented by churches this Christmas season.

**After carnage in Nigeria, spiritual leaders seek unity, fearing religious war**

Abuja, Nigeria (ENInews)--After Muslim militants bombed a Nigerian church over the Christmas weekend, northern Nigerian Christians say they will fight to defend themselves against a possible religious war in Africa's most populous country.

On Christmas Day, a suicide bomber tried to force his way into St Theresa's Roman Catholic Church in Madella, on the edge of the capital, Abuja. He was stopped by police and detonated a bomb as parishioners poured out of the church after Christmas Mass. Thirty-nine people died and hundreds were injured.

In the U.S. the National Council of Churches (NCC) condemned the bombing as "intrinsically evil." Incoming president Kathryn Mary Lohre added that "we condemn any violent act so contrary to the common understanding of God's love as it is expressed among Christians, Muslims and persons of all the major faith traditions."

**29 December 2011**

**Dissident's book reveals "secret history" of Christianity in China**

(ENInews)--Though Western companies, from American automakers to European luxury firms, have recently gained a foothold in China, Western religion has played a role there for much longer than General Motors or Hermes. Nonetheless, Christianity's presence in China has been "hidden from the West for many years," says Wenguang Huang in the introduction to his translation of "God is Red: The Secret Story of How Christianity Survived and Flourished in Communist China" (Harper One, September 2011) by Liao Yiwu, a dissident writer whose previous book landed him in jail.

**Clergy brawl erupts at Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity**

Bethlehem, West Bank (ENInews)--A brawl erupted on 28 December between Greek Orthodox and Armenian clergy in Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity, traditional birthplace of Jesus Christ, also known as the Prince of Peace.

According to numerous media reports and online videos, the priests were participating in an annual cleaning ritual at one of Christianity's holiest churches when accusations flew that they were trading on each other's turf in a building that is apportioned among the Greek, Armenian and Roman Catholic denominations.

**9 January 2012**

**Pope Benedict's latest group of cardinals: more Roman, less 'catholic'**

(ENInews)--Pope Benedict XVI's announcement on 6 January of 22 new cardinals shows that he is continuing a pattern of stacking the College of Cardinals with Europeans (mainly Italians) and with leaders of the Roman curia, the papal bureaucracy whose officials are often considered more conservative than prelates in dioceses around the world. This trend goes against the push by Benedict's predecessors, notably the late John Paul II, to "internationalize" the College of Cardinals and make it more representative of the global church, Religion News Service reports.

**Christian roots of African movement recalled during anniversary**

(ENInews)--The Christian roots of the African National Congress (ANC) were cited during weekend celebrations in South Africa marking the centennial of Africa's best known liberation and political movement. More than a dozen African heads of state and representatives from around the world attended to honor the movement that eventually overcame the apartheid system of racial segregation. On 8 January, hundreds packed into Waaihoek Wesleyan Church in Bloemfontein, where the ANC began. The movement was founded by Christian pastors, mission-educated journalists, lawyers and social workers on 8 January 1912.

**In Israel, Christian population has lowest growth rate, report says**

Jerusalem (ENInews)--Christians have the lowest growth rate among the Israeli population, according to an Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics report released on 6 January. According to the report, the Christian growth rate of 0.9 percent compares to the Jewish rate of 1.7 percent and the 2.7 percent growth rate among Muslims. Christian Arabs have a growth rate of one percent while the rate among non-Arab Christians is 0.7 percent. About 154,000 Christians live in Israel, constituting 2 percent of the population, according to the bureau.

**6 January 2012**

**Church of Norway to improve inclusion of native Sami people**

Oslo, Norway (ENInews)--The (Lutheran) Church of Norway in the next five years will be implementing a plan to enhance the role of the indigenous Sami people in church life. "We want Sami church life to be an equal and natural part of the church, and the Church of Norway to be a multicultural fellowship," said Jens-Petter Johnsen, director general of the Church of Norway National Council. He spoke with the Church of Norway Information Service. The Sami are an indigenous people in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland, and on the Kola Peninsula in Russia.

**Report names 50 worst countries for Christian persecution**

(ENInews)--The international Christian organization Open Doors released its annual World Watch List this week, naming the 50 countries where it says Christians face the worst persecution. For the first time in the 20

years that the list has been compiled, the situation for Christians did not improve in any country, Open Doors said. For the tenth year running, North Korea topped the list. Open Doors reported that Christianity has been driven so far underground in North Korea that parents wait until their children are old enough to understand the dangers of practicing their faith before teaching them about it. The organization also estimated that between 50,000 and 70,000 Christians are currently interned in labor camps.

### **Egyptian Christian leaders consider dialogue with Islamic groups**

(ENInews)--Christian leaders in Egypt are meeting to discuss opening a dialogue with Islamic groups as a way of addressing sectarian violence. Ahead of the Eastern Christmas celebrated on 7 January, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church leader, met on 5 January with Anglican Church leaders, according to news reports, to discuss how they could begin "constructive dialogue" with the Islamists who have won a majority in Parliament. The meeting came as the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and the Nour Party secured a clear win in the elections that began on 28 November.

**3 January 2012**

### **Holy Land pilgrimage can lead to inter-religious understanding**

Jerusalem (ENInews)--Pilgrims to the Holy Land who are searching for the roots of Christianity can also gain a surprisingly rich understanding of other religions, according to a prominent Franciscan clergyman. "A pilgrim does not come to the Holy Land to understand politics or to understand the geography. First and foremost he is a religious pilgrim," said Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa, whose formal title is Custodian of the Holy Land and who is the head of all Franciscans in the region. "But of course when they come here as Christians they are exposed to the understanding and the presence of other Christians ... and understand what ecumenical dialogue is and why it is so important." He spoke at a two-day interfaith conference on pilgrimage held from 28 to 29 December in Jerusalem.

### **In Kenya camp, Christian agency to review safety after killing**

Nairobi, Kenya (ENInews)--After the killing of a volunteer refugee peace and security worker and the wounding of another, a Christian relief agency which is responsible for housing and security at the Dadaab refugee complex in northern Kenya said safety measures were being reviewed. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) made the announcement after Ahmed Mahmoud Mohammed, chairperson of community peace and security teams (CPST) for the Hagadera camp, was shot dead near his house on 29 December. The other volunteer was shot and wounded on 1 January at the IFO camp.

### **Vatican launches Catholic home for U.S. Episcopalians**

(ENInews)--American Episcopalians upset with their denomination's acceptance of gay and female clergy can now convert to the Roman Catholic Church while keeping many cherished traditions in a special new U.S. diocese that was established on 1 January by Pope Benedict XVI. The Houston, Texas-based diocese, called the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, will allow a special Anglican-style Catholic Mass that can include sections from the Book of Common Prayer and other Anglican liturgies, Religion News Service reports.

**16 January 2012**



### **In south India, churches aid victims of devastating cyclone**

Bangalore, India, 16 January (ENInews)--Following the devastating cyclone that wreaked havoc in India's southern Tamil Nadu state at yearend, church charities are getting aid to affected families. "People are still struggling without electricity, [with] roofless houses and roads blocked by fallen trees," said Florina Benoit, chief zonal officer of Churches Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA). Benoit was speaking to ENInews on 16 January from Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, after a weekend visit to the worst-hit remote villages around Cuddalore.

### **Paul Simon's long meandering spiritual journey**

(ENInews)--In a career that has spanned half a century, American musician Paul Simon says there's always been a spiritual dimension to his work. But the overt religious references in his most recent album, "So Beautiful or So What," surprised even him. There are songs about God, angels, creation, pilgrimage, prayer and the afterlife, reports Religion News Service. Simon says the religious themes were not intentional -- he does not describe himself as religious. But in an interview with the U.S. Public Broadcasting Service program "Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly," he said the spiritual realm fascinates him.

**27 January 2012**

### **Nigerian conflict mixes religion, poverty and politics**

(ENInews)--Christian and Muslim leaders worldwide are being urged to act together to address the violence being unleashed in northern Nigeria that has been blamed on Boko Haram, a self-proclaimed Islamist group. "It is a cause of deep concern internationally, and the great faith traditions can be part of the solution," said Archbishop Michael Kehinde Stephen of the Methodist Church of Nigeria in an interview posted by the Geneva-based World Council of Churches (WCC). In recent months, Boko Haram has increased attacks on in the north of the country, raising fears of a broader religious war in Africa's most populous nation.

### **Jewish group criticizes German Media Prize candidate**

Berlin (ENInews)--Jewish organization B'nai B'rith International on 27 January called for the committee of the prestigious German Media Prize to reconsider its recognition of Mitri Raheb, an Evangelical Lutheran pastor in Bethlehem. Raheb is due to be presented with the prize on 24 February in recognition of his creation of schools, health centers and meeting places. But B'nai B'rith, a humanitarian, human rights and advocacy organization, said Raheb's views "echo the widely eschewed replacement theology maintaining that Christians have superseded Jews in the Divine plan and have inherited God's promises to Jews."

### **Russia and Italy exchange religious art**

Moscow (ENInews)--The Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches are sometimes at odds on issues ranging from church leadership to theology, but an exchange between Moscow and Florence shows that they have common ground in art. The exhibits, called "In Christ," are on display at Moscow's State Tretyakov

Gallery and at Florence's Baptistery, the historic octagonal building next to the Duomo cathedral, constructed to host baptisms. Two masterpieces by the early Renaissance artist Giotto, the Madonna and Child and ten-panel St. Reparata Polyptych, which have never been to Russia before, came to Moscow. In turn, three icons from the Tretyakov, including one connected to Andrei Rublev, Russia's most famous iconographer, went to Italy.

### **As New Orleans still recovers, prayer teams cover one block at a time**

New Orleans (ENInews)--Millie Campbell, 76 years old, is one of the people praying for New Orleans, a city still recovering from the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster and experiencing a murderous crime wave. A couple of times per week, Campbell and her companion Betty Minor, 69, drive slowly around assigned neighborhoods, praying for their city, reports the New Orleans Times-Picayune via Religion News Service. Half a dozen others also do the prayer drives. They pray for an end to the scourge of murders sapping the city -- 199 last year, and 17 or so on the streets Campbell drove last week. In August, 2005, Hurricane Katrina flooded 80 percent of the city and resulted in about 1,400 deaths.

**20 January 2012**

### **In Fiji, Methodists frustrated over repressive decree**

Suva, Fiji (ENInews)--Methodist clergy in Fiji are frustrated that the removal of a repressive law requiring permits for religious meetings has been replaced by a more permanent decree by the country's interim military regime. Leaders of Fiji's 2,000 Methodist congregations were thrilled when Prime Minister Commodore Voreqe 'Frank' Bainimarama announced on New Year's Day that the Public Emergency Regulations (PER), which in 2009 granted the police and military extensive powers, would be lifted by 7 January. Clergy believed meeting permits would no longer be required. But they were disappointed when a new and permanent law -- a revised Public Order Act -- subsequently replicated the PER, requiring churches to apply for permits at community police posts.

### **Churches in Sudan encounter more hostility after South's independence**

(ENInews)--Christians and churches in Sudan are facing increased restrictions and hostility, since the secession of the southern part of the country six months ago, according to some church leaders. The leaders are highlighting arrests and abduction of Christians and threats directed at clergy, while warning of more challenges when the country implements Sharia (Islamic law). "Restrictions in Sudan are not new, but we are worried things are getting harder since the secession of the south. With Sharia law we expect things to get even harder," the Rev. Mark Akec Cien, the Sudan Council of Churches, deputy general secretary of the told ENInews on 20 January in a telephone interview.

### **Health, human rights experts call for "safe spaces" in churches**

Geneva (ENInews)--Experts in health and human rights from around the world gathered in Geneva 16-18 January to ponder a question: How can churches create "safe spaces" where people can learn and discuss sensitive issues without fear of judgment? "We need to have open and inclusive dialogue on mental and physical health issues, so that we can create safe spaces, where communities can express their concerns in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust," said Dr. Elizabeth Vadakekara, of the Medical Mission Sisters in London, based in India.

### **U.S. church council names Chapman as interim general secretary**

New York (ENInews)--Clare J. Chapman, deputy general secretary and general counsel of the National Council of Churches (NCC), on 20 January was named interim general secretary by the council's governing board. Chapman, who had been carrying out the duties of general secretary since the 31 December 2011 departure of Michael Kinnamon, will serve as interim until the board decides on the next steps for filling the office permanently.

### **Conservative Presbyterians in U.S. launch new denomination**

(ENInews)--Conservative U.S. Presbyterians launched a new denomination on 19 January, saying that the Presbyterian Church (USA) is too consumed by internal conflicts and bureaucracy to nurture healthy congregations. "This 'new Reformed body' is intended to foster a new way of being the church, just as traditional, mainline denominations rose to serve in their day," wrote leaders of the new Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO), Religion News Service reports.

**13 March 2012**

### **U.S. Christians hope for an 'ecumenical spring'**

(ENInews)--For years, advocates for greater unity among Christian churches have wrung their hands amid talk of an "ecumenical winter." But now, 10 years after leaders took the first steps toward forming the broad-based group Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT), some have hopes that U.S. churches may be entering a new season of closer relations. At a recent CCT meeting in Memphis, Tennessee, 85 Christians -- Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox, white and nonwhite -- made pilgrimages to historic sites of the civil rights movement, Religion News Service reports. They also made plans to pursue anti-poverty projects with houses of worship unlike their own. "I would like to think of it as an ecumenical spring and that we do not yet know what will break forth," said the Rev. Stephen J. Sidorak Jr., ecumenical staff officer of the United Methodist Church. "I think that there's the potential for the ecumenical movement to be more alive than it's ever been because it will be more inclusive."

### **Australian Aboriginal archdeacon supports reconciliation**

(ENInews)--The Anglican Church in Australia's first female indigenous archdeacon, Karen Kime, said she sees her role as improving communication with the nation's aboriginal communities and supporting reconciliation with the church and the wider society. "All clergy have a responsibility to indigenous people," Kime said in an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corp. (ABC). "It's about teaching our people that there's a role for them to play in the church ... and helping other people to see that." Canberra-Goulburn Bishop Stuart Robinson, who conducted Kime's ordination service on 25 February, told the Daily Advertiser that this sends a strong signal that indigenous ministry is now on the church's agenda.

**19 March 2012**

### **Norway's Lutheran state church headed toward dis-establishment**

Oslo (ENInews)--Major steps toward the dis-establishment of Norway's state church, the (Lutheran) Church of Norway, were passed by the government on 16 March in its weekly session with King Harald V. Expected to be adopted by the Parliament (Storting) in May or June this year, the proposals will make changes in the country's constitution as well as in other church legislation, the Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs announced. "I hope we have now prepared a good basis for the Church of Norway to be an open and inclusive national church, also in a multicultural and multi-religious setting," Minister Rigmor Aasrud (Labour Party), said in a news release.

### **Egyptian Christians mourn death of Coptic Pope Shenouda III**

(ENInews)--Thousands of Egyptians are mourning the death of Pope Shenouda III, the longtime leader of the Coptic Orthodox Church, who died 17 March at the age of 88. His funeral will be on 21 March, at St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo, where his body has been sitting in state on a large wooden throne. Tributes have come in from around the world, with Pope Benedict XVI offering prayers and U.S. President Barack Obama praising Pope Shenouda as an "advocate for tolerance and religious dialogue."



Pope Shenouda III Lies in State

### **Rio+20 summit must include ethical principles, say experts**

Geneva (ENInews)--The current draft text for the forthcoming U.N. Rio+20 summit on sustainable development is weak and needs to be strengthened to include ethical principles that highlight stronger commitments on equity, accountability, and universal human rights norms, experts said. "The conference should lift up human rights mechanisms as major instruments to hold governments and the private sector accountable," Guillermo Kerber, program executive with the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs at the World Council of Churches (WCC), told a forum in Geneva on 16 March.

### **3 February 2012**

### **Church of South India diocese to challenge ruling on properties**

(ENInews)--A diocese of the Church of South India (CSI) is preparing an appeal against a court order that has virtually stripped it of more than half its churches and institutions, inherited from the Basel Mission church. "We are preparing a strong appeal to get this order quashed. We are hopeful that our appeal will be

upheld by the (federal) Supreme Court," Bishop J.S. Sadananda of CSI's Karnataka Southern Diocese told ENInews 3 February in a telephone interview.

### **Argentine Methodists send hopes for peace to British counterparts**

(ENInews)--Amid renewed tensions over the Falkland Islands, the Argentinean Methodist Church has sent a letter to the Methodist Church of Great Britain, expressing its desire for their governments to resolve their issues peacefully. "A war is always a human failure in the light of God's project that we share his creation and that we all enjoy the resources that He has given us," wrote Bishop Frank de Nully Brown, according to the Latin America and Caribbean Communication Agency. "The issue of the Malvinas Islands is for the Argentinean people and our church, an extremely sensitive and delicate one, given the claim that our country has made for the sovereignty of the islands for many years," the letter said.

### **Archbishop of Greece warns of social upheaval**

(ENInews)--Archbishop Hieronymos II of Athens and All Greece on 2 February warned the Greek government of a possible social upheaval if more austerity measures are ushered in by international financial institutions overseeing the sovereign debt crisis. "Our hearts are shattered and our minds are blurred with all that is taking place," he said in a letter sent to interim Greek Prime Minister Lucas Papademos, extracts of which were published in Greek on the Greek Orthodox Church's official site ([www.ecclesia.gr](http://www.ecclesia.gr)). "The phenomenon of the homeless and the famished, a reminder of WWII occupation conditions, is taking nightmare dimensions," wrote Hieronymos.

### **Vatican to host global summit on sexual abuse**

Vatican City (ENInews)--Ten years after the clergy sexual abuse scandal erupted in the United States, Catholic bishops from all over the world will meet next week at a Vatican summit aimed at preventing abuse and protecting children. The conference, "Towards Healing and Renewal," will be held on 6-9 February and is organized by the Jesuit-run Gregorian University in Rome, Religion News Service reports. The Vatican's top spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, told reporters on 3 February that the summit enjoys the "full support and participation" of the Vatican's highest offices, but Pope Benedict XVI is not expected to attend.

## **6 February 2012**

### **French candidate wants to put church-state separation into constitution**

Paris (ENInews)--The front-runner in the race for the French presidency wants the separation of church and state to be put into the constitution, prompting religious and legal experts to question how this might alter the way France functions as a state that is already secular by law. The proposal is part of the platform unveiled by Socialist Party candidate François Hollande, who leads President Nicolas Sarkozy and other candidates in public opinion polls ahead of the two-stage presidential election scheduled for April and May.

### **Egypt's humanitarian problems need addressing, say Christian representatives**

New York (ENInews)--Egyptian Christian humanitarian leaders say while politics and religion are garnering the most attention in their country right now, Egypt's serious humanitarian problems will soon have to be

addressed. As one example, rising food and fuel prices and a drop in foreign currency reserves are making it harder to Egyptians to put food on the table, causing the level of malnutrition to rise in the country. "This is going to be a serious situation," said the Rev. Andrea Zaki Stephanous, general director of the Cairo-based Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services, a Christian development organization that serves Egyptians regardless of religion and which promotes religious pluralism within Egypt.

## **2 February 2012**

### **African inter-faith group calls for end to Senegal protests**

(ENInews)--With less than a month to go until elections on 26 February, faith leaders in Senegal are uniting to urge peace after President Abdoulaye Wade's attempt to gain re-election sparked violent protests across the country. The protests follow a 30 January ruling by the Constitutional Council, the country's top legal body, that Wade, 85, could seek a third term in office.

### **Catholic bishops in India concerned about growing economic divide**

Bangalore, India (ENInews)--Cardinal Oswald Gracias, president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, told the bishops' biennial assembly on 1 February that the widening of the gap between rich and poor is "a matter of serious concern for the church." "We have two sets of Indians. One section of the people is racing ahead while the majority is limping," Gracias said. Meeting in Bangalore, the assembly runs from 1-8 February and is being attended by 170 bishops.

### **Ecumenical group affirms relationship with Rome**

Rome (ENInews)--One of the world's most recent ecumenical entities, the Global Christian Forum (GCF), met in late January with Vatican officials, affirming a desire to continue to journey together in the search for Christian unity. In his first GCF committee meeting since becoming secretary of the organization on 1 January, the Rev. Larry Miller said the invitation to meet in Rome by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and subsequent conversations indicated "a consolidation of the shared commitment to build bridges between all churches."

## **22 February 2012**

### **On Ash Wednesday, Episcopalians take it to the streets**

(ENInews)--Five years ago, the Rev. Teresa K.M. Danieley had an epiphany of sorts. If people can grab breakfast on the go or pay a bill from their cell phone, she thought, why shouldn't they be able to get their ashes in a flash? That's why, on Ash Wednesday 2007, Danieley planted herself in full priestly regalia at a busy intersection in St. Louis, smudging the sign of the cross on the foreheads of bicyclists, drivers and bus passengers, reports Religion News Service.

### **Fears grow Syrian conflict may slide into sectarian civil war**

Geneva (ENInews)--The increase of sectarian violence among warring sides in the Syrian conflict has heightened fears the brutal 11-month crackdown by the Assad regime on pro-democracy forces could see the country slide into an all-out civil war fanned by religious animosity. "It is vital that all sides refrain from

targeting people because of their ethnic or religious identity, and that every effort is made to avoid further civilian casualties," said Rupert Colville, spokesman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

### **Catholic Priest resigns over new Mass translation**

(ENInews)--A pastor in Belleville, Illinois, has become the first Catholic priest to resign over the new translation of the Mass, which was introduced throughout most of the English-speaking world last November. Bishop Edward Braxton wrote in a letter to parishioners last week: "Father William J. Rowe, 72, has resigned from his position as Pastor of St. Mary Parish in Mount Carmel...because, as he has told me forthrightly on several occasions, he simply could not and would not pray the prayers of the Mass as they are translated in the new Roman Missal."

**24 February 2012**

### **In Cameroon, faith leaders fear expansion of extremism from Nigeria**

Yaounde, Cameroon (ENInews)--The campaign of violence in Nigeria carried out by the extremist Islamist sect Boko Haram has raised fears of religious extremism gaining a foothold in Cameroon, its neighbor to the east. Secular and religious authorities have warned against following a group that has been responsible for an estimated 450 killings in 2011 and has stated it wants to replace Nigeria's secular government with Sharia, or Muslim, law to address poverty and injustice. In the latest incident, four policemen were shot to death on 23 February in the northern Nigerian towns of Kano and Minna, where the people are now "gripped by fear," according to the Times of Nigeria.

### **Church-related group outlines key issues facing digital media platforms**

(ENInews)--The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), a church-related organization working for communication rights, has published a document that outlines ethical guidelines for digital media platforms, according to a news release. "The Internet is a vital part of today's communications scene. But it is under threat from governments intent on stifling freedom of expression and from global corporations intent on levying high charges for access," notes the release.

### **Survey: more Israeli Jews express belief in God**

Jerusalem (ENInews)--Almost 80 percent of Israeli Jews say they believe in God according to a recent survey, up from 76 percent in 1999. The survey results reflect a marked move away from the socialist-secular ideals of the Eastern European Jews who were the driving force behind the founding of modern Israel. The survey result "gives an answer to all those who said secular Zionism [support for a Jewish state] had ... made a secular religion. It shows that there is a tendency towards religiosity," said research analyst Ayala Keisser-Sugarmen.

### **Public health is theme of 2012 Fraternity Campaign in Brazil**

Brasilia, Brazil (ENInews)--The Catholic National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) has launched a move to bring attention to the state of public health care in the nation. The objective of the 2012 Fraternity Campaign, which carries the slogan, "That health be spread on earth," was launched on 22 February, Ash Wednesday, according to a news release from the Latin America and Caribbean Communication Agency.

### **Top European official urges Iran to halt execution of Christian pastor**

Geneva (ENInews)--The European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, urged Iran to release a Christian pastor sentenced to death for apostasy amid worrying reports his execution may be imminent. A similar appeal came from the White House on 23 February. Pastor Nadarkhani, a 34 year-old minister of the Church of Iran and leader of a 400-member congregation in the city of Rasht, was initially sentenced to death in November 2010 by a state court for apostasy (abandonment of a religion) and evangelizing Muslims.

**28 February 2012**

### **Filipino church leaders raise concerns on "People Power" anniversary**

(ENInews)--As Philippine president Benigno Aquino on 25 February led celebrations of the 26th anniversary of the "People Power Revolution" against former dictator Ferdinand Marcos, church leaders raised concerns over what they see as threats to religious freedom and human rights. "Church lay leaders, pastors, priests and nuns have been harassed or killed for doing their ministries especially [when] standing with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized," Fr. David Tabo-oy, evangelism and Christian education program national coordinator of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines (ECP), told ENInews.

### **Honduran church demands inquiry into horrific prison fire**

(ENInews)--The Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras (ICHL) is demanding an inquiry into a fire at the central jail in Comayagua that killed 350 prisoners on 14 February. The ICHL, a member of the Geneva-based Lutheran World Federation (LWF), also said it was praying for wisdom on the part of the country's leaders as they decide how to safeguard the rights of prisoners, according to a news release from the LWF's information service, Lutheran World Information.

### **After months of wrangling, occupiers evicted from St. Paul's Cathedral**

London (ENInews)--Police in London on 28 February evicted scores of demonstrators from a makeshift tent city they had erected outside historic St. Paul's Cathedral more than four months ago as part of a global protest against capitalism. After brief skirmishes in the operation that authorities launched before dawn, 20 protesters were arrested but most reacted largely peacefully as they were moved out, Religion News Service reports.

### **Archbishop of Canterbury links human rights to faith**

Geneva (ENInews)--The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, spoke on 28 February of the link that human rights must have with faith and of the responsibilities inherent in Christian unity in a day-long visit to the Ecumenical Center in Geneva. The responsibility of Christians who receive the gift of unity lies in "seeking a life in which no one is without the other," Williams told staff, visitors and governing members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and other organizations based at the center.



**29 February 2012**

**New book explores a Jewish view of the New Testament**

New York (ENInews)--A new edition of the New Testament has done what none other has done before -- explain the core body of Christian writings through the lens of Judaism. "The Jewish Annotated New Testament," published by Oxford University Press, takes at its starting point the fact that the central figures in the New Testament -- Jesus, Mary, the apostle Paul, as well as the gospel writers -- were Jewish and lived in a Jewish cultural milieu.

**New Zealand Christian leaders decry income inequality**

Wellington, New Zealand (ENInews)--Christian leaders in New Zealand are decrying the widening gap between the lowest and highest income earners, in a country that has one of the highest rates of income inequality among developed countries. The Salvation Army said it fears a permanent fracture in New Zealand society if policy makers continue along the path of concentrating the nation's wealth and influence in the hands of a privileged few.

**In Japan, Shinto followers prepare to mark disaster anniversary**

Washington, D.C. (ENInews)--Shinto priests throughout Japan are preparing to hold commemoration ceremonies on 11 March to mark the one-year anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami that devastated the northeastern coast, attendees were told at a program at Georgetown University. An estimated 20,000 people were killed in the disaster. The Association of Shinto Shrines has issued a suggested prayer to be read during the ceremonies. That prayer, according to the Rev. Masafumi Nakanishi, a Shinto priest, describes the calamity, pleads that there be no more disasters and asks that people live peacefully.

**Forum on HIV/AIDS and hunger cites importance of faith groups**

Geneva (ENInews)--Senior U.N. officials, business leaders, and development experts on 29 February praised faith groups' support of global efforts to fight HIV/AIDS and hunger but also stressed their continued support was vital in confronting daunting challenges ahead. During the forum, which was held at the Geneva headquarters of the World Health Organization and included the participation of Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, participants also praised the strong human rights-based approach taken by faith groups.

**2 March 2012**

**Quake-damaged cathedral in Christchurch, New Zealand to be demolished**

(ENInews)--The earthquake-damaged Anglican Cathedral in Christchurch, New Zealand is beyond repair and will be demolished and replaced by a new cathedral with a different design, said Bishop Victoria Matthews on 2 March. The 131-year-old landmark ChristChurch Cathedral was severely damaged in last year's 22 February earthquake, which killed 185 people. The building sustained further damage from several aftershocks and had been cordoned off.

### **Show restored Nuremberg trial film in schools, says British rabbi**

(ENInews)--A historic film account of the post-World War II Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals will shortly go into general release in Britain and should be shown in secondary schools, said a prominent Jewish leader. "Although we cannot live in the past, it is important not to forget it," Rabbi Jonathan Romain, spokesman for the Movement for Reform Judaism in the U.K., told ENInews. The 90-minute film, titled "Nuremberg: Its Lesson for Today," was pieced together from an earlier account made by the U.S. Marine Corps in 1948 for the then-U.S. Department of War.

### **Faith leader urges Lenten fast to protest mistreatment of tomato harvesters**

Washington (ENInews)--The tomato retailer Publix insists on underpaying workers and forcing them to work in conditions "most of us do not and would not tolerate," said Rev. Michael Livingston, director of the National Council of Churches Poverty Initiative. Livingston, a former president of the National Council of Churches (NCC), called on churches to express their disapproval of Publix's policies by joining farm workers and the Presbyterian Hunger Program in a public fast on 5 March to urge the company to change its ways, according to an NCC news release.

### **UN experts urge Pakistan to improve security for religious minorities**

Geneva (ENInews)--Three independent United Nations human rights experts urged the government of Pakistan on 2 March "to respond decisively" to end sectarian violence and improve security for religious minorities, following targeted killings of Shia Muslims in February. "These targeted killings once more display the appalling degree of religious hatred in a country where there seems to be a failure to protect the security of religious minorities," said Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, in a statement.

**5 March 2012**

### **Christians, activists remember slain Pakistani minister**

(ENInews)--Christians and human rights activists paid tribute on the 3-4 March weekend to Shahbaz Bhatti, former minister for religious minority affairs in Pakistan's federal cabinet, who was assassinated a year ago. Churches across Pakistan held special prayers in remembrance of Bhatti who was ambushed in his car and sprayed with bullets on 2 March in Islamabad, and secular groups such as Citizens for Democracy organized candlelight vigils and public observances in several cities. The 42-year old federal minister, who was Catholic, became a target for Islamic fundamentalists after he criticized Pakistan's blasphemy law, which carries harsh penalties for insulting Islam or the Prophet Muhammad.

### **Congo explosion kills 200, destroys church**

(ENInews)--A series of ammunition explosions in the city of Brazzaville, capital of the Republic of Congo, on 4 March killed more than 200 people and destroyed a Roman Catholic Church. The explosions originating from the national arms depot tore through a densely populated neighborhood in the outskirts of the city, flattening

houses, bringing down roofs and shattering windows. More than 1,500 people were injured. Government officials said the explosion was caused by a fault in an electrical system.

### **Mormons warned against baptizing Holocaust victims, celebrities**

Salt Lake City, Utah (ENInews)--Anne Frank, Simon Wiesenthal's parents, Gandhi, Daniel Pearl, Elvis. Mormon leaders are fed up. On 2 March, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (LDS) governing First Presidency issued an unequivocal mandate to its members: Do not submit names of Jewish Holocaust victims or celebrities for proxy baptism. Doing so could cost Mormons access to their church's genealogical data or even their good standing in the faith, reports Religion News Service via the Salt Lake Tribune. "Without exception, church members must not submit for proxy temple ordinances any names from unauthorized groups, such as celebrities and Jewish Holocaust victims," LDS President Thomas S. Monson and his counselors wrote in a letter to all Mormon bishops.

**6 March 2012**

### **Latin American theologian Milton Schwantes dies at 65**

Brasilia, Brazil (ENInews)--Prominent Brazilian biblical scholar and author Milton Schwantes died on 1 March after a long illness. He was 65. A pastor in the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil, and a professor of the Old Testament at the Superior School of Theology (EST) in São Leopoldo in the 1970s and early 1980s, Schwantes' ecumenical witness influenced a generation of Brazilian and Latin American scholars, according to a report by the Latin America and Caribbean Communication Agency (ALC).

### **Christian Aid to join rapid disaster-response network in United Kingdom**

London (ENInews)--Christian Aid, a London-based organization that works to end poverty in nearly 50 countries, will be part of a new rapid-response network in the United Kingdom. The group of U.K.-based businesses and charities will respond to major international crises such as famine, floods, and earthquakes, according to a Christian Aid news release. The network, called the Rapid Response Facility (RRF), will mobilize life-saving support in the critical 72 hours following a humanitarian disaster by allowing quick access to funding.

### **Don't lose sight of Middle East peace, U.S. religious leaders say**

New York (ENInews)--With world attention focused on tensions between Iran and Israel, a coalition of Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders reminded U.S. presidential candidates not to lose sight of the need for a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. Citing the "core teachings of our traditions," the leaders affirmed on 1 March "with urgency that Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace is more vital than ever." The statement from the National Inter-religious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East, an advocacy group, came as U.S. President Barack Obama met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over ways to deal with Iran's nuclear capability. The statement was distributed more widely by the National Council of Churches (USA) on 5 March.

### **Italy considers taxing some church properties**

Rome (ENInews)--Strapped for cash as it seeks to avoid falling victim to the European debt crisis, Italy's parliament is debating a controversial measure that will force church-owned properties to pay property taxes. Prime Minister Mario Monti is under pressure to increase tax revenue, reduce government spending, and jump start growth. The proposed measure would tax church-owned properties that are used for a profit-making venture, such as a hotel, restaurant or store.

**7 March 2012**

### **Head of Episcopal School in U.S. killed in murder-suicide**

(ENInews)--A Spanish teacher who had been fired earlier in the day on 6 March shot and killed Dale D. Regan, the head of Episcopal School in Jacksonville, Florida, on the school's campus and then turned the gun on himself. No students were injured at the grades 6-12 (ages 11-18) school, Episcopal News Service reports. Police said Shane Schumerth, 28, carrying an AK-47 rifle in a guitar case, went to the administrative office and shot Regan several times before killing himself, according to a report from News4 television station.

### **Panama churches seek end to violence in mining dispute**

Panama City, Panama (ENInews)--Church leaders in Panama are calling for cooler heads to prevail after new violence erupted during protests over government-approved copper mining and dam projects on land inhabited by Panama's indigenous Ngabe-Bugle people. Negotiations between the two sides have been suspended, so officials can investigate the effects of the Barro Blanco dam project on the Tabasara River, the Latin America and Caribbean Communication Agency (ALC) reported. Talks are set to resume 12 March.

### **Religious minorities subject to cruel treatment, UN expert says**

Geneva (ENInews)--Religious minorities imprisoned for their beliefs have been subject to torture and other cruel treatment in Iran, Afghanistan, China, and Egypt among other countries, according to a report by the U.N. independent expert on torture. "We receive many complaints where the underlying factor is religious persecution," Juan Mendez, the U.N. special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, told reporters in Geneva on 7 March. Mendez said that some complaints also involve people being subjected to cruel forms of punishment for apostasy, or abandonment of a religion.

### **South Sudanese face deadline to leave the north**

(ENInews)--Sudanese Christians who have barely a month to leave the north or risk being treated as foreigners are starting to move, but Christian leaders are concerned that the 8 April deadline set by Islamic-majority Sudan is unrealistic. Sudan in February announced the deadline for the former citizens it had stripped of nationality after South Sudan's January 2011 vote to secede. The ultimatum will affect an estimated 500,000-700,000 people, mainly Christians of southern origin who still live in the north.

### **Pakistan vows to support rights of religious minorities**

(ENInews)--The government of Pakistan vowed to uphold the rights of religious minorities in the Muslim-majority nation at a conference in Islamabad that marked the first anniversary of the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, former federal minister for minority affairs. "We are making all-out efforts to impart the sense of equal

citizenship so far as fundamental rights pertaining to safety, security, honor, life, liberty and properties of the (religious) minorities are concerned," declared Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani on 6 March at the conference. It was organized by the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance, which Bhatti helped found.

## **12 March 2012**

### **A grieving Japan marks disaster anniversary**

Tokyo (ENInews)--A nation paused in grief on 11 March as Japan marked the one-year anniversary of the magnitude-9.0 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident that took 19,000 lives and triggered a continuing reconstruction crisis. As Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda reminded the Japanese people that their predecessors "have repeatedly risen up from crises," faith communities throughout the country remembered the victims through prayer and acts of worship.

### **Church council pays tribute to Japanese nuclear accident survivors**

Geneva (ENInews)--On the first anniversary of the 11 March nuclear accident in Japan, the World Council of Churches (WCC) expressed solidarity with the victims and encouraged governments to take steps to avoid such tragedies in future. The magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami on 11 March last year crippled the Daiichi nuclear power station at Fukushima, exposing people in the area to radiation, killing workers at the plant and forcing more than 100,000 people to abandon their homes, the Geneva-based WCC said in a news release.

### **Germany celebrates 60th annual Christian-Jewish Brotherhood Week**

Berlin (ENInews)--Germany's 60th annual Brotherhood Week, celebrating cooperation between Christians and Jews, opened on 11 March with organizers recalling the event's founding in the years after the Holocaust. In 1952, "the aim was to focus for one week on tolerance, understanding and acceptance of the other without trying to convince him of your religion or values," said Eva Schulz-Jander, one of three presidents of the German Coordinating Council of Societies for Christian-Jewish Cooperation.

### **Nigeria seeing expansion of religious-based attacks**

(ENInews)--Christian leaders in Nigeria were urging calm on 12 March as reprisals attacks continued to rock central Plateau State a day after suicide bombers attacked a Roman Catholic Church in the state's city of Jos. Since the blasts on St. Finbar Church on 11 March in which 11 people were killed, several reprisal attacks followed the blasts, resulting in the deaths of 20 people, according to reports. Since 2009, the militant Islamist group called Boko Haram has concentrated attacks in northern Nigeria, but in the past six months the sect has expanded attacks in 10 other states.

## **29 March 2012**

### **Dalai Lama awarded 2012 Templeton Prize**

New York (ENInews)--The Dalai Lama, already a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, is the recipient of the 2012 Templeton Prize, often called the most prestigious award in religion. The announcement, made on 29 March

by the John Templeton Foundation, based in West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, cited the Tibetan leader's "incomparable global voice for universal ethics, nonviolence, and harmony among world religions."

### **Faith and labor leaders honor farm workers at Washington, D.C. event**

Washington (ENInews)--Members of the faith community joined with leaders of the farm worker movement on 26 March to kick off a series of events leading up to the second national Cesar Chavez Day on 31 March, according to a National Council of Churches (NCC) press release. U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis honored the contributions of laborers by inducting martyred farm workers and faith leaders into the agency's Labor Hall of Honor. Solis dedicated the department's auditorium in honor of Cesar E. Chavez.

### **Orthodox primates stress need for peace and stability in Middle East**

(ENInews)--A Synaxis of the Primates of Eastern Orthodox Churches in the Middle East met in Cyprus on 27 March to discuss the situation of Christians in the region and to agree on common approaches to solidarity and strengthening the support of Christian communities, according to a World Council of Churches press release. The invitation for the gathering was extended by Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus, said the release. He was joined by Patriarch Theodoros II of Alexandria and All Africa, Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch and All the East, and Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

### **RECENT DEATH OF GAY MAN HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAW IN CHILE – UN**

#### **New York, Mar 30, 2012**

The United Nations human rights office today urged the Government of Chile to pass a law against discrimination, including on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, following the recent killing of a young gay man in the capital, Santiago.

"We also urge Chile to enact hate crime legislation that establishes hatred based on various grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity, as an aggravating factor for the purposes of criminal prosecution," said a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Rupert Colville.

Speaking at a news conference in Geneva, Mr. Colville said that the killing of 24-year-old Daniel Zamudio is just the latest reminder of the gravity and prevalence of homophobic violence that exists in all regions.

"The case should be seen in the wide context of hate-motivated violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender person around the world," he said. "This time it happened in Santiago, Chile, but it happens every day on the streets of towns and cities all over the world."

Mr. Zamudio died on Tuesday, 25 days after being viciously assaulted by a group of alleged neo-Nazis in a Santiago park, according to OHCHR.

"He was reportedly tortured for an hour by his attackers, who stubbed cigarettes out on him, carved swastikas into his body, and mutilated him in other ways," said Mr. Colville. "We deplore the violent criminal act that took the life of this young man and urge the Chilean Congress to pass a law against discrimination,

including on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, in full compliance with relevant international human rights standards.”



## **LOCAL ECCLESIASTICAL NEWS**

### **The Archdiocese Hosts the Biannual Meeting of the Oriental Orthodox Churches**



On Tuesday, January 17, members of the Standing Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Churches met at the Archdiocesan offices in Teaneck, NJ for their biannual meeting. His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim welcomed the participant hierarchs and clergy on behalf of Eastern Archdiocese. His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church, chaired the meeting the meeting was also attended by His Eminence Archbishop Mor Titus Eldho, of the Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church and His Eminence Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, the Ecumenical Director of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church, as well as, clergy representing the Coptic and the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches.

The meeting began with a short morning prayer. Discussion topics included plans being made for a youth retreat to be hosted by the Syrian Orthodox Church and possible daylong regional meetings of Oriental Orthodox clergy.

Participants also spoke about their respective Christian education programs and reviewed the Oriental Orthodox Concelebration of the Divine Liturgy held last November at the Coptic Orthodox Church of Archangel Michael and St. Mena in Staten Island, NY. Next year’s concelebration will be hosted by St. Leon Armenian Church of Fair Lawn, NJ.

Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, the Eastern Diocese’s Ecumenical Director, and Archbishop Karim spoke about the participation of Oriental Orthodox churches in the Christian Churches Together organization and

presented updates on the ongoing dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. Turning to developments overseas, participants discussed the situation of Copts in Egypt and Christians in Syria.

The Very Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan gave a presentation on the new website of the Standing Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. [Click here](#) to visit the website for news and information about the organization.

In addition to Archbishop Karim, Very Rev. Fr. Shamoun Asmar, Rev. Fr. Aziz Hadodo and Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun were also present.

The meeting continued over lunch prepared by the Ladies Auxiliary of St. Mark's Cathedral.





**His Holiness is back in Ma'arat Sayyidnaya,**

April 28, 2012

His Holiness is back in Ma'arat Sayyidnaya, Damascus, Syria after the Apostolic Visit to Switzerland. May the Lord God strengthen and safeguard our Holy Father.



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At the invitation of St. Afrem Church in Chicago, His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim visited the area from January the 15th till the 17th. The visit started with a meeting with the priest of St. Afrem, Rev. Fr. Sharbel Bcheiry and the Board of the Church. His Eminence was given a report about the activities of the parish and its future plans. In return, he congratulated them on their achievements during the short history of the parish, which was established 18 months ago. He also gave them his fatherly advice and offered to help them in any way possible.

On the morning of Sunday January the 16th His Eminence attended the Holy Qurbono (Divine Liturgy) at St. John the Baptist Church in Villa Park. The Liturgy was celebrated by the parish priest, Rev. Fr. Yacoub Youhanoun. During the Holy Qurbono His Eminence delivered a sermon on the Feast of Epiphany and its implications on our daily life. He concluded by wishing all a Happy and healthy New Year. Following the Liturgy, His Eminence spent some time with the parishioners in the Church hall.

In the afternoon of Sunday the 16th, His Eminence celebrated The Holy Qurbono with St. Aphrem's parishioners. During the Holy Qurbono, His Eminence ordained seven young men to the rank of Qoruyo (Reader) and elevated a Qoruyo to the rank of Aphodyakno (Sub-Deacon).



MA`ARAT SAYYIDNAYA, SYRIA: On the evening of Tuesday 25 January 2011, His Beatitude Ieronymos-II, the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece and the accompanying delegation were given a warm welcome at the St. Ephrem Syriac Orthodox Monastery in Ma`arat Saydinnya, Damascus. His Holiness Ignatius Zakka-I Iwas the Patriarch of Antioch & All the East and the supreme head of the Universal Syriac Church, along with the Metropolitans and clergy of the holy Church received the delegation at the Monastery hall. Later the delegation was welcomed to the St. Peter & St. Paul's Cathedral where a special meeting was convened in honor of the visiting Archbishop. His Excellency Dr. Mohammed Abdul-Sattar al-Sayyed, Minister of Awqaf (Religious Endowments) who arrived there on a special invitation from His Holiness was accompanied by a galaxy of Muslim scholars and directors of various institutions and colleges in Damascus. The Ambassador of Greece to Damascus, bishops and heads of Christian communities in Damascus, and some of the elders of the Syriac community in Damascus also participated in the meeting. Speaking on the occasion, the Minister H.E. Mohammad Abdul-Sattar al-Sayyed recalled the significant role of Syria in building the human civilization adding to its prosperity.

The Minister highlighted the importance of spreading the culture of dialogue and exchange of ideas and strengthening the concept of religious fraternity and its role in spreading peace, security and stability in the world. Welcoming the delegation His Holiness the Patriarch emphasized the importance of the visit of Archbishop Ieronymos II in activating warm relations between the churches in Syria and Greece. His Holiness requested for further cooperation between the Churches so that wider ecumenical forum can be formed. Archbishop Ieronymos II, in turn, agreed with Patriarch on the significance of enhancing dialogue and sharing ideas between the churches in the two countries in a spirit of amity to serve the interests of their friendly peoples. H.B. also recalled the historical relations between the two Churches and stressed the need for continuous interaction. Metropolitans Their Eminences Mor Osthathos Matta Rohum, Mor Silwanus Petrus,

Mor Titus Yeldo, Mar Philexinos Mattias Nais, Mor Clemis Daniel Kourieh, Mor Dionysius Yuahnon Kawaq, Mar Ivanios Paulos, and Mar Dionysius Behnan Jajawi, and a large number of priests and monks and students of the Faculty of Theology were also present during the meeting.



The Christian Churches Together in the USA held its Annual General Meeting in Memphis, Tennessee February 14-17. His Eminence Archbishop Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim represented our Syriac Orthodox Church who is a founding member of the organization. Archbishop Karim also participated in the meetings of the steering committee of the organization which were held before and during the gathering.

On Wednesday February 15, His Eminence led the morning prayers according to the tradition of our church.

The CCT-USA is an ecumenical organization which brings together leaders and representatives of different Christian churches and organizations to pray and witness together, as well as, discuss challenges facing our society and try to speak to these issues with one voice. The CCT-USA is the only organization that includes in its membership all major Christian traditions such as: Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical/Pentecostal, mainline Protestant and African American Families of Churches.

This year's gathering included visits to historical places associated with the civil rights movement such as the Lauren motel where Martin Luther King was assassinated and the Slave Haven: Underground Railroad Museum.





The Archdiocese of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Eastern United States held its Annual Clergy Retreat on March 4-8, 2012, in St. Mary's Villa Convent, Sloatsburg, New York. His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim presided over the Retreat, which was attended by the clergy from all the parishes of the Archdiocese. The theme of this year's retreat was: "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one is found faithful" (I Corinthians 4:1-2).

According to the retreat schedule, prepared beforehand by the Archdiocese, the clergy met with His Eminence at the Archdiocesan Center in Teaneck, New Jersey, on Monday evening, on March 4. The retreat was opened with the evening prayers, where His Eminence prayed for those priests who could not make it, and for the peace and tranquility of the Church. After a short message by the Archbishop, a Lenten dinner was prepared for the attendees, after which they all left for the convent, happy and singing praises to the Lord.

In addition to daily morning, noon and evening prayers, several bible studies were conducted by members of the clergy around the theme of the retreat taken from chapter four of the first Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians. They also studied together this year's Patriarchal Encyclical for lent and listened to the final testimony and will of Mor Aphrem the Syriac. Very Rev. Raban Saliva Aliases presented a paper on the Bema in the Syriac Church and Rev. Fr. Mattias Alan Shelton talked about miracles in the Bible.

During the retreat the clergy received reports on several projects and programs of the Archdiocese. Sandy Ghats's, Sara Cancan and Matthew Hadodo gave a detailed account of the progress concerning the new Sunday School Curriculum. Shamash Gabriel Ayden gave a preview of the book he's preparing about writing the musical notes for church liturgical hymns. Binyamin Malik and Julie Jabil gave a brief account of the newly-established (International Christian Outreach) organization, which is a broader project of the Suryoyo Relief Fund. Deacon Dr. George Kiraz talked about the Clergy Continuing Education Program, and encouraged all the priests to join it. Also, he talked about the progress in printing the church services books of Baptism, Matrimony and Burial of the dead, in Syriac and English.

On Wednesday night a joint meeting of the Archdiocesan Clergy Council (ACC) and the Archdiocesan Executive Council (AEC) was held. Following the opening prayers and introduction by the Archbishop, Dr. Yamo Deniz, president of the AEC conducted the meeting which proved to be a valuable venue for interaction between members of both councils. Extensive time was spent on discussing plan and progress of the New Archdiocesan Center in Paramus, NJ.

Following the noon prayers on Thursday, the retreat was concluded with final words from His Eminence who asked members of the clergy to convey his prayers, blessings and best wishes to members of their

parishes. He asked the Lord God to bless our Church throughout the world and to keep His Holiness, our Patriarch, Mor Zakka I Iwas, in His Divine care. He also asked God to bless the priests and their families, in order to continue serving their parishes with fervor and love.

In return, the clergy thanked His Eminence for his great fatherly care and love, and for his humble spirit and immediate concerns towards his children's needs, and asked the Lord to keep him healthy for many years to come.



On Friday, March 9, 2012, His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim received The Honorable Congressman Scott Garrett at the Archdiocese Complex in Teaneck. Opening the hour and a half program with a prayer, His Eminence asked the Almighty Father to bless those who are in the service of this Country, that they may be given the strength and courage to lead this wonderful Nation with foresight and wisdom. The Archbishop welcomed the Congressman assuring him that the mindset of our Syriac Orthodox Community is always one of cooperation and willingness to serve our country. His Eminence said that we are community living the fear of the Lord and continually striving to be better citizens.

Congressman Garrett being from Wantage, New Jersey, was impressed at the Archdiocese Beth Antioch initiative. His Eminence discussed our 96 acre property and touched upon the future plans the Archdiocese has for that location.

Member of the clergy in attendance included Very Rev. Fr. Shamoan Asmar, Rev. Fr. Aziz Hadodo, Rev. Rev Fr. Samer Yacoub Yohanon and Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun. Also on hand from the Archdiocese Executive Council were Sait Samuel, Jack Darakjy and Elias Sarkar. Other participants included John Samuel, Ramona Malki and Dr. Gretchen Hannoush.

Mike Ghassali, program Coordinator, asked Elias Sarkar, Chairman of Public Relations to give a brief history of our Church and Community in North Jersey. Jack Darakjy, Archdiocese Counsel, presented the future plans of the Archdiocese in terms of the Midland Avenue Project. The architectural plans were shared with the congressman giving him a clear picture as to the direction the Archdiocese is taking.

His Eminence displayed a few parchments of the Dead Sea Scrolls and some antiquities to the Congressman. He was extremely impressed at what he saw and expressed his deep appreciation for being afforded such an opportunity.

After some refreshments, in his remarks Congressman Garrett thanked His Eminence for his hospitality and spoke about the history of separation of Church and State. He recalled in history the days when God and the Bible were a significant part of Government. He also noted that the Rotunda of the Capitol was used for prayer groups in the early days when there were no church buildings to be used. Congressman Garrett said that he was a believer and a man of faith. At this point, His Eminence invited the Congressman to tour St. Mark's Cathedral.

Upon entering the Cathedral, His Eminence drew attention to the Altar Design and explained that it is constructed in the tradition of the Syriac Orthodox Church. After the singing of the Aboon Bashmoyo (The Lord's Prayer) Ramona Malki, Secretary of the St. Mark's Parish Council, welcomed everyone and explained that St. Mark's is a Cathedral because it is the seat of the Archbishop. She continued to introduce two members of the Junior Youth, Mina Matty who sang a hymn in Syriac, entitled Toyson, and Zahra Denho, who sang a patriotic song, America the Beautiful. Both were accompanied by Elias Sarkar on the Violin and Dr. Gretchen Hannoush on the Keyboard.

At the conclusion, Congressman Garrett thanked His Eminence for being so gracious. He also thanked everyone present for such a delightful and enjoyable reception.



It is with deep sorrow that we report the passing away of Pope Shenouda III, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, on Saturday, March 17, 2012. Hany Aziz, Pope Shenouda's political advisor, reported the 117th Pope of Alexandria, passed away at the age of 89 "due to health complications and old age".

He was ordained a monk in 1954 taking on the name Father Antonios el-Syriani. He was consecrated a Bishop in 1962 and enthroned as Pope of Alexandria in 1971.

His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim, Archbishop of The Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese for the Eastern United States, extends his deepest heartfelt condolences to the world wide Coptic Orthodox Church, its hierarchy, clergy and congregants on the loss of their beloved Pope. We pray to our Heavenly Father to bless his soul and give him eternal rest in the heavenly Jerusalem. We also pray to the Almighty to watch over the Coptic Orthodox Church, our sister church, during these very difficult days.



A memorial service for His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, hosted by the Coptic Orthodox Archdiocese of North America was held at St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church in East Brunswick, New Jersey on Sunday, March 25, 2012.

Numerous clergy from all denominations, along with political dignitaries from the United Nations and the State of New Jersey, came to pay their respect to the Coptic Church and Community on their great loss. Representing His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim and the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese for the Eastern United States were Very Rev. Fr. Shamoan Asmar, Very Rev. Fr. John Khoury, Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun and Rev. Fr. Eli Shabo. Representatives from our Archdiocese Executive Council were Elias Sarkar and Sami Mourad.

In a letter from His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim, read by the Very Rev. Fr. Shamoan Asmar, the Archbishop noted that he regrets that he could not attend the memorial service and that he was currently on a three week visit in India. In his letter, the Archbishop mentioned that he was greatly privileged and honored to have had His Holiness as a teacher in theology during his student years at the Coptic Theological College in Anba Rwais, Cairo. The Archbishop recalled in the letter that "His Holiness always made sure I was well taken care of. Whenever I would meet him he would show extra attention and tender love towards me. His Holiness' leadership will be dearly missed, but our faith and trust in the Lord, the High Priest of our Faith, fills us with hope that the church will always be cared for by good shepherds chosen by God's divine love and compassion."

As part of the memorial service, the Lord's Prayer was sung in Syriac. Two gigantic projection screens displayed the words for all those in attendance to and follow and sing along with our Syriac Orthodox clergy and attendees.

A video biography of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III included numerous photos of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III and our Patriarch, His Holiness Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas. Both Patriarchs had mutual respect and admiration for one another and worked together for years advocating Christian unity, love and forgiveness.



Their combined efforts resulted in making noteworthy advancement in work towards ecumenism and mutual understanding.

His Grace Bishop David, General Bishop and Patriarchal Exarch of the Coptic Orthodox Archdiocese for North America, in his concluding remarks, thanked everyone for attending the memorial service and sharing in the grief and sorrow of the Coptic Orthodox Church and Community.



Beth Mardutho: The Syriac Institute

Under the Auspices of His Eminence Mor Cyril Ephrem Karim

Presents a Lecture

Making the Encyclopedia of the Syriac Heritage

By George A. Kiraz

Followed by a Book Launch

This is the first time an encyclopedia of the Syriac heritage is published. Written by over 70 international specialists, this encyclopedia covers over 600 topics on all aspects of Syriac Christianity: history, religion, towns and villages, saints, writers, themes. This is a perfect resource for parents and students to learn about the Syriac heritage.

### **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 Syriac 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 Kekan 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 Syriacs 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 Syriacs 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 Syriacs,” Mr. Tutus said.

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

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



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.



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### **Religion and Foreign Policy Bulletin December 2011**

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##### **F. Gregory Gause III, University of Vermont**

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Gause explores U.S.-Saudi tension in the wake of the Arab Awakening, finding that the two nations still have many mutual interests.

Religion's Role in Combatting AIDS

Isobel Coleman, CFR Senior Fellow and Director

On her blog, "Democracy in Development," Isobel Coleman comments on the critical role religious institutions can play in combatting the spread of AIDS. Looking at a number of Muslim communities in Africa and Indonesia, Coleman is encouraged by religious leaders' use of Islamic principles as the vehicle to educate adherents about disease prevention. [Join the Conversation »](#)

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**Arzuman Amirov, PhD,  
Institute of History,  
National Academy of Science of Azerbaijan**

**The Cooperation between Azerbaijan and international institutions  
in the field of humanitarian activities(1991-2005)**

International organizations, foreign companies and joint ventures carry out multi-faceted activities in the context of the expanding relations between Azerbaijan and foreign countries. Alongside the implementation of various international programs and large-scale projects in the economic, public and cultural life of Azerbaijan and the analysis of current experience, they cooperate in providing financial and technical assistance in the humanitarian field as well. During the period under review, the International Public Charity Fund of Lukoil Company, the World Hope International Azerbaijani Humanitarian Organization, DAWF German Society for Technical Cooperation, Itochu (Japan), Siemens (Germany), Total (France), Statoil (Norway), McDermot (USA), Exxon Mobil, and Exxon-Azerbaijan companies developed active business partnerships in this respect.

Starting from 1996, the activities of World Hope International Azerbaijani Humanitarian Organization included assistance in meeting the humanitarian needs of the people of Azerbaijan, creating the conditions for improving the living standards of households in particular and the community in general, and increasing and strengthening the hope of the people (21). In the field of reconstruction, the relevant section of World Hope has become the center of assistance contributing to the development and education of displaced people and low-income earners and to rebuilding the physical infrastructure of the construction and reconstruction sector. World Hope renovated refugee centers and improved living facilities, constructing 20 new ordinary schools and boarding schools. In the field of vocational training, the Training Center of this international humanitarian organization provided assistance to create new jobs for refugees, displaced people and low-income earners and to improve their computer and English language skills. In order to meet the requirements of displaced people, homeless children and other underprivileged people in Azerbaijan, World Hope created its Special Projects Division.

This humanitarian agency provided aid to thousands of children, their families and communities in many districts of the country, helped purchase beds for homeless children and equipment for children's playgrounds, distributed books, school desks and chairs, school supplies and gift sets and arranged trips to historical and cultural places for children.

Another major stakeholder in the humanitarian sector of Azerbaijan is the Baku branch of the International Public Charity Fund of Lukoil Company. This Charity Fund was established in 1996, and Lukoil Company is along among foreign oil companies in creating such a permanent charity fund. This institution is very active in the fields of health, culture, science and education, and provides assistance to disabled veterans and refugees. The Lukoil Charity Fund provided financial assistance to sick children and war and long-service veterans so that they could obtain major surgeries and health resort treatment abroad and purchase necessary medicines.

In the field of culture, the Fund contributed financially to organize trips of Jujaliyarim and Oriental Stars children bands to Turkey, to stage student musical comedies in the Azerbaijani National Philharmonic Hall, to

present the KVN-95 Panel Game, to refurbish the Russian Drama Theater in Baku, to organize Russia Days in Azerbaijan, to put on the exhibition of the Russian National Tretyakov Art Gallery and to organize concerts by Liyudmila Zykina (Honored Artist of Russia and Azerbaijan); it also provided significant support to build the monument to Y. Mammadaliyev, the eminent Azerbaijani scientist and academician, to restore the museum of Sergey Yesenin, the famous Russian poet, in the village of Mardakian near Baku, to renovate the monument to Alexander Pushkin and to develop the area around the monument, to hold a national artistic contest in Azerbaijan to commemorate the 200th anniversary of this great Russian poet, and to stage the Cheerful Widow opera by F. Zeqar (17).

In the field of science, the Lukoil Charity Fund supported the publishing of works by Shihab ad-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad an-Nasavi and the Dede Gorgud National Epic Encyclopedia, helped young Azeri historians and participated in sponsoring Ekologiya magazine, as well as sponsoring the provision of services from the best Russian publishing houses for the Mega Project of the Azerbaijani National Library Fund named after M. F. Akhundov (18).

In the field of education, the Fund provided financial assistance for capital repairs of Secondary School No. 1 in Baku, bedrooms in Boarding School No. 2 for orphans in Mardakian District as well as direct financial and technical support to the kindergarten in Chukhuryurd village in Shamakha District. Apart from this, the Fund actively supported the activities of the Russian Community of Azerbaijan, the repairs to its cultural and information center, various cultural and health activities, events of the Russian Orthodox Church of Azerbaijan; it helped the Russian Community to organize health resorts and summer camps for children of war veterans, orphans and low-income families every year. The Fund has always focused its efforts on providing refugees and veterans of the Second World War and Karabakh War with medical supplies and foodstuffs including the donation of a 100 kWt Diesel Electric Power Station, medical, humanitarian and social aid to senior, underprivileged people and earthquake victims. One of the major charity actions of the Lukoil Fund in Azerbaijan was a \$2 million grant for the development of education and culture and for assistance to thousands of people affected by natural and social disasters (19).

The government of Japan and Japanese companies allocated \$700 million for the development of infrastructure in the humanitarian sector of Azerbaijan and \$4 million of technical support for the educational sector. Grants totaling \$53 million were provided for the construction of schools, hospitals, kindergartens, roads and drinking water facilities. Itochu was the first Japanese company to start its business in Azerbaijan in 1996. Charity events have also been organized by the International Red Cross Society and other international humanitarian agencies in cooperation with the government of Azerbaijan to build houses for refugees in 1997 and to distribute aid to earthquake victims in Agdash District in 1998. The International Council of Organizations for Folklore Festivals and Folk Art (ICOFF) helped arrange a trip to Japan for an Azeri children's band as well as various youth sports events in 2000. A special Oil Fund (CIECO MESENA) was established by Itochu in 2001 to supply the country's educational institutions with computers (14). The Oil Fund donated computers to Baku Computer College, to Secondary School No. 49 in Baku, to Secondary School No. 1 in Agdash District, to orphanages in Ganja and Sheki, to Technical and Humanitarian College No. 2, named after Mahmudbeyov, to the Technical and Humanitarian College in Balaken District, to the National Oil Academy of Azerbaijan and to other institutions (15). The government of Japan allocated \$2.5 million to build a village for refugees and displaced persons in Mingechevir District, and this village housing 412 families was completed in 2003 (9). In addition, the Japanese government provided the following financial assistance for internal migrants: \$600,000 in 1996, \$486,000 in 1997, \$1,180,000 in 1998, focusing mainly on building temporary residential units and implementing social and health programs (4). Another \$2 million was allocated as a grant



aid to complete the construction of the Baku Cancer Research Center and to provide three hospitals with medical equipment and supplies.

Exxon Mobil as a world-leading petrochemical company is represented worldwide, and Azerbaijan plays a significant role in the company's growing activities. The company has a good tradition of combining its business with humanitarian activities in all the regions where it is active. The company's charity program is one of the largest in the world, and this program in Azerbaijan covers quite a number of fields. All charity programs implemented by Exxon Mobil in Azerbaijan are dedicated to education. At the same time Exxon Azerbaijan provided assistance to publishing Azeri school books in the Latin alphabet, supplied schools and libraries with educational and training materials, donated computers to higher education institutions, and distributed the Children's Encyclopedia in refugee camps (10).

Exxon Azerbaijan Operations Company, an Exxon Mobil affiliate, spent around \$3 million for charity projects in Azerbaijan as of 2002 (5). The major part of these funds was used for educational projects and assistance to refugees. Exxon Azerbaijan cooperated with leading international humanitarian organizations in delivering aid to thousands of people living in refugee camps in Bilasuvar, Saatli and Sabirabad Districts. The projects implemented over the last few years covered various fields such as community development, job creation, construction of schools, public buildings and hospitals as well as organization of entertainment events for refugee children. Exxon Azerbaijan actively cooperated with major international and local humanitarian agencies to accomplish all these programs. Exxon Azerbaijan provided financial assistance for the construction of schools in refugee camps located in the south of the country. It also supplied those schools with furniture, electrical and heating equipment as well as school supplies. Under the auspices of Exxon Mobil several hospitals have been constructed as well. These hospitals largely facilitated the delivery of primary medical care, the distribution of basic medicines and circulation of health care information among refugees and also contributed to malaria prevention measures and to organizing training on primary care services in refugee camps. With a view of promoting the education in Azerbaijan, Exxon Azerbaijan paid a special attention to preparing and publishing Azeri school books in Latin alphabet, supplying books to schools and libraries, providing higher education institutions with computers. The company helped a lot to organize workshops and scientific conferences for teachers, supported the admission of Azeri students to professional and scientific organizations, cooperated with leading universities to offer new opportunities for Azeri students to study in the United States. The US-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce established the Caspian Regional Research Center under Harvard University with the sponsorship of Exxon Mobil in October 1999. The company also contributed to the creation of "Youth Values Organization" with the purpose of developing business, economic activities and entrepreneurship among young people (6).

One of the most significant projects funded by Exxon Azerbaijan was the publication of "Ayna" Children Encyclopedia in Latin alphabet. This multilingual edition covers a large number of topics – from nature to history, from sports to information technologies. Starting from 1999, Exxon Azerbaijan distributed thousands of children educational materials to schools and libraries in numerous refugee camps throughout the country. The company also provided financial assistance for the compilation and publication of the first Azeri-English dictionary and the anthology titled "One thousand five hundred years of Oguz poetry" (2). Every year thousands of children from refugee camps, orphan homes and schools for people with special needs participate in Nowruz and New Year Holidays, Knowledge Day and other holidays and festivities organized with the support of Exxon Azerbaijan. The company considered the support to children deprived of parental care and attention as one of its priorities and offered new opportunities for them to feel the happiness of holidays and festivities again. Beginning in 1998, the company has been providing financial support to the International Environmental and Energy Academy and to "Energy, Environment and Economics" magazine. At

the same time it sponsored a series of scientific conferences in order to bring together scientists and experts to tackle on the issues of environmental protection of the Caspian Sea.

The delegation of “Ost-Ausschuss” Association of German Companies working in Eastern Europe and CIS countries met with Mr. Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, on November 24, 2005 and had a comprehensive exchange of views on economic relations between our countries (1). The delegation left Azerbaijan with great expectations from the development of bilateral business relations in near future (4). The Central Clinical Hospital and other hospitals of the Ministry of Health have been supplied with the latest diagnostic equipment by “Siemens”. The National Oncological Center has long-time partnership relations with this German company which played a special role in providing the “Medi Club”, “Leyla Shikhlinskaya”, “City Hospital” and many other private hospitals with necessary equipment and facilities. “Siemens” is actively involved into the country’s social life as well. As an example, one can mention the charity event titled “Sing your song” organized by “Siemens” to support and promote new talents.

Large-scale cooperation is underway between the Ministry of Economic Development of Azerbaijan and DAWF Society for Technical Cooperation. This Society played an important role in organizing the visit of the German Commission for Eastern Economies to Baku on November 23-24, 2005. A delegation representing 14 German companies headed by Dr. Klaus Mangold had the opportunity to meet with local businessmen. A number of German companies showed interest to implementing new investment projects in Azerbaijan (7).

“Mcdermott”, a US-based company, is carrying out charity programs in Azerbaijan using its large financial and human resources. MKKI sponsored a series of humanitarian and educational projects to help the most under-privileged people, particularly children and homeless children. From November 2002 to December 2004, the company spent around 80.000 USD for charity purposes. Another 50.000 USD were allocated in 2005 to support humanitarian programs and projects (20).

The French company “Total” helped to develop boarding schools in Azerbaijan providing financial assistance under a five years program to improve living conditions and to equip school rooms with necessary facilities. Moreover, the company provided funds to modernize the first aid services at children’s hospitals of Baku. In the field of education, the European Association of Geoscientists and Engineers (EAGE) together with its Azeri section organized training courses for young Azeri engineers.

The Oil Institute of France organized one and half year training courses, while “Total” conducted theoretical training and refresher courses (13). The company concluded an agreement with the National Rugby Association to develop this sport in Azeri secondary schools. It also carried out various social and economic investment programs in Azerbaijan with a view to support small size enterprises, communal facilities, schools, to rehabilitate health centers, infrastructure and communications, to improve living conditions of people who live along oil transportation routes. International and local non-governmental organizations actively participated in the implementation of this program under the auspices of “Total”. In the field of environmental protection, “Total” cooperated with the Ministry of Environment of Azerbaijan to enforce protection measures in “Qizil Agac” Natural Reserve as well as to exchange experience. From 2001 up to now, “Umid” (Hope) and “Hayat” (Life) Humanitarian Agencies built 47 schools and renovated 123 school rooms in the communities of internally displaced people living around Baku and Sumgait cities.

The cooperation among scientists which was initiated and sponsored by the “Statoil” company from Norway created favorable conditions to control pollution of rivers in Caucasus region. Training courses in the field of human rights were organized for Azeri teachers and students by the Refugee Council of Norway with the assistance of Statoil and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway. To further develop the agricultural

sector in Azerbaijan the Refugee Council of Norway with the sponsorship of Statoil provided financial and material assistance to restoring and improving housing facilities for internally displaced people who returned to their homes in Fizuli District of Azerbaijan (3). In 2005, Statoil spent more than 2.3 million USD out of its own reserves as well as funds from oil projects for the projects of social, economic and community development in Azerbaijan. Statoil closely cooperated with GTZ, International Financial Corporation and British Petroleum (BP) in order to provide technical assistance to local companies with the ultimate goal of increasing the participation in the oil and gas sector of Azerbaijan. Statoil along with OSCE, Transparency International and BP also sponsored the first nation-wide public opinion poll on corruption. Statoil undertook to support projects related to the tradition of praising the Azeri national identity and pride. Statoil contributed to the publication of the work by Ismail Mammadov, famous Azeri artist, titled "Absheron is a place of wind and fire", which was a logical follow-up of his previous works dedicated to the maps of Baku and its Old City ("Icheri Sheher"). This new map is now a good source of information about architectural numerous monuments scattered all over the Apsheron Peninsula (16).

The US Exxon Mobil made it a long standing tradition to contribute to community development wherever they work in Azerbaijan. Its aid programs for Azerbaijan have always included the promotion of education and the assistance to refugees and internally displaced people. Exxon Mobil allocated more than 3 million USD for the needs of education and community development in Azerbaijan; it also financed the publication of so much needed educational and training tools in Azeri alphabet as well as the organization of the country's educational programs in the field of environment protection (6). At the same time Exxon Mobil continued its cooperation with major humanitarian agencies to promote community development programs and profit making activities for thousands of refugees living in southern districts of Azerbaijan. Education and environmental protection projects are among "Exxon Mobil's" priorities focusing on environmental education. In 2004, "Exxon Azerbaijan Operation Company" supported the implementation of a number of measures in the field of environmental protection. Exxon Azerbaijan worked together with governmental and public agencies to clean public parks, to plant trees, to carry out environmental educational programs for school children, and allocated funds for this purpose (12). This foreign company also lent effective support to publish Children's Encyclopedia and A-B-C book on environment and to create green spots in a series of Baku secondary schools. With a financial support from Exxon Azerbaijan, the Humanitarian Information Agency and Caucasus International Cultural and Ecotourism Center organized a number of events in secondary schools and orphan homes of Baku. Exxon Azerbaijan and the Environmental Educational Center established by the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan jointly organized ecological contests on environment protection of the Caspian Sea. Beginning from 2003, the school children in 15 districts of the country were involved in this project. Exxon Mobil, USAID, "Chevron", "Texaco", "Statoil", "RUC.OSI-AF", "SI American Express", "Itochu", "Unocal Khazar Ltd.", "Hyatt Hotels" and "Baker Botts" provided significant support and assistance to economic education development programs for secondary schools in Azerbaijan carried out by the Azerbaijani Youth Values Organization (11).

While strengthening its cooperation with the above mentioned international societies, organizations and foreign companies, Azerbaijan continues to further develop its social and economic system making efforts to bring its national standards closer to international norms and moving towards the integration with the rest of the world.

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19. "Back again", p.29.
20. McDermott Caspian Contractors Inc., B., 2003, p.6.
21. World Hope International Azerbaijan, B., 2005, p.3.

## RESUME

The article looks into the main forms of cooperation, strengthening humanitarian relations of Azerbaijan with international agencies, foreign companies and joint ventures such as "Lukoil International Charity Fund", DAWF German Society for Technical Cooperation, "Siemens", "Itochu", Total, "Statoil", "McDermot", Exxon Mobil, Exxon-Azerbaijan. The article proves the need for expanding relations and cooperation of Azerbaijan with international organizations and foreign companies to get closer to the world community.

Apart from economic and social projects in Azerbaijan, the realization of humanitarian programs and charity activities by international agencies and foreign companies contributes to strengthening of the country's social and economic foundations and its integration into world system.