

Holy Wisdom

Peace: Showing that Others Matter!

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Publication of the Syrian Orthodox Church in America on United Nations Affairs. In fulfilling the UN Mission of SOCA, both Orthodoxy and Ecumenism are involved. SOCA is an NGO associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information. 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.

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

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OUR WORK AT THE UNITED NATIONS

Subject: ANNOUNCEMENT: Message from Maher Nasser, Director of the Outreach Division of UN DPI

Dear NGO Colleagues,

I wanted to write to DPI's partners in the NGO community as early as possible after the holiday season to wish you a Happy New Year and all the best for 2013 and beyond. I also wanted to thank you for the great cooperation and support received in the last two years since I assumed my position as Director of DPI's Outreach Division. I particularly appreciated your individual and collective contributions that lead to the great success of the 3-5 September 2011 DPI/NGO Conference in Bonn and the many activities and briefings we have had at UN Headquarters in New York or that you implemented in your own geographic area and local membership.

The declaration that was adopted at the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development provides us with groundwork on which to build the Future We Want. To succeed, we will need to vitalize our interaction and energize UN-Civil Society partnership.

While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have made a huge impact in the lives of billions, much more needs to be done to address extreme poverty, disease, and environmental crisis. Accelerated actions must continue for the world to achieve the MDG targets by 2015. At the same time, much focus is now being placed on the post-2015 global development agenda that would build on progress achieved through the MDGs. This would also need to confront persistent inequalities and new challenges facing people and our planet Earth.

The Secretary-General's High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda will continue internal discussion and consultation with civil society and other key groups before submitting a report containing its recommendations to the Secretary-General by the end of May 2013.

In addition to the above, there are a large number of issues and priorities that DPI will be working on with our partners to help achieve the Organization's substantive goals in development, human rights and peace and security. These are detailed in [DPI's Communications Guidelines for 2013](#). This way, those who want to see it would have to visit your website, it is on a UN website and not being sent by e-mail. If that is feasible, let us proceed this way. I am very pleased to share with you with this message. I hope that you will find these Guidelines useful in organizing your own agenda and activities over the coming year.

I am looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible in the first DPI/NGO Briefing of 2013 on Thursday, 17 January, to discuss the above and other aspects of further collaboration with you in person. At a meeting with the Chair and the Officers of the Board of the NGO/DPI Executive

Committee on Thursday, 10 January, I shared with them additional details about the years to come and the increased challenges facing all of us, particularly those arising from the impact of the global economic crisis.

For those who will not be able to attend in person but will be following the webcast, please send any questions or queries as an inbox message to the NGO relations Facebook page: [facebook.com/UNDPINGOsPartners4Change](https://www.facebook.com/UNDPINGOsPartners4Change). Please give your name and affiliation with your question.

Once again, I wish you all the best for 2013 and beyond.

Maher Nasser
Director
Outreach Division - Department of Public Information

United Nations, DPI/NGO Resource Centre, Room GA-37

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Provisional Winter/Spring 2013 NGO Briefing and Events Calendar January - June 2013

17 January

Open Mic with the Director of the Outreach

Division, Maher Nasser

24 January

“Rescue During the Holocaust: The Courage to Care” (in observance of the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust)

31 January

“Addressing Excessive Price Volatility in Food and Related Financial and Commodity Markets”

7 February

Briefing in observance of the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation

14 February

Focus on Faith: Buddhism

21 February

Film screening

28 February

Youth Orientation Programme

7 March Youth Led Briefing “Breaking the Cycle: Raising and Empowering Resilient Youth”

14 March

“Responsibility to Protect and the Role of Civil Society”

21 March

“Forever Free: Celebrating Emancipations” (In observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade)

28 March

Communications Workshop

4 April

“Nuclear Techniques for Global Development and Environmental Protection”

11 April

Briefing in observance of the International Day of Human Space Flight & the 50th Anniversary of Women in Space

18 April

“May I Ask a Question Madame High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay?”

24/25 April

Orientation Programme for Newly Associated NGOs

2 May

Briefing in observance of World Press Freedom Day

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9 May

“Ocean Acidification: Addressing the Challenge for Future Generations”

16 May

“Advancing Social Integration and Intergenerational Solidarity” (in observance of the International Day of Families)

6 June

Roundtable Discussion: “Can war be abolished?”

13 June

“May I Ask a Question Madame Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Valerie Amos?”

20 June

Briefing in observance of the International Day of Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (26 June)

27 June

Town Hall Meeting

Services Provided by the DPI/NGO Relations Section

The NGO Relations Section is the link between the Department of Public Information and the over 1,300 NGOs associated with DPI in which it serves. The Section is committed to reaching out, engaging and educating non-governmental organizations, civil society and academia with the goal of building support for peace, development and human rights for all. The mission of the Section is to assist the non-governmental community to effectively bring the UN message to local communities, in particular grass roots organizations and marginalized groups, to mobilize them to become successful advocates for change. The section accomplishes this through its many programs and activities. The section also maintains an ongoing mutually beneficial partnership with the NGO/DPI Executive Committee, which represents the NGOs associated with DPI.

- Advisory Services
 - Section provides advisory services to President of GA, UNIC/UNIS, OLA, other UN System Offices and Programs.
- Association of New NGOs
 - DPI Committee meets twice a year
 - Criteria for association
 - Evaluation of NGOs
 - Liaise with UNICs
 - Mobilization of NGOs
- Orientation Programs
 - 2-day Orientation Program for new NGO Representatives
 - 1-day Orientation Program for Youth Representatives
- 36 Briefings throughout the Year
 - Weekly briefings for NGOs
 - Recordings and webcast / online summaries
 - Diverse speakers
 - “May I Ask a Question” and faith-based series

- 2 Communications Workshops per Year in Consultation with NGO/DPI Executive Committee
- Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference
- Conference Planning Committee Meetings
- Conference Board Meetings
- Liaison with Host Country and NGO Focal Group
- Conference Programme and travel information
- 25-30 Workshops for NGOs
- Student Journalist Programme
- Conference website with webcast of Opening and Closing Ceremonies for Roundtables
- Facilitation of networking among NGOs
- Mobilization of NGOs in different regions
- Final Report of Conference and Summary of NGO Workshops
- Database
- Associated NGOs on CSO Net
- NGO Relations Website
- Announcement of UN events
- Briefings information (webcast, summaries)
- Information on other NGO Relations policies and activities
- Social Media Outreach to NGOs
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Tumblr Blog
- Youth Program
- Monthly meetings of Youth Representatives
- Youth Representatives Facebook group
- Renovated Resource Centre
- Only Resource Centre for NGOs at the UN
- Multilingual staff
- Interacting with NGOs around the world

- Facilitating ad hoc meetings for NGOs visiting UNHQ
- Diverse publications and reports of UN Agencies, Funds and Programs
- Conference Registration
- Annual Review
- Dissemination of UN-related information
- Space for networking & meetings
- Phone and web inquiries
- Technical assistance and troubleshooting
- Computers for use by NGO Representatives
- Tickets to the General Assembly Debate and UN concert

DPI / NGO Resource Centre

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<http://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/>

Tehran's Supposed Nuclear Weapons Program, Still an Issue

By: Christopher Casais, January 17, 2013

(Topic: Disarmament)

-Report of the International Atomic Energy Agency

- Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East.

-Conclusion of effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.)

As most of us have already been aware of, worldwide debate between nuclear weapons programs' versus peace has been an ongoing and critical one. Recently, Tehran's purported nuclear weapons program was under the spotlight due to increasing demands to undergo thorough investigations by global powers and United Nations officials. This past week, United Nations nuclear inspectors returned from a trip to Iran without securing an agreement to investigate Tehran's alleged atom bomb research. Additionally, the United Nation's nuclear weapons ombudsman, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), was denied access to a military site in Tehran due to "differences".

Russia has also stated that it is attempting to establish plans for talks for the end of this January between global powers and Iran over Tehran's suspected nuclear program. European Union officials,

however, have stated that any such talks about arranging a future date for investigations and discussion over this issue have not been settled. Contrariwise, the ISNA, an Iranian news agency, confirmed that discussions have resumed with global powers, but the IAEA did not verify this announcement.

According to numerous sources, Iran has pushed ahead with stockpiling more nuclear material, which many people believe could be used for civilian purpose, military ones, or both. Russia has stated that an Israeli attack on one of Iran's nuclear energy sites would be devastating and they must quell concerns over their nuclear program. Still, sources from Russia have avowed that Western fears about Tehran's military aims are inflated.

Department of Public Information (DPI) /NGO Briefing with the Director Maher Nasser

January 17, 2013

By: Rev. Fr. Faustino Quintanilla

Dr. Anne Riccitelli was present.

Maria Luisa Chavez, who will retire in the summer, Chief of DPI chaired the meeting. In his talk and dialogue Mr. Nasser mentioned a book "60 Ways the UN Makes a Difference." He went over the schedule of 2013 which all NGO members have received. [It is in our Newsletter] There will be Holocaust exhibits. On January 19, Tuesday, there will be a meeting for Youth. The UN budget has been cut 3% which will affect DPI. College students might be able to help out as volunteers. There maybe location changes for DPI but the places will be good.

NGO have access to the UN Library and this may be done over the internet. The DPI Annual Conference for 2012 was not held and probably will be held alternate years. DPI NGOs can say things ambassadors cannot so we are of value. Encouragement was given to member to interact with the member states and then report back to DPI the progress of interest.

On the matter of Annual convention there was much discussion with many proposing New York as the site, it was difficult to get other member states to act as host country. Richard Jordan suggested holding the Conference either before or after another Conference, possible topics were discussed. The UN is not about debate but rather win-win though a cooperative solution. 7 out 10 in a USA survey say the UN is needed today.

The Secretary General has appointed an Envoy on Youth who will be with the DPI.

One important info communicated by Mr. Maher Nasser was, that the library will be electronic and you will be able to access from your computer all documents produce at UN.

Launch of 2012 Global-Go-to-Think Tanks Ranking Report

(Reported from webcast, January 17, 2013 by A.J.DeLuca)

The United Nations University hosts Dr. James McGann from the University of Pennsylvania. The report focuses on the rise of think tanks in G20 and BRIC countries. Topics dealt with: Importance of Think

Tanks for governments and civil society; Areas not covered by think tanks: Middle East, North Africa, Latin America. Brookings Institute ranks highest in the world.

Further data is available on UNU website.

UN REPORT: THE STORY OF THE DANISH JEWS – RESCUE DURING THE HOLOCAUST: THE COURAGE TO CARE – DPI/NGO BRIEFING...1/24/2013

By: Philip Faccione

The DPI/NGO briefing was headed by Maria- Luisa Chavez who is the head of the NGO relations cluster. This meeting focused on commemorating the heroics during World War II and specifically the story of the Danish-Jews. The Nazi's did not treat Danish-Jews harshly until they started to speak out against them. This led to the Nazi's deporting them into camps but the story of their rescue is the largest rescue rebelling against Nazi oppression in history. Many people risked their own lives to help bring justice during World War II and help save the lives of Danish-Jews. These actions of bravery were so remarkable because this story could have gone in the complete opposite direction, ending in mass-murder. But the acts of bravery led to more people becoming inspired to help. The strength in numbers were remarkable, making this one of the greatest acts of bravery in history. If more people were to stand up for what they think is right just like those during World War II did, the world would be a better place because of the spread of peace.

H.E. NASSIR ABDULAZIZ NASSER- UN HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

MARCH 14, 2013

Dr. Anthony DeLuca

PRESS CONFERENCE

Nasser [former President of the General Assembly] referred to Vienna Declaration of the Alliance of Civilizations which is the first of its kind as a tool to defuse world tensions. There are six priorities: 1. Building upon previous achievements: education, media and immigration. 2. Strengthening partnerships. 3. Tools of prevention: mediation, arts and music. 4. Connecting AOC with the development agenda. 5. Financing of the Alliance. 6. Increasing the AOC connection with media, civil society and business.

Attention should be given to reaching out to religious leaders and an increase in inter-faith dialogue. Nasser had met with Benedict XVI in the past and looks forward to invitations from the new Pope, Francis. It is important to work with the Holy See.

Questions followed. Why should there be concern with the new pope when first we need to resolve problems in Islam e.g. Sunni and Shihites.

AOC rests upon four pillars, Education, Youth, Immigration and Media; there might be included mediation, sports, music, arts.

North Africa, Libya, Sudan, Palestine, Egypt- the whole world is troubling. How will AOC work?

AOC is only five years old. Nasser took over on March 1. We are trying to bring member states together and already 112 have joined. We consider AOC a "soft power tool."

How will AOC be helpful in mediating some of the issues that have come forth from the Women's Conference?

On the Zionism issue how will we have a dialogues of religions?

What can AOC do about the destruction of religious sites in Syria? There is a targeting of religious sites. Nasser: we cannot do anything while the war is on.

What are the main obstacles to AOC? Nasser: our mission is challenging; most importantly is providing a good education for youth.

You have a dual role the AOC and the Holy See. Nasser: I envision a bigger role for the Holy See particularly in sending a positive message to the Arab-Christian communities in the Middle East in the wake of the Arab Spring. Why are minority Christians not being protected?

What innovative strategies does AOC have? Nasser: we may be working independently to diffuse tensions.

It is this observer's opinion that Nasser is a sincere and hardworking man with a good background of effective leadership and esteemed by fellow diplomats. What comes out in this press conference is that he is new to the job. And there are many issues that are not digested. Further, it seems at this point he sees AOC only in outline and perhaps it was premature in having this conference. The expectation might have been that he would have had more to offer. Note the brevity of the presentation. The conference was lacking in specificity. Could not there have been included plans to increase the membership and how others could work to support AOC. Maybe in six months another conference on this extremely important organization.

United for a culture of peace through interfaith harmony

Video:

To mark the World Interfaith Harmony Week, as proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 65/5
 [Event organized by the Office of the President of the General Assembly, in cooperation with the UNESCO and the Committee of Religious NGO at the UN]

<http://webtv.un.org/watch/united-for-a-culture-of-peace-through-interfaith-harmony/2165451739001/>



Faustino Quintanilla (our UN Representative) holds a Proclamation from the Office of New York City Council Member Mark Weprin. Joining him from left are; Ambassador Manongi; Ms. Lily Munanka; President Call and Dr. Van Wck. Dr. Quintanilla is Director of the QCC Gallery of CUNY

Submitted to Holy Wisdom by Dr. A. M. Riccitelli on Feb 2, 2013

Dr. A.M. Riccitelli who served 4 years (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010) as Media Co-Chair of the UN/DPI/NGO Conferences, attended the February 1 11th Youth Assembly to the United Nations event: *"A Special Overview: The Past 4 Years of the UN DPI/NGO Conferences."* Youth leaders from all over the world were present to hear DPI/NGO Outreach Chief Maria Luisa Chavez, as well as former Conference Chairs Shamina DeGonzaga, Chuck Hitchcock PhD, Mary Norton PhD, and Richard Jordan give their insights on the annual conference. The Paris conference, the first in UN history to leave UN NYC Headquarters, focused on Human Rights and was chaired by Ms. De Gonzaga, who was 27 years old at the time. The conference in Mexico, chaired by former Southampton College Dean, Dr. Chuck Hitchcock, took place in a nuclear free zone and focused on disarmament and small arms control. Dr. Mary Norton, a teacher of nurses and Professor of Global Academic Initiatives at Felician College chaired the Australian conference on global health. Richard Jordan, who chaired the 2007 conference on climate change, the last held in NYC, was the final speaker. Maria Luisa Chavez, mentioned her coming retirement this summer. She has been a great champion of the NGO community at the UN and will be sorely missed. Her position may not be replaced. All panelists spoke on what

each conference achieved and the challenges and opportunities of "going on the road." Richard Jordan, who spoke as chair of the Experts Committee for the 2011 conference on sustainability, inspired those present with his comments. He concluded the panel by recalling to the young people in attendance that as chair of the 2007 conference, when he opened the event, taking the podium in the General Assembly, he was awed and humbled. He told all present: "I'm just a kid from Flushing, NY. If I can do it, you can too!" His comments were met with great applause and appreciation.

Submitted to Holy Wisdom by Dr. A. M. Riccitelli

The new 2012 UN Office on Drugs and Crime "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons" was presented to an audience of dignitaries and members of civil society on Tuesday February 12. Millions of people are trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced labor. They come from at least 136 different nationalities and 118 countries. While the majority of the victims are women, the number of children has been increasing. The victims can be found in the world's restaurants, brothels, farms and homes, among other places.

"This global crime generates billions of dollars in profits for the traffickers," said Yury Fedorov, executive director of UNODOC. "The International Labor Organization estimates that 20.9 million people are victims of forced labor globally." The UNODOC Chief continued, "Human trafficking is a widespread crime in the 21st century, it cannot be allowed to continue into the 22nd century."

UN PANEL ON WORLD DAY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: PROGRESS DENIED: THE IMPACT OF INEQUALITIES ON DEVELOPMENT

Meeting reported by Dr. Anthony DeLuca (Feb 21, 2013)

This meeting was co-sponsored by the International Labor Organization and the Mission of the Kyrgyz Republic for the World Day of Social Justice (2/20) which was the General Assembly initiative of Kyrgyzstan in 2007.

The chair of the meeting was Ambassador Talaik Kydyrov who spoke of hostile inequalities and in particular the fact that regarding children 48.5% are in poverty and 1:8 in extreme poverty in his country. The government is attempting to work out specific strategies to lessen the problem. Additionally one fifth of the population are migrant workers and their families. The Kyrgyz President has approved a National Strategy on sustainable development for the period 2013-2017. A letter of the Secretary General was read: benefits for the few are coming about from the work of many. Fulfilling the Millennium Goals entail dialogue, transparency and social justice. The Director of the ILO spoke through a tape recording indicating that "lasting peace rests on social justice." The 2008 crash led to cuts in salaries. Child labor and forced labor still

exists. Workers are being prevented from joining trade unions. There are some positive signs in some countries which realize adopting "smart policies" that invest in stronger protections for workers.

The panel indicated that some of the current problems flowed from the recession leading to governments initiating austerity measures out of fear of budget deficits; in Greece, in particular, the minimum wage was lowered and collective bargaining outlawed. On the matter work distribution and wages, the wealth generated to workers became centered on wealth generated to capital / profits. There is a decline in what is going to workers as compared to profit. There was wage adjustment (2/3 of median wage), changes in technology - leading to machine over man, less educated and low pay workers, and outsourcing of jobs.

The 2008 recession lead to an increase of immigrants especially for domestic work. New York has a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights which apply to both legal and illegal immigrants. But there are little protections- problem of boundaries in employer-employee relationships, lack of professionalism, no job security, no days off and no social security coverage etc...

Less and less being given to the worker is a trend of the last 20-30 years - "wage raise to bottom." This leads to more inequality. This is prevalent in the USA and most other places with the exception of Brazil and Thailand. The European Central Bank and IMF bailout packages make the conditions of extending loans contingent on the reduction of the minimum wage. The right to strike is becoming illegal in the EU, collateral bargaining is being eliminated and negotiation model is that between the employer and employee. Contract re-hiring is limited and at a lower wage.

These violations of social justice are counter-productive for the growth of the economy. In Greece, suicides have tripled, 34% of population are below the poverty level, and life expectancy is down two years. There is a growing anti-immigrant sentiment with emergence of neo-fascist parties. With a reduction in government spending, less is allowed for medical and education. Eight out of ten households cannot afford heating oil. Immigrants are in danger of being killed and the police cannot guarantee security. There is no income to pay domestic workers.

There followed a question and answer period.

Global Report on Trafficking

By: Dr. Lacey Sloan

On February 12, 2013, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime released its latest Global Report on Human Trafficking. Human trafficking is defined internationally as the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of person by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or the giving or

receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2012, p. 16). Exploitation includes sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, servitude and/or organ removal (UNODC). Although often thought of as transportation across international borders, this is not a necessary element of trafficking and data on trafficking confirms that 25% of trafficking is domestic. The majority of trafficking victims are women (55-60%), however this number is decreasing as the number of girls trafficked is increasing. About 2/3s of people prosecuted or convicted of trafficking are male although there are regional differences, such as in Europe and East Asia, where the majority were female (77% between 2007-2010) (UNODC). Although it is believed that most trafficking is for the purpose of prostitution and sexual exploitation, in Africa, the Middle East, South Asian and East Asia, forced labor is more common than other forms. Trafficking for organ removal is the rarest form of trafficking, comprising 0.2% of detected cases.

For a copy of this report, go to http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/Trafficking_in_Persons_2012_web.pdf

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2012). Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. Available from Author, POB 500. 1400 Vienna, Austria.

INSIDE LOOK AT MAJOR UN ACTIONS & EVENTS

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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YEAR-END PRESS CONFERENCE

New York, 19 December 2012

Good morning. It is a great pleasure to see you. I would like to express my sincere thanks for all you have been doing in and around the United Nations.

Best wishes for the holiday season. I look forward to seeing you tonight at the UNCA dinner.

A tumultuous year is coming to a close.

2012 saw tension from Syria to the Sahel, and from Eastern Congo to the Middle East.

Turmoil tested us, once again, on our founding obligation: to stop conflict and build peace.

At the same time, the United Nations helped to lay foundations for progress on the top challenge of the 21st century: sustainable development.

Let me start with the situation in Syria.

Syria began the year in conflict, and ends the year in war. Day by day, the death toll has climbed. Month by month, the regional spillover has grown.

The Syrian opposition is coming together. This is critical. I am deeply concerned about the increased militarization of the conflict and the potential for sectarian atrocities.

Earlier this month, the Deputy Secretary-General visited Lebanon, where Government officials and others voiced serious concern about the worsening regional implications.

As you know very well, I visited Syrian refugees in Jordan and Turkey to see the situation for myself. They expressed grief at the destruction of their cities and villages, and fear and anger at the growing targeting of people because of their religious or ethnic identity.

The exodus has reached more than 500,000 people. It will grow in number as fighting rages, and in intensity as winter takes hold. Neighboring countries face a huge financial burden in sheltering and caring for them. The increasing peril faced by Palestinian refugees in Syria is another growing concern. I call on the international community to respond generously and urgently to the humanitarian appeal launched today in Geneva. I am considering convening an international donor conference, in close coordination with key partners, early next year.

I also urge the international community to unite firmly behind the mediation efforts of the Joint Special Envoy, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi. Syria needs a peaceful, political solution that brings democratic change, while preserving the fabric of Syrian society and the peaceful coexistence of its communities.

In the Sahel region, some 20 million people across nine countries are in crisis, their lives upended by a volatile mix of drought, hunger, poor governance, drug trafficking, terrorism and extremism.

The situation in Mali is especially urgent. We must do all we can to help Malians restore their democracy, recover their territory, address the humanitarian crisis and end the shocking human rights violations. Dialogue and negotiations should be pursued seriously, even as military options are carefully prepared.

We welcome the appointment of Prime Minister [Django] Cissoko as an opportunity to bring new momentum to the political process. Yet we remain concerned over the military's continued interference in politics.

The eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo remains the scene of instability, including sexual violence committed by combatants on all sides. The time has come for the international community to rethink its approach to the DRC and the Great Lakes region. The underlying causes of the conflict in the region must be addressed in a comprehensive manner.

In Northeast Asia, at a time when many countries are undergoing leadership transitions, I hope high priority will be given by the new leaders to building a more prosperous future based on stability and the peaceful resolution of disputes. The provocative rocket launch by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has raised regional concerns and defied the international community. I look forward to the outcome of Security Council consultations on an appropriate response.

The global economy continues to leave too many people behind. As the United Nations reported yesterday in our latest economic outlook, growth continues to be weak -- meaning it will take a long time to ease the global jobs crisis. Our response must protect -- and invest in -- the world's poorest people and nations.

The killings of health workers in Pakistan were cruel, senseless and inexcusable acts that I condemn in the strongest terms. Those killed were among thousands across Pakistan, especially women, who are working selflessly to achieve the historic goal of polio eradication. I call on all concerned to do their utmost to create the secure environment needed to provide life-saving health services to Pakistan's children.

While bombs and rockets have stopped falling in Gaza and Israel, it has become clearer than ever that peace must be more than the absence of war.

The Middle East peace process is in a deep freeze. The two sides seem more polarized than ever, and a two-state solution is farther away than at any time since the Oslo process began. I am deeply concerned by heightened settlement activity in the West Bank, in particular around Jerusalem. This gravely threatens efforts to establish a viable Palestinian state. I call on Israel to refrain from continuing on this dangerous path, which will undermine the prospects for a resumption of dialogue and a peaceful future for Palestinians and Israelis alike. Let us get the peace process back on track before it is too late.

The United Nations has mobilized to face these and many other tests. All our tools are at work: from peacekeeping and good offices to human rights monitoring, humanitarian relief and development assistance.

Transitions are taking hold in Libya, Myanmar, Somalia and Yemen.

Last month Sierra Leone held successful elections. At the end of this month, the UN peacekeeping mandate in Timor-Leste will end, a measure of the progress the country has made from fragility to stability.

Egypt's transition is at another critical moment. I have spoken with President [Mohamed] Morsi in recent days and expressed my hope that the transition will be able to move forward in a peaceful, consensual manner.

My hope is for compromise on all sides so that Egypt can focus on its pressing socio-economic needs and build a "pyramid of democracy" in the heart of the Arab world. This is an Egyptian-led process. It will take time. It is crucial for Egyptians to resolve their differences through dialogue and build a new Egypt that respects and protects the rights of all.

In the past year the United Nations also took major steps to advance economic and social progress and to build solid foundations for long-term peace.

The Rio+20 conference in June took us further along the path towards a sustainable world of dynamic growth, shared prosperity and environmental protection.

In September, Member States adopted a landmark declaration on the rule of law.

The Doha climate change conference, which I attended earlier this month, delivered what we need to keep us on track for a legally binding global agreement by 2015. That is what governments have pledged to do, and it is what they must achieve. As a spur to what we know will be very difficult negotiations, I intend to bring world leaders together in 2014.

Finally, 2012 also saw the launch of crucially important discussions on the post-2015 development agenda and a set of sustainable development goals. We aim to build on the progress we have made towards the Millennium Development Goals - and press harder as the deadline approaches.

The gains of 2012 position us for further advances in the years ahead. We have seized some opportunities, but failed on many others.

Too much of our progress is lost to conflict or remains fragile for want of investment and commitment.

There is too little emphasis on prevention, people and global citizenship.

Far too often, short-term thinking trumps long-term vision.

I will have more to say about my forward agenda in the New Year. We continue to work with Member States and staff to build a coherent global Secretariat and to modernize the management of our resources and workforce. I count on the Member States' support and timely guidance.

I will speak to staff at a town hall meeting in early January. Later in the month, I will make my annual presentation to the Member States and then speak to you again.

The New Year coincides with new beginnings here in the Secretariat building. I am glad to be back in what is now a modern, eco-friendly facility. I thank the Member States for their generous support of the renovation. Our work will benefit greatly from the improvements. I look forward to your own move back in the weeks ahead.

For now, let me express my thanks to you all for another year of covering the big issues that face the United Nations. I pledge my ongoing availability to you as we go about our work together.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General. On behalf of the UN Correspondents Association, thank you for this final press conference and thank you for your availability. We are sure you will be even more available now that you have your eco-friendly office and another eco-friendly car. My question, I'll leave Syria to my colleagues, is on North Korea. Do you think that in 2013 you will be ready to travel to North Korea?

SG: I have been expressing my position when it comes to the peace and stability and dialogue and exchange and cooperation between the Republic of Korea and the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea]. The DPRK has, as you know, new leadership, and when the time comes, when appropriate conditions are created, I am ready to visit, myself, Pyongyang to discuss with the leaders of the DPRK on all the issues to help facilitate, first of all, dialogue and exchange and cooperation between the two parties of Korea and I will do whatever I can.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, since we're on Korea, I couldn't let that go by without a quick follow up on whether you had any reaction to Korean elections which were, at least, the results were being announced today. My real question was on the Middle East: You said that the situation is more polarized now than it ever has been. The United Nations and you yourself have been stepping up your criticism of Israel on the settlement building and I wondered whether you had spoken to Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu and whether there is anything other than words that you think can really be done to try to get both sides back to the negotiating table.

SG: As for the presidential election [in the Republic of Korea], as you know, the counting is still going on. I know that the main opposition candidate has made a concession statement, and also the ruling party candidate, Ms. Park Geun-hye, has also made [a] statement. For me as Secretary-General, it would be prudent and correct to wait until the final result will be announced by the authorities concerned of the Republic of Korea. At this time, what I can tell you is that the Republic of Korea and [its] people have shown a maturity – political and democratic maturity – by conducting, peacefully and in an orderly manner, the presidential election. This is another good achievement and the people have heard and listened to the visions of the candidates and the candidates have been able to lay out their visions and their priorities to the people. So it is what the Korean people have decided. I believe that the result will be announced very soon and I will make some official statement after that. Thank you very much.

About the situation in the Middle East, as you are, I am also deeply concerned about what is happening across the Middle East. First of all, the situation in Syria: We do not see any prospect of any end of violence or any prospect of political dialogue to start. Lakhdar Brahimi, in his capacity as Joint Special Representative, has been actively engaging the parties concerned, not only the Syrians and all the countries in the region, but key partners of the Security Council, including the United States and the Russian Federation. I also myself have been discussing with leaders in the region. So I sincerely hope that the world community, in a unified manner, [will] help those parties to stop violence, first of all, then immediately commence political dialogue. I believe that is the only way to resolve this issue. I again urge the international community to be united, particularly the Security Council, to give a very strong political direction, unified political direction, and at the same time, we are doing our best to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance. Valerie Amos, head of OCHA [the Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs], was in Syria just recently, three days ago. We are raising our voices, appealing to the international community to have generous support. That is what I said in my remarks and I am considering convening an international donor conference soon, early next year.

Martin Nesirky: If I could just add very briefly, Secretary-General, just before we came down here, that Ms. Amos, when she was in Damascus, asked for fuel imports to be allowed for humanitarian aid deliveries. I can tell you that Ms. Amos has been advised by the [Syrian] Deputy Foreign Minister that he's confirmed that the Council of Ministers has approved the request for fuel imports for humanitarian aid delivery. So that's just the latest update as we were coming down here.

Q: There are reports that the Syrian authorities are moving their chemical agents, maybe inside the country and possibly towards Lebanon, according to new reports published today in the Washington Post. What should be done now if Syria starts using chemical weapons? My other question: how are you going to address the refugee influx into Lebanon from Syria? They are adding more pressures on Lebanon, a fragile situation already. What is your main message now for President Assad regarding the Palestinian refugees in Syria? Thank you so much.

SG: As for the possible relocation of chemical weapons stockpile as well as possible use of chemical weapons, I have made my position very clear, very strongly, to Syrian authorities. I have written two letters separately to President [Bashar al-] Assad, urging him that the under any circumstances, these chemical weapons and any weapons of mass destruction should not be used. I received a reply to my letter of July from Syrian authorities. And a few days ago, I spoke to Foreign Minister [Walid Al-] Moualem of Syria, discussing this matter. I warned them that this will be an outrageous crime, whoever may use these will be brought to justice, and I urged them not to use it. Foreign Minister Moualem told me that under any circumstances, they will not use chemical weapons. This, I'm making it clear for the record.

For the refugees, it is not only Lebanon – four countries: Iraq, Jordan and Turkey and Lebanon. They are suffering hugely because of this burden – financial and socio-economic burden – posed by the influx of refugees. The officially registered number of refugees in four countries has surpassed more than half a million. By the end of January next year, we may expect more than 700,000 people. In all, four million people have been affected by this crisis at this time. At least more than two million people internally displaced inside Syria. I really appreciate those countries who are supporting and who are opening their borders to Syrian refugees. It was quite sad, but at the same time I was very touched by the generous support and caring hands of those countries. Our appeal for humanitarian support has been funded less than 50 per cent. We need urgent support from the international community. In Geneva today, we made another appeal and I am going to do it again. We have to do all what we can so that these refugees will be able to return to their home. This is our top priority at this time.

Q: Let me go back to the East Asia issue again. You've touched on a little bit in your statement. South Korea is electing a new president, Japan has just voted in a new leadership, China and North Korea have now new leaders. What, in concrete terms, what do you expect those new leaders to work for peace and stability in the region and beyond, contributing to world peace?

SG: This is quite an important and exciting time for those countries in Northeast Asia, starting from China, Japan, now and the Republic of Korea. They are all undergoing transition in their leadership. I hope that the new leaders of the region will embrace the spirit of mutual understanding, respect and

cooperation for regional peace and stability. The peace and stability and their cooperation in the region have wider regional implications. East Asia is a dynamic economic force, a contributor to UN peacekeeping, human right and development, and we have a very strong coordination and partnership with those three countries. They are also a major source of innovation and ideas shaping our future. I expect the new leaders to be forward-looking, with broader global vision, to coordinate and cooperate among themselves.

And I have taken note of all of these situations in Japan and I'd like to extend my warm congratulations to Mr. Abe Shinzo, a former Prime Minister, who is going to be elected as Prime Minister. I have been working with him very closely when he was Prime Minister and I'm also looking forward to working with him on all of the matters of our mutual concern when he officially [is] inaugurated as Prime Minister. Thank you.

Q: Recently in Morocco, the majority of countries that are members of the Friends of Syria recognized the Syrian opposition as the legitimate organization representing the people of Syria. Recently, the United States and major European countries joined this action. Do you think that President Assad is still legitimately representing the Syrian people or do you think the Syrian opposition is the legitimate representative of the Syrian people? Thank you.

SG: I have very closely followed this situation where these opposition members, they have created the Syrian National Coalition, [in a] more coherent, more structured way, and that is a welcome development and that is also critical for the partners' dialogue once the political negotiations begin. And I have also noted that many countries have recognized the Syrian National Coalition as the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people. As far as the United Nations is concerned, it is up to the Member States to recognize or not to recognize their decision. As Lakhdar Brahimi is going to continue to discuss with the parties concerned, he will also very closely coordinate and discuss all the matters with Syrian National Coalition. At this time, again, both parties must realize that there is no military solution. There is no military solution. This crisis should be resolved through political dialogue. Many parties concerned have been discussing what to do with the future of President Assad. This, I hope, will have to be discussed and resolved through negotiations as soon as possible.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, Recently there has been very heavy fighting in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus. And today, Palestinian President [Mahmoud] Abbas offered to host the Palestinian refugees fleeing the fighting in Syria in the West Bank and Gaza. He appealed directly to you to facilitate that. What is your response?

SG: I have received the request from President Abbas. I am deeply concerned about all the violence taking place against Palestinian refugees in Yarmouk camp. There are more than 160,000 Palestinian refugees who are being housed in that camp. There are some accounts that about two-thirds of the residents – or more than 100,000 people – have fled. We will discuss this matter as a priority agenda, how we can support and help those people. At this time, I would urge again all the neighboring countries to open their borders so that there should be free and unhindered movement of refugees and I will discuss this matter very seriously.

Q: Does that include Israel to allow them to cross through Israeli territory into...?

SG: Yes, all the countries who can give support and cooperation, including Israel.

Q: On behalf of the Free UN Coalition for Access, thanks for giving this press conference, and we hope that in 2013 you will ensure that your other Under-Secretaries-General hold press conferences and seek at least to take questions, without discrimination or censorship. I wanted to ask you about the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. You mentioned sexual violence there, and I wanted to ask about your human rights due diligence policy as it applies to the rapes that are now numbered to be 126 in the town of Minova? What is MONUSCO [United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo] going to do? Are they willing to disclose which units of the Congolese army they currently work with? And as the estimate has now come up to 126, how can you be sure that MONUSCO is not working with the very same units that committed those rapes at the time? I have tried to ask Mr. [Hervé] Ladsous that, and even last night at the stakeout he declined to take the question and moved the microphone, so it is your policy, how do you make sure that your human rights due diligence policy is fully implemented in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere?

SG: The situation currently happening in the eastern part of the DRC is a source of grave concern and a priority. I have been deeply involved in this crisis, trying to find out some broader political framework. If I may disclose, recently – just during the last four or five days, including the weekend, I have been speaking to at least eight African leaders in the region – President [Joseph] Kabila of the DRC, President [Paul] Kagame of Rwanda, and President [Yoweri] Museveni of Uganda, then Presidents of Tanzania, Republic of Congo-Brazzaville, Angola, South Africa, and I am going to speak with Madame [Nkozasana Dlamini] Zuma this afternoon. We have a certain broader political framework on the basis of which we can really resolve this one as soon as possible.

Now, about MONUSCO, I have been discussing again with the members of the Security Council and major troop contributing countries, including the European Union, on how we can have some different approaches, strategic approaches, to change the mandate, if necessary [for] MONUSCO. MONUSCO, I think they have been doing their work properly, but sometimes when they are not able to closely cooperate, work together with the FARDC [Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo] of DRC – the national armed forces – then it is very difficult for MONUSCO to operate alone. We have been trying our best to protect the civilian population. We have been trying to protect the major facilities, like Goma airport, and MONUSCO is patrolling very regularly Goma city and in and around there. So we will try to [discuss] what would be the best way to address this issue, politically, in terms of security, and how we can enhance the capacity of MONUSCO. So this will be done very quickly. And I am very seriously discussing this matter with the Security Council members.

Q: What about the rapes? Just to make sure that MONUSCO doesn't actually work with the units that committed the rapes. I'm sorry for the follow-up; I just wanted to know your thoughts.

SG: That is our priority. Human rights due diligence policy is always in force. I convened recently a policy committee meeting among senior advisers. We have very strict vigilance and protective measures to protect women and girls, to protect them from rape violence.

Q: With the development of the situation in Egypt and the recent attacks on Al-Wafd party, the oldest liberal political party in Egypt, and with people trying to burn down their newspaper and the attack on the independent media, and the surrounding of Media City which houses the studios of independent television, and the rigging of the referendum in Egypt and the prevention of the NGOs from observing the referendum and the attacks by the fascist-style militias of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi groups on the opposition and the National Salvation Front, what kind of pyramid of democracy do you

foresee that Egypt is going to build? And what kind of guarantees, did your conversation with the Egyptian President Morsi, was he willing to offer, since there are more and more attacks on opposition, more attacks on free media, and independent ones, and the situation doesn't really look like going in the direction of anything rather than Somalization of the country? Thank you.

SG: We have seen the process of the Arab Spring. In the course of the Arab Spring we have seen some successes and we have seen some unsuccessful results, as we are seeing now in Syria. Egypt's transition is very important, for the Egyptian people and for the region as a whole. That is why the whole world, including myself, are following very closely the situation there. My hope is for compromise on all sides so that Egypt can focus on its pressing socio-economic needs and build a pyramid of democracy in the heart of the Arab world. There is a constitutional referendum going on; this is again an ongoing process. I hope the second round of the referendum will be carried out in a peaceful manner so that the people of Egypt can express their views freely. Whatever course the Egyptians decide with respect to the constitution and its interpretation is crucial for the transition process to be inclusive and respect fundamental rights and [freedoms]. I sincerely hope that there should be no further violence and protests must be protected. Protests must be carried out in a peaceful manner so that the people will be free to express their views. All parties must act to prevent violence and respect human rights and uphold their national laws.

Q: A couple of days ago the General Assembly approved a resolution to schedule a meeting to discuss the UN Convention on Drugs in 2016 and at the same time the states of Washington and Colorado here in the U.S. legalized the possession of small quantities of marijuana. The Uruguay Congress is discussing a similar measure. So it seems that political opinion is changing. I know that it is up to Member States to modify these conventions of the UN, but what are your personal thoughts on this? And what would you recommend these UN Member States to consider during these discussions? Thank you.

SG: Drug trafficking is a crime, and the United Nations and the international community is doing all to prevent such illegal drug trafficking, which have been causing a lot of social and economic problems as well as political instability in many countries in the world, as we have seen. I do not have a comment on domestic laws or regulations, whereby drug sales have been legalized in some parts of the states within the United States and some other countries. As far as the United Nations is concerned, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime – the UNODC, based in Geneva - is very closely coordinating with the Member States. Whenever we see that more needs to be done, we try to establish our regional offices there. When we address political instability in some countries, particularly in West African states, drug trafficking is now seen as one of the very serious elements which we have to address in our comprehensive dealing with this matter.

Q: My question to you is regarding the settlements. You called on the Israeli Government to refrain from activities. Yesterday the Americans expressed their deep disappointment – a recurring sentiment – on the transfer of Palestine [inaudible]. Will you support Palestinian efforts first to join the International [Criminal] Court, and second, that they pursue criminal charges against Israel to stop settlement activities?

SG: I was very deeply involved in facilitating the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, together with President Morsi and the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. I have been urging them not to provoke each other. When I heard this announcement, I said that this is a near fatal blow to a very fragile Middle East peace process. You have seen my statements in the past, how many times I have been condemning

these illegal settlements. This is clearly a violation of international law, and it is a violation of the Quartet guidelines, and it is obstructing the Middle East peace process. It is encouraging that this ceasefire is holding, but still it is very fragile, and therefore either side should not take any provocative action which may derail this very fragile process. The Middle East peace process must be put on track as soon as possible. I am urging the Israeli Government to refrain from taking any measures of establishing settlements.

Q: What about the Palestinians joining the International Criminal Court?

SG: I have no comment on that, because with the enhanced status of the Palestinian Authority in the General Assembly [with] non-member observer status, I think they have the right to sign the Rome Statute, but it is up to the Palestinian authorities. It is not in my hands. But as the depository of the Rome Statutes, whenever there is any such application or whatever, then I will only review on a technical basis.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, on Mali, you mentioned negotiations. Can you be specific about who would negotiate with whom, and can one negotiate with extremists – Al Qaeda and its offshoots - without military action?

SG: The situation in Mali has many difficult dimensions, not to mention humanitarian aspects, where 18 million people are affected by this, not only political instability, but a long spell of drought and climate change impact and other issues.

As far as the political and security situations are concerned, then first and foremost, constitutional order should be restored. All these issues should be resolved through political dialogue. In that regard, we welcome the appointment of Prime Minister [Diango] Cissoko. I sincerely hope that he will continue to have dialogue. As you know, I have appointed Special Envoy for the Sahel, Romano Prodi, and my Special Representative for West Africa, Said Djinnit - he has been continuously discussing with the Malian authorities.

There may be a case or situation where the people may not have a proper dialogue, may not be able to address through dialogue. That is why I have recommended to the Security Council that as one of the elements, as part of the political process in dealing with the terrorist element, extremist elements in the northern part of Mali, there may need to be a military operation. That is what the African Union and ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States] have been recommending to the United Nations. Based on their concept of operations report, I have also made my own recommendation to the Security Council; it is now being actively discussed by the Security Council. What is important is that we must resolve all these issues through a political dialogue and process, while the possibility of establishing [inaudible] an African-led support mission in Mali, could also be discussed.

Again, I am looking forward to seeing you this evening, and more officially and personally, I would like to wish you all the best to your family and yourselves – happiness and prosperity and good health. Thank you very much.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS TO MEDIA AT THE FIFTH GLOBAL FORUM OF THE
UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS
Vienna, 27 February 2013**

SG: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to first of all thank the Government of Austria for organizing this very important Forum of UN Alliance of Civilization.

The Alliance of Civilization is an important United Nations initiative and I am very much encouraged by growing understanding and appreciation of the importance of the Alliance of Civilization.

Again there is growing understanding that the politics of division, hatred and misperceptions, particularly the language of hatred tear the fabric of our society.

At a time of test for the human family we are living in an era of dramatic transformation in economic, social, political and environmental areas. The last thing the world needs at this time is intolerance and hatred.

The Alliance is trying to build bridges, speak out against extremism, and promote harmony and human dignity.

Responsible leadership is the key in addressing all the challenges which we are now having. This will be crucial. That is why the theme of this Global Forum of the Alliance of Civilization meaning responsible leadership in diversity and dialogue is very fitting and appropriate.

I am glad there are so many distinguished leaders, civil society leaders, and religious leaders are taking part this time in Vienna.

I was truly inspired by many leaders, the remarkable work and the leadership they had been demonstrating in addressing all these challenges which we are now facing.

Yesterday, I participated in a very moving event in the Volkstheater where we were able to see many young people, their creative and very determined engagement to promote mutual understanding among diversity. This is what we really want. We have to help this young generation so that they can shape the future, a better future and more tolerant society, where everybody can live in peace and security, with a dignity and in harmony.

Ladies and gentlemen, at the margins of this meeting I am also meeting many leaders who are participating in this, including leadership of the Austrian Government. I met President Heinz

Fischer and I am also looking forward to my meeting with the Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister and I am also meeting leaders sitting in this Forum.

Our agenda this time which has a direct relationship to our discussions today, particularly the situation in Syria, Mali, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Millennium Development Goals, and how to identify and agree on the sustainable development goals, the post-MDG development agenda in a broader sense.

We are also focusing on deepening our partnership, not only among government leadership but business communities, religious leadership, civil society leadership through this strengthened network and partnership. I am sure that we will be able to promote more effectively, more harmoniously, in a more structured way the goal which we are now promoting to make a better world, more tolerant and more and deeply understanding and appreciating the diversity of this world, forever, and wherever we may be living with whatever background of religious thoughts or belief and everybody has a right to live with dignity and respect. This is the main purpose of our initiative of the Alliance of Civilization. And let us work together. And each and every one of us has a role to play. And I really count on the leadership of the world's government so that they place the highest political priority on this matter.

I thank you very much.

Q: (in Turkish) The Secretary General was asked about reform of the Security Council and whether he agreed with the Turkish Prime Minister on this.

SG: The Security Council Reform has been an issue which Member States have been very seriously discussing during the last 2 decades, for at least 20 years.

If we consider the dramatic changes that have taken place since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, I believe that the Security Council needs change in a more representative, more democratic, more transparent way. Members of the Security Council, they have also have been trying to change and improve their way of working. In this regard they have made this certain progress in terms of transparency of their way of working but when it comes to fundamental structural reform of the Security Council, despite such a long and very serious debate among the Member States we have not seen much progress. There is a widely shared almost a consensus of views that the Security Council must be changed but how to change? How many members there should be? What to do about veto powers which Prime Minister mentioned? Who will be represented? How the Member States can be represented? All these critically important issues have not met with satisfactory consensus opinions among the Member States.

I sincerely hope that the Member States continue to discuss this matter. The ninth intergovernmental negotiation is soon going to take place, the President of the General Assembly together with his facilitator who is Ambassador of Afghanistan, is very actively engaged in this matter. As the Secretary General I will also try to facilitate a political conducive atmosphere so the Member States will accelerate their discussions on this matter.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Message from Maria-Luisa Chavez

31 December 2012

Dear NGO Colleagues,

As we end the Year 2012, let me take this opportunity to express my very bestwishes and gratitude to all of the NGOs around the world for their monumentalcooperation and I look forward to our continuing fruitful, productive partnership in theNew Year.

We have a challenging year ahead!

At the beginning of the New Year, the Secretary-General will outline his prioritiesfor 2013, which we will disseminate to all of you. The challenges faced by theInternational community can only be successfully addressed through solid cooperationand partnership, and I call on NGOs to make their views and voices heard about theUnited Nations' wide-ranging agenda through proper channels. I would like to remindyou of civil society's valued contributions to bringing a number of priorities in the past to the forefront of global debates.

Although there was disappointment at not having held this year an Annual UNDPI/NGO Conference for the first time in its 64-year history, it allowed time forreflection on the Conference, its periodicity, its core funding, as well as the question of rotating the annual meeting between UN headquarters and various regional capitalsdepending on the interest and commitment of Member States. There has been a recordnumber of Member States, including Brazil, Canada, Cuba, Hungary, Ireland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine, that expressedinterest in hosting the next Conference, but there has not been a firm commitment fromany Government. DPI looks forward to a commitment by a Member State.

As we begin 2013, I will only touch on two of our latest, proud achievements: a.)the redesign of our website (<http://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/>). The section continuesexpanding its social media strategy and providing skills enhancement through itsCommunications Workshops to allow the NGOs to familiarize themselves with ourwebsite as a new communication tool as well as the social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter and a blog titled NGO VOICES that are aimed at encouraging intergenerationaldialogue among members of the NGO community; and b.) out intensifying efforts to attract younger NGO representatives to the work of the DPI/NGO community as driversof the UN's social and political change. Currently, about 50 NGO youth representativesare actively participating in person or via Skype in monthly meetings facilitated by theNGO Relations.

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We will continue facilitating in building greater dialogue between the Secretary-General and the NGO community by hosting another interactive meeting with theSecretary-General during 2013 to discuss priorities and issues of mutual concern.

We are also hoping to increase efforts to mobilize NGOs from developingcountries and reach out to civil society partners around the world, through localUNIC/UNIS offices, in order to enhance their interaction with and understanding of thework of the United Nations. Reaching out to new communities has indeed created greaterdiversity within our community and opportunities for reaching out to new grassrootsorganizations especially in developing countries.

NGO Relations looks forward to maintaining the unending solid partnership with NGO/DPI Executive Committee and invites all NGOs to be in touch with this body.

We are extremely grateful to all of you for all your hard work and contributions on the challenges ahead and how the United Nations can strengthen its partnership with this key stakeholder group. The dialogue between NGO Relations and the NGO community is essential to ensuring that your voices are heard within the United Nations.

I would like to conclude my message by expressing my deep gratitude to the “older/seasoned generation” for giving, advising and guiding the “new generation” with your example of a commitment to a lifelong dedication to the UN Charter and its principles that are needed as we face the new challenges ahead.

Your contribution to the UN has been guidance for the new generation to continue the commitment to the UN!

Best wishes from all of us in NGO Relations to you and your families for a

Prosperous and Healthy 2013!

I hope that 2013 will be another year of strong and productive collaboration in support of the United Nations’ work for a better world.

Working Together: Making a difference!

Maria Luisa Chávez

Chief

NGO Relations

Department of Public Information

NEW UN ENVIRONMENT STUDIES SHOW RISING MERCURY THREAT TO PEOPLE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

New York, Jan 10 2013 11:00AM

Communities in developing countries are facing increasing health and environmental risks linked to exposure to mercury, according to new studies by the United Nations environmental agency.

Produced by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the studies note how parts of Africa, Asia and South America could see increasing emissions of mercury into the environment, due mainly to the use of the toxic element in small-scale gold mining, and through the burning of coal for electricity generation.

“Mercury, which exists in various forms, remains a major global, regional and national challenge in terms of threats to human health and the environment,” UNEP’s Executive Director, Achim Steiner, said in a news release on the studies.

Mercury – a naturally-occurring, silvery-white metal that is liquid at ordinary temperatures – can be harmful to humans and the environment. When released from industry and other man-made sources, it can circulate in the environment for up to centuries at a time. This, according to UNEP, means that it is likely to be several years or decades before reductions in mercury emissions have a demonstrable effect on mercury levels in nature and the food chain.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF COMMEMORATION IN MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

27 January 2013

During the Second World War, millions of people who did not conform to Adolf Hitler's perverted ideology of Aryan perfection – Jews, Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, communists, the mentally ill and others – were systematically persecuted, rounded up and transported to death camps. Some were murdered immediately; others cruelly worked to death. Every year on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau we observe the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust so as never to forget these crimes.

This year's theme – "Rescue During the Holocaust: the Courage to Care" – pays tribute to those who risked their lives and their families to save Jews and others from almost certain death under Nazi rule. The stories of the rescuers vary. Some sheltered the intended victims in their homes; others led families to safety or helped them to obtain the necessary documents to escape. Yet each shares a common thread: courage, compassion and moral leadership.

A number of these accounts have achieved iconic prominence – such as the story of Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat who helped save tens of thousands of Jews in Budapest. But the stories of many of the rescuers are known only to those who benefited from their brave acts. This year's observance is meant to augment the historical record, and give those unsung heroes the regard they deserve.

The Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme has produced an educational package on these rescuers. Although acts of genocide illustrate the depths of evil to which individuals and whole societies can descend, the examples of these brave men and women also demonstrate the capacity of humankind for remarkable good, even during the darkest of days.

On this International Day, let us remember all the innocent people who lost their lives during the Holocaust. And let us be inspired by those who had the courage to care – the ordinary people who took extraordinary steps to defend human dignity. Their example can help us build a better world today.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, General Assembly, 22 January 2013

Let me start today's discussion by thanking you for your support and encouragement throughout 2012. At the beginning, I offer you my best wishes for your continued good health and success throughout 2013 and beyond.

For several years now, we have come together in January for dialogue on our shared efforts to meet our shared goals.

This year, we meet amid tremendous turmoil and uncertainty. From armed conflict in Africa and the Middle East, to economic and environmental distress across the globe, we are being tested every minute of every day.

One year ago, with waves of monumental change surging around us, I called for equally dramatic steps to transform the human condition.

I identified five areas where needs are greatest and where collective action can make the greatest difference. They are: sustainable development; prevention; supporting nations in transition; building a more secure world; and empowering women and young people.

These imperatives -- these generational opportunities -- flow naturally from the eight priorities the General Assembly has set for the United Nations. They are: sustainable development, peace and security, human rights, humanitarian assistance, disarmament, justice, the development of Africa, drug control, crime prevention and combating terrorism.

My fervent hope -- and our common urgent need -- is that we can stop moving from crisis to crisis, from symptom to symptom, and instead address the underlying causes and inter-relationships, and recognize the flaws in many of our approaches.

I am pleased to report today on what we have achieved together in some of the areas -- and where concerted action today can yield great gains tomorrow.

2012 fut une année de turbulences, mais aussi de gains tangibles.

À la Conférence sur le développement durable, Rio +20, nous avons fait un grand pas dans la bonne direction. Le mois dernier, à Doha, nous avons maintenu sur les rails les négociations sur le climat. C'est une priorité pour moi et, l'année prochaine, j'entends inviter les dirigeants du monde individuellement et collectivement, à mobiliser la volonté politique nécessaire à l'adoption, d'ici à 2015, d'un instrument fort, complet et contraignant sur les changements climatiques.

Les débats relatifs au programme de développement pour l'après-2015 ont démarré en force l'an dernier. Quarante-quatre pays ont adopté des plans d'accélération des activités axées sur les objectifs du Millénaire pour le développement. La croissance économique est restée robuste en Asie, en Afrique et en Amérique latine, ce qui a permis à des millions de personnes d'échapper à la pauvreté et à la marginalisation.

L'Assemblée générale a adopté une résolution phare sur les mutilations génitales féminines, et nous avons célébré la première Journée internationale de la fille, ouvrant ainsi la voie à des progrès dans la protection des enfants contre la discrimination, la violence, le mariage précoce et la circonscription forcée.

Mon initiative « L'éducation avant tout » a mis plus encore l'accent sur l'égalité des chances pour tous les enfants et, la semaine dernière, j'ai annoncé la nomination du premier Envoyé des Nations Unies pour la jeunesse, le Jordanien Ahmad Alhindawi.

L'opération de maintien de la paix qui était déployée au Timor-Leste a mené à bien sa mission. Des élections ont eu lieu en Sierra Leone, marquant une autre étape importante. Soucieux de faire une place plus grande à la prévention et aux interventions rapides, nous avons déployé des spécialistes de la médiation dans 22 pays.

Avec l'assistance de l'ONU, la Libye, la Somalie et le Yémen ont consolidé leurs acquis démocratiques. En appuyant les pays en transition, dont ceux qui sont inscrits à l'ordre du jour de la Commission de consolidation de la paix, nous avons contribué à améliorer les perspectives de paix à long terme.

Nous avons noué des liens plus étroits avec des organisations régionales, de l'Union africaine à l'ASEAN en passant par la Ligue des États arabes et l'Union européenne. L'Assemblée générale a adopté une résolution majeure sur la sécurité humaine. Nous avons rendu plus rigoureuse la procédure de sélection

du personnel des missions des Nations Unies. Au titre du Fonds central pour les interventions d'urgence, qui aide les pays touchés par des catastrophes naturelles et d'autres sinistres, des montants plus importants que jamais ont été versés à plus de pays que jamais, ce qui montre qu'il s'agit réellement d'un mécanisme pour tous, financé par tous.

L'an dernier, l'ancien Président libérien Charles Taylor a été condamné pour crimes de guerre et crimes contre l'humanité; ce fut une nouvelle étape dans la consolidation de la justice pénale internationale, qui montre que nous sommes à l'ère de la responsabilité. Par ailleurs, la déclaration ambitieuse adoptée à la première réunion de haut niveau que l'Assemblée générale ait jamais consacrée à l'état de droit devrait aider les pays et la communauté internationale à renforcer l'action qu'ils mènent en faveur de la paix et de la sécurité, du développement et des droits de l'homme.

These achievements, and many more like them, spanned the full range of UN priorities. We responded to crisis, tried new approaches and built new foundations for a better future.

I am encouraged -- but I am far from satisfied. The stresses of our times, the pressures on our planet, the pain of the people we serve – all this demands that we do better in 2013.

We can start next Wednesday at the Syria Humanitarian Conference that I am convening in Kuwait. I appeal to Member States to send high-level delegations and come forward with generous pledges. I call on Syria's neighbors to continue to allow those seeking refuge to cross borders to safety. And I thank His Highness Emir of Kuwait for his very generous position to convene this meeting together with me.

We must do everything we can to reach Syrians in need. We must intensify our efforts to end the violence through diplomacy, overcoming the divisions within Syria, the region and the Security Council. I call again for all states to cease sending arms to either side in Syria.

We remain a long way from getting the Government and opposition together to make the key decisions about the country's future that only Syrians can make. In the meantime, we must make it clear that all perpetrators of atrocity crimes in Syria will be held to account.

Syria is one among several crises that have led to the largest refugee flows since the Kosovo crisis 13 years ago. Other large-scale displacements are taking place in Mali and the Sahel.

Mali is under threat from terrorists, with regional and global repercussions. Addressing these challenges requires political, security and humanitarian efforts. At the same time, in calibrating the extent of its own involvement, the United Nations has to carefully take into account the human rights, safety and security issues at stake.

Working with African and international partners, we must do our part to help fully restore Mali's constitutional order and territorial integrity. Meanwhile, we continue to work towards an integrated strategy for the Sahel region that would address the mix of extremism, poverty, drought and governance challenges that is causing such profound misery and dangerous insecurity.

This year we must also re-consider our approach to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I have been in close contact with President Kabila of the DRC and other leaders of the Great Lakes Region to establish a new peace and security framework to break the appalling cycle of violence. I hope the Framework will be signed at the upcoming AU Summit.

2013 will be a critical year for the Middle East Peace process. As illegal settlement activity continues and Israelis and Palestinians remain polarized, five key priorities stand out: first, we must renew collective international engagement; second, we must resume meaningful negotiations; third, we must preserve stability in Gaza; fourth, we must make progress on Palestinian reconciliation, and fifth, we must prevent the financial collapse of the Palestinian Authority. Concerted action is essential if we are to salvage the two-state solution.

We need to do more to advance the Responsibility to Protect in the face of grave crimes and incitement – and avoid un-doing the great progress we have made. In both Syria and Mali, we must do everything we

can to keep those conflicts from generating reprisal killings that escalate into widespread ethnic and sectarian warfare and even genocidal activities.

And we need to advance the rule of law on disarmament and non-proliferation. I urge you to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty into force. Conclude negotiations on an Arms Trade Treaty in March. Fulfill the Action Plan adopted at the 2010 NPT Review Conference. Begin negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament without further delay. And convene a conference this year on establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

We will press ahead in 2013 on the paramount challenge of sustainable development.

In September, there will be a special event on the Millennium Development Goals to assess progress and discuss the contours of an ambitious, practical and coherent post-2015 development framework. Toward this end we will draw on the work of my High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, which will report to me at the end of May. Global consultations and other processes will also be key parts of this process.

I am pleased to note the imminent adoption by the General Assembly of a resolution establishing an Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals. Let us do our utmost to inspire and mobilize the world behind this effort.

In September the General Assembly will hold high-level meetings on migration and on the rights of people with disabilities. We will prepare for conferences on the land-locked and small-island developing states to be held in 2014. And we will advance preparations for a World Humanitarian Summit to be held in 2015.

We continue our campaigns against violence based on sexual orientation. I urge Member States to come to the March session of the Commission on the Status of Women with specific plans to end violence against women, including through UN Women's new COMMIT initiative. And we have high hopes for ESCWA's recently launched work with regional bodies to establish an Arab Women's Observatory to monitor and promote progress, protection and participation.

Our work at the national and international levels requires solidarity and mutual understanding. Next month at its forum in Vienna, the Alliance of Civilizations will continue its work to counter extremism and hatred. Whether on the world stage or in their communities, leaders have a responsibility to speak the language of tolerance and respect, not division and defamation.

Lasting solutions to global problems no longer lie in the hands of governments alone. The United Nations of the 21st century must think in terms of networks and coalitions.

I am pleased to report that the Every Woman Every Child alliance has generated more than \$10 billion in new resources on life-saving health interventions. The Scaling Up Nutrition movement is making inroads against malnutrition and childhood stunting. The Sustainable Energy for All initiative will bring in more partners and pledges in 2013.

We will continue to explore where else to apply this model. I am putting forward a proposal to the General Assembly, through the Regular Budget process, for a UN Partnership Facility to accelerate our efforts. I ask for your strong support.

I reiterate my gratitude to the Member States for the generous investments in the Capital Master Plan. We have returned to a modernized Secretariat building. The renovation of the General Assembly will begin in June this year, and is expected to be finished late next year, along with the renovation of the conference building already under way.

We are moving ahead, with your blessing, on the deployment of our Enterprise Resource Planning system, Umoja, and the implementation of International Public Sector Accounting Standards, called IPSAS. Other major change management efforts include the integration of research, training and library services, and the moves towards a digital Secretariat through technological solutions such as the paper-smart concept, which I saw in action at the Doha climate change conference.

I look forward to your approval of the proposed mobility framework in March. The sooner the Organization can enjoy the benefits of a truly global workforce and Secretariat, the better.

I also look forward to continued dialogue on reforming the backstopping and funding of our political missions.

We in the Secretariat are well aware of the severe financial constraints that define our work. As I told the staff at a town hall meeting earlier this month, no one can afford so-called a greenhouse mentality in which there is always sun and water to nourish what we do.

It will be very difficult to cut a further \$100 million from the budget for the next biennium, over and above the efficiencies I had already identified, as you have asked. But we are, of course, committed to budget discipline.

At the same time, as demands continue to grow, it is unrealistic to think that substantial budget reductions will have no impact. It is unsustainable for Member States to add and add while the Secretariat is asked to cut and cut.

I urge you to consider reviewing mandated activities that may have been fulfilled or overtaken by new developments. I appeal to you to review your practices, and find efficiencies there, too. Let us work together to weather the current financial storm.

This is no time for business as usual. To shape the future we want, we will have to think and act innovatively and differently. We will have to throw off another brake on our common progress: the tyranny of the status quo.

Too often, Governments and our international machinery operate on auto-pilot. Issues remain in their silos; worrying trends are allowed to persist and unfold, all because “that is the way things have been done”, or because true change is seen as costly or unrealistic, or entrenched interests have a hold on the legislative machinery.

This Organization has a solid record of achievement. UN staff across the world continue to perform heroically, often under daunting circumstances.

But we must do more than save lives, central as that is to our mission. We must save our very future.

Let us make the year ahead one in which we rise above disunity and the lowest common denominator, and show the world that good international solutions are in the national interest. I repeat that: international solutions are in the national interest.

The decisions we take -- or fail to take -- in the crucial next few years will shape the world for decades to come. Let us be wise, responsible and forward-looking. Let us work as one to deliver for all.

Thank you very much for your leadership.

SECRETARY-GENERAL APPOINTS AHMAD ALHENDAWI OF JORDAN ENVOY ON YOUTH

January 17, 2013

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced today the appointment of Ahmad Alhendawi of Jordan as his Envoy on Youth.

In his Five-Year Action Agenda, the Secretary-General identified “Working with and for Women and Young People” as one of his top priorities, and in that context, the Envoy on Youth will address the needs of the largest generation of youth the world has ever known.

A strong youth advocate, Mr. Alhendawi brings to the position extensive knowledge of and commitment to working on youth issues at the local, regional and international levels. Since December 2012, he has been Team Leader at the World Bank-funded programme to the League of Arab States on Institutional Development to Strengthen Arab Policy and Participation. Prior to that, he served as Youth Policy Adviser to the Arab League in Cairo, and Officer in the Technical Secretariat of the Arab Youth and Sports Ministers Council (2009-2012).

Mr. Alhendawi also served as Team Leader for the National Youth Policy Project in Iraq, Youth Programme Associate at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Iraq office and Emergency Programme Officer at Save the Children. He also provided support for the Danish Youth Council's projects in the Middle East and North Africa, as regional consultant.

As part of his voluntary work, Mr. Alhendawi was among the co-founders of the All Jordan Youth Commission. He also co-founded and headed the Youth for Democracy Network at the Jordanian Commission for Democratic Culture, in addition to co-founding the International Youth Council in New York.

Born in 1984, Mr. Alhendawi holds a master's degree in advanced European and international relations, a diploma as "Policy Officer in European and International Organizations" from the Institut Européen in Nice, and a bachelor's degree in computer information systems from the Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE FOR INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

New York, 1 February 2013

For billions of people around the world, faith is an essential foundation of life. It provides strength in times of difficulty and an important sense of community. The vast majority of people of faith live in harmony with their neighbors, whatever their creed, but each religion also harbors a strident minority prepared to assert fundamentalist doctrines through bigotry and extreme violence.

These acts are an affront to the heritage and teachings of all major religions. They also contravene the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms the right of all to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. It is imperative that the moderate majority is empowered to stand firm against the forces of extremism. But, this can only be achieved through strong leadership.

Next month at its forum in Vienna, the Alliance of Civilizations will continue its efforts to unite faiths and cultures. Whether on the world stage or in their communities, religious and cultural leaders have a responsibility to speak the language of tolerance and respect. This is a central message of World Interfaith Harmony Week.

We must also reach out to young people with a message of hope. Too often marginalized, jobless and facing a future of uncertainty, youth can be easy prey for fanatics offering a sense of cause and community. We need to expose the invalidity of this lure and offer a compelling alternative.

This cannot be achieved by words alone. Young people need jobs and a meaningful stake in a future that they can believe in. The United Nations is currently engaged in defining a post-2015 sustainable development agenda. Our goal is to eradicate extreme poverty in our lifetime and promote equitable economic opportunity for all while protecting the environment. To do that, we need the engagement of all

actors – including young people and communities of faith.

We live in times of turmoil and transformation – economic, environmental, demographic and political. These transitions bring both hope and uncertainty. Our job is to ensure that hope wins, and our task will be made easier if the followers of all faiths collaborate in common cause. Let us never forget that what divides us is minuscule compared with what unites us. Working together, we can achieve all our goals for peace, prosperity and physical and spiritual well-being.

Statement by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, on International Women’s Day, March 8, 2013

Today, as we celebrate International Women’s Day, we applaud the progress and achievements of women all across the world. From the announcement that combat positions would be open to the women bravely serving in the U.S. military to the record number female members of the U.S. Congress currently in power, the U.S. has made real progress towards leveling the playing field for American women and empowering them to live up to their full potential.

But today is also a day to acknowledge the progress we as Americans and international community have yet to make. One in three women worldwide will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in their lifetimes. More than 30 million girls worldwide do not receive the benefit of any schooling, and more than 280,000 women die each year from childbirth complications that can be anticipated and treated.

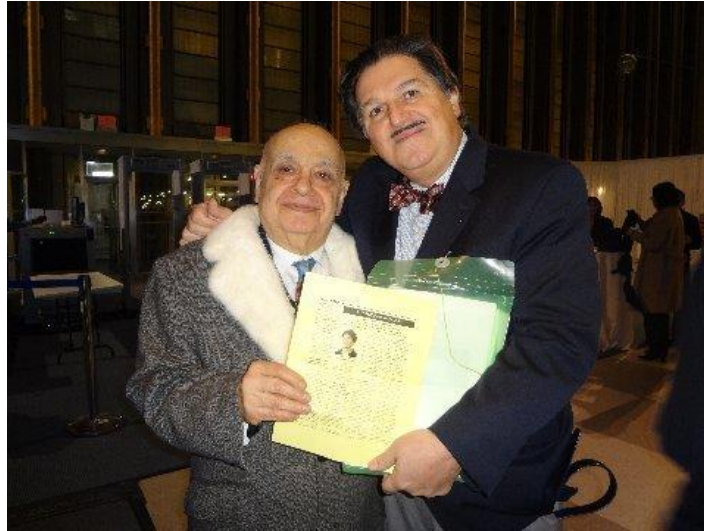
Our societies are not truly free, if we do not uphold our fundamental ideals of fairness and equality. We as a people are not free when women and girls still struggle for their survival and safety or find their reproductive rights blocked. When women around the world still face discrimination and even death because of their sexual orientation and gender identity, our values are compromised.

Yesterday, President Obama signed the Violence Against Women Act, which launches new programs to help survivors of rape and assault, strengthens tools to hold offenders accountable, and offers increased protections for Native American women and the LGBT community. The U.S. is working to improve girls’ access to education and to ensure that all women have access to reproductive health services as well as maternal, newborn and child health services.

On this International Women’s Day, I applaud the dedication of all who work to ensure that every girl and every woman can realize her fundamental right to live free from violence and fear and to reach her full potential. Let us step up the fight to protect and support our sisters, mothers and daughters.

Nowruz or New Day is celebrated

Doctors Morewedge and Takooshian at Nowruz celebration, March 18 at United Nations. Nowruz or New Day is celebrated as the first day of spring in Central Asia and surrounding states including Kyrgyzstan. It was a snow storm in New York.



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

21 March 2013

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination this year focuses on using the power of sport to end the blight of racism. It is an opportunity to highlight the sharp contrast between the positive values of sports and the despicable incidents of racism that scar even some professional competitions.

Sport is a universal activity that can reaffirm our fundamental human rights. Combating racism lies at the heart of the United Nations Charter. The international community has an obligation to work for equality and non-discrimination, and we can advance progress by promoting these values through sports.

Each year we mark this Day on the anniversary of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre. We can never forget the 69 unarmed and peaceful demonstrators who were killed by South African police as they protested the country's unjust apartheid laws.

Apartheid has long since been dismantled and there have been other important advances in the struggle against racism. These include treaties and declarations, the development of an international framework to combat racism, and national protection systems by numerous States.

Despite much progress, racism remains a pervasive menace to individuals and ethnic and religious groups worldwide. It is a threat to stability and a grave violation of human rights.

We must join forces to end racism, and sport can help reach this goal. On this International Day, let us recommit to ending racial discrimination and realizing our vision of justice, equality and freedom from fear for all.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE OF THE
VICTIMS OF SLAVERY AND THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE**

25 March 2013

The transatlantic slave trade raged for 400 years and claimed more than 15 million victims. Africans and people of African descent were victims of these brutal acts and continue to suffer the consequences.

On the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, we tell the world to never forget this global crime against humanity.

We must never forget the torture, rape and killing of innocent men, women and children, the families that were separated, the lives that were uprooted, and the horrific conditions on slave ships, plantations and at slave markets. These degradations cannot be buried by time; they must be examined, understood and addressed.

As we reflect on the contemporary consequences of this tragedy, let us remember the bravery of those who risked everything for freedom and those who helped them on that perilous path. Their courage should inspire us as we struggle against contemporary forms of slavery, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance.

This year, along with somber reflection, we have special reason to celebrate. We mark 150 years since Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing millions of African-Americans from enslavement.

This year also marks other milestones. In 1833, slavery ended in Canada, the British West Indies and the Cape of Good Hope. Some 170 years ago, the Indian Slavery Act of 1843 was signed. Slavery was abolished 165 years ago in France; 160 years ago in Argentina; 150 years ago in the former Dutch colonies; and 125 years ago in Brazil.

On this Day, let us pledge to honor and restore the dignity of affected people and to intensify efforts to eliminate the remnants of slavery that persist in our world.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS

21 March 2013

Forests are vital for our well-being. They cover nearly a third of the globe and provide an invaluable variety of social, economic and environmental benefits. Three fourths of freshwater comes from forested catchment areas. Forests stabilize slopes and prevent landslides; they protect coastal communities against tsunami and storm. More than 3 billion people use wood for fuel; some 2 billion people depend on forests for sustenance and income, and 750 million live within them.

By proclaiming the International Day of Forests, the United Nations has created a new platform to raise awareness about the importance of all types of forest ecosystems to sustainable development.

Forests are often at the frontlines of competing demands. Urbanization and the consumption needs of growing populations are linked to deforestation for large-scale agriculture and the extraction of valuable timber, oil and minerals. Often the roads that provide infrastructure for these enterprises ease access for other forest users who can further exacerbate the rate of forest and biodiversity loss.

Forests are also central to combating climate change. They store more carbon than is in the atmosphere. Deforestation and land-use changes account for 17 per cent of human-generated carbon dioxide emissions. As weather patterns alter due to climate change, many forested areas are increasingly vulnerable. This underlines the urgency of a global, inclusive, legally binding climate change agreement that will address greenhouse gas emissions and encourage the protection and sustainable management of forests.

Notwithstanding these immense challenges, there are encouraging signs. The

global rate of deforestation has decreased by almost 20 per cent in the past decade. We need now to intensify efforts to protect forests, including by incorporating them into the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals. On this first International Day of Forests, I urge governments, businesses and all sectors of society to commit to reducing deforestation, preventing forest degradation, reducing poverty and promoting sustainable livelihoods for all forest-dependent peoples.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD WATER DAY

22 March 2013

Water holds the key to sustainable development. We need it for health, food security and economic progress. Yet, each year brings new pressures. One-in-three people already lives in a country with moderate to high water stress, and by 2030 nearly half the global population could be facing water scarcity, with demand outstripping supply by 40 per cent. Competition is growing among farmers and herders; industry and agriculture; town and country; upstream and downstream; and across borders. Climate change and the needs of populations growing in size and prosperity mean we must work together to protect and manage this fragile, finite resource.

This is the International Year of Water Cooperation, and World Water Day 2013 is dedicated to highlighting the joint efforts necessary to ensuring a fair share for people and planet. The United Nations system, through UN-Water and its 30 UN members and 25 international partners, is fostering collaboration from the global level to the grassroots. For example, the UN Development Programme's Shared Waters Partnership is supporting political agreement on shared waters, such as in the Nile Basin. UNESCO is supporting the equitable management of trans boundary water resources to avoid conflict, while the UN Economic Commission for Europe's Convention on the Protection and Use of Trans boundary Watercourses and International Lakes will soon be available to all UN Member States. I urge countries outside the UNECE region to join the Convention and further develop it.

Agriculture is by far the largest user of freshwater, and there is growing urgency to reconcile its demands with the needs of domestic and industrial uses, especially energy production. Climate change also presents a growing threat to agricultural productivity and food security. My Zero Hunger Challenge promotes sustainable agriculture by sharing best practices and harnessing the most appropriate technologies so small farmers and industrial giants alike can get more crop per drop. No message on water should pass without mentioning sanitation. While the Millennium Development Goal target for providing access to improved water sources has been reached, we are woefully short on sanitation. Some 2.5 billion people lack access to the dignity and health afforded by access to a toilet and protection from untreated waste. We count the cost in lives -- 4,500 young children a day -- and economic productivity. Yet we know that every dollar spent on sanitation can bring a five-fold return. That is why the Deputy Secretary-General has this week launched a global call to action to accelerate work towards the MDG on sanitation. Investment in sanitation is a down-payment on a sustainable future.

There are little more than 1,000 days left before the MDG deadline, but with renewed effort we can finish the job started at the beginning of the Millennium. But 2015 is not a finishing line, merely a milestone in a long and challenging journey. As we develop the post-2015 development agenda, our aim is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and to create an equitable world of opportunity for all. To do that, we need to give equal consideration to the environmental dimension of sustainable development. We cannot prosper without clean, plentiful freshwater. On this World Water Day, I appeal for heightened cooperation. Water is a common resource. Let us use it more intelligently and waste less so all get a fair share.

The United States Supports the Arms Trade Treaty

Press Statement

John Kerry
Secretary of State - Washington, DC

March 15, 2013

The United States looks forward to working with our international partners at the upcoming conference from March 18-28 to reach consensus on an Arms Trade Treaty that advances global security and respects national sovereignty and the legitimate arms trade. We supported and actively participated in negotiations on an Arms Trade Treaty held at the United Nations in July 2012. Those negotiations made considerable progress, but ended before a treaty could be concluded. Accordingly, the United States supported a UN General Assembly resolution December 24, 2012 to convene the conference this month to build on those efforts.

The United States is steadfast in its commitment to achieve a strong and effective Arms Trade Treaty that helps address the adverse effects of the international arms trade on global peace and stability. An effective treaty that recognizes that each nation must tailor and enforce its own national export and import control mechanisms can generate the participation of a broad majority of states, help stem the illicit flow of conventional arms across international borders, and have important humanitarian benefits.

The United States could only be party to an Arms Trade Treaty that addresses international transfers of conventional arms solely and does not impose any new requirements on the U.S. domestic trade in firearms or on U.S. exporters. We will not support any treaty that would be inconsistent with U.S. law and the rights of American citizens under our Constitution, including the Second Amendment.

While the international arms trade affects every country, over one hundred states today do not have a system for control of international conventional arms transfers. We support a treaty that will bring all countries closer to existing international best practices, which we already observe, while preserving national decisions to transfer conventional arms responsibly. The international conventional arms trade is, and will continue to be, a legitimate commercial activity. But responsible nations should have in place

control systems that will help reduce the risk that a transfer of conventional arms will be used to carry out the world's worst crimes, including those involving terrorism, and serious human rights violations.

I wish the conference well and hope that we can reach consensus on a treaty that improves global security, advances our humanitarian goals, and enhances U.S. national security by encouraging all nations to establish meaningful systems and standards for regulating international arms transfers and ensuring respect for international law.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

2 April 2013

World Autism Awareness Day has succeeded in calling greater international attention to autism and other developmental disorders that affect millions of people worldwide.

The current session of the United Nations General Assembly has adopted a new resolution on this issue, demonstrating a commitment to help affected individuals and families. The resolution encourages Member States and others to strengthen research and expand their delivery of health, education, employment and other essential services.

The Executive Board of the World Health Assembly will also take up the subject of autism spectrum disorders at its forthcoming session in May.

This international attention is essential to address stigma, lack of awareness and inadequate support structures. Current research indicates that early interventions can help persons with autistic conditions to achieve significant gains in their abilities. Now is the time to work for a more inclusive society, highlight the talents of affected people and ensure opportunities for them to realize their potential.

The General Assembly will hold a high-level meeting on 23 September to address the conditions of more than one billion persons with disabilities, including those with autism spectrum disorders. I hope leaders will seize this opportunity to make a meaningful difference that will help these individuals and our human family as a whole.

Let us continue to work hand-in-hand with persons with autism spectrum disorders, helping them to cultivate their strengths while addressing the challenges they face so they can lead the productive lives that are their birthright.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF MINE AWARENESS AND ASSISTANCE IN MINE ACTION

4 April 2013

Eliminating the threat of mines and explosive remnants of war is a crucially important endeavor that advances peace, enables development, supports nations in transition and saves lives.

The United Nations continues to provide wide-ranging assistance to millions of people in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Colombia, Laos, Lebanon, South Sudan and elsewhere. But more progress is needed, and new frontiers for action have emerged, most notably in Syria and Mali, where the devastating humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is growing.

I am encouraged that 161 Member States have agreed to be bound by the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention of 1997. In addition, 111 have signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and 81 States have consented to be bound by Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. 127 nations have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I call for universal adherence to these important treaties.

United Nations mine action programmes continue to create space for humanitarian relief efforts, peace operations and development initiatives, allowing UN staff to deploy and refugees and internally displaced persons to return voluntarily to their homes. The United Nations 2013-2018 Strategy on Mine Action sets out a series of steps towards a safer world where individuals and communities can pursue socio-economic development and where survivors are treated as equal members of their societies.

The United Nations is strongly committed to mine awareness and mine action throughout the world. On this International Day, we reaffirm our commitment to a world free from the threat of mines and other remnants of war.

RELIGIOUS NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Patriarch Maxim, Orthodox Leader of Bulgaria, Dies at 98

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Published: November 6, 2012



SOFIA, Bulgaria (AP) — Patriarch Maxim of Bulgaria, who weathered a revolt over his Communist-era ties to lead his country's Orthodox Christians for more than 40 years, died here on Tuesday. He was 98.

Dimitar Deinov/Associated Press

Patriarch Maxim's tenure as the church's leader bridged Bulgaria's transition from Communism.

The cause was heart failure, the Holy Synod said in a statement.

Orthodox Christianity is Bulgaria's dominant religion, followed by more than 80 percent of the country's 7.4 million people. Patriarch Maxim's tenure as the church's leader bridged the country's transition from Communism, and he withstood efforts to oust him by the new democratic government and by rebel priests who saw him as a Communist ally.

Born Marin Naidenov Minkov on Oct. 29, 1914, he graduated from the Sofia Seminary in 1935 and entered Sofia University's theology department in 1938, before rising through the church ranks to be named patriarch on July 4, 1971.

After the collapse of Communism in 1989, Bulgaria's new democratic government sought to replace Communist-appointed figureheads, including the patriarch. The church split between supporters of Patriarch Maxim and breakaway clergymen, who tried to oust him and then formed their own synod.

The division plunged the church into turmoil, with church buildings being occupied, priests breaking into fistfights on church steps, and water cannons and tear gas being turned on rebel bishops to clear the main St. Alexander Nevsky cathedral in Sofia.

For more than a decade the two synods existed side by side. The schism ended in 2010, when the head of the alternative synod called for healing and the synod was dissolved.

Patriarch Maxim was hailed for meeting with Pope John Paul II during the pontiff's visit to Sofia in 2002, a trip seen as warming the frosty relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Vatican.

The Holy Synod of 13 senior clergy members will choose an interim patriarch until a larger Church Council is held within four months to pick Patriarch Maxim's successor, church officials said.



ST. NERSESS ARMENIAN SEMINARY
Ս. ՆԵՐՏԷՍ ԸՆԾԱՅԱՐԱՆ
150 STRATTON ROAD, NEW ROCHELLE, NEW YORK 10804

Beloved Seminary Chef "Ovi" Goes to be with the Lord

Dear St. Nersess Friends and Family,

With deep sorrow the Seminary announces the sudden passing of Ovider "Ovi" Padilla. The 54-year old Seminary chef at St. Nersess for more than seven years died of a massive stroke on Sunday. His wife Iries and son Christopher were at his side.

Ovi was known by everyone who passed through the Seminary doors and shared a delicious, nutritious meal prepared by his loving hands.

"He was part of the St. Nersess family," said Seminary Administrator, Deacon Levon Aliparmakian.

Ovi is survived by his wife Iries and four children, including his 15-year old son Christopher, who is well known to the participants of the Summer Conferences, of which he was a participant.

Ovi was an upstanding, hard-working man dedicated to his craft and especially to St. Nersess. He lighted up the Seminary kitchen with his smile as he wore his staple, pristine white tee-shirt.

Ovi, we miss you.

Funeral arrangements will be announced once they are finalized. In lieu of flowers donations would be gratefully received by the family. Checks made out to Ovi's wife, "Mrs. Iries Gregorio" may be sent directly to St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 150 Stratton Road, New Rochelle, NY 10804.



Ovi and Christopher in the Seminary kitchen last summer.

May our Lord rest the soul of his servant in peace. Աստուածհոգիներուսատրի:

DATA SUGGESTS SYRIA DEATH TOLL COULD BE MORE THAN 60,000, SAYS UN HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE

New York, Jan 2 2013

Data analysis suggests that the death toll in the ongoing conflict in Syria has surpassed 60,000, the United Nations human rights office said today.

Preliminary analysis carried out by data specialists on behalf of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has led to the compilation of a list of 59,648 individuals reported killed in Syria between 15 March 2011 and 30 November 2012.

“Given there has been no let-up in the conflict since the end of November, we can assume that more than 60,000 people have been killed by the beginning of 2013,” said High Commissioner Navi Pillay said.

“The number of casualties is much higher than we expected, and is truly shocking,” she added.

According to a news release issued by OHCHR, the preliminary analysis, which took five months to complete, was conducted using a combined list of 147,349 reported killings, fully identified by the first and last name of the victims, as well as the date and location of the deaths.

Any reported killing that did not include at least these four elements was excluded from the list, which was compiled using datasets from seven different sources, including the Syrian Government.

The analysts noted that 60,000 is likely to be an underestimate of the actual number of deaths, given that reports containing insufficient information were excluded from the list, and that a significant number of killings may not have been documented at all by any of the seven sources.

“Although this is the most detailed and wide-ranging analysis of casualty figures so far, this is by no means a definitive figure,” Ms. Pillay noted. “We have not been able to verify the circumstances of each and every death, partly because of the nature of the conflict and partly because we have not been allowed inside Syria since the unrest began in March 2011.

“Once there is peace in Syria, further investigations will be necessary to discover precisely how many people have died, and in what circumstances, and who was responsible for all the crimes that have been committed. This analysis provides a very useful basis upon which future investigations can be built to enhance accountability and provide justice and reparations to victims’ families.

“This massive loss of life could have been avoided if the Syrian Government had chosen to take a different path than one of ruthless suppression of what were initially peaceful and legitimate protests by unarmed civilians,” said the High Commissioner.

Recent months have witnessed an escalation in the conflict, which began as an uprising against President al-Assad and is now in its 22nd month. The crisis has left four million people inside the country in need of humanitarian assistance, and it is estimated that up to a million Syrian refugees in neighboring countries will need help during the first half of this year.

“As the situation has continued to degenerate, increasing numbers have also been killed by anti-government armed groups, and there has been a proliferation of serious crimes including war crimes, and – most probably – crimes against humanity, by both sides. Cities, towns and villages have been, and

are continuing to be, devastated by aerial attacks, shelling, tank fire, bomb attacks and street-to-street fighting,” said Ms. Pillay.

She noted that the increasingly sectarian nature of the conflict, highlighted in a recent update by the UN-mandated independent international Commission of Inquiry on Syria, means a swift end to the conflict will be “all the more difficult to accomplish.”

“While many details remain unclear, there can be no justification for the massive scale of the killing highlighted by this analysis,” Ms. Pillay stated. “Unless there is a quick resolution to the conflict, I fear thousands more will die or suffer terrible injuries as a result of those who harbor the obstinate belief that something can be achieved by more bloodshed, more torture and more mindless destruction.”

The failure of the international community, in particular the Security Council, to take concrete actions to stop the blood-letting, “shames us all,” the UN official said. “For almost two years now, my staff and the staff of the independent Commission of Inquiry have been interviewing Syrians inside and outside the country, listening to their stories and gathering evidence.

“We have been repeatedly asked: ‘Where is the international community? Why aren’t you acting to stop this slaughter?’ We have no satisfactory answer to those questions. Collectively, we have fiddled at the edges while Syria burns.”

Religion Press Release Services

Religious Fanatics Invade Home, Brutally Attack Indian Christians during Holy Week

March 29, 2013



Mother’s Hand Cut Off, Family Severely Beaten

CARROLLTON, Texas – On March 27 in the middle of the Christian observance of Holy Week, a band of Religious fanatics burst into the home of Indian Christians, beating all family members and maiming the mother. The family had just sat down to dinner in their home in an undisclosed area of Uttar Pradesh, India, when the attack began.

Every member of the family suffered brutal injuries. Mrs. Survati, the mother, was severely maimed. Attackers severed her hand, cutting it into two pieces. Their 22-year-old daughter, Archana, was badly beaten and her hand fractured. The father, Ramnath, and daughter Antika were also beaten, and Arvind, their 20-year-old son, suffered injuries that rendered him unconscious.

Neighbors came to the aid of the family and admitted them to a hospital where they are all currently receiving medical aid.

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” said K. P. Yohannan, Gospel for Asia (www.gfa.org) founder and president. ‘Persecution and suffering, the way of the Cross—this is what Christ promised us, and I am convinced nothing is going to stop his Church.’”

Bablu, a Gospel for Asia-supported pastor, ministers to about 200 believers spread over this area of India. Because some live long distances away, the pastor conducts prayer meetings in various locations in believers’ houses, including the home of this persecuted family. Religious militants have targeted these prayer host homes for attacks.

All evidence points to a strategy of violence to eliminate Christians from this village. The group of fanatics is currently focused on a planned attack on Pastor Bablu, waiting for him to return to other houses in the area where he often preaches or holds prayer services.

Indian Christians in this area are actively joining believers around the world focusing on the most holy week of the Christian calendar, commemorating the passion, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

“John 12:24 tells us, ‘Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.’ Jesus died and rose again. Through our choice to enter into the suffering of Christ, we are given the privilege to bring the Good News of hope,” said Yohannan. “This family experienced this privilege, and the Lord will use it to build his Kingdom.”

Gospel for Asia (www.gfa.org) is a mission organization based in Carrollton, Texas, involved in sharing the love of Jesus across South Asia.

1925 Ecumenical Meeting with Coptic, Armenian, Syrian, Anglican, Greek and Russian Churches....



Open Doors to Release 2013 Worst Persecutors List Jan. 8 at D.C. Press Conference

Compelling 'The Insanity of God' Book to Be Introduced during Event

SANTA ANA, Calif. – Open Doors will release its 2013 World Watch List of 50 countries that are the worst persecutors of Christians on Tuesday, Jan. 8, 2013 during a press conference in Washington, D.C. The press conference will be held from 10 to 11 a.m. at the National Press Club, First Amendment Lounge, 529 14th St. NW.

“The annual World Watch List has raised awareness of the plight of persecuted Christians for many years,” says Open Doors USA interim President/CEO Steve Ridgway. “It is important to get this information out to the public so it can look beyond the headlines and be a voice for those who are often voiceless in places such as North Korea, Syria and Somalia. Even on Christmas Eve in northern Nigeria, suspected Islamic extremists killed a reported 12 Christian worshippers and even more after Christmas.”

For the past 10 years, the hermit communist country of North Korea has topped the list. Last year Afghanistan was No. 2, followed by Saudi Arabia. Rounding out the top 10 were Somalia, Iran, Maldives, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Iraq and Pakistan.

Expert speakers at the press conference include veteran journalist Ron Boyd-MacMillan, chief strategy officer for Open Doors International, and Nik Ripken, author of the inspirational new book “The Insanity of God” (B&H Books, 2013). Both Boyd-MacMillan and Ripken have travelled worldwide to meet with those persecuted for their faith.

For more information on “The Insanity of God,” go to www.nikripken.com. There will be opportunity for media members to ask Boyd-MacMillan and Ripken questions regarding persecution.

The World Watch List ranks countries according to the intensity of persecution Christians face for actively pursuing their faith.

An estimated 100 million Christians worldwide suffer interrogation, arrest and even death for their faith in Christ, with millions more facing discrimination and alienation. Open Doors supports and strengthens believers in the world’s most difficult areas through Bible and Christian literature distribution, leadership training and assistance, Christian community development, prayer and presence ministry and advocacy on behalf of suffering believers. To partner with Open Doors USA, call toll free at 888-5-BIBLE-5 (888-524-2535) or go to our Website at www.OpenDoorsUSA.org.

For more information regarding the World Watch list press conference and requests for interviews, contact Open Doors USA Media Relations Director Jerry Dykstra at 616-915-4117 or email JerryD@odusa.org.

LOCAL ECCLESIASTICAL NEWS

[A Regional Bishop for the Malankara Archdiocese in North America](#)

Fri Jan 18, 2013

A Regional Bishop will be consecrated for the Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in North America

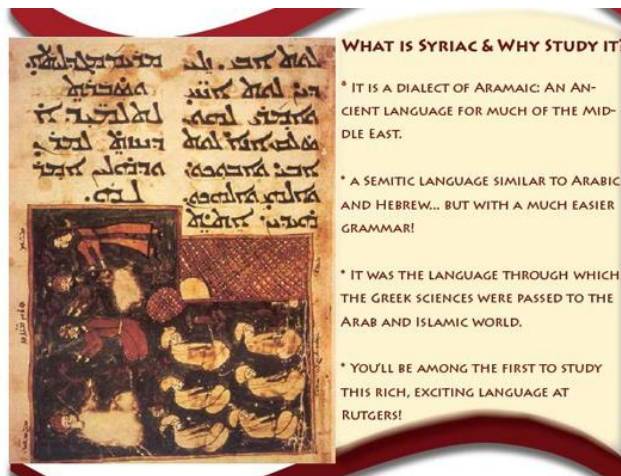
Considering the vastness of the American Malankara Archdiocese that is spread across North America & Canada, His Holiness Mor Ignatius Zakka I, Patriarch & the Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church has decided to consecrate a regional bishop to provide assistance to the Archbishop and issued an Apostolic Bull accordingly. As directed by the Patriarch a delegation headed by Archbishop, His Eminence Mor Titus Yeldho, visited the holy father in Lebanon and participated in the detailed discussions before making such a vital decision for traversing the administrative tasks of the Archdiocese more effectively. Secretary to the Clergy Association, Very Rev. Mathews Edathara Corepiscopus and the Joint Treasurer of the Archdiocese, Mr. Saju K. Paulose Marroth, were among the delegation.

As per the direction of the Patriarch, the General Body of delegates from all churches, the decision making supreme body of the Archdiocese, must draw a geographical region as well as recommend name of a priestly person to be consecrated as bishop for that region by His Holiness. The next General Body meeting of the church delegates is scheduled along with the Archdiocesan Annual Family & Youth Conference 2013 to be held from July 18 through 21st in Dallas, Texas. According to the Bull a few parishes in the American continent previously allowed to operate as churches directly under the Patriarch are added as member parishes of the American Archdiocese. The representatives of the newly constituted region will also be in the governing Archdiocesan Council. The implication of this arrangement is meant to proceed as per the Constitution for having an undivided single American Archdiocese, a single governing Archdiocesan Council, an Archbishop and a regional Metropolitan to aid assistance to the Archbishop to foster the entire spiritual flock from Malankara in this hemisphere. H.E. Mor Themotheos Mathews Karimpanackal, Patriarchal Secretary for Indian Affairs, will work along with the Archbishop, His Eminence Mor Titus Yeldho, up until such a regional bishop is selected and consecrated by the Patriarch.

His Holiness with his fatherly affection advised all faithful to abide with these directions and work together for the benefit and glory of the Holy Church and to witness the Savior, Lord Jesus Christ.

For this news in Malayalam & the related photos, Please click the link below or visit Pravasi Sections of all Major Malayalam Dailies:

May God Bless the Holy Church.
Chevalier Babu Jacob Nadayil
Public Relations Officer,
Malankara Archdiocese of the S.O.C. in North America



The Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch Archdiocese for the Eastern United States is pleased to announce that it is sponsoring a new course in Syriac language at Rutgers University.

Course Name: Introduction to Syriac

Course Number: 01:013:411

Credits: 3

Spring 2013

Taught by Dr. George A. Kiraz

Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:15-3:35PM in Hickman Hall – 218, Cook/Douglas Campus



A meeting of the Standing Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in America was held at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, New York on Wednesday, December 19, 2012. His Eminence, Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim participated in this meeting, with their Eminences: Khajag Barsamian, Vicken Aykazian and Mor Titus Yeldho.

Archbishop Karim was accompanied by Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Shabo, Rev. Fr. Joseph

Chamoun and Rev. Fr. Alan Shaltan.

Some of the items on the agenda were: A proposed Forum on Oriental Orthodox Youth, Review of the Concelebrated Liturgy, Joint Commission of the Eastern/Oriental Orthodox Churches, Eastern Orthodox/Oriental Orthodox Prayer Service for U.N., Christian Churches Together, Roman Catholic/Oriental Orthodox Dialogue, Oriental Orthodox NGO Project and Scooch Website.

Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim talked about Christian Churches Together's plans for 2013. He specifically announced the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of MLK's letter from prison, which the Conference decided to hold in Alabama, on April 15. He also read a draft of the Orthodox contribution to this letter. There was an agreement on holding the next CCT meeting in Austin, Texas, from January 29 to February 1, 2013, and the topic chosen was Immigration. Also, under the item (Roman Catholic/Oriental Orthodox Dialogue), His Eminence, Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim headed the discussion about Christians in the Middle East, particularly Pope Benedict's visit to Lebanon, immigration and refugee issues. The next meeting was scheduled for October 10 and 11, 2013. Fr. Findikian was appointed the secretary for the Oriental Orthodox delegation to assist Mor Cyril.

After the meeting, a dinner was held at St. Nersess Seminary for all the attendees.

CHRISTMAS FAST



By His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas

The institution of this fast was towards the beginning of the fourth century AD. This can be gathered from reading memres of St. Ephrem the Syrian (+373) and the hymns he composed in the fourth Century. Christmas fast is practiced in preparation for welcoming the commemorative day of Lord Jesus' birth in the flesh and in memory of the grief brought by sin, which we experienced before the Lord's birth. The darkness of ignorance, Satan's enslavement of us, and the infliction of the created world, in expectation of salvation accomplished through the birth of the savior, who redeemed us by His incarnation. We practice this fast to become pure in our souls and body and be worthy of

welcoming the commemoration of the redeemer's birth, the word of God incarnate, the way Moses fasted before the written word of God, that is the Law of the Old Testament, was handed over to him.

Christmas fast used to last for forty days. The church, however, shortened the period to 25 days. In 1946 and pursuant to a decision taken by the Council held in Homs, Late Patriarch Ephrem I Barsoum of Good memory limited it to 10 days starting on December 15 and ending on Christmas Day, Dec. 25.

PATRIARCH IGNATIUS IV HAZIM PASSES AWAY



It is with great sorrow that we report the passing away of His Beatitude Ignatius IV Hazim, Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch. His Beatitude was suffering from a stroke and on Wednesday, December the 5th passed away at the age of 92 at St. George's hospital in Beirut, Lebanon.

Patriarch Hazim was born in Mhareh-Homs, Syria. After finishing his studies there, he moved to Lebanon, where he became active in the church and community. He was ordained Bishop of Palmyra, in 1961 and in 1971 was consecrated a metropolitan for Lattakia, Syria.

Ignatius IV Hazim was consecrated the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch in 1979. By his passing away, the Greek Orthodox community lost a great pillar of the Faith. We pray to our Father Almighty to bless his soul and give him eternal rest in the heavenly Jerusalem. We also pray that He will watch over the Greek Orthodox Church in the East our sister church, during these difficult times.

HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH ZAKKA PARTICIPATES IN THE INSTALLATION OF POPE THEODOROS II



On November 18th, 2012, His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, joined our sister Coptic Orthodox Church in the installation of the new Patriarch, His Holiness Pope Theodoros II, on the Holy See of Alexandria. Pope Theodoros II is the 118th Pope in the line of succession presiding over the Coptic Church of Alexandria. This celebration took place at St. Mark's Cathedral in Abbasia, Cairo.

H.H. Mor Zakka I led a delegation of seven Archbishops and a number of priests and monks from our Church. Patriarchs of other Orthodox and Catholic Churches also attended this celebration in addition to many officials and dignitaries from the Egyptian government.

After the installation ceremony, H.H. Mor Zakka I presided over special prayers and hymns from the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch. In conclusion, His Holiness our Patriarch delivered a speech in which he thanked God and praised Him for sending His Holy Spirit to choose the Pope, bless him and install him as the successor of St. Mark the Evangelist on the Holy See of Alexandria. He congratulated the new Patriarch, Pope Theodoros and wished him success in his mission, asking God to grant him wisdom, patience and perseverance to carry this huge responsibility well.

His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas added: "As the Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Apostolic See of Antioch and in observation of our authentic Oriental tradition, we extend the hand of recognition and apostolic communion to His Holiness Pope Theodoros II, asking the Lord God, Who chose him to this high rank, to bless him in all his works, for the glory of the Holy Trinity and the advancement of the Holy Church."

After concluding his speech H.H. Mor Zakka I presented H.H. Pope Theodoros the Pontifical Pastoral staff, as a symbol of his "Good Shepherd's" appointment. The new Pope blessed the faithful, and thanked Patriarch Zakka for his love, participation and support.

***ARCHBISHOP APHREM KARIM PARTICIPATES
IN THE INSTALLATION CEREMONY OF THE
NEW ARCHBISHOP OF GERMANY***



On Sunday, December 9th His Holiness Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and all the east, presided over the Holy Qurbano (Divine Liturgy) at the monastery of Mor Yacoub of Sarugh in Warburg, Germany. His Holiness was assisted by several archbishops from different parts of the world and served by the clergy, deacons and choirs of Germany. Also in attendance were representatives from sister Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches.

During the Holy Qurbano His Eminence Archbishop Mor Philoxenus Matthias Nayis, former patriarchal assistant, was installed as the new archbishop for the archdiocese, patriarchal vicariate of Germany. While seated on his episcopal throne, His Eminence read the Gospel of the Good Shepherd. Afterwards the patriarchal decree of appointment (Sustathicon) which contains the duties and privileges of the new archbishop, as well as the obligation of the archdiocese towards him, was read. Archbishop Nayis then delivered a speech in which he thanked God for His blessings and His Holiness the Patriarch for allowing him to serve as a secretary and a patriarchal assistant for many years. Archbishop Nayis also thanked all the archbishops, members of the Holy Synod, especially those who attended the event. He also expressed his gratitude to all members of the clergy and church councils of Germany offering to work with them all for the advancement and prosperity of the Archdioceses.

His Eminence Archbishop Mor Julius Hanna Aydin, in charge of the ecumenical and governmental affairs in Germany, spoke on behalf of the Archdiocese calling upon all to obey and work hand in hand with the new Archbishop. He thanked all the dignitaries and guests who attended this event.

Following the conclusion of the Qurbano everyone was invited to a dinner reception organized by the Archdiocesan council of Germany at a local banquet hall.

***CHRISTMAS RECITAL PAYS TRIBUTE TO
SANDY HOOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL VICTIMS***



A Christmas recital featuring ten young and upcoming violinists from the Syriac Community, held at the Archdiocesan Complex in Teaneck, New Jersey, opens with prayers, poetry reading and candle lighting to commemorate the Connecticut school shooting at Newtown's Sandy Hook Elementary School. Twenty children and six adults innocently became victims of evil and murdered 9:30 early morning on Friday December 14th. The program began with 26 candles being lit, one by one, by children and adults in attendance and an opening prayer offered by His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim. A moment of silence was followed by the singing of the Lord's Prayer.

His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim told the packed Reception Hall, "as we mourn their death we also realize that evil still exists in the world and evil forces influence people to do evil things." He continued, "Goodness has to abound and flourish and our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ become stronger during this tragedy." The Archbishop consoled the young children in attendance and asked them to pray for the victims as well as their teachers, parents, brothers and sisters and be thankful for them.

His Eminence concluded thanking Elias Sarkar, the children's violin instructor and also thanked the parents for all they do for their young ones. He reminded the children that they are blessed because they belong to a wholesome church community. He encouraged them that as they grow, advance and achieve more, to offer their musical talents to the service of our Holy Church.

At the conclusion of the recital, His Eminence presented the children with crosses from the Holy Land and Christmas gifts as a token of his appreciation.

***HIS EMINENCE MOR CYRIL APHREM KARIM
CELEBRATES THE HOLY LITURGY ON
CHRISTMAS DAY***



His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim celebrated the Holy Liturgy on Christmas Day at St. Mark's Cathedral. The Tuesday morning liturgy marked the Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ over 2000 years ago in the little town of Bethlehem.

The Cathedral quickly filled to capacity with standing room only and noticeably, the large number of young people in attendance drew everyone's attention.

In his sermon, the Archbishop recalled the story of the Nativity and drew comparisons between the difficulties, fears and struggles of the Holy Family with those of families in today's society, especially those members of our church community throughout Syria. He asked everyone to pray for those struggling in Syria and asked everyone to remain cognizant that "those presently in Syria have no food, no clean water, no gasoline, no medicine and no basic necessities." The Archbishop continued, "While we are here enjoying Christmas with all its festive and celebrative activities, we must keep in mind, our brothers and sisters in Syria who are celebrating Christmas with very little." Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim extended his Christmas wishes and greetings to Our Beloved Patriarch, His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, wishing His Holiness a Blessed Christmas with health and contentment as he continues leading our Holy Church. Likewise His Eminence Mor Cyril extended wishes for a Merry Christmas to the Archbishops of the Holy Synod, all the clergy of our Archdiocese, the deacons and the Parish Councils. On a special note he thanked all the organizations of the Cathedral, including its pastor, Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun for all their efforts throughout the year.

The grand procession is always the highlight of the Christmas Service. Led by the raised cross, held high by one of the deacons, and followed by the young altar boys and an entourage of senior deacons, the procession moved slowly around the Cathedral with parishioners being blessed by the Archbishop. Choir sang joyfully the traditional "O Come all Ye Faithful" accompanied by the Cathedral's organist and ten of the Cathedral's young violinists, led by their teacher, Shamosho Elias Sarkar, the choir master of the Cathedral, until the procession entourage arrived back at the altar for the Christmas service.

Many of the faithful who observed the Christmas Fast, along with other parishioners, received Holy Communion. The Archbishop was assisted by Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Shabo and Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun with the dispensation of the Holy Communion.

At the conclusion of the Holy Liturgy, In the spirit of Christmas, His Eminence received the greetings and good wishes of the faithful at the Archdiocesan Complex, adjacent to the Cathedral.

HIS EMINENCE CELEBRATES HOLY QURBONO WITH ST. JAMES PARISHIONERS IN CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS



On Sunday, January 27, 2013, His Eminence Archbishop Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim celebrated Holy Qurbono (Divine Liturgy) with the parishioners of St. James of Nisibis in Corpus Christi, Texas. He was assisted by the deacons and the choir of the parish. During the Liturgy His Eminence delivered a sermon on the gospel reading for the third Sunday after Epiphany, which covers the encounter between The Lord Jesus Christ and Nicodemus. Following the liturgy lunch was served by the parishioners.

HIS EMINENCE PARTICIPATES IN THE MARCH FOR LIFE



His Eminence Archbishop Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim participated in the 40th Annual March for Life in Washington D.C. On Thursday, January 25 His Eminence attended the opening Mass of the Virgil of the March for Life celebrated by the Roman Catholic Church

at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C. The Liturgy was presided by His Eminence Cardinal Sean O'Mally the Archbishop of Boston. Four other US cardinals, the Papal Nuncio and dozens of catholic bishops participated in the Liturgy. Hundreds of priests and seminarians also were in attendance. The church was filled to capacity with thousands of people who came out in support of the right of life and to say no to abortion. In his homily Cardinal O'Mally reminded the audience of the terrible impact of abortion on women, men and society in general.

On Friday the 26th of January, in the freezing cold weather, hundreds of thousands of people, all of strong conviction and faith, marched in the National Mall to make a bold statement in support of the rights of unborn babies to life. At the beginning of the March Archbishop Karim joined several Catholic and Orthodox bishops in offering opening prayers. The large crowds of people who came from all over the United States formed a long procession which ended at the doors of the Supreme Court.

THREE DAY FAST OF NINEVEH



The Nineveh Fast: February 25-27, 2013

The three day fast of Nineveh commemorates the three days that Prophet Jonah spent inside the belly of the fish. (*Book of Jonah in the Bible*). The Syriac Orthodox Church started observing this fast since the early centuries. Later, two sister Oriental Churches, the Coptic and the Armenian followed this tradition. It is observed for three days from the second Monday before lent.

Like other fasts of the church, the Nineveh Fast is observed by abstaining from all kinds of dairy foods and meat products. However, some parishioners abstain from food and drink altogether from Sunday midnight to Wednesday after Holy Qurbano, which is celebrated before noon. We take this opportunity to advice those who wish to observe the strict fasting without food or drink to do so only after consulting their physicians and not

to harm their bodies which are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord God accept your prayers, repentance and fasting. May He reward you and shower His blessing upon you.

HYMNS FROM THE SYRIAC ORTHODOX BOOK OF SIMPLE PRAYER

The Ninevites trembled at the voice of Jonah, the son of Mathai, and took refuge in penitence by watching, fasting and prayer; and by tears and groans the sentence of judgment was annulled which Jonah had pronounced concerning the destruction of Nineveh. Blessed be the Compassionate one who turned them from evil to good (*Thursday Evening Prayer*).

God, who heard the prayer of the son of Mathai in the sea and commanded the mighty fish, and in three days it cast him up; hear our prayer and be reconciled with us and respond in your mercy to our requests; and if we have angered you, there are those who will reconcile you with us, the just who died for love of you (*Wednesday Morning Prayer*).

CHURCH LEADERS URGE FUNDAMENTAL IMMIGRATION REFORM

PRESS RELEASE

Church leaders urge fundamental immigration reform

February 1, 2013

For Immediate Release

Christian leaders representing the breadth of Christian churches and denominations in the U.S. issued a strong and urgent call today for fundamental immigration reform. The annual meeting of Christian Churches Together released this statement at the close of their four day gathering in Austin, Texas.

The entire CCT meeting, planned a year ago, focused on the challenge of immigration reform, hearing from “dreamers,” a variety of immigrants and experts on immigration issues. Its statement comes as the nation’s political leadership has turned its attention during the past week to this challenge. The CCT leaders said they would engage this debate “as followers of Jesus Christ who commanded us to welcome the stranger.”

“Each day in our congregations and communities, we bear witness to the effects of a system that continues the separation of families and the exploitation, abuse, and deaths of migrants. This suffering must end,” the statement declared.

The diverse group, representing leadership from Catholic, Evangelical/Pentecostal, Historic Protestant, Orthodox, and Historic Black churches, agreed on these unified principles:

- An earned path to citizenship for the 11 million people in the United States without authorization.
- The priority of family reunification in any immigration reform.
- Protecting the integrity of our borders and protecting due process for immigrants and their families.
- Improving refugee protection laws and asylum laws.
- Reviewing international economic policies to address the root causes of unauthorized immigration.

During the course of the Christian Churches Together gathering, the group heard from immigration advocates from evangelical organizations such as World Relief, immigration policy experts at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, legislative advocates serving major Protestant denominations, and leaders from the Hispanic Christian community, among others.

The statement issued today represents the broadest coalition of Christian denominations and groups to address together the urgency of fundamental immigration reform. It will be followed by advocacy to members of Congress from the membership of denominations and groups represented at the Austin meeting.

Statement on Immigration Reform

Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A.
 February 1, 2013
 Austin, Texas

Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A., representing the breadth of Christian churches and denominations in the U.S., gathered in Austin, Texas, for its annual meeting to focus on the challenge of immigration reform. We heard from “dreamers,” a variety of immigrants and experts on immigration issues. Through a process of prayer, reflection and discernment of God’s call, we agreed on a statement that provides principles for just and humane immigration reform. In this hour, as our nation launches a national debate seeking immigration reform, we call upon people of faith, people of good will, elected officials in Congress and the President of the United States to work together to enact just and humane immigration reform legislation in 2013.

As Christian leaders and Christian communities, we engage in this debate as followers of Jesus Christ, who commanded us to “welcome the stranger,” (Matthew 25:35) and advised that “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40)

As Christians we believe that all will be judged, in part, by the way they treat strangers in their midst. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.” (Matthew 25: 31,32a) We acknowledge that members of our own faith communities have been complicit in the establishment and reinforcement of our current system through active political engagement and apathetic inaction. As a moral matter, we cannot tolerate an immigration system that exploits migrants, is inhospitable, and fails to offer immigrants the full protection of the law.

While immigration is often viewed as an economic, social, or legal issue, it is ultimately a humanitarian and spiritual issue that directly impacts millions of unauthorized immigrants and the entire fabric of our society. The Bible frequently commands us to treat the immigrant justly. Further, every person is created in the image of God and possesses inestimable value. It is therefore paramount that our national immigration system protects the basic human rights and dignity of all persons. Sadly, our current system fails to meet this test and requires comprehensive reform now.

The timing of our statement on immigration is ever more poignant given that our country is celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. We are reminded that there are those in our nation whose forebears were brought here involuntarily through the unjust institution of slavery. There are also those who lived here long before others arrived who experienced the denial of their basic human rights. Each day in our congregations and communities, we bear witness to the effects of a system that continues this legacy of separation of families and the exploitation, abuse, and deaths of migrants. This suffering must end. Therefore, in our relentless effort to achieve a more perfect union, we urge our elected officials to enact immigration reform consistent with the following principles and policies:

Pathway to Citizenship

The 11 million individuals now in the U.S. without authorization should be given an opportunity to earn citizenship, if the individual chooses. Many have built equities in our nation and have contributed to the economic and social fabric of this country. Such reforms would ensure that families are not separated and that the undocumented population can fully enjoy the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship. (Leviticus 18:33-34)

Family reunification

Family reunification should be the cornerstone of our nation's immigration policy. Immigrant families have helped build this nation economically and socially, and will continue to do so. We support changes to the family-based immigration system, which expedite the reunification of families. Family-based visa categories should not be eliminated or reduced and the current lengthy backlogs should be addressed. (Mark 10:9)

Enforcement and due process

Enforcement measures should be just and include due process protections for immigrants. We support the right of our nation to defend our borders and to ensure the integrity of the workplace through immigration enforcement. However, for over twenty-five years, our nation has pursued an enforcement-only policy toward immigration, with severe humanitarian consequences. At the same time that our nation has spent billions of dollars on immigration enforcement, the number of undocumented in the nation has more than tripled. Millions have been incarcerated unnecessarily, thousands of families have been separated, and thousands have died attempting to enter the United States. We urge Congress to review our enforcement policies and restore due process protections to immigrants and their families in a way that respects their God-given dignity, including reform of our detention laws. (Exodus 1:1-22)

The human dignity and image of God has been further violated as a result of the cooperation between local law enforcement and federal immigration agencies that leads to racial profiling of people suspected of being in the U.S. without authorization. Immigration laws should be reformed and implemented in a way that does not facilitate racial profiling. Enforceable detention standards and reforms should be established and include the review of partnerships between the federal government and for-profit prison corporations.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Refugees and asylum-seekers should receive special protection as particularly vulnerable migrants because they are fleeing persecution. The United States has a moral obligation to continue to provide protection to ensure refugees and asylum-seekers are able to find safety in the United States through the appropriate processes and not at heightened risk of being returned to their persecutors. There should be improvements to the asylum process to ensure asylum-seekers are not detained upon arrival and are given a fair opportunity to express a fear of persecution. There should also be more robust support of the refugee resettlement program and adequate resources to help refugees integrate upon their arrival to the United States. We are also mindful of the millions of families and individuals waiting for resettlement, living, raising families, and dying in temporary refugee camps and the many who perish attempting to reach those camps. (Matthew 2:13-18)

Root Causes

In order to find a long-term solution to the problem of unauthorized immigration, the root causes of such migration should be examined. Persons should be able to find employment in their home countries in order to sustain their families in a place that is free from fear and violence. At a minimum, Congress and the Administration should review our international economic policies to ensure that they do not encourage unauthorized migration and do not eliminate living wage jobs in sending countries. Our country should help to foster job opportunities and respect for human rights in the countries from which many immigrants come. (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-5)

As Christian Churches Together, we recommit ourselves to be promoters and examples of justice, showing hospitality and love for the immigrant; for we know we may be “entertaining angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2) We call for our nation to engage in an immigration debate that is conducted in a civil manner and does not dehumanize immigrants. We will speak out and educate communities about the past and current contributions of immigrants in building and growing this nation. Finally, we will work with our elected officials to ensure that, consistent with the aforementioned policies and principles, the human rights of immigrants are protected in any final legislation.

See www.christianchurchestogether.org, for further information.

***HIS EMINENCE ORDAINS SUBDEACONS AT
MOR BARSAWMO’S CHURCH***



On Sunday, February the 3rd, 2013 His Eminence Archbishop Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim celebrated the Holy Qurbano (Divine Liturgy) with the parishioners of St. Barsawmo's parish in Wyckoff, New Jersey. His Eminence was assisted by the Very Rev. Fr. Joseph Shabo, who is visiting the USA. The Liturgy was served by both the choir and the deacons of the Parish. During the celebration His Eminence elevated to the rank of Aphodiakno (Sub-Deacon) two Qoruye (Readers): Romio Toro and Bassam Shamoon.

During the celebration His Eminence delivered a spiritual sermon on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord Jesus to the Temple. After the sermon, His Eminence blessed the candles and led the procession and the service of the Veneration of the Cross.

Following the Divine Liturgy, H. E. and the new deacons accepted the congratulations of the parishioners.

HIS EMINENCE PARTICIPATES IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES TOGETHER ANNUAL GATHERING IN TEXAS

This year, the Christian Churches Together Annual Gathering was held in Austin, Texas, from January 28 till February 1. His Eminence, Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim participated in the gathering, representing the Syriac Orthodox Church.

The gathering's main issue was "Immigration Reforms". The Churches present, unanimously asked for "an earned path" for undocumented immigrants to find a way to citizenship. The family reunification, protecting the borders, improving the refugee status and the international economic causes of the unauthorized immigration were also discussed.

The gathering issued a statement that represents the coalition of most Christian denominations' aspirations for important immigration law reforms.

Christian Churches Together in the USA, is a new forum growing out of a deeply felt need to broaden and expand fellowship, unity and witness among the diverse expressions of Christian faith today. CCT is inclusive of the diversity of Christian families in the United States: Evangelical/Pentecostal, Orthodox, Catholic, Historic Protestant and Historic Black Churches.

2013 GREAT LENT PATRIARCHAL ENCYCLICAL - CHARITY



“Prayer is good with fasting and charity and almsgiving is better than storing gold...for charity and almsgiving delivers from death and it will purge away every sin. Those who practice it will have fullness of life” (Tobias 12: 8-9).

We extend our apostolic benediction, benevolent prayers and greetings to our brethren, His Beatitude Mor Baselios Thomas I, Catholicos of India, and their Eminences the Metropolitanans; our spiritual children the reverend vicars, priests, monks, nuns, deacons and deaconesses, and our blessed Syrian Orthodox people all over the world. May the divine providence embrace them through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and St. Peter, chief of the apostles, and the rest of the Martyrs and Saints. Amen.

What a sublime wisdom uttered by the Archangel Rafael when addressing the righteous Tobias and his son Tobias! It summarizes the three pillars on which religion stands, namely fasting, prayer and charity. These are the duties of the believer who practices them to be saved from sin and in order to receive forgiveness of intrusions and eternal life. Thus, he will be like the wise man alluded to by the Lord Jesus saying: “everyone therefore who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock; the rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.” (Matthew 7: 24-25).

The wisdom of this man and his rationality were obvious when he put the commandments of the Lord into practice. He was not satisfied with being a passive believer listening to the word; rather, he mixed his faith with good deeds. In this respect, the apostle St. James writes: “you believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deed is useless?” (James 2: 19-20). Also, the apostle St. Peter affirms: “but just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, ... for you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to

you from your forefathers, but with a precious blood, a lamb without blemish or defect, the blood of Christ” (I Peter 1: 15, 18-19). With this precious blood, we have received gratuitously the grace of justification, sanctification and adoption amidst the holy Church founded by the Lord Jesus as a ladder bridging earth to the heavens. He granted her divine authority and made her guardian of the channels of divine graces that she grants her children by the practice of the seven holy sacraments.

Indeed, the holy Church is a mother to all and a teacher. She beseeches the guidance of the Holy Spirit who dwells in her. She directs us to practice the three religious duties: fasting, prayer and charity. As one of the Syriac doctors of the Church has expressed in prayer in the Ephremian meter which is recited in the evening prayer of the Great Lent: which translates as follows: “Fast [O Believer] the forty days of the Great Lent and give your bread to the hungry; pray seven times daily as you have learned from the son of Jesse [i.e. David]”. “Prayer is good with fasting and charity and almsgiving is better than storing gold ... for charity and almsgiving delivers from death and it will purge away every sin. Those who practice it will have fullness of life” (Tobias 12: 8-9).

Dearly beloved,

The central component of our words here is charity. Charity with our neighbor is commended by natural law and recommended by divine law as well; people are all children of Adam and Eve, brothers sharing the goods of this earth. They have to love each other. After receiving the sufficient needs from their wealth, the rich shall fill the needs of the poor with their abundant goods; this is what natural law dictates. Our Lord Jesus Christ commends in His divine law that we shall love our neighbor as our selves (cf. Matthew 22: 29); our neighbor is every man who needs our help. The Lord sets a valuable rule about charity and deeds of mercy saying: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Matthew 9: 13). In His sermon on the mountain, He says: “blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5: 7). According to His divine teachings, inheriting the kingdom of heaven depends on actions of mercy. We shall all stand one day in front of His heavenly court and be answerable to the law of charity. The righteous will be called to inherit His kingdom forever; they will not be judged worthy of this kingdom because they spread the gospel, or endured the persecutions, or became martyrs for their faith, or made miracles in His name, or despised this world and worshipped Him day and night; rather, He will say to them: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to me... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25: 34-36, 40). “He who is kind to the poor, lends to the Lord and He will reward him for what he has done” (Proverbs 19: 17). What we give as charity for the poor and needy, is considered as a loan for the Lord Jesus that we lend Him through the least of His brethren, the poor and needy on earth, so that we receive it back in heaven with a multiplied interest. For this reason, He told us: “store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6: 20).

The rich people of all times, those who have hardened hearts and stiff necks, those who rely on unstable wealth (I Timothy 6: 17) – and are not merciful to their brethren whom they see bit by the dagger of times – will get the retribution of the rich man who did not have mercy on Lazarus the poor, according to the parable that the Lord Jesus told about Lazarus the poor who got into the heavenly bliss with Abraham while the rich was tortured in eternal fire screaming to his father Abraham saying: ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue

because I am in agony in this fire'. Abraham replied: 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus receive bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony' (cf. Luke 16: 19-31).

This rich fool and his kinsmen will hear the voice of the Lord on the day of judgment saying to them: "depart from me, you who are cursed, into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels for I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me and I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me ... I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me, then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (Matthew 25: 41-46).

He who has hardened his heart to the appeal of his brother and neighbor, will not find mercy in the fearful day of Judgment "because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food, if one of you says to him 'God, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed'; but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2: 13-17) "give alms from your possessions and do not turn your face away from any poor person and the face of God shall not be turned away from you" (Tobias 4: 7).

The Holy Bible with both Old and New Testaments is filled with famous verses to incite us to do charity and shows us the way to do it and the benefits we harvest from it. We confine our Biblical references to what we have cited above, dearly beloved, while we direct our minds to meditate the life of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth. Indeed, He is the rich one who voluntarily became poor and was born as a poor child. In order to save humanity, He was crucified also a poor person while He is the source of all richness. It is written about Him that "He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him" (Acts 10: 38). When going around the different places, He collected charity and donations to cover the material needs of His disciples, and He distributed to the poor as well (cf. John 13: 29).

The Lord fought against the vice called hypocrisy. He attacks the hypocrisy of many believers shown in improperly practiced fasting, prayer or charity. The Lord wants to uproot this vice from the hearts of his followers because it will otherwise corrupt these hearts and not allow the seeds of the gospel to grow. On charity, He says: "be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret, then your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you publicly" (Matthew 6: 1-4). The Lord also teaches the necessity of sacrifice in charity; He wants us to invite the meek and needy to the feasts we have (cf. Luke 6: 24). The apostle St. Paul commands us to give with joy and abundantly: "whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly ... each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver ... as it is written: 'He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.'" (II Corinthians 9: 6, 7 and 9). He also said: "in everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is

more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20: 35).

Dearly beloved,

Our holy Forefathers taught us that charity is not exclusively distributing material things to the needy, the sick, the burial of the dead and the like to assist in the requirements of the flesh; it comprises also the spiritual matters like forgiveness of sins, prayer for friends and foes alike, guiding sinners to virtue and bringing them closer to God almighty through true repentance, comforting those who are in grief and other deeds that lead man to salvation, and to the glory of the holy name of the Lord.

We ought, therefore, to cleanse our hearts from the impurities of sin through true repentance while we enter this great lent. We ought to confess to the Lord’s priest and receive communion so that Christ dwells in us. We should dedicate the days of the great lent as directed by the holy Church, for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and in obedience to His divine commandments. We shall refrain from committing sins and what causes it, while we remain in prayer, pouring our purified selves before God so that our prayers are lifted like incense of good smell before the divine court. We should mix our prayers and fasting with charity and almsgiving in assistance of the poor and needy so that we store up treasures in the heavens and be counted worthy with those who are called by the Lord to His kingdom for believing in Him and serving their lesser brothers with charity and deeds of mercy.

May the Lord bless you and accept your fasting, prayers and charity. May you be rewarded abundantly. May He pour on you and your families many gifts and graces so that we joyful celebrate His glorious resurrection in purity and holiness. May He have mercy on the souls of your faithful departed.
God bless you all with His grace, Amen.

Issued at our Patriarchate in Damascus, Syria
on the 20th of February, in the year two thousand and thirteen
which is the 33rd year of our Patriarchate

ARCHBISHOP CYRIL APHREM KARIM DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE VOCATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD ON ALL PRIESTS DAY



On Sunday, March the 3rd, All Priest Day, His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim

celebrated the Holy Liturgy at St. Mark's Cathedral and in a moving sermon, drew attention to the departed clergy who served this Archdiocese and our churches throughout the world saying, "these were not ordinary men." The Archbishop elaborated on the vocation of the priesthood and said, "We, members the clergy, did not choose this service as a profession for self-serving purposes, fame or glory but rather as a response to a calling from God. The Archbishop continued, "There are great demands made on the clergy and we are only human, so we ask all of you to have patience with us and be understanding of our shortcomings."

His Eminence turned his attention to the children of the Sunday school who were in attendance and asked them to entertain the vocation if they are inclined and if they have a sincere interest. He also asked the parents to encourage their children if they are truly motivated to serve God and the Holy Church. The Archbishop said "from today's children will rise the future clerics and hierarchs of the church".

He conclude saying, "The highest privilege is to join the priesthood and take on this awesome vocation." He noted that on March the 3rd, sixteen years ago, was when he celebrated for the first time, the Holy Liturgy on the altar of St. Mark's Cathedral. This drew an arousing round of applause from all the parishioners in attendance.

THE ARCHDIOCESAN EXECUTIVE COUNCIL HOLDS ITS SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING



The Archdiocesan Executive Council held its all day semi-annual meeting on Saturday March 2nd at the Upper Hall of St. Mark's Cathedral, the seat of the Archbishop of the Archdiocese. At the opening of the morning session, His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim led the traditional morning prayers and asked all present to participate in the recitation and hymn singing of the service. Clergy members present included Very Rev. Fr. Gabriel Adde, Rev. Fr. Aziz Hadodo, Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun, Rev. Fr. Alan Shaltan and Rev. Fr. George Somi. Also included were representatives from eight parishes, membership of the Archdiocesan Council and Chairs of committees who were on hand to brief and be briefed on issues that have been dealt with over the previous six months.

The meeting, chaired by Ben Isik, Council President, without delay heard reports that set the tone of the meeting. Jack Darakjy gave an update on the Archdiocesan By-laws which was followed by a detailed report on the relief initiative and the activities and

collaborative involvement of the International Christian Outreach which is chaired by Julie Jabaly. Next on the agenda, was an update given by Ramona Malki on the Sunday School curriculum, book printing and distribution. His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim remarked that this was perhaps one of the most important initiatives of the Archdiocese. The Archbishop noted that nothing of this magnitude has been attempted and accomplished in the past sining that the Sunday School Children who will be taught this curriculum are the future of our church. These books will guarantee that our youngsters will be taught correctly in the tradition of our church. The Archdiocesan Youth Director, Gabriel Bar-Sawme, ended the first half of the meeting with his presentation on the Activities of the Youth throughout the Archdiocese and his expanded plans for the future.

Due to the length of the agenda, the group worked through lunch and viewed a video presentation prepared on the Midland Avenue Project. This production is intended to tell the story and will be used to publicize the initiative. The video served as an effective segue for Semir Sirazi's presentation on the Midland Avenue Project. The chairman of the initiative, moved quickly to give a status report and discuss a construction time lime that will move in tandem with the fund raising campaign. He effectively outlined the series of events that will take place over Spring, including a "road show" throughout the Archdiocese. Semir Sirazi and Sait Samuel, Archdiocesan treasurer, jointly gave a financial report on both the project and the operations of the Archdiocese.

Elias Sarkar, chair of the Public Relations Committee, gave a status report of the "Voice" the Archdiocesan Quarterly Magazine. He also reported that the theme of the 2013 Archbishop's Appeal has been finalized.

Sait Samuel, Chairman of the Parish and Clergy Committee, reported on the committee's findings for a clergy pension plan. The chairman offered several options and offered a recommendation for consideration.

In his closing remarks, His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim, thanked everyone for attending and asked everyone to keep our brothers and sisters in Syria in their prayers. The Archbishop also asked everyone to pray for our beloved Patriarch, His Holiness Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, the bishops throughout the world and all those who work and give of their time in the service of our Hoy Church. In the benediction, the Archbishop asked the Almighty to watch over those who traveled from far distances and watch over them during their return trip home.

***VERY REV. FR. SHAMOUN ASMAR HONORED
WITH MOR IGNATIUS NURONO PATRIARCHAL
MEDAL***



His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim, at the highlight of a dinner banquet honoring Very Rev. Fr. Shamoun Asmar, called on the Corepescopos and proceeded to ask all guest to rise as he read a resolution issue by His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, which decreed that Fr. Asmar is the recipient of the Ignatius Nurono Medal, the highest recognition award bestowed by His Holiness and the Church. His Eminence assisted by Archbishop Gregorius Saliba Shamoun, of Mosul Iraq, proudly said, “This comes as a result of Fr. Asmar’s sixty years of dedicated and unselfish service to the Holy Church. We sincerely congratulate Fr. Asmar on this noteworthy achievement and pray that the Almighty bless and shower him with good health as he continues with his ministry.” His Eminence proceeded to decorated Very Rev. Fr. Shamoun Asmar with the Ignatius Nurono Medal, pinning it to his lapel. Cheers and applause followed from a very emotional crowd.

Sunday, March 10th was no ordinary day for St. Barsawmo Syriac Orthodox Church. In a very befitting tribute to their pastor, the Very Rev. Fr. Shamoun Asmar, the parish worked and collaborated closely with the Archdiocese in putting forth a program second to none. The Social Hall of the Church of the Virgin Mary, in Paramus, New Jersey, housed over four hundred guests and clergy, including the entire parish of St. Barsawmo and representatives for many parishes of the Archdiocese. Immediately after the grand entrance of His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim, His Eminence Mor Gregorius Saliba Shamoun, Very Rev. Fr. Shamoun Asmar and an entourage of clergy chanting along with local church choirs the traditional To Bashlom, the program was underway. Video clippings and letters from clergy who could not be present were tended to. A slide presentation, covering the life of Fr. Asmar, was also shown and enjoyed by everyone. Several speeches from family members and noteworthy individuals from Fr. Asmar’s tenure as a clergyman were eloquently delivered.

His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim, in his address, complimented the parish of St. Barsawmo for honoring their pastor. He also noted that through divine providence, His Eminence Mor Gregorius Saliba, a long time spiritual mentor, teacher and advisor of Fr. Asmar, appropriately came to be here at this particular time to share in the joy of this celebration. The Archbishop acknowledged Fr. Asmar’s dedication and loyalty to his church, community and family emphasizing his love for education and his knowledge of the church. The Archbishop said, “Fr. Asmar is a true example of a priest.” His Eminence also took this opportunity to compliment Fr. Asmar’s amazing voice and deep rooted understanding of traditional church melodies and hymns.

At this point in the program, Rev. Fr. Shamoun Asmar was invited to the podium and took center stage. The enthusiastic audience gave the honored guest a well-deserved

standing ovation. He began by noting that he was a cancer patient presently receiving dialysis. He thanked His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, our Patriarch, for his leadership and his spiritual guidance and also thanked him for the honor to wear and be the holder of the Ignatius Nuroño Medal. He asked that the Almighty bless His Holiness with good health so he can continue to lead our church with fortitude during these difficult times. He also thanked our Archbishop, His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim saying, over the years it has been an absolute pleasure, honor and privilege to work with him on church matters, especially on issues relating to our youth. He looked at the Archbishop saying, “Your Eminence, I love you so much for all that you do. God Bless you as you continue leading our church.”

Fr. Asmar, turned to his parish of St. Barsawmo, thanking them for all they have done for him over the years, saying, “You have been loving, supportive, generous and patient. You are truly the ideal parish.” He turned to the members of his family thanking them for their uncompromising support.” In conclusion, Fr. Asmar thanked all those who have traveled from distant places to be present at this celebration. At this juncture His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem gave the benediction and blessed all those in attendance asking the Almighty to keep Fr. Asmar and the parish of St. Barsawmo in His tender loving care.

DR. KATHLEEN MCVAY OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY AND STUDENTS VISIT ST. MARK’S CATHEDRAL

Dr. Kathleen McVay, professor of Syriac Studies at Princeton University, along with ten of her students focusing on Syriac Studies attended the Holy Liturgy on Sunday March 17 at St. Mark’s Cathedral. His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim was the celebrant assisted by Rev. Fr. Joseph Chamoun and Rev. Fr. Eli Shabo.

Dr. McVay, a faculty member at Princeton University and a renowned Syriac Scholar, on several occasions, afforded her students the opportunity to experience, first hand, our Syriac Orthodox Church in terms of liturgical service, hymns, theology and history. His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim accredited Dr. McVay for her concerted efforts in providing a clearer understanding of our rich tradition and heritage to her university students. The Archbishop said often “our own people lose sight and many times are oblivious and unaware, often taking for granted the richness of their own church, faith and heritage.” He continued by encouraging the students to aspire to becoming scholars in this field of study. The Archbishop assured Dr. McVay of his delight in these visits and in what he sees as slowly becoming a very positive and welcomed annual tradition.

The guests and the rest of the congregation also heard the Patriarchal encyclical which is read in all our churches world-wide at the beginning of lent. The encyclical was delivered by Ewengeloyo Dr. George Kiraz. The Sunday service also included the special prayer of forgiveness (Shubkono) which is conducted just prior to the beginning of lent. This service exhorts everyone to begin the Lenten season with a clean heart and mind.

Immediately after the Holy Liturgy, Dr. McVay and her students joined the parish and His Eminence for lunch after which they had a private audience with the Archbishop in

the Archdiocesan Complex.

CELEBRATING ST. EPHREM'S DAY IN WASHINGTON D.C.



On Saturday, March 23rd 2013, His Eminence, Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim paid a pastoral visit to St. Aphraim's Church in Washington D.C. area, upon an invitation by the parish to celebrate Mor Ephrem the Syrian Day, the Patron Saint of the Church.

The celebration started with Evening Prayers, followed by a lecture delivered by our beloved Archbishop on St. Ephrem and his great influence on Syriac Church Hymns and Choirs, and especially his professionalism and huge talent in defeating the enemies of the Church, and his teachings on fasting. After the lecture a recital was performed by the Church Choir, which received big cheers and applause for a successful performance. The celebration was concluded by a delicious Lenten dinner prepared by the Ladies Auxiliary, and by H.E. accepting a Plaque of Appreciation from the church committee and well-wishers' felicitations on his namesake day.

The following morning, on Sunday, March 24th, His Eminence celebrated the Holy Qurbano (Divine Liturgy) at St. Aphraim's Syriac Orthodox Church. He was assisted by Very Rev. Raban Fady Abdul Ahad, the parish priest, deacons and the choir. During the celebration His Eminence delivered a spiritual sermon on the Feast of Mor Aphraim, and the high rank he has in our Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch.

After the Liturgy, a brunch was served in the church for all the parishioners.

A NEW ARCHBISHOP IS INSTALLED IN ARGENTINA



Upon an invitation for the Installation Ceremony of His Eminence Mor Chrysostom John Ghassali, as the new Archbishop of Argentina, His Eminence, Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim travelled to Argentina to participate in this festive event. The installation took place on Sunday, March the 31st, at St. Peter's Syriac Orthodox Cathedral in La Plata, Argentina.

Mor Clemis Daniel, Archbishop of Beirut, Mor Timotheos Matthew Alkhoury, Patriarchal Secretary, Clergy and many Representatives from other sister Churches, joined in to share the spiritual joy of our Suryoye faithful of Argentina. The Cathedral was crowded by parishioners, who came from all over the regions around to attend this historical celebration.

The Archbishops celebrated the Holy Qurbano (Divine Liturgy) and participated in the installing ceremony, during which the Patriarchal Encyclical of the installing was read. Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim delivered a sermon on this sacred event, in which he congratulated the new Archbishop and his parishioners on behalf of his Archdiocese in Eastern USA, and offered him a gift of love, and good wishes for success in his new mission. Drs. Evelina, Malak and Samira Yunan, from New Jersey, accompanied His Eminence in this trip.

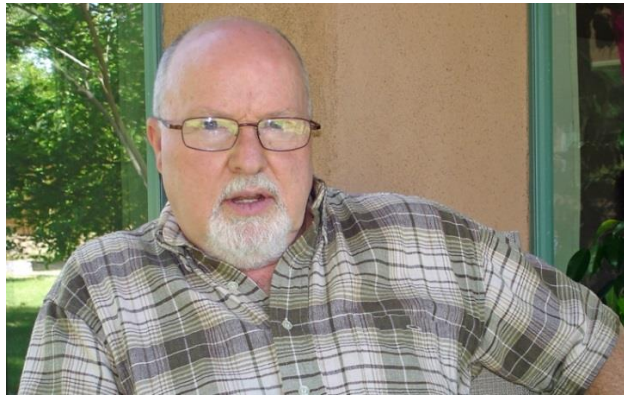
On Saturday, March the 30th, there was a gathering with the faithful, who came with welcoming cheers and many questions about spiritual and church issues. The evening was spent singing Church hymns and prayers by the attendees, after which a Lenten dinner was offered to all. Many parishioners, who have relatives in the USA, came and asked our Archbishop about their whereabouts.

During his five-day visit, His Eminence visited many families, shared many old stories with them, and experienced their nostalgia to the homeland.



OTHER RELATED NEWS

Richard Rohr on the Living School and getting off the road



Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr in 2009 (NCR photo/Tom Roberts)

By: [Jamie Manson](#) | Jan. 16, 2013 [Grace on the Margins- The Living School](#)

On a recent trip to Albuquerque, N.M., I had the opportunity to visit the Center for Action and Contemplation. The center was founded almost 25 years ago by Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr to provide educational materials, events and curriculum bearing witness to the Christian tradition of contemplative practice and compassionate action.

During my visit, I had the chance to sit down with Father Richard and other staff members of the CAC to discuss the opening of their latest program, called the Living School for Action and Contemplation. In part one, I offer the highlights of my interview with Father Richard. Next week, in part two, I will present a larger story on the Living School and other new developments at the CAC.

Manson: You've said you will stop traveling for speaking engagements beginning in March. What is the story behind your decision?

Rohr: I decided years ago, in conversation with my Franciscan superior and members of the CAC staff that if I'm going to keep teaching contemplation, then the last years of my life should be contemplative. The most un-contemplative part of my life is getting on airplanes and flying all over the world. I love it once I reach my destination because I meet the most wonderful people on this earth. But after 42 years of itinerant ministry, I had to accept that I shouldn't take myself so seriously and that I do not need to save the world.

Also, the other key part of the mission at CAC is social justice, so I've had to look at the carbon footprint I'm creating with all of this traveling. So I set a demarcation line and decided that if I made it to 70 years of age, I would stop traveling for conferences and speaking engagements. I turn 70 in March and, so far, it looks like I'm going to make it!

So it's not that I'm retiring. If God continues to give me health and a sane mind and verbal ability, I want to teach. Of course, I'll travel from time to time to visit friends and family, but after March, I will teach only in New Mexico.

How will your outreach ministry change when you get off the road?

I've had an extraordinary opportunity to communicate both nationally and internationally, which really started in earnest in 1973 with the cassette recordings of my talks. Then came the CD sets, and then I started writing books. Now we have the immense success of [the webcasts](#). People from as far away as Denmark, South Africa, Cambodia and Venezuela log in to hear me talk in this room. It's just astounding. I've often wondered what would have happened if Jesus or Paul had the opportunities to communicate the way we do today.

The biggest change in our outreach efforts will come later this year with the opening of the Living School for Action and Contemplation, which really is the fulfillment of a longtime dream of mine.

How did such a big dream like the Living School end up becoming a reality?

A year and a half ago, Alicia Johnson joined the staff as executive director of the CAC. She not only has a remarkable mind, but also an extraordinary background in academia and business. And she really understands the vision of CAC. It astounds me what she can hold together.

When she started here, I told her about my plan to get off the road. She asked me to do two things. First, to list on paper where, I believe, I get the authority to say the things I say. In other words, she was asking me to reflect on my lineage, which is a word we're borrowing from the Buddhist tradition. As a Catholic, lineage is important. Of course, we would call it tradition. It's how we know that our ideas are not simply our own, but are other peoples' ideas, too. They are part of the collective unconscious or the big spirit. I realized there are 15 building blocks that I rely on in the lineage of wisdom that has formed my own thinking and living. We've listed [these 15 key sources](#) on the CAC website, and visitors can click on each point and hear me offer a brief synopsis.

And what was the second task Alicia asked you to do?

After I did that, she asked me to distill my lineage a little more and discover its underlying themes. I talk about so many different subjects, from the Enneagram to social justice to sexuality. Sometimes I feel like I'm jack-of-all-trades and master of none! That's not false humility. I really had to ask myself, why do people trust me? I think because my gift is to synthesize different fields: philosophy, theology, sociology, anthropology, psychology. I'm not an expert in any of them, but I've done my homework in terms of reading the people who are experts. And as I read, the lights start going off about how things connect to one another.

All of these disciplines have contributed to, what I discovered, are seven underlying themes that have developed over my career and my ongoing contemplation. These themes are [also online](#), and each one links to an audio file in which I discuss them in some more detail.

How did all of these discoveries impact the development of the Living School?

After I told Alicia about these key sources and underlying themes, she said to me, "We've got the curriculum for a school." She'd noticed I had been using the phrase "a living school" even before I realized we were developing a school. I used the term because I was envisioning a program emphasizing praxis and orthopraxy just as much as orthodoxy. So the "Living School for Action and Contemplation" became the name, and it really caught on among the staff here.

"Orthodoxy" is frequently invoked among more religiously conservative, particularly Roman Catholics. How do you understand the word?

Even though "orthodoxy" isn't found in the Bible, as a believer, I understand that there is mainline tradition of verbal orthodoxy. I respect it because I've been trained in it. But I'm unimpressed by it. I'm not trying to be cynical or unfair, but those who are most insistent on orthodoxy to the tradition often seem to understand it the least. They call the last 500 years the tradition. They seem to know little about the fathers of the church or the intertestamental period, or the Jewish tradition, or the Desert Mother and Fathers, which is all part of the tradition, too.

This is why it is so important to balance orthodoxy with orthopraxy. St. Thomas Aquinas said, "Life itself is prior to doctrine." It's an idea that really speaks to what we call the "Franciscan alternative orthodoxy," which says that lifestyle and practice are much more important than mere verbal orthodoxy.

Does the response to the Living School seem to suggest that your approach is resonating with people?

Well, first, the donations have come to this like nothing else we've ever done. Second, more than 1,600 people have asked for an application, and almost 700 ended up applying. Now this is a 23-page application, and it is quite daunting to fill out. But having so many applicants is a good problem to have because we want to have a nice balance of younger and older, Protestant and Catholic, American and international, gay, lesbian and straight. Now we've got the pool to choose from to make that happen.

What does the response tell you about the spiritual hunger out there?

This all tells me that people want something substantial. They realize that the weekend conference is a shot in the arm. But there is no solidifying carry-through or follow-up, just the high you sometimes get from a weekend conference. Somehow the metaphor of school is exciting far more people.

What are your hopes for the Living School?

Our deepest hope for the Living School is that students will emerge ready to live out their own soul task at home, in their places of work, and in all of their relationships. We hope that through education and contemplation, they can further develop their own spirits of collaboration, compassion and joy, and engage themselves more deeply in social action for our suffering world.



Permanent Mission of Kyrgyzstan to the United Nations

STATEMENT BY H.E. Mr. Talaibek Kydyrov

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Kyrgyzstan
to the United Nations
at the Security Council open debate on
"United Nations Peacekeeping: a multidimensional approach"

January 21, 2012
New York

Mr. President,

Let me thank you for organizing this important debate since the UN peacekeeping operations are one of the main instruments of effective maintenance of peace and security. In the light of recent events in the African region and in the Middle East, the role of peacekeeping activities is increasing and therefore it is necessary to discuss the existing approaches and outline further tasks.

Mr. President,

A multilateral dimension requires that UN peacekeeping activities should promptly and effectively respond to the arising conflicts, new political challenges and threats to peace.

Today, we can definitely state that the potential of the UN peacekeeping activities has significantly increased in both quantitative and qualitative terms. We support the measures aimed at strengthening the operational potential of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, especially in promoting women to relevant positions in the UN peacekeeping missions. This includes increasing the number of female police officers to 20 per cent by 2014, systematic involvement of peace building elements, and implementing better mechanisms in the mobilization of resources for ensuring peacekeeping operations. It is also necessary to achieve the effective realization of the *Global Field Support Strategy* in order to improve the quality of services and to carry out the mandate of the missions.

Mr. President,

It is still imperative to support the Global Partnership, including the strengthening of cooperation between the UN Security Council, UN General Assembly, the countries sending peacekeepers and their host states.

Peacekeeping and the system of its support should promptly respond to the changes in the world in order to resolve the conflicts. In addition, it is extremely important that peacekeeping operations be combined with all possible preventive, diplomatic and other measures. The experience of the last year's events prove again that we should strictly observe the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. Accordingly, UN Peacekeeping missions should operate firmly within the framework of the main peacekeeping principles, namely, *consent of the parties, non-use of force except in self-defense and impartiality*.

We believe that the modern peacekeeping tasks and resource deficits require enhancing the cooperation with regional organizations in the framework of their mandates. In this regard, it is important that UN DPKO along with the traditional partners, the African Union and the European Union, increase cooperation with other regional structures, in particular, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Kyrgyzstan welcomes the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Collective Security Treaty Organization and Department of Peacekeeping Organization in September 2012. This legal framework will allow using UN experience in the peacekeeping field. We hope that the working meeting of the delegation of CSTO and UN DPKO on the implementation of this Memorandum, which will be held during this week, will result in elaborating concrete measures of joint peacekeeping activities.

Mr. President,

Today, Kyrgyzstan is represented by 33 civil servicemen and officers from law-enforcement organizations in assisting peacekeeping missions, mainly in the States of the African continent, Liberia and outside in Haiti. We were among the first countries to send their military observers to Syria with the aim of conflict settlement and providing assistance to the Syrian civilian population.

In recent years, effective cooperation has been established with UN DPKO, which provides assistance to Kyrgyzstan in training, expeditious processing of the documents of the

candidates from Kyrgyzstan to peacekeeping missions, and expert assessments of the most pressing peacekeeping problems.

To our mind, more attention should be paid to improving the legal framework for international cooperation, as well as to the development of legislation on the national level. In this respect, Kyrgyzstan has made additional effort on the legislative regulation of peacekeeping activities. On July 13 of 2012, the President of Kyrgyzstan signed the law "On Principles and Modalities for Participation of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Activities of Maintaining International Peace and Security." In October 2012, the Government of Kyrgyzstan approved the Regulations on the procedure of training of military officers, who will be deployed in UN peacekeeping missions. To implement the adopted legislation, Kyrgyzstan is currently considering the deployment of the military unit in UN peacekeeping missions. We highly appreciate the readiness of UN DPKO to render assistance to Kyrgyzstan in these efforts.

In conclusion, I would like to confirm, that Kyrgyzstan, as a peaceful country, will continue making its contribution to increasing the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations for the sake of the maintenance of international peace and security.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Prof. DeLuca is advisor to Ambassador

Abraham Joshua Heschel on the decline of religion

"It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, and insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion--its message becomes meaningless."

— Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*

EULOGY FOR RONALD CROSS

(March 9, 2013)

By Dr. Anthony J. DeLuca

[Dr. Cross died on February 22 and served for many years on the Board of Trustees of Ignatius University, American Institute for Creative Living, International School for Mental Health Practitioners, and Syrian Orthodox Church in America]

Thank you Pastor Peterson [Lutheran Pastor] for inviting me to deliver the eulogy at the Solemn Funeral.

Dear friends of Ronald Cross,

The strength for this high fantasy was gone now.
But at last my will and my desire -
Like a wheel moving evenly - were revolving
from the love that moves the sun and all the stars
L'amor che move il sole e l'atre stelle.
The end of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Ronald Cross, Doctor of Philosophy, New York University; Doctor of Music *honoris causa*, Ignatius University.

My friendship with Dr. Cross stretches nearly a half century. From our time at Notre Dame College now St. John's University where I was philosophy professor and Catholic chaplain till 50 years later moving down the road to Wagner College as Orthodox chaplain. He was professor of music at both. During all this time he remained my good friend, advisor and confidante from bringing the Collegium to play at my daughter's baptism, which incidentally was the time of no pope as today, till witnessing my Last Will.

At Notre Dame College, an all-women's school, we used to discuss Music a lot especially Vivaldi who was a priest. And it always intrigued me as to how this priest functioned in two worlds being chaplain and the same time composer and conductor at a big orphanage for girls on one of the islands around Venice. So I would tell him endless stories of things I found out. I only found out recently that he was a Fulbright Scholar at the Conservatory of Venice. Anyway one day he told me that he brought our Vivaldi conversations to class. I asked him what the students thought. "Well," he said, "I started off by saying that I was talking to Father DeLuca yesterday and then I was drowned out by their laughing hysterically." Indeed. Well I guess if you are such a fool as to come to class to teach in clerical costume reminiscent of Count Dracula, girls will laugh. You get what you deserve. This is the earliest memory of our friendship.

Fast forward 50 years. About a month ago, I went over to see Ron and waited outside the classroom while he was finishing his lecture; it was on Vivaldi. And to be quite honest, it didn't sound very exciting. So at the end I burst into the room and said I am the red priest, Padre Vivaldi of Venice. It was a small group and I asked " Did you know that Vivaldi was chaplain to 100 or more girls at the Orphanage and each of them was a virtuosa; they played on 12 string instruments and practiced day and night - can you imagine a 100 girls playing Vivaldi's Four Seasons and the sheer beauty of those sounds drifting across the misty Venetian lagoon?" There was no laughter this time but a blank 2013 expression and the possible thoughts: " well another one from the Dr. Cross Collection of Distinguished Lunatics and Fools." During all this, Ron had his characteristic serene blessed Fra Angelico smile perhaps mumbling - ah children of the night- que sera, sera. That was the last time I saw him.

I tell my patients, if we know the first memory and the last memory and they match, all we need to do is to connect the dots and we then know what happened in the entire relationship.

You may not know his interior life. Ron loved the Middle Ages. Because in the medieval world everything speaks beyond itself; it was a symbolic universe- a sacramental universe. You could kiss the earth and be kissing the face of God. A

cup was just not a cup; it became the Holy Grail. The cathedral held everything - the whole story - even our nightmares and the invisible angels and devils everywhere; they all found their place in stone. The whole universe was captured there for the last time.

If we were to ask Ron, how come the statues carved way up on the top of the steeple were just as exquisite as those on eye level, he would answer because God sees them. This is the universe he lived. This is the world within which he walked and breathed. How well he understood the alchemists- their mystical marriage of the elements- and their quest to turn base metal into gold. That task was only symbolic. The quest was about inner transformation of the soul. And that transformation was to take place by going inside with each person exploring his own soul. And this was dangerous because it was moving outside the institution, namely the Church, which was the invincible guide of the soul's journey. And here we are not only talking about churches; so they used symbols.

The Holy Grail is the chalice used by Christ at the Last Supper. The search for it is symbolic. On the way it causes changes to happen in the heart, in the mind, in the soul. Those who encounter the mystery are never the same again. They are caught up in an entirely new form of existence. They are no longer bounded by time and space. They are transformed by the process of what they encounter.

The Grail Castle, where so many wondrous things have taken place, is described as ruinous and empty, a place of ghosts. And its once sacred and mysterious nature is already beginning to be forgotten. To this place come two young knights in search of adventure, after the manner of the old heroes of the Round Table.

They were fair knights indeed, very young and high spirited. And they swore they would go. And full of excitement they entered the castle. They stayed there a long while, and when they left, they lived as hermits, wearing hair shirts and wandering through the forests, eating only roots; it was a hard life, but it pleased them greatly. And when people asked them why they were living thus, they would only reply: "Go where we went, and you will know why. Go where we went and you will know why."

Many people have been "going there" ever since. They seek the mysterious object of which they have heard such marvelous reports. More often than not, they have failed. But sometimes, like the two young knights, they have discovered things about themselves and their own inner state. The Grail itself remains hidden, elusive. Yet most have found its "secret" is indissolubly linked with the idea of service.

Our service, love, hope or desire, is offered up to be accepted and transformed into pure energy. If we have behaved in a right manner on our quest, we will reap the rewards: the divine sustenance of the Grail. And if we open this out still further, our service will help transform the land on which we live and walk and have our being. The grail does not need to be in view -it is present all around us, in every act of service we do, whether it be symbolically for the king or the land.

We live in two worlds: the world as it is, which we might call power and the world as it should be, which we might call love. The ideal world of love is always before us like the North Star to guide. But one never really arrives, or needs to arrive at the North Star. One simply needs vision, direction and hope that it is all going somewhere.

Once we have learned the truth, we are trapped in it. And we cannot believe the world of power is adequate or a correct response to reality. We have chosen Jesus as our primary hero and no one addresses the issues of power or domination more directly. One could read the whole Gospel of Jesus undercutting false power and standing insistently and constantly on the side of the powerless. He always takes the side of the victim, the poor, the minority, the oppressed, and the little ones.

Dante, at the end of his journey through the Inferno, Purgatorio, and the Paradiso - a journey that stands for the divine tragedy and comedy that is all our lives - sees "the love that moves the sun and the other stars." That's the love that has been guiding him. We do not have to take ourselves so seriously. That is why we can laugh like the Holy Fool. And we don't have to secure ourselves because we are radically secured- we are beloved sons and daughters.

We are all carriers of the spirit. And by seeking the inner reality of the Grail beyond the symbols and the stories, we are taking part in an ongoing work. Without this work, all we hold most dear would long ago have perished. And if people look at us askance as we wander through the world with a strange look in our eyes, we have only to give the same answer as those knights who visited the ruined Grail Castle, "Go where we went, and you will know why."

That was Ron's journey.

Thomas Mann's work, "Death in Venice" was made into a film some years ago. There is a dramatic and unforgettable gesture at the end, where Tadzio, the adolescent-young man like Ron, forever young, beckons and points as if to show us the direction. As Mann writes "he released the slender form he had beheld in his mind and would present to the world as an effigy and mirror of spiritual beauty." Venice is a dying city but something lies beyond it. He points to what we all long for - the possession of the transcendent - Beauty.

Dr. Cross loved the Collegium. And because he did not have spouse or family, you were his children. He had an abiding interest in young lives that went beyond the classroom. Years after you had him for a course or a project together, he would speak about you. And how he admired you and cared about you and your welfare as a loving father.

I do remember, and this was along time ago before I met my wife. Through Ron, I met many of the people of the Collegium. One I particularly liked- I think her name was Margo- we would talk and have coffee together. One day I called her up to ask her out to the movies. She said, "I don't think so." I asked her "Why not?" She said, "Dr. Cross says you are too old for me." I don't think he used the word "old" - perhaps "too mature."

In closing, from all that we have seen from Ron's interior life, his knowledge of the spiritual marriage of clergy and religious, we may easily understand that things like mystical marriage would not be strange or foreign to him. And so I believe he was married to Music and wherever he went he would bring her along. So for

nearly a half century of love and devotion to Music at Wagner College can we not imagine a spiritual marriage rite:

Do you Ronald Cross take Music of Wagner College as your spouse, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.

I do.

Los Angeles, a victory for truth

NCR Editorial Staff | Feb. 2, 2013 Ed

To those familiar with the protocols of the Catholic hierarchy, the news was stunning. The archbishop of Los Angeles publicly rebuked his predecessor^[1], a cardinal, for his failures in dealing with the priest sex abuse scandal.

The action by Archbishop Jose Gomez, relieving Cardinal Roger Mahony of “any administrative or public duties,” was remarkable on two levels.

First, it broke with the unspoken but nearly ironclad rule of the culture of Catholic hierarchy that bishops do not publicly criticize other bishops. That courtesy extended even to the most egregious examples of ecclesial malfeasance – the deliberate and persistent hiding of criminal activities by priests. No one to this point had uttered a word against a predecessor, not in New York or Connecticut, not in Philadelphia or Milwaukee, not in Seattle or Santa Fe. There were “mistakes made,” they would say, and offer vacuous apologies. For whatever reasons yet unknown, Gomez broke the code.

Second, the language Gomez used was blunt and unqualified. The behavior he found in the files, he said, was “evil.” The acts themselves and the handling of these matters, as the files revealed, showed more than mistakes made, they showed a “terrible failure.”

“I find these files to be brutal and painful reading. The behavior described in these files is terribly sad and evil. There is no excuse, no explaining away what happened to these children. The priests involved had the duty to be their spiritual fathers and they failed,” Gomez wrote, who also referred to Mahony’s sorrow “for his failure to fully protect young people entrusted to his care.”

Gomez’s words are a direct contradiction of the weak defense that Mahony has advanced for years, all the while spending untold sums in attempts to keep the truth hidden. It is the same list of explanations that he repeated in a lengthy and testy response to Gomez’s statement. “Nothing in my own background or education equipped me to deal with this grave problem,” wrote Mahony. In studying for his master’s degree

in social work, he said, no lecture or textbook ever referred to the sexual abuse of children.

There is, of course, some truth to the “we didn’t know” defense. Few knew, years ago, the seriousness of the disease borne by those who molest children. Much of it remains a mystery today.

But the “we didn’t know” defense quickly wears thin against the details contained in the 12,000 pages of documents that were just released by the court in Los Angeles, just as it wore thin against the truth revealed when documents were released in other places like Philadelphia and Boston.

That’s why Mahony spent so much time and money over nearly a decade attempting to keep the documents sealed. It’s why, even after agreeing to release documents as part of a 2007 settlement with 508 victims costing \$660 million, he continued to fight tooth and nail to keep the documents secret. It is why he and the diocese’s lawyers tried a last ditch and ultimately failed attempt to get the courts to redact the names of church officials from the documents so that it would be difficult to tell who did what. The documents put the lie to the “we didn’t know” defense.

What they demonstrate – and we have yet to read through all the thousands of pages -- is that diocesan officials, while they may not have understood the intricacies of the sex abuser’s mind and motivation, did know that laws were being broken, children were being raped and otherwise abused. They knew they had to take extraordinary lengths -- sending priests to counselors who were also lawyers so they could claim their conversations were privileged, sending some priests out of the country and others from parish to parish and diocese to diocese -- to avoid detection by the law and by the very Catholic community the officials were charged to serve. They knew enough to understand they had to hide the crimes and the behavior if they didn’t want to besmirch the good name of the clergy culture. Consideration of what was happening to the abused children and their families was incidental, at best.

What Mahony and others -- Cardinals Bernard Law, Justin Rigali, Edward Egan, Anthony Bevilacqua, and a host of archbishops and bishops -- really didn’t understand was the degree to which their moral compasses had been distorted by the strong magnetic pull of the clergy culture. In their fierce allegiance to that exclusive club at all costs, in their willingness to preserve the façade of holiness and the faithful’s high notion of ordination, they lost sight of simple human decency and the most fundamental demands of the gospel.

It doesn’t take a master’s or a doctorate to understand that the first obligation of adults is to protect the children. When the first instinct became protection of the clergy and the institution, our leaders became disfigured at some deep and essential level. The Catholic community is still waiting for them to deal honestly with that reality, with what happens to them when their robes turn to purple.

Meanwhile, there are no heroes in any of this. Gomez may have broken with normal behaviors, but as many have already pointed out, he had access to the documents for two years and said nothing. And it is reasonable to expect that if Mahony and the lawyers had succeeded in keeping the documents sealed, nothing would have been said. The “evil” would have remained festering on some chancery shelf.

If Archbishop Gomez really wants to do a service to the people of God in Los Angeles, he will reveal how much of the archdiocese’s treasury was spent during the last decade on trying to hide that truth. By its own admission the Kansas City-St. Joseph, Mo., diocese spent \$1.39 million^[2] in a failed 18-month attempt to defend Bishop Robert Finn from charges of failing to report a child pornographer, and the Milwaukee archdiocese has spent \$9 million^[3] in a two-year-long, far-from-settled bankruptcy case precipitated by sex abuse law suits. The amount of money the Los Angeles archdiocese has spent hiding these documents must be mind-boggling. That is evil, as well.

There are no heroes among the many other chancery officials and public relations advisors and lawyers who knew, some for many years, what crimes and sins had been committed against children.

There are no heroes in the Vatican structures, on up to the pope, among those who years ago could have demanded a review of the documents, come to the same conclusions as Gomez and removed Mahony long ago. It would have saved the church of Los Angeles years of suspense and enormous amounts of money. We say we believe that the truth will set us free. In too many dioceses today, the truth remains hidden and the church remains in chains fashioned by its bishops.

Endless speculation will swirl now about why Gomez did what he did and what precisely it means. None of that really matters. What matters is the truth that will outlast reporters, commentators, perpetrators, cardinals, bishops, victims and the rest. The revelation and preservation of that truth in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles just received a boost with the release of the documents.

The Role of Indian Women in Diaspora in Ending violence Against Women and Girls

February 6, 2013



Topic: **"Outcry on Violence against Indian Women and Girls: The role of Indian women in Diaspora"**.

Speaker: Mrs. Ranju Batra President, The Association of Indians in America INC New York Chapter

Host: Dr. Ada Okika Co-Host: Mrs. Chi Ezekwueche

Research and News-: Dr. Ifechukwu Anikpe and Ms. Amara Nwosu

The tipping point in India for public outrage over violence against women was reached on December 16, 2012 when a 23-year-old Delhi medical student was gang-raped by six men. The world was shocked. The attack was New Delhi's 636th that year. Hundreds of ordinary citizens took to the streets in disapproval of the state's inability to make India a safer and more equitable country for women. India is ranked 105 of 135 countries on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report. And ranked 90th of 235 countries and territories in the African Views index, which measures a country's capacity to promote human development with least amount of bias on gender, race, creed, or religion. India is an important country in the world, and the growth of India as democratic capital economy has been formidable. India is clearly improving rapidly in many areas but, are the necessary ethical and social standards developing at similar pace?

Joining us to kick start this year's discussion on the role of Diaspora Indians in stopping violence against women in India and countries in similar situation is Mrs. Ranju Batra, the President of the Association of Indians in America (New York chapter). She has had a long-standing foundation in different social and charitable causes. We are very pleased to have Mrs. Batra on the program and looking forward to an insightful discussion

Governance in India: Women's Rights

Author: [Beina Xu](#), Online Writer/Editor
Updated: March 25, 2013

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Introduction

The rape and subsequent death of a New Delhi university student in December 2012 sparked nationwide furor over Indian authorities' lax treatment of sexual violence. After other such incidents surfaced, including the rape and suicide of a young Punjab girl, critics began scrutinizing aspects of Indian society that many claim have perpetuated violence and discrimination against women. The high-profile cases called attention to the broader issue of women's rights in India, a nation which ranks 84th out of 113 countries on the *Economist's* women's [economic opportunity rankings](#).

Women in India face myriad cultural challenges that impede social advancement, analysts say. Discriminatory family codes, lack of education, and cultural stigmas are only a few examples. Heightened media attention on such inequities has mounted pressure on the government to not just reform the institutional treatment of women, but also raise the level of dialogue on the larger issue of women's rights in a rapidly modernizing society.

Gender Inequality

The Indian constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, but the position of women remains unequal, according to a [United Nations report](#). Women in India have long been subject to entrenched cultural biases that perpetuate the valuing of sons over daughters, who are often seen as an economic burden to families that fear high dowries and wedding costs, experts say.

Sex-selective abortions have occurred at staggering rates in India despite a 1996 ban on gender screening for such purposes: researchers say up to 600,000 female fetuses are aborted in India every year, or 2.2 percent of the [annual birth rate](#). This has tipped the gender ratio so dramatically that in 2011, there were 914 girls for every 1,000 boys among children up to six years old--the most imbalanced [gender ratio](#) since India's 1947 independence.

Researchers point to other significant factors contributing to the normalization of sex selection, including inheritance laws. The Hindu Succession Act of 2005 granted women equal inheritance rights to ancestral and jointly owned property, but enforcement of this law is weak, say experts. Many women, particularly in northern India, are still deprived of their rightful inheritance.

India's Sexual Assault Laws

The December [gang rape](#) and subsequent death of a twenty-three-year-old student in New Delhi, ignited a national furor over India's treatment of women and the perceived culture of complicity with regards to sexual violence in India. Such cases occur on a regular basis, says CFR Fellow for Women and Foreign Policy [Rachel Vogelstein](#), but this incident drew particular attention due to a few uncommon circumstances, including the publication of her name and her father's outspokenness of her plight. "The fact that she was a middle-class girl striving for a middle class life really rang a chord with a lot of Indians," says CFR Senior Fellow [Isobel Coleman](#). "Here is a girl living a modern life and subjected to such barbaric treatment."

Rape complaints [increased 25 percent](#) between 2006 and 2011 in India, although it's unclear whether this represents a real uptick in crime or a greater willingness by victims to file charges or by the police to accept them. However, gender-based violence as a whole has worsened in India over the past several years. National Crime Record Bureau [statistics](#) show a 7.1 percent nationwide hike in crimes against women since 2010.

"It's really a constellation of factors hindering women's rights, including gender sex selection, literacy, child marriage and violence." -- CFR Fellow Rachel Vogelstein.

Under the Indian Penal Code, [crimes against women](#) include rape, kidnapping and abduction, molestation, sexual harassment, torture, homicide for dowry, and the importation of girls. But critics have voiced concern over the vagueness of their definitions, particularly that of rape. Often, perpetrators of severe sexual attacks are charged with criminal assault on a woman with "intent to outrage her modesty," an offense that carries a light penalty and is almost never enforced.

For example, "eve-teasing," a common euphemism for sexual harassment or molestation in public places, goes mostly unreported. Many analysts attribute this to a culture of complicity and the government's weak prosecution of such assault crimes. A study by the *Hindustan Times* found that in the last five years, fifty-one cases related to eve-teasing in the city of Jalandhar in Punjab were taken to court, and only five people were convicted, while thirty others were acquitted due to [lack of evidence](#)

Searching for Justice

India's slow, overburdened, and under-funded criminal justice system has exacerbated the plight of rape and sexual assault victims, analysts say. Most rapes go unreported, largely because of cultural stigmas surrounding such incidents that could bring shame to victims and their families. Those who do report cases often face a [dehumanizing experience](#). A lack of specialized training for police and doctors often drives the problem, reports Human Rights Watch and other rights groups.

Furthermore, rights activists say, the lack of uniform national standards for treatment and examination of sexual assault survivors undermines the potential for a successful prosecution. Only around 26 percent of rape cases tried in court in 2011 [resulted in convictions](#), and only four out of ten cases were reported, according to the National Crime Records Bureau, although these trends are not necessarily [unique on a global scale](#). A study of forty acquitted rape cases in Delhi,

where [only seven percent](#) of the police force is women, found that more than half of the acquittals were due to [police failure](#) to perform sufficient investigations.

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Still, some sexual assault victims face even worse injustice, as in the case of a seventeen-year-old village girl who was drugged and gang raped in northern Punjab. She [committed suicide](#) in December 2012 after a police officer pressed her to drop the case and marry one of her attackers. Reports surfaced that officers had not only harassed the victim, but failed to register her case and attempted to broker an out-of-court settlement between her family and the families of her alleged attackers--a practice known locally as "[compromise](#)" that analysts say occurs often in some parts of the country.

Manyrights activists have pointed to a pervasive culture of complicity when it comes to sexual violence against Indian women, where some senior political and religious leaders have routinely helped perpetuate the practice of "blaming the victim." Violence against women is so lightly condemned that over the past five years, Indian political parties have nominated 260 candidates who have outstanding charges for [crimes against women](#), according to Coleman.

"It's really a constellation of factors hindering women's rights, including gender sex selection, literacy, child marriage, and violence," says CFR's Vogelstein. "In addition to that, there's been a culture of impunity around a lot of these issues. They have laws on the books that address all these issues, yet these problems continue to flourish part in many parts of India."

Political Representation

One of the major elements hampering women's rights progress in India is the chronically low level of female political representation, analysts say. While Sonia Gandhi, the widow of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, presides over the Indian National Congress Party, only about 10 percent of parliament members are women. Comparably, 17 percent of the U.S. Congress is women. In Pakistan, the National Assembly has [17.5 percent of its seats](#) reserved for women.

Progress on this front has been halting; in January 2012, India's lower house delayed for at least a year a bill that would have reserved [one-third of seats in Parliament](#) and in state assemblies for women. The legislation was passed in the upper house in March 2010 after a thirteen-year debate. Even after the amendment is ratified by the lower house it still must be approved by at least half of the country's state legislatures and the president--a process that will likely drag on for years and ensure that parliament, at least in the near term, will be dominated by men.

Road to Reform

The national uproar in the aftermath of the Delhi gang rape prompted the Indian government to address calls for reform of the country's judicial system. As provisional measures, Delhi ordered the use of so-called [fast-track courts](#) in several sexual assault cases in the capital, and established the first special court to handle crimes against women. The court, which opened in West Bengal

in late January, is staffed and run entirely by women--a forum which officials hope will encourage more female victims to come forward.

A breakthrough came in March 2013 when India's parliament passed a [new law](#) further protecting women against sexual violence. The legislation criminalizes stalking, voyeurism, and sexual harassment, and imposes the death penalty on repeat offenders and for rape attacks that lead to the victim's death. The law also makes it a crime for police officers to refuse reporting cases when victims file complaints of sexual attacks. The legislation came after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh set up a special committee in January 2013 that produced a [650-page report](#) of suggestions on how to strengthen criminal laws dealing with sexual assault against women.

Much of the work to improve conditions for women, however, is being done at the grassroots level, where some Indian and foreign NGOs are engaging with the male community in an effort to elevate women in society. For instance, in Bihar state, a village planted mango and lychee trees to [celebrate the birth of a girl](#), with the idea that profit from the fruit would help support the family and discourage the community from marrying its daughters at young ages. Saba Ghori, a Senior South Asia women's issues adviser at the U.S. State Department, says the real gains in India have been at the local level, where women village leaders have been so effective that certain states have called for a greater percentage of women in such roles.

However, some analysts say the government's actions have merely been a knee-jerk political expedient and will not materially improve much for women in the long run. "It's a sort of Band-Aid," says Coleman. "Laws alone aren't going to change this. Not that laws aren't important--they are--but we're talking about social attitudes, cultural practices, and those don't change overnight." Many rights groups say the government has more work to do, particularly because it failed to outlaw marital rape and handle the legal impunity afforded to members of the military. Still, other activists say the new measures, which imposed much stricter penalties for a range of crimes, mark one of the most significant changes to India's laws protecting women.

"India is uniquely compelling because it's a BRIC economy," says Vogelstein. "India is emerging, and the degree to which women and girls are hampered in their ability to participate fully in their society and economies is going to be detrimental to the country's modernization."