

# Holy Wisdom

*Peace: Showing that Others Matter!*

VOLUME

XX

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

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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!*

**March and message highlight plight of India's Dalit Christians**

Bangalore, India (ENI). Churches in India are calling for equality and justice for discriminated and marginalized communities in a Lenten campaign that has started in the world's second most populous nation. It has a message that cites the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark in the Bible (15:34), who, when he had been crucified, cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" "The Rev. Raj Bharath Patta, secretary of the NCCI Commission on Dalits told Ecumenical News International, "In our times today, when the doors of hope are closed from every corner to communities that have been dying under the rubric of discrimination and oppression, to cry out one's frustration is also to invoke hope".

### **Christian rights' body asks UN to reject new Burma poll law**

Kathmandu (ENI). A Christian rights organization has urged the United Nations to reject a law passed by Burma's military rulers that could lead to the expulsion of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from her own party ahead of the country's first poll since 1990, an election she convincingly won. The military junta in Burma has not yet set a date for the next election but there has been speculation that it could be held in October. There has also been speculation that the authorities will aim to have the election before Suu Kyi is released from imprisonment. The new law disenfranchises significant sections of the population, and bars a person with a criminal conviction, which would include Suu Kyi and Buddhist monks arrested for protesting, from standing as a candidate or being members of a political party. Christian Solidarity Worldwide and BurmaInfo (Japan) recently sent a joint fact-finding mission to the Burma-Thailand border, and released a report earlier in March.

### **Malawi churches discuss gay issue as donors apply pressure.**

Blantyre, Malawi (ENI). Churches in Malawi have begun to talk openly about homosexuality, with some clerics saying this is due to pressure from donor organizations that criticize human rights abuses, including the arrest of gays, taking place in the southern African nation. The Malawi Council of Churches on 16 March held a meeting of church leaders to discuss issues around homosexuality, plus HIV and AIDS, and the need for churches to take a position on the issues. "As the Church we need to unite and come up with a position on the issue of homosexuality," MCC chairperson Bishop Joseph Bvumbwe told the meeting in the capital, Lilongwe. "There have been so many complaints about homosexuality in the country and, as the Church, we have a role to play."

### **Salvation Army reports record US donation despite sour economy**

Washington DC ENI/RNS). Nickels, dimes, quarters and dollars added up quickly last Christmas despite the economic slump as Americans donated a record US \$139 million to the Salvation Army's Red Kettle Campaign. "America is an incredibly generous nation and philanthropy is alive and well, despite the current economic conditions impacting so many." Said Commissioner Israel L. Gaither, national commander of the Salvation Army. Religion News Service reports. "We are grateful for every donor, volunteer and corporate partner for supporting the Salvation Army's mission by giving more than ever during a time when some have so little to give." The Salvation Army reported a seven percent increase in giving over the \$130 million record of 2008.

### **Gaddafi's call for Christian-Muslim split denounced in Nigeria**

Nigeria (ENI). Nigerian religious and political leaders have criticized Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi's call for the partitioning of Africa's most populous nation into two countries – one for Christians and one for Muslims Nigeria said on 19 March it was recalling its ambassador to Libya, noting that Gaddafi's remarks were offensive and irresponsible, Gaddafi said on 17 March that partition had saved many lives in India and Pakistan. He asserted that splitting Nigeria into two "would stop the bloodshed

and burning of places of worship”. Gaddafi’s comments came in a speech to students and were quoted by the Libyan State news agency, Jana.

### **Ousted Zimbabwe bishop said to be flouting court order**

Harare (ENI). Anglicans in Zimbabwe are saying that former Harare Anglican Bishop Nolbert Kunonga is ignoring a High Court ruling that restored access to church buildings by members of the Anglican Church of Central Africa. High Court Judge Chinembiri Bhunu on 5 March dismissed an attempt by Kunonga to block an appeal by the Church of the Province of Central Africa against a ruling in 2009 that gave Kunonga, who has been excommunicated, control of church properties. The man who took over as bishop of Harare after Kunonga was excommunicated, Sebastian Bakare, said in an interview carried in the Church Times newspaper on 12 March that other denominations in Zimbabwe “have been silent on the injustices perpetrated against ordinary members of one church whose only ‘crime’ is to worship in their churches”.

### **Irish cardinal’s apology comes as Pope releasing Irish abuse letter**

Dublin (ENI). The leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland is facing pressure to resign after apologizing for his actions in 1975, when he represented the church at meetings where victims of a pedophile priest signed an oath of silence. At the same time the Vatican said that Pope Benedict XVI has signed a pastoral letter aimed at defusing anger in Ireland over a simmering sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. The letter follows growing criticism over the church’s handling of abuse cases across Europe. Cardinal Sean Brady used a homily on St. Patrick’s Day, when the patron saint of Ireland is celebrated, to apologize after he had earlier confirmed that he represented the church at meetings where two victims of the pedophile priest signed their oath of silence.

### **Dutch summit to engage faith leaders and UN on HIV response**

Geneva (ENI). A summit of 40 Bahai, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh leaders and the United Nations aims to inspire change in the fight against HIV and AIDS and the stigma that goes with it. The two-day summit, which organizers said is the first of its kind, starts on 22 March in Den Dolder, Netherlands. It aims to explore opportunities for religious leaders to take action to eliminate the stigma and discrimination-affecting people living with HIV and AIDS. “The leaders gathered at this summit have the ability to inspire and empower change within their own communities, across countries and throughout wider communities,” said the Rev. Richard Fee, head of the board of directors of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance.

### **Swedish S. African clerics say arms deal weakens new democracy**

Cape Town (ENI). South African and Swedish church leaders have reiterated grave concerns that a 10-year-old arms deal that involved Sweden with South Africa threatens the fledgling African democracy. The deal to sell armaments to South Africa also involved other European and Western nations such as Britain, France and Germany. It was signed a decade ago, estimated at around US - \$4.8 billion. “As predicted, the arms deal unleashed a culture of corruption that has severely undermined the transition in South Africa from apartheid to democracy,” said Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba along with the Swedish church leaders.

### **Christians call for protest against Israeli travel permits for Easter**

Jerusalem (ENI). Holy Land Christians are calling on their religious leaders to protest against the travel permit system imposed by Israel during Easter celebrations. The situation is complicated in 2010 by the

overlapping of Easter with the Jewish feast of the Passover. “Any system which assigns entry permits to Easter celebrations necessarily denies the rest of the faithful their rights of participation in these religious events,” they wrote in a letter that has been circulated during the month of March. Some 103 Christian lay leaders and 21 Christian organizations of all denominations, including the Near East Council of Churches, Gaza and Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees, Sabeel, the YMCA-Jerusalem, Bethlehem Bible College, Norwegian Church Aid and Arab Orthodox Society, signed the document. Like all West Bank Palestinians, Christians must have permits to travel to Jerusalem.

### **Churches in Scotland concerned about human egg ‘auctions’**

Edinburgh (ENI). A senior member of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, backed by a Roman Catholic counterpart, has raised strong concerns around the practice of “auctioning” and selling human eggs for in vitro fertilization treatment. “The sale of human eggs favors the commoditisation of human parts – human eggs should not be in a shopping basket on the same level as a grocery item,” the Rev. Ian Galloway, convenor of the church’s Church and Society Council, told Ecumenical News International. The sale of human eggs is not allowed in Britain, where donors are only compensated “reasonable” expenses and loss of earnings up to a maximum of 250 British pounds (US \$375). Galloway said, “The Church of Scotland has a clear policy against the sale of human eggs because it considers the practice exploitative of the poor, who may feel compelled to become donors for a fee, undergoing invasive, potentially dangerous and often painful procedures.”

### **Renewed call made for a common Christian Easter calendar**

New York (ENI). The U.S. National Council of Churches has renewed its call to set a common date for the celebration of Easter, when Christians mark the raising of Jesus from the dead. This year marks a rare occurrence as Christians from both Orthodox and non-Orthodox traditions will mark Easter on 4 April. A similar call for a common date for Easter was made more than 10 years ago, when Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians celebrated Easter on the same date. The renewed call came in a joint letter to member churches by the Rev. Michael Kinnamon, The NCC’s general secretary, and Antonios Kireopoulos, the NCC’s director for faith and order and interfaith relations. They said “almost every year the Christian community is divided over which day to proclaim this good news. Our split, based on a dispute having to do with ancient calendars, visibly betrays the message of reconciliation. It is a scandal that surely grieve our God.”

### **SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS ON WORLD PARLIAMENTARIANS TO SUPPORT MDGS AND DISARMAMENT EFFORTS**

New York – 27 March 2010. Given the common goal of the United Nations and parliaments worldwide to strive for a better future, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called for strong cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), disarmament and clean energy. “Parliaments, at their best, embody the principles of dialogue, democracy and the rule of law, which are inextricably tied to reconciliation and good governance, the Secretary-General said in a <http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=4460> message delivered today by Supachal Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development <http://www.unctad.org/Templates/StartPage.asp?intitemID=2068> (UNCTAD) at the IPU Assembly underway in Bangkok, Thailand.

Quoting the opening words of the United Nations Charter, “We the People”, Mr. Ban said today that parliaments and the UN share a common responsibility to strive for the betterment of lives for people

particularly the most vulnerable.

In pursuit of this goal, the Secretary-General called on IPU members to help achieve the eight universally accepted MDGs before the 2015 deadline.

“Parliaments provide the enabling national legislative framework for achieving the MDGs. You are also at the forefront of fighting for improved livelihoods and access to basic services.”

Ways to accelerate progress will be the main theme of the MDG Summit hosted by Mr. Ban at the General Assembly High-Level debate in September in New York.

On nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, the Secretary-General asked the IPU for its support to ensure success in May at the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, whose members include five nuclear powers – also the five permanent members of the Security Council—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The Secretary-General also called for the IPU’s efforts to support climate change, saying parliamentarians can provide the foundation for building a green economy.

“While the private sector will be a big part of the picture, parliaments can produce legislation that establishes incentives for innovation, promotes investment in clean technologies and renewable energy, and develops national plans and goals.”

Mr. Ban noted the challenges parliamentarians face, including lack of sufficient resources and keen insight that elections are not, by themselves, enough to make a democracy.

He noted that the UN was working with parliaments to strengthen “the quality of governance after the ballots have been counted” in Afghanistan, Burundi, Timor-Leste and Nepal, where the UN Mission there <<http://www.unmin.org.np>> (UNMIN) helped Nepalis achieve their long-held vision of establishing “a Constituent Assembly that is representative of the country’s ethnic and religious mosaic.”

### **Science, religion like two windows on world says Templeton winner**

New York (ENI). A geneticist and molecular biologist, who has argued that science and religion should be kept separate, has won the Templeton Prize – an award associated with honoring those who advocate dialogue between the two disciplines. The winner, Francisco J. Ayala, aged 76 and a former Dominican priest, is a native of Spain and a naturalized U.S. citizen. He now teaches biological science at the University of California in Irvine. Ayala is known as an opponent of religious intrusion into science, and argues for the need to protect the teaching of evolutionary theory in U.S. public schools. Still, he has also called for discussions between religion and science, and claims that they “are like two different windows through which we look at the world”. “I contend that science and religious beliefs need not be in contradiction,” Ayala said.

### **‘Accountability crucial’ when faith is funded to fight HIV**

Den Dolder, Netherlands (ENI). A top official from a major funding agency says faith communities are crucial to combating the HIV pandemic, but they need to meet international standards of accountability when funds are channeled through them. Christoph Benn, director of external relations and partnerships at the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, said relationships between funding organizations regard the role of faith communities as, “absolutely critical”, said Benn. “We want to work with you, and channel funds through you, otherwise we often cannot make progress against AIDS and

other diseases.” On the other hand, he noted that one challenge in working with faith communities is that of accountability. “You may be used to being accountable to a higher authority,” Benn told the religious leaders but he added that for funding organizations, “accountability is about money”.

### **Hong Kong church official praises Google on ‘information freedom’**

Hong Kong (ENI). A Hong Kong Roman Catholic diocesan official has praised Google’s decision to stop filtering the contents in its search engine as it faces a backlash in the Chinese mainland. “The action of Google is encouraging,” Or Yan-yan, project officer of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, told Ecumenical News International on 24 March. “It brings a positive message in promoting the freedom of information.” Google shut its search engine in Mainland China on 22 March, after it refused to carry out filtering required by Chinese laws. Church official Or acknowledged that many international companies want to invest in China because the economy there is booming. She noted that, “A successful deal may require some compromises,” adding, “but to uphold business ethics is also important.”

### **Maoist violence in India ‘challenges’ churches to be peacemakers**

Thrissur, India (ENI). A senior Indian church official has called on churches in his country to address increasing Maoist violence, as well as the strong-arm response to it by the State. “The situation is getting worse, and more and more incidents of violence are reported. We should not remain silent spectators to this increasing violence,” the Rev. Asir Ebenezer, acting general secretary of the National Council of Churches in India, told Ecumenical News International. Ebenezer, whose organization groups 30 Orthodox and Protestant churches, made his remarks following increasing violence by Maoists. Seventy-six security personnel died on 6 April, when a convoy was ambushed by hundreds of Maoists in a remote village of central Chattisgarh state.

### **Church in Slovakia takes on US casino giant.**

Warsaw (ENI). Roman Catholic bishops in Slovakia have condemned moves by a U.S. gambling company to set up Europe’s largest mega-casino complex on their country’s border with Austria, outside the capital Bratislava. “Games of hazard are ethically questionable. They damage the person and society, and the economic benefits flowing from them are highly doubtful,” said the bishops’ conference in Slovakia. “Academic research proves gambling brings more negative than positive consequences. We need a change in the law. The church leaders were reacting to plans by Nevada-based Harrah’s Entertainment Inc. for a 30-hectare (74 acre) complex at Jarovce, south of Bratislava. The project, expected to be completed by 2015, has the backing of the center-left Slovak government of Prime Minister Robert Fico.

### **Catholic bishop in Norway dismissed due to sex abuse**

Oslo (ENI). Former Roman Catholic bishop Georg Maller, who abruptly left his post as Bishop of Trondheim in Norway on 8 June 2009, was dismissed due to his sexual abuse of an altar boy 20 years ago, the Vatican has said. Maller’s dismissal was confirmed to journalists on 7 April by Vatican spokesperson the Rev. Federico Lombardi. The Catholic Bishop of Oslo, Bernt Eidsvig, had earlier announced the dismissal in a press release. Eidsvig has been acting Bishop of Trondheim since German-born Maller, aged 58, left. Eidsvig said the matter had not been publicized earlier because the person abused had not wanted it made public, and had requested anonymity.

### **Muslim women push European fashion boundaries**

Paris (ENI/RNS). It is hard to associate Saadia Boussana’s stylish bonnet with the traditional Muslim

head covering that has drawn sneers, protests and injunctions in cities across Europe. But 29-year-old Boussana, cradling a coffee at a Paris-area Starbucks, was indeed wearing a hijab – sort of – that offered an elegant finish to her jeans and black embroidered shirt. Religion News Service reports, “There are times I can dress really extravagantly,” said Boussana, the communications manager for MWM or My Woman Magazine, a new French online publication for Muslim women. Often derided by Western critics as a dowdy symbol of female oppression, hijabs, or Islamic headscarves, are at the forefront of a fashion revolution in Europe as young Muslim women mix, match and borrow from a wide array of styles to create their own look.

### **World Council of Churches hails Russia-U.S. nuclear treaty**

Geneva (ENI). The World Council of Churches has welcomed the signing of a treaty by Russian President Dmitri Medvedev and his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama, which aims to shrink each country’s nuclear arsenals by almost a third. “The new U.S.-Russia nuclear arms reduction treaty signed today in Prague is news that the World Council of Churches has awaited for a long time. The achievement of a nuclear weapons agreement between the two most heavily armed nations in the world.” WCC general secretary, the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit said on 8 April. He was commenting on the signing by Medvedev and Obama of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in the capital of the Czech Republic, which during the Cold War was considered a crossroads between the West and the Communist Bloc.

### **‘Banker to the poor’ urges new financial structures to end poverty**

Nairobi (ENI). The Bangladeshi economist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for championing microcredit loans to the poor has called for an urgent re-invention of global financial systems to end poverty and protect the underprivileged. Muhammad Yunus said in Nairobi on 7 April that a new system could allow those excluded from mainstream banking, especially in Africa and the Middle East, to access credit that would enable them to live in dignity. “We are not just happy to make ourselves rich and wealthy, we also want to make sure our fellow human beings can stand on their feet with pride and dignity, no matter where they live.” Yunus said at the opening of the four-day Africa-Middle East Microcredit Summit in the Kenyan capital.

### **Absent Bethlehem landlords, many Christians, spark land review**

Jerusalem (ENI). Bethlehem, a municipal spokesperson has given details of the workings of a process aimed at preventing land theft whereby landowners can contest registration details of their plots. The scheme began at the beginning of 2010 to prevent the theft of land belonging to the increasing number of residents who have left the town in which Jesus was born. “The municipality has embarked on a process of setting land registration in order to avoid any problems of land theft,” said Sari Dallal, director of public relations for Bethlehem. Preparations for setting up the appeals process began two years ago at the request of Bethlehem Mayor Victor Batarseh and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas following numerous complaints of property thefts from landowners living abroad said Dallal. He explained that even though many of those affected by the illegal sales of property are Christians, because many Christians have emigrated from Bethlehem, the problem is not divided along religious lines.

### **Nagasaki statue that survived A-bomb, going to New York**

Tokyo (ENI). The remains of a statue of the Virgin Mary that survived the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki is to be exhibited in New York ahead of an international conference aimed at curbing arms proliferation, says the Roman Catholic Church in the Japanese city. The wooden statue of the mother of Jesus, which stood in Urakami Cathedral in the western Japanese city, was almost completely destroyed by the atomic

bomb dropped on Nagasaki by the U.S. Air Force in the last days of the Second World War on 9 August 1945. Only Mary's head remained intact. The cathedral itself was reduced to rubble." The head, will be shown while prayers are said during a Mass in New York", Midori Shikayama, an official of the Nagasaki archdiocese's public relations department told Ecumenical News International. Shikayama explained it would be the first time the statue has visited the United States when it is shown during the Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City on 2 May.

## **HAITI: UN PREPARES TO HELP RELOCATE 7,500 QUAKE SURVIVORS AT RISK FROM FLOODS**

New York April 9, 2010. Relief organizations working with UN peacekeepers in Haiti are preparing to relocate some 7,500-earthquake survivors at risk of potential flooding in a camp above Port-au-Prince, the capital.

People living in dangerous areas at the Petionville Club settlement were presented with voluntary relocation options and when those are not possible, relocation will be facilitated to a new site at Corail Cesselesse, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (<<http://www.unicef.org>>OCHA) said. Relocation to this site will start tomorrow and is expected to take several days.

The new site will include health care and food distribution services as well as specialized services for children, such as a learning area provided by the UN Children Fund (<<http://www.unicef.org>>UNICEF). The 12 January quake killed more than 200,000 people and left one third of the country's 9 million people in need of aid, with scores of thousands sheltering in camps where they live in difficult conditions.

Meanwhile, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro will travel to Haiti on Sunday to survey the situation in the camps, assess steps that have been taken and explore areas for further action after Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon voiced his concern, in particular at reports of sexual violence against women and children

Ms. Migiro will meet with President René Préval and other senior Government officials and spend Sunday night in one of the camps, meeting with residents and police to assess the efforts to protect the people there from sexual violence and related problems.

On Monday she will visit the town of Léogâne, which was also badly affected by the quake, to discuss child protection issues with Haitian officials.

## **KYRGYZSTAN: UN SENDS MEDICAL SUPPLIES TO TREAT VICTIMS OF CLASHES IN CAPITAL**

New York April 9, 2010. The UN World Health Organization (WHO) is rushing medicines and surgical equipment to help doctors in Kyrgyzstan treat the hundreds of casualties from this week's deadly clashes that have led to the apparent overthrow of the Central Asian country's Government.

Antibiotics that could treat up to 1,500 cases of wounds and disease are being sent, as well as medical equipment that includes forceps and stethoscopes. WHO spokesperson Paul Garwood told reporters today at the agency's headquarters in Geneva.

Mr. Garwood said WHO was working to dispatch additional supplies to meet a request from the Kyrgyz



health ministry, which has reported that at least 75 people were killed in this week's clashes in the capital, Bishkek, and another 500 are being treated at the three major hospitals in the city.

Kyrgyzstan's opposition has set up an interim government and the President, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, has fled Bishkek after several days of deadly unrest related to protests over a steep rise in the cost of fuel and electricity, according to media reports.

Mr. Garwood said WHO understood that the situation in Bishkek is becoming "a bit more stable," particularly the state of security and the provision of health care.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has dispatched a special envoy, Ján Kubiš, the Executive Director of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), to Kyrgyzstan to try to help resolve tensions and promote dialogue.

Mr. Kubiš has headed to the country for several days of consultations with key political forces and civil society representatives in Kyrgyzstan, and he is expected to work closely with envoys of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU) and individual countries in the region and elsewhere.

Mr. Ban is continuing to stress the need for an urgent return to constitutional order in Kyrgyzstan, telling the OSCE's Permanent Council yesterday in Vienna that he remains "deeply concerned about the violence and shocked about the loss of life that occurred in recent days."

The Secretary-General said a vibrant civil society, political participation, freedom of speech and the rule of law are critical for modernization and social progress in Kyrgyzstan and its Central Asian neighbors. "The bloodshed in Kyrgyzstan is a deeply troubling reminder of the vital importance of addressing such issues...there are political, economic and social issues underlying the unrest."

### **BAN STRESSES NEED TO REVIVE AREAS AFFECTED BY CHERNOBYL DISASTER ON 24TH ANNIVERSARY**

New York, April 26, 2010 – Marking the 24th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster – which exposed more than 8 million people in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia to radiation -- today, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reiterated his commitment to reviving sections of the three nations still coping with the catastrophe.

The Secretary-General, who took part in the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington two weeks ago, welcomed world leaders' renewed commitment to this issue.

The General Assembly has declared 2006-2016 the Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions, urging assistance for Chernobyl-affected communities to return to a normal life.

### **Clerics plead with US officials to protect Iraq Christians**

New York (ENI). U.S. National Council of Churches' officials have asked their national authorities to take steps to protect Christians in Iraq as well as members of other threatened minority groups due to continuing violence and political uncertainty. Leaders from the biggest ecumenical agency in the United States sent a letter on 26 April to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and to the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. The NCC officials asked Clinton and Gates to urge Iraqi authorities and commanders of U.S. – led forces in Iraq to take steps to minimize violence affecting the beleaguered Iraqi Christian community and others who continue to face threats and acts of violence. The letters urged the

United States to work with Iraqi authorities to help protect Christians and other minority groups; provide humanitarian assistance to those displaced, and encourage the preservation of religious and ethnic diversity in Iraq.

### **Nepal's Christians hold vigil for new secular constitution**

Kathmandu (ENI). Hundreds of Christians have held their first public vigil in the Nepalese capital to pressure the government into implementing a new secular constitution within a stipulated deadline. Their vigil comes during a period of growing anxiety that the country's political parties may bungle their task on the basic law of the country and that Nepal could become a Hindu State again. "This is our vigil to ensure that the new constitution that is being written by the people themselves for the first time, protects secularism," said Pastor Ishwor Chandra Kafle, a member of the Christian Recommendation Central Committee. Though the country's parliament declared Nepal secular in 2006, Christians say they are still oppressed in what was once the only Hindu Kingdom in the world.

### **Palestinian professor unhappy about Bethlehem to Jerusalem run**

Jerusalem (ENI). A Bethlehem professor has expressed distress at a sporting event organized in conjunction with the Israeli Ministry of Tourism, a Vatican pilgrimage organization and the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism. The event saw hundreds of Italian, Israeli and Palestinian athletes running from the Nativity Church in Bethlehem to the Old City in Jerusalem on 25 April. "We were distressed to find that they had coordinated their visit with the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and with the Israeli Ministry of Tourism," said Bethlehem University professor and activist leader Mazin Qurnsiyeh.

### **Brazilian Lutheran leader mourned after unexpected death**

Geneva (ENI). The senior vice-president of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil, the Rev. Homero Severo Pinto, who had been tipped as a future head of his denomination, has died at the age of 58 after contracting malaria in Africa. "We will miss him for his support, his friendship and his collegiality. Many people saw him as hope for the future of our church," said the church's president, the Rev. Walter Altmann in a 28 April statement issued by the Gustav-Adolf-Werk, a German-based association that offers support to Lutheran churches outside Germany. Pinto died on 23 April after contracting malaria while visiting Mozambique at the end of February. He had been taken into hospital on his return to Porto Alegre in southern Brazil where the Lutheran church has its national headquarters.

### **Indian churches study 'zero tolerance' rules on sex abuse**

Thissur (ENI). Churches in India are responding to allegations of sexual abuse by clergy around the world by considering their own guidelines to deal with the issue. "Our message should be crystal clear, that churches will not tolerate anyone who is guilty," said the Rev. Christopher Rajkumar, executive secretary of the National Council of Churches in India's commission for justice, peace and creation.

The NCCI, which groups 30 Orthodox and Protestant churches, is taking to the June meeting of its executive committee, guidelines on dealing with sexual harassment that were set out in April at the general assembly in Kuala Lumpur of the Christian Conference of Asia.

### **Christian sworn in a Nigerian president after death of Yar'Adua**

Lagos (ENI). Nigeria's acting president, Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian, has been sworn in as the country's president following the death of his Muslim predecessor, Umaru Yar'Adua. Jonathan is expected to serve as president until next year when a general election will be held. There is widespread

speculation that Jonathan will seek to stand in that election. Members of the ruling People's Democratic Party from the north of the country are, however, insisting on a Muslim northerner as a candidate.

### **Faith leaders in Sweden form council to support religious freedom.**

Uppsala/Geneva (ENI). A national interfaith council has been created in Sweden to highlight the role of faith groups in creating understanding and to respond to those who are hostile to religion. "We want to strengthen the freedom to believe in and practice religion, both individually and in fellowship, but we also want to be a voice for public discussion of ethics and spirituality," said Archbishop Anders Wejryd of the Lutheran Church of Sweden.

### **LACK OF HUMAN SECURITY IMPEDING PROGRESS FOR PALESTINIANS, SAYS UN-BACKED REPORT.**

New York, May 9, 2010 – Human security is a pr-requisite for development, and its widespread absence in the occupied Palestinian territory has greatly impeded progress for the people living there, according to a new report released today by the United Nations.

### **GOVERNMENTS MUST ACT SWIFTLY TO SALVAGE BIODIVERSITY, UN REPORT FINDS**

New York, May 10, 2010 – A new biodiversity report released today by two United Nations environmental bodies concluded that unless radical and creative action is taken quickly to conserve the variety of life on Earth, natural systems that support lives and livelihoods are at risk of collapsing. "We need a new vision for biological diversity for a health planet and a sustainable future for humankind," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon writes in the forward of the report produced by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Environment Program (UNEP).

### **S. African religious leaders offer support, advice to soccer team**

Cape Town (ENI). South African religious leaders have expressed strong support for the national soccer team 40 days before the kick-off of the World Cup tournament on 11 June with one cleric calling on the players to be role models for young people. The support came in the form of remarks by Christian and Jewish leaders published in South Africa's Sunday Times newspaper on 25 April. Roman Catholic Cardinal Wilfrid Napier said from Durban, "All we ask is that their presence, behavior and performance on and off the field bear the qualities that will make them worthy role models for our children and youth for generations to come." Napier said, "May God bless Africa, may He nurture and protect all who will be guests during the World Cup, and may He nurture and protect all who will be guests during the World Cup, and may He ensure that the best and most sporting team be the World Champions, and may that team be Bafana Bafana [the nick-name of the South African team]."

### **Shell must do more on Niger Delta says church-linked group – Feature**

London (ENI). The oil giant Shell continues to face scrutiny over its operations in Nigeria, with a British church-based investor coalition saying the company needs to take longer-term action to reduce the negative impact of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta. "After years of unresolved community tensions, Shell could reap benefits by making accountability to local people a higher priority," said Miles Litvinoff, coordinator of the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility. It had released a report in February that said the oil company's operations in the Niger Delta had a negative social and environmental impact.

### **Hindu governor praises Christians at India Presbyterian gathering**

Mawngap, India (ENI). The Hindu governor of India's Meghalaya state has at a mass gathering of

Presbyterians hailed the role of Christian missionaries in spreading a message of “love, trust and peace in the turbulent tribal societies” of the country’s north-east. The presence of Governor Ranjit S. Mooshahary and his sermon excited many delegates at the 39th general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in India. Still, some church leaders said they were angry because a non-Christian had been allowed to address a solemn worship service. The Rev. S.S. Majaw, who heads communications for the Presbyterian Church in India, however, told Ecumenical News International that “it should have been treated as an honor that the head of the government came to our worship service and addressed us”.

### **Obama meets Billy Graham at evangelist’s home**

Washington DC (ENI/RNS). U.S. President Barack Obama and ailing evangelist Billy Graham have exchanged prayers during their first meeting at Graham’s home in western North Carolina. Obama had traveled to nearby Asheville, North Carolina, and requested the visit – the first time a sitting president has visited Graham at his residence, said Graham’s longtime spokesperson, A. Larry Ross, Religion News Service reports. Graham, who is aged 91, issued a statement saying he was pleased with the 25 April visit and encouraging “Christians everywhere to pray for our president.”

### **SAFETY OF DARFUR PEACEKEEPERS TOPS TALKS BETWEEN UN, AFRICAN UNION AND SUDAN**

New York, May 10, 2010 – The protection of blue helmets serving in Darfur has topped the agenda of the latest talks between the United Nations, the African Union and the Sudanese Government, which are taking place just days after two peacekeepers were killed and three others seriously wounded in an ambush in the war-torn region.

### **UN ATOMIC AGENCY A SOUNDING BOARD FOR COUNTRIES CONSIDERING GOING NUCLEAR**

New York, May 11, 2010 – The United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (<<http://www.iaea.org/>>IAEA) fans out across the globe to not only ensure that nations are adhering to international pacts or security and other issues, but also to help them decide whether or not to make the leap to nuclear power.

At the start of the five-yearly review conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which kicked off last week, the agency’s head, Yukiya Amano, told more than 100 nations taking part at the event in New York that dozens of countries are considering introducing nuclear power to generate electricity.

He noted that “it is expected that between 10 and 25 new countries will bring their first nuclear power plants online by 2030,” joining the 30 nations already on the nuclear bandwagon.

### **COUNTRIES AGREE ON UN-BACKED ROADMAP TO CURB CHILD LABOR**

New York, May 12, 2010 – With more than 200 million children around the world working at the expense of their future, a new United Nations-backed action plan seeks to ramp up global action to stamp out the scourge by 2016.

At the end of a two-day Global Child Labor Conference in The Hague yesterday, more than 450 delegates from 80 countries agreed on a so-called roadmap, which characterizes the effective abolition of child labor as a “moral necessity.”

The program also emphasizes that “government responsibility should be assumed at the highest level and with the best interests of children in mind taking into consideration the views of children and their families, and should include due attention to the most vulnerable children and the conditions that create their

vulnerability.”

### **‘Reach out to other faiths’ call made at German church gathering**

Munich, Germany (ENI). There has been a call on the opening day of an ecumenical convention gathering thousands of people in Germany for churches to expand their cooperation to include members of other faiths. “It is no longer just a question of dialogue between Catholics and Protestants,” Eckhard Nagel, the Protestant co-president of the Ecumenical Kirchentag (church convention), told journalists on 12 May in Munich in southern Germany. Nagel said that interreligious dialogue would have a “special place” at the five-day event, and noted that Munich is sometimes called a “city of religions” because of its faith make up. “The important signal that will go out from Munich is that interreligious contact does not mean inevitable tension or even a smoldering fire of perpetual conflict,” said Nagel. Rather it is, “an opportunity to learn from each other, and to seek solutions together for issues that are not always straightforward”.

### **S. African cleric warns, ‘World Cup will increase sex trafficking’**

Cape Town (ENI). The World Cup soccer tournament is due to kick-off on 11 June in South Africa and the president of the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference, Archbishop Buti Tihagale, has warned that sex trafficking will increase in the country during the event, “As Christians, we must resist with every strength we have this dangerous and degrading form of modern slavery,” Tihagale told an 8 May rally of about one thousand people, who had gathered in Pretoria to pray for an end to human trafficking.

### **Church leaders alarmed at increasing violence in Iraq**

Geneva (ENI). The general secretary of the World Council of Churches has joined peers in the Middle East in expressing concerns about the escalating rate of violence against Christians in northern Iraq, following attacks on buses carrying Christians in Mosul, in which a shopkeeper was killed. “As we express our solidarity with the people of Iraq, and convey our condolences to the families of the victims, we are very concerned about the new escalation of violence against Christians in Mosul,” said the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches. Thousands of Christians protested in northern Iraq on 3 May about the previous day’s bomb attacks on the buses, which were carrying students and workers. It is believed the explosions wounded around 200 people.

### **NEW JERSEY NURSE ARTICLE**

An article has been written by Anne Riccitelli, Litt, D. United Nations Representative for New Jersey Nurse (circulation 110,000) about the 63rd Conference Chair, Dr. Mary Norton, pegged to the Conference, titled “How Nurses Make a Difference.” Pending approval by Chair, the article will run in the July/August issue.

The Catholic Advocate, a publication of the Diocese of New Jersey (circulation 62,000), received information from Anne Riccitelli on the 63rd Conference and it’s Chair, Dr. Mary Norton, a lifelong resident of New Jersey and a Lector and Eucharistic Minister at Queen of Peace R.C. Church, North Arlington, N.J. since 1966. They will interview her for a summer issue prior to the Conference.

NGO Reporter, a publication of the NGO/DPI Executive Committee at the United Nations will publish material created and submitted by Anne Riccitelli in their next issue, which will be out in two weeks.

On Wednesday, May 20, SOCA NGO Representative, Anne Riccitelli, Media Committee Co-Chair for the 63rd UN DIP/NGO Conference, attended a 2-hour teleconference meeting with the Australian Media Committee at the invitation of UN/DPI.

## **News! News! News!**

Episcopal Synod of the Jacobite Church strongly criticized Bishop Coorilose (UK) for his inability and weakness. Majority of bishops and Catholicose expressed their unhappiness and questioned the loyalty of Bishop Coorilose to Jacobite Church. The whole Synod strongly opposed the fundraising of Bishop Coorilose who collects millions from the church and people, and uses it for his own lavishness and pleasure. Bishop Coorilose collects money in the name of POOR Children but is using it for building his own palaces. Catholicose and the Synod asked Bishop Coorilose to stop fund collection from the church immediately and withdraw from THEERAM as early as possible since it has nothing to do with the Jacobite Church.

The whole Synod expressed their unhappiness about the inability and weakness of Bishop Coorilose for the pathetic situation of the Jacobite Church and St. Paul's Mission since he took charge.

## **UN AGENCY AGAINST HIV VOICES CONCERN OVER CONVICTION OF MALAWIAN GAY COUPLE**

New York, May 27, 2010 – The head of the United Nations agency fighting HIV/AIDS has expressed concern over the recent conviction in Malawi of a gay couple and their sentencing to 14 years in jail, warning that it could undermine health-care efforts aimed at helping people living with the disease.

Michael Sidibè, Executive Director of the Joint UN Program on HIV/AIDS

(<http://www.unaids.org/en/default.asp>), SIAD ON Tuesday that the conviction of Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga earlier this month for “indecent practices between males” and “unnatural offences” had worrying health, societal, cultural and human rights ramifications.

## **THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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Message for 100-day countdown to International Day of Peace

13 June 2010

One hundred days from today, the world will mark the International Day of Peace—a day which armed conflict is meant to be stilled...a day on which we appeal to combatants to observe a cease fire...a day on which we reaffirm commitment to non-violence and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

This year's observance, which takes place on 21 September, focuses on youth and development, under the slogan: “Peace—Future.”

Young people already play a crucial role in working for peace. Yet I know they can do even more. So this International Day comes with a challenge for young people everywhere: Expand on your work to build peace. Share your plans and ideas, with creativity and passion. The world's concerns will soon be in your hands.

This year, the International Day of Peace coincides with the Summit I am convening to boost progress towards the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Achieving the goals is essential for ending armed conflict and building sustainable peace. I hope the voices of young people will be heard at the summit and in the run-up to it.

Over the next 100 days, I urge young people to plan projects that can help create the conditions for peace in their communities, in their schools, in their countries. We need your voice and commitment, and we will share your stories with the world.

As we start the countdown to the International Day of Peace, we recognize two truths: Only in a peaceful environment will young people realize their full potential—and young people have the potential to start

building that peaceful world today.

## NEWS – SYRIAC ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ANTIOCH

Concelebrated Divine Liturgy of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the U.S.A.

On June 12th, 2010, the Annual Concelebrated Divine Liturgy of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the USA took place in St. Mark's Syriac Orthodox Cathedral, Teaneck, NJ. The Liturgy was celebrated this year according to the ancient rites of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, presided by H.E. Archbishop Abuna Zecharias, Primate of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church Archdiocese of North-Eastern USA. Participating in the Divine Liturgy also were the following Hierarchs, His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Orthodox Church in America, His Eminence Archbishop Mor Titus Yeldho of the Malankara Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in North America, His Eminence Archbishop Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim of the Syrian Orthodox Church for the Eastern USA. Present also were the Ethiopian Orthodox Archbishop of Trinidad, His Eminence Abuna Thaddaius and the retired Armenian Archbishop, His Eminence Yeghishe Gizirian, His Eminence His Grace Bishop David of the Coptic Orthodox Church was unable to participate due to his travel overseas. Several priests and deacons served the Liturgy from the sister Oriental Orthodox Churches. A big crowd of parishioners from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church showed up with their choir and their traditional drums.

All the clergy walked in a procession to the church, amid clapping and chanting of the parishioners. Everyone enjoyed their chanting and music, which started them into worship. There was a great joy in the Church, especially after receiving Communion, which spread the feeling of oneness among the congregation. The Liturgy lasted over three hours. It was concluded by some warm thanksgiving words given by Archbishop Karim, in which he thanked His Eminence Zecharias and his clergy for agreeing to conduct the liturgy and for choosing our Cathedral for the celebration assuring them that they are always welcome. His Eminence also thanked the Hierarchs, the clergy and the parishioners for their presence and participation in this year's Concelebrated Holy Liturgy.

After the conclusion of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist all participants were invited to a delicious Lenten Lunch provided by our sister Ethiopian Church.



For further information on the various programs contact:  
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