

# Holy Wisdom

## *Peace: Showing that Others Matter!*

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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!*

## Pope encourages talks with Oriental Orthodox churches



January 28, 2011

Pope Benedict XVI met on January 28 with members of a joint commission for dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox churches. The Pontiff expressed appreciation for their work and confidence for the future of the ecumenical dialogue.

The Oriental Orthodox churches are those Christian bodies that broke away with Rome in the wake of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, over disagreements on the christological doctrines affirmed by that council. The Oriental Orthodox churches include the Armenian Apostolic, Syrian, and Coptic Orthodox—but not the larger Russian, Greek, and other Orthodox churches of the Byzantine tradition.

Since the commission was established in 2003, the Holy Father observed, the group has reached a basis for agreement on the nature of the Church. The Pope observed: “We can only be grateful that after almost 1,500 years of separation we still find agreement about the sacramental nature of the Church, about apostolic succession in priestly service and about the impelling need to bear witness to the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the world.” The commission has now moved on to discussions on the communion among Christian churches prior to the Council of Chalcedon, and the role of monasticism in early Christianity.

In addressing the Orthodox members of the panel, Pope Benedict noted that many “come from regions where Christian individuals and communities face trials and difficulties that are a cause of deep concern for us all. “ He emphasized that all Christians have a moral obligation to

work for justice and to support each other in such times of need.

### **World churches' leader to meet Pope in Rome**

Geneva (ENInews). The general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, says he hopes his upcoming audience in Rome with Pope Benedict XVI will advance Christian unity. "It is important that we speak honestly in this meeting about the challenges we have," Tveit said of the 4 December meeting at the Vatican. It will be Tveit's first meeting with Pope Benedict since the Norwegian Lutheran theologian took up his WCC post in January. "There are expectations for the ecumenical movement that have not been fulfilled, and there are tensions arising in and between churches," Tveit said in a 2 December statement issued from the WCC's Geneva headquarters. Some observers have suggested that the Vatican sees relations with Eastern Orthodox churches as having a higher priority than contacts with Protestants.

### **Korean churches say global prayers needed after military clash**

Tokyo (ENInews). The head of the Seoul-based National Council of Churches in Korea has urged global prayers during Advent for peace on the peninsula following a North Korean military attack on a South Korean island. The council's newly-elected general secretary, the Rev. Kim Young-Ju, said he wanted the "prayer and solidarity of the worldwide churches" to help nurture peace. Advent marks the period of the church year before Christmas and commemorates the coming of Jesus into the world. Kim made his appeal in a 1 December statement on the council's Web site, which also urged North and South Korea to use only peaceful means to achieve reunification of the two countries that were divided after the Second World War.

### **Swiss church group urges 'don't buy Zimbabwean diamonds'**

Geneva, 2 December (ENInews)--The Swiss church-backed group Bread for All says numerous human rights violations are being committed in certain Zimbabwe's diamond mines by State security forces and the minerals should be labeled "blood diamonds". Bread for All (Switzerland) is calling on the government of Switzerland, as a member of the Kimberley Process, to demand the exclusion of certain Zimbabwean diamonds tainted by links to human rights' violation from international trade. Marlon Zakeyo, who heads the Zimbabwe Advocacy Office in Geneva, told ENInews, "Switzerland is an important jeweler centre, but it is also known as a country that is a centre for human rights. The Swiss government is also a key partner in the Kimberley Process, which deals with international diamond trading."

### **Muslims say respect is key to better relations**

Washington DC (ENInews/RNS). Half of Muslims surveyed worldwide believe the West does not respect them, according to a new Gallup report. "We also found that this concept of respect ... now includes perceptions of fairness in policies, not just culturally sensitive language," said Dalia Mogahed, executive director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, Religion News Service reports. The findings are part of a report on "Measuring the State of Muslim-West Relations", released on 1 December at Gallup's Washington headquarters.

### **[Another Iraqi Syrian Orthodox Christian murdered in Mosul](#)**

**Posted by: "SOCM News Bureau" [SOCM News Bureau](#)  
Thu Dec 2, 2010 2:18 pm (PST)**

Another Iraqi Syrian Orthodox Christian murdered in Mosul  
December 02, 2010

The targeted murder of another Christian in Mosul has drawn a new protest from Church leaders, who are demanding effective government action to ensure their security.

Gunman who broke into his home seized Fadi Walid Gabriel, a Syrian Orthodox layman; he was taken to a nearby empty shop where he was killed.

Eight Christians have now been murdered in Iraq-- all in execution-style killings-- since the October 31 massacre at

the parish of Our Lady of Salvation in Baghdad.

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6 December 2010

### **Pope gets gloves from ecumenical leader to warm relations**

Rome (ENInews). The head of the World Council of Churches in his first official meeting with Pope Benedict XVI has said he wants to strengthen cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church, especially in the Middle East. No official statement was released after the 4 December audience at the Vatican, but the WCC general secretary, the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, told journalists in Rome there had been a "a very open and friendly" conversation. He noted that at the meeting, he and Pope Benedict had stressed that there are many levels at which the WCC and Roman Catholic Church already cooperate.

### **Indian churches hail probe into pastor-led 'child trafficking'**

Chennai, India (ENInews). Church officials and activists have welcomed an investigation ordered by India's federal Supreme Court into trafficking in children by pastors and exploitative Christians eyeing ways to pull in foreign donations. "Such unscrupulous social work by some Christians is bringing discredit to the entire Christian community. Such transplantation will not help the growth of the children," Bishop G. Devakadasham, the Church of South India's deputy moderator, told ENInews. Devakadasham heads the CSI diocese of Kanyakumari in the southern Tamil Nadu state where the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights has conducted raids on dubious orphanages at the direction of the Supreme Court.

### **US clergy's professional reputation hovers in the middle**

Washington DC (ENInews/RNS). What do nurses, soldiers, pharmacists, elementary school teachers, doctors, and police officers have in common? U.S. Americans say they are all more ethical and honest than members of the clergy, according to a Gallup survey released on 3 December, Religion News Service reports. Slightly more than half of Americans (53 percent) rate the moral values of priests, ministers and other clerics as "very high" or "high."

7 December 2010

### **Filipino sugar laborers' lives painful, church group finds**

Tarlac, Philippines (ENInews). Life is not sweet for workers at a sugar estate owned by the family of Philippines' President Benigno Aquino III, a visiting church group has found. "I have been watching closely developments in the Philippines since the late dictator (Ferdinand) Marcos was ousted in 1986 but it looks like much remains to be desired in this so-called democratic country," Tony Waworuntu, a former staff member of the Christian Conference of Asia, told ENInews.

### **King James Bible still exerts influence, literary scholar argues**

New York (ENInews). The King James Bible may not be the dominant cultural reference point it once was in the United States, but it still influences contemporary letters in the country, argues a new book. While "we no longer have a culture pervaded by Scripture, where Bible reading is a daily practice in parlor and pulpit," the King James Bible's influence remains embedded in American culture, writes scholar Robert Alter in "Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible". King James I of England authorized the King James Version of the Christian Bible. Completed in 1611, it became the standard Bible in the English-speaking world up through the 20th century. Its cultural influence in Britain, and subsequently the American colonies and later the United States, has long been noted.

### **Survey: Typical US atheist is white son of religious parents**

Washington DC (ENInews/RNS). The typical member of a fast-growing U.S. atheist association is a highly educated, married white male who grew up with religious parents. The Freedom from Religion Foundation, which grew from 5500 in 2004 to about 16 000 members this year, announced results of a survey of its members on 1 December, Religion News Service reports. Asked about their primary reason for being "de-converted from religion to free-thought," about a third of respondents said, "Religion doesn't make sense." Seventeen percent said religious hypocrisy or bigotry was the cause; 9 percent said reading skeptical authors; 5 percent cited reading the Bible.

### **UNIVERSAL DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY A HUMAN RIGHTS IMPERATIVE, BAN SAYS**

New York, Dec 10 2010

Noting that over 70 countries still consider homosexuality a crime, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today appealed for its

complete and universal decriminalization, stressing that human rights must always trump cultural attitudes and societal strictures.

In an event on sexual orientation at UN Headquarters in New York, held in conjunction with Human Rights Day, Mr. Ban <"http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=4992">deplored discrimination against homosexuals and the violence of which they are often victims, for which the perpetrators escape punishment.

"Together, we seek the repeal of laws that criminalize homosexuality, that permit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, that encourage violence," he said. "When individuals are attacked, abused or imprisoned because of their sexual orientation, we must speak out. We cannot stand by. We cannot be silent.

"This is all the more true in cases of violence. These are not merely assaults on individuals. They are attacks on all of us. They devastate families. They pit one group against another, dividing larger society. And when the perpetrators of violence escape without penalty, they make a mockery of the universal values we hold dear."

Mr. Ban recognized that social attitudes run deep and social change often comes only with time, but he highlighted the collective responsibility to stand against discrimination, to defend fellow human beings and fundamental principles.

"Let there be no confusion: where there is tension between cultural attitudes and universal human rights, universal human rights must carry the day," he said. "Personal disapproval, even society's disapproval, is no excuse to arrest, detain, imprison, harass or torture anyone – ever."

Mr. Ban noted that during his recent trips to Africa, he urged leaders to do away with laws criminalizing homosexuality. He was particularly pleased that in Malawi he was able to secure the release of a young gay couple sentenced to 14 years in prison, with President Bingu wa Mutharika freeing them on the very day he asked him to.

Last night Mr. Ban <"http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=4988">spoke to a Human Rights Day event at the Ford Foundation in New York called 'Speak Up,' at which one of his fellow speakers was a young activist from Uganda, Frank Mugisha, who has been working with a variety of civil society groups to stop legislation that institutionalizes discrimination against gay and lesbian people.

"With extraordinary eloquence, he appealed to us, the United Nations, for help," Mr. Ban said today. "He asked us to rally support for the decriminalization of homosexuality everywhere in the world. And that is what we will do. We have been called upon, and we will answer."

Pledging to "put myself on the line" in this struggle, he said he would continue to speak out, at every opportunity, wherever he goes. "I will do so because this is the right thing to do, because this cause is just," he declared. "That is why this day, this very special day, means so much to me. Human Rights Day commemorates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"It is not called the partial declaration of human rights. It is not the sometimes declaration of human rights. It is the universal Declaration, guaranteeing all human beings their basic human rights – without exception. Violence will end only when we confront prejudice. Stigma and discrimination will end only when we agree to speak out. That requires all of us to do our part, to speak out – at home, at work, in our schools and communities – to stand in solidarity."

At an event in Geneva today, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay echoed Mr. Ban's appeal, underscoring the need to protect the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people through legislative reform and education initiatives.

14 December 2010

### **Trade union founded for Bulgarian Orthodox clergy, lay employees**

Sofia (ENInews). The founding of a trade union for Bulgarian Orthodox Church priests and church employees has angered at least one member of the senior hierarchy of the church, who denounced it as being against the church's canon law. According to Bulgarian-language media reports on 13 December, the union will be part of Podkrepa, one of the southeastern European country's two national trade union federations. In the northwestern town of Vratsa, priests said that they had not been paid on time for a long time and their statutory health and retirement insurance had not been paid, the Standart daily newspaper reported. The Vratsa Metropolitan Kipriyan said, however, it is "absurd" for priests to have a trade union and that this is against the church's own law.

### **Japanese Baptist leader says statistics hide impact of homelessness**

Tokyo (ENInews). Being homeless cuts people off from the rest of humanity, says a Japanese pastor who heads an award-winning non-profit organization for those without a roof over their heads. "We need to support those homeless people in both physical and relational poverty by providing them with their material needs and helping to restore their human ties," said the Rev. Tomoshi Okuda, who chairs the board of directors of the Kitakyushu Organization to Support the Homeless in Fukuoka, southwestern Japan. He said government statistics do not reveal the true cost of homelessness.

### **Presbyterian theologian takes helm at Indian church council**

Bangalore, India (ENInews). A Presbyterian theologian, the Rev. Roger Gaikwad, has been installed as the new general secretary of the National Council of Churches in India, which groups 30 Orthodox and Protestant churches. "My aim is to strengthen ecumenical relations at the grass roots. This will bring out greater unity among the churches," Gaikwad told ENInews on 14 December following his installation five days earlier at the NCC's Nagpur headquarters in central India. Fifty-seven-year old Gaikwad had been principal of the Aizwal Theological College of the Presbyterian Church of India and was chosen unanimously for the post in August.

### **SECURITY COUNCIL STEPS UP FIGHT AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT**

New York, Dec 16 2010

The United Nations stepped up its battle against sexual violence in conflicts around the world today with the Security Council calling for perpetrators to be publicly listed and punished with sanctions.

"Even as we take this step here, catastrophe is unfolding for communities caught in the chaos of conflicts," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon <"http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=5003">told the 15-member body as the meeting today where it unanimously adopted the resolution. 60 countries, including somewhere the worst cases of recent abuse have been perpetrated, had sponsored it.

The Council resolution – voicing deep concern at the slow progress in combating the scourge and the limited number of perpetrators brought to justice – stresses the need to end impunity and vowed to take "appropriate steps to address widespread or systematic sexual violence in situation of armed conflict" in accordance with procedures of relevant sanctions committees.

It also asks Mr. Ban to include detailed lists of those credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for rape and other forms of sexual violence in his

Regular reports to the Council on the issue

"Armed elements are targeting civilians, raping women and men, and terrorizing entire populations," Mr. Ban said. "Pre-meditated campaigns are being waged with the most sinister goals: to silence women leaders, to empty areas that are filled with rich minerals but poor people, to recruit others and perpetuate the cycle of abuse."

### **UN, RELIGIOUS LEADERS PROMOTE EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING IN INDONESIA**

New York, Dec 21 2010

Faced with a marked decrease in exclusive breastfeeding in Indonesia, the United Nations has teamed up with Government and religious leaders to promote a practice that is proven to protect newborns and infants from disease, illness and impaired development.

As Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous country, commemorates national Mothers' Day this week, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist and Hindu leaders pledged at a conference led by the Ministries of Health and Religious Affairs to develop an action plan with their clerics to spread key information about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months.

"Religious leaders have the power to persuade their followers about the importance of breastfeeding, a simple life-saving practice that is referred to in all the Holy Scriptures including the Quran, the Bible, the Vedas and the Tripitaka," UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Representative Angela Kearney <"http://www.unicef.org/media/media\_57284.html">said.

"The health of the nation is dependent upon a shared vision and shared action that can only come through practical partnerships... Every religion accepts a responsibility to guide its followers, to show wisdom and foresight in enabling people to make the right choices in life. Today, we are focusing on a critical health issue, where our collective voices can offer life-saving guidance to families."

### **THE DPI NGO COMMUNITY**

Through the cooperation and collaboration of the NGO Community, United Nations Department of Public Information Cluster, Government of Australia, Australian Convener, Planning Committees in Melbourne and New York, and donors who enabled delegates and speakers from developing nations to attend, we planned and implemented a very successful conference.

The Conference Vision Statement provided a philosophical approach to foster global health which emphasized the multidisciplinary, multifaceted issues in fostering global health; not just managing disease. It helped us set goals and priorities in planning and implementing the conference that included: disease prevention, identification of skills and resources needed to design and implement programs, and measures to evaluate their quality and sustainability. Topics and discussions also included human rights, human dignity and security, climate change, nuclear disarmament and their roles in fostering global health and achieving the MDGs.

We had the largest number of delegates at any DPI/NGO Conference. Workshops discussed issues and possible solutions to underlying social determinants of health such as education, poor nutrition, substandard housing, contaminated water and lack of sanitation, and gender inequalities. Exhibits amplified the work being done in these areas by the NGO community and roundtables brought together world experts who shared best practices in fostering health and achieving the MDGs.

A highlight of the conference was the sensitive and beautiful indigenous welcome. Another memorable moment was the introduction of a statement on "Strengthening humanitarian response to severe floods in Pakistan," written by several NGOs and unanimously approved by the delegates. Under-Secretary-General delivered it to the Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Kiyo Akasaka.

The most significant document to emerge from the three-day meeting was the Conference Declaration. The Declaration is based on the values of social justice, equity and quality health care for all people and calls on all governments, agencies, corporations and individuals to deliver on their human rights obligations and provide the financial and political will necessary to achieve the MDGs; as a moral imperative. The Declaration, forwarded by the Australian Government to the President of the General Assembly, was circulated on 22 October. (The official UN symbol is A/65/525.)

In closing, I want to "thank" all who made this conference possible and successful. I extend a special note of appreciation to my colleagues of the NGO Community for providing me with this extraordinary opportunity to serve, you, as Chair of the Conference. Together we helped educate the world community that health is more than managing disease and remind them we have the ability, and skill, to eliminate the social determinants that are the root causes of illness and disease.

**Dr. Mary E. Norton**  
**Chairperson of the 63rd United Nations Annual DPI/NGO Conference**

## IN MELBOURNE, WE ARE ALL CONNECTED

Melbourne is a vibrant, happily multicultural city with a generous spirit for engagement with the rest of the world - an ideal place to consider global health and the MDGs. More than 1,700 delegates, drawn from around 70 of countries attended the conference held at the Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Over 45 exhibits from NGOs working on global health and poverty eradication filled the foyer of the Convention Centre. During breaks the foyer became an animated hub of activity with delegates able to browse the colorful exhibits, or simply engage likeminded individuals in conversation while enjoying the lunch and refreshments provided.

The participation of youth in all aspects of the conference added another layer to the overall experience. Each morning around 100 youth delegates gathered for breakfast at the Centre. The breakfasts quickly became a time for youth to deepen their engagement with the conference, swap ideas and to network.



The Conference brought the multicultural fabric of Melbourne to life. Highlights included a symphony orchestra featuring musicians from over 20 different cultural backgrounds, a sand animation artist, a traditional indigenous welcome and a closing ceremony with hundreds of children performing on stage.

All the elements of the Conference were accessible to the general public, thanks to an impressive social networking and outreach program. Live feeds of conference proceedings, real time commentary on twitter and in-depth analyses were available through the website [www.makinghealthglobal.com.au](http://www.makinghealthglobal.com.au). The conference was well covered by local and international media

The conference Declaration was adopted with overwhelming support from the delegates. It serves as a strong call to individuals, non-government organizations and governments to unite in their efforts to improve global health and alleviate poverty. Subsequently the Australian Ambassador to the UN transmitted the Declaration to the President of the General Assembly who circulated it to the representatives of all member states.

It is unacceptable that so many children and adults in low-income countries continue to suffer preventable illness, disability and premature deaths each year. The world knows how to prevent and treat most of the causes and has shown that well-focused efforts can significantly



reduce levels of suffering. The MDGs can be, indeed must be, achieved by 2015!

**Philip Batterham**  
**Convener, NGO Focal Group**  
**Melbourne, Australia**

## THE MELBOURNE CONFERENCE DPI/NGO RELATIONS



Dear NGO Community,

I am pleased to report that the 63rd Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference, titled "Advance Global Health: Achieve the MDGs", was the largest UN event ever organized in Australia. Held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, 30 August to 1 September 2010, the Conference attracted 1,731 participants, from 260 NGOs and 70 countries, as well as representatives from academia, the media, the UN system and Member States. DPI/NGO Relations, the Australian Government and the NGO/DPI Executive Committee organized it.

The three-day event was a true example of successful partnership between the United Nations and civil society to raise awareness about global health and the MDGs, and a tribute to the important role of civil society in the United Nations system. It featured experts in global health addressing the Opening and Closing ceremonies, four Roundtables on how NGOs can participate in achieving the MDGs, more than 50 NGO-organized workshops, and 50 NGO exhibits, including a Youth MDG

Village. The participants were also treated to several displays of Aboriginal art and culture.

In his remarks at the Opening Ceremony, Kiyoo Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, said: "We have come to Australia in recognition of this country's strong support and rich and varied contributions to the United Nations since its very founding in 1945. And we have come to the beautiful city of Melbourne in recognition of its history, culture and care for its citizens, as well as for its embrace of those from around the world". Describing global health as "the most important and most pressing issue in the world", Mr. Akasaka noted that "The fate of nations is inextricably linked to the health of their people."

The enthusiastic participation of numerous NGO youth representatives was a welcome development at the Conference. This was acknowledged in speakers' remarks, as well as by Mr. Akasaka, who said: "I have also been thrilled by the energy and enthusiasm of all the participants and speakers, in particular the young people, who have joined us and actively participated in our conference. We are all heartened by your strong desire to become involved in improving the lives of millions of children, mothers and people in need."

The Conference was accompanied by several public events linked to the themes of global health and poverty. They were organized across Melbourne by civil society to raise awareness of health issues. Also, NGO delegates were treated to several demonstrations of Aboriginal and multicultural song and dance. The Conference stage was adorned with Indigenous interpretations of the eight MDGs that were carved into rock-like formations.

The Conference Declaration recognizes the relationship between the MDGs and human rights. It notes that billions of people around the world still lack access to adequate and appropriate food, improved sanitation and safe drinking water. It underscores that almost 9 million children die before the age of five; while several hundred thousands of women continue to die each year of pregnancy-related causes. These are just a few examples in the Declaration, which also notes that many more people die of insufficient access to health care, health care professionals, and medicines or of non-communicable diseases; or face discrimination and poverty as a result of their disabilities.

My deepest appreciation and thanks go to the Federal Government of Australia, the Victorian State Government, and the Melbourne City Council for the enthusiasm with which they embraced this Conference and the unwavering and generous support they extended to it. Without their contributions, and dedicated commitment, the convening of this event in Australia would have been impossible.

I would be remiss if I did not express a word of thanks to the members of the Conference Planning Committee in New York and Australia - as well as to NGOs worldwide - for their selfless dedication and efforts to make this Conference a success.

With warm regards to all,

**Maria Luisa Chavez**  
**Chief, NGO Relations**  
**Department of Public Information**

## UN AUTHORIZES NEW BODY TO STEM LOSS OF ECOSYSTEMS VITAL TO LIFE

New York, Dec 21 2010

A new international body aimed at reversing the unprecedented loss of species and ecosystems vital to life on Earth due to human activity has passed its final hurdle with <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2010/ga11040.doc.htm> approval by the United Nations General Assembly.

In a resolution adopted by consensus, the Assembly yesterday called on the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to take the necessary steps to set up the Intergovernmental Science Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the final approval needed for the body for which the groundwork had been laid at UNEP-sponsored meetings earlier this year.

“IPBES represents a major breakthrough in terms of organizing a global response to the loss of living organisms and forests, freshwaters, coral reefs and other ecosystems that underpin all life, including economic life, on Earth,” UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner said today.

It caps 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity, launched in January to raise awareness and generate public pressure for action by global leaders on the vital link between biodiversity, ecosystems and survival, based on the premise that the world's diverse ecosystems purify the air and the water that are the basis of life, stabilize and moderate the Earth's climate, renew soil fertility, cycle nutrients and pollinate plants.

IPBES, which in many ways mirrors the UN-backed Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that has helped to catalyze government action on global warming, will foster the search for government action needed to reverse the accelerating degradation of the natural world and its species, which some experts put at 1,000 times the natural progression.

### **COPTIC PRAYER SERVICE HELD AT ST. VARTAN CATHEDRAL NEW YORK December 14, 2010**



In light of a recent spate of violence and persecution against Christians in Egypt, members of the Coptic Orthodox Church of America gathered at New York's St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral for a special prayer service.

Some 1,000 people took part in the service, which was organized by the Coptic Orthodox Bishops in the United States.

The morning of worship and remarks included an address by Bishop David, the Coptic General Bishop of North America, and other Coptic bishops, as well as Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

Other speakers and participants included Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikatt, the Vatican's permanent observer to the United Nations; Bishop Serapion, of the Coptic Diocese of Los Angeles; Bishop Souriel, the Coptic Bishop of Sidney, Australia; Bishop Youssef, the Coptic Diocese of Southern United States; Bishop Marcarius, the Coptic General Bishop of North America; and Bishop Michael, the Coptic General Bishop of Virginia. Others from the Eastern Diocese included Archbishop Yeghishe Gizirian and the Rev. Fr. Madiros Chevian, dean of St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral, the Rev. Fr. Tateos Abdalian, and the Rev. Fr. Bedros Kadehjian, a representative of the Syrian Catholic Church also attended.

## **Egypt and the Destruction of Churches: Strategic Implications**



By George Friedman | January 4, 2011

Over the past few days, Christian churches have been attacked in at least two countries — Nigeria and Egypt — while small packages containing improvised explosive devices were placed on the doorsteps of Christian families in Iraq. Attacks against Christians are not uncommon in the Islamic world, driven by local issues and groups, and it is unclear whether these latest attacks were simply coincidental and do not raise the threat to a new level or whether they indicate the existence of a new, coordinated, international initiative. There is a strong case to be made for the idea that there is nothing new in all of this.

Yet I am struck by the close timing of events in three distant and dispersed countries. Certainly, Egyptian intelligence services are looking for any regional connections (e.g., whether Iraqi operatives recruited the Egyptian bomber). While there have been previous bombings in Egypt, they have focused on tourists, not churches. What is important is this: If the recent attacks are not coincidental, then a coordinated campaign is being conducted against Christian churches that spans at least these countries. And it is a network that has evaded detection by intelligence services.

### **UN LAUNCHES FIRST WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK**

New York, Feb 1 2011

The United Nations launched the first World Interfaith Harmony Week today with a broad range of activities around the world, including interfaith breakfasts, film screenings and talks featuring the active participation of civil society, UN entities and other intergovernmental organizations.

The UN General Assembly in November resolved that the first week of February be devoted to spreading “the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world’s churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship... based on love of God and love of one’s neighbor or on love of the good and love of one’s neighbor, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions.”

“The first World Interfaith Harmony Week is an opportunity to focus global attention on the efforts of religious leaders, interfaith movements and individuals around the world to promote mutual respect and understanding between followers of different faiths and beliefs,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon <<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2011/sgsm13382.doc.htm>> said in a message. “These partners play an indispensable role in supporting United Nations efforts for peace.

“Respect for diversity and peaceful dialogue are essential if the human family is to cooperate globally to face shared threats and seize common opportunities,” said Mr. Ban.

“That is why efforts by States, civil society and other actors to build trust among communities and individuals lie at the heart of so many United Nations initiatives, from the Alliance of Civilizations to our wide-ranging work to protect human rights, promote social cohesion and build a culture of peace.”

The Alliance of Civilizations is an initiative launched in 2005 by Spain and Turkey under UN auspices to promote better cross-cultural relations worldwide.

>From Jerusalem to Malappuram in India, from Amman in Jordan to Pietermaritzburg in South Africa, from Sedona in the United States to Newcastle in Australia, and a myriad of other places special events are being held to shine the spotlight on the need for interfaith understanding.

Feb 1 2011

### **The Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations**

The Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations voted to officially endorse World Interfaith Harmony Week, as proclaimed by the UN General Assembly for 1-7 February annually.

This year, the RNGOs will host an interfaith breakfast to celebrate the Week on Thursday, February 3rd from 8:30-9:45, prior to the DPI NGO briefing. The location will be announced shortly, since it depends on the briefing location, which has not yet been determined. If you would like to serve on the task force for this event, please contact Monica Willard <[MBWillard@aol.com](mailto:MBWillard@aol.com)>.

## **INTERFAITH BREAKFAST**

## **The Committee of Religious NGOs Helps Launch the First Annual WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK 3 February 2011**

**The Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations**, working with the **UN Department of Public Information**, hosted an Interfaith Breakfast on 3 February 2011 to help launch **World Interfaith Harmony Week**. World Interfaith Harmony Week was proclaimed by UN General Assembly Resolution A/65/PV.34 to fall on the first week of February of every year. It was proposed in 2010 by **HM King Abdullah II and HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad** of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and was warmly supported by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

**Monica Willard**, President of the Committee of Religious NGOs, saw the Week as an excellent project for RNGOs to demonstrate their commitment to interfaith solidarity and support of the goals of the United Nations. The RNGOs enlisted the partnership of the NGO Section of the UN Department of Public Information, organizing the breakfast for 8:30-9:45 a.m., preceding the weekly DPI NGO briefing. The NGO Section sent the invitation to the entire list of affiliated NGOs, greatly helping to publicize World Interfaith Harmony Week. The Salvation Army, itself an NGO, kindly offered the use of its space on East 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, where many of the DPI NGO briefings have been held during the current period of UN reconstruction.

Despite the early hour and the ice storm the day before, nearly 100 people attended the event. They were greeted by a lovely continental breakfast buffet set up by volunteers from the **New Seminary for Interfaith Studies**. Along with their refreshments, they enjoyed quotes on harmony from various traditions that were posted on the walls, such as: "All human beings regardless of religion, race, national origin, color, creed, or gender are living icons of God, innately worthy of such respect and dignity."

(Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew)

Monica opened the brief formal part of the gathering by inviting **Commissioner Christine MacMillian**, Director of the Salvation Army Social Justice Commission, to welcome everyone, which she did with great warmth. Rev. **Deborah Moldow** of the Committee of Religious NGOs expressed gratitude to the Kingdom of Jordan for initiating World Interfaith Harmony Week. She set the tone with an opening Minute of Silence and invited everyone to say together, "May Peace Prevail on Earth." Monica then introduced the very distinguished speakers.

**UN Under Secretary-General Kiyotaka Akasaka** shared some of the Secretary-General's message for World Interfaith Harmony Week and mentioned the importance of human rights in interfaith harmony and how interfaith harmony helps build a culture of peace.

**HRH Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein**, Permanent Representative of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the UN, began his remarks by joking about the length of his name. He went on to say that the real purpose of the GA Resolution is to go beyond social gatherings and reach out to congregations and encourage them to site passages from their own traditions to acknowledge the "others," as a way of breaking down stereotypes. He shared that the Resolution emphasizes the terms "love of God and love of neighbour or love of the good and love of neighbour." Since February already has Valentine's Day, it was a good month for a Week that encourages love!

**Marc Scheuer**, Director of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, shared how the Alliance supports interfaith cooperation and that President Jorge Sampaio, UN High Representative for the Alliance, supports World Interfaith Harmony Week.

**Stephen Hanmer**, Civil Society Partnerships, UNICEF shared the importance of faith-based organizations in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. He also shared that spiritual well-being is mentioned four times in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Dr. Azza Karam**, Senior Technical Advisor, UNFPA ended the program of speakers. She spoke about the importance of UNFPA's work with faith-based organizations and made special mention of the rights of the disabled. She was also grateful to be with us as a past President of the Committee of Religious NGOs and as a person from Egypt during this moment of turbulence in her country.

Monica shared a story she saw through the United Religions Initiative list serve about how Christians were protecting Muslims at prayer during the demonstrations in Egypt. She encouraged communities of faith to recognize what they are already doing to build interfaith harmony.

Everyone in the extremely diverse crowd enjoyed the spirit of the event and agreed that more must be done next year to promote and implement World Interfaith Harmony Week.

As one of the signs on the wall said:

"May Peace Prevail Among Religions. May Peace Prevail on Earth."

Thursday, 20 January 2011

**"After Cancun: Where Do We Stand on Climate Change?"**

*(A Follow-Up to Cancun Conference  
29 November – 10 December 2010)"*

193 countries gathered at The UN Climate Change Conference in Cancún, Mexico where they produced a balanced package of decisions that set all governments more firmly on the path towards a low-emissions future and support enhanced action on climate change in the developing world. The United Nations Climate Change Conferences in Cancun and in Copenhagen were further steps on the way to a balanced life of human and nature. The Conference in Cancun took place from 29 November to 10 December of 2010 created a new "Cancun Adaptation Framework". This framework established an improved planning and implementation of adaptation projects in developing countries through increased financial and technical support, including a clear process for continuing work on loss and damage.

As climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time, attendees of the Cancun Conference concluded Conventions based on concerns made at the Cancun Conference. Their vision addresses mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology development and transfer, and capacity-building in a balanced, integrated and comprehensive manner to enhance and achieve the full, effective and sustained implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, now, up to and beyond 2012. "The outcomes in Cancun have given us important tools. Now we must use them, and strengthen our efforts in line with the scientific imperative for action," stated Mr. Ban.

21 January 2011

### **Sentencing is significant for Egypt's Christians**

Jerusalem (ENInews) The sentencing to death of a Muslim man in connection with an attack in 2010 that killed six Coptic Christians and a Muslim police officer is seen as being particularly significant for Egypt's Christians and a marked difference from previous responses to attacks on Copts.

### **Indigenous traditions infuse theological gathering**

Toronto, Canada (ENInews) Indigenous Christian theologians from around the world will gather in La Paz, Bolivia in the coming week to share their experiences and reflections. Sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC), in partnership with local ecumenical organizations, the 23-27 January gathering is a follow-up to previous indigenous consultations in the Philippines in 2008 and Switzerland in 2009.

### **Minority Christians cling to tenuous position in Pakistan**

Lahore, Pakistan (ENInews)--As Pakistan's main churches held special prayers in memory of Salman Taseer, the Punjab governor assassinated for his opposition to a law that punishes insult to Islam by death, Christians in Pakistan spoke of their feelings that they are in a precarious position in their own country.

### **INDIA'S HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NEED BETTER PROTECTION, SAYS UN EXPERT**

New York, Jan 21 2011

An independent United Nations human rights expert today called on Indian authorities to do much more to ensure a safe and conducive environment for human rights defenders working in the country.

The visit by Ms. Sekaggya, the UN Special Reporter on the situation of human rights defenders, began on 10 January and included discussions with State officials, a broad segment of civil society and the press, representatives of UN agencies and the diplomatic corps, as well as visits to five states.

She underscored the testimonies she received about human rights defenders and their families, who have been killed, tortured, ill-treated, disappeared, threatened, arbitrarily arrested and detained, falsely charged and under surveillance because of their legitimate work in upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Ms. Sekaggya said the Government should enact a law on the protection of human rights defenders "in full and meaningful consultation with civil society," and review the functioning of the National Human Rights Commission with a view to strengthening it.

### **RECORD-SETTING 2010 HIGHLIGHTS GLOBAL WARMING TREND, SAYS UN WEATHER AGENCY**

New York, Jan 20 2011

The year 2010 ranked as the warmest on record – together with 2005 and 1998 – [http://www.wmo.int/pages/mediacentre/press\\_releases/pr\\_906\\_en.html](http://www.wmo.int/pages/mediacentre/press_releases/pr_906_en.html) according to the United Nations World Meteorological Organization (WMO), which added that last year also witnessed a large number of extreme weather events, including the heat wave in Russia and the devastating floods in Pakistan.

In 2010, the global average temperature was 0.53 degrees Celsius (0.95 degrees Fahrenheit) above the mean for the period from 1961 to 1990, the reference period for the Geneva-based WMO.

In addition, Arctic sea-ice cover in December 2010 was the lowest on record, with an average monthly extent of 12 million square kilometers, 1.35 million square kilometers below the 1979-2000 average for December.

The agency also highlighted a number of major weather events in late 2010 and early 2011, including the January floods that have affected more than 800,000 people in Sri Lanka, the flash floods that have resulted in over 700 deaths near the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro, and the severe flooding in eastern Australia which is expected to be the most costly natural disaster in that country's history.

### **UN AGENCY CALLS ON UGANDA TO ENSURE SECURITY OF GAYS AFTER ACTIVIST'S MURDER**

New York, Jan 27 2011

The United Nations today condemned the murder of a prominent gay activist and human rights defender in Uganda and called on the Government to ensure the security of gays in a country where homosexuality is a crime under existing laws.

According to media reports, David Kato, a primary school teacher and a leading voice against Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill, was beaten to death with a hammer yesterday.

The bill would prohibit homosexual relations and contains provisions for punishing people alleged to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered. It could also lead to a prison sentence of up to three years for anyone who fails to report within 24 hours the identities of any such people they know, including members of their own family, or who overtly supports their human rights.

"I urge the Government of Uganda to conduct a thorough investigation into his death, as well as to ensure adequate security for its lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens," Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Executive Director Michel Sidibé said in a [statement](http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2011/january/20110127uganda/), voicing deep sadness at Mr. Kato's death.

The UN, including UNAIDS and many development partners, have called on the Ugandan Parliament to drop the bill and to decriminalize same-sex behavior. Last month Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appealed for the complete and universal decriminalization of homosexuality, still a criminal offence in some 80 countries, stressing that human rights must always trump cultural attitudes and societal strictures.

A year ago UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay warned that the "draconian" bill would bring Uganda into a "direct collision" with established international human rights standards aimed at preventing discrimination.

Mr. Kato's death comes days after the High Court of Uganda ruled that the constitution protects the right to dignity and privacy for all Ugandans regardless of their sexual orientation. Specifically, it ruled that inciting violence against people based on their sexual orientation threatens their right to human dignity.

This ruling came from a case against a local publication that had published a photograph of Mr. Kato and others, urging citizens "to hang them because of their sexual orientation.

"UNAIDS denounces homophobia and actions that incite violence against individuals and communities... [And] believes that such laws are discriminatory and create obstacles for people accessing HIV services," today's statement said.

### **ALARMED AT RISE IN KILLINGS, UN RIGHTS CHIEF URGES IRAN TO HALT EXECUTIONS**

New York, Feb 2 2011

Voicing alarm at reports that at least 66 people have been executed in Iran in January alone, including several political activists, the United Nations human rights chief today once again called on the Government to halt the use of the death penalty.

"We have urged Iran, time and again, to halt executions," said High Commissioner Navi Pillay. "I am very dismayed that instead of heeding our calls, the Iranian authorities appear to have stepped up the use of the death penalty."

There are at least three known cases in which political activists were executed. Jafar Kazemi, Mohammad Ali Haj Aqaei and another man whose name was not disclosed were affiliated with banned political parties. Mr. Kazemi and Mr. Aqaei were

arrested in September 2009 during protests. All three individuals were convicted of mohareb or "enmity against God," and hanged last month.

"Dissent is not a crime," Ms. Pillay stressed, recalling that Iran is party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the right to free expression and to free association.

"It is absolutely unacceptable for individuals to be imprisoned for association with opposition groups, let alone be executed for their political views or affiliations."

"As Iran is no doubt aware, the international community as a whole is moving towards abolition of the death penalty in law or in practice. I call upon Iran to establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty," stated the High Commissioner.

"At a minimum, I call upon them to respect international standards guaranteeing due process and the protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty, to progressively restrict its use and reduce the number of offences for which it may be imposed."

## **UN WORLD HERITAGE AGENCY APPOINTS SPECIAL ENVOY FOR PREAH VIHEAR TEMPLE**

New York, Feb 11 2011

The head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) today named Ko'ichiro Matsuura as Special Envoy to address the issue of Preah Vihear, a Hindu temple inscribed on the World Heritage List that has been damaged owing to recent border clashes between Cambodia and Thailand.

8 February 2011

## **Russian Orthodox Clergy May Run for Office**

Moscow (ENInews)--The Russian Orthodox Church has ruled that hierarchs (church leaders) and clergy can run for office in exceptional cases when their presence is needed to fight "forces striving to use electoral power to fight the Orthodox Church."

10 February 2011

## **New Nepal PM urged to ensure Christians' rights**

Kathmandu, Nepal (ENInews)--With the former Hindu kingdom of Nepal ending a seven-month political deadlock by electing a new prime minister, Christian organisations are asking the new government to finalize a new constitution by May and guarantee the rights of Christians, including allowing an official burial site.

## **Sudanese churches seek action on Ugandan rebel group**

Juba, Southern Sudan (ENInews)--Church leaders in Southern Sudan have called for urgent strategies to end threats caused by northern Uganda's rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The leaders said attacks are escalating, threatening a fragile peace in a region that will celebrate independence on 9 July.

## **Church of Scotland to discuss sustainable farming**

Canterbury, England (ENInews)--Ways and means of improving food production in Britain and overseas against the background of high fuel prices and a growing demand for all land-based commodities will be discussed in Edinburgh on 10 February at a one-day conference organized by the Church of Scotland.

10 February 2011

## **Kandhamal Christians struggling after carnage**

Borimunda, India (ENInews)--Junos Nayak's family owns more than ten acres of land in Gadaguda, a village in the Kandhamal district in eastern India, but his turmeric and rice fields have remained barren for the last two years. [706 words, ENI-11-0060 Note: story was re-sent to incorporate a correction; use the second version.]

## **In the watery Netherlands, a modern Noah builds an ark**



Utrecht, Netherlands (ENInews)--If there was ever a country that understands floods, it is the Netherlands, where one-quarter of the land is below sea level, and it is there that a modern Noah is constructing an ark.

### **Indonesia urged to repeal blasphemy laws**

London (ENInews)--Indonesia has been urged to repeal its blasphemy laws and provide greater protection to religious minorities? Including Christians and the Muslim Ahmadiyya sect - in order to safeguard its reputation as one of the world's most progressive and tolerant Muslim-majority countries.

14 February 2011

### **Anti-Semitic incidents last year in Britain were second-highest**

London (ENInews)--Anti-Semitic incidents in Britain last year fell by 31 percent from the all-time high of 926 in 2009, but were the second-highest ever amid a generally increasing trend, according to a report by a Jewish community organization.

### **Ugandan faith leaders welcome pledges for peaceful election**

Nairobi (ENInews)--Religious leaders in Uganda have welcomed pledges from presidential candidates for a violence-free election, due to take place 18 February. The candidates made the commitment at national prayer rally held at the Kololo independence grounds in Kampala on 13 February.

### **Membership trends for U.S. churches reported to be "stable"**

New York (ENInews)--Trends in church membership in the United States remain stable, with churches that have grown in recent years showing continued growth and those with declining memberships experiencing continued drops, according to an annual publication that tracks church membership.

### **Russian Orthodox Christians debate Valentine's Day, but others celebrate**

Moscow (ENInews)--As shoppers snapped up heart-shaped goods, restaurants advertised romantic dinners and many Russians planned to celebrate Valentine's Day, Russian Orthodox Christians debated the morality of the holiday, which some denounce as a commercial imposition from the West.

### **Episcopalians, Moravians inaugurate full communion relationship**

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 14 February (ENInews)--Representatives of the Episcopal Church and the two provinces of the Moravian Church in North America on 10 February formally inaugurated a full-communion relationship with a service that blended elements of the liturgical and musical practices of both traditions.

18 February 2011

### **Pope, Russian president vow to strengthen relationship**

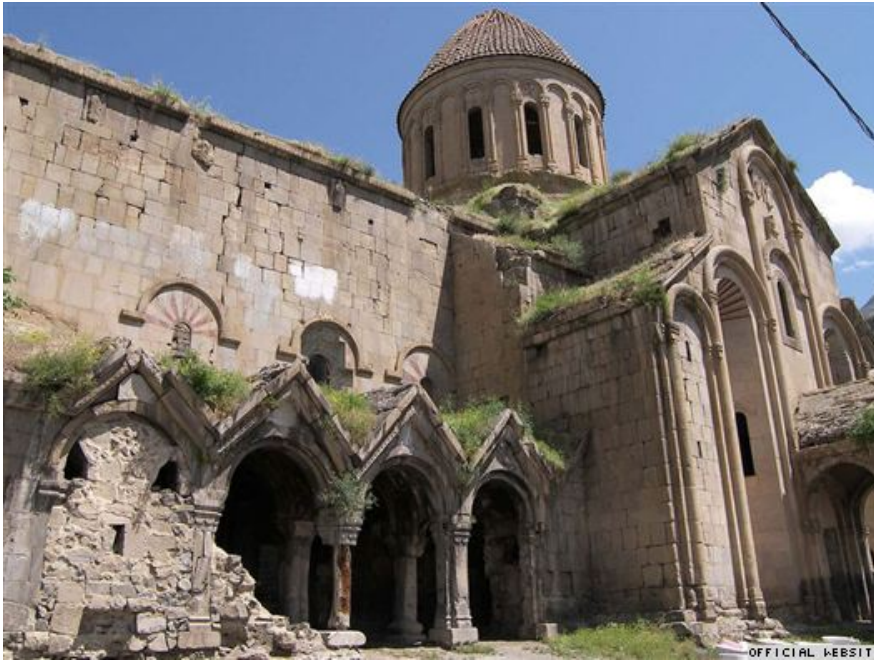
Rome (ENInews)--In their first meeting after the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Russia, Pope Benedict XVI and President Dmitry Medvedev expressed their desire to strengthen bilateral relations.

### **Are American clothing donations really needed?**

Washington, D.C., 17 February (ENInews)--On a recent family trip to Africa, spotting locals wearing T-shirts and baseball caps bearing American brands or slogans became something of a parlor game -- a way to pass long hours in the Land Rover driving from place to place.

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## **Georgia's Showdown Between Church And State**



Efforts to restore churches like the Oshki Cathedral in Turkey have exposed a growing rift between the Georgian government and the church.

February 20, 2011

By Ghia Nodia

The authority of the Orthodox Church is perceived as unshakeable in Georgia. Opinion polls consistently show trust in the church at over 90 percent, a rating politicians can only dream of. The personal popularity of Patriarch Ilia II, who has led the Georgian Orthodox Church since 1977, is particularly high.

As a result, it has become a taboo for politicians to criticize the church. In fact, they regularly compete with each other to demonstrate their personal religiosity and close relations to the patriarch.

For its part, the church is increasingly trying to play an independent political role. Many church figures view the "liberal West" as an enemy, so they are naturally upset by the pro-Western orientation of President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Some clerics have openly encouraged congregations to oppose the authorities. The patriarch himself has been more cautious, but he occasionally makes comments that are viewed as unpleasant by the government.

The political opposition sees the church as a potential ally. This bothers the government, although officials have refrained from engaging church figures in public and continue to subsidize the Orthodox Church from the state budget.

### **Agreement With Turkey A Flashpoint**

But it appears this simmering discord is becoming more difficult to contain. A proposed agreement between Georgia and Turkey on the issue of preserving religious monuments in the two countries is becoming an important divisive issue.

There are several medieval Christian churches in Turkey that are considered important examples of Georgian culture. If they are not renovated in time, they may be lost forever.

In exchange, the Turkish government is seeking the right to restore three mosques and to build a fourth to replace a mosque in Batumi that was destroyed during the Soviet period.

A similar agreement was drawn up three years ago, but a last-minute veto from the patriarch scuttled the signing. At that time, the government, frightened by a wave of opposition-led mass demonstrations, didn't dare to go against the church's wishes. In fact, the scrapped agreement was not even discussed in public.

21 February 2011

### **WCC pressed to develop new policy statement on gender justice**

Geneva (ENInews)—Members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee, at their meeting here, took a fresh look at the ecumenical movement's progress on gender justice issues and many members didn't like what they saw.

## Churches in India challenged to support indigenous people

New Delhi (ENInews)--Churches in India have been urged to stand up for indigenous peoples who have been affected by such development projects as dams and mines.

## In Southern Sudan, ecumenical movement turns to nation-building

Geneva (ENInews)--Having successfully brokered a historic and peaceful referendum in southern Sudan -- on 9 July the Republic of South Sudan will be born -- ecumenical organizations in Africa and around the world are focusing on the equally challenging task of helping to build the new nation.

February 22, 2011

## Hopes are Mounting for Meeting between the Pope and the Patriarch

Patriarch Cyril confirmed a great harmony with Benedict XVI in the report he presented Feb. 2, 2010, to his bishops on the occasion of the first anniversary of his enthronement. In regard to the various questions that are at the heart of Catholics and Orthodox, "Benedict took positions very close to those of the Orthodox," said Cyril.

ROME, Italy (Zenit.org) - "Welcome, Mr. President, this meeting of ours is very important," Benedict XVI, told Russian President Dmitry Medvedev last Thursday when the president visited the Pope in the Vatican.

These words underscore something of the visit's significance, Medvedev's first after the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Russia. It was at their first meeting in December 2009 that the president and Pope agreed to upgrade existing ties to the level of full diplomatic relations.

"The broad-ranging collaboration," the note continues, "between the Holy See and the Russian Federation was recognized, both in the promotion of specifically human and Christian values, and in the cultural and social field. Subsequently, emphasis was given to the positive contribution antireligious dialogue can make to society."

### Changing tides

a first positive change occurred with the election of Benedict XVI to the Throne of Peter, under whose leadership there has been no more talk of a new Patriarchate. In an interview published at the end of April 2008 in the daily Russian newspaper "Kommersant," Alexy II praised the new German Pontiff for his "powerful intellect."

"The whole Christian world," he said, "including the Orthodox world, respects him. Without a doubt there are theological differences. But in what regards the view of modern society, of secularization and moral relativism, of the dangerous erosion of Christian doctrine and on many contemporary problems our perspectives are very close."

After the death of Alexy II in December 2008, the election of the metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, Cyril, as patriarch of Moscow, was a second turn. As the chairman of the Moscow patriarchate's foreign relations department, Cyril already had met Benedict XVI in the Vatican on three occasions. The last time was that same December during the patronal feast of the Russian Orthodox parish of St. Catherine of Alexandria in Rome.

Interviewed by L'Osservatore Romano after that meeting, Cyril described as "very positive" the state of relations between the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Catholic Church. "There were so many important topics on our agenda," he said. "I am thinking of the promotion of fundamental values for the life of the person, which today concerns the whole of humanity and not just Russia."

"We need one another," he continued. "We must not forget that Jesus Christ called for the unity of his disciples. We are one family. In fact, we share the same values."

### Allies

These are very significant words. Just as the Kremlin recognizes in the Orthodox Church a partner to re-launch post-Soviet Russia, faced with phenomena such as a fall in the birth rate and the scourge of alcoholism, this statement illustrates how in turn the Patriarchate sees the Catholic Church as an ally in the battle against the crisis of values.

Cyril confirmed a great harmony with Benedict XVI in the report he presented Feb. 2, 2010, to his bishops on the occasion of the first anniversary of his enthronement. In regard to the various questions that are at the heart of Catholics and Orthodox, "Benedict took positions very close to those of the Orthodox," said Cyril. "And this is demonstrated in his addresses, in his messages as well as in the opinions of other representatives of the Roman Catholic Church with whom we have contacts" (L'Osservatore Romano, Feb. 4, 2010).

23 February 2011

### **Number of Catholics worldwide edged up, Vatican says**

Vatican City (ENInews/RNS)--The number of Catholics in the world edged up by one percent in 2009, the Vatican said, bringing to 1.18 billion the number of adherents of the world's largest church.

### **Libyan Christian clergy vow to stay on amid violence**

Nairobi (ENInews)--Christian clergy in Libya said they have no intention of leaving the country, where several days of protests and retaliation by government armed forces have left hundreds of people dead.

### **WCC criticizes U.S. veto of UN resolution on Israeli settlements**

Geneva (ENInews)--With one U.S. delegate dissenting, the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee on 21 February criticized the U.S. veto on 18 February of a UN Security Council resolution condemning continued settlement construction by Israel in the Palestinian Territories.

### **Churches in India protest inquiry into church attacks**

Bangalore, India (ENInews)--More than 15,000 Christians took part in a rally here on 21 February to protest what they said was a biased inquiry report into attacks on churches in the troubled Karnataka state.

### **Rescuers search for quake survivors in Christchurch, New Zealand**

New York (ENInews)--Rescue teams in Christchurch, New Zealand were digging through rubble on 23 February, searching for survivors of the 6.3-magnitude earthquake that killed at least 75 people and destroyed and damaged many buildings in the city on 21 February, among them a number of historic churches.

### **Ambassador Al-Bayadi (Iraq), Antoinette DeLuca, Psy.D, at UN Reception on Women's Issues**

2 March 2011

### **Harvard minister Peter J. Gomes remembered as "an original"**

New York (ENInews)--The Rev. Peter J. Gomes, best known as an imposing but beloved figure on the campus of Harvard University, where for many years he served as the minister of the university's Memorial Church, is being remembered as one of the era's great preachers. Gomes, 68, died 28 February in Boston of complications from a stroke he suffered in December.

### **Pakistan's minister for religious minorities assassinated**

Islamabad, Pakistan (ENInews)--Pakistan's Minister for Religious Minorities and the only Christian cabinet member, Shahbaz Bhatti, was assassinated on 2 March outside his home in Islamabad. He was the second high-ranking Pakistan government official murdered this year after expressing opposition to the country's law that makes criticism of the Prophet Muhammad a capital crime.

### **British banks must address social responsibility, says report**

London (ENInews)--A report calling on British banks to address a broad range of social, ethical and environmental concerns following the financial crisis of the last three years was published on 1 March by the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR) a charity which works with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

## **Israel revokes Anglican bishop's residency permit**

Jerusalem (ENInews)--Israel has declined to renew a residency permit for the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, Suheil Dawani, according to Yusef Daher, executive secretary of the Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (ICC).

## **New Yorkers gather for prayer and hope in the aftermath of Japan's earthquake and Tsunami**

On Friday, March 18th, marking one week since Japan was devastated by the massive earthquake and tsunami, New Yorkers came together to pay respect to the victims of this tragedy and send solidarity to all those affected.

The "Gathering for Prayer and Hope," coordinated by Rev. T.K. Nakagaki, Vice President of the Interfaith Center of New York, began at 5:30 pm at The Church Center for the United Nations, 777 First Ave. at 44th St., New York City.

Buddhist, Shinto and Christian Priests from Japan chanted and prayed for the victims.

"This will be a chance for the Japanese community here in New York, and all New Yorkers, to come together for healing and comfort," said Reverend Nakagaki. "I hope the event can provide us with the spiritual encouragement and strength to overcome this time of suffering together."

The "Candlelight Vigil for the People of Japan" followed the prayer service at 7:00 pm, which took place nearby at the Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, (47th St. between 1st and 2nd Ave.).

"We wish to send love and hope, safety and well-being to the people of Japan," said Emiko Nagano, one of the event organizers. "This is a time that we need to be together."

**19 Mar 2011**

### **Please Play the next files:**

#### **Two files ( per the below web link) about monk ordination...**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94a5DILXteA&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94a5DILXteA&feature=player_embedded)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61zJwQQFFPI&feature=related>

### **UN Department of Public Information Continues to Mobilize Non-Governmental Organizations Worldwide, Associating 11 More with Its Work**

The Department of Public Information has associated 11 new non-governmental organizations (NGOs), bringing the total number of such organizations that work with the Department to 1,597. This was done after the 16 March first biannual meeting of its Non-Governmental Organizations Committee, which approves the applications for association.

The newly appointed Director of the Department of Public Information Outreach Division, Maher Nasser, expressed his pleasure at chairing his first Committee meeting and welcomed the new diverse group of non-governmental organizations. He expressed the hope that this group would ably demonstrate their commitment to supporting important criteria of association, namely their "commitment to promote the work of the UN".

The newly associated NGOs represent organizations based in Australia, Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, United Kingdom, and the United States. They work with a wide range of issues, including autism awareness, health, global sustainable development and youth.



The list of the newly associated non-governmental organizations is as follows: American Cancer Society (ACS) (United States); Autism Awareness Ltd (Australia); Congregations of Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Eastern Province, Inc./Claretian Missionaries (United States); International Society of Nurses in Cancer Care (ISNCC) (United Kingdom); Institute of Research, Formation and Diffusion in Public and Social Politics (IPFD/Obores) (Brazil); Mother Helpage UK (United Kingdom); Peace Dividend Trust (PDT) (United States); Patronato Pro Zona Mazahua A.C. (Mexico); Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future (United Kingdom); Women's Freedom Forum, Inc. (WFF) (United States); and Youth Enhancement Organization (YEO) (Nigeria).

Among the recent Department of Public Information-associated organizations, four NGOs also hold consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

The Non-Governmental Organizations Committee also reviewed a list of NGOs, which no longer met the criteria for association. Consequently, the following such organizations have been disassociated: Orphans International America; Orphans International Worldwide; and International Film and TV Exchange.

The Department of Public Information is also pleased to announce that its sixty-fourth Annual United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI)/Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) Conference, entitled "Sustainable Societies; Responsive Citizens", will be held in Bonn, Germany, from 3 to 5 September. This will be the fourth time the Conference will be held outside United Nations Headquarters in New York, and the second time the Conference has been held in Europe.

The objective of taking the Conference "on the road" is to diversify and strengthen the geographical representation of non-governmental organizations associated with the Department of Public Information, as well as broaden its reach to NGOs in that region. To assist with this new initiative, the Department revised its association policy, giving priority for affiliation to non-governmental organizations based in the region hosting the annual Conference. This revised policy has proven to be an effective way to reach out to those NGOs and members of civil society, who, otherwise, would be unable to attend the Conference, or become involved with the UN DPI/NGO community.

In 2009, as a result of the sixty-second DPI/NGO Conference in Mexico City, 43 non-governmental organizations based in Mexico were newly associated, and more than three quarters of the attendees at the Conference hailed from the region. In 2010, 62 NGOs from the Asia and Pacific region were associated with the Department of Public Information as a result of the sixty-third DPI/NGO Conference in Melbourne, Australia.

As this year's Annual United Nations DPI/NGO Conference heads to Bonn, prospective non-governmental organizations in Eastern, Central and Western Europe interested in association with the Public Information Department are encouraged to apply by contacting their nearest United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) or United Nations Regional Information Centre (UNRIC) for information on the association process. This does not preclude any other interested non-governmental organization from other regions of the world from applying for association.

#### **SYRIA: UN HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE VOICES CONCERNS ABOUT SITUATION**

New York, Mar 25 2011

The United Nations human rights office today spoke out over the worsening situation in Syria, saying it will be closely monitoring the pledge of the country's Government to introduce political and economic reforms.

Rupert Colville, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), told reporters in Geneva that the office was concerned by the use of live ammunition and tear gas by authorities against peaceful protesters in

Syria.

At least 37 people were killed in the southern town of Deraa, including two children, and media reports today indicate that more protesters have been shot dead by security forces.

“We welcome the decision to investigate the killings and reiterate our call for this investigation to be independent and impartial; those responsible for the killings must be held accountable,” Mr. Colville said.

“We also welcome the release of those associated with the protests in Deraa, and hope that all human rights defenders and political activists throughout Syria, who have also reportedly been arrested, will also be released without delay.”

The demonstrations in Syria are part of a broader protest movement that has swept the Middle East and North Africa since the start of the year, toppling long-standing regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and leading to fierce fighting in Libya.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spoke by telephone earlier today with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and earlier this week he urged authorities to refrain from violence and to abide by their international human rights commitments.

The Syrian Government announced yesterday that it would introduce a series of political and economic reforms, including holding consultations aimed at ending the state of emergency that has been in existence within the country since 1963.

Mr. Colville welcomed the news and said OHCHR “will be closely monitoring the speedy and effective implementation of such reforms.”

### **Damascus, Syria – March 22, 2011**

Dr. Martin Harrich, staff of UN, new graduate of the Ignatius /Sofia universities program at the United Nations brings the greetings of Father Rector Anthony DeLuca of Ignatius [of Antioch] University to the Patriarch of Antioch and All The East, His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Damascus, Syria on March 22, 2011.



**Ignatius and Sofia Universities offer master and doctoral programs in Peace Studies and Diplomacy to diplomats, secretariat staff and NGO representatives at the United Nations. <http://IgnatiusU.com>**

### **UN CHIEF MARKS AUTISM AWARENESS DAY WITH CALL FOR GREATER SUPPORT TO THOSE AFFECTED**

New York, Apr 1 2011

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called for increased support for children and adults with autism and their families, saying public awareness about the condition remains low, with those affected suffering discrimination, abuse, isolation and violation of their fundamental rights.

“Children and persons with autistic conditions face major challenges associated with stigma and discrimination, as well as a

lack of access to support. Many struggle with multiple barriers in their daily lives,” Mr. Ban said in a message to mark the *World Autism Awareness Day*, which will be observed tomorrow.

The United Nations chief executive said that the number of children and people with autistic conditions continues to rise in all countries and racial, ethnic and social groups, but awareness remained low despite the recognition of autistic conditions among the scientific, health and care communities.

Mr. Ban described the annual observance of World Autism Awareness Day as an “opportunity to mobilize for action and assistance.”

“Autism is a complex disorder. But in many cases the right treatment early on can bring improvements. That is why it is so important to raise awareness about the signs of autism and provide services as soon as possible,” added Mr. Ban.

He spoke of the need to support parents, create jobs for individuals with autism based on their skills and strengths, and improve public education to better meet the needs of students with autism. Such steps can benefit society and enrich the lives of people with autism and their loved ones.

Mr. Ban highlighted a remark by a mother of a child with autism who said: “Although my daughter has walked a long way, I have walked a longer way.”

“Together, let us travel this road toward a more caring and inclusive world,” the Secretary-General added.

Rev. Ambassador Anthony DeLuca also attended this meeting.



### **St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Cathedral, Teaneck N.J.**

His Eminence, Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim celebrates his 15-year of consecration.  
Guest at celebration **MOR POLYCARPUS EUGENE AYDIN of the Netherlands**



**Archbishop Eugene with Fr. George McBride, Editor of Holy Wisdom.**



**Fr. Kamil Ishak visits St. Mark's Cathedral**



**Fr. Joseph Chamoun celebrates birthday**





The Archdiocese of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Eastern United States held its Annual Clergy Retreat on March 21-24 2011, in St. Mary's Villa Convent, Sloatsburg, New York. His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim presided over the Retreat, which was attended by the clergy from all the parishes of the Archdiocese.

### **His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim meets with the Turkish Speaker of the Parliament Mehmet Ali Şahin**



The Turkish Council General Mehmet Samsar of New York invited His Eminence Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim to meet with the Turkish Secretary of State Mehmet Ali Şahin on Wednesday, March 23rd. Fr. Aziz H. Hadodo, Sait Samuel, Gabriel Akyon, Aziz Akyon, Lahdo Yildiz and Sami Gelin accompanied his Eminence. Speaker Şahin was accompanied by delegates from Turkey, including Congressman Suat Kınıkkoğlu, Ambassador Namık Tan of Washington D.C., Council General Mehmet Samsar, and Assistant Council General Ayşe Üzer. Turkish media organizations TRT and Anatolia News Agency also were present at the meeting.



The main topic of discussion was Mor Gabriel Monastery's land issues in Turkey. The discussion covered also a guesthouse built in the town of Hazakh (Idil) next to a local church, as well as a land grant to build a new church in Istanbul. The questions His Eminence posed were friendly but firm. Mr. Şahin's answers were sincere and affirming. The speaker's dedication to working with our community was evident when phone calls were made to resolve the Hazakh guesthouse issue. We were assured that the building would not be demolished, as previously decided, and that the community there would be satisfied with the outcome.

Mor Gabriel's Monastery is currently in litigation with the Supreme Court of Turkey. If Mor Gabriel were denied any land rights in the lawsuits, Mr. Şahin assured His Eminence and the attendees that the Turkish Government would do their utmost to help Mor Gabriel. When discussing the Istanbul land grant, Mr. Şahin said he would look into the case and try to find property suitable for our church needs.

His Eminence Karim and Speaker Şahin had a fruitful dialogue with positive outcomes to look forward to. Mr. Gabriel Akyon, one of the attendees, presented a short speech on the issues at hand. Fr. Aziz H. Hadodo also mentioned that all of the monasteries are part of a national heritage; they attract tourists to the country built in; and tens of thousands of saints are buried within our sacred and holy monasteries. The meeting was an excellent opportunity to raise some of the difficulties faced by our Syriac people in Turkey with the highest Turkish authorities.

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International School for Mental Health Practitioners, chartered by the Regents of the University of the State of New York, registered with the New York State Office of the Professions offers a program leading to NYS licensure for the independent practice of psychoanalysis. Further information may be obtained at <http://IgnatiusU.com> or calling the Dean, Anthony DeLuca, Ph.D., L.P., (718) 698-0700.

American Institute for Creative Living is approved by the NYS Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services to offer the educational components of the Credentialed Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counselor (CASAC) and other credentials in the field. See above web; (718) 698-0300.